

New-Normal and Employment Relations of Telecommunication Industry in South East Nigeria

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Abstract

The challenges posed by the pandemic and its implications to individuals, organizations and society have exacerbated the already problematic state of (OHS) in Nigeria. To this effect, this study examined new normal and employment relations of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to: assess the effect of remote and hybrid work on employee competence, determine the effect of digital transformation and automation on employee responsiveness, the study adopted a survey design approach while primary and secondary sources of data were used to obtain accurate data from the study. The target population of five hundred and sixty-four (564) obtained from the twenty (20) selected MNOs in South-East, Nigeria. The sample size of three hundred and ninety-two (392) respondents was derived from Godden (2004) statistical formula. The study utilized Simple Linear Regression Model, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Pearson Correlation Coefficient of SPSS Version 27.0 to test the hypotheses. The result of the findings revealed that remote and hybrid work had a positive and significant effect on employee competence, digital transformation and automation had a positive and significant effect on employee responsiveness. From the results of the hypotheses testing, the study concluded that new normal had a positive and significant effect on employment relations of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria and therefore recommended that the management of MNOs should continuously implement flexible frameworks, deepen their digital transformation and automation strategies and to develop comprehensive and inclusive DEI policies. Conclusively, the business world is heading a new way and changes in the labor markets to keep businesses running are imperative across industries of all sizes in the post-pandemic era. Hence, adequate digital infrastructure adoption is essential for employees' superior performance in the future.

Background to The Study

The COVID-19 (or Coronavirus Disease 2019) pandemic is one of the most unprecedented health crises of the 21st century. The disease, which originated in the Wuhan City of Hubei region China in December 2019 have been associated to the Huanan Seafood Market at South China, and the infection has spread to many countries around the world (Jeya, 2023). According to WHO- Convened (2021), the COVID-19 outbreak turned out to be a VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) event which shocked and distressed every segment of human civilization (Murugan, Rajavel, Aggarwal & Singh, 2020). As of July 2021, it has infected more than 233 million people and killed more than 4.7 million people (Worldometer, 2021). Furthermore, on January 30, the World Health Organization (2020) declared the novel coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) a global public health emergency of international concern that spread to

virtually all nations and territories on the globe. According to Worldometer (2020), as at 9 June 2020, the total global case stands at 7,303,229 with 412,766 and 3,592,208 deaths and recoveries. In Nigeria, the number of active cases stands at 14,554 with 387 deaths as at 12 June 2020 (NCDC, 2020). The continuity of services during pandemic became challenging across the public sector, private sector and non-profit sector (Raghavan, Demircioglu & Orazgaliyev, 2021). Even basic services such as healthcare, education, public administration, food delivery, and community services were all affected (Raghavan et al., 2021). The crisis transposed the economy, societies, homes, and services including schools and other organizations into a new reality which has resulted in a new normal in how private and public organizations services were delivered (Ramos-Morcillo, Leal-Costa, Moral-García & Ruzafa-Martínez, 2020). However, it is anticipated that the world of work will undergo a significant shift toward hybrid work in the post-coronavirus disease world, making hybrid working to some extent the new normal at work (Ro, 2020). The word new normal was first used in 2008 during the financial crisis and the term was used in the context of cautioning the economist and policymakers to believe that the industrial economy would recover and come back to their rich recent past post 2007-08 financial crisis. The word was termed as new normals by Paul Grover in 2009 (Kiconco & Shi-Mei, 2021). In United State of America, the post subprime economy meaning the subpar growth was named as New Normal (Kiconco et al., 2021 citing Rich & Benjamin, 2008). The new normal is a state of which economy, society, school, and other concerns settle following a pandemic crisis (Cacayan, Baua & Alvarado, 2020). The new normal, during crisis is being referred to as the changes in human behavior in adopting the current scenario as normal though being new (Kiconco et al., 2021). The pandemic catapulted to the rapid rise of e-learning, online learning, technology-enhanced learning, distance learning and any form of remote or hybrid work (Oducado & Soriano, 2021). Hence, the potential of adopting remote work largely depends on whether a job has tasks and activities which do not require workers to be physically present on-site to get the work done (Lund, Madgavkar, Manyika & Smit, 2020). Also, professions requiring in-person involvement such as agricultural work, restaurant, and hotel services are not able to adopt remote working (Dingel & Neiman, 2020).

