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RESEARCH ARTICLE

GIG ECONOMY AND TALENT MANAGEMENT: MANAGING FREELANCERS IN THE NIGERIAN CREATIVE INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of the gig economy has transformed traditional employment patterns by promoting flexible, technology-enabled, and project-based work arrangements. This study examined the role of talent management practices in managing freelancers within the Nigerian creative industry, with specific focus on how talent development and talent engagement influence freelancer performance, job satisfaction, and career sustainability. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted for the study. Data were collected from 238 freelancers involved in digital platform-based creative activities using a structured instrument titled Gig Economy and Talent Management Questionnaire (GETMQ). The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression techniques. The findings revealed that talent development practices significantly influence freelancers' performance by enhancing skills, competence, and professional capacity. The study also found that talent engagement strategies significantly contribute to improved job satisfaction and the sustainability of freelance careers through supportive communication, recognition, and effective professional relationships. The findings indicate that while digital platforms provide Nigerian creative professionals with increased access to global markets and employment opportunities, sustainable participation in the gig economy requires deliberate investment in skill development, mentorship, engagement mechanisms, and supportive digital work environments. The study concludes that effective talent management is essential for improving freelancer outcomes and strengthening Nigeria's digital creative economy. It recommends that digital platforms, creative industry stakeholders, and relevant institutions establish stronger talent development programmes, mentorship networks, and engagement strategies that promote productivity, career growth, and sustainable participation among Nigerian creative freelancers.

Keywords: GIG economy, talent management, freelancers, Nigerian creative industry, talent development.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the gig economy has brought significant changes to the traditional understanding of work and employment relationships. Unlike conventional employment structures that are built around permanent contracts and organizational membership, the gig economy is characterized by short-term, flexible, and task-based engagements often coordinated through digital platforms. Platforms such as Upwork, Fiverr, and Freelancer have created new pathways through which individuals can offer professional services to clients across geographical boundaries (Wood, Graham, Lehdonvirta, & Hjorth, 2019; Kässi & Lehdonvirta, 2019). This transformation has shifted the responsibility for career development, income stability, and professional growth toward individual workers.

The expansion of digital labour platforms has particularly influenced creative occupations where work is often project-oriented and skill-dependent. Professionals such as graphic designers, writers, filmmakers, animators, and digital marketers can now access international markets without being restricted by physical workplace boundaries. To Van Doorn (2020), the platform-based labour has become an important feature of contemporary creative industries because it enables independent workers to participate in global production networks. The opportunities are accompanied by new forms of control, as digital platforms increasingly rely on algorithmic systems to manage worker visibility, performance evaluation, and access to available tasks (Bucher, Schou, & Waldkirch, 2021).

In Nigeria, the growth of internet access, mobile technology, and digital entrepreneurship has contributed to the increasing participation of creative professionals in the gig economy. Nigerian freelancers are increasingly using online labour platforms and social media networks to provide services in areas such as content creation, graphic design, animation, music production, and digital marketing. This development has created new opportunities for young creatives to access global markets and diversify their sources of income (Opesade, 2024). However, participation in digital labour markets does not automatically guarantee career stability. Many Nigerian freelancers continue to experience irregular income, limited access to professional development opportunities, weak institutional support, and uncertainty regarding long-term career progression (Opesade, 2024)

These challenges raise important questions about how freelancers can be effectively supported within the gig economy. Traditional talent management practices were primarily designed for permanent employees operating within established organizational structures. However, freelancers function differently because they often work independently, manage their own careers, and interact with multiple clients through digital platforms. Consequently, talent management approaches within the gig economy require adaptation to address issues such as continuous skill development, worker engagement, performance improvement, and career sustainability (Collings, Mellahi, & Cascio, 2019; McKeown & Cochrane, 2021).

