

# AUTHENTICITY OF EMPLOYEE VOICE CHANNELS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF NIGERIA'S BANKING AND ICTs SECTORS

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## Abstract

Employee voice efficacy has remained at the centre of global employment relations discourse following the continuing demise of union representative voice, largely portrayed as a tendentious function of the surge of alternative voice systems (or non-unionised employee representations -NERs). Discourses pertaining to voice have equally remained contentious in the developed world and fundamentally complex to follow in the developing countries, giving the widening gap in their employment relations literatures, particularly in Nigeria's terrain currently being investigated in this study. Thus, this research aims to identify the various voice channels through which employees are represented and to establish how participatory they are perceived by respondents. Consequently, an empirical investigation was conducted in 5 organisations across the Nigeria's banking and ICTs sectors, via a semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 73 managers and employees altogether. Data gathered consequently were qualitatively analysed via critical discourse analytical (CDA) framework, to uncover Nigeria's unique cultural-environmental dynamics driving the adoption of non-unionised employee voice systems by organisations.

**Keywords:** Employee Voice Channels, Stakeholder Engagement, Legitimacy, Nigeria, Banking, Industry, ICTs Sector, CDA/DHA.

## Introduction

The objective of this research is to interrogate employee voice authenticity in Nigeria's employment relations, by establishing the range of voice channels adopted by management in the banking and ICTs sectors and also by determining how participatory they are perceived by case study's respondents, in a work environment that is strongly shaped by cultural influence. Employee voice concept has remained relatively contentious, which has created

diverse understanding of the phenomenon amongst field commentators (Kinge, 2014; Holland, 2014). Arguably, it is assumed to entail the engagement and inclusion of the workforce in the overall work-related processes, for informed decisions making (Freeman & Medoff 1984, Spencer 1986; Marchington and Kynighou, 2012). Thus, if employees perceive to be engaged, involved, valued and respected, they would be open to express both personal grievances and work related barriers, which can compel necessary changes to impact work commitment, efficiency, high performance (Wilkinson et al, 2014) and the overall achievement of organisational goals (Avgar and Owens, 2014; Gollan et al, 2015). Conversely, the outcome is likely to be different where employees aggrieve, retreat, overlook and or at worst disrupt work process, as a consequence of their voice being marginalised (Wilkinson et al, 2014).

For many writers, voice efficacy is largely dependent upon the platform within which employees are engaged and involved. Accordingly, employee voice is traditionally facilitated globally via **union** collective representation or via alternative (and individualised) channels of **non-unionised employee representation (NERs)**, or by both-also known as a hybrid approach (Marchington and Kynighou, 2012; Thomas, 2013). Nonetheless, authenticity of employee voice remains an issue beginning to be resolved, as problematised by Dundon et al (2015) in the context of which between union and NERs channels can deliver the best mutual employer-employee outcomes? The former is absolutely preoccupied with employees' collective interests and welfare (which it considers non-negotiable), however, many view it as inflexible, old fashion and of selfish interests, which often stifles organisational effort towards change management in turbulent business time (Wilkinson et al, 2014). The later is considered moderate, flexible and promises mutual employer-employee benefits via partnership, involvement, team members and rhetoric of cordial relationship, however, given its perceived managerial orientation, many have continued to question the authenticity of employee voice under such arrangement (Wilkinson et al, 2014; Gollan et al, 2015; Donaghey, 2016).

Furthermore, since the ability of workers to voice or remain silence is determined by the cultural-environmental dynamic of the host country, which applies to all firms (Hofste, 2001; Rhee et al, 2014); more questions are being raised regarding the universality of employee voice concept, which studies have primarily captured from the prism of Western countries. As many writers have noted, the cultural dynamic of Western countries are shaped around individualism and low power distance (PD) index (Winterich and Zhang, 2014), as opposed to the culture of collectivism and high power distance index noted across developing countries, particularly in Africa (Khatri, 2009). According to Farh et al (2014), this cultural dissimilarity can distort inter-organisational relationship, which makes it complex to transport certain models of social science from developed countries to developing countries. Thus, employees in a high power distance environment are less likely to experience positive voice outcomes as those in low power distance environments, given that the choice of employee voice channels is voluntary and at management's discretion.

These questions are increasingly being asked in the Nigeria's employment relations, which is an interesting terrain to test these phenomena. Nigeria has a cultural-environmental dynamic of high power distance (PD) index, which consciously and unconsciously accepts and endorses inequality in power distribution and superior-subordinate relationship. This does not parallel with the ethos of speaking up and challenging the status quo (the hallmark of voice), as employees in PD work environment are less likely challenge their superiors (Rao, 2013). Secondly, whilst the rapidly declining trade union is believed to have generated much excitement in Nigeria's employment relations literature (Anyim et al, 2013), there appears to be no formal documentation of NERs, which is currently widely adopted in the private sector and ostensibly growing in the public sector. To the knowledge of this study's author, there is no study on the cultural-environmental dynamics driving the choice of employee representative channels adopted by management in Nigeria and how participatory they are perceived across her employment terrain?

Furthermore, previous studies on employee voice and employer-employee relationship in Nigeria have largely been conducted via quantitative-survey methodology and analysed thematically or via content analysis amongst others (Okpu and Jaja, 2014; Madu, 2013), which however are not critical approach and can be constraining (and manipulative of information and communication) in investigative inquiry relating to socio-corporate reality. Citing this "issues", Bakre (2004) noted the need for research to adopt a "critical turn", which can offer alternative ways of doing things, particularly in terms of understanding rhetoric as a social-corporate construct, as opposed to a medium of transparency or accountability (Wodak, 2001).

Against this backdrop, this empirical study aims to extend employee voice literature by establishing the participatory dynamic of voice channels adopted in Nigeria's banking and ICTs sectors and the cultural-environmental dynamics that is driving this, via the employment of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is a precursor to 'critical (theory) turn' (Wodak, 2000, 2001). CDA is a "problem-oriented" (Waugh et al, 2015:72) and "multimodal meaning making" interdisciplinary language tool (Djonov and Zhao, 2014:4) for understanding "how societal structure influences discourse structures..., how they are instituted, legitimised reproduced, confirmed or countered by talk or text" (Wodak 2011b,p.60). Thus, CDA can be effective in the analysis of socio-corporate discourses and the characteristic of institutional dynamics and the elite class that shape them (Fairclough, 2013). CDA functions along with different sub-sections; however the discourse historical analysis (DHA) is the chosen extension, which utilises three key approaches namely, themes, strategies and linguistic means of understanding language. Thus, CDA/DHA which will be instrumental in the effective interrogation of issues being discussed in this study, via interview and focus group discussions with managers and employees in five firms each across the Nigerian banking and ICTs sectors. The next section will briefly look at the channels of employee voice from global perspectives, followed by the Nigeria's context.

