



SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS AND THE SMES' EMPLOYEES COMMITMENT IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study focuses on the influence of socio-cultural factors, specifically in the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) of Nigeria's South-South region. The study examines the impact of religious beliefs, financial disparity, and cultural norms on affective, normative, and continuance employee commitment. This study employed a descriptive research design to analyze the state of SMEs in Nigeria's South-South region, focusing on participants' characteristics, behaviours, and opinions through quantitative data collection. Using stratified random sampling, three states—Edo, Delta, and Rivers—were selected from the region, and structured questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 300 employees from 15 SMEs per state. Data were analyzed with SPSS, utilizing the Chi-square test to identify significant associations between socio-cultural factors and employee commitment across the sampled SMEs. The findings showed that religious beliefs, wealth distribution, and moral values significantly impact SME workers' commitment in South-South Nigeria. This indicated that the interplay of socio-cultural factors plays a crucial role in shaping employees' commitment within SMEs in South-South Nigeria. The study recommends that business management create an inclusive environment that respects and supports employees' socio-cultural identities, including religious beliefs, to foster unity and collaboration. By integrating socio-cultural factors into organizational strategies, companies can enhance employee commitment, build a positive workplace culture, and improve overall performance.

Keywords: Employee Commitment, Religious Beliefs, Wealth Distribution, Moral Values, (SMEs), Niger Delta.

JEL Classification Code: M

1. Introduction

The business environment is a dynamic and complex landscape, shaped by a mix of sociocultural factors that reflect the diversity of its workforce. Employees come from varied cultural backgrounds, contributing distinct values, beliefs, and perspectives that can influence their commitment and performance (Taborosi et al., 2023). This diversity requires Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to adapt strategically, integrating social and cultural considerations to enhance competitiveness and employee engagement. Studies suggest that active employee engagement is essential for driving optimal performance (Faruk, 2023). However, SMEs often face challenges as competitive pressures and increased workplace demands lead to diminished motivation and commitment among employees (Pepple, Akinsowon,

& Oyelere, 2021), affecting overall organizational success (Virgiawan et al., 2021).

In Nigeria, SMEs are particularly diverse, encompassing employees from numerous ethnic and cultural backgrounds, each with unique values that impact their work ethic and commitment. Understanding and aligning organizational values with employees' cultural values have been shown to enhance commitment (Pepple, Akinsowon, & Oyelere, 2021). Recognizing individuality and cultural diversity within the workplace fosters an inclusive environment, which is essential for sustaining employee commitment and organizational cohesion.

Employee commitment has become an essential focus within organizations, as it is closely linked to positive outcomes such as high performance, retention, and organizational success (Đorđević et al., 2020). Gao

and Bai (2011) assert that an individual's dedication to their work is often influenced by their job satisfaction and the opportunities for growth and respect within the workplace. Leaders who actively recognize and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds of their teams can create policies and practices that support commitment across cultural lines (Blank, 2021). Effective leadership in this context involves adopting a blend of transformational and transactional styles, allowing flexibility in meeting employees' needs and fostering commitment (Luitel, 2021).

Committed employees contribute significantly to organizational effectiveness, as commitment fosters morale, motivation, and productivity, giving businesses a competitive edge (Wasiu, 2013; Akintayo, 2010; Salami, 2008). However, research indicates a widespread lack of employee commitment in many Nigerian workplaces (Inegbedion, 2022; Wasiu, 2013). This challenge is especially pronounced in the Niger Delta region, a culturally diverse and economically critical area due to its oil reserves, where ethnic diversity and regional distinctiveness play a pivotal role in shaping workplace dynamics (Mauer & Saelens, 2014). This region, comprising states such as Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, and others, reflects the ethnic and linguistic diversity of Nigeria, each with cultural nuances that affect workplace interactions and employee engagement (Iguisi, 2014).