Talent management in this context involves more than attracting and retaining employees; it includes creating systems that enable independent professionals to develop their capabilities, remain competitive, and sustain their participation in digital labour markets. For Nigerian creative freelancers, access to learning opportunities, mentorship, professional networks, and fair platform practices may determine their ability to achieve consistent performance and long-term success. Although existing studies have examined the opportunities and challenges associated with gig work, limited attention has been given to how talent management practices can support freelancers within Nigeria's creative industry. This study therefore examines the relationship between GIG economy participation and talent management practices, focusing specifically on how talent development and talent engagement influence freelancer performance, job satisfaction, and sustainability.

The rapid growth of the gig economy has created new opportunities for Nigerian creative professionals to participate in digital labour markets. Through online platforms and social media networks, freelancers can now access clients beyond their immediate geographical locations and provide services in areas such as graphic design, digital marketing, animation, video production, and content creation. However, the increasing participation of freelancers in these platforms has not been matched by the development of effective talent management structures that support their professional growth and long-term sustainability. Unlike employees in conventional organizations who often benefit from formal training programmes, mentorship opportunities, performance evaluation systems, and career advancement pathways, many freelancers operate without structured support mechanisms.

The Nigerian creative industry presents a unique situation because freelancers operate within a growing digital economy while also facing local structural constraints. Problems such as unreliable digital infrastructure, high internet costs, limited access to professional training, and weak institutional support continue to affect the ability of many creative individuals to maximize opportunities available through the gig economy. Consequently, possessing creative skills alone may not be sufficient for achieving sustainable success in digital labour markets.

Although previous studies have examined the economic opportunities and challenges associated with gig work, limited research has focused on how talent management practices can be applied to support freelancers in Nigeria's creative industry. Existing talent management frameworks are largely designed around traditional employment relationships and may not adequately address the realities of independent, platform-based workers. This gap creates the need to examine how talent development and engagement strategies can improve freelancer performance, job satisfaction, and career sustainability within the Nigerian gig economy. Therefore, this study seeks to address the problem of inadequate talent management support among creative freelancers by examining the relationship between talent management practices and freelancer outcomes in Nigeria's digital creative sector.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of talent management in managing freelancers within the GIG economy in the Nigerian creative industry. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the effect of talent development practices on the performance of freelancers in the Nigerian creative industry.
2. Assess the influence of talent engagement strategies on the job satisfaction and sustainability of freelancers in the Nigerian creative industry.

1.2. Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do talent development practices influence freelancers' performance in the Nigerian creative industry?
2. How do talent engagement strategies affect freelancers' job satisfaction and sustainability in the Nigerian creative industry?

1.3. Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

$H0_1$: Talent development practices do not significantly influence freelancers' performance in the Nigerian creative industry.

$H0_2$: Talent engagement strategies do not significantly affect freelancers' job satisfaction and sustainability in the Nigerian creative industry.

2.0. CONCEPTS, THEORIES, AND EMPIRICAL REVIEW

2.1. Conceptual Review

GIG Economy

The GIG economy represents changing pattern of work in which individuals provide services through short-term, project-based, or task-specific arrangements rather than through permanent employment relationships. Unlike the traditional labour system where workers are attached to specific organizations through long-term contracts, gig workers often operate independently and obtain assignments through digital platforms that connect them with potential clients (Kässi & Lehdonvirta, 2019). Platforms such as Upwork, Fiverr, and Freelancer have expanded the reach of this model by allowing workers to participate in labour markets beyond their immediate geographical locations.

The growth of the gig economy has been largely influenced by advances in digital technology, increased internet accessibility, and the growing demand for flexible work arrangements. For creative professionals, this model has created new opportunities because many creative services are naturally project-based. A graphic designer, video editor, writer, or digital marketer can complete assignments for different clients without being permanently employed by any single organization. Wood et al. (2019) explain that digital platforms have reshaped employment relationships by enabling remote participation while also transferring greater responsibility for income security and career development to individual workers.

