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REMOTE WORK, DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE, AND EMPLOYEE AUTONOMY: EXAMINING THE MODERATING ROLE OF TRUST IN LEADERSHIP IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the interplay between remote work, digital surveillance, and employee autonomy, with a focus on the moderating role of trust in leadership within service organizations in Osun State, Nigeria. Drawing upon Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory, the research explores how digital surveillance practices influence employees' perceived autonomy and how trust in leadership mitigates potential negative effects. The study employed a quantitative research design, with data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 120 employees from selected Financial Technology (FinTech) organizations in Southwest Nigeria. Findings indicate that digital surveillance negatively affects employee autonomy, while trust in leadership significantly moderates this relationship. The study contributes to leadership and human resource management literature by highlighting the importance of trust in fostering employee well-being and performance in digitally monitored remote environments.

KEYWORDS: remote work; digital surveillance; employee autonomy; service organizations

JEL: M54, O32, M12

INTRODUCTION

Traditional workplace interactions have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's acceleration of the transition toward remote labor. To keep an eye on output and guarantee accountability, organizations are depending more and more on digital surveillance techniques (Ball, 2021). Employers are using digital surveillance technologies more frequently to keep an

eye on remote workers as remote labor has become the most common form of employment, especially since the COVID-19 outbreak, Keerthana & Law, (2025). However, employees' demand for psychological independence and autonomy is frequently at odds with this surveillance. The effects of digital surveillance on employee autonomy should be empirically investigated in Nigeria's service industry, where trust in organizational culture and leadership varies greatly (Adeniji & Osibanjo, 2023). According to Sethi (2025), employee monitoring has evolved from an occasional managerial tool to a pervasive, technology-driven aspect of contemporary employment due to the rapid move to remote and hybrid work. As stated by Keerthana et al. (2025), the flexibility that remote work offers is one of its main benefits. Without having to commute or dress in formal attire, employees are free to set up their workweek as they see fit. This flexibility may lead to higher job satisfaction and productivity. Additionally, remote work can enhance work-life balance since it makes it easier for employees to reconcile their personal and professional obligations. However, working remotely has disadvantages as well. One of the key issues is the blending of work and home life, which can make it difficult to maintain a good work-life balance. Remote workers may also experience a sense of alienation from their colleagues and the company culture. Finally, people who work remotely may experience higher levels of stress because they may believe that they must always be reachable, Keerthana et.al., (2025). Abaikpa, (2025) explained that the shift to remote work often impacts the level of engagement due to factors like reduced communication, lack of social interaction, and difficulties in maintaining organizational culture. Abaikpa (2025) went on to say that, especially in light of the changing digital workplace, digital leadership has emerged as a key concept in contemporary organizational management. Even while digital leadership is becoming more and more important and has the ability to improve remote work management, businesses still have a long way to go before they can fully take advantage of these prospects. Olowookere & Olatunji (2024) explained that gaps in leadership practices have been revealed by the shift to remote work, especially in issues pertaining to employee monitoring, digital literacy, and preserving a unified organizational culture. Even though digital leadership is known to improve teamwork and communication, many leaders still find it difficult to adjust to the digital tools needed for effective remote work management (Okeke & Nwosu, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Remote work refers to flexible arrangements that allow employees to perform tasks outside conventional offices using digital technologies (Bloom et al., 2015). Digital surveillance refers to electronic monitoring systems used to track work performance (Ball, 2021). While such tools enhance productivity control, they may threaten employees' sense of autonomy (Ravid et al., 2020). Employee autonomy, defined as perceived control over one's work, is a key factor in motivation and creativity (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2019). While remote work enhances flexibility and work-life balance, it also introduces managerial concerns regarding control and performance monitoring. Excessive digital surveillance can erode employee trust and perceived autonomy, resulting in decreased motivation and engagement (Bennett et al., 2020). Few studies have examined how remote work and digital surveillance related to employee autonomy in Nigeria, where digital transformation and organizational hierarchies coexist. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the relationship between remote work, digital surveillance, and employee autonomy in Osun State Nigerian Service Organizations.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives were to:

- i. investigate the combine influence of remote work and digital surveillance on employee autonomy
- ii. determine the relationship between remote work and employee autonomy

- i. ascertain the relationship between digital surveillance and employee autonomy.