## **Employee Voice Channels: Orthodox Union and Non-unionised Employee Representations (NERs)**

As noted earlier, employee voice can be facilitated via **union** collective platform or via alternative platforms of individualised employee representations, otherwise known as non-employee representative platform (**NERs**) (Marchington and Kynighou, 2012; Thomas, 2013). Subtly perceived as confrontational and inflexible amongst other draw backs (in its pursuit of employees' interests), trade union has been systematically avoided by management in replacement with the NERs (Wilkinson et al, 2014), which it considered not only moderate but also promises mutual employer-employee benefits (Kinge, 2014). However, many have equally questioned the efficacy of employee voice under such establishment, given its wide perception of strong managerial derivation, which contrasts employees' core interests (Dundon et al, 2015). These conflicting views necessitate further clarification, as to what may or may not constitute effective (or participatory) voice, irrespective of the channels *per-se*.

To this end, Legitimacy theory (Suchman, 1995) would be considered crucial in interrogating the underlying reasons driving the adoption and justification of specific voice channels by management, while engagement theory (Albrecht, 2010; Macey et al, 2011) will enable the examination of engagement scope and level, which determines how participatory employee voice may be perceived (see conceptual framework section). Thus, the combination of legitimacy theory and engagement theory (to form **engagement-legitimacy theory**) falls in line with the current call for research studies to adopt multi-theoretical approach, which can provide more nuanced understanding of organisational-stakeholders relationship, as opposed to theoretical pluralism, which is a functionalist tradition and constraining. Thus legitimacy-engagement theory is ideal in the study of employee voice efficacy and participatory dynamics of the representative channels adopted by management across the Nigeria's employment sectors. This is one of the key preoccupations of this current study, as past researches have often used legitimacy theory to interrogate organisational behaviour, which is considered lopsided due to the overly focus on managerial perception and total neglect of employees' perception of voice notion, which engagement theory addresses.

Furthermore, as Hostede (2002) noted, the relationship between the cultural-environmental dynamics of host countries (which apply to firms) and organisational culture are not in isolation of factors driving managerial behaviours and the perception of employee voice outcomes. The following sections look briefly at the implication of cultural dynamic on employee voice efficacy

### **Employee voice and Cultural Dynamic: Global and Nigeria's Perspectives**

Numerous industrial/employment relations studies have indicated there is a strong relationship between cultural dynamics and employee voice outcomes (Rhee et al, 2014). While employee voice entails the ability of workforce to have input or a say in the process of decision making without backlash from their superiors (Wilkinson et al, 2014); it is essentially the cultural orientation of individual countries (which applies to all firms) that

determines how organisations may behave towards stakeholder's outcomes (Griffith and Harvey, 2001). In Hofstede and Hostede (2005), culture in organisation-stakeholder relationship is defined as a multidimensional construction which can be explained along the axis of masculinity vs. femininity, individualism and collectivism (IDC) and power distance. In masculine vs femininity culture, the later thrive on the value of success and competitiveness, while equality of life defines the later. While culture of individualism describes how people perceive their own image (such as I or we) and relationship towards family members; collective culture places premium on society and group consensus. Power distance (PD) refers to societal acceptance and endorsement of power disparity (Hofstede and Hostede, 2005; Griffith and Harvey, 2001).

Going by Ting-Toomey's (1988) face negotiation theory, power distance (PD) and individual vs collective (IVC) are relevant in this study, as it reflects the likelihood for individual on a low power distance to attempt voicing out, as opposed to a high power distance culture, where individual may view challenging or confronting the status quo as unethical and damaging to socio-corporate reputation (Merkin, 2006). This disparity in cultural dynamics presents challenges to employee voice studies, as they are largely captured from the cultural perspectives of Western countries, built on the anvils of collectivism and low power index (Farh et al, 2014), which differs from the collective and high power distance index that characterised cultures in most developing countries such as Nigeria. Nigeria's cultural-environmental dynamics is shaped around collectivism and high power distance index, which accept and endorse superior-subordinate relationship and respect for people in the position of leadership or authority (Umar and Hassan, 2014). It is essentially this culture that have shaped Nigeria's institutional dynamics and characterised her employment environment, which has been embroiled in long history of conflict between unions and corporations over stakeholder disengagement and employee voice marginalisation. Thus, cultural-environmental dynamic is envisaged to have greater implication for employee voice strategies/channels adopted by organisations and the outcomes for employees across Nigeria's employment sectors. The following sections look at employee voice channels in Nigeria's employment relations.

### **Employee Voice in Nigeria's Employment Relations**

Often referred to as the most populous Black nation in Africa, Nigeria boast of over 180 million population, huge wealth of reserve in natural resources and a host of functioning employment sectors, which includes the (leading but controversial) petroleum sector, the harbinger of her economy (Obi, 2010), followed by (but not restricted to) the **banking** and **ICTs** sectors, two of which are being reviewed in this study. These sectors attract huge foreign investment and employment in the country, although the impact remains to be felt amongst the vast (mass) population (Investor Resources, 2012). Employees in Nigeria have endured a long hostile employment environment under trade unions representations, but currently, the near erosion of unions has only exacerbated the hostile employment environment and the marginalisation of employees' voice (Oruh, 2014; Madu, 2013). The unions are systematically sidelined due to a number of factors, such as their own incompetence, self-centred interests and environmental aggression including (in particular)

union abhorrence (and penchant for NERs) by multinational corporations (MNCs), who dominate the industries and are equally supported by the Nigerian state for strategic reasons (Iyayi, 2009). A brief overview of voice channels in Nigeria's Banking and ICTs sectors follows next.

### **Employee Voice Channels in the Nigeria's Banking and ICTs Sectors: The Submerge of Unions and Surge of NERs**

As Otobo (2007) noted, before privatisation, the financial sector recognised trade union bodies under the auspices of NUBIFIE, ASSBIFI and NEABIA. However, the newly emerged generation of privately owned banks and financial institutions which dated the privatisation and liberalisation of 1986 abhorred unionism and collective bargaining, in favour of individual mechanisms of employee contracts and representations, which explained the emergence of both collective and individualised employer-employee relationship in the sector then (Madu, 2013). As with the Banking sector, privatisation in the ICTs sector means the takeover of the industry by foreign investors, whose preference of employees mode of representation have remained till date alternative voice system (Erap, 2011; Anyim et al, 2013) (known as **NERs**). There is however no coverage of the surge of NERs in Nigeria's employment relations literature, which essentially compels this study's clarion call for researchers to engage this phenomenon.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In reconceptualising employee voice efficacy via interrogating the participatory dynamics of channels of voice adopted in the Nigeria's Banking and ICTs sectors employment, legitimacy and engagement theories are combined (to form **legitimacy-engagement theory**) and employed in this study, to interrogate this from both managerial and employees' perspectives, which previous studies have largely engaged from the perspective of organisational legitimacy. This is in response to the current call for research studies to adopt critical turn (Bakre, 2004), of which Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be instrumental, being a problem-oriented language tool that facilitates multiple theoretical affiliations, necessary in understanding the "*missing link*" between language construction, the underlying intent and meaning (Wodak 2011b,p. 60).

