

DIGITAL HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON HUMAN RESOURCE TRANSFORMATION IN THE ERA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to explore the transformation of Human Resource Management (HRM) through the implementation of Digital Human Resource Management (Digital HRM) in the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Design/methodology/approach: This study employed a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis involving HR managers and employees. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, supported by data triangulation to ensure credibility.

Findings: The findings indicate that Digital HRM supported by AI has transformed recruitment, employee development, performance management, and talent management. AI enhances operational efficiency, data-driven decision-making, and employee experience. However, successful implementation depends on organizational readiness, digital competencies, ethical AI governance, and effective change management.

Research limitations/implications: This study is limited to a single case study. Future research is encouraged to examine multiple organizations and industries using comparative qualitative or mixed-method approaches.

Practical implications: The findings provide insights for organizations in developing effective Digital HRM strategies while ensuring ethical AI implementation and sustainable human resource development.

Originality/value: This study offers empirical evidence on how Artificial Intelligence supports Human Resource Management transformation and contributes to the growing literature on Digital HRM in the Industry 5.0 era.

Paper type: Qualitative Case Study

Keywords: Digital Human Resource Management, Artificial Intelligence, Human Resource Transformation, Qualitative Case Study.

A. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed organizational management practices, particularly in Human Resource Management (HRM). The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), big data analytics, cloud computing, and Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) has shifted HR functions from administrative activities toward strategic decision-

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making processes. Organizations are increasingly adopting Digital Human Resource Management (Digital HRM) to improve operational efficiency, employee experience, talent acquisition, and organizational competitiveness (Bondarouk & Brewster, 2016; Strohmeier, 2020).

Digital Human Resource Management refers to the integration of digital technologies into HR functions, including recruitment, selection, training and development, performance management, employee engagement, compensation, and workforce analytics. AI-based technologies enable organizations to automate repetitive HR activities, identify talent more accurately, predict employee turnover, and support evidence-based decision-making (Vrontis et al., 2022). Consequently, HR professionals are no longer expected merely to perform administrative tasks but also to become strategic partners who create organizational value through digital innovation (Parry & Tyson, 2011).

The rapid diffusion of Artificial Intelligence has accelerated organizational digital transformation across industries. AI applications, such as intelligent recruitment systems, chatbot-assisted employee services, predictive analytics, and automated performance evaluation, have become increasingly common in organizational practices (Minbaeva, 2021). While these technologies provide significant opportunities to improve efficiency and productivity, they also create new challenges related to employee adaptation, digital competencies, ethical governance, algorithmic transparency, and data privacy (Budhwar et al., 2023).

Despite the growing adoption of Digital HRM, many organizations continue to face substantial barriers in implementing AI-driven HR practices. Organizational resistance to technological change, inadequate digital skills, limited technological infrastructure, and uncertainty regarding AI ethics frequently hinder successful digital transformation (Marler & Boudreau, 2017). Furthermore, organizations often struggle to balance technological innovation with human-centered management practices, resulting in concerns about employee trust, fairness, and organizational sustainability. Previous studies have extensively examined Digital Human Resource Management from quantitative perspectives, emphasizing the relationships among technology adoption, organizational performance, employee engagement, and innovation capability (Marler & Boudreau, 2017; Vrontis et al., 2022). However, limited studies have explored how organizational actors experience and interpret HR transformation during AI implementation using qualitative approaches. Existing research tends to measure outcomes statistically while providing limited understanding of organizational processes, managerial experiences, and contextual challenges associated with Digital HRM implementation.

This gap highlights the need for qualitative research that provides a comprehensive understanding of organizational transformation in the era of Artificial Intelligence. A qualitative case study enables researchers to capture the perspectives of HR managers and employees regarding organizational readiness, leadership support, digital competency development, and change management strategies during Digital HRM implementation. Such an approach offers richer insights into the dynamic interactions between technology, organizational culture, and human behavior than can be obtained through quantitative methods alone.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of Digital Human Resource Management and Artificial Intelligence from a qualitative case study perspective. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on technological adoption or organizational performance, this research explores the organizational transformation process by emphasizing managerial experiences, employee adaptation, ethical AI governance, and sustainable human resource development within the Industry 5.0 context. This study therefore contributes both theoretically and practically by providing an in-depth understanding of how organizations can successfully implement AI-driven HR practices while maintaining human-centered values. Accordingly, this study aims to explore how Digital Human Resource Management transforms organizational human resource practices in the era of Artificial Intelligence, identify the challenges and opportunities arising during digital transformation, and

formulate strategic implications for sustainable Human Resource Management in contemporary organizations.