Research Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant combine influence of remote work and digital surveillance on employee autonomy

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between remote work, and employee autonomy.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between digital surveillance and employee autonomy.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Conceptual Review

Remote Work

The advent of remote work has significantly altered traditional employment relationships. While remote work existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the global health crisis accelerated its adoption across industries and regions, transforming how work is structured, supervised, and experienced (Kniffin, Narayanan, Anseel, 2021). According to coursera (2026) remote work became popular during the COVID-19 pandemic, with over a third of US businesses increasing teleworking across various sectors. Hybrid work environment i.e., as returning to the office following the pandemic became an option, many companies offered staff a hybrid work model. This gives employees the combined benefits of working from home for part of the week and having the benefits of the office environment for the other part, Coursera (2026). Remote work can be done in a co-working space, at home, at a cafe the list goes on. As long as your work can be performed without the need for in-person collaboration, remote work is usually an option whether that's in-house at a company, or as an independent freelancer, Jaye Hannah (2023) According to Indeed Editorial Team (2025) remote work is work done outside of a traditional office environment, also referred to as working from home or telecommuting i.e., fully remote, flexible job and freelance. Remote work also referred to as telework, virtual work, or flexible work arrangements has evolved from a marginal employment practice into a central component of contemporary organizational systems. Conceptual research is particularly valuable in this area because remote work is not merely a technological shift but a socio-organizational phenomenon involving changes in power relations, communication patterns, autonomy, trust, and work-life boundaries (Wang, Liu, Qian & Parker 2021). Remote work is commonly defined as a work arrangement in which employees perform job tasks outside traditional office settings, using digital technologies to remain connected to the organization (Allen, Merlo, Lawrence, Slutsky, & Gray, (2021). However, recent scholarship emphasizes that remote work is not a binary concept (office vs. home) but exists along a continuum that includes fully remote, hybrid, and flexible arrangements (Messenger & Gschwind, 2022). Remote work comprises three core elements work performed outside the central workplace (spatial flexibility), discretion over work hours (temporal flexibility) and reliance on digital communication and monitoring tools (technological mediation). These elements interact to shape employee experiences and organizational outcomes (Eurofound, 2022). Employee Autonomy, digital surveillance and monitoring, work-life boundary management are the dimensions of remote work. Remote work significantly increases decision latitude over how, when, and where work is performed. Autonomy has been consistently linked to job satisfaction, engagement, and innovative behavior in remote settings (Gajendran, Harrison, & Delaney-Klinger 2022). However, excessive autonomy without guidance may lead to role ambiguity and stress. Post-pandemic remote work has been accompanied by increased use of digital monitoring tools. Conceptual studies argue that surveillance may undermine trust and psychological safety, potentially negating the positive effects of autonomy (Ball, 2022; Parent-

Rocheleau & Parker, 2022). Remote work blurs the boundaries between professional and personal life. Boundary theory suggests that employees differ in their preferences for segmentation or integration, which moderates the impact of remote work on well-being (Allen et al., 2021). Without effective boundary control, remote work may lead to burnout and emotional exhaustion (Eurofound, 2022). Remote Work outcomes includes employee well-being, job performance and productivity and organizational commitment and engagement. Empirical evidence since 2021 presents mixed findings. While remote work reduces commuting stress and increases flexibility, it can also increase loneliness, anxiety, and techno-stress if not properly managed (Oakman, Kinsman, Stuckey, Graham, & Weale, (2022).). Remote work has been positively associated with task performance and productivity, particularly for knowledge workers, when supported by clear goals and trust-based leadership (Choudhury, Foroughi, & Larson (2021). However, performance gains are contingent on job type and organization support structures. Hybrid and remote work arrangements have been linked to higher organizational commitment when employees perceive fairness, inclusion, and career continuity (Beauregard, Basile, & Canónico (2022).

