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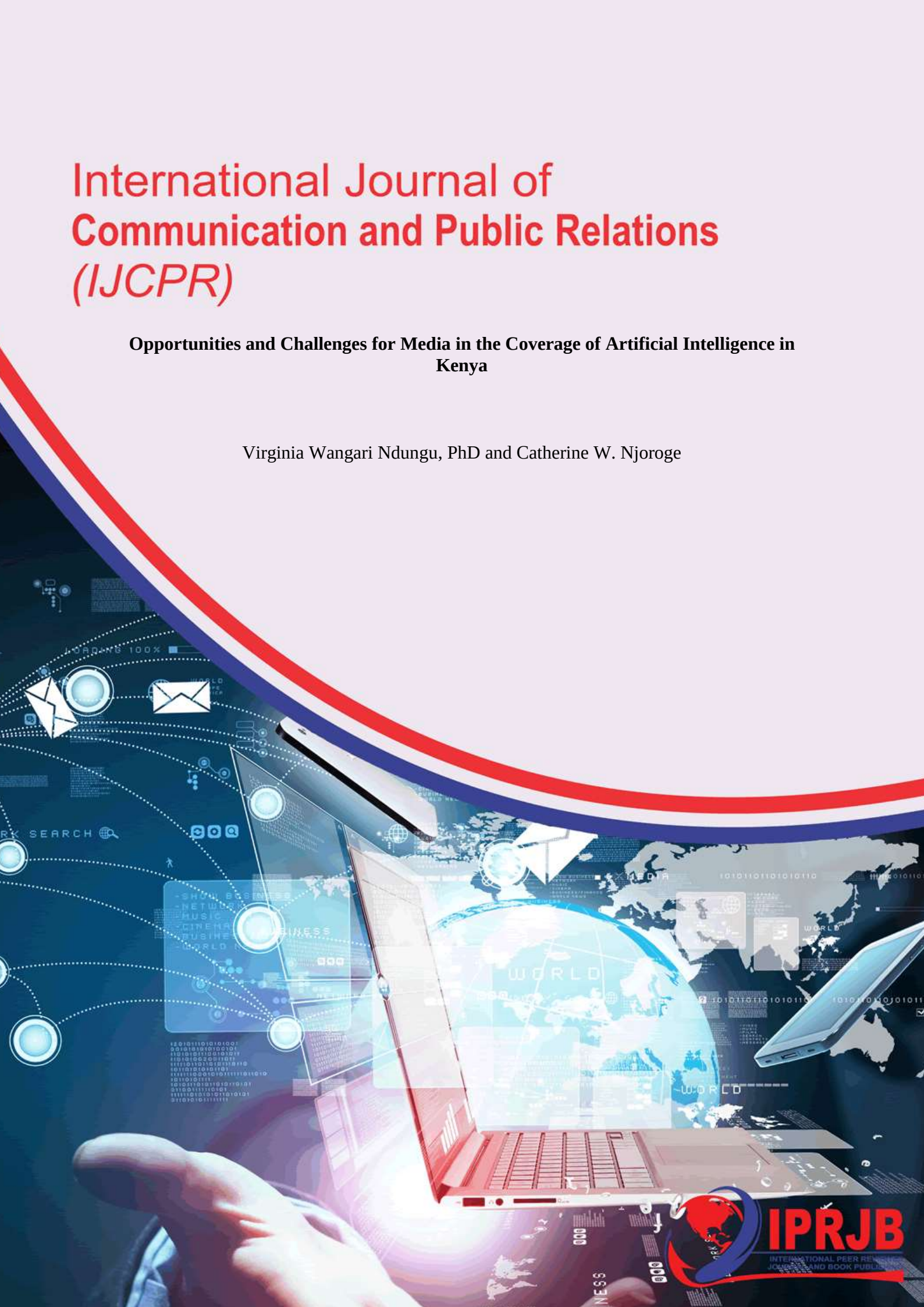

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to establish opportunities and challenges for media in the coverage of artificial intelligence (AI) in Kenya. Today AI is continuously changing how societies live, work and function, and is now being applied in almost all life facets including communications and media. AI technologies not only enhance the efficiency of media production, distribution, and consumption, but they expose challenges related to misinformation, content manipulation, and potential threats to journalistic autonomy.

Methodology: Agenda setting and cognitive theories were used to navigate this paper. Methodology used was content analysis, where 20 online goggle links spanning 24 months were studied and analysed. The links were isolated and classified into 4 sub themes namely; adoption, legislation, regulations and policy, misuse, corporate and government business processes. The links were then analysed according to study frames categories.