Although the gig economy provides flexibility and wider market access, it also presents significant challenges for workers. A major concern is that the independence associated with gig work often comes with uncertainty regarding income stability, social protection, and professional advancement. Adekoya, Mordi, Ajonbadi, and Chen (2023) argue that while digital platform work offers workers greater flexibility and income opportunities, it also transfers many employment-related risks and responsibilities from organizations to individual workers through algorithmic management and non-standard employment arrangements. Unlike traditional employees who may benefit from organizational training, welfare schemes, and structured career development, freelancers are often required to independently manage their skills, professional reputation, and future career opportunities.

Another important feature of the gig economy is the increasing role of digital platforms in governing work processes. While these platforms are commonly viewed as neutral spaces connecting clients and workers, they often influence how freelancers obtain opportunities through rating systems, search rankings, pricing structures, and automated decision-making processes. Berg et al. (2020) describe this as algorithmic management, where digital systems perform functions traditionally associated with human supervision, including performance assessment and task allocation.

This situation is particularly relevant to freelancers in developing economies such as Nigeria. Although digital platforms provide Nigerian creative inductry with access to international clients, participation in these markets is affected by local realities such as limited digital infrastructure, high internet costs, unstable power supply, and unequal access to professional development opportunities. Graham, Hjorth, and Lehdonvirta (2024) note that while online labour platforms can expand economic opportunities, they may also reinforce inequalities when workers operate under unequal technological and economic conditions.

Within Nigeria, the gig economy has become increasingly significant as young professionals seek alternative sources of income through digital platforms and creative entrepreneurship. Odey and Afo (2024) observe that gig work provides opportunities for employment generation and economic participation, particularly among young Nigerians. However, Ndukwu and Sydney (2024) caution that emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence-driven systems, may introduce additional concerns relating to job displacement, worker evaluation, and algorithmic control.

Therefore, the gig economy should not be understood only as a source of flexible employment opportunities. It also represents a new form of labour organization that requires appropriate talent management approaches to support workers. For freelancers in the Nigerian creative industry, sustainable participation in the gig economy depends not only on access to digital platforms but also on opportunities for skill development, professional engagement, and long-term career support.

Talent Management

Talent management refers to the systematic process through which organizations identify, develop, engage, and retain individuals whose skills and abilities contribute to improved performance and competitive advantage. Traditionally, talent management has been associated with permanent employees within formal organizational settings, where institutions provide recruitment systems, training opportunities, performance evaluations, and career advancement pathways (Collings, Mellahi, & Cascio, 2019). However, changes in the nature of work have expanded the meaning of talent management beyond conventional employment relationships to include freelancers, contractors, and other categories of independent workers.

The emergence of digital and flexible work arrangements has created the need to reconsider how talent is developed and managed. Freelancers do not usually operate within the boundaries of a single organization, yet their skills and expertise remain valuable resources within the labour market. McKeown and Cochrane (2021) argue that contemporary talent management systems must adapt to include remote and non-traditional workers by emphasizing continuous learning, digital support systems, and flexible engagement mechanisms. This shift recognizes that talent development is no longer limited to organizational employees but also involves individuals who contribute to economic activities through independent work arrangements.

In the gig economy, talent management takes a different form because freelancers are responsible for managing many aspects of their professional growth. Unlike traditional employees who may receive structured training from employers, freelancers often invest personally in acquiring new skills, maintaining professional visibility, and improving their competitiveness. This makes talent development a critical factor in determining their ability to secure projects, satisfy clients, and sustain long-term careers. Morris, Snell, and Björkman (2016) argue that contemporary talent management requires organizations to effectively identify, develop, and deploy talent across geographically dispersed workforces. Advances in digital technologies have enabled organizations and digital platforms to support workers through online learning opportunities, digital skill certification, continuous feedback systems, and professional networks.

In platform-based labour markets, these mechanisms help freelancers strengthen their competencies, enhance professional visibility, and bridge the gap between individual skill ownership and broader workforce development objectives. Also, Minbaeva (2021) highlights the growing role of data-driven approaches in contemporary talent management. Digital systems can provide insights into worker performance, skill gaps, and engagement patterns, enabling more informed decisions about talent development and support. In the context of freelance work, these systems may assist platforms in creating better opportunities for workers while improving the quality of services delivered to clients.

