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WORKPLACE ETHICS AND EMPLOYEE WORK PASSION OF WORKERS IN COMMERCIAL BANKS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between workplace ethics and employee work passion in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria, with a specific focus on integrity and trustworthiness as dimensions of workplace ethics and harmonious passion and obsessive passion as dimensions of employee work passion. The study was anchored on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the role of ethical behaviour and intrinsic motivation in fostering work passion. A quantitative research design was adopted for a population of 320 employees, and data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to bank employees. A total of 178 questionnaires were distributed to 7 commercial banks around Trans Amadi and Olu Obasanjo Axis, out of which 161 were duly completed and returned, representing a high response rate. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS version 4.0 software. The structural model results revealed significant and positive relationships between integrity and both harmonious passion ($\beta = 0.753$, $p = 0.000$) and obsessive passion ($\beta = 0.545$, $p = 0.000$). Similarly, trustworthiness significantly predicted harmonious passion ($\beta = 0.692$, $p = 0.000$) and obsessive passion ($\beta = 0.504$, $p = 0.000$). These findings suggest that ethical values, particularly integrity and trustworthiness, are vital drivers of employee work passion, though their influence is stronger on harmonious passion compared to obsessive passion.The study concludes that commercial banks in Rivers State can enhance employee work passion by embedding strong ethical practices within their organizational culture. It is recommended that banks strengthen integrity-driven policies and cultivate trustworthy relationships between management and employees to sustain high levels of harmonious passion while minimizing the negative consequences of obsessive passion.

***Keywords*:** *Workplace Ethics, Integrity, Trustworthiness, Employee Work Passion, Harmonious Passion, Obsessive Passion*

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1.0 Introduction

In the contemporary business environment, workplace ethics has emerged as a crucial determinant of employee behavior, organizational performance, and long-term sustainability. Ethics in the workplace refers to the moral principles, standards, and values that guide employees' decisions and actions within organizational settings (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015). In the banking industry, which is highly sensitive to trust, transparency, and accountability, workplace ethics becomes even more critical. The ethical values of employees—particularly integrity and trustworthiness—serve as the foundation of customer confidence, organizational reputation, and regulatory compliance (Okpara, 2014; Hassan, 2016).

Workplace ethics is particularly relevant to employee work passion, which refers to an enduring and strong inclination toward work that people find meaningful and enjoyable (Vallerand, 2015). Scholars distinguish between two types of passion: harmonious passion, which promotes balance, flexibility, and well-being, and obsessive passion, which often leads to rigidity, over-commitment, and burnout (Lalande et al., 2017). When employees perceive that their workplace upholds ethical standards such as integrity and trustworthiness, they are more likely to develop harmonious passion, engaging in their tasks out of genuine interest and alignment with personal values (Astakhova & Ho, 2018). Conversely, environments that compromise ethics or pressure employees to cut corners may foster obsessive passion, where employees pursue work excessively and at personal costs (Forest et al., 2012).

The Nigerian banking industry has faced ethical controversies in recent years, ranging from financial misconduct and insider abuses to regulatory non-compliance (Adeniran et al., 2024). Such practices not only undermine the stability of the financial system but also erode employees' trust in the organization, leading to reduced passion, job dissatisfaction, and high turnover intentions (Eneh & Awara, 2016). For employees in commercial banks in Rivers State, workplace ethics plays a vital role in shaping whether their passion for work remains balanced (harmonious) or becomes excessive and unhealthy (obsessive).

Despite the recognition of ethics in organizational success, research linking workplace ethics—specifically integrity and trustworthiness—to employee work passion remains limited in Nigeria's banking context. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by empirically examining the relationship between integrity, trustworthiness, and employee work passion in commercial banks in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

The banking sector in Nigeria is highly competitive, dynamic, and regulated, placing significant pressure on employees to meet demanding performance targets while maintaining high ethical standards. However, repeated reports of unethical practices, ranging from fraudulent transactions, insider lending, and regulatory violations, have raised concerns about the ethical orientation of bank employees (Okpara, 2014; Adeniran et al., 2024). These ethical lapses not only jeopardize the reputation of banks but also strain employees' psychological well-being, as they often face conflicts between meeting organizational demands and adhering to ethical values (Hassan, 2016).