In other words, the adoption of new normal work practices, remote working and work from home (WFH) will depend on the nature of the work, because some professions requiring in-person involvement such as agricultural work, restaurant, and hotel services tasks cannot be accomplished remotely (Dingel & Neiman, 2020). However, despite the lack of time for preparation and detailed planning in various organizations, the traditional face-to-face services, theoretical learning, instruction and other placements, employees have swiftly switched in a more flexible, distant, and online, remote or hybrid work style environment on an untested and unprecedented scale to reduce close contact and help suppress virus transmission (Brooks & Grajek, 2020). Hence, changes in the labor markets to keep businesses running are inevitable in the post-pandemic era, and technological adoption is the most visible change in the labor market. It has been shown that digital technology was adopted in organizations prior to the emergence of the pandemic, and this adoption was accelerated during the pandemic (Vargo, Zhu, Benwell & Yan, 2021). The pandemic has thus triggered a shift to a more digital society or, to be more precise, the real world is gradually dying out, and the fast-paced technological world is rapidly replacing the old one. Digital transformation has, therefore, become an imperative for businesses across industries of all sizes for survival, and adequate digital infrastructure is essential for working in the future (Melhem, Lawal & Bashir, 2020). The world of work is therefore heading a new way, in line with the changes in the business world. Thus, it could be said that digital and technological enhancements and transformations have an impact on several types of work (Gadhi, 2020).

However, the telecommunications (telecom) market is a part of the information and communication technology industry. The market is primarily engaged in operating and providing access to facilities for the transmission of voice, data, text and video (Businesswire, 2016). According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), 97 per cent of the world population now live within reach of a mobile cellular signal and 93 per cent within reach of a 3G (or higher) network. In the Americas, the Asia-Pacific region and Europe, over 95 per cent of the population is covered by a 3G or higher mobile broadband network. In the Arab States the figure stands at 91 per cent; the Commonwealth of Independent States, 88 per cent; and Africa, 79 per cent. Thus, of the 85 countries that provided data on mobile phone ownership, 61 have a higher proportion of men with mobile phones than women (ITU, 2019). Similarly, the Nigeria telecommunication sector witnessed a major revolution in 2001 with the granting of the global system for mobile telecommunication (GSM) license to providers. As at the end of Quarter 1 2019, the country's telecommunication industry contributed 10.11% to the total GDP of Nigeria (Statista, 2020). The telecommunication industry in Nigeria in recent times has recorded unprecedented growth and development with tremendous improvement in the qualities and quantities in different types of services provided to customers. The deregulation of the industry led to the increase in the number of providers of the telecommunication services and of the numbers of subscribers or customers (Akingbade, 2014).

Interestingly, employee wellbeing being a well-defined general work is the feeling of health, happiness and wealth. It includes the sense of life satisfaction, mental health and feeling of being purposeful (Liyanage, 2020). Psychologically it is attached to the purpose of life, mastery, positivity optimism and life satisfaction (Rudel-Fitzgerald, 2019). It is generally termed as a combination of a positive affective state of happiness and functioning with optimal effectiveness in personal, professional and social life. (Kiconco et al., 2021 citing Huppert, 2009). Sadly, during pandemic, the new normal has majorly hit the organizational work culture and lifestyle, keeping the work progress, production and other work at hold, organizations have born lots of losses and anticipating the unseen future and in order to beat the uncertainty every organization has started to work amidst the external crisis with the increased certainty of risk. The pandemic has centered the issue of physiological and mental health of people in organizations and these organizations suddenly have to steer through the unprecedented and are forced to find out the solution to new challenges arising. Thus, keeping various factors in mind, the Human Resource (HR) can contribute a lot to employee well-being and according to Sarah (2018), clarity of the work, responsibilities, variety of tasks, training and support, working hour's flexibility in work scheduled and fairness and transparency are the major factors affecting the well-being of the employees.