Employee commitment remains crucial to organizational stability and productivity, making it essential to understand the interplay between socio-cultural factors and organizational dynamics. Despite the recognition of these factors, limited research examines how these aspects specifically influence the distinct forms of employee commitment, namely, normative, affective, and continuance commitment. Studies on employee commitment often highlight the importance of financial incentives (Ihemereze et al., 2023), work-life balance (Emre & De Spiegeleare, 2021), and career growth (Al Balushi et al., 2022). Many studies focus on Western business contexts or treat socio-cultural variables as secondary factors, overlooking the direct impact of these elements on employee commitment in regions where socio-cultural factors play a defining role. This gap underscores the need for a study that rigorously examines how socio-cultural dynamics affect employee commitment to SMEs in the South-South region in Nigeria.

Particularly within contexts where these factors are deeply embedded in employees' day-to-day lives and work ethics. This research seeks to provide more contextually relevant findings that contribute to a clearer understanding of how these influences manifest in the business environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was Meyer and Allen (1991) three-component model of the Organisational Commitment model. The model was proposed in their scholarly article titled "A Three-Component Conceptualization of Organisational Commitment." According to Meyer et al (2013) employee commitment is a consequence of affective attachment, the obligation felt to be in that organization and the cost of leaving. The model is built on the assumption that employee commitment is multifaceted and can be understood through three distinct components (affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment) (Meyer et al., 2013). These components are not mutually exclusive; rather, they interact in varying degrees to influence an employee's overall commitment (Ateke & Akani, 2018). The components can also vary in intensity among different individuals, and the relative strength of each component may fluctuate over time based on both internal and external organizational factors (Khandakar & Pangil, 2020).

Affective commitment pertains to the emotional connection, sense of belonging, and active engagement that an employee experiences towards the organisation. (Haque, Fernando, & Caputi, 2020; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). Individuals who possess high affective commitment exhibit a robust and favourable emotional attachment to their place of employment (Van Der Werf, 2023). Normative commitment encompasses an individual's perception of a moral duty or obligation to maintain their affiliation with the organisation (Van Der Werf, 2023). Sayan (2011) posited that the decision to remain with an organisation is contingent upon an individual's conviction regarding the significance of loyalty, duty, or adherence to moral principles which is represented by normative commitment. Continuance commitment pertains to the perceived expenses that are linked to the act of departing from an organisation (Keiningham et al., 2015). Employees who possess a strong sense of continuing commitment are more likely to remain in

their current employment due to their belief that quitting would entail personal sacrifices, like the loss of perks, spent time, or financial implications (Keiningham et al., 2015).

By recognizing that commitment is not a one-dimensional construct, the model provides a better approach to assessing employee loyalty and involvement (Haque et al., 2020). This model is instrumental for organizations seeking to enhance employee retention, as it highlights the different drivers of commitment, allowing for targeted interventions to improve organizational outcomes (Haque et al., 2020). Moreover, by acknowledging the role of both emotional attachment and rational factors like cost and obligation, the model helps organizations craft policies and practices that foster a more engaged, satisfied, and committed workforce (Somers et al., 2020). The addition of conformance commitment by Ateke and Nwulu (2019) further enriches the model, broadening its applicability in understanding how employees adapt their behaviours to align with organizational norms and expectations.

2.2 Conceptual Issues

2.2.1 Employee Commitment

Employee commitment reflects an individual's loyalty, sense of responsibility, and dedication to their workplace and its goals (Devayani & Meria, 2023). Olayinka and Adeniyi's (2022) study shows the relationship between organisational justice and employees' commitment that employees are more inclined to maintain their job positions when they perceive fair treatment within the workplace. This conclusion was drawn based on the analysis of a sample size consisting of 204 employees from the aforementioned organisation. According to the findings of Ogunbanjo, Awonusi, and Olaniyi (2022), it can be inferred that the work environment plays a crucial role in fostering and sustaining the commitment of library professionals towards their respective university libraries. There was a suggestion made on the provision of a conducive working environment for employees by management. Consequently, the enhancement of organisational commitment would yield a favourable working environment across all dimensions.