Integrity, defined as the adherence to moral and professional standards regardless of personal or organizational pressures, is increasingly under threat in banking institutions (Etim et al., 2023). Employees may be compelled to misrepresent financial transactions, manipulate records, or engage in unethical sales practices to achieve performance benchmarks. This can

diminish their intrinsic motivation and prevent the development of harmonious work passion, instead fueling obsessive behaviors that compromise work-life balance (Astakhova & Ho, 2018). Similarly, trustworthiness, which refers to the ability of employees to act consistently, transparently, and reliably in their dealings with colleagues and clients, is often undermined by systemic corruption and short-term performance incentives in Nigeria's banking sector (Acho-Elendu et al., 2024).

The absence of strong workplace ethics can lead employees to experience reduced harmonious passion, making them disengaged, dissatisfied, and less committed to organizational goals. Conversely, an overemphasis on performance without adequate ethical grounding can encourage obsessive passion, where employees pursue success at all costs, often resulting in stress, burnout, and counterproductive behaviors (Lalande et al., 2017; Gorgievski et al., 2019). While global studies have highlighted the connection between workplace ethics and work passion, empirical research contextualized in Nigerian commercial banks, particularly in Rivers State, remains scarce.

This knowledge gap raises critical questions: Does integrity promote harmonious passion among bank employees? Does a lack of trustworthiness foster obsessive passion? And how do these ethical dimensions shape employee work passion in real organizational settings? Without empirical answers, commercial banks risk overlooking the ethical foundations necessary to cultivate healthy and sustainable work passion among employees. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by investigating the relationships between integrity, trustworthiness, and employee work passion in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the relationship between integrity and harmonious passion of workers in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. Examine the relationship between integrity and obsessive passion of workers in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria.
3. Examine the relationship between trustworthiness and harmonious passion of workers in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria.
4. Examine the relationship between trustworthiness and obsessive passion of workers in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study;

1. What is the relationship between integrity and harmonious passion of workers in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between integrity and obsessive passion of workers in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria?
3. What is the relationship between trustworthiness and harmonious passion of workers in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria?
4. What is the relationship between trustworthiness and obsessive passion of workers in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between integrity and harmonious passion of workers in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between integrity and obsessive passion of workers in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Ho_3: There is no significant relationship between trustworthiness and harmonious passion of workers in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Ho_4: There is no significant relationship between trustworthiness and obsessive passion of workers in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria.

2.0 Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), which emphasizes that human motivation is shaped by the satisfaction of three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are met in the workplace, employees are more intrinsically motivated and display positive outcomes such as passion, commitment, and ethical conduct (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Workplace ethics, particularly integrity and trustworthiness, create an environment of fairness and psychological safety that nurtures autonomy and relatedness. Such an environment encourages employees to develop harmonious passion—where work is pursued with balance and enthusiasm—while reducing tendencies toward obsessive passion, which is characterized by compulsion and imbalance (Vallerand, 2015).Empirical evidence supports this linkage. Gagné and Deci (2014) observed that ethical practices foster autonomous motivation and employee passion. Similarly, Donia et al. (2016) found that ethical climates enhance intrinsic motivation, which strengthens harmonious passion. Thus, SDT provides a useful lens to explain how workplace ethics influence employee work passion in commercial banks in Rivers State.