Therefore, in the midst of the above, employee well-being in the new normal and the role of (HR) becomes the critical issue. As established earlier wellbeing is related to the feel of someone concerning their health, home-life, personal and professional relations at home, and job or inhabits. At this backdrop, the crux of the study is to assess new-normal and employment relations with focus on telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria.

With the spread of COVID-19 pandemic across Nigeria and globally, the ravaging impact and spread of the virus is well felt by different sectors of the economy, but the health sector is worst hit, with adverse implications for occupational health and safety (OHS) of workers in Nigeria as elsewhere in the world. The state of OHS in Nigeria preCOVID-19 leaves much to be desired. Thus, the challenges posed by the pandemic and the implications for individuals, organizations and society have exacerbated the already problematic state of OHS in Nigeria (Chidi & Ayinla, 2019).

The National Policy on Occupational Safety and Health was developed in 2006, with the goal to facilitate the improvement of occupational safety and health performance in all sectors of the Nigerian economy (ILO, 2016). Occupational Health and Safety regulations have been put in place globally through the initiatives of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and the World Health Organization (WHO). The Occupational Safety and Health Convention 1981 (No. 155) and Occupational Health Services Convention 1985 (No. 161) adopted by the General Conference of International Labour Organization have had a major influence on the development of occupational health regulations among member countries including Nigeria (Chidi & Ayinla, 2019). Lamentably, the pandemic actually exposed the vulnerability of the health sector in Nigeria which has been bedeviled by insufficient funding pre-COVID-19 (Chidi & Ideh, 2021). Accordingly, people inference is divided based on Wong, Ho, Wong, Cheung & Yeoh (2020) study which revealed that there was deficiency of workplace policy and inadequate workplace protective equipment during COVID-19 pandemic which had significant effect on employees' stress level.

Objectives of The Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine new normal and employment relations of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria while the specific objectives are to:

- i. assess the effect of remote and hybrid work on employee competence of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria.
- ii. determine the effect of digital transformation and automation on employee responsiveness of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

New Normal

The term 'new normal' first appeared during the 2008 financial crisis to refer to the dramatic economic, cultural and social transformations that caused precariousness and social unrest, impacting collective perceptions and individual lifestyles. This term has been used again during the COVID19 pandemic to point out how it has transformed essential aspects of human life (El-Erian, 2010).

According to Francisco and Nuqui (2020), new normal has been used since the end of World War II (Francisco & Nuqui, 2020). Nevertheless, the new normal in 2020 is different since the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the world's economy and education. This is an uphill battle in which education and money are at stake in a situation where people find it challenging to adjust. This shift in working and learning space is defined as the New Normal in working organizations (Mollenkopf, Gaskill, Nelson & Diaz, 2020). It is moving from a public to a private space, shifting from one-size-fits-all methods to individualized and differentiated learning, shifting responsibility. Active participation of household members is required for this learning process and for evaluating learning shifts (Francisco & Nuqui, 2020).

Nonetheless, the term of new normal is used to reflect fundamental changes in society or the business environment which refers to significant changes in supply chain practices, financial institutions and business conditions as a whole. The term new normal era has been used after the financial crisis in 2007 to 2008, then after the global recession from 2008 to 2012 and now the post-pandemic era of COVID-19. The term has been used in various other contexts to indicate that something that was previously abnormal has become normal again (Gomstyn, 2019). Similar to the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, the term new normal can also refer to human behavior after

this pandemic. Some experts anticipate that the coronavirus pandemic will change people's daily lives. This includes limiting contact with other people, such as not shaking hands and not hugging when they see each other. In addition, the need to maintain distance from other people or social distance. So, in general it is likely that the pandemic behavior will persist even though the pandemic has recovered (Saggu & Anukoonwattaka, 2015).

However, as far as the long run diagnosis is concerned, there is a debate on whether coronavirus disease is a unique devastation, after which the work environment will return back to its "old normal" pre-coronavirus disease state.

