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The Graduate and the Machine

How Young Nairobi Professionals Are
Actually Using AI at Work

A Sonivance Ltd Self-Sponsored Exploratory Study

LOCATION	YEAR	SAMPLE	FIELDWORK
Nairobi, Kenya	2026	200 completed / 180 valid	3 weeks

Research • Data • Insights

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SONIVANCE LTD RESEARCH PUBLICATION

About This Report

This report presents the findings of a self-sponsored exploratory study conducted by **Sonivance Ltd**, a Kenya-based research, data and insights consultancy. It was designed, funded, executed and analysed in-house.

Research disclaimer

This is a Sonivance Ltd self-sponsored exploratory study. All sample figures, respondent characteristics, percentages, findings and budget figures presented here are **illustrative**, and should **not** be interpreted as nationally representative or as an actual financial statement.

Website teaser

Everyone's talking about AI taking jobs. We wanted to know what's really happening on the ground, so we asked 180 young professionals and recent graduates in Nairobi how they're actually using AI tools, what worries them, and what they've quietly stopped doing by hand. The answers were more practical, and more mixed, than the headlines suggest.

At a glance

Item	Detail
Location	Nairobi County
Population studied	Young professionals and recent graduates (aged 20 to 30)
Sample size	200 completed, 180 valid after data quality checks
Fieldwork period	3 weeks
Data collection	Digital questionnaire (KoboToolbox)
Team	4 enumerators, 1 field supervisor
Analysis	Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation
Estimated cost	KES 60,000 to 95,000 (illustrative)
Status	Self-sponsored, exploratory, not nationally representative

SECTION 01

Why We Conducted This Study

Most research gets done because a client has a budget and a deadline. We think that's a limited way to understand a country. Some of the most useful questions don't come with a commissioning letter attached. They come from paying attention to what people are actually talking about.

By early 2026, AI tools had become a normal part of conversation among Nairobi's young professionals: in campus WhatsApp groups, in office kitchens, on Twitter/X threads about "which jobs are safe." This wasn't just anecdotal. A mid-2026 global update on digital behaviour found that 97.5% of Kenyan internet users had used at least one AI tool in the past month, the highest adoption rate of any country tracked, well ahead of markets like the UAE and Indonesia (DataReportal, We Are Social & Manochi, 2026). Yet most of what we were reading about this shift was either promotional ("AI will transform everything") or anxious ("AI will take your job"), and very little of it was based on actually asking young Kenyans what they were doing day to day.

So we decided to fund the study ourselves. Not because we had a client asking for it, but because we wanted to demonstrate something about how **Sonivance Ltd** works: when we see a question worth answering, we don't wait for permission to go and answer it. A modest budget, a tight questionnaire, and three weeks of fieldwork were enough to get a useful, honest picture.

CONTEXT FIGURE — EXTERNAL SOURCE

97.5%

of Kenyan internet users had used at least one AI tool in the past month, the highest adoption rate of any country tracked (DataReportal, We Are Social & Manochi, 2026).

SECTION 02

The Research Question

How are young professionals and recent graduates in Nairobi actually using AI tools in their work and job search, and how do they feel about what it means for their careers?

Supporting questions

1. Which AI tools, if any, are young professionals using in their day to day work or studies?
2. What tasks have they started doing differently (faster, less carefully, or not at all) because of AI?
3. Do they see AI mainly as a threat to their job prospects, a tool that helps them compete, or both?
4. Where did they learn to use these tools, and do they feel confident using them?
5. What would make them trust AI tools more, or use them less?

SECTION 03

Study Design

We kept the design deliberately narrow so that it could be executed quickly and cheaply, while still producing a coherent, useful picture.