Conceptual Framework

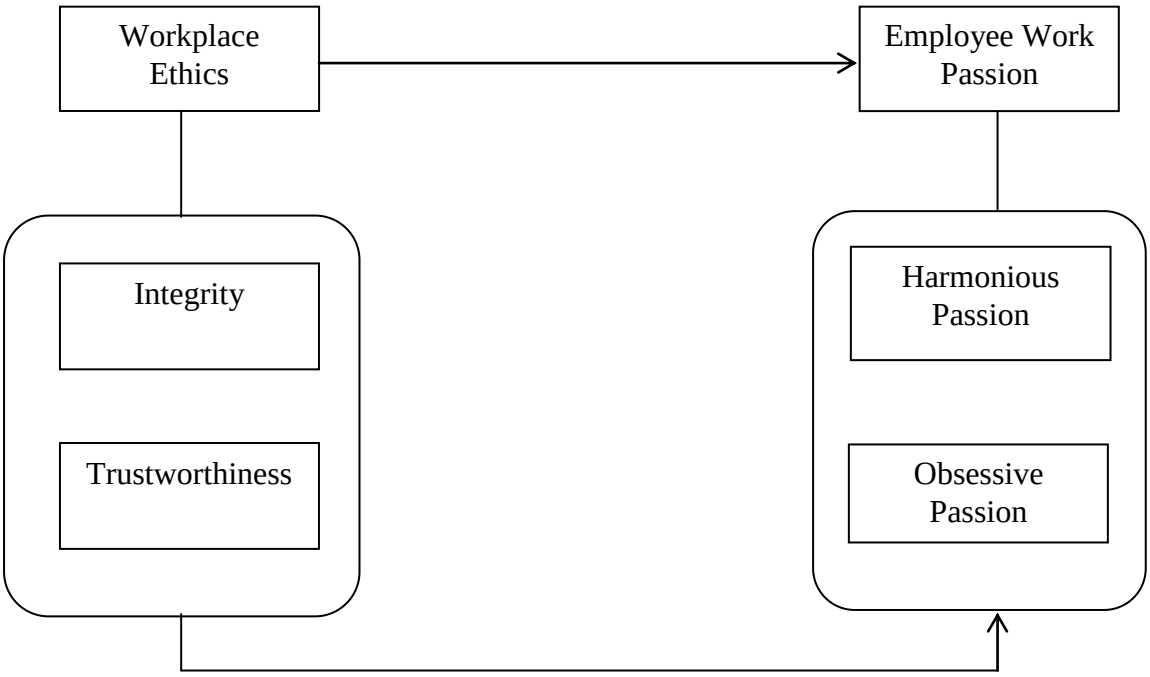


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: The dimensions of Workplace Ethics were adapted from Treviño, den Nieuwenboer and Kish-Gephart (2014), while the measures of Employee Work Passionwere adapted from Vallerand (2010)

Concept of Workplace Ethics

Workplace ethics denotes the set of moral principles, values, standards and norms that shape acceptable conduct and decision-making in an organization. A strong ethical climate guides employee choices, shapes organizational culture, and signals to employees what behaviours will be rewarded or sanctioned (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015). In the banking sector, ethical conduct is especially crucial because employees frequently handle sensitive financial transactions that demand transparency and trust (Correia, 2019). Workplace ethics ensures compliance with regulatory frameworks and builds confidence among employees and stakeholders, ultimately shaping organizational culture and passion for work.In service-sensitive sectors such as banking, ethical conduct underpins customer trust, compliance with regulation, and the firm's reputation; when ethics are salient and enforced, employees are less likely to experience moral conflict and more likely to internalize work roles in an autonomous, value-congruent way — conditions that foster healthy engagement with work.

i. Integrity

Integrity is often regarded as the cornerstone of workplace ethics. It entails consistency between values and actions, honesty in dealings, and adherence to moral principles (Etim et al., 2023). Employees working in organizations that prioritize integrity perceive fairness and value congruence, which fosters trust and reduces moral dilemmas (Acho-Elendu et al., 2024). Research has shown that integrity in leadership and institutional practices is positively linked with employee engagement and passion, as it creates a stable environment that supports autonomous motivation (Ariyo, 2024). In the banking context, integrity is not only an ethical obligation but also a strategic necessity to prevent fraudulent practices and maintain customer confidence.

ii. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which individuals and organizations are perceived as reliable, fair, and benevolent. It is a critical factor in building effective interpersonal and organizational relationships (Ho, 2018). Trustworthiness in the workplace provides psychological safety, enabling employees to take initiative and innovate without fear of exploitation (Gao et al., 2019). Empirical evidence suggests that trust-based work climates enhance employees' intrinsic motivation and engagement, thereby supporting harmonious passion (Zhang et al., 2022). In contrast, when trustworthiness is absent, employees may feel compelled to prove themselves through overcommitment, which can foster obsessive passion (Dos Santos et al., 2023).

Concept of Employee Work Passion

Employee work passion is defined as a strong inclination toward work that individuals value and in which they invest energy and time (Vallerand, 2015). Unlike temporary enthusiasm, passion reflects a deep-seated motivational force that shapes long-term engagement and performance outcomes. The Dualistic Model of Passion categorizes work passion into harmonious passion and obsessive passion, each with distinct antecedents and consequences.

i. Harmonious Passion

Harmonious passion occurs when employees freely internalize their work as important to their identity without feeling pressured. It is characterized by flexible persistence, work-life balance, and sustainable performance (Forest et al., 2012). Studies indicate that harmonious

passion is fostered in environments that support autonomy, fairness, and ethical behavior (Gao et al., 2019). In the context of commercial banks, integrity and trustworthiness serve as ethical antecedents that align employee values with organizational expectations, encouraging employees to embrace their work as meaningful.

ii. Obsessive Passion

Obsessive passion arises when employees internalize their work in a controlled manner, often due to external pressures or contingent self-worth. It manifests as rigid persistence, work-life conflict, and susceptibility to burnout (Lalande et al., 2017). Obsessive passion may initially lead to high performance but tends to have long-term negative effects, such as stress and diminished well-being (Vallerand, 2015). Research suggests that environments lacking integrity or trustworthiness increase employees' reliance on external validation, pushing them toward obsessive passion (Dos Santos et al., 2023).