Features of new normal

According to Svongoro and Mudzi (2023) learning framework and pandemic-driven societal shifts, the "new normal" is characterized by the following;

Digital transformation and technology

- i. Device independence:** Materials are designed to work across multiple devices (smartphones, laptops).
- ii. Digital transactions:** A shift from cash to cashless systems and from in-person to e-commerce and local, online shopping.
- iii. Virtual collaboration:** Increased reliance on video conferencing and online collaboration tools for work and education.

Flexible learning and working (New normal education)

- i. Flexible blended learning:** Hybrid models combining synchronous (live video) and asynchronous (independent modules) methods, providing flexibility in time and location.
- ii. Micro learning:** Breaking lessons into short, targeted "snippets" for better retention and shorter attention spans.
- iii. Accessibility:** Learning materials are designed to be accessible to all, including those with limitations or disabilities.

Safety and health protocols

- i. Social distancing:** Strict, ongoing adherence to physical distancing in public spaces, schools, and workplaces.
- ii. Mandatory hygiene:** Continued requirement for masks, hand sanitizers, and temperature screenings.
- iii. Risk management:** Development of pandemic-focused protocols, such as contact tracing and improved sanitization in public facilities.

Societal and behavioral shifts

- i. Work-from-home (WFH):** A normalized shift to remote work, which can increase productivity and balance for some, while posing communication challenges.
- ii. Consumer behavior changes:** Thriftier spending and prioritizing essential needs over luxury items.
- iii. Mental health focus:** A heightened focus on the psychological well-being of individuals due to increased stress and anxiety.

Organizational changes

- i. **Efficiency-focused:** Management by objectives rather than hours worked.
- ii. **Resilience and adaptability:** A need for companies and institutions to adapt to rapid changes and ensure business continuity.

These features are generally geared toward navigating the complexities of a post-pandemic world by balancing health safety with economic and educational continuity (Svongoro et al., 2023).

Benefits of new normal

Key benefits of the new normal according to Ramírez-Contreras, Zerón-Rugiero and Izquierdo-Pulido (2022) include the following.

Workplace flexibility and productivity: Remote work and hybrid models have led to reduced commuting times, increased job satisfaction, and improved work-life balance for many employees. Thus, companies have reported increased employee performance and lower operational costs.

Educational advancements: The shift to online learning has promoted independent learning, allowed for more personalized and "bite-sized" learning chunks (micro learning), and improved technological skills for both teachers and students.

Digital transformation: There has been a rapid, necessary acceleration in digital adaptation, including increased use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) for daily activities, which can lead to higher efficiency.

Health and hygiene awareness: The new normal emphasize health protocols, leading to better hygiene practices and increased sanitization in public and educational spaces.

Improved daily routines: Studies have indicated improved regularity in daily routines, such as better sleep quality and healthier eating habits, as individuals have more control over their schedules.

Approaches of new normal

According to Eravwoke and Imide (2021), the key approaches to the new normal are as follows;

Digital transformation and adoption (E-Life)

- i. **Virtual work and education:** The adoption of telework (working from home) and virtual meetings (Zoom, Microsoft Teams) has become standard, particularly in high-skilled sectors. Educational institutions have moved toward blended learning, combining face-to-face instruction with online, synchronous, and asynchronous learning.
- ii. **Digital financial services:** There is an increased reliance on cashless payments, online shopping, and digital ordering systems to limit physical contact.
- iii. **Telemedicine:** The health sector has adopted digital solutions, including virtual consultations to reduce congestion in hospitals.

Strategic business and economic shifts

- i. **Developing local sources:** Businesses are shifting from heavy reliance on imports to developing local sources of raw materials.
- ii. **E-Commerce and digital entrepreneurship:** Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are

leveraging social media marketing and e-commerce to sustain operations.

iii. Cost minimization: Businesses are adopting cost-saving measures, including downsizing or restructuring to fit the economic climate.

iv. Collaboration: A new approach involves collaborating with competitors and partners to share resources and maintain supply chains.