2.2.2 Religion and Employee Commitment

Organisational commitment improves when employees demonstrate their religious beliefs, which can undoubtedly have a good impact on organisations as shown in a study by Amiruddin et al. (2023). Amiruddin et al (2023) study showed that it is possible to encourage employees' organisational commitment by bolstering their religious beliefs and utilising the benefits of the results. In another research on workspace spirituality, Sulastini et al (2023) revealed the value of encouraging spirituality in the workplace and demonstrated how it could encourage academics to behave to achieve outstanding professional achievements. Sulastini et al (2023) further recommended that organisations make an effort to foster an atmosphere at work that meets workers' social and psychological needs for influence, attachment, connectedness, and inclusion. Their job attitudes and results are positively impacted by these good experiences of connectedness, which is advantageous to both the individual and the company and helps them achieve greater efficacy and sustainability in the current unstable economic climate. (Sulastini, Wijayanti, & Rajiani, 2023).

H₀₁: Religion does not have any impact on the commitment of SME workers in South-South Nigeria

2.2.3 Wealth Distribution and Employee Commitment

Wealth may be referred to as the total value of all the assets that a person or a household owns, such as money, property, stocks, bonds, and pensions (Eggleston et al., 2020). Wealth distribution is how the wealth of a society or a group of people is divided among its members (König et al., 2020). Wealth distribution shows the economic inequality or diversity within a population (König et al., 2020). In a study conducted by Fagbamigbe et al. (2015), an analysis of wealth quintiles unveiled significant disparities in the standard of living among Nigerian families across different geo-political zones, states, and rural-urban regions. These disparities had a profound impact on household health-seeking behaviour (Fagbamigbe et al., 2015).

One of the primary challenges to employees' commitment, particularly in the workplace, is economic inequality, which manifests as a social class struggle among workers (Kish-Gephart et al., 2023). According to Bapuji (2015), social classes become

evident in environments characterized by high economic inequality, where the affluent constitute a minority. The unequal distribution of wealth affects employees in these classes disparately across dimensions such as cognition, emotion, and behaviour (Leana & Meuris, 2015). These variations influence individual behaviour within an organization and their interactions with others (Elfenbein, 2023). Furthermore, the widening gap between the rich and the rest shapes the broader institutional framework, impacting aspects like corruption, distributive policies, and protectionism (Bapuji, 2015).

H₀₂: Wealth distribution Employees have no effects on the commitment of SME workers in South-South Nigeria.

2.2.4 Moral Values and Employee Commitment

Moral values are the principles and standards of behaviour that guide individuals in distinguishing right from wrong and making ethical decisions (Wittmer, 2019). These values often encompass honesty, integrity, respect, fairness, and responsibility (Wittmer, 2019). In the workplace, moral values serve as a foundation for ethical conduct and guide interactions between employees and organizational stakeholders (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). The presence of strong moral values within an organization fosters an environment where ethical practices are prioritized, leading to a cohesive and respectful workplace culture (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). Martínez et al (2021) show that employees are more committed when their values align with the organization's moral principles, creating a sense of shared purpose and identity. According to a study by Burhan et al (2023), organizations that promote moral values such as fairness, transparency, and respect tend to experience higher levels of employee commitment. These values inspire trust and foster a supportive work environment, which strengthens employees' emotional attachment to the organization (Obuba, 2023).

However, a lack of moral values in the workplace can lead to ethical dilemmas, conflict, and employee disengagement (Newman et al., 2020). When employees perceive unethical practices or observe behaviour that contradicts their moral beliefs, their commitment may weaken, impacting both morale and productivity (Mostafa et al., 2021). Consequently, upholding moral values is not only essential for fostering employee commitment but also plays a

crucial role in building a positive organizational culture, which in turn enhances overall performance and long-term success (Mostafa et al., 2021).