For Nigerian creative freelancers, effective talent management is particularly important because success in digital labour markets depends heavily on specialized skills, creativity, adaptability, and professional reputation. A video editor, graphic designer, animator, or content creator must continually improve technical abilities and respond to changing market demands in order to remain competitive. However, many freelancers face difficulties accessing affordable training, mentorship, and structured career development opportunities.

Therefore, talent management within the gig economy should be viewed as a broader process that supports the growth, engagement, and sustainability of independent professionals. Rather than focusing only on employee retention, gig-based talent management emphasizes skill development, performance improvement, digital engagement, and the creation of conditions that allow freelancers to build sustainable careers.

Talent Management in GIG and Platform Work

Managing talent within the gig economy differs significantly from traditional human resource management practices. In conventional organizations, talent management activities such as recruitment, training, performance evaluation, and employee development are usually coordinated through formal human resource departments. However, freelancers working through digital platforms operate outside these traditional structures. As a result, talent management functions are increasingly influenced by digital platforms, automated systems, and online reputation mechanisms.

Digital labour platforms such as Fiverr, Upwork, and Freelancer have become important actors in determining how freelance talent is identified, evaluated, and rewarded. These platforms do not simply connect clients with workers; they also establish systems that influence worker visibility, access to projects, and professional reputation. Bucher, Schou, and Waldkirch (2021) explain that algorithmic management has become a central feature of platform work, with automated systems performing functions such as task allocation, performance monitoring, and ranking of workers.

For example, freelancers on digital platforms are often evaluated through client ratings, response times, completion records, and other performance indicators. A creative professional with consistently positive reviews may receive greater visibility and attract more valuable projects, while another freelancer with similar skills but weaker platform ratings may struggle to access opportunities. This shows that success in the gig economy depends not only on technical ability but also on understanding and navigating platform-based evaluation systems.

However, reliance on algorithmic management creates challenges for freelancers. Unlike employees in traditional organizations who may communicate directly with managers and receive feedback through established processes, gig workers often interact with automated systems that provide limited explanations for decisions affecting their careers. Changes in platform policies, ranking systems, or pricing structures can therefore influence freelancers' income and professional opportunities without direct negotiation.

Another challenge is the limited availability of structured talent development systems for gig workers. Traditional employees may benefit from employer-sponsored training, mentorship programmes, and career progression plans. Freelancers, on the other hand, are often expected to independently identify skill gaps, fund their own training, and develop strategies for career advancement. Wood et al. (2019) argue that while digital platforms create access to global markets, they also place significant responsibility for employability and career management on individual workers.

These realities highlight the importance of developing flexible talent management approaches suitable for platform-based workers. Digital platforms and industry stakeholders can support freelancers through accessible training programmes, professional certification opportunities, mentorship networks, transparent evaluation systems, and improved communication channels. Such interventions would help freelancers strengthen their skills, improve performance, and achieve greater career stability.

In the Nigerian creative industry, these issues are particularly significant because freelancers operate within a rapidly growing digital market while facing environmental challenges such as infrastructure limitations, unstable income patterns, and limited institutional support. Effective talent management approaches can therefore serve as a bridge between the opportunities created by the gig economy and the need for sustainable professional development among Nigerian creative workers.

Nigerian Creative Industry and Freelancing

The Nigerian creative industry has become one of the most dynamic sectors within the country's emerging digital economy. It covers areas such as film production, music, fashion, advertising, photography, content creation, animation, and digital media services. The expansion of digital technologies, social media platforms, and internet access has created new opportunities for Nigerian creative professionals to promote their skills and connect with local and international markets. Okoeguale (2022) argues that Nigeria's creative economy, particularly the film and music industries, has significant potential for economic development because digital technologies have expanded the reach and visibility of Nigerian cultural products.