Empirical Review

Etim et al. (2023) investigated organizational culture and performance in Nigerian banks and found that integrity significantly influenced employees' engagement and passion for work. Similarly, Acho-Elendu et al. (2024) reported that in Port Harcourt deposit money banks, integrity in organizational practices fostered harmonious passion by reducing moral ambiguity and promoting value congruence. These findings suggest that employees are more likely to develop harmonious passion when integrity is embedded in workplace ethics.

Lalande et al. (2017) showed that unsatisfied psychological needs and low ethical consistency are predictors of obsessive passion. In banking institutions where integrity is weak, employees may experience controlled motivation, compelling them to work obsessively to secure recognition or avoid sanctions. Ariyo (2024) observed that lack of integrity in management practices increases compulsive work behaviours among employees, which aligns with the notion that integrity deficits fuel obsessive passion.

Gao et al. (2019) found that empowering leadership and trustworthy climates significantly enhanced harmonious passion by promoting psychological safety and autonomy. Ho (2018) also confirmed that cooperative climates built on trust strengthened employees' harmonious passion. In Nigeria's commercial banking sector, trustworthiness is likely to create a conducive climate for employees to develop harmonious passion, thereby improving their commitment and discretionary effort.

Zhang et al. (2022) reported that performance-driven and low-trust climates are associated with obsessive passion, as employees strive to meet external expectations compulsively. Dos Santos et al. (2023) also demonstrated that lack of organizational trust can lead to rigid persistence and work-life conflict, hallmarks of obsessive passion. In commercial banks, diminished trustworthiness in leadership and systems may compel employees to engage obsessively with work as a means of proving their loyalty or worth.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design, specifically a correlational survey design. The population of this study comprised employees of selected commercial banks in Rivers State. The accessible population was limited to 320 employees of 7 commercial banks around Trans Amadi and Olu Obasanjo Axis, with at least two years of work experience to ensure adequate knowledge of the banks' ethical climate and personal experiences of work passion. The banks include Access Bank, First Bank, GTCO, Keystone Bank, Sterling Bank, and UBA. A total sample size of 178 respondents was targeted for the study, determined using the

Taro Yamane (1967) formula. A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed. Stratification was based on job roles (operations, customer service, marketing, and administration) to ensure that responses adequately reflected the perspectives of employees across functional departments. The study relied primarily on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire. The retrieved questionnaires were coded and analyzed using the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach with SmartPLS version 4.0 software.

Table 1: Firm Distribution

Bank Name	Estimated Population	Sample Size Allocation
Access Bank	46	26
First Bank	46	26
GtCo	46	26
Keystone Bank	44	22
Sterling Bank	46	26
UBA	46	26
Zenith Bank	46	26
Total	**320**	**178**

4.0 Analysis and Discussion

A total of 178 questionnaires were distributed to employees of selected commercial banks across Rivers State. Out of these, 169 were returned, representing a response rate of 94.9%. After careful screening for incomplete or inconsistent responses, 161 questionnaires were retained for analysis, yielding a valid response rate of 90.4%.