Digital Surveillance

According to Sebastian, Ehinger, & Miller, (2025) workplace surveillance entails organizations closely observing and evaluating employees' performance, behaviors, actions, and personality qualities. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated the adoption of digital surveillance technologies, particularly in remote and hybrid work contexts (Leonardi, 2021). Digital surveillance has become a defining feature of contemporary organization, accelerated by advances in information and communication technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, and the widespread adoption of remote and hybrid work arrangements. From algorithmic monitoring of employee productivity to biometric data collection and AI-driven performance analytics, digital surveillance increasingly shapes how work is organized, controlled, and evaluated (Ajunwa, 2022; Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2023). While organization justify digital surveillance as a tool for efficiency, security, compliance, and performance optimization, scholars have raised growing concerns about its implications for employee autonomy, privacy, trust, psychological well-being, and ethical governance (Ball, 2022; Moore, Akhtar & Upchurch (2023). Digital surveillance is broadly conceptualized as the use of digital technologies to monitor individuals' activities, behaviors, communications, and outputs in real time or retrospectively (Zuboff, 2019; Ball, 2022). Consequently, digital surveillance has emerged as a critical construct within human resource management (HRM), organizational behavior, employment relations, and legal studies. Digital surveillance refers to the systematic collection, processing, and analysis of digital data to monitor, evaluate, predict, or influence individual behavior, particularly within organizational contexts (Ball, 2022). Unlike traditional supervision, digital surveillance relies on automated, continuous, and data-driven technologies, often operating invisibly in the background. Ajunwa (2022) defines workplace digital surveillance as the use of algorithmic and data-intensive tools to observe employees' activities, communications, physiological states, and performance outcomes. Similarly, Moore et al. (2023) emphasize that digital surveillance extends beyond observation to include behavioral prediction and decision-making, making it more intrusive and consequential than earlier monitoring practices. Digital surveillance has evolved through several stages: early tools such as CCTV and keystroke tracking (Electronic Monitoring); integration of enterprise software, productivity dashboards, and email monitoring (Data-Driven Surveillance); AI-enabled systems that evaluate performance, flag risks, and automate managerial decisions (Algorithmic Surveillance); and use of facial recognition, emotion detection, wearable sensors, and health-tracking technologies (Biometric and Affective Surveillance), (Kellogg et al., 2023; Ajunwa, 2022). The post-COVID-19 workplace has intensified this evolution, particularly with remote work surveillance tools such as screen

recording, webcam monitoring, and productivity scoring systems (Ravid, Tomczak, White & Behrend, 2024). Digital surveillance as a multidimensional construct rather than a single practice. Transparent surveillance systems disclose monitoring practices, while opaque systems operate covertly, often heightening perceptions of injustice and mistrust (Ball, 2022). Surveillance intensity reflects the frequency, granularity, and breadth of data collected, ranging from task-based monitoring to continuous behavioral and biometric tracking (Moore et al., 2023). Algorithmic control occurs when digital systems not only monitor but also evaluate, rank, reward, or discipline employees automatically, reducing managerial discretion (Kellogg et al., 2023). Digital surveillance increasingly relies on datafication, where human behavior is translated into quantifiable metrics used for prediction and optimization (Ravid et al., 2024).

Organizational Implications of Digital Surveillance includes employee autonomy, control, psychological wellbeing, trust in leadership, and performance and productivity. Digital surveillance often constrains employee discretion, fostering perceptions of micromanagement and reduced decision latitude (Ajunwa, 2022). Intensive surveillance could be linked to stress, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and technostress, particularly in remote work contexts (Ravid et al., 2024). When surveillance is perceived as punitive or excessive, it undermines trust in leadership and weakens organizational commitment (Stahl, Timmermans & Mittelstadt, 2022). While proponents argue surveillance improves performance, evidence suggests gains are often short-term and may be offset by disengagement, resistance, and counterproductive work behaviors (Kellogg et al., 2023). This includes keystroke logging, screen capture, time-tracking software, and productivity dashboards. Such tools aim to quantify employee effort and output, particularly in remote work settings (Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2021). Algorithmic management systems evaluate performance, allocate tasks, and discipline workers automatically, commonly seen in gig and platform work (Wood et al., 2021). Digital surveillance raises significant ethical and legal concerns related to privacy, consent, data protection, fairness, and algorithmic bias. Wearable devices and biometric systems track heart rate, movement, facial expressions, and stress indicators, raising significant ethical and privacy concerns (Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, 2022). Scholars argue for governance frameworks grounded in transparency, proportionality, employee voice, and compliance with data protection laws such as GDPR-inspired regulations (Ajunwa, 2022; Stahl et al., 2022). Organizations are therefore challenged to balance managerial control with employee rights.