Digital platforms have transformed how creative services are produced, marketed, and delivered. Nigerian designers, writers, programmers, video editors, and content creators can now provide services to clients across different countries without relocating. According to Tukur et al. (2022), information and communication technologies have become important tools for entrepreneurship among Nigerian youths by improving access to markets, information, and business opportunities. Similarly, Babarinde et al. (2021) emphasize that ICT adoption supports youth entrepreneurship and business growth in Nigeria by improving communication, innovation, and market access.

The growth of platforms such as Fiverr, Upwork, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok has provided Nigerian young people with alternative pathways for employment and entrepreneurship. Creative workers can market their skills globally, develop personal brands, and generate income through digital services, advertising, partnerships, and online audiences. Sambo, Sulaeiman, and Jimada (2021) explain that ICT-driven entrepreneurship contributes to wealth creation among Nigerian youths by enabling individuals to participate in emerging digital opportunities. However, participation in the digital creative economy also involves several challenges. Many Nigerian freelancers operate without formal employment protection, stable income structures, or organized career development systems. Digital workers often experience uncertainty because they depend on project-based opportunities and must continuously develop their skills to remain competitive. Ajah and Ononiwu (2021) note that Nigerian technology entrepreneurs and digital innovators often face environmental uncertainties, limited resources, and infrastructural challenges while building sustainable ventures.

Infrastructure limitations remain a major barrier to the growth of Nigeria’s creative freelance sector. Issues such as unreliable electricity supply, expensive internet services, limited access to advanced digital tools, and inadequate infrastructure affect productivity and competitiveness. Ogban et al. (2022) highlight the importance of ICT education and entrepreneurship development in improving digital participation and youth empowerment in Nigeria. For example, a Nigerian freelance video editor may obtain international projects through online platforms but still experience difficulties caused by power interruptions, high data costs, and limited access to professional equipment. Likewise, content creators may attract large audiences online but require additional knowledge of analytics, branding, and monetization strategies to develop sustainable careers. These realities demonstrate that access to digital platforms alone is insufficient; creative workers also require continuous training, supportive policies, and effective talent management systems.

Therefore, the sustainability of Nigeria’s creative freelance sector depends on more than participation in global digital platforms. It requires investment in human capital development, digital infrastructure, entrepreneurship support, and fair working conditions. Effective talent management approaches can help Nigerian creative freelancers improve their skills, increase productivity, and build sustainable careers within the expanding digital economy.

2.2. Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on two related theoretical perspectives: Human Capital Theory and Platform Governance Theory. These theories provide a foundation for understanding how freelancers develop their capabilities, interact with digital labour platforms, and achieve sustainable outcomes within the gig economy.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, developed by Becker (1964), explains that individuals’ knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences represent valuable resources that influence productivity and economic outcomes. The theory is based on the argument that investment in education, training, and skill

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development increases an individual's capacity to perform effectively and compete within labour markets. From this perspective, workers are not merely recipients of employment opportunities; they possess valuable human capital that can be developed to improve their economic value.

The theory is particularly relevant to freelance work because freelancers depend largely on their personal skills and competencies to obtain and complete projects. Unlike employees in traditional organizations who may receive structured development support from employers, freelancers are often responsible for improving their own knowledge, acquiring new skills, and maintaining their relevance within changing markets. In creative industries, where technology and consumer preferences change rapidly, continuous learning becomes essential for professional survival. Within the Nigerian creative industry, human capital plays a major role in determining the success of freelancers. Professionals involved in graphic design, animation, video production, digital marketing, and content creation must continuously improve both technical and creative abilities to compete effectively in local and international markets.

The relevance of Human Capital Theory to this study lies in its explanation of the relationship between talent development practices and freelancer performance. The theory suggests that when freelancers have opportunities for training, mentorship, and continuous skill improvement, they are more likely to enhance their productivity, improve service quality, and achieve sustainable career outcomes. Therefore, the theory provides support for examining the influence of talent development practices on the performance of freelancers in the Nigerian creative industry.