Thus, based on the multi-theoretical credentials of CDA which functions along multiple extensions such as discourse historical analysis (DHA) (Wodak, 2000, 2001), which (as noted earlier) is the chosen sub-section for this study; legitimacy theory is employed to interrogate the potential motives driving organisational behaviours. In Suchman's (1995) theory of organisational legitimacy, institutional (normative) and strategic (managerial) dimensions, which relies on communicative strategies of manufacturing consent and persuasion, were implicated amongst some of the motives driving organisational behaviours (Leeuwen, 2007), including (in this current case) the rising adoption and justification of alternative voice systems (Marchington and Kynighou, 2012). The common justification for managerial

adoption of alternative voice systems (as opposed orthodox unions) is usually shaped around mutual employer-employee benefit via collaboration, partnership and cordial relationship (Wilkinson et al, 2014). However Hobfoll's (1998) stakeholder/employee engagement framework was purposefully employed, with specific reference to engagement level and scope, particularly in the form of '*under-engagement*' in matters concerning employees' interests and or '*over-engagement*' in work-related activities- initiated by management, which subtly can undermine work-life balance (Albrecht, 2010; Macey et al, 2011) and employee voice efficacy (Marchington and Kynighou, 2012).

This is replete in most developing countries such as Nigeria, where employees are forced to do overtimes as well as work during weekend (Anyim, 2013; Otopo, 2007), hence the drive to justify the choice and adoption of alternative voice systems, which are moderate and cooperative than unions. According to Leeuwen (2007), organisations often strive towards achieving and sustaining stakeholder's endorsement/legitimisation (of their practices), via the use of manufacturing consent and persuasive rhetoric of mutual benefits, partnership and collaboration. Essentially, stakeholder/employees perception of voice and engagement is critical for their motivation and work commitment, which can translate to organisational performance, hence the effort to achieve stakeholder/employee endorsement/legitimacy (Leeuwen, 2007; Albrecht, 2010). The question remains, do employees and their representatives have the requisite resources such as power, competence and autonomy (relative to cultural-environmental barriers) to achieve balanced bargaining prospect with management, in the delivery of employees voice (Wilkinson et al, 2014)? It is hope that the development of **legitimacy-engagement theory** (which enshrines CDA imperatives) will provide more insight into this. A brief presentation of the research methodology follows next.

### **Methodology of Study**

This empirical investigation utilised purposive sampling based on social construction and interpretive methodology (Berg & Lune, 2012; Silverman, 2013), which Saunders et al (2009) suggested for the interrogation of human reality. As a consequence, a total of **66** managers and employees were interviewed and **7** focus group participants engaged in discussions, to identify salient themes, which were discursively analysed via Wodak,s (2000;2001) critical discourse analysis (CDA). As an interdisciplinary study and enabling tool for understanding language (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Fairclough, 2013), CDA was adopted here to identify and analyse themes of salient, required in establishing the cultural-environmental factors influencing the prevailing employee voice channels adopted in Nigeria's banking and ICTs sectors and to determine how participatory they are perceived by respondents across the sectors. Importantly, CDA is deemed ideal for this research, as it interrogates social constructions and discourse functions (Dijk, 2008). The choice of discourse historical analysis (DHA) (which is the sub-section of CDA preferred in this study) is potentially based on its utility of three critical steps; these are themes *of discourse*, *strategies of discourse* and *linguistic means* (Wodak, 2001), which are used in arriving at discourse themes, informed construction of language intent and analysis of empirical findings

of this study. The following sections will present the demography of the case study sectors and organisations, which were ascribed pseudo names.

### Demography of Banking Sector

As shown below (table 1), the banking sector's demography involved the total of 35 participants of which managers (*Hr, Brand, Marketing and Line managers*) are 18 and employees are 17. Out of these 35 participants, 16 are female and 19 are male. 13 of these participants are from Lagos branches, 12 from Abuja and 10 from Porthacourt. The sector has unions but the organisations currently adopt NERs approach to employee voice delivery.

**Table 1: Aggregate Demography of Banking Sector's Sample Frame: Bank 1, Bank 2, Bank 3, Bank 4 and Bank 5**

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Firms</i>	<i>Mode of Rep</i>	<i>Lagos Branches</i>	<i>Abuja Branches</i>	<i>Port Harcourt</i>	<i>Male/ Female</i>	<i>Work Position</i>	<i>Employment Yrs</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Managers</b>	<i>Bank 1</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 / 2</i>	<i>2,1,1/HR/Brand/line</i>	<i>4yrs +</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>Employees</b>	<i>Bank 1</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 / 1</i>	<i>Employees</i>	<i>6yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Managers</b>	<i>Bank 2</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 / 1</i>	<i>1,1,1/Brand/Mkt/Line</i>	<i>3yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Employees</b>	<i>Bank 2</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 / 2</i>	<i>Employees</i>	<i>5yrs +</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>Managers</b>	<i>Bank 3</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2/2</i>	<i>2,1,1/Line/HR/Mkt</i>	<i>7yrs +</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>Employees</b>	<i>Bank 3</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2/1</i>	<i>Employees</i>	<i>3yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Managers</b>	<i>Bank 4</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 / 2</i>	<i>2,1,1/ Mkt/brand/Hr</i>	<i>4yrs +</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>Employees</b>	<i>Bank 4</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1 / 2</i>	<i>Employees</i>	<i>3yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Managers</b>	<i>Bank 5</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 / 1</i>	<i>1,1,1/HR/Brand/line</i>	<i>8yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Employees</b>	<i>Bank 5</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 / 2</i>	<i>Employees</i>	<i>6yrs +</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>All Banks</b>	<b>All NERs</b>	<b>Lagos: 13</b>	<b>Abuja: 12</b>	<b>PH: 10</b>	<b>19 / 16</b>	<b>5 Hr/, 4 Brnd/, 4 Mkt/, 5 Line Mangrs- &amp; 17 workers</b>	<b>All 3yrs +</b>	<b>35</b>

(Researchers, 2016)

### Demographics of ICTs Sector

In table 2 below, the ICTs (telecommunication) sector's demography involved the total of 31 participants of which managers (*Hr, Brand, Marketing and Line managers*) are 15 and employees are 16. Out of these 31 participants, 13 are female and 18 are male. 11 of these participants are from Lagos branches, 10 from Abuja and another 10 from Porthacourt. The sector has no unions, it adopt NERs approach to employee voice representations.