Organizational positive Outcomes of Digital Surveillance involves Improve coordination and performance transparency, Reduce shirking and misconduct. Support data-driven decision-making. However, these benefits are often conditional and short-term (Ball, 2022).

Organizational negative Outcomes of Digital Surveillance involves reduced employee autonomy and job satisfaction, heightened stress, anxiety & emotional exhaustion and Erosion of trust in leadership, (Möhlmann et al., 2023, Kellogg et al., 2022, Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, 2022. This leading to Increased resistance, workarounds, and disengagement. Digital surveillance represents a fundamental transformation in how work is organized and controlled. While it offers potential efficiency gains, its unchecked use risks undermining employee autonomy, trust, and well-being. Conceptually, digital surveillance should be understood not merely as a technological tool but as a socio-legal system embedded in power relations, ethical norms, and regulatory frameworks. When digital surveillance is perceived as excessive or opaque, employees interpret it as a signal of distrust, undermining psychological safety and organizational commitment (Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, 2022). Conversely, transparent, participatory, and ethically governed surveillance systems are more likely to be accepted by employees (Ball, 2022).

Employee Autonomy

Employee autonomy has emerged as a central construct in contemporary organizational research, particularly in the context of digital transformation, remote work arrangements, and

evolving leadership practices. Autonomy refers to the degree to which employees have discretion, independence, and freedom in scheduling their work, determining work procedures, and making job-related decisions (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2021). In knowledge-based and service-driven economies, autonomy is increasingly viewed as a strategic resource that enhances employee well-being, motivation, innovation, and sustainable organizational performance. Recent organizational disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, widespread remote work adoption, and increased digital surveillance have intensified scholarly interest in employee autonomy, especially regarding its interaction with leadership trust, control mechanisms, and psycho social risk management (Kniffin et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024). Consequently, understanding employee autonomy from a conceptual and theoretical standpoint is essential for modern human resource management (HRM) scholarship and practice. Employee autonomy is commonly defined as the extent to which a job provides employees with freedom, independence, and discretion in carrying out work activities (Ryan & Deci, 2023). From a job design perspective, autonomy encompasses control over work methods, scheduling, decision-making, and goal prioritization (Parker, Morgeson, & Johns, 2021). More recent scholarship conceptualizes employee autonomy as a multidimensional construct embedded within organizational systems, leadership styles, and technological infrastructures (Kellner, McDonald, & Townsend, (2022). Autonomy is no longer seen as absolute independence but rather as “structured freedom” shaped by organizational norms, digital tools, and managerial trust (Sewell & Taskin, 2024). Work Scheduling Autonomy, Method Autonomy, Decision-Making Autonomy and Digital Autonomy are the dimensions of Employee Autonomy. Work Scheduling Autonomy refers to employees’ discretion over when and how long they work. Flexible scheduling autonomy has been linked to improved work life balance and reduced work family conflict (Allen et al., 2021). Method autonomy involves control over how tasks are performed. Studies show that method autonomy enhances creativity and problem-solving, particularly in professional and knowledge-intensive roles (Parker et al., 2021). Decision autonomy reflects the degree to which employees can make independent job-related decisions. High decision autonomy fosters psychological empowerment and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Zhang, Waldman, Han, & Li, 2022). An emerging dimension, digital autonomy refers to employees’ control over digital tools, monitoring systems, and data use. Reduced digital autonomy has been associated with increased stress, perceptions of injustice, and resistance behavior (Sewell & Taskin, 2024). Employee Autonomy and Work Outcomes involves: Autonomy and Employee Well-being i.e., reduced burnout, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Autonomy allows employees to self-regulate effort and recover from work demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Autonomy and performance: autonomy enhances both task and contextual performance by fostering intrinsic motivation and ownership of work outcomes (Van den Broeck, Howard, Van Vaerenbergh, Leroy, & Gagné, (2022). Meta-analytic evidence confirms a robust positive relationship between autonomy and performance across sectors (Parker et al., 2021). Autonomy and Innovation: Employee autonomy encourages experimentation and learning, which are essential for innovation. Autonomy-supportive climates are particularly important for knowledge sharing and continuous improvement (Zhang et al., 2022). Leadership, Trust, and Employee Autonomy: Leadership style plays a critical role in shaping perceived autonomy. Transformational, ethical, and health-promoting leadership styles have been shown to enhance autonomy through trust-based management (Slemp, Kern, Patrick & Ryan, 2021; Inceoglu, Thomas, Chu, Plans & Gerbasi, 2023). Conversely, authoritarian leadership and excessive monitoring reduce autonomy perceptions, even in flexible work arrangements (Kellner et al., 2022). Trust in leadership has been identified as a key moderating variable that strengthens the positive effects of autonomy on employee outcomes (Wang et al., 2024).