Platform Governance Theory

Platform Governance Theory is concerned with how digital platforms organize, regulate, and influence activities within online environments. Scholars such as Gillespie (2018), Srnicek (2017), and Lehdonvirta (2019) argue that digital platforms are not simply neutral spaces where transactions occur; rather, they actively shape user behaviour through rules, algorithms, policies, and technological systems.

In the gig economy, this theory explains how platforms influence the experiences and opportunities of freelancers. Platforms such as Fiverr, Upwork, and Freelancer determine how workers are matched with clients, how their performance is evaluated, and how their visibility is managed. Through algorithmic systems, platforms can rank freelancers, recommend certain workers to clients, and establish standards for measuring service quality. Bucher, Schou, and Waldkirch (2021) describe this process as algorithmic management, where automated systems increasingly perform functions traditionally associated with human resource management.

For freelancers, platform governance creates both opportunities and limitations. On one hand, digital platforms provide access to global clients and create opportunities for independent professionals to earn income beyond traditional employment structures. On the other hand, platform rules, rating systems, and automated decision-making processes can influence freelancers' career progression and financial stability. A worker's ability to secure future opportunities may depend not only on professional competence but also on how effectively they navigate platform-based evaluation systems.

The theory is relevant to this study because talent engagement within the gig economy is shaped by the relationship between freelancers and the platforms through which they obtain work. Fair evaluation systems, transparent communication, reliable payment structures, and supportive platform policies can improve freelancers' satisfaction and encourage long-term participation. Conversely, unclear algorithms and limited worker support may reduce engagement and create uncertainty. Therefore, Platform Governance Theory provides a useful explanation of how digital platforms influence freelancer experiences and career sustainability. Together with Human Capital Theory, it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how talent development and engagement practices contribute to improved outcomes among freelancers in Nigeria's creative industry.

2.3. Empirical Studies

Previous studies have examined different aspects of the gig economy, digital labour platforms, and talent management, particularly in relation to employment opportunities, technological changes, and the experiences of independent workers.

Odey and Afo (2024) explored the role of the gig economy in addressing Nigeria's economic development challenges. Using a qualitative approach based on literature review and case analysis, the study examined how digital platforms contribute to employment generation and income creation. The authors observed that gig work provides opportunities for young Nigerians to participate in economic activities by offering flexible pathways to earn income and utilize their skills. However, they emphasized that the long-term contribution of the gig economy depends on supportive policies, improved digital infrastructure, and measures that protect workers. This finding is relevant to the present study because it highlights the need to move beyond access to gig opportunities and consider the systems required to sustain freelancer participation.

Similarly, Ndukwu and Sydney (2024) examined the implications of artificial intelligence for the future of work and the gig economy in Nigeria. Their conceptual analysis showed that emerging technologies can improve productivity through better task matching, automation, and efficient service delivery. However, the study also identified concerns relating to algorithmic control, possible job displacement, and unequal access to digital opportunities. These observations suggest that freelancers require continuous skill development and adaptive talent management strategies to remain competitive in technology-driven labour markets.

Focusing specifically on Nigerian digital workers, Cieslik, Banya, and Vira (2022) examined the experiences of individuals engaged in online platform-based work in Lagos, Nigeria. Their findings showed that digital platforms create opportunities for workers to access remote employment and connect with clients beyond local markets. However, the study also highlighted challenges associated with platform work, including income uncertainty, informality, limited worker protection, and the absence of adequate institutional support structures. The authors argued that while online platforms expand economic opportunities, sustainable participation requires stronger support systems, skills development, and improved working conditions. This evidence suggests that digital access alone may not guarantee successful freelance careers, emphasizing the importance of effective talent management practices for developing and retaining creative professionals within Nigeria's growing digital economy.

In relation to talent management in modern work environments, McKeown and Cochrane (2021) examined how human resource practices are changing due to remote and digitally mediated work arrangements. The study argued that traditional talent management approaches, which focus mainly on permanent employees, are insufficient for contemporary labour markets. The authors emphasized the importance of flexible development systems, digital learning opportunities, and engagement practices that include freelance and remote workers. This perspective supports the argument that freelancers should be considered part of the broader talent ecosystem rather than excluded from organizational development processes.