Design element	Approach
Location	Nairobi County, with respondents drawn from a mix of neighbourhoods to capture a range of income levels and employment situations (from Kilimani and Westlands to Kasarani and Umoja)
Target population	Employed and job seeking young people aged 20 to 30, with at least a diploma or degree, working in or applying for office based, creative, or client facing roles
Sample size	Approximately 180 respondents
Sampling approach	Purposive and snowball sampling through professional networks, campus alumni groups, and co-working spaces, supplemented by short intercept interviews at two business hubs
Data collection period	3 weeks
Tool	A short structured questionnaire (12 to 15 minutes) programmed in KoboToolbox and administered on tablets and phones
Analysis	Descriptive statistics and cross tabulation by sector, seniority, and gender

This is not a representative sample of Nairobi's workforce, and we're not claiming it is. It's a focused snapshot, gathered honestly, that tells us something real about a specific and relevant group of people.

SECTION 04

Data Quality and Respondent Profile

Fieldwork yielded 200 completed questionnaires. As part of standard data quality checks, our supervisor reviewed every submission for completion time, response patterns, and duplicate device or contact details. 20 records were dropped as invalid (mostly very short completion times or clearly patterned "straight line" answers suggesting the questionnaire wasn't genuinely engaged with), leaving a clean analytical sample of 180 valid respondents.

200 completed questionnaires	20 dropped in quality checks	180 valid respondents analysed
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Profile of the 180 valid respondents (illustrative)

Category	Group	Share of sample
Gender	Female	52%
	Male	48%
Age group	20 to 24	38%
	25 to 27	41%
	28 to 30	21%
Employment status	Employed full time	46%
	Employed part time or freelance	21%
	Actively job seeking	33%
Highest education	Diploma	24%
	Bachelor's degree	63%
	Postgraduate	13%
Sector	Business, finance, or admin	28%
	Tech, media, or creative	25%
	Education or NGO	18%
	Sales, retail, or hospitality	16%
	Other	13%
Area of residence	Kilimani, Westlands, Lavington	27%
	Kasarani, Roysambu, Ruaka	24%
	Umoja, Buruburu, Donholm	22%
	South B, South C, Langata	16%
	Other Nairobi County	11%

Employment status of respondents (illustrative)

Employed full time		46%
Actively job seeking		33%
Part time / freelance		21%

Figures shown are the illustrative sample shares reported in the table above. No additional data has been generated for this chart.

SECTION 05

What We Found

The findings below are illustrative of the kind of patterns a study like this could surface, and are presented as such rather than as claims about the national or even city wide population.

FINDING 1**Most respondents use AI tools, but casually rather than systematically**

Around two thirds reported using an AI tool at least weekly, most often for drafting text, summarising documents, or generating ideas, but few had built it into a consistent workflow.

FINDING 2**Job seekers use AI more heavily than the employed**

Respondents actively job hunting were considerably more likely to use AI tools regularly, mainly for CVs, cover letters, and interview preparation, treating it as a competitive necessity rather than a convenience.

FINDING 3**Confidence is uneven and mostly self taught**

Most respondents said they'd learned to use AI tools informally, through YouTube, friends, or trial and error. Confidence using the tools well was notably lower than the frequency of use would suggest.

FINDING 4**Anxiety about AI is real, but specific rather than general**

Concern wasn't so much "AI will take all jobs" as worry about particular tasks, such as entry level writing, basic research, and first draft design work, that respondents felt were becoming less valuable to offer as standalone skills.

FINDING 5**Many see AI as helping them appear more competent than they feel**

A recurring, more candid theme was using AI to polish work quickly under deadline pressure, sometimes without fully understanding what the tool had changed.

FINDING 6**Trust depends heavily on the stakes involved**

Respondents were comfortable using AI for drafting and idea generation, but far more cautious about relying on it for anything with financial, legal, or academic consequences.

FINDING 7**Few have received any formal guidance from employers**

Most said their workplace had no clear policy or training on AI tool use. People were largely left to work out for themselves what was acceptable.

SECTION 06

What Surprised Us

- **Job seekers, not employees, are the heaviest users.** We expected the reverse, that people already in demanding jobs would lean on AI most. Instead, the sharpest, most deliberate use was among people trying to get hired.
- **The anxiety is quieter and more specific than public conversation suggests.** Rather than sweeping fear about “losing everything to AI,” most concerns were narrow and task level, closer to “this particular skill matters less now” than to panic.
- **Nobody is really being trained.** Given how normalised AI tool use already is, the almost complete absence of employer guidance or training stood out.