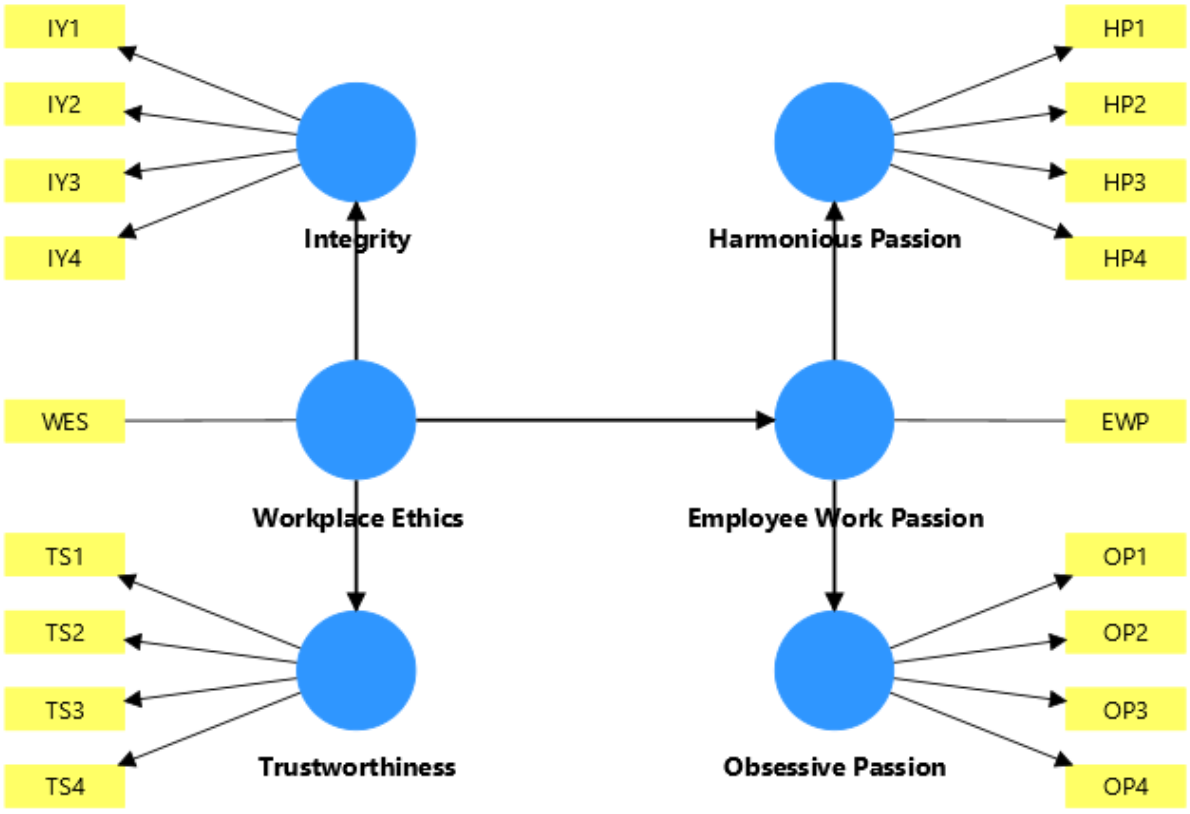


Figure 2: Research Model

This is the conceptual model showing Workplace Ethics and its dimensions (Integrity and Trustworthiness) as independent variables predicting Employee Work Passion and its measures (Harmonious Passion and Obsessive Passion).

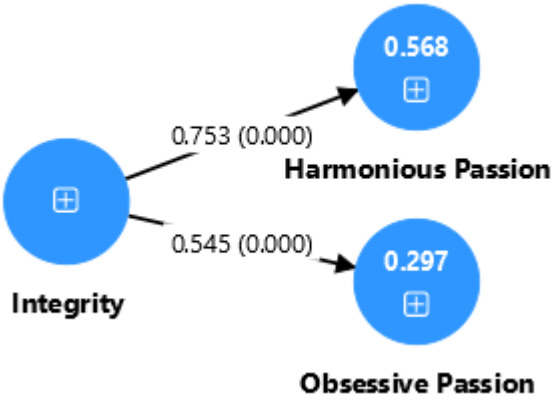


Figure 3: Hypotheses 1 and 2

Figure 3 illustrates the structural model paths for hypotheses 1 and 2. The path from Integrity → Harmonious Passion was found to be positive and significant (β = 0.753, p = 0.000), indicating that higher levels of integrity are associated with stronger harmonious passion among bank employees. Similarly, the path from Integrity → Obsessive Passion was positive and significant (β = 0.545, p = 0.000), suggesting that integrity also contributes to employees' obsessive passion.

Hypothesis 1: Integrity and Harmonious Passion
The findings revealed that integrity has a positive and significant relationship with harmonious passion. This suggests that when employees perceive integrity within their organizational environment, they are more likely to develop an autonomous and balanced passion for their work. This aligns with the work of Etim et al. (2023), who emphasized that integrity-driven environments foster intrinsic motivation and ethical enthusiasm in employees. Similarly, Ariyo (2024) found that integrity in the banking sector contributes to employees' sustained and healthy work passion.