Findings: Findings show that generally, AI solutions were successfully deployed albeit erratically and several reasons point to this outcome. First, this was a typical case of mirror metaphor where the media simply reflect the existing AI landscape, rather than being a primary force that creates or transforms it. Secondly, media itself is taking a gradual metamorphosis into AI, given the inconsistent and erratic coverage revealed in the study. Policy and strategic implementation, integration across functions, talent and skills development, performance measurement were identified as enablers of AI adoption in media. Thirdly, there was no definitive legal basis on AI although regulation groundwork has been around since 2018. So, media like any sector faces significant hurdles due to absence of robust legal framework, and related challenges e.g. opacity, bias, misuse and fakes and intellectual property rights, data bias exists. Despite this, the media is expected to continue its growth trajectory of AI adoption.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: This study recommends continued upskilling of journalists and media in general to keep with evolving AI trends to remain relevant. Constant capacity building of journalists could be done to enable them to drive the implementation of AI in newsrooms. Support professionals such as data miners, software engineers, analysts, and coders could be incorporated to boost newsrooms' capacity to interpret, unravel information and data issues of public interest for their audiences. Media policies could be reviewed to include artificial intelligence management while media owners could support their organization's initiatives to adopt AI. Existing gaps and inequitable use of AI in all sectors e.g. rural and urban economies may be highlighted and bridged, when media plays an advocacy role.

Keywords: *Media, Coverage, Artificial Intelligence*

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INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) is continuously changing how societies live, work and function, and is now being applied in most aspects including healthcare education, transportation, data storage, communications and media. Artificial intelligence practitioner's guide, sees this field of computer science as systems that perform specific functions or tasks that would normally require human intelligence. AI intelligence of machines and computers enables mimics of human capabilities by processing large amounts of data, reasoning, and learning historical patterns from the data, analysing and solving complex problems. Whether AI for profit or public good, it continues to redefine how societies organize and socialize (Siyonbola, 2021). Deshpande et al., (2022) says that AI stakeholders; developers, governance, users, infrastructure experts, and media have varying and intersecting interests and responsibilities toward its growth.

In Kenya, AI has become the highest priority for private and public organizations, and impacting operations and functions. The media landscape itself is undergoing a transformative shift driven by utilization of AI in internal workflow processes and management. This powerful technology is now being deployed for content creation, and audience engagement (MCK, 2025), boosting news gathering, packaging, and distribution (Kioko et al. 2022, Chege 2022). Further, media interrogates and reveals real challenges brought about by this advancement. How media portrays AI directly impacts audiences' conceptualization of its use, development, and regulation. This paper reviewed online media links and frames on media coverage of AI. The analysis comprised commentaries, opinions and editorials.

Research Objective

To establish opportunities and challenges for media in the coverage of artificial intelligence (AI) in Kenya.

Research question

What are the opportunities and challenges for media in the coverage of artificial intelligence (AI) in Kenya?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the digital space, Kenya is among the top five African countries and 78 globally in the 2021 edition of Government Artificial Intelligence Readiness Index (Oxford Insights, 2022). Additionally, readiness for frontier technologies index (UNCTAD, 2021) showed Kenya was ranked 105 globally, and 10 in Africa. Thus, Kenya has joined advanced developed economies such as United Kingdom and Russia in utilizing fourth industrial revolution technologies to address various challenges. Subsequently, the country was tagged as "Silicon Savannah," and is the third most innovative economy in sub-Saharan Africa, behind Mauritius and South Africa, (Oxford Insights, 2022).

Artificial intelligence is crucial in driving growth and enhancing operational efficiency in public and private sector including media business processes. So what opportunities does artificial intelligence (AI) offer to media in Kenya? These are twofold, first media like other sectors is proactively embracing, testing and applying AI in internal areas ranging from predictive analytics, scenario planning, workflow processes and management. Secondly, media have ability to harness AI to interpret, unravel information and data issues of public interest for their audiences. Newsrooms (Chege, 2022, Kioko et al., 2022) are adopting the technology in varying degrees to meet different needs. They transcribe video-to-text (Norton, 2017) and deal

with misinformation (Biswal & Gouda, 2020). Journalists are enabled to collect data and evidence from safe distances by deploying technologies that have capacity for facial recognition. Furthermore, AI-based programs are used to piece stories and to create interactive videos and infographics. For instance, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC News Africa, April 2025) deployed this technology to produce a documentary, "Blood Parliament" in Kenya. In another case, Nation Media Group (2022) provided their audiences with imagery through Sentinel Hub chronological satellite timelines to establish the activities back to 2020 inside Shakahola forest for deaths that were related to religious fanatics (Parliament, 2023). Pedrero-Esteban & Pérez-Escoda (2021) and Zayani (2021) affirm that that investigative and data journalism now a global trend in newsrooms.

