

TRADE UNION DYNAMICS AND INDUSTRIAL PEACE OF OIL SERVICING FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE.

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the dynamics of trade unions and the level of industrial harmony in oil servicing companies located in Rivers State, Nigeria. The aim was to analyze the connection between various aspects of trade union dynamics and indicators of industrial peace. This study was based on the principles of Social Exchange Theory. A correlational survey approach was utilized for the research, gathering data from 161 supervisors and managers in 22 different companies through a carefully designed questionnaire. To evaluate the hypotheses, Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis was implemented. The findings indicated a statistically significant but weak positive correlation between digital involvement and fair pay. Additionally, a robust and statistically significant positive relationship was identified between clear communication and trust between parties. The results suggest that the use of digital technologies somewhat enhances perceptions of fair wages, while transparent communication is essential in fostering trust within labor and management relationships. It was determined that improving these specific practices related to unions can significantly aid in achieving industrial tranquility in the industry. The research suggested that oil servicing companies should enhance their digital engagement frameworks to increase transparency and encourage more equitable practices in remuneration.

Keywords: Trade union dynamics, industrial peace, digital engagement, open communication, equitable remuneration, mutual trust, oil servicing firms, Rivers State

Background to the Study

Industrial tranquility is crucial for the efficiency and security of any economic field, particularly in intricate and high-pressure sectors like oil service companies in Rivers State, Nigeria. Industrial tranquility denotes a lack of discord between employers and employees, marked by cooperative relationships between labor and management, few industrial actions, and effective dispute resolution processes (Agabe, 2023). In the absence of industrial tranquility, companies could face interruptions such as strikes, lockouts, and halts in work, which detrimentally affect operational performance and financial success. In the oil service sector, where providing effective services is vital for the overall petroleum supply chain, upholding amicable industrial relations is critical for both local economic stability and national energy goals.

Trade unions play a key role in establishing industrial tranquility by representing workers' interests, negotiating collective agreements, and participating in conflict resolution efforts. Within Nigeria's oil and gas sector, major unions such as the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) and the Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) are instrumental in championing workers' rights, employment conditions, and workplace safety. These unions act as formal avenues for employees to present concerns and seek advancements, thereby fostering an organized industrial relations framework. Collective bargaining, a primary responsibility of trade unions, creates a venue for negotiating employment terms and addressing disputes before they escalate into industrial discord (Mgbamoka, 2023). Despite this, achieving a balance between proactive unionism and cooperative industrial relations poses an ongoing challenge.

In Rivers State, studies indicate that the actions of trade unions and their conflict management techniques significantly affect industrial peace in oil and gas companies. For example, research shows that effective collective bargaining and compromise approaches are closely linked to a decrease in strikes and an increase in mutual trust, both of which are essential indicators of industrial tranquility (Agabe, 2023). Moreover, conflict resolution strategies such as mediation and arbitration, facilitated by trade union representatives, have proven effective in alleviating disputes between employers and employees and promoting organizational peace (Akpan, Akpan, & Olsson, 2023; Mekuri-Ndimele & Kaanawa, 2025). However, outstanding conflicts and sudden industrial actions like wildcat strikes may indicate deeper issues regarding working conditions, the results of negotiations, and compliance with agreements, highlighting the fluid nature of union-management interactions (Badey, Korsi, & Kirikiri, 2023). The trends in trade unionism within oil service companies also mirror wider socio-economic and organizational factors. Employee morale, pay structures, and welfare standards intersect with union operations to influence the general industrial atmosphere.

Statement of the Problem

Industrial tranquility is essential for the ongoing effective functioning of oil service companies in Rivers State, considering the vital role this industry plays in both the local and national economies. Nevertheless, despite its significance, the oil service sector has been plagued by ongoing labor-management disputes, such as strikes, work halts, and ongoing arguments regarding pay, working conditions, job security, and employee welfare. These disputes frequently interfere with service provision, lower efficiency, and create tensions between employers and employees, thus jeopardizing stability within organizations and disrupting industrial harmony.

Trade unions play an important role in influencing the industrial relations landscape within oil servicing companies. However, the developments in union activities, including online interactions, transparent communication, collective negotiations, grievance resolution strategies, leadership approaches, and methods of interfacing with management, have led to varied results. Some union initiatives foster communication and collaboration, while others heighten conflicts and extend disagreements, raising questions about their total effect on industrial harmony in the industry. The responses from management, existing regulations, and the socio-economic conditions in Rivers State further add complexity to these relationships.