Digital Human Resource Management (Digital HRM)

Digital Human Resource Management (Digital HRM) refers to the application of digital technologies to support and transform human resource management functions, including recruitment, employee development, performance management, compensation, communication, and workforce planning (Bondarouk & Brewster, 2016). Digital HRM represents a strategic evolution of conventional HRM by integrating information technology into organizational processes to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and employee experience (Strohmeier, 2020).

The emergence of cloud computing, Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS), mobile applications, and people analytics has significantly changed the role of HR professionals. Rather than focusing solely on administrative tasks, HR departments are increasingly expected to provide strategic insights that support organizational competitiveness and sustainable business performance (Marler & Boudreau, 2017). Consequently, Digital HRM has become an essential organizational capability for responding to rapid technological changes and dynamic labor market conditions.

Artificial Intelligence in Human Resource Management

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems capable of performing tasks that normally require human intelligence, including learning, reasoning, prediction, language processing, and decision-making (Russell & Norvig, 2021). Within HRM, AI has been increasingly adopted to automate recruitment processes, screen job applicants, predict employee turnover, personalize learning programs, and evaluate employee performance using data-driven approaches (Minbaeva, 2021). AI technologies provide numerous organizational benefits, such as reducing recruitment time, minimizing human bias in candidate screening, improving workforce planning, and supporting evidence-based HR decisions (Vrontis et al., 2022). Nevertheless, AI implementation also introduces challenges related to ethical governance, transparency, accountability, employee privacy, and algorithmic fairness (Budhwar et al., 2023). Therefore, organizations must balance technological innovation with ethical considerations and human-centered management practices.

Human Resource Transformation

Human Resource Transformation is the process of redesigning HR functions, structures, competencies, and strategies to create greater organizational value and align HR practices with organizational objectives (Ulrich et al., 2013). In the digital era, HR transformation is no longer limited to restructuring HR departments but also involves adopting digital technologies that enable agile decision-making and continuous organizational learning. Ulrich et al. (2013) argue that successful HR transformation requires HR professionals to act as strategic partners, change agents, employee champions, and administrative experts. The integration of AI and digital technologies has further expanded these roles by enabling HR professionals to utilize workforce analytics, predictive models, and digital platforms for strategic talent management. Digital transformation also requires organizations to strengthen employees' digital competencies, encourage innovation, and foster a culture that supports continuous learning and organizational adaptability (Verhoef et al., 2021). Therefore, HR transformation should be viewed as an organizational change process rather than merely technological adoption.

B. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore the implementation of Digital Human Resource Management (Digital HRM) in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The qualitative case study approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of organizational experiences, managerial practices, and contextual factors influencing the adoption of digital technologies in human resource management (Yin, 2018).

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The research was conducted in selected MSMEs in Sidoarjo Regency that have adopted digital technologies to support human resource management activities, such as digital recruitment, online communication, attendance systems, employee performance monitoring, digital training, and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based applications. Sidoarjo was chosen as the research setting because it is one of Indonesia's leading MSME centers, with increasing digital transformation initiatives supported by government programs and technological innovation.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in Digital HRM practices. The informants consisted of MSME owners, human resource managers (where applicable), supervisors, and employees who actively use digital technologies in daily business operations. The selection continued until data saturation was achieved, ensuring that no substantial new information emerged from subsequent interviews.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, opportunities, and challenges in implementing Digital HRM. Observations were carried out to understand how digital technologies were integrated into HR practices within the workplace. Organizational documents, including HR policies, employee records, training materials, and digital platform documentation, were also reviewed to strengthen data triangulation and improve research credibility. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns related to digital transformation, AI utilization, organizational readiness, employee adaptation, and HR management strategies within MSMEs.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study adopted the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of interview, observation, and documentary data, as well as member checking with selected participants. Transferability was achieved by providing detailed descriptions of the research context. Dependability was supported through systematic documentation of the research process, while confirmability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail and minimizing researcher bias throughout data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate after receiving information regarding the objectives of the research. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning pseudonyms to participants and ensuring that all collected information was used solely for academic purposes.