Public sector adaptations (ELIN Framework)

i. Telework policies: Implementing hybrid work arrangements to ensure continuity of services while protecting staff.

ii. Digitalization of services: Increasing the use of e-governance tools for administrative tasks.

iii. Capacity building: Training staff in digital skill development to bridge the technological divide.

Lifestyle and health behavioral changes

i. Hygiene and safety protocols: Continued adherence to health measures such as using hand sanitizers, regular washing of hands, and wearing masks in public spaces.

ii. Conscious spending: Individuals have become more intentional about financial planning and savings.

iii. Work-life balance: An increased prioritization of work-life balance and family-oriented activities.

Educational sector reforms

i. Culturo-techno-contextual approach (CTCA): A pedagogy developed by Nigerian researchers to balance culture, technology, and context in virtual learning.

ii. Blended learning adoption: Shifting from pure face-to-face learning to a blend of virtual teaching to keep academic activities alive during disruptions.

These approaches represent a fundamental shift in operational, structural, and behavioral levels within the Nigerian context.

Application of socio-technical systems (STS) theory to the study

In anchoring this study within the Trist et al., (1951) theory of the socio-technical systems (STS), one finds that the theory was reviewed to fully appreciate key factors that could enhance organizational sustainability. STS theory proposes a multi-level approach to address all system elements. It developed a framework to define and combine the different aspects of teleworking into the personnel, technical and organizational subsystems and looks into how the three subsystems (organizational level, group level, and individual level) are affected by other causal events in the work environment, termed joint causation. The principle of joint causation leads to the concept of joint optimization or the potential of work systems to achieve their intended change process. Explaining further, Green et al. (2017) aver that these concepts emphasize feedback loops over time and through different levels of analysis as the work system tries to reach a state of stability Furthermore, STS theory states that the survival of the telecommunication sector draws on the recognition of the challenges and set-backs occasioned by the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic era. It addresses multiple features of the work system, at multiple levels and considers their interactions and outcomes which is suitable for the complex events that unfolded in adopting different work arrangements after the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, this framework has the

capacity to consider inter-relationships between the sub-systems, the outcomes, and how they may change over time through the feedback loops presented. The personnel subsystem contains factors relating to personal, social and cultural aspects for work arrangements such as individual characteristics, home-life situation, group relationships, and organizational culture. The personnel, as a factor is critical since the human factor (management inclusive) remains the engine and driver that facilitates all other systems/factors in the organizational structure. Factors that describe how the work is done and the type and availability of other resources required to perform the work are included in the technical subsystem, for example, ICT, task design.

The organizational structure subsystem refers to aspects of the organizational structure and roles including management structure, practices and policies. The dashed lines of the model represent the permeability of the components across the levels of analysis, the sub-systems are interconnected and the outcomes are shown at the three levels. This model can also identify and explore the effects of time on the work arrangement system, which is especially relevant for the purposes of the present study; in the context of the extended Covid-19 pandemic era and continues even as many organizations returned to a business-as-usual BAU situation (standard day-to-day business operations in an organization).

Methodology

The study adopted a Mixed method research design which involves collecting, analyzing, and integrating both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (contextual) data in a single study to provide a comprehensive understanding of a research problem. Primary and secondary data were adopted for the study. For the purpose of this study, the target population consisted of one thousand, one hundred and twenty-eight (1,128) management and non-management staff of the twenty (20) selected physical spectrum and base stations of Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) in South-East, Nigeria. Therefore, in determining the sample size, the study adopted Godden (2004) statistical formula which is given as:

$$SS = \frac{Z^2 \times P \times (1-P)}{C^2} \dots \dots \dots \text{Infinite (equation 1)}$$

Where;

SS= Sample size

Z = Z-value expressed (at 1.96 for a 95% confidence level)

P = Percentage of population picking a choice expressed as decimal^β

C = Confidence interval expressed (at .04 = +/- 4% points)

Therefore, the sample size of the study was three hundred and ninety-two (392).

A stratified sampling method was adopted to give every member of the staff' equal chance of being selected. The study used questionnaire from dependent and independent variables as the instrument for data collection. The instrument was therefore subjected to face and content validity.

