

12 - 14 March 2026

Berlin , Germany

The Digital Leap: Comparing Human and AI-Driven Interpretations of Non-Linear Firm Growth

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Abstract

Firm growth, long theorised as a sequential process (Penrose, 1959; Levie & Lichtenstein, 2010), is increasingly recognised as a non-linear phenomenon that challenges traditional empirical frameworks (Brown et al., 2017; Phelps et al., 2007). This research builds upon the concept of "entrepreneurial leaps" as transitional phases between dynamic organisational states (Sternad & Mödritscher, 2021; Sternad & Mödritscher, 2022; Levie & Lichtenstein, 2010) by introducing a novel computational layer to qualitative inquiry. While previous findings were derived from human-coded interviews across international case studies, this study isolates a specialised subset of IT-sector data for algorithmic re-analysis. By deploying Artificial Intelligence (AI) to interpret these narratives, the paper investigates whether machine-driven processing can uncover latent patterns or theoretical nuances that elude manual coding. The primary objective is to evaluate the divergence between human intuition and AI-driven synthesis in terms of thematic structure and emphasis. Consequently, our study advances the conversation on hybrid research designs in entrepreneurship studies and intends to offer a rigorous assessment of AI's utility for deciphering complex, narrative-based organisational transitions. By contrasting these interpretive lenses, the research clarifies the boundaries of machine-assisted qualitative analysis in understanding the multidimensional nature of modern firm evolution.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Leaps; Firm Growth; Qualitative Research; Artificial Intelligence; Research Method