

Building A Digital Economy; Empowering Nigerian Youths Through Entrepreneurship And Skills Development

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Abstract

This study examined the need for empowering Nigerian Youths through Entrepreneurship and digital skills. It emphasized that Nigerian youths of today are not just passive inheritors of the world we create; they are the architects of tomorrow's reality. Their creativity, innovation, and perspectives will shape the trajectory of our society, industries, and policies in the years to come. The study objectively assessed empowering Nigerian youths through entrepreneurship and digital skills, knowledge, and resources to realize their full potential and become active contributors to their communities and society as a whole. Both primary and secondary methods of data collection were used. The study used a qualitative approach to examine the data collected from 32 entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs were identified using purposive sampling from different areas. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and the respondents were asked about how the adoption of digital skill can create unintended consequences, adverse impacts; positive entrepreneur experiences; technological changes and techno-stress among entrepreneurs. The findings revealed that there is a potential risk of data leaks and security breaches, drastic changes resulting from digital transformations and job risk and insecurity brewing in the employee psyche. The study concluded that there exists an evolving and reciprocal relationship between technology interventions and entrepreneurship development through digital skill. The study recommended that technological interventions like digital skills need to be implemented at a different pace in startup organizations since they possess a greater entrepreneurial spirit with a flatter organizational structure in comparison to traditional organizations.

Keywords: Digital Skills, Youth Empowerment, Entrepreneurship Development

INTRODUCTION

In a world driven by rapid technological advancements, shifting global dynamics, and evolving socio-economic landscapes, the empowerment of youth has emerged as an indispensable cornerstone for building a resilient and promising future. The phrase "Empowering Nigerian Youths through Entrepreneurship and Digital Skills" encapsulates a profound idea that has gained remarkable prominence across diverse spheres of the nation. As we stand on the threshold of tomorrow, it becomes increasingly apparent that nurturing the potential and aspirations of our younger generations is not just an option, but an imperative that holds the key to progress and sustainability. The significance of empowering Nigerian Youths through entrepreneurship and digital skills cannot be overstated. Nigerian youths of today are not just passive inheritors of the world we create; they are the architects of tomorrow's reality. Their creativity, innovation, and perspectives will shape the trajectory of our society, industries, and policies in the years to come. Therefore, it is not enough to merely equip them with education; true empowerment through entrepreneurship and digital skills encompass providing them with the tools, knowledge, skills, and

opportunities to take charge of their own destinies and contribute meaningfully to the betterment of the world. This notion extends beyond individual development to encompass the broader scope of societal progress. An empowered youth population contributes to a more dynamic economy, as fresh ideas and entrepreneurial endeavors invigorate markets and drive innovation. Moreover, an engaged and informed youth demographic plays a pivotal role in shaping social and political discourse, ensuring that the concerns and aspirations of future generations are adequately represented in decision-making processes.

However, the path towards empowering youth through entrepreneurship and digital skills, is multifaceted and complex. It involves addressing a range of challenges, including equitable access to digital skills, education, meaningful employment opportunities, mental health support, and a nurturing environment that fosters personal growth and self-confidence. It requires a collaborative effort from governments, educational institutions, community organizations, and the private sector to create an ecosystem that nurtures, guides, and uplifts young individuals. As we delve into the intricate

dimensions of empowering Nigerian youths through entrepreneurship and digital skills, this exploration will uncover not only the strategies and initiatives that are proving successful but also the stories of resilience, innovation, and determination exhibited by young people around the world. From technology hubs to rural communities, from creative industries to scientific endeavors, the movement to empower youth knows no bounds and transcends geographical, cultural, and socio-economic barriers.

The objective of this study is the empowerment of Nigerian youths through entrepreneurship and digital skills, knowledge, and resources to realize their full potential and become active contributors to their communities and society as a whole. By fostering an environment that nurtures personal growth, critical thinking, and holistic development, this study seeks to empower youth to overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and shape a promising future for themselves and their communities. Through a comprehensive approach that combines education, mentorship, skill-building, and exposure to diverse experiences, we aim to build a strong foundation that not only enhances individual lives but also contributes to the overall progress and sustainability of our society. By providing youth with the tools, they need to succeed, we aspire to create a generation of confident, responsible, and engaged citizens who are well-prepared to address the complex and evolving demands of the modern world