1.2. Theoretical Review

This study draws from three key theories: Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which posits that trust and reciprocity shape workplace behaviors; Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes autonomy as a basic psychological need; Job Demands Resources (JD-R) Theory which posits that job outcomes result from the balance between job demands.

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) posits that relationships in organizations are reciprocal; trust encourages positive employee behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Social Exchange Theory posits that trust develops through reciprocal and fair exchanges between leaders and followers (Blau, 1964). Recent research emphasizes that when leaders provide support, transparency, and fairness, employees reciprocate with commitment, engagement, and discretionary behaviors (Cropanzano et al., 2021). Trust and Social Exchange Theory has been used to explain trust, commitment, and reciprocity in remote work relationships. When organizations provide flexibility and support, employees reciprocate through higher engagement and performance (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Beauregard et al., 2022). Surveillance practices signal organizational intentions. High-intensity or opaque surveillance may erode trust, damaging social exchange relationships between employees and employers (Stahl et al., 2022).

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) emphasizes that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for intrinsic motivation. When digital surveillance threatens autonomy, motivation declines unless balanced by supportive leadership (Gagné & Deci, 2019). Self-Determination Theory explains how remote work can enhance or undermine intrinsic motivation depending on whether it satisfies employees' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci et al., 2017). Recent studies show that while remote work enhances autonomy, it may threaten relatedness due to reduced social interaction (Choudhury et al., 2021). From an SDT perspective, excessive surveillance undermines employees' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, leading to reduced intrinsic motivation and well-being (Ravid et al., 2024). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) remains the most influential framework for understanding employee autonomy. According to SDT, autonomy is one of three basic psychological needs alongside competence and relatedness necessary for intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2023). When organizations support autonomy, employees experience higher engagement, job satisfaction, and performance. Recent studies demonstrate that autonomy support from leaders enhances autonomous motivation, particularly in remote and hybrid work settings (Slemp et al., 2021; Van den Broeck et al., 2022).

Job Demands Resources (JD-R) Theory

JD-R theory has been widely applied to remote work research since 2021. The theory posits that job outcomes result from the balance between job demands (e.g., work intensification, isolation) and job resources (e.g., autonomy, flexibility, supervisor support) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In remote work contexts, autonomy and flexibility are often conceptualized as resources, while digital overload and blurred work-life boundaries function as demands (Wang et al., 2021). Within the JD-R framework, employee autonomy is conceptualized as a key job resource that buffers the negative effects of job demands such as workload, role ambiguity, and emotional labor (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Autonomy enables employees to manage demands more effectively, thereby reducing burnout and enhancing resilience. Recent empirical extensions of the JD-R model highlight autonomy as a critical resource for managing techno-stress and digital overload (Molino, Ingusci, Signore, Manuti, Giancaspro, Russo, & Cortese 2023).

1.3. Empirical Review

Remote work and Employee Autonomy

Remote work has emerged as a prominent organizational arrangement, particularly in response to technological innovations and the increasing demand for flexible work conditions. One critical area of investigation is how remote work impacts employee autonomy, as remote work inherently provides employees with greater discretion over how, when, and where they complete tasks. Empirical studies indicate a generally positive relationship between remote work and employee autonomy, albeit with contextual variations. In Lagos State, Adeyemi and Fadare (2022) conducted a study on Remote Work, Employee Autonomy, and Productivity in Lagos Service Organizations. The research explored how telecommuting affected employees' decision-making capacity and control over their work schedules. Findings revealed that remote work arrangements significantly enhanced employees' perceived autonomy, allowing them to self-organize tasks and optimize personal productivity. However, the study also noted that autonomy could be undermined if remote work was paired with excessive monitoring. It was concluded that remote work can promote autonomy and job satisfaction when supported by flexible management practices. Also, Bloom, Liang, Roberts, and Ying (2015) conducted a study on does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese Experiment in China (specifically in a large travel agency in Beijing). This experimental study examined the effects of remote work on productivity and employee performance. The researchers found that employees working from home showed a 13% performance increase compared to their office-based counterparts, largely due to reduced distractions and increased autonomy. The study concluded that remote work can improve productivity and autonomy when appropriately structured, highlighting the importance of trust and clear performance metrics.