H₀₃: Moral Values do not influence the commitment of SME employees in South-South Nigeria

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design adopted in this study is descriptive, which is particularly suitable for providing a clear and detailed snapshot of the current state of SMEs in the South-South region of Nigeria. Descriptive research was chosen because it allows for the collection of quantifiable data that can describe participants' characteristics, behaviours, and opinions (Doyle et al., 2020). Using a quantitative approach, specifically through a structured questionnaire, enabled the researcher to gather numerical data that could be statistically analyzed (Khoa et al., 2023).

3.2 Data and Sources

The questionnaire was adapted from Gearahayalsew's (2019) study on "Leadership Style and Employees' Commitment in Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research" and incorporated the Allen and Meyer (1999) three-component employee commitment questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed in person and by mail to ensure broader coverage and participation from respondents across various SMEs.

3.3 Population and Sample Size

The population for the study consisted of 5,859 SMEs operating in three selected states—Edo, Delta, and Rivers—out of the six states in the South-South region. These states were selected using simple random sampling with 2,677, 1,524, and 1,658 SMEs respectively. The states were treated as distinct strata, and a stratified random sampling technique was employed to select 15 SMEs from each state. The sample size for the study consisted of 300 employees, selected using a combination of stratified and simple random sampling from the three states.

3.4 Method of Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The Chi-square test was employed for hypotheses since it is suitable for examining relationships between

categorical variables. The Chi-square test allowed the researcher to determine whether significant associations exist between leadership styles and employee commitment across the selected SMEs, providing insights into underlying patterns of employee behaviour within the organizations.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.260E3 ^a	28	.000
Likelihood Ratio	1.266E3	28	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	163.640	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	2400		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 36.63.

The Chi-Square test results indicate a significant association between religious beliefs and the commitment of workers in the business environment. The Pearson Chi-Square value is 1260 with 28 degrees of freedom and an asymptotic significance (2-sided) of 0.000, which is less than the typical alpha level of 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that religious beliefs do not have any impact on worker commitment, is rejected. This outcome supports the

Hypothesis One

H_0 : Religious beliefs do not have any impact on the commitment of workers in the business environment

H_1 : Religious beliefs have an impact on the commitment of workers in the business environment

alternative hypothesis (H_1), suggesting that religious beliefs do indeed have an impact on the commitment of workers in the business environment.

Hypothesis Two

H_0 : Wealth distribution does not affect the commitment of SME workers in South-South Nigeria.

H_1 : Wealth distribution has effects on the commitment of SME workers in South-South Nigeria.

Table 2: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.804E2 ^a	28	.000
Likelihood Ratio	657.577	28	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	19.456	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	2400		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 16.63.

The Chi-Square test results indicate a statistically significant relationship between wealth distribution and the commitment of SME workers in South-South Nigeria. The Pearson Chi-Square value is 680.4 with 28 degrees of freedom and an asymptotic significance (2-sided) of 0.000, which is below the standard significance level of 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_0), which posits that wealth distribution

does not affect worker commitment, is rejected. This finding supports the alternative hypothesis (H_1), suggesting that wealth distribution does indeed impact the commitment of SME workers in South-South Nigeria.

Hypothesis Three

H₀: Moral values do not influence the commitment of SME employees

H₁: Moral values do not influence the commitment of SME employees

Table 3: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.035E3 ^a	20	.000
Likelihood Ratio	1.065E3	20	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	86.022	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	1800		
a. 0 cells (.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 44.83.			

The Chi-Square test results reveal a significant relationship between moral values and the commitment of SME employees. The Pearson Chi-Square value is 1035 with 20 degrees of freedom and an asymptotic significance (2-sided) of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 threshold for significance. Thus, the null hypothesis (H_0), stating that moral values do not influence employee commitment, is rejected. This result supports the alternative hypothesis (H_1), indicating that moral values do influence the commitment of SME employees.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

The study discovered that religion significantly impacts the commitment levels of SME workers in South-South Nigeria. This indicates that a religious orientation may be an influential factor in shaping employees' work values, ethics, and dedication to organizational goals. This is in line with Hélot et al (2020) study which highlighted that religious beliefs serve as a motivator for higher commitment, as they often promote values such as honesty, loyalty, and hard work, which align with organizational expectations. Asutay et al (2022) also found that religious environments could positively impact job satisfaction and organizational commitment, particularly in collectivist cultures where communal values are emphasized. For SMEs, religious influences might shape an employee's perspective on work as a duty or calling, which can enhance engagement and reduce turnover (Saleh et al, 2023).