**Table 2: Aggregate Demography of ICTs sector's Sample Frame: ICT 1, ICT 2, ICT 3, ICT 4 & ICT 5**

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Firms</i>	<i>Mode of Rep</i>	<i>Lagos Branches</i>	<i>Abuja Branches</i>	<i>Port Harcourt Branches</i>	<i>Male/ Female</i>	<i>Work Position</i>	<i>Employment Yrs</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Managers</b>	<i>ICT 1</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2/1</i>	<i>1,1,1/HR/Brand/Line</i>	<i>4yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Employees</b>	<i>ICT 1</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 / 1</i>	<i>Employees</i>	<i>7yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Managers</b>	<i>ICT 2</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 / 1</i>	<i>1,1,1 /Brand/Line/Mkt</i>	<i>6yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>



<b>Employees</b>	<i>ICT 2</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 / 1</i>	<i>Employees</i>	<i>5yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Managers</b>	<i>ICT 3</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 / 1</i>	<i>1,1,1/Line/Mkt/Hr</i>	<i>7yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Employees</b>	<i>ICT 3</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 / 2</i>	<i>Employees</i>	<i>3yrs +</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>Managers</b>	<i>ICT 4</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1 / 2</i>	<i>1,1,1Mrk./Hr//Brand</i>	<i>4yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Employees</b>	<i>ICT 4</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1 / 2</i>	<i>Employees</i>	<i>3yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Managers</b>	<i>ICT 5</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2 / 1</i>	<i>1,1,1,/HR/Brand/Line</i>	<i>5yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Employees</b>	<i>ICT 5</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2/1</i>	<i>Employees</i>	<i>5yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>All ICTs</b>	<b>All NERs</b>	<b>Lagos: 11</b>	<b>Abuja: 10</b>	<b>PH: 10</b>	<b>18 / 13</b>	<b>4 Hr/ 4 Brnd/ 3 Mkt/ 4 line Mgrs &amp; 16 workers</b>	<b>All 3yrs +</b>	<b>31</b>

(Researchers, 2016)

### Demography of Focus Group and Locations

As highlighted below (table 3), the focus group comprised of 7 participants from across the sectors. The first focus group sitting held in Lagos involved 3 participants of which 1 is female and 2 male representatives, 2 from ICT sector organisations and 1 each from the banking sector. The second sitting was held in Abuja and involved 2 participants of which 1 is female and 1 male representative each from the two sector organisations. The third sitting held in Porthacourt involved 2 participants of which 1 is female and 1 male representatives each from banking and ICTs sectors.

**Table 3: Aggregate Demography of Focus Group Sample Frame: Bank, ICTs and Petroleum,**

Focus Group in	Banking	Mode of Rep	IC T	Mode of Rep	Male/Female	Employment Yrs	Total
<b>Lagos</b>	<i>1</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>2/1</i>	<i>4 yrs +</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Abuja</b>	<i>1</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1/1</i>	<i>5 yrs +</i>	<i>2</i>
<b>PortHacourt</b>	<i>1</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>NERs</i>	<i>1/1</i>	<i>3 Yrs +</i>	<i>2</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<i>NERs</i>	<b>4</b>	<i>NERs</i>	<b>4/3</b>	<b>3 Yrs +</b>	<b>7</b>

(Researchers, 2016)

Using pseudo names, participants (or sample population) were labelled **bank 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5; ICTs 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5** and **Focus Group 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7**, bringing the total sample population to 73. To this end, this sample size can be conceived to have attained what theories have described as lending credence to research methodology and findings via inclusive mechanism (Saunders et al, 2009; Silverman, 2013), considering the balanced participation of male and female across diverse locations of sample frame. Indeed, Porthacourt can arguably represent the commercial centre of the Eastern Nigeria and Lagos-the Western and the commercial centre of Nigeria, while Abuja-the North and the Federal Capital territory of Nigeria. These cities were purposefully selected for this study, being the most population dense cities in the country (Falola & Heaton, 2008), with the highest number of (these firms) offices and employees. The empirical section (which is data presentation and analysis of study) follows next.

### Empirical Sections

As recalled, the CDA extension of discursive-historical analysis (DHA) utilises three key analytical dimensions, but due to the remit of this study, the first two (themes of discourse

and strategies of discourse) were adopted, to identify and analyse recurring salient themes. When certain themes of salient or topic reoccur across discourse of organisational norms, Fairclough (1992) and Wodak (2001) suggest they can be applied in arriving at discursive judgement, which in this case is the perception of employee voice channels and their participatory dynamics, which resonates with Fairclough's (2003) inter-discursive analysis and Wodak's (2000) inter-textual strategy. A graphic depiction of the analytical framework will make these sections clearer and easier to follow.

**Fig. 1: Framework for Discursive Themes of Salient: Employee Voice Channels**

<i>Discursive Themes of Salient</i>			
Employee Voice Channels			
Non-unionised Employee Representation (NERs) -		Union Representation	
Village Meeting, Village Square Meeting, Active Hr Office, Staff Association Forum, Breakfast with CEO, Employee Engagement Forum, One-to-one with Managers, Team Briefing, External Employee Engagement Survey, Internal Survey, Joint Consultation Council (JCC), My pain Website & Social Blog and others ( <i>Currently adopted by all of the organisations</i> )		ASSUBIFI, NASSUBIFI & NEABIA (Banking Sector Unions) ( <i>Currently not adopted</i> )	
<i>Strategies of Discourse</i>			
How participatory are the above listed Voice Channels?			
Cultural-Environmental Dimensions (e.g. NERs, Fear, Favouritism & 'my oga at the top syndrome- MOTS )			
Legitimacy Strategy	Persuasion & Manufacturing consent	Strategy of Engagement	Level & Scope of Engagement
<i>(Sub)Strategies of Discourse</i>			
Institutional/Normative Legitimacy		Strategic/Managerial Legitimacy	

**Source: Researcher (2016)**

### **Discursive Themes and Strategies of Analysing Salient Themes**

Following Cillia et al's (1999) *matrix of topics* (p. 158) which defined how salient themes can be identified and interrogated, certain macro semantic themes were highlighted including their corresponding narratives and perceptions (see Appendix), in relationship with the various employee voice channels adopted in Nigeria. Apart from *ASSUBIFI*, *NASSUBIFI* and *NEABIA* (the financial sector unions), which however are currently not being adopted in the sector; the channels of voice captured across the two sectors are all non-unionised employee representations (**NERs**) in nature with diverse names including **Village meeting**, **Village square meeting**, **Breakfast with the CEO and Staff forum** amongst many others. Furthermore, theme of '*cultural-environmental dimensions*' were identified and interrogated, to establish how participatory these channels are perceived by respondents (see fig.1). These themes of silent were adopted based on responses from participants, researcher's knowledge of the research terrain and employee representative channels as

covered in the global extant literature. Thus, this approach addresses themes of discourse and strategies of discourse (Wodak, 2000; Fairclough, 2003; Leeuwen, 2007) employed by management to earn employees'/stakeholder's endorsement and legitimacy of organisational practices (Vaara et al, 2006) including management choice and justification of alternative voice systems (NERS). The following section turns to the theoretical affiliation of this study