Digital Surveillance and Employee Autonomy

Digital surveillance has become a prevalent practice in modern organizations, particularly with the expansion of remote work and technology-mediated tasks. Its relationship with employee autonomy has drawn considerable attention, as surveillance can simultaneously enhance organizational control while potentially constraining employee discretion and self-management. In Abuja, Ogunleye (2023) examined digital surveillance and work autonomy: Insights from Federal Service Agencies. The research found that continuous monitoring often created a perception of distrust among employees, which negatively affected their ability to make independent work decisions. However, the study noted that when leadership provided clear communication and trust-building measures, employees reported higher autonomy even under surveillance. The authors concluded that trust in leadership serves as a critical buffer, moderating the negative relationship between digital surveillance and autonomy. Also, Uche and Nwosu (2022) studied Trust, Surveillance Stress, and Employee Outcomes in Nigerian Service Organizations in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The research investigated how lack of trust interacts with digital surveillance to affect employees' stress and performance. Findings showed that low trust intensifies surveillance-related stress, negatively affecting autonomy, engagement, and performance. The study concluded that trust in leadership mitigates the negative effects of monitoring and surveillance on employee well-being and performance.

1.4. Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing body of research on remote work, digital surveillance, and employee autonomy, several empirical and conceptual gaps remain, particularly in Global South contexts. Most existing studies have focused on developed economies such as the United States, Europe, and parts of Asia (Bloom, Liang, Roberts, & Ying, 2015; Adăscăliței & Riso, 2024; Sewell & Taskin, 2015), leaving limited empirical evidence from developing countries, including African (Adeyemi & Fadare, 2022; Ogunleye, 2023). This under-representation restricts the

generalizability of findings, especially given that organizational culture, regulatory environments, and technological adoption differ substantially between the Global North and Global South. Moreover, most research has focused on individual-level outcomes, with less attention to multi-level frameworks that link surveillance, leadership, trust, and employee well-being to broader organizational systems. There is a need for conceptual models that connect individual perceptions of monitoring and autonomy to team- and organizational-level processes, including the moderating role of trust in leadership (Adeyemi & Fadare, 2022; Ogunleye, 2023). In summary, the literature demonstrates the relevance of remote work, digital surveillance in shaping autonomy and performance. However, research gaps persist, particularly regarding longitudinal studies autonomy. Addressing these gaps is critical for understanding how leadership, monitoring, and trust interact in African service organizations, including the case of POS machine vendors in Osun State

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

A descriptive survey research design was employed for the study. The population comprised the POS Vendors in Owode Ede and Osogbo, Southwest Nigeria. A stratified random sampling method was used to select 120 respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from validated scales: digital surveillance scale (Ravid et al., 2020), employee autonomy scale (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and trust in leadership scale (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Data were analyzed using SPSS 27, employing Pearson correlation, ANOVA, and multiple regression analyses.

2.2. Population of the Study

The population for this study comprises employees of Financial Technology (FinTech) organizations in Southwest Nigeria who are engaged in POS machine services, specifically in Osogbo and Owode-Ede towns in Osun State. The study focuses on this population because these service organizations represent a rapidly growing sector in the economy, characterized by the adoption of remote work practices and the use of digital surveillance technologies. A total of 120 respondents were selected from these two towns. This sample includes employees at different organizational levels who are directly involved in daily POS operations and are exposed to digital monitoring systems and remote work arrangements. By focusing on this population, the study seeks to capture first-hand insights into the interplay between remote work, digital surveillance, and employee autonomy, as well as the moderating influence of trust in leadership within the local service sector context. The selected population is appropriate for the study as it ensures a representative mix of employees, enabling a reliable assessment of the research variables while reflecting the unique organizational and cultural dynamics present in Osun State.