At the global level, Kässi and Lehdonvirta (2019) examined the growth and characteristics of online labour platforms. Their analysis showed that digital freelancing expands access to international employment opportunities by connecting workers and clients across geographical boundaries. However, they also noted that increased competition among online workers can contribute to income instability and pressure on service pricing. This finding demonstrates the complex nature of gig work, where expanded opportunities exist alongside new forms of economic uncertainty.

he reviewed empirical studies demonstrate that the gig economy offers significant possibilities for employment creation, global market access, and professional independence. However, they also reveal challenges associated with skill development, worker protection, platform control, and career sustainability. While existing research has addressed various dimensions of gig work, limited attention has been given to how specific talent management practices influence freelancer performance, satisfaction, and sustainability within Nigeria's creative industry. This gap provides the justification for the present study.

3.0. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study comprised freelancers operating within the Nigerian creative industry, particularly those involved in digital platform-based creative services such as graphic design, content creation, video editing, digital marketing, animation, and other related creative activities. These categories of freelancers were considered relevant because their work is largely facilitated through digital platforms such as Fiverr, Upwork, Freelancer, Instagram, and TikTok, where professional engagement and talent management processes are increasingly influenced by digital systems rather than conventional organizational structures.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who had a minimum of one year experience in freelance creative work and actively relied on digital platforms for attracting clients and delivering services. A total of 250 freelancers participated in the study. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire titled Gig Economy and Talent Management Questionnaire (GETMQ). The instrument was developed using a modified four-point Likert scale consisting of Strongly Agreed (SA) = 4, Agreed (A) = 3, Disagreed (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 1.

To establish the suitability of the instrument, it was subjected to face and content validation by two experts in human resource management and digital economy studies. Their assessments focused on the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the questionnaire items in measuring talent development practices, talent engagement strategies, freelancer performance, and job satisfaction/sustainability.

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The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha, which produced a coefficient value of 0.84, indicating a high level of internal consistency. Of the 250 questionnaires distributed, 238 were successfully retrieved, representing a response rate of 95.2%. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, to address the research questions. The hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression analysis with the aid of SPSS Version 25 at a 0.05 level of significance.

4.0. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Presentation of Results

Ho1: Talent development practices do not significantly influence freelancers' performance in the Nigerian creative industry.

Table 1: Relationship between Talent Development Practices and Freelancers' Performance

Variables	N	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Talent Development Practices	238	1.000	–
Freelancers' Performance	238	0.684**	0.000

Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Source: Researcher's Data (2026).

Table 1 presents the relationship between talent development practices and freelancers' performance in the Nigerian creative industry. The result indicates a correlation coefficient of r = 0.684 with a significance value of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there is a significant positive relationship between talent development practices and freelancer performance. Based on this result, the null hypothesis (Ho1), which states that talent development practices do not significantly influence freelancers' performance in the Nigerian creative industry, is rejected. The finding suggests that improvements in areas such as skill development, continuous learning, and professional capacity building are associated with improved performance among creative freelancers.

$H0_2$: Talent engagement strategies do not significantly affect freelancers' job satisfaction and sustainability.

Table 2: Relationship between Talent Engagement Strategies and Freelancers' Job Satisfaction and Sustainability

Variables	N	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Talent Engagement Strategies	238	1.000	–
Job Satisfaction and Sustainability	238	0.702**	0.000

Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Source: Researcher's Data (2026).

Table 2 examines the relationship between talent engagement strategies and freelancers' job satisfaction and sustainability. The analysis produced a correlation coefficient of r = 0.702 with a significance value of 0.000, which is lower than the 0.05 significance level. This indicates a significant positive relationship between talent engagement strategies and freelancers' job satisfaction and sustainability. Following the result, the null hypothesis (Ho_2), which states that talent engagement strategies do not significantly affect freelancers' job satisfaction and sustainability, is rejected. The finding implies that effective engagement mechanisms, including supportive communication, fair treatment, recognition, and reliable professional relationships, contribute to improved satisfaction and the ability of freelancers to sustain their careers within the gig economy.