SECTION 07

What the Findings Mean

For businesses and employers

Young staff are already using AI tools, often without guidance. A short, practical policy covering what’s encouraged, what needs a human check, and what’s off limits, would likely close real gaps rather than restrict something already happening informally.

For NGOs and development organizations

Programmes aimed at youth employability could usefully include basic AI tool literacy, particularly around judgement and verification, not just tool familiarity, which most young people already have.

For policymakers

The picture is less about mass job replacement and more about a shifting skills premium, worth addressing task by task rather than as one undifferentiated threat.

For researchers

The gap between frequency of use and confidence in use points to an unaddressed training and quality-assurance need.

For employers hiring entry-level talent

If job seekers already use AI to present themselves, screening built entirely around written application quality may need rethinking.

For young professionals themselves

The data suggests real value in developing judgement about when to rely on AI output and when to check it carefully, a skill distinct from simply knowing how to use the tools.

SECTION 08

Keeping Research Affordable

We wanted this project to prove a point: useful research doesn't have to be expensive to be credible. Every design choice was made with cost in mind.

- **A short, focused questionnaire.** One clear research question, not a wide ranging survey trying to cover everything.
- **Digital data collection from day one.** No paper forms, no manual re entry, fewer errors.
- **A small, well briefed field team.** Four enumerators who knew the tool and the topic well, rather than a large team needing heavy supervision.
- **Targeted rather than random sampling.** Reaching the right people through networks instead of expensive door to door listing.
- **Real time monitoring.** The supervisor reviewed submissions daily on KoboToolbox's dashboard, catching problems early.
- **Automated data checks.** Skip logic and validation built into the form itself, reducing cleaning time later.
- **Lean supervision.** One supervisor overseeing the whole team, rather than a layered management structure.
- **In house analysis.** No external statisticians brought in; the team that collected the data analysed it.
- **A short reporting turnaround.** A focused insight report instead of a lengthy academic style document.

Illustrative budget

Illustrative only — not an actual financial statement.

Category	Estimated cost (KES)
Enumerator fees (4 people, 3 weeks)	25,000 to 35,000
Transport and fieldwork logistics	10,000 to 15,000
Data and communication (airtime, KoboToolbox, mobile data)	5,000 to 8,000
Field supervision	8,000 to 12,000
Data processing and analysis	7,000 to 15,000
Reporting and design	5,000 to 10,000
Estimated total	60,000 to 95,000

SECTION 09

What This Demonstrates About Sonivance Ltd

This project, small as it was, took the study through the same cycle we'd run for any client:

Research design	Tool development	Digital data collection	Field supervision
Data quality	Analysis	Insights	Reporting

We wrote the questionnaire, built and tested it in KoboToolbox, trained and deployed a small enumerator team, monitored data quality in real time, cleaned and analysed the results, and turned it into a report worth reading, all within a modest, self funded budget and a short timeline.

That's the point. **Sonivance Ltd** doesn't need a large national mandate to produce research that's rigorous, honest about its limits, and genuinely useful. We can do it at a scale that fits a start up's curiosity or a department's small discretionary budget, and still do it properly.

The bigger question

If young Kenyans are already teaching themselves to work alongside AI faster than employers, educators, or policymakers are learning to respond to it, who is actually setting the terms of that relationship, and what does it mean for how the next generation of jobs gets designed?

Conclusion

This wasn't a project anyone asked us to do. We funded it, designed it, and ran it because we thought the question mattered and we wanted to find out the answer properly. That's the kind of research company **Sonivance Ltd** is trying to be: curious enough to ask its own questions, and disciplined enough to answer them well on a modest budget.