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is the empowerment of Nigerian youth through entrepreneurship and digital skills, knowledge, and resources to contribute significantly to the society.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it demonstrates how empowering Nigerian youths through entrepreneurship and digital skills can foster innovation, job creation, and sustainable economic growth. By highlighting both the opportunities and challenges of digital adoption, the research provides practical guidance for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in designing effective empowerment programs. It emphasizes that equipping youths with entrepreneurial capacity and digital literacy not only reduces unemployment but also prepares them to compete in a global digital economy. Ultimately, the study bridges the gap between youth potential and national development goals, contributing to poverty reduction, community development, and long-term socio-economic resilience.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative approach to examine the data collected from 32 entrepreneurs. These

entrepreneurs were identified using purposive sampling from different areas. Out of 32, seven were females and twenty-five were male respondents. The maximum work experience of the respondent is 18 years. Interviews were taken until theoretical saturation was reached. Semi- structured interviews were conducted and the respondents were asked about how the adoption of digital skill can create unintended consequences, adverse impacts; positive entrepreneur experiences; technological changes and techno-stress among entrepreneurs.

DATA ANALYSIS

The following process was followed to analyze the data collected. In the first step, the interviews were coded into text and were converted into the transcript by collating the responses into a single response sheet for every research question separately. In the next step, data cleaning was done to eliminate special characters, numeric values and spaces from the transcript. Uniformity of cases was done for these files. In the next step, stop words were defined. Finally, these transcripts were imported for analysis. Face validity was also established through a group consensus-based approach. The team for establishing reliability and validity consisted of four researchers, each of whom had prior research experience and had a doctorate in management. Word cloud was generated, which is used in extracting the main content from the analysis followed by thematic and sentiment analysis using the feature of auto code. A mix of text mining and qualitative content analysis was utilized so that thematic convergence was evident from the data collected in the interview transcripts.

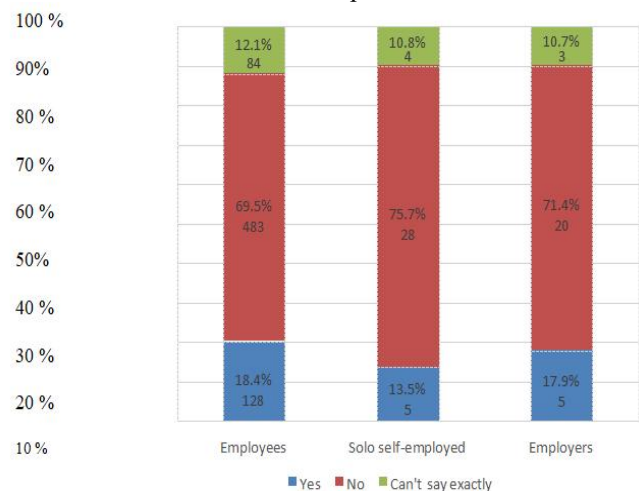
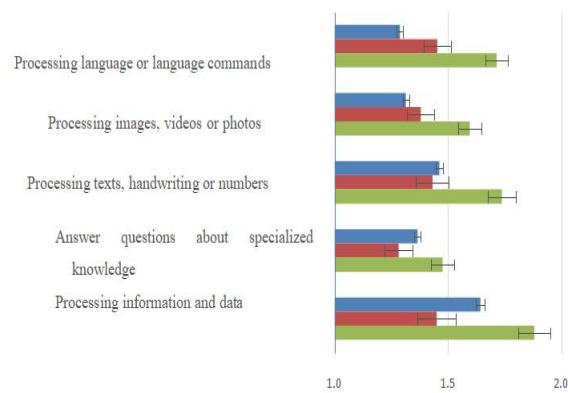


FIG 1: Do you think that you work with digital systems at your workplace that use artificial intelligence or machine learning?

Notes: The bars show the shares of answers given by respondents within the three occupations. Observation numbers are provided below the shares. Source: own calculation based on the 2025 SOEP-IS



Notes: Respondents were asked to indicate how often they work with each type of digital system. The first four digital systems are AI systems, although they were not presented to respondents using this term. Scale: 1=Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Weakly, 4=Daily, 5=Multiple times a day. The x-axis is cut off at 2 for better readability. The figure shows mean values by occupation with 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Own calculations based on the 2020 SOEP Core.