While many studies have looked into labor conflicts and relations within Nigeria's oil and gas sector, there has been limited empirical research specifically focusing on how trade union dynamics impact industrial peace within oil servicing companies in Rivers State. Many existing studies tend to concentrate on upstream oil corporations or broad labor relations, failing to sufficiently consider the distinct operational circumstances of oil service firms. This lack of focus results in an inadequate comprehension of how trade union activities influence industrial tranquility. Consequently, the present study aims to address this void by thoroughly investigating the dynamics of trade unions and their effects on industrial peace in oil servicing companies in Rivers State.

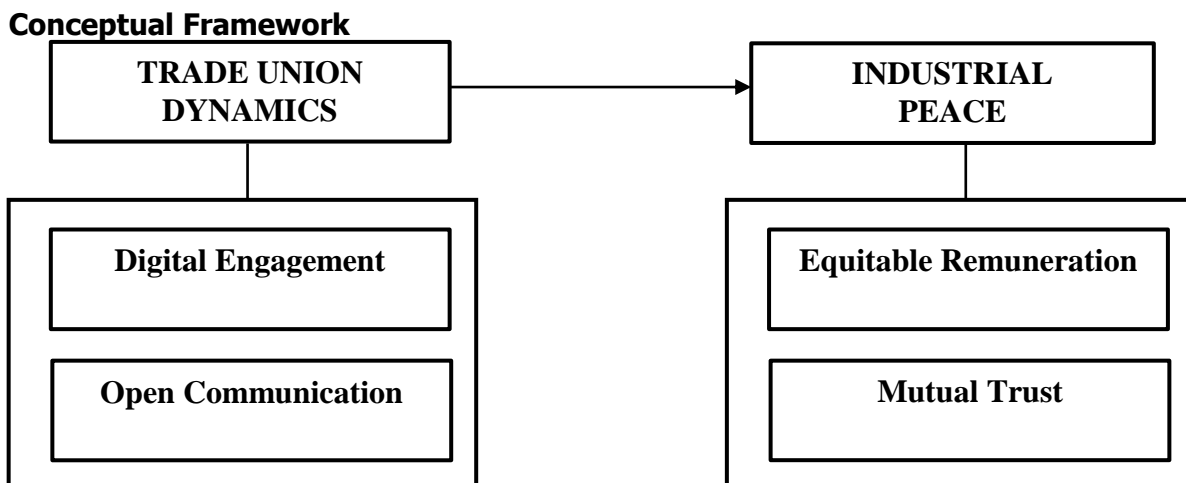


Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing trade union dynamics and industrial peace.
Source: Dimensions of trade union dynamics was adopted from Loganathan and Ganesan, (2023) while measures of industrial peace was adopted from work of Adetunji, & Eze, (2022).

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the research was to explore the connection between the dynamics of trade unions and industrial harmony within oil servicing companies located in Rivers State. More specifically, the research aims to:

1. explore the correlation between digital engagement and fair compensation in oil servicing companies in Rivers State.
2. assess the link between transparent communication and shared trust in oil servicing companies in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following questions directed the research:

1. What is the correlation between digital engagement and fair compensation in oil servicing companies in Rivers State?
2. What is the link between transparent communication and shared trust in oil servicing companies in Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were developed and examined in the research:

- H01: There is no notable correlation between digital engagement and fair compensation in oil servicing companies in Rivers State.
- H02: There is no notable correlation between transparent communication and shared trust in oil servicing companies in Rivers State.

Review of Related Literature

Concept of Trade Union Dynamics

Trade union dynamics pertains to the changing trends in interaction, behaviors, power dynamics, and strategic initiatives of trade unions within the industrial relations framework, especially regarding their dealings with employers and their impact on workplace results. At its core, it involves how unions coordinate collective efforts, rally member backing, and maneuver through negotiation proceedings to advocate for workers' needs, such as higher wages, better working conditions, and enhanced job security (Zientara et al., 2024). A critical aspect of this idea is bargaining power, which denotes the ability of unions to affect employment conditions compared to the authority of employers; research indicates that different levels of union strength and negotiation tactics have a

direct impact on labor results, which include wage rates and fairness within workplaces (Petreski & Tanevski, 2023; Zientara et al., 2024). Trade union dynamics also encompasses the relationship processes between unions and management that are influenced by cooperation, conflict, and institutional frameworks, which define the quality of industrial relations across various sectors (Stensaker et al., 2023). In modern scenarios, union dynamics are increasingly viewed not merely as fixed organizational traits but as context-sensitive and relational processes that adapt to economic conditions, labor legislation, and the broader sociopolitical landscape (Zientara et al., 2024). Grasping these dynamics is essential for examining how union activities either promote or obstruct industrial harmony, worker representation, and organizational effectiveness.