Research Informants

Table 1. Research Informants

Informant Code	Position	Business Sector	Data Collection Method	Main Information Obtained
I1	MSME Owner	Food and Beverage	In-depth Interview	Digital strategy and HR business transformation
I2	Employee	Food and Beverage	In-depth Interview	Experience in using digital HR applications
I3	MSME Owner	Fashion and Apparel	In-depth Interview	AI adoption in employee management

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14	Employee	Fashion and Apparel	In-depth Interview	Employee adaptation to digital technology
15	MSME Owner	Handicraft	In-depth Interview	Digital recruitment and workforce management
16	Employee	Handicraft	In-depth Interview	Challenges in Digital HR implementation
17	MSME Owner	Printing Services	In-depth Interview	Digital performance evaluation and HR practices
18	Employee	Printing Services	In-depth Interview	Employee perceptions of Digital HRM
19	MSME Owner	Retail Business	In-depth Interview	Organizational readiness for AI adoption
I10	Employee	Retail Business	In-depth Interview	Digital competency development
I11	Representative from the Sidoarjo MSME Office	Key Informant Interview	Government Support	Policies and digital transformation programs for MSMEs
I12	Digital Business Consultant	Expert Interview	Professional Perspective	Best practices in Digital Human Resource Management

Source: Compiled by the authors (2026).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of interview transcripts, observations, and organizational documents identified four major themes regarding the implementation of Digital Human Resource Management (Digital HRM) in MSMEs in Sidoarjo Regency: (1) digital transformation of HR practices, (2) opportunities created by Artificial Intelligence, (3) challenges in Digital HRM implementation, and (4) organizational readiness for sustainable digital transformation.

Digital Transformation of Human Resource Management Practices

The findings indicate that most participating MSMEs have gradually integrated digital technologies into their HR practices. Digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp Business, Google Workspace, and cloud-based applications are widely used to coordinate employees, monitor attendance, distribute work schedules, and evaluate performance. Several MSMEs have also adopted online recruitment through social media and digital job portals to attract potential employees. One MSME owner explained:

"Previously, employee administration was handled manually. Today, attendance, communication, and performance monitoring are conducted through digital applications, making HR processes more efficient and transparent." (Informant I3)

These findings demonstrate that Digital HRM is no longer limited to large corporations but has also become increasingly relevant for MSMEs seeking operational efficiency and organizational flexibility. Digitalization enables business owners to reduce administrative workloads while improving communication and decision-making. The findings are consistent with Bondarouk and Brewster (2016), who argue that Digital HRM transforms traditional HR functions into strategic organizational capabilities through technology integration. Similarly, Strohmeier (2020) emphasizes that digital technologies enable HR departments to shift from administrative roles toward strategic business partnerships. The findings also support Marler and Boudreau (2017), who reported that digital HR systems improve organizational responsiveness through data-driven decision-making.

Artificial Intelligence Creates New Opportunities for HR Management

The study reveals that Artificial Intelligence has begun to support several HR activities within MSMEs, although its implementation remains relatively simple. Informants reported using AI-powered applications such as ChatGPT for preparing recruitment advertisements, drafting employee training materials, creating standard operating procedures (SOPs), and developing performance evaluation forms. Several business owners also utilize AI-assisted design platforms to prepare internal communication materials.

One participant stated:

"Artificial Intelligence helps us prepare HR documents much faster. Instead of spending hours writing recruitment announcements or training materials, AI provides a useful first draft that we can easily adjust." (Informant I5)

Participants perceived AI as a tool that enhances productivity rather than replacing human workers. They emphasized that managerial judgment remains essential when making recruitment and employee development decisions. These findings align with Minbaeva (2021), who argues that AI strengthens strategic HR functions by improving recruitment efficiency, employee development, and workforce planning. Likewise, Vrontis et al. (2022) found that AI enables organizations to optimize HR processes while supporting evidence-based managerial decision-making. Rather than replacing HR professionals, AI complements their expertise by automating repetitive administrative activities.