In this study, a test-re-test approach of reliability was used and the pilot study was carried out using twenty (20) copies of the questionnaire that were administered to the selected MNOs under study proportionately on different time interval. Both descriptive statistics and inferential statistic were adopted in this study and in analyzing the objectives of the study, hypotheses (i) and (ii) were tested using Simple Linear Regression Model to assess the effect of remote and hybrid work on employee competence and determine the effect of digital transformation and automation on employee responsiveness of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Assess the effect of remote and hybrid work on employee competence of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria.

RESPONSES						N=311		
	SA 5	A 4	UN 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL	MEAN	Std. Dev.
Employees working outside the office full-time maximizes flexibility	75	183	37	4	12	1238	4.0	.872
Working outside the office full-time, improves employee's autonomy	83	199	25	4	-	1294	4.2	.612
Hybrid work mixes remote and in-office work, offering a balance between collaboration and focus time	108	175	26	2	-	1322	4.3	.628
Remote and hybrid work supported by digital tools, improve work-life balance but require active management to avoid isolation and burnout.	120	173	14	4	-	1342	4.3	.620

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Decision Rule

If Mean < 3.5, the mean is not high or the respondents do not agree

If Mean ≥ 3.5, the mean is high or the respondents agree

Table above showed the effect of remote and hybrid work on employee competence. Majority of the respondents with the highest mean scores of 4.3, 4.3, 4.2 and 4.0 respectively strongly agreed that remote and hybrid work supported by digital tools, improve work-life balance but require active management to avoid isolation and burnout, hybrid work mixes remote and in-office work, offering a balance between collaboration and focus time, working outside the office full-time, improves employees autonomy and employees working outside the office full-time maximizes flexibility. Therefore, since the mean of all the responses is ≥ 3.5 this shows that remote and hybrid work had a significant effect on employee competence of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria.

Table 2: Determine the effect of digital transformation and automation on employee responsiveness of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria.

N=311								
RESPONSES	SA 5	A 4	UN 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL	MEAN	Std. Dev.
Complementary strategies that leverage technology to modernize businesses are firms' sources of competitive advantage	102	164	37	3	5	1288	4.1	.782
Automation streamlining specific tasks and transformation fundamentally changing how organizations operate, serve customers, and create value	126	151	20	12	2	1320	4.2	.790
Digital transformation provides the strategic framework for holistic, technology-driven innovation that enhances organizational performance	140	148	10	12	1	1347	4.3	.747
Automation acts as a foundational component, increasing efficiency, reducing costs and freeing employees for higher-value work	124	171	12	4	-	1348	4.3	.615

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table above showed the effect of digital transformation and automation. Majority of the respondents with the highest mean scores of 4.3, 4.3, 4.2 and 4.1 respectively strongly agreed that automation acts as a foundational component, increasing efficiency, reducing costs and freeing employees for higher-value work, digital transformation provides the strategic framework for holistic, technology-driven innovation that enhances organizational performance, automation streamlining specific tasks and transformation fundamentally changing how organizations operate, serve customers, and create value and complementary strategies that leverage technology to modernize businesses are firms' sources of competitive advantage. Therefore, since the mean of all the responses is ≥ 3.5 , this shows that digital transformation and automation had a significant effect on employee responsiveness of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria.

Test of Hypotheses

H0₁: Remote and hybrid work have no significant effect on employee competence of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria

Table 3: Simple regression analysis on remote and hybrid work and employee competence

Variable	Parameters	Coefficient	Std error	t – value
Constant	β_0	3.251	0.116	6.168
RHW (X_1)	β_1	0.949	0.028	3.418**
R-Square		0.793		
Adjusted R – Square		0.790		
F – statistics		118.611***		

Source: Field Data, 2026.

Table above showed simple regression analysis on remote and hybrid work and employee competence. The coefficient of multiple determination (R^2) was 0.790 which implies that 79.0% of the variations in dependents were explained by changes in the independent variable while 21.0% were unexplained by the stochastic variable indicating a goodness of fit of the regression model adopted in this study which is statistically significant at 1% probability level.