In other forms of media, AI tools transmits weather and climatological prediction services to agriculture, forestry, water resources management, civil aviation and the private sectors. A linkage between newsrooms and Kenya Meteorological Department (meteo.go.ke, 2024) enables dissemination of this information to audiences. Similarly, Kenya agricultural observatory platform (KAOP) uses geo-data from satellite to generate location specific agro advisories (KALRO, 2024, meteo.go.ke, 2024). The system predicts precipitation and temperature, and plots dynamic charts given GPS coordinates for locations for the next 14 days. Real time information is then sent to users through SMS and other online platforms. Social media itself is also highly impactful in target marketing through use of deep learning algorithms to identify individuals and their preferences. This form of AI allows users to solve problems by creating services and products using large datasets. Rogers (1996) theorized the role of media channels raising awareness in disseminating a technology.

So, what challenges does the media face in their pursuit of coverage of artificial intelligence (AI) in Kenya? First, AI industry is constantly evolving, and journalists have to keep on upskilling to put up with the changes in the sector. Kioko et al., (2022) found that availability of people with the right technical skills to develop and manage AI systems was as a key factor driving adoption of the systems in newsrooms. Moreover, a capacity gap existed between developers and most newsroom staff, a scenario worsened by the fact that different AI models required different skill sets. Moreover, journalists had limited technical skills to create AI models, yet they formed the most significant percentage of newsroom employees (Kioko et al., 2022). Hall and Pesenti (2017) concurs that AI attracts interest from highly skilled young people, and the media must keep with this trend to remain relevant.

Along rapid development of AI in Kenya, legislation seem to lag behind. This is evident by reports of AI manipulation to spread wildfire of disinformation, misinformation and propaganda to influence decision-making by targeting individual users of platforms and services. This study shows a two cases as a point. The Central Bank of Kenya cautioned on the use of bitcoin, citing gaps in legislation, anonymity of the currency and lack of centralized oversight (CBK, 2015). In yet other case, the Government (CA & ODC, 2023) suspended crypto project over data security concerns amid a hysterical uptake as Kenyans scanned their eyeballs with a foreign AI agency as proof of humanity against their online identities. These Government agencies cited legitimate regulatory concerns raging from absence of consumer protection on cryptocurrency and related ICT services or inadequate information on cybersecurity safeguards and standards. In other jurisdictions, Germany, France, UK and India (CA& ODPC, 2023) similar concerns were raised. Guardian (2019) cited a case in the US where an IT firm harvested data from millions of Facebook users for political reason without

their consent and as a result, Facebook was fined $5 billion by the Federal Trade Commission for privacy violations

Clearly there is widely recognized benefits and harms of emerging risks associated with AI. The paradox is for media to remain competent to recognize benefits and harms in view of public interest.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and cognitive (McLeod, 2024) theories were used to navigate this paper. For McCombs & Shaw (1972), media through their ability to identify and publicize issues play a pivotal role in highlighting problems that attract attention from governments and international organizations, and direct public opinion towards specific issues. The theory advances that in choosing and displaying news editors and newsroom staff play an important part in shaping reality. Audiences learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance and the frames to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. The most common use of frames in the news is the information they convey. This theory enabled this study to show the role of media in AI adoption.

On other hand, cognitive theories (McLeod, 2024) explain that the human mind is like a computer that is constantly processing and encoding data. The theory posits that, when a person experiences stimuli, their minds will look toward prior schema to help them understand this information. In this case, the media plays an intermediary role by synthesizing data and information though AI, which is then relayed to their audiences. The replication is also played where receivers of agenda setting theory suggests that the media can shape public opinion by determining what issues are given the most attention, and has been widely studied and applied to various forms of media. In order to efficiently process new information, Goffman (1974) says that individuals apply interpretive schemas or primary frameworks to classify information and interpret it meaningfully.

METHODOLOGY

Study Population and Site

A content analysis study was undertaken between January 2023 and December 2024, where 20 online goggle links on media coverage on artificial intelligence (AI) in Kenya were studied and analyzed. The sample size allowed a deep analysis of content and reader comments, while the any manipulation. Boddy (2016) described such a study in qualitative research as highly informative and meaningful, and that sample sizes can be justified by researcher. Thus the online goggle links comprising commentaries, opinions and editorials coverage were identified and studied for information being sought. The links were isolated and classified into four news topic namely; adoption, legislation, regulations and policy, misuse, corporate and government business processes. Media coverage frames were categorized as critique, informative, discursive, persuasive, educative or disruptive. They following study frames were then defined; critique where a story was damaging, informative for new revelations and discursive where broad AI feature articles were published. Educative involved dissemination of new AI knowledge while disruptive was construed as highlighting breaches, disinformation and misinformation. Table below show AI media coverage links, and coverage frames in the said period.