SECTION 10

References

External sources — contextual background

DataReportal, We Are Social & Manochi. (2026). *Digital 2026: Mid-Year Global Update*. Retrieved August 2026, from <https://datareportal.com>

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International Labour Organization. (2026). *ILOSTAT Labour Force Statistics Database*. Retrieved August 2026, from <https://ilostat.ilo.org>

Note: External sources above are cited for general contextual background only. All sample figures, respondent quotations, percentages, and findings presented in this study are illustrative, generated for demonstration purposes, and are not drawn from these or any other external dataset.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Study Questionnaire

Structured questionnaire administered digitally via KoboToolbox. Estimated completion time: 12 to 15 minutes. Skip logic applied where noted.

Section 1: Screening

1. What is your age? (Open numeric; screen out if under 20 or over 30)
2. Do you currently live within Nairobi County? (Yes / No — screen out if No)
3. What is your highest completed level of education? (Below diploma / Diploma / Bachelor's degree / Postgraduate — screen out if below diploma)
4. Which best describes your current situation? (Employed full time / Employed part time or freelance / Actively job seeking / Student / None of the above — screen out if Student or None of the above)

Section 2: Background

5. What is your gender? (Female / Male / Prefer not to say)
6. Which area of Nairobi do you currently live in? (Open / dropdown list of estates)
7. Which sector do you currently work in, or are you seeking work in? (Business, finance, or admin / Tech, media, or creative / Education or NGO / Sales, retail, or hospitality / Other)

Section 3: AI Tool Use

8. Have you used any AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, Canva AI) in the last month? (Yes / No — skip to Section 6 if No)
9. How often do you use AI tools? (Daily / A few times a week / Weekly / A few times a month / Rarely)
10. Which tasks have you used AI tools for? (Select all that apply: Writing or editing text / Summarising documents / Research or idea generation / CV or cover letter writing / Interview preparation / Design or image creation / Coding or technical tasks / Other)
11. Which single task would you say AI has changed the most for you? (Open text)
12. Has AI use changed how carefully you check your own work? (More careful / Less careful / About the same / Not sure)

Section 4: Learning and Confidence

13. Where did you mainly learn to use AI tools? (Self taught through trial and error / YouTube or online tutorials / Friends or colleagues / Formal training or coursework / Employer training / Other)
14. How confident do you feel using AI tools effectively? (Very confident / Somewhat confident / Not very confident / Not at all confident)
15. Has your employer or institution provided any guidance or policy on AI tool use? (Yes, clear guidance / Some informal guidance / No guidance at all / Not applicable / Not sure)

Section 5: Attitudes and Trust

16. Overall, do you see AI mainly as: (A threat to job prospects / A tool that helps you compete / Both, depending on the task / Neither)
17. Which of the following, if any, worry you about AI in your field? (Select all that apply: Losing entry level opportunities / Being replaced entirely / Skills becoming less valuable / Over-reliance reducing my own ability / Not worried / Other)
18. For which of these would you trust AI-generated output without double-checking it? (Select all that apply: Casual drafting / Work emails / Financial calculations / Legal or compliance matters / Academic work / None of these)
19. What would make you trust AI tools more in your work? (Open text)

Section 6: Job Search Specific (shown only to respondents who selected “Actively job seeking” in Q4)

20. Have you used AI tools to help with your job search? (Yes / No)

21. If yes, which parts of your job search have you used AI for? (Select all that apply: Writing CVs / Writing cover letters / Practising interview answers / Researching companies / Other)

Section 7: Closing

22. Is there anything else about AI and your work or job search that you would like to share? (Open text, optional)

End of questionnaire. Enumerator to confirm submission and thank respondent.

APPENDIX

Appendix B: Field Documentation

Field procedures were documented through a pre-deployment team debrief and supervised sample interviews. This version of the report has been prepared without field photography.

CLOSING

About Sonivance Ltd

Sonivance Ltd is a Kenya-based research, data and insights consultancy. We help research firms, NGOs, universities, development organizations, government stakeholders and businesses turn questions into evidence: designing studies, recruiting, training and supervising field teams, collecting reliable digital data, and reporting findings that can be acted on.

Research & Surveys	Monitoring & Evaluation	Digital Data Collection
Data Analytics	Capacity Building & Advisory	

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Have a research question worth answering?

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