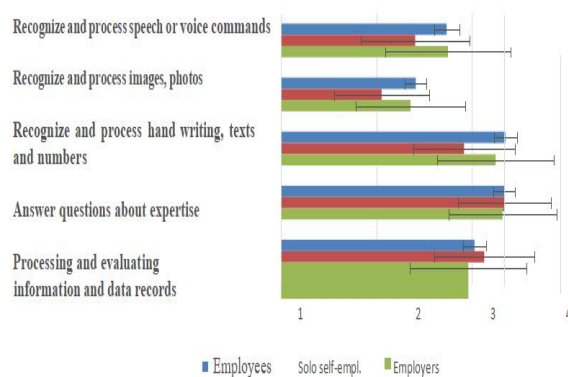


FIG 3 Frequency of work tasks suitable for AI

Notes: Respondents were asked to indicate how often they perform each work task. The first four work tasks are suitable for AI in principle. Scale: 1=Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Weekly, 4=Daily, 5=Multiple times a day. The figure shows mean values by occupation with 95% confidence intervals. Source: Own calculations based on the 2019 SOEP-IS.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis of the respondents' responses reveals three major categories that can be defined as unintended consequences of AI adoption, positive impacts of AI deployment on entrepreneurs and techno stress among entrepreneurs. The responses for research question one depicts that "Changes" is the word which is highlighted most by the respondents followed by insecurity, stress, work, change, technology, overload, adoption, issues, create, technology, consequences and automation, etc. These words helped in forming themes while taking help from thematic analysis. Thematic

analysis of the first research question indicated some unintended or negative impacts of AI deployment among entrepreneurs. The majority of the responses were centered on problem areas and issues encountered by employees, integration of organizational functions with technology results in a potential risk of data leaks and security breaches. AI has created unintended scientific and societal issues spanning technology, security and privacy and standardization. Responses to research two depicts that "entrepreneurs" is the most frequent word used in the responses followed by techno- stress, technology, stress, work and change, etc. The sentiment analysis indicated a moderately negative/very negative sentiment harbored by the respondents. This leads us to believe that AI deployment in I4.0 is creating techno-stress among entrepreneurs.

The thematic analysis of the second question revealed some definitive themes related to techno stress creation among entrepreneurs. The themes can be categorized as work overload. This implies that increased expectation of productivity has led to prolonged working hours and faster turnaround time thereby increasing workloads. IT & AI systems can increase entrepreneurs' productivity to a certain level, and after that, they only cause technical overload and techno stress. Such systems can drive entrepreneurs to work nonstop, leaving no leisure time meant for rest, family and other tasks.

The current study makes some noteworthy contributions that have implications in the arenas of both research and practice. While the discussion on the findings is already integrated with the specific findings, we highlight in this section, areas where we extend the existing boundaries of knowledge and the implications of our findings. The current study has performed an in-depth analysis of the unintended consequences of AI deployment among entrepreneurs. This research makes the unique contribution of establishing a qualitative hierarchy of prominent factors constituting unintended consequences and adverse impacts of incorporation of AI.

The findings revealed the following factors: potential risk of data leaks and security breaches, drastic changes resulting from digital transformations and job risk and insecurity brewing in the employee psyche. Further research can be carried out in this direction to reveal whether these factors are causing only negative impacts or on further probing, they can have certain positive job outcomes as well. It is possible that the adverse impact elements when viewed in the long-term perspective can have some positive outcomes on the employee psyche as well as their job-related performance. The IT or digital skill resources have a three-pronged impact in terms of digital infrastructure, technical skills acquired by entrepreneurs and enhanced knowledge, better

customer orientation and synergistic benefits. All these resources can drive innovation in organizations (1). However, digital skill has changed the very premise of doing business, which in turn calls for a different path to be traveled for managing human resources.

Secondly, this research study attempts to comprehend in detail the positive impacts of digital skill among entrepreneur's work processes. The study proposes a hierarchy of factors comprising the positive impacts. These factors are work-related flexibility and autonomy, creativity and innovation and overall enhancement in job performance. Prior research has indicated that AI-based technological intervention is considered relatively superior. It not only enhances creative thinking but also supports context awareness, reasoning ability, communication ability and self-organization ability (2). It is the combination of AI, big data and robotics which has initiated the fourth edition of the industrial revolution (3). The premise behind this deployment is not to replace human resources, but to function as a complementary facilitator to augment human intelligence and knowledge.

Human resource development has emerged as a vital research area in Digital Skill/Artificial Intelligence (AI). Although most manufacturing firms have failed to fully take advantage of the opportunities presented by the digital era and the accompanying human resource challenges (4). Firms that have adopted these technologies have displayed enhanced productivity even in small enterprises (5). Future research can attempt to empirically validate these factors in creating a positive impact on job performance as well as test their moderating or mediating impact.