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Table 1: Google Links and Frames of AI Media Coverage between January 2023 and December 2024

Year	No	AI Media Coverage Links	Media Coverage frames
2023	**5**	Adoption	$b^3 + d^1 + e^1$
		Legislation, regulations & policy	$a^0 + b^0 + c^0 + d^0 + e^0 + f^0$
		Misuse	$a^0 + b^0 + c^0 + d^0 + e^0 + f^0$
		Corporate & government business processes	$a^0 + b^0 + c^0 + d^0 + e^0 + f^0$
2024	**15**	Adoption	$a^3 + b^6 + c^1 + d^2 + e^3 + f^0$
		Legislation, regulations & policy	$a^2 + b^1 + e^1 + f^1$
		Misuse	$a^3 + b^1 + c^1 + f^1$
		Corporate & government business processes	$b^2 + e^2$

*Key: * Media Coverage frames: Critique=a, Informative=b, Discursive=c, Persuasive=d, Educative=e, Disruptive=f*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings shown in table 1 above indicates that online media coverage on AI adoption only yielded five stories in 2023. The frames used were informative three stories, and persuasive or educative one story each. AI issues on legislation, regulations and policy, misuse and, corporate and government business processes failed to attract media attention. However, this changed in 2024 indicating that the media paid a significant focus on the matter. Coverage of adoption of AI yielded fifteen news stories which were framed as critique three, informative six, discursive one, while persuasive yielded two and educative three. The media covered five online stories on legislation, regulations and policy in the same year. These were framed as critique two, while persuasive, educative and disruptive each yielded a story each. Furthermore, stories on AI misuse in 2024 were framed as critique three, while informative, discursive, educative and disruptive each yielded one story. Four stories were on business processes in media, corporate and government, and were framed as informative and educative.

Generally during the duration, topics on AI were underreported and several reasons point to this outcome. First, was a typical case of mirror metaphor where the media simply reflect the existing AI landscape, rather than being a primary force that creates or transforms it. The mirror metaphor or reflection inference suggests that media content essentially reflects societal values, norms, and beliefs (Katz, 1983, Gunther & Christen, 1999). Secondly, media itself is taking a gradual metamorphosis into AI, given the inconsistent and erratic coverage revealed in this study. MCK (2025) agreed that media has limitations of AI, was undergoing a transformative shift to conform. Policy and strategic implementation, integration across functions, talent and skills development, performance measurement were identified as enablers of AI adoption in media. Thirdly, there was no definitive legal basis for adopting AI in Kenya although regulation groundwork has been around since 2018. Currently media like any sector faces significant hurdles due to absence of robust AI legal framework, and related challenges e.g. opacity, bias, misuse and fakes and intellectual property rights, data bias exists.

AI solutions are being deployed successfully albeit erratically within media. Media emphasizes positive narratives on technological advancements and societal benefits, while also zooming in on negative ones mainly on ethical practices. They also have moral obligation to create a digital conscious society which in turn promotes public trust, and legal compliance for AI to thrive.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study confirmed that media was focused on all issues that come with AI e.g. adoption, infrastructure roll out, rights of data subjects, protection albeit erratically and gradually. If properly harnessed, AI is poised to revolutionize the media industry with exciting benefits. It is expected to continue its growth trajectory, with increased adoption in the media. Alongside opportunities across industries and society, significant risks loom and the media must stay alert. Misuse, misinformation and disinformation, societal disruption, privacy intrusion, data breaches, and bias are pressing challenges that must be acknowledged and navigated responsibly.

Recommendations

Generally, the AI industry across most sectors is attracting highly skilled young people and is evolving fast. Journalists, and the media industry need to upskill constantly to harness opportunities of these changing trends to remain relevant. Constant capacity building of journalists could be done to enable them to drive the implementation of AI in newsrooms. Support professionals such as data miners, software engineers, analysts, and coders could be incorporated to boost newsrooms' capacity to interpret, unravel information and data issues of public interest for their audiences. Media policies could be reviewed to include artificial intelligence management while media owners themselves should support their organization's initiatives to adopt AI. The media should embrace AI in its own internal areas such as workflow processes and management for effectiveness and efficiency. Existing gaps and inequitable use of AI in all sectors e.g. rural and urban economies may be highlighted and bridged, when media plays an advocacy role.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study was conducted within a limited timeframe, and did not capture media coverage of AI in Kenya in the long term. The scope was limited to 20 google links only for a 24-month period. Therefore, the study recommends further investigation using longitudinal research that will allow track of changes, developments, and trends over an extended period. Further research could also increase number of google links to enhance the generalizability of the results. An indepth comparative analyses of online media coverage of AI in 2024 in relation to the previous years was outside the scope of this study and could be opened up for further research.

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