4.2. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study show that talent management practices significantly influence the experiences and outcomes of freelancers in the Nigerian creative industry. Specifically, the study revealed that talent development practices enhance freelancer performance, while talent engagement strategies improve job satisfaction and sustainability. This suggests that success in the gig economy depends not only on access to digital platforms but also on the ability of freelancers to continuously improve their skills and maintain productive professional relationships.

The relationship between talent development practices and freelancer performance supports Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes that investment in knowledge, skills, and competencies improves individual productivity and economic value (Becker, 1964). This finding agrees with McKeown and Cochrane (2021), who argued that talent management systems must be redesigned to accommodate freelance and remote workers through continuous learning, digital training, and flexible development opportunities. In the Nigerian creative industry, where freelancers largely depend on their personal abilities to secure projects, skill improvement remains a major factor influencing competitiveness and performance.

The finding also supports Ezenwaka and Ozor (2023), who observed that digital platforms provide Nigerian freelancers with access to global opportunities but that challenges such as limited career development support and unstable work conditions affect long-term success. This indicates that participation in gig platforms alone is insufficient; freelancers require effective talent development systems to build sustainable careers.

Furthermore, the study found that talent engagement strategies significantly influence freelancers' job satisfaction and sustainability. This supports Platform Governance Theory, which explains how digital platforms shape workers' experiences through policies, algorithms, evaluation systems, and communication structures. Bucher, Schou, and Waldkirch (2021) similarly noted that algorithmic management influences freelancer visibility, task allocation, and performance assessment. Therefore, transparent platform practices, fair evaluation systems, and effective communication are important for improving freelancer engagement.

The findings are also consistent with Odey and Afo (2024) and Ndukwu and Sydney (2024), who emphasized that while the gig economy creates employment opportunities in Nigeria, sustainable participation requires supportive policies, digital infrastructure, and continuous skill development. Overall, the study highlights that managing freelancers requires a shift from traditional employee-focused approaches to flexible talent management systems that promote development, engagement, and long-term sustainability

5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between gig economy participation and talent management practice in managing freelancers within the Nigerian creative industry. The findings established that talent development practices significantly influence freelancers' performance, while talent engagement strategies contribute significantly to job satisfaction and career sustainability. The study demonstrates that participation in the gig economy provides Nigerian creative professionals with opportunities to access wider markets, develop independent careers, and generate income through digital platforms. However, access to these opportunities alone does not guarantee long-term success.

Freelancers continue to face challenges associated with unstable income, limited professional support, changing platform requirements, and uncertainty surrounding career progression. The study therefore concludes that effective talent management is essential for improving freelancer outcomes within the gig economy. Unlike traditional employment systems where organizations provide structured development and engagement mechanisms, freelancers require flexible support systems that promote continuous learning, professional growth, and sustainable participation in digital labour markets. For the Nigerian creative industry, strengthening talent development and engagement practices will be important in ensuring that freelancers can maximize the opportunities created by digital platforms while overcoming the challenges associated with independent work

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Organizations, digital platforms, and other stakeholders within the Nigerian creative industry should invest more in talent development initiatives by creating opportunities for training, mentorship, continuous skill improvement, and professional certification. Such efforts will help freelancers improve their creative abilities, increase their competitiveness, and achieve better performance outcomes in the gig economy.

2. Digital platforms and relevant industry stakeholders should adopt better engagement practices that promote fairness, transparency, and trust among freelancers. This can be achieved through clearer work allocation processes, improved communication with workers, reliable payment systems, and recognition mechanisms that encourage freelancer satisfaction and support sustainable careers.

Artificial Intelligent (AI) Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) solely for language refinement and improvement of clarity. All AI-generated outputs were critically reviewed, edited, and validated by the author before final publication of this manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that no conflict of interest exist in this manuscript.

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