Challenges in Implementing Digital Human Resource Management

Despite recognizing the benefits of Digital HRM, participants also identified several implementation challenges. The most frequently reported barriers include limited digital competencies among employees, resistance to technological change, financial constraints for technology investment, and concerns regarding data security and privacy.

One employee explained:

"Some employees are still unfamiliar with digital systems. They prefer manual processes because they feel more comfortable using conventional methods." (Informant I8).

Similarly, MSME owners expressed concerns regarding investment costs and the lack of technical expertise required to implement more sophisticated AI-based HR systems. These findings support Budhwar et al. (2023), who identified organizational resistance, ethical concerns, and technological readiness as major barriers to AI implementation in Human Resource Management. Verhoef et al. (2021) also emphasize that successful digital transformation requires not only technological infrastructure but also organizational culture, employee capabilities, and leadership commitment.

Organizational Readiness for Sustainable Digital HRM

Another important finding concerns organizational readiness for long-term Digital HRM implementation. Most participants acknowledged that digital transformation is no longer optional but has become essential for maintaining business competitiveness. However, successful implementation depends on continuous employee training, digital leadership, organizational learning, and supportive government policies.

A representative from the Sidoarjo MSME Office explained:

"Digital transformation among MSMEs requires collaboration between government institutions, universities, and business communities. Capacity building is equally important as technology adoption." (Informant I11)

Participants highlighted the importance of continuous digital literacy programs to improve employees' confidence in adopting new technologies. Organizational leaders also play a significant role in encouraging innovation and reducing employee resistance toward digital transformation. These findings are consistent with Ulrich et al. (2013), who emphasize that HR transformation requires strategic leadership and continuous competency development. Furthermore, Kotter (1996) argues that successful organizational transformation depends on effective change management, leadership commitment, employee participation, and continuous communication throughout the transformation process.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that Digital Human Resource Management (Digital HRM) has become an important strategic instrument for MSMEs in Sidoarjo Regency to improve organizational effectiveness and strengthen business competitiveness. Although the participating MSMEs have not yet implemented sophisticated enterprise-level Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS), they have gradually adopted digital technologies to support employee administration, recruitment, communication, attendance monitoring, training, and performance evaluation. These findings suggest that digital transformation within MSMEs is evolutionary rather than revolutionary, where organizations progressively integrate digital technologies according to their financial resources, technological capabilities, and organizational needs. This finding supports the Digital Human Resource Management framework proposed by Bondarouk and Brewster (2016), which explains that digital technologies fundamentally reshape HR functions from administrative support into strategic organizational resources. Rather than simply replacing paper-based procedures, Digital HRM enables organizations to improve communication, decision-making, and employee management through technology integration. Similarly, Strohmeier (2020) argues that Digital HRM should be viewed as an organizational capability that enhances strategic flexibility and long-term competitiveness rather than merely an information system.

The present findings also reinforce the Dynamic Capability Theory proposed by Teece (2018), which emphasizes that organizations must continuously develop, integrate, and reconfigure internal resources in response to rapidly changing business environments. In the context of MSMEs, Digital HRM represents one form of dynamic capability because business owners continuously adapt HR practices to emerging digital technologies. The ability to combine human competencies with digital platforms enables organizations to remain competitive despite limited organizational resources. Another important finding concerns the role of Artificial Intelligence in supporting HR activities. Participants indicated that AI applications are primarily used to prepare recruitment advertisements, employee training materials, standard operating procedures, and administrative documents. Interestingly, AI is perceived not as a replacement for human workers but as a decision-support technology that increases productivity while allowing managers to retain final authority in strategic HR decisions.