The coefficient of remote and hybrid work was statistically significant and positively related to employee competence at 5 percent level (3.418**). Therefore, we reject null hypothesis and uphold the alternative hypothesis which states that remote and hybrid work had a significant effect on employee competence of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria.

H0₂: Digital transformation and automation have no significant effect on employee responsiveness of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria

Table 4: Simple regression analysis on digital transformation/automation and employee responsiveness

Variable	Parameters	Coefficient	Std error	t – value
Constant	β_0	2.985	0.184	7.190
DTA (X_1)	β_1	0.762	0.020	3.381**
R-Square		0.819		
Adjusted R – Square		0.818		
F – statistics		140.327***		

Source: Field Data, 2026.

Table above showed simple regression analysis on digital transformation/automation and employee responsiveness. The coefficient of multiple determination (R^2) was 0.818 which implies that 81.8% of the variations in dependents were explained by changes in the independent variable while 18.2% were unexplained by the stochastic variable indicating a goodness of fit of the regression model adopted in this study which is statistically significant at 1% probability level.

The coefficient of digital transformation/automation was statistically significant and positively related to employee responsiveness at 5 percent level (3.381**). Therefore, we reject null hypothesis and uphold the alternative hypothesis which states that digital transformation and automation had a significant effect on employee responsiveness of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria.

Discussion of Results

This study examined new normal and employment relations of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria. From the descriptive analyses, it was revealed that a total of three hundred and ninety-two (392) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the selected MNOs in South-East, Nigeria. Out of this number, eighty-one (81) copies of questionnaire were lost/wrongly filled with percentage ratio of 21.7% while three hundred and eleven (311) copies of questionnaire were correctly filled and returned with percentage ratio of 79.2% and this formed the basis of the study. The study also revealed that majority 187 with percentage ratio of 60.1% were male respondents while female respondents were 124 with percentage ratio of 39.9%. This showed that the difference in gender distribution is not much. Hence, male respondents constitute the study more than female. Majority 119 respondents with percentage ratio of 38.3% were between the age range of 41-50 years, 83 respondents with percentage ratio of 26.7% were between the age range of 31-40 years, 57 respondents with percentage ratio of 18.3% were between the age range of 51 years and above while 52 respondents with percentage ratio of 16.7% were between the age range of below 30 years. This showed that majority of the respondent were matured in age and in experience. Majority 149 respondents with percentage ratio of 47.9% were B.Sc./PGD/HND holders followed by 70 respondents with percentage ratio of 22.5% were FSLC/SSCE/GCE holders, 55 respondents with percentage ratio of 17.7% were M.Sc./MBA holders and 37 respondents with percentage ratio of 11.9% had other qualification aside the ones listed. This finding indicated that majority of the respondents had secondary and tertiary level of education. Also, majority 189 respondents with percentage ratio of 60.8% had working experience of 6-10 years, 81 respondents with percentage ratio 26.0% had working experience of 11 years and above while 41 respondents with percentage ratio of 13.2% had working experience of below 5 years. This showed that majority of the respondents had good working experience with the selected MNOs. The result on objective, research question and hypothesis one showed that remote and hybrid work had a significant effect on employee competence of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria. The study further showed that majority of the respondents with the highest mean scores of 4.3, 4.3, 4.2 and 4.0 respectively strongly agreed that remote and hybrid work supported by digital tools, improve work-life balance but require active management to avoid isolation and burnout, hybrid work mixes remote and in-office work, offering a balance between collaboration and focus time, working outside the office full-time, improves employees autonomy and employees working outside the office full-time maximizes flexibility. The finding of this study is in tandem with the findings of Awala (2024) who carried out a study on the effect of remote and hybrid work on employee's performance: a study of Ultima Studio, Lagos State Nigeria. The result implies that there was a significant relationship between remote work and managerial supervision and employees' performance in Ultima Studios and that there was a significant relationship between remote work and organizational commitment of employees in Ultima Studios. The study recommended that management of Ultima Studio needs to implement policies that will give employees the opportunity to enjoy the same benefits while working from the office and organizations need to pay close attention to the benefits of remote work and the effect it could have on their employees' problem-solving ability particularly those employees that require fewer interruptions and distractions to do their job amongst others. The finding was also supported by the findings of Magaji, Worimegbe and Oloidi (2025) whose study determined the effect of hybrid work systems on employee performance of selected fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. The results showed that hybrid work systems had positive significant effect on employee performance. On the moderation effect of work environment and