### **Theories Informing Themes of Salient: Legitimacy & Engagement Theories**

The relationship between the themes of salient highlighted in this section is interrogated, in relationship with the dynamics of employee voice mechanisms covered in the extant literature. These themes of salient borders mainly on the choice of employee voice approach preferred and adopted by management, and as such, draws from *engagement theory* (Hobfoll, 1998; Albrecht, 2010; Macey et al, 2011) which implicates organisations' desire to be seen as engaging stakeholders, particularly employees, via specific voice channel deemed appropriate by management. Similarly *legitimacy theory* of persuasion and manufacturing consent (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) are central to this section, as they implicate management's desire to manufacture a consent of responsible, caring and ethical organisation, to persuade stakeholder/ employees into endorsing and legitimising the choice of voice and engagement systems adopted in organisational setting (Cho & Patten, 2007; Carnegie, 1936). Also crucial here is Suchman's (1995) institutional and strategic legitimacy, the former focuses on organisational drive to be seen as meeting legitimacy criteria and ethical business standards-as perceived by the societal setting and the wider community, while the later is preoccupied with swaying internal stakeholders (such as employees) into endorsing organisational practices and norms, hence corporate tools for control. These theories have largely shaped the themes and analysis of discourse presented in this study, which follows next.

### **Employee Voice Channels Adopted in Case Study Organisations**

Extant literature has provided two basic mode of employee representative platform adopted by contemporary organisations in employment relations, which are orthodox union and Non-unionised employee representations (NERs) (Thomas, 2013; Wilkinson, 2014). While this two can co-exist; union representations are known to have been adopted previously in Nigeria's public sector employment (Nwoko, 2009), however, responses from participants in this current study tend to depict a rapidly shifting trend towards NERs platforms across the Banking sectors (which is both public and private sector) and ICTs sector (which is predominantly private sector). According to majority of managers:

*“we have unions which are ASSUBIFI and NASSUBIFI- but like most banks, we do not subscribe to them. However, employees are effectively engaged via our active Hr Office, Team briefing forum, Village square meeting, internal survey platform and Breakfast with*

*the CEO (Bank 1 Line Manager)”*

*“We have alternative channels such as the Village square meeting, Employee engagement forum, My pain website consider. the staff association forum and others, but no union (ICT 1 Marketing Manager)”*

*“There are unions in most sectors, but for obvious reasons, full time and permanent employees are not eligible to their subscriptions. Besides, signing up against union subscription forms part of the pre-requisite for employment (Focus Group 1)”*

Along same axis, some employees claimed to have disregarded any desire for union subscription, because they are not convinced or compelled to do so, others claimed it does not make any difference between union and NERs *“as they all represent platform of lips service (ICT 1 Employee)*. In this direction, one extract also read;

*“I see no particular significance of union existence and the so called collective bargaining, rather, unionism is far more counter-productive than it appears, particularly in this part of the world. This work environment is scary (Employee Bank 3)”*

The above resonates with culture of fear and insecurity that has shaped employer and employee relationship in Nigeria’s work environment (Iyayi, 2009), which stems partly from the institutional dynamics of workplace justice founded upon acceptance of unequal distribution of power and the rising rate of unemployment, which compounds to hinder employees from speaking up. One employee lamented that;

*employees are sceptic of making opposing statements in the current employment environment, they just want to manage their job, at the mercy of their superiors. You either shut up, go with the flow, keep your job or quit (ICT 5 Employee)”*

Thus, the non-existence of union representation in these sectors chimes with Erapu’s (2011) evidence of rapid union decline in Nigeria’s employment environment, which many western writers have identified with as the function of NERs surge (Marchington and Kynighou, 2012). From managerial viewpoint, unionism is outdated, counterproductive, compromised, inflexible and ineffective (amongst other draw backs) and unfit for 21<sup>st</sup> century purpose. Some of the extracts that typify this mood include:

*“the function of unionism is completely misplaced today with*

*union leadership hijacking the course for their own personal interests (ICT 3 Brand Manager)”.*

*“unionism brings about too many conflict, because they see themselves detached from the management of the organization in which they represent employees (Focus Group 7)”*

The above underscores common managerial excuses presented in the extant literature in justification for union avoidance (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Thomas, 2013), however some elements of high power distant culture is implicated in motives driving the choice of NERs in this current study. Thus, the trend of employee representation (based on this study) appeared to have majorly shifted towards alternative platforms (see fig 1), which lack collective bargaining mechanisms hence classified under NERs, as they not only differs with orthodox union in nature; but also raises questions regarding their participatory efficacy (Wilkinson et al, 2014; Gollan et al, 2015). To this effect, some statements were captured below;

*“we have a range of employee representation avenues here, but obviously, they are not authentic avenues for employees to express their voice, let alone challenge the status quo, especially the village meeting which involves management top hierarchy. So, employees will not want to make unguarded comments (Bank 2 Employee)”*

*The staff association is more like the village meeting which is management oriented, it encourages employees to speak up supposedly, but less likely to accommodate anyone challenging the powers that be (Focus Group 2)”*

*Apart from the **External Employee Engagement Survey**, we operate the **My Pain website** but as you know, this is a management controlled and monitored website. If your voice is not favoured by your **Oga** (boss), then you probably have yourself to blame (ICT 3 Employee)”*

*imagine asking the **CEO** at the **breakfast** meeting to increase your salary? or why some colleagues were sacked? That may spell the end of your employment if they perceive you may corrupt other employees **ICT 2 Employee)***

*“in short those in the superior positions that are delegated with the role*

*of pushing employees information and grievances to the management are mostly the one that will discourage you from making such move (Focus Group 5)”*

From the foregoing, it is clear employees are represented across the two sectors organisations via NERs platforms, note, the major difference between NERs as defined in western context and NERs as highlighted in this current study is the term **Village meeting** and **Breakfast with the CEO** which adopt more or less same voice mechanism. While the Village meeting is the dominant and widely adopted voice platform across the whole organisations interrogated, other alternative voice channels highlighted in this study have the same characteristics with the village meeting. As recent studies have supported, no matter their names and their unique approaches, NERs have same agendas and outcomes in nature, which are penchant for individual voice approach and abhorrence for collective bargaining (Barry and Wilkson, 2015; Gollan et al, 2015; Donaghey, 2016), a common characteristics noted within the range of voice channels listed here (see fig 1).