The practical research implications are summarized thus: Firstly, an organization's digitization process is affected by its age and size. Thus, technological interventions like AI need to be implemented at a different pace in startup firms since they possess a greater entrepreneurial spirit with a flatter organizational structure in comparison to traditional organizations. The traditional organizational structure will need to have a step-wise diffusion of technological interventions with a gradual blending and transition of various workflow processes. The human resource aspect of an organization is being driven by the emerging knowledge economy and technological interventions. These changes are the driving force for the evolution of the human resource element of a firm. The job profiles are changing, hence the need for different skill sets and technological competencies.

Secondly, HR managers need to focus their efforts on integration of various emerging technologies with the proposed utilitarian benefits supposed to accrue from them. By achieving this integration, digital skills/AI

will be able to achieve the true potential of the technological evolution for accomplishing marked improvement in complex organizational ecosystems.

Thirdly, entrepreneurs can implement AI-based decision making either in a sequential or an aggregated manner. AI adoption and deployment is driven by entrepreneurs' attitude (towards technology) and the infrastructure of the firm. Another factor having an impact is the level of intelligence and education of entrepreneurs. The organization has to deploy a sequential digital skill/AI implementation procedure by first selecting data sources, followed by algorithms and finally the training and deployment. The immense potential of virtual reality can also be explored for value-added training programs for existing and new manpower resources. With the unlocking of the digital potential, it has affected the work styles and life of organizational human resources. Hence, entrepreneurs need to understand in order to support them in the evolving socio-technical organizational relationships. This will result in improved work performance. The success of digital skill/AI driven systems lies in the symbiotic relationship between entrepreneurs and AI machines.

CONCLUSION

There exists an evolving and reciprocal relationship between technology interventions and entrepreneurship development through digital skill. These relationships can be lucidly explained by such in-depth qualitative studies. Through this exploratory study, we explore the impacts of AI adoption within I4.0 firms, specifically focusing on the entrepreneurs. Prominent adverse impacts of the adoption of AI like the potential risk of data security breaches, drastic organizational changes resulting from digital transformations and job risk and insecurity often trouble entrepreneurs. Concerns surrounding biases in decision making and misinformation-related challenges were also highlighted. The negative impacts accentuate some dysfunctional organizational aspects. This study contributes to the techno stress literature and opens up avenues for future research. However, positive impacts like work-related flexibility and autonomy, creativity and innovation, and overall enhancement in job performance are also identified. Further factors contributing to techno stress among employees including work overload, disruption of work-life balance, job insecurity and complexity were also identified. Such a study provides a comprehensive understanding adding to the considerable existing literature on technology deployment and interplay of organizational roles and structure. The bottom line is that findings of this study provide valuable developmental information for managers in the human resource domain, challenged by digitization issues. It calls for multifaceted organizational support in the

form of developing digital skills such as communication skills (helps achieve clarity in communication), problem-solving skills (helps take initiatives and arrive at appropriate solutions), team building and team work skills (helps in role definitions and collaborative work), learning skills (helps in always having a learning attitude), analytical thinking skills (helps information comprehension and evaluation and sound decision making), conflict resolution skills (helps in peaceful resolution of conflicting situations), time management skills (helps in enhancing efficiency and effectiveness), creative thinking skills (helps in devising new ways and means to complete tasks), interpersonal skills (helps in interaction with people) and leadership skills (helps in motivation and inspiring people to work for a common cause). All these digital skills are essential life savers in a technology-driven world and help entrepreneurs to withstand techno stress and maintain their physical as well as psychological wellbeing.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study is not without limitations. Its reliance on a relatively small purposive sample of 32 entrepreneurs limits the generalization of findings across the broader Nigerian youth population. The qualitative design provided rich insights but restricted statistical validation. In addition, the study focused primarily on digital skill adoption and AI deployment, leaving other crucial empowerment factors—such as access to finance, policy frameworks, rural challenges, and cultural influences—less explored. Respondents' views may also have been shaped by subjective experiences of techno-stress and job insecurity, potentially affecting objectivity. Finally, given the rapidly evolving nature of digital technologies, the findings should be interpreted within the specific time and context in which the study was conducted. Future research should expand the scope by adopting larger and more diverse samples across regions and sectors of Nigeria. Employing mixed-method approaches that combine qualitative depth with quantitative validation would strengthen conclusions. Further studies should also integrate additional empowerment dimensions, including financial access, government support programs, and gender-related factors. Longitudinal studies could capture how youth entrepreneurship and digital skill adoption evolve over time, while comparative research across countries or regions would help identify best practices. Moreover, targeted investigations into interventions for mitigating techno-stress and job insecurity would enhance both the theoretical and practical value of this line of research.

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