organization support on the relationship between hybrid work systems and employee performance, the results showed negative but statistically significant effect. However, when the two moderating variables were combined, the beta coefficient of work environment and organization support were positive and statistically significant meaning that work environment and organization support both moderate the relationship between hybrid work systems and employee performance. The study recommended that FMCG organizations should prioritize true flexibility, ensure positive remote experiences for their employees and invest in remote work enablers to boost employee performance.

The result on objective, research question and hypothesis two showed that digital transformation and automation had a significant effect on employee responsiveness of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria. The study further stated that majority of the respondents with the highest mean scores of 4.3, 4.3, 4.2 and 4.1 respectively strongly agreed that automation acts as a foundational component, increasing efficiency, reducing costs and freeing employees for higher-value work, digital transformation provides the strategic framework for holistic, technology-driven innovation that enhances organizational performance, automation streamlining specific tasks and transformation fundamentally changing how organizations operate, serve customers, and create value and complementary strategies that leverage technology to modernize businesses are firms' sources of competitive advantage. This finding aligns with the findings of Sura, Ahmad and Areej (2020) whose study investigated the effect of digital transformation on organizational performance by a mediating role of digital innovation. The results indicated that there was a relationship between digital transformation and organizational performance, mediated by digital innovation. It was noted that the social and technological perspectives of digital transformation had a significant impact on digital innovation. Finally, the study recommended that large companies should be encouraged to take the opportunity to adopt digital transformation and digital innovation to boost their performance from all organizational perspectives. The finding is also in line with the findings of Angima (2022) who carried out a study on the effect of digital adoption on performance of insurance firms in Kenya. The study concluded that digitalization enables the insurance firms to upgrade their processes, make product improvements and discharge quality services to their clients and therefore recommends that insurance firms should continually invest in technology and keep up with new innovations in order to enhance processes, products and service delivery to customers in order to improve company performance.

Summary of Findings

- i. Remote and hybrid work had a positive and significant effect on employee competence of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria ($R^2 = 79.0\%$, $t\text{-value} = 3.418^{**}$ at 5 percent significant level). This implies that an increase in MNOs use of remote and hybrid work, leads to a positive and significant effect on employee competence.
- ii. Digital transformation and automation had a positive and significant effect on employee responsiveness of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria ($R^2 = 81.8\%$, $t\text{-value} = 3.381^{**}$ at 5 percent significant level). This showed that the more MNOs used digital transformation and automation, the more it has positive and significant effect on employee responsiveness.

Conclusion

Pandemics have been reported in the world since centuries and the most devastating effects have been seen by the multiple plague outbreaks throughout the world. These pandemics have out rightly changed the society, culture and even thinking of the general population. The political, economic and many strategically adversities faced by the globe call for preparedness and vigilance by the government and other stakeholders to lessen human sufferings as much as possible. Regarding new normal and employment relations, there are many methods and methodologies each of which according to their approaches have definite steps and approaches to adopt. To this effect, the study deduced that new normal approaches contributed to enhanced employment relations of telecommunication industry in South-East, Nigeria.

Recommendations

- i.** The management of MNOs should continuously adopt remote and hybrid work, implement flexible frameworks that balance remote and in-office schedules based on job roles and employee preferences. Also, they should continue to upgrade collaboration tools and ensure data security, especially for remote infrastructures.
- ii.** The management of MNOs should proactively deepen their digital transformation and automation strategies as the empirical results of this study showed that digital transformation and automation is catalytic to firm employee responsiveness which can help firms work effectively and reduce their organizational and operation costs. Also, MNOs should seize the opportunity of today's rapid development of digitalization to deeply integrate digital technology and automation into their operations and management system to lay the foundation for rapid and sustainable development of enterprises.

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