Digital Engagement: Digital engagement involves the interactive application of digital technologies and platforms to enhance meaningful exchanges between an organization and its stakeholders, including both active participation and emotional connection through digital mediums such as information and communication technology, social media, and more (Jo & Ahn, 2024). Within organizational studies, digital engagement is defined as the degree to which individuals or groups—be they customers, staff, or partners—actively engage with digital materials, tools, or services in ways that shape their views, attitudes, and actions (Li et al., 2024). This notion surpasses simple access to digital resources; it integrates the quality of engagement, satisfaction with digital interactions, and ongoing usage patterns that lead to significant organizational outcomes such as loyalty, efficiency, and innovation. For instance, effective strategies for digital engagement comprise the development of interactive and responsive digital platforms that encourage cognitive, emotional, and social involvement (Saharah & Windasari, 2024).

Open Communication: Open communication signifies the degree to which information circulates freely, transparently, and reciprocally among members of an organization, allowing employees and management to share ideas, concerns, and feedback without the fear of adverse repercussions. It serves as a fundamental element of effective organizational communication and is linked to trust, employee involvement, and positive labor-management relationships (Men & Yue, 2023). Environments characterized by open communication promote dialogue rather than unidirectional information flow, enabling employees to feel acknowledged and engaged in decision-making processes that impact their work (Kim & Rhee, 2022). Studies suggest that organizations that exhibit open communication tend to experience reduced levels of misunderstanding and conflict, as timely and accurate information sharing aids in preventing misinformation and distrust (Karanges et al., 2024). In the context of industrial relations, transparent communication is essential for fostering collaboration and mitigating confrontational interactions between management and trade unions by enabling negotiations, consultations, and prompt addressing of grievances (Ruck et al., 2023). Therefore, open communication transcends being just a method of conveying information; it serves as a strategic tool that fosters trust, teamwork, and harmony within organizations.

Concept of Industrial Peace

Industrial peace signifies a condition of collaborative and stable interactions between employers and their workforce, where tasks are performed without interruptions caused by strikes, lockouts, or extended labor disputes. It is defined by shared trust, collaboration, effective dialogue, and the presence of systematic channels for resolving disagreements through discussion and negotiation rather than conflict (Adeyemi & Aturu, 2022). Industrial peace does not suggest there are no conflicts, but rather that companies and worker representatives can effectively handle opposing interests constructively within the frameworks of industrial relations (Yesufu, 2021).

In modern organizations, industrial peace is increasingly associated with equitable labor practices, honoring workers' rights, inclusive decision-making, and adherence to collective agreements, all contributing to tension reduction and promoting stability within organizations (Adebayo & Ojo, 2023). Where industrial peace exists, organizations are likely to see enhancements in productivity,

employee dedication, and operational consistency, while workers benefit from job security and a feeling of belonging. Alternatively, a lack of industrial peace can lead to frequent industrial actions that harm performance and put a strain on labor-management relations. Consequently, industrial peace is broadly seen as a vital factor for ongoing organizational success and socio-economic progress, especially in sectors that are labor-intensive and strategically important.

Equitable Remuneration:

Equitable remuneration represents a just and fair compensation framework where employees receive salaries and benefits that reflect the value of their work, skills, responsibilities, and contributions while ensuring fairness both internally and externally within an organization. This principle is based on fairness, promoting equal pay for equal work and minimization of unwarranted wage disparities among employees in similar roles (ILO, 2023). Equitable remuneration extends beyond base salary, incorporating allowances, incentives, and benefits that align with industry benchmarks, cost-of-living factors, and the financial capabilities of the organization (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Within industrial relations, equitable remuneration is a key factor influencing employee satisfaction, motivation, and loyalty, as perceptions of inequitable pay can lead to grievances, diminished morale, and industrial unrest (Bloom & Van Reenen, 2022).