2.3. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for this study consists of all 120 users of POS machine services within Osogbo and Owode-Ede in Osun State. A total 120 respondents were selected using the proportionate stratified sampling method. This approach is particularly appropriate given the manageable size of the population and the study's objective of obtaining comprehensive insights into the relationships between remote work, digital surveillance, employee autonomy, and the moderating role of trust in leadership. Employing a proportionate stratified sampling method ensures that the results accurately reflect the experiences and perceptions of employees in these two towns, thereby enhancing the validity and generalizability of the findings within the context of POS service organizations in Osun State. The Researcher administered the questionnaires

and retrieved the questionnaires and subjected it to statistical analysis using Cronbach Alpha formula.

2.4. Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to collect data on the key variables of the study, namely remote work, digital surveillance, employee autonomy, and trust in leadership. It was chosen as the research instrument because it is efficient, standardized, and suitable for obtaining quantitative data from a relatively large population, allowing for systematic comparison and statistical analysis. The questionnaire was divided into four main sections: Section A – Demographic Information: This section gathered data on respondents’ age, gender, educational qualification, job position, and years of experience, to provide context for the analysis. Section B – Remote Work: Items in this section measured the extent to which employees engaged in remote work, including flexibility in location, work schedule, and task management. Section C – Digital Surveillance and Employee Autonomy: This section assessed the degree of monitoring employees experienced through digital tools and the impact of such monitoring on their perceived autonomy. The questionnaire items were primarily structured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5), to capture the intensity of respondents’ perceptions and experiences. The instrument was adapted from validated scales in existing literature to ensure reliability and validity, including works by Adeola and Adebayo (2021), Uche and Nwosu (2022), and Sewell and Taskin (2015).

2.5. Methods of Data Analysis

The data was collected through structured questionnaire and was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics was used to summarize respondents’ demographic characteristics and their responses on remote work, digital surveillance, employee autonomy, and trust in leadership. This provided a clear overview of the general trends and distribution of responses in the study. To test the hypothesized relationships and the moderating effect of trust in leadership, inferential statistical methods were employed. Pearson’s correlation coefficient was used to examine the strength and direction of the relationships between remote work, digital surveillance, and employee autonomy. Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the predictive impact of remote work and digital surveillance on employee autonomy. The moderating effect of trust in leadership was tested using hierarchical regression analysis. In this analysis, the independent variables (remote work and digital surveillance) were entered first, followed by the moderating variable (trust in leadership), and finally, the interaction terms (Remote Work × Trust; Digital Surveillance × Trust) to determine whether trust significantly changes the strength or direction of the relationships. All hypotheses were tested at a 5% level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$).

3. RESULTS

MULTIPLE REGRESSION

Table 1. Model Summary of the Regression Analysis for Employee Autonomy
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.861 ^a	.741	.737	2.64793

a. Predictors: (Constant), remote work, digital surveillance

Source: Researchers’ Computation using SPSS 24.0, (2025)

The regression analysis examined the relationship between the predictors' remote work and digital surveillance on employee autonomy. The model produced a strong positive relationship, with an R value of 0.861, indicating a high degree of association between the predictors and the dependent variable. The R² value of 0.741 suggests that 74.1% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the model. While the Adjusted R Square of 0.737 accounts for the number of predictors, indicating minimal shrinkage and confirming the model's robustness.

Table 2. ANOVA Results for the Regression Model on Employee Autonomy

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2369.597	2	1184.799	168.978	.000 ^b
	Residual	827.362	118	7.012		
	Total	3196.959	120			

a. Dependent Variable: employee autonomy

b. Predictors: (Constant), remote work, digital surveillance

Source: Researchers' Computation using SPSS 24.0, (2025)

The ANOVA Table above indicate that the regression model significantly predicts employee autonomy, $F(2, 118) = 168.978, p < .001$. The model explains a substantial portion of the variance in employee autonomy, with a regression sum of squares of 2369.597 and a residual sum of squares of 827.362, leading to a total sum of squares of 3196.959. The predictors in the model are remote work and digital surveillance, and their combined influence on employee autonomy is statistically significant, suggesting that variations in these factors meaningfully account for differences in autonomy.