The **Village Meeting** or **Square meeting** took its root from the traditional African monarch systems where different constituencies (villages) are represented by selected elders/chieftains in gatherings before the king, to deliberate over societal issues including enacting new policies and providing common ground for ordinary people to voice out their concerns (Ahiauzu: 1986; Akpan, 2009). Perhaps the choice for the names/terms ‘**Village**’ or **CEO** were inspired and widely adopted in the Nigeria’s employment relations to sway stakeholders/employees’ endorsement and legitimacy, as it denotes element of joint consultation and collective attributes, which underpin legitimacy theory of manufacturing consent and persuasion (Herman and Chomsky, 1988), adopted to encourage participation and reassurance of participants’ protection against intimidation or victimisation. This tendentious motive demonstrates how employees’ interests are placed at the centre of management rhetoric, with the view to gaining stakeholder’s endorsement of organisational behaviours (including the choice of employee voice channels) (Cho & Patten, 2007; Carnegie, 1936). Indeed, as vindicated in one statement;

*“the Village meeting is like our traditional ethos, people do not usually challenge but say exactly what the king want to hear. The same apply to management established voice platform, where you dare not challenge your **Oga** (boss)(Focus Group 7)”*

As can be gleaned from the foregoing, in replacement with union voice, the NERs platform is widely adopted and justified by managements across the case study organisations. The common assumption here is that NERs are moderate platform built on the value of cooperation, respect for superiors and aligns with Nigeria’s culture of power distance, as opposed to the rather confrontational orthodox union. However, there is no formal documentation of NERs, and so, how participatory are these platforms?

### **The Participatory Efficacy of NERs Platforms in Case Study Organisations**

In view of Cillia et al's (1999) *matrix of topics* (p. 158) and Belal's (2004) reflexive and interactive method of analytical interrogation of organisational practices, themes of '*Cultural-Environmental Dimensions*', were discursively identified and brought to perspective, as demonstrated in the following sections.

- *Cultural-Environmental Dimension: NERs surge, High rate of Unemployment, Fear, Favouritism and My Oga at the Top Syndrome (MOTS)*

The consideration of the cultural-environmental context is deemed critical in determining how participatory these voice channels are perceived by respondents. The cultural-environmental dimension is multifaceted; first, there is an element of institutional and strategic avoidance of orthodox unions- largely assumed the most effective and collective bargaining platform for employee voice representation, as opposed to NERs which is managerially and individually oriented (Thomas, 2013). Similarly, the ever rising unemployment, fear, favouritism and 'my oga at the top syndrome (MOTS)' provide the basis for the interrogation of these voice channels. As one manager explained:

*“This is a non-unionised but a performance driven environment, when you get things done according to set target- you certainly get your reward. So that motivates you to go out there, meet the target as well as the reward (Bank 3 Hr Manager)”*.

Subtly, with NERs prominence, employees voice are left at the mercy of employers, however, management is habitually seen to argue in denial of voice marginalisation or the existence of friction, provided the mode of representation is NERs, as opposed to union that are traditionally known for instigating conflict (Wilkinson et al, 2014). On this note, another manager continued:

*“All parties are provided equal opportunity to voice their concerns, provided the boundaries are not overstepped (Oiler 1 Line Manager)”*

The above finds expression in what Van Dyne et al (2003) described as workplace relationship and partnership based on employees' resignation, fear, intimidation and forced cooperation, where management alone dictate mode of cooperation (Cathcart, 2014). In line with the above, one respondent noted:

*“there is no competition within the sector due to high rate of unemployment. Depending on whom you know **at the top**, this situation leave employees with little*

*or no room to bargain with management in decision processes (ICT 5 Employee)”.*

Parallel to the above, one employee noted:

*“voice is facilitated individually rather than collectively, which outcome may depend on the state of relationship between the **Oga’s** (managers) and the individuals. Interestingly, we all prefer individual engagement approach because everybody is suspicious of one another, with regards to whistle blowing for instance (Bank 3 Employee)*

Similarly:

*“ I wish to live this team, ‘my oga (boss)’ is a tribalist, He has his way of creating different sub-cliques and double standards for appraising employees’ performance within the team. I just don’t trust him enough to disclose my concerns (ICT 5 Employee)”*

The foregoing indicates that where there exist slight forms of engagement (if any), it is likely to be exclusively dependent on who you know at the top and your personal relationship with such person, which also implicates the theme of ‘favouritism’ in employment relations (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). As can be recalled, NERs is often seen as a platform of fear and intimidation, which makes it almost impossible for individual to voice out, except if such voice effort is favoured, backed and protected by someone at the top (Ahiauzu: 1986; Akpan, 2009). Similar to favouritism is a Nigeria’s long existing ‘power distance-related’ cultural embodiment known as “*My Oga at the Top Syndrome -(MOTS)*”, which essentially gained global media prominence since 2013, when it was used in a Channel TV by a chief security personnel (NSCDC) to avert interviewer’s questions (Irene, 2013; Chukwu, 2013). Rather than respond to questions regarding why job applicants are complaining over the institution’s multiple websites, which are rather confusing; the Chief security refused to provide any answer and had continued to shift responsibility to his superiors, such as “it is my oga at the top that would give you answer to this question”, “*it is not my responsibility*”, “*response of this question will have to come from the top*”. Indeed, relative to MOTS which is common phenomenon in Nigeria, one respondent noted:

*“it is our cultural ethos to respect our elders, leaders and people at the positions of authority. This value dovetails to the work environment, which requires you to follow the hierarchical order, including the prohibition of unsolicited voice effort (Bank 5 Line Manager)”*

Though highly steeped in power distance culture, ‘My Oga at the Top Syndrome (MOTS) has some element of silo-effect in management science, where sharing of common task and



power resources are facilitated along the line of hierarchy, departments and or groups etc, which discourages sharing or accommodating ideas from other quarters for improved collaboration of work process. However, the ‘MOTS’ has a Nigerian context which subtly not only differs from silo-effect; but also is consciously and unconsciously endorsed within the socio-corporate environment, hence the acceptance of power inequality and superior-subordinate relationship in the country. The use of ‘**My Oga**’ simply means ‘my senior boss’, which can also be substituted with ‘*daddy*’ or ‘*mummy*’ used in Nigeria’s social and work environment to show respect to people at high positions and to also portray them as mini-Gods, who cannot be challenged or put right (Ahiauzu: 1986; Akpan, 2009). The issue with MOTS is that it creates a work environment where everyone is encouraged to avert personal responsibility and self initiative, while shifting accountability elsewhere, such as ‘*it is not my responsibility, but the CEO’s, Director’s, or manager’s etc*’. As noted in the extract below:

*“it is not in my power as a manager to comment or change organisational policy, rather, it is the function of the ogas at the top. The village meeting is facilitated for employees to comment on issues (ICT 5 Hr Manager)”*

Indeed, it is aberrant to challenge the status quo in a hierarchical setting, however it is expected that employment relations actors lead change somehow (no matter their position), as opposed to the ‘*not my responsibility*’ attitude, which has only exacerbated the Nigeria’s hostile and disengaging employment environment (Iyayi, 2009), as no one is willing to take voice risk. This resonates with numerous statements extracted from the empirical discourses:

*“these platforms here are far from participatory, they are one dimensional and mainly shaped around work commitment and efficiency concerns, but no commitment to work-life balance, which underscores our parameter for judging employee voice and engagement efficacy. Rather, we are constantly reminded of the consequences of overstepping bounds (Focus Group 10)”*

*we are always informed at the communication/staff forum ones specific policies have been passed. So we are not involved during drafting and review processes leading to the enactment of these policies (Focus Group 1)”*