Mutual Trust:

Mutual trust refers to a collective confidence between organizational members, such as management and employees, that all parties will behave honestly, honor their commitments, and take into account each other's interests in interactions within the workplace. It is a key component of effective industrial relations, as trust diminishes doubt, promotes collaboration, and facilitates constructive discussions during negotiations and conflict resolution (Dirks & Ferrin, 2023). In employment relationships, mutual trust is fostered through consistent management actions, clear decision-making, equitable treatment, and compliance with established rules and collective agreements (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2022). Research shows that elevated levels of mutual trust correlate with enhanced employee dedication, an increased inclination to exchange information, and a greater acceptance of organizational decisions, even amid difficult situations (Searle et al., 2023). In unionized environments, a strong mutual trust between management and trade unions improves the results of collective bargaining and lowers antagonistic relations, fostering industrial harmony (Budd, 2022).

Theoretical Review:

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory was introduced by George C. Homans in the year 1958. This theory suggests that social connections are established and maintained through reciprocal exchanges, where individuals strive to enhance their gains and minimize their expenses. People or groups participate in interactions when they believe that the rewards, such as trust, support, fairness, or financial advantages, surpass the possible costs. Over time, continuous positive exchanges create mutual obligations, dedication, and enduring relationships, while adverse or unequal exchanges can result in dissatisfaction, withdrawal, or disputes.

Social Exchange Theory is founded on several fundamental assumptions.

1. Initially, social participants are rational and assess relationships according to the perceived advantages and disadvantages.
2. Secondly, relationships evolve over time through successive interactions rather than immediate trust.
3. Thirdly, reciprocity is fundamental; benefits received establish a belief in future returns.
4. Lastly, any imbalance or perceived unfairness in exchanges has the potential to undermine relationships and incite conflict or disengagement.

The significance of Social Exchange Theory to this investigation into trade union relationships and industrial tranquillity in oil servicing companies in Rivers State lies in its portrayal of labor-management dynamics. Industrial peace is most likely sustained when employers offer reasonable wages, facilitate open dialogue, and engage respectfully, a practice that workers and trade unions reciprocate with collaboration, allegiance, and a decrease in industrial disputes.

Empirical Review

Okpalibekwe and colleagues (2015) investigated the relationship between trade unions, collective bargaining, and the performance of organizations, focusing on the Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees within the Idemili North Local Government Council in Anambra State. The purpose of this research was to explore how the management of grievances influences organizational performance. Trade unions have frequently faced criticism for prioritizing their own interests over their contributions to enhancing organizational effectiveness. Consequently, a thorough analysis of the potential contributions of trade unions to organizational performance is essential; thus, this investigation aims to delve into the interconnectedness of trade unions, collective bargaining, and organizational performance. The research employed a survey method and utilized both primary and secondary data sources extensively. Three hypotheses were established to guide the research, and a simple random sampling method was implemented to select participants for the study. The collected data was evaluated using percentage calculations and mean scores, while the hypotheses underwent testing through a one-sample t-test. The study's results indicated that the Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees has played a significant role in promoting industrial harmony, fostering employee dedication toward maximizing job performance, and proficiently utilizing collective bargaining to improve organizational outcomes. The conclusion drawn from this research is that the Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees in Idemili North serves as an effective tool for enhancing both employee productivity and organizational performance. The researcher proposes the necessity of ongoing and comprehensive education for stakeholders (trade unions, management, and government) regarding their responsibilities in not only creating but also maintaining a conflict-free work environment, which is essential for organizational success.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a correlational survey research design. The target population comprised 22 registered oil servicing firms located in Rivers State, with data acquired from Finelib (2025). These firms were selected due to their availability and operational status at the time of the research. A census sampling method was utilized owing to the relatively small size of the population. The sample consisted of 176 participants, including managers and supervisors from various managerial roles, to ensure a diverse representation. Data collection was conducted using a self-constructed questionnaire. The instrument underwent validation by experts, and its reliability was affirmed through a test-retest method, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.71, indicating satisfactory consistency. Questionnaires were distributed to participants across the firms, and the completed forms were collected. A total of 176 questionnaires were distributed among the 22 oil servicing companies in Rivers State. From these, 161 completed responses, representing 91%, were successfully returned. Data analysis was performed using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient at a 0.05 significance level using SPSS software.

RESULTS

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between digital engagement and equitable remuneration in oil servicing firms in Rivers State.