Hypothesis 2: Integrity and Obsessive Passion
The results showed a significant positive relationship between integrity and obsessive passion. This implies that in environments where integrity is emphasized, employees may also internalize high standards and expectations, which could lead to obsessive forms of work engagement. This finding supports Lalande et al. (2017), who argued that ethical environments can sometimes encourage over-commitment as employees strive to uphold moral standards in competitive workplaces.

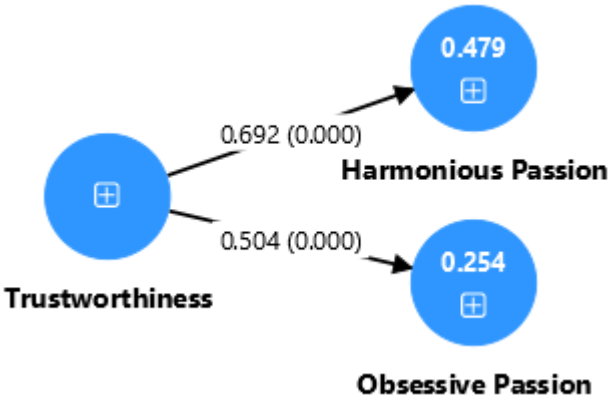


Figure 4: Hypotheses 3 and 4

Figure 4 shows the paths for hypotheses 3 and 4. The relationship between Trustworthiness → Harmonious Passion was positive and significant (β = 0.692, p = 0.000), confirming that trustworthiness nurtures employees' harmonious engagement with their work. The path from Trustworthiness → Obsessive Passion was also positive and significant (β = 0.504, p = 0.000), showing that trustworthiness contributes to the development of obsessive passion, albeit to a lesser extent.

Hypothesis 3: Trustworthiness and Harmonious Passion
Trustworthiness was found to be positively associated with harmonious passion. Employees in trustworthy organizational settings are more likely to engage in their work freely and with satisfaction, without undue external pressures. This resonates with the findings of Correia (2019), who noted that trust-based cultures enhance employees' well-being and encourage sustainable passion for work. Likewise, Adeniran et al. (2024) highlighted that trustworthiness in Nigerian banks strengthens employees' emotional connection to their work.

Hypothesis 4: Trustworthiness and Obsessive Passion
The study further revealed that trustworthiness positively influences obsessive passion. While trust fosters commitment, it can also drive employees to exceed boundaries in an attempt to maintain reputational trust. This is consistent with Acho-Elendu et al. (2024), who reported that trust-based environments sometimes pressure employees into unhealthy levels of engagement. However, when properly managed, this form of passion may still contribute to organizational productivity.

5.0 Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between workplace ethics and employee work passion in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria. The constructs of workplace ethics (integrity and trustworthiness) were tested against the two dimensions of employee work passion (harmonious passion and obsessive passion). Using PLS-SEM analysis in SmartPLS 4.0, the findings revealed that integrity significantly enhances both harmonious and obsessive passion, while trustworthiness also showed significant positive effects on harmonious and obsessive passion.

The results underscore the importance of ethical practices as critical enablers of employee work passion in the banking sector. Integrity provides employees with a sense of fairness and

transparency, which strengthens their balanced and autonomous engagement in work. Similarly, trustworthiness creates a culture of reliability that fuels both healthy and sometimes intense passion toward work. Although obsessive passion may carry risks of over-engagement, when managed appropriately, it can still contribute positively to organizational outcomes. Overall, the study concludes that workplace ethics—through integrity and trustworthiness—play a vital role in shaping the quality and intensity of employee work passion, and by extension, the sustainable performance of commercial banks in Rivers State.

6.0 Recommendations

1. Commercial banks should strengthen integrity-driven practices, such as transparent communication, fair reward systems, and adherence to ethical codes of conduct. By embedding integrity into their organizational culture, banks can promote harmonious work passion that enhances employee satisfaction and long-term engagement.
2. Banks should monitor and regulate workloads to prevent employee burnout. While high ethical standards are beneficial, management should ensure that expectations do not create undue pressure. Training on work–life balance and stress management should complement integrity-based policies.
3. To enhance harmonious passion, commercial banks should continue building trust through consistency in leadership actions, transparency in decision-making, and honouring commitments to employees. Trustworthiness should be institutionalized through clear policies that foster openness and strengthen employee confidence in management.
4. Banks should adopt supervisory frameworks that encourage healthy passion without crossing into over-commitment. Regular employee well-being assessments and provision of support systems (e.g., counselling services, flexible scheduling) will help channel obsessive tendencies into productive but sustainable work practices.

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