*“Call it Village square meeting, employee voice forum or breakfast with CEO, truth is, employees are too scared to voice out. Employee representative bodies often have avoided raising pressing issues such as terms of work and*

*conditions out of fear of being sacked, choosing instead to discuss canteen matters such as menu quality and sanitary matters (Bank 1 Employee)”*

The foregoing is indicative of the (non-) participatory nature of employee voice and engagement as observed in the dynamic of NERs channels (MacLeord & Clarke, 2009), which has been widely adopted across the two sectors employment. Thus, from the responses garnered and analysis generated here, these NERs oriented platforms are replete with Nigeria’s unique cultural-environmental barrier of high power (PD) index and rising unemployment, which have coalesced in fuelling fear, intimidation, favouritism and apparent voice marginalisation observed in the characteristics of these voice channels. Essentially, the ‘*my oga at the top syndrome (MOTS)*, a Nigeria’s unique cultural norm of power distance (PD) has only serve to validate the acceptance of the non-participatory nature of the voice channels adopted by management in this study, and thus tantamount to employee silence rather than voice. Theoretical analysis and discussion is presented next.

### **Theoretical Analysis and Discussions**

In response to the current call for research studies to adopt critical turn (Bakre, 2004), this current study has employed CDA and its DHA extension, to interrogate how organisational practices and norms are endorsed and legitimised (Fairclough, 1992; Wodak, 2001), in Nigeria’s employment terrain, in the context of the channels of voice adopted and justified by management and how participatory they are perceived by respondents.

Being a precursor to critical theory, CDA is considered a “*problem-oriented*” (Waugh et al, 2015:72) and “*multimodal meaning making*” interdisciplinary language tool (Djonov and Zhao, 2014:4) which facilitates nuance understanding of “*how societal structure influences discourse structures..., how they are instituted, legitimised reproduced, confirmed or countered by talk or text*” (Wodak 2011b,p.60). Thus, CDA can be instrumental in understanding the dynamics of employee voice channels in Nigeria, particularly, being a pragmatic language tool that facilitates multiple theoretical affiliations, necessary in understanding the “*missing link*” between language construction, the underlying intent and meaning (Wodak 2011b,p. 60).

Based on these multi-theoretical credentials, CDA framework was combined with **legitimacy-engagement theory** (developed in this study) and discourse historical analysis (DHA), to discursively identify a range of alternative voice channels prevailing across the sectors. These are *Village Meeting, Active Hr Office and Breakfast with CEO amongst others (all of which fall within NERS)*, which were justified via the communicative framework founded within legitimacy theory (manufacturing consent and persuasive strategy), deployed to legitimise organisational behaviours and actions (Wodak, 2001; Dijk, 2008), such as the avoidance of unions and adoption of NERs in this case.

Importantly, theory of organisational legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) and Wodak's (2000) linguistic properties were employed to interrogate the surge of NERs platform, which uncovered managerial systemic abhorrence for representative union voice, which it views as disruptive, inflexible, incompetence, corrupt, selfish, compromised and generally counter-productive to employer-employee's mutual interests. The question however remains how participatory are NERs platforms in the delivery of genuine employee's voice (Macleord & Clarke, 2009; Wilkinson et al, 2014), in a cultural-system of high power distance index (Hostede, 2001)? Consequently, via the imperatives of engagement concept, the themes of **cultural-environmental dimension** (such as the *surge of NERs platform, high unemployment, culture of fear, intimidation, favouritism and MOTS*) were revealed as significant barriers to genuine employee voice and engagement, due to the widening power distance, which inheres within these voice channels adopted by management. This section has looked at the implication of **legitimacy-engagement theory**, which also has **institutional** and **strategic** affiliation to this discourse.

### **Institutional & Strategic Salient of Legitimacy and Engagement**

From the **institutional perspective**, these themes of salient (NERs platforms) entails managerial attempt to observe the legal requirement for employees' mandatory consultation, which subtly responds to the many critics of Nigeria's employment sectors for poor stakeholder/employee accountability and engagement (Madu, 2013; Emesh & Songi, 2014). The preponderant utility of the (non-confrontational and non-participatory) NERs portends element of institutional dimension, which depict organisations as meeting both legal and moral hallmark of employee voice and engagement requirement (essentially necessary for work commitment and efficiency. The justification of NERs here chimes with Habermas's (1987) legitimacy theory, relative to organisational tendency to adopt communicative strategies of persuasion and manufacturing consent, to depict organisational behaviours and actions in positive light and to intertwine the notion of mutual interests and engagement commitment in stakeholder-employers relationship (Leeuwen, 2007). Suchman (1995) described this as discursive strategies employed to gain stakeholder approval and legitimacy of normative institutional fundamentals, deployed by management to sway stakeholder's perception of the cultural-environmental barriers including high power distance index and poor resource state of employee representative bodies (Umar and Hassan, 2014), embraced by management to disengage and further marginalise their voice.

The **strategic dimension** of legitimacy and engagement theories are seen to play critical role in uncovering the tendentious appropriation of the salient themes (noted in the various channels of voice adopted by management and the overt use of engagement and mutual rhetoric), which are viewed as discursive strategies intended at gaining employees consent and legitimacy of corporate behaviours and practices (Wodak, 2001). By reminding employees of the gross failures of unions and the range of mutual benefits associated with NERs platforms; management tends to create certain persona, which paint others negative but

positively depicts management as committing towards employee voice and engagement, a rationalisation strategies well described in Leeuwen's (2007) discourse treatises, which also implicates acquiescent voice noted in the warning against '*overstepping bound*'. Based on Fairclough's (1992) and Wodak's (2001) discursive analysis, the underlying motive here is to foreground the long and short term sustainability of the corporation, which is dependent on the employees (the brain box), whose endorsement of the NERs platform is critical for agenda setting and other managerial prerogatives. However, engagement framework was deployed to clarify what may constitute genuine voice to employees (Albrecht, 2010; Macey et al, 2011), and thus, considering the pervasive cultural-environmental factors, largely embroiled in high power distance (PD) index and 'my oga at the top syndrome (MOTS)', which is compounded by the growing rate of unemployment, the NERs platform are far from participatory.

## **Conclusion**

While the ICTs sector is found to adopt NERs platform from the outset; the financial sector unions (ASSUBIFI & NASSUBIFI) have been systematically avoided in recent time, this leave employees across the two sectors to be predominantly represented via NERs, which has no formal documentation in Nigeria's employment relations literature. Although these platforms are given diverse names, they all have same non-unionised and individualised approach to employee voice, which aligns with managerial prerogative. Relative to institutional and strategic legitimacy, management is observed to pursue stakeholder's/employees' endorsement, such as the legitimisation of these NERs platforms by instilling persuasion and manufacturing consent founded within discourse strategies and linguistic construction, which defines CDA. However, engagement concept raises critical questions as to the participatory efficacy of these voice channels based on the unique nature of Nigeria's cultural-environmental barriers that are steeped in high power (PD) index and rising unemployment, which have coalesced in fuelling fear, intimidation, favouritism and apparent voice marginalisation observed in the characteristics of these voice channels. As noted earlier, the '*my oga at the top syndrome (MOTS)*' has only serve to validate the acceptance of the non-participatory nature of the voice channels adopted by management in this study. This study leaves us at how trade union intend to respond, which is a question for another day.