Table 1: Correlations between digital engagement and equitable remuneration

			Digital Engagement	Equitable Remuneration
Spearman's rho	Digital Engagement	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.278**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	161	161
	Equitable Remuneration	Correlation Coefficient	.278**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	161	161

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 1 displays the outcomes of Spearman's rho correlation analysis, which investigates the link between digital participation and fair compensation in oil servicing companies located in Rivers State. The correlation coefficient found between digital participation and fair compensation is 0.278, signifying a positive but minor connection between these two factors. This indicates that as digital involvement rises, there tends to be enhancements in fair compensation, even though the strength of this connection is relatively weak. The significance level ($p = .000$) reveals that the connection is statistically significant at the 0.01 threshold. In light of these findings, the null hypothesis (H_01), asserting the absence of a significant relationship between digital engagement and fair compensation, is dismissed. This suggests that digital participation has a meaningful effect, even if slight, on shaping views or actions regarding fair compensation in oil servicing companies in Rivers State.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between open communication and mutual trust in oil servicing firms in Rivers State.

Table 2: Correlations between open communication and mutual trust

			Open Communication	Mutual Trust
Spearman's rho	Open Communication	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.765**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.
		N	161	161
	Mutual Trust	Correlation Coefficient	.765**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.
		N	161	161

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 2 presents the outcomes of Spearman's rho correlation analysis pertaining to the link between open dialogue and reciprocal trust in oil service companies located in Rivers State. The correlation coefficient stands at 0.765, signifying a strong and affirmative connection between open dialogue and reciprocal trust. This finding denotes that increased open dialogue within organizations is significantly correlated with elevated levels of reciprocal trust among management and staff. The statistical significance of this relationship is confirmed at the 0.01 threshold, establishing that the noted correlation is not a mere coincidence. As a result, the null hypothesis (H_02), which posits the absence of a significant link between open dialogue and reciprocal trust, is therefore dismissed. This result highlights the crucial role of open dialogue as an essential element in fostering and maintaining reciprocal trust within oil service companies in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

Digital Engagement and Equitable Remuneration

The results shown in Table 1 indicate a weak yet positive correlation between digital engagement and fair pay in oil servicing companies located in Rivers State. This implies that a greater reliance on digital tools and platforms corresponds with better equity in remuneration systems. Such a connection points to the notion that digital engagement may improve clarity, information availability, and effective payroll management, which in turn aids in achieving fair pay outcomes. While the strength of this correlation is not robust, its statistical relevance suggests that digital approaches play a significant role in shaping perceptions and execution of remuneration practices. This observation is consistent with previous research indicating that the digital transformation of human resource functions enhances pay transparency and minimizes discrepancies in compensation management (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Similarly, Bloom and Van Reenen (2022) found that companies employing digital management strategies often exhibit better pay equity. Nonetheless, the relatively weak nature of the correlation indicates that equitable remuneration in oil servicing companies is also impacted by additional factors, such as outcomes from collective bargaining, the influence of labor unions, and the policies within organizations, beyond just digital engagement.

Open Communication and Mutual Trust

The findings presented in Table 2 reveal a robust and positive correlation between open communication and mutual trust in oil servicing firms situated in Rivers State, illustrating that clear and effective communication significantly fosters trust between employees and management. This conclusion emphasizes the importance of transparent communication as a cornerstone for healthy industrial relations, where workers feel informed, valued, and assured regarding management's motives. The strength of this correlation indicates that when communication avenues are accessible and inclusive, trust is more likely to flourish and endure. This aligns with prior research demonstrating that clear and participatory communication methods enhance trust and collaboration within organizations (Men & Yue, 2023; Searle et al., 2023). In unionized settings, similar findings suggest that transparent communication diminishes distrust and aggressive behavior, contributing to industrial harmony (Budd, 2022). Thus, the current results reinforce the existing empirical literature asserting that open communication is a vital factor in building mutual trust and promoting cooperative labor-management relations in industrial environments.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that practices related to trade unions significantly contribute to fostering industrial peace within oil servicing firms in Rivers State. The results indicate that digital engagement has a meaningful positive relationship with fair remuneration, suggesting that utilizing digital tools improves transparency and equity in pay systems. Additionally, open communication was discovered to have a strong and important connection with mutual trust, underscoring its significance in nurturing collaborative labor-management interactions. These findings highlight the likelihood that when organizations adopt open communication practices along with contemporary digital engagement strategies, employees are more prone to perceive fairness and cultivate trust in management, which consequently lowers the chances of industrial discord. Overall, the research emphasizes the necessity for oil servicing companies to enhance digital engagement and ensure open lines of communication as vital strategies for maintaining industrial harmony and peaceful industrial relations in Rivers State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Among others, the following suggestions were provided:

1. Oil service companies ought to improve their digital interaction platforms to boost transparency and encourage fairer pay practices.

2. Leaders of oil service firms must establish transparent and inclusive methods of communication to build mutual confidence among workers, trade unions, and leadership, thus maintaining a harmonious workplace.

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