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This finding is consistent with the concept of Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence promoted within the Industry 5.0 framework, which emphasizes collaboration between humans and intelligent technologies rather than full automation (European Commission, 2021). Human judgment remains indispensable because employee recruitment, competency assessment, conflict management, and organizational culture involve social, emotional, and ethical dimensions that cannot be entirely delegated to algorithms. Therefore, AI functions as an augmentation technology that strengthens managerial capability instead of substituting human expertise. The findings also corroborate previous empirical studies conducted by Minbaeva (2021), who reported that AI significantly improves recruitment quality, workforce planning, and employee development through predictive analytics and intelligent decision support. Likewise, Vrontis et al. (2022) found that AI adoption enables organizations to enhance operational efficiency while supporting evidence-based HR decisions. However, the present study extends these findings by demonstrating that even small-scale enterprises with limited financial resources can benefit from AI by utilizing affordable generative AI applications such as ChatGPT and other cloud-based digital platforms. Despite these advantages, this study identifies several organizational challenges that potentially hinder Digital HRM implementation. Limited employee digital literacy, financial constraints, technological infrastructure, resistance to organizational change, and concerns regarding data privacy remain significant obstacles among MSMEs. These findings indicate that technological adoption alone is insufficient to achieve successful digital transformation. Organizational readiness, leadership commitment, and continuous employee capability development are equally important determinants of Digital HRM success.

These findings strongly support the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), which suggests that employees are more likely to accept new technologies when they perceive them as useful and easy to use. Several participants explained that employees initially resisted digital HR applications because they lacked confidence in operating digital systems. However, after receiving practical training and experiencing the benefits of digital technology, their acceptance gradually increased. This finding confirms that employee perceptions significantly influence Digital HRM implementation.

Furthermore, the present findings are consistent with Kotter's (1996) Change Management Theory, which argues that organizational transformation requires effective leadership, communication, employee involvement, and continuous learning. Digital transformation is fundamentally an organizational change process rather than merely technological implementation. MSME owners who actively communicated the benefits of digitalization, provided employee training, and encouraged organizational learning experienced considerably lower levels of resistance than organizations that implemented technology without adequate preparation. The findings also reveal the strategic importance of digital competencies in supporting organizational sustainability. Participants emphasized that continuous learning and digital skill development are becoming essential organizational investments. This observation supports Ulrich et al. (2013), who argue that future HR professionals must evolve from administrative specialists into strategic partners capable of managing organizational transformation and developing human capital. In the context of MSMEs, digital competency is no longer limited to technical ability but also encompasses critical thinking, adaptability, collaborative learning, and responsible AI utilization. Compared with previous quantitative studies, this qualitative case study provides richer insights into how MSME owners and employees experience Digital HRM implementation in everyday organizational practices. Previous studies have predominantly focused on measuring relationships among digital technology adoption, innovation, and organizational performance using statistical approaches (Marler & Boudreau, 2017; Vrontis et al., 2022). In contrast, the present study reveals the underlying organizational processes through which digital transformation occurs, including managerial decision-making, employee adaptation, leadership commitment, organizational culture, and ethical considerations regarding

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Artificial Intelligence. Consequently, this study contributes not only empirical evidence but also contextual understanding regarding Digital HRM implementation within Indonesian MSMEs.

Finally, the study contributes to the growing discussion on Industry 5.0 by demonstrating that sustainable digital transformation should maintain a balance between technological innovation and human-centered management. Artificial Intelligence should be positioned as an enabling technology that complements human capability rather than replacing employees. Organizations that successfully combine technological advancement with employee empowerment, ethical governance, continuous learning, and adaptive leadership are more likely to achieve sustainable organizational performance and long-term competitive advantage.

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of Digital Human Resource Management (Digital HRM) has transformed human resource practices among MSMEs in Sidoarjo Regency through the integration of digital technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The findings indicate that Digital HRM improves the efficiency of recruitment, employee development, communication, and performance management while supporting organizational adaptability and competitiveness. However, successful implementation depends on organizational readiness, digital competencies, leadership commitment, and ethical AI governance. This study contributes to the Digital HRM literature by providing qualitative evidence on how MSMEs experience digital transformation in human resource management. The findings emphasize that AI should be utilized as a strategic tool to support, rather than replace, human decision-making in achieving sustainable organizational development.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, MSME owners are encouraged to strengthen employees' digital competencies through continuous training and to develop ethical guidelines for the use of Artificial Intelligence in HR practices. Government agencies and higher education institutions should also enhance collaboration in providing digital literacy programs and technical assistance to support the sustainable implementation of Digital HRM. Future studies are recommended to involve broader research settings and multiple industrial sectors or apply mixed-methods approaches to provide more comprehensive insights into Digital HRM implementation.

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