## **Research Implications**

By relying on Woodak's (2001) and Leeuwen's (2007) frameworks of discourse themes and strategies of discourse, this empirical enquiry observed that organisations have resorted to the adoption of NERs platform, for reasons (for and) beyond the scope of union avoidance, which are largely driven by cultural-environmental dynamics. The problem however is that

NERs concept does not exist in Nigeria's employment relations literature and it is relatively less understood in this terrain, and for employee voice to make sense in an employment environment that is currently overwhelmed by the surge of alternative voice channels, NERs concept need to be understood critically, which calls for the attention of researchers in this area. Furthermore, it raises more questions regarding how trade union intend to respond, which may draw the attention of researchers and academics across this terrain.

### **Contributions**

This study has made theoretical and practical contributions; which includes the research methodology adopted in employee voice study in developing world (Nigeria). Indeed, as opposed to the dominant survey, thematic and content analysis utility, this is the first of employment relations study to adopt CDA (an interdisciplinary critical theory) in interrogating employee voice channels and their authenticity in Nigeria via interview and focus group discussion. Secondly, a theoretical contribution was made here, via combining legitimacy theory and engagement theory, to form **legitimacy-engagement theory**, which was instrumental in the interrogation of organisational behaviours from both managerial and employee perspective. Thirdly, while numerous studies have approached employee voice in Nigeria from the prism of trade unions, with just a few providing sketchy outlooks on the shifting trend towards alternative voice; none has clearly addressed this from the perspective of NERs, which is central to this current study. Finally, this study has added theoretical value to the knowledge and understanding of employer-employee relationship via the uncovering of certain cultural-environmental factors such as high power distance (PD) and 'my oga at the top syndrome **MOTS**' that have influenced the surge of NERs and voice marginalisation in Nigeria's employment sectors.

### **Further Research**

Findings here are not being generalised, and thus, establishing a trend in the study of NERs and their efficacy in Nigeria requires a lengthier timeframe and expanded sample frame, which may necessitate quantitative research approach. In addition, CDA is relatively new in employee voice studies, particularly in the developing countries such as Nigeria and thus may generate some controversies, given it criticism by few writers who find it as not only "self marketing" (Chilton, 2005: 21); but quite ignorance of critical "context" which need put "into account" (Breeze, 2011:514), These issues have been taking into account, by relying on Nigeria's heuristic of employee voice trend, to complement data analysis and study's findings

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## APPENDIX

Table 7.2: Themes of Discursive Salient, Corresponding Narratives &amp; Perceptions

	<b>Themes of Discursive Salient</b>	<b>Corresponding Narratives</b>	<b>Language/ Discourse Features</b>	<b>Application</b>	<b>Perception</b>
i	<b>PENGASSEN &amp; NUPPENG</b>	<i>Unionised voice platforms utilised in employees representation in the oil and gas sector</i>	Adoption of collective bargaining rhetoric	Used to represent collective interest of employees	<i>Orthodox Union voice platform and labour oriented</i>
	<b>ASSUBIFI and NASSUBIFI</b>	<i>Unionised voice platform utilised in the banking and financial sector</i>	Adoption of collective bargaining rhetoric	Used to represent collective interest of employees	<i>Orthodox Union voice platform and labour oriented</i>
ii	<b>Village Meeting</b>	<i>Voice platform adopting traditional nomenclature in Nigeria and held quarterly, to suggest notion of peaceful/cordial engagement between employee council representative and management</i>	<i>Individual voice approach. Adoption of HRM rhetoric of oneness in organisation which subtly underpins unilateral philosophy</i>	Used to earn employees endorsement and legitimisation of management actions	<i>Non-unionised Employees Representative s (NERs) Platform and management oriented</i>
iii	<b>Village Square Meeting</b>	<i>Voice platform adopting traditional nomenclature in Nigeria held monthly, to suggest notion of peaceful engagement between employees and management departments (Hr, finance, customer care and production departments etc).</i>	<i>Individual voice approach. Adoption of HRM rhetoric to set conditions of engagement, compliance and employees legitimisation of managerial behaviours</i>	<i>Used to discuss work-related issues and initiatives aimed at instilling employees' commitment to organisational goals</i>	<i>Non-unionised Employees Representative s (NERs) Platform and management oriented</i>
iv	<b>Active Hr Office</b>	<i>Voice platform adopted by management via hr department</i>	<i>Individual voice approach. Language-Rhetorical alignment to the discourse of employee voice commitment in relation to mutual interest</i>	<i>Used to reproduce arguments that defies criticism of organisational procedure</i>	<i>Non-unionised Employees Representative s (NERs) Platform and management oriented</i>
v	<b>Staff Association/Forum</b>	<i>Voice platform adopted by management</i>	<i>Individual voice approach. Enforcing agreement and commitment based on management interpretation of employee's engagement</i>	<i>Used to influence and shape employees perception of engagement</i>	<i>Non-unionised Employees Representative s (NERs) Platform and management oriented</i>
vi	<b>Breakfast with CEO</b>	<i>Monthly based voice</i>	<i>Individual voice</i>	<i>Used for</i>	<i>Employees Representative</i>

		<p><i>platform pioneered by the CEO with selected employees outside of the work premises (such as in restaurant), to show that employees are valued by the organisation..</i></p> <p><i>To encourage employees-CEO engagement and direct communication without interference from the various hierarchy of management's levels</i></p>	<p><i>approach.</i></p> <p><i>Initiating and enforcing agreement and commitment based on CEO's interpretation of employee's engagement</i></p>	<p><i>capturing and reshaping employees concerns, interests and perception of satisfaction</i></p>	<p><i>s (NERs)</i></p> <p><i>Platform and management oriented</i></p>
vii	<p><b>And Others:</b></p> <p>Employee Engagement Forum, One-to-one with Managers, Team Briefing, External Employee Engagement Survey, Internal Survey, Join Consultation Council, My pain Website &amp; Social Blog, e-mail, intranet</p>	<p><i>Quarterly based Voice platform pioneered by the CEO held quarterly, employees are seen to be encouraged to voice their opinion individually to the CEO in front of managers</i></p>	<p><i>Individual voice approach.</i></p> <p><i>Initiating engagement platform based on CEO's definition and rhetoric of engagement.</i></p>	<p><i>Used for capturing and reshaping employees concerns, interests and perception of satisfaction</i></p>	<p><i>Employees Representative s (NERs)</i></p> <p><i>Platform, it is management oriented</i></p>

Source: Researcher (2016)