The study discovered that wealth distribution significantly impacts the commitment of SME workers in South-South Nigeria. This indicates that equitable

wealth distribution within SMEs may enhance employee commitment by fostering a sense of fairness, recognition, and financial security among workers. This is in line with Hareendrakumar et al (2020) assertion that when employees perceive that their financial contributions and efforts are adequately rewarded, their commitment to organizational goals and loyalty often increase. Ashraf (2020) noted that employees who perceive fair compensation are more likely to display loyalty and dedication to the organization. Similarly, Almerri (2023) argues that in contexts like Nigeria, where socio-economic disparities can affect worker morale, fair wealth distribution within organizations significantly contributes to reducing turnover and increasing commitment.

The study discovered that moral values significantly impact the commitment of SME workers in South-South Nigeria. This indicates that strong moral values within an organization can positively influence employee dedication, loyalty, and overall commitment by fostering an environment of trust, integrity, and mutual respect. This aligns with Sumlin et al (2021) finding that organizations with a strong ethical climate benefit from higher levels of employee commitment and job satisfaction. Agu et al (2024) study also asserted that when employees feel that their organization aligns with their moral beliefs, they are more likely to commit to its goals and remain loyal. Additionally, Akpa et al (2021) highlighted that moral and ethical organizational practices help build trust and reinforce employees' sense of belonging, which is essential for commitment.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the influence of socio-cultural factors within the business environment on employee commitment in the South-South region of Nigeria. By focusing on religious beliefs, wealth distribution, and cultural moral values as independent variables, the study explored their impact on affective, normative, and continuous commitment among employees, particularly in Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises (SMEs). Unlike previous research, which broadly addresses employee commitment in manufacturing sectors, this study highlights the unique socio-cultural dynamics of the Niger Delta region, where these factors play a pivotal role in shaping employees' dedication and loyalty to their organizations.

The findings underscore that socio-cultural influences significantly shape employee commitment, demonstrating that religious beliefs, income distribution, and cultural values are crucial to employees' affective, normative, and continuous commitment. Organizations in this region, therefore, must actively foster an inclusive environment that respects and values diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. By promoting inclusion and acceptance, companies can enhance employees' commitment levels, positively affecting organizational cohesion and productivity. These insights offer practical implications for organizational policies aimed at strengthening commitment through culturally sensitive approaches.

Based on the conclusion, the study recommends that:

- i. SMEs should introduce regular training programs to increase cultural awareness

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 - Al Balushi, A. K., Thumiki, V. R. R., Nawaz, N., Jurcic, A., & Gajenderan, V. (2022). Role of organizational commitment in career growth among employees and management. These programs should focus on understanding and respecting the religious beliefs, cultural moral values, and income dynamics specific to the Niger Delta region. This initiative will promote inclusivity, reduce workplace biases, and enhance affective commitment.
 - ii. Organizations should prioritize equitable wealth distribution through transparent and fair compensation policies. By addressing disparities in income distribution and offering competitive remuneration, companies can foster normative commitment, ensuring employees feel valued and motivated to remain loyal to their employers.
 - iii. SMEs should align their core values and practices with the cultural and moral principles of the Niger Delta. This could include recognizing local cultural holidays, integrating ethical standards that resonate with the community, and encouraging participatory decision-making processes that reflect the region's communal ethos.
 - iv. Organizations should create spaces and opportunities for employees to practice their religious beliefs without prejudice or conflict. Examples include designated prayer rooms, flexible schedules for religious observances, and promoting interfaith dialogues. Such practices can strengthen affective and normative commitment by building trust and a sense of belonging among employees
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