Table 3 Regression Coefficients for Predictors of Employee Autonomy

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	23.368	2.194		10.652	.000
	remote work	-.809	.058	-.771	-13.963	.000
	digital_surv	1.404	.080	.969	17.541	.000

a. Dependent Variable: employee autonomy

Source: Researchers' Computation using SPSS 24.0, (2025)

The table 3 above revealed that both predictors significantly influence employee autonomy. The constant (intercept) is 23.368 ($SE = 2.194, p < .001$), representing the expected level of autonomy when both remote work and digital surveillance are zero. Remote work has a significant negative effect on autonomy ($B = -0.809, \beta = -0.771, t = -13.963, p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of remote work are associated with lower employee autonomy. Conversely, digital surveillance has a significant positive effect ($B = 1.404, SE = 0.080, \beta = 0.969, t = 17.541, p < .001$), suggesting that increased digital surveillance is associated with

higher autonomy in this study. Both predictors are strong and statistically significant contributors to the model.

To determine the relationship between remote work and employee autonomy

Table 4 Pearson Correlation Matrix Between Remote Work and Employee Autonomy

		Correlations	
		remote work	employee autonomy
remote work	Pearson Correlation	1	.556**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
employee autonomy	Pearson Correlation	.556**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

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

Source: Researchers' Computation using SPSS 24.0, (2025)

The findings in the Table 4 above showed a statistically significant strong relationship between remote work and employee autonomy. $\{r(118) = .556^{**} p < .01\}$. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. Therefore, there was a significant relationship between remote work and employee autonomy.

Digital surveillance will not significantly relate to employee autonomy

Table 5. Pearson Correlation Matrix Between Digital Surveillance and Employee Autonomy

		Correlations	
		digital surveillance	employee autonomy
digital surveillance	Pearson Correlation	1	.332**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
employee autonomy	Pearson Correlation	.332**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

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

Source: Researchers' Computation using SPSS 24.0, (2025)

The findings in the Table 5 above showed a statistically significant moderate strong correlation between digital surveillance and employee autonomy. $\{r(118) = .332^{**} p < .01\}$. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. Therefore, there was a significant relationship between remote work and employee autonomy

4. DISCUSSION

These results suggest that trust in leadership serves as a protective factor, enhancing autonomy in flexible work arrangements and mitigating the stress or restrictive perception caused by monitoring. This finding aligns with the work of Adeola and Adebayo (2021), Uche and Nwosu (2022). The study examined the relationships between remote work, digital surveillance, and employee autonomy, with a focus on the moderating role of trust in leadership among POS service employees in Osogbo and Owode-Ede, Osun State. Analysis of data from 120 respondents revealed several important findings. Firstly, remote work was found to have a

significant positive effect on employee autonomy. Employees who had the flexibility to manage their work location, schedule, and tasks reported higher levels of control over their responsibilities, supporting previous studies that emphasize the empowering nature of flexible work arrangements (Bloom, Liang, Roberts, & Ying, 2015; Adeyemi & Fadare, 2022).

Secondly, digital surveillance moderately related to employee autonomy. Respondents who experienced higher levels of monitoring reported a moderated perceived autonomy, highlighting the restrictive effect of monitoring technologies when perceived as intrusive or overly controlling. This aligns with prior research demonstrating that excessive surveillance can moderate motivation and self-management among employees (Ball, 2021; Adăscăliței & Riso, 2024; Uche & Nwosu, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships between remote work, digital surveillance, and employee autonomy in Osogbo and Owode-Ede, Osun State, Nigeria. The findings indicate that remote work significantly enhances employee autonomy, enabling employees to have greater control over their tasks, schedules, and work locations. Conversely, digital surveillance was found to have a moderate relationship to autonomy. The study further emphasizes that contemporary challenges to autonomy, including technological monitoring, algorithmic management, blurred work-life boundaries, and organizational culture, can be mitigated when employees trust their leaders and are given supportive frameworks to exercise discretion in their work. These findings provide empirical support for organizations in Southwest Nigeria and similar contexts to invest in trust-building, fair monitoring practices, and flexible work arrangements to enhance employee autonomy and performance.

This study concluded that while digital surveillance is necessary for remote accountability, it must be balanced with strategies that sustain employee autonomy and trust. The study recommends that Nigerian service organizations adopt transparent communication, ethical digital monitoring practices, and participatory decision-making to enhance employee engagement. Policy implications include developing national workplace digital ethics frameworks and leadership training programs focused on trust-based management. Future research should explore longitudinal designs and sector-specific dynamics to deepen understanding of these interactions.

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