MAKERERE UNIVRSITY
Department of Journalism and Communication

ANNUAL MEDIA CONVENTION 2024

Harnessing Artificial Intelligence and Social Networks to Combat Misinformation in Uganda

Concept Note

1. Introduction

The Department of Journalism and Communication at Makerere University will host the Annual Media Convention (AMC) 2024 on 3rd September 2024 in the Yusuf Lule Central Teaching Facility Auditorium. The Department has held the Annual Media Convention since 1998 with the aim of providing a forum for discussing emerging issues media, journalism and communication in Uganda and beyond. Under the theme, '*Harnessing Artificial Intelligence and Social Networks to Combat Misinformation in Uganda*', the convention will provide an opportunity for participants to share experience for improving and advancing journalism and communication in Uganda with a critical focus on Artificial Intelligence and Open Source Intelligence (OSINT). Practitioners, scholars, policy makers, regulators, researchers and students in the field of media, journalism and communication are expected to attend.

2. Background

Technology is rapidly transforming the way in which journalism and communications professionals hold leadership at various levels – national, organizational, and community – accountable to their constituents. Investigative journalists have the duty to report exhaustively on corruption, human rights and rule of law, and peace, security and conflict. Similarly, public relations and strategic communications professionals are responsible for raising the public's understanding of the operations of organizations they represent by encouraging transparency and access to information as key components of accountability. Investigative journalism practice in Uganda, however, is both a difficult and dangerous task in spite of the laws that provide for ease of access to information. In a society characterized by a culture of secrecy, public officials and public relations practitioners typically withhold information from journalists even when it is in the public domain.

Traditionally, media investigations relied on witness testimony, on-site evidence, and the paper trail to prove the existence of corruption and violations of the ideals of democracy – human rights, rule of law, and peace and security. Communications professionals also relied on manual means (e.g. press conferences, press releases, etc.) to provide information to the public, an approach that is inefficient and unreliable in situations where information must be shared quickly and frequently, such as during times of crisis (e.g. pandemics) and violent conflict. More recently, though, investigative bodies are increasingly turning to Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) such as social media content and satellite imagery, to overcome the physical, security, and societal barriers to gathering reliable evidence; and organizations are embracing and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to share timely and relevant information. In line with the global theme of this year's International Day for Universal Access to Information (September 28), which is *'Artificial Intelligence, e-governance and Access to Information',* the Annual Media Convention 2022 will provide a platform for participants to discuss where Uganda's media, journalism and communication sector is with regard to adoption and use of

OSINT an AI, and how these technologies can be leveraged within the media and communication ecosystem in the country.

3. Open-source intelligence

Open-source intelligence is the collection and analysis of data gathered from open sources (overt and publicly available sources) to produce actionable information. The U.S. Department of Defense defines OSINT as intelligence "produced from publicly available information that is collected, exploited, and disseminated in a timely manner to an appropriate audience for the purpose of addressing a specific intelligence requirement." Open source acquisition involves obtaining verbal, written, or electronically transmitted material that can be obtained legally from overt collection: all types of media, government reports and other documents, scientific research and reports, commercial vendors of information, the Internet, etc. Obtaining OSINT does not require any type of clandestine collection techniques and adheres to copyright and commercial requirements where applicable (Lowenthal, 2005). OSINT sources can be divided into the following categories of information flow:

(i) **Media**: print newspapers, magazines, radio, and television from across and between countries.
(ii) **Internet**: Online publications, blogs, discussion groups, citizen media (i.e. mobile phone videos, and user created content), YouTube, and other social media websites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Istagram, etc.).
(iii) **Public government data**: Public government reports, budgets, hearings, press conferences/releases, websites, and speeches. Although this source comes from an official source, they are publicly accessible and may be used openly and freely.
(iv) **Professional and academic publications**: Information acquired from journals, conferences, symposia, academic papers, dissertations, and theses.
(v) **Commercial data**: Commercial imagery, financial and industrial assessments, and databases.
(vi) **Grey literature**: Technical reports, preprints, patents, working papers, business documents, unpublished works, and newsletters.

3.1 OSINT in Journalism

With an abundance of publicly available information in the media and on the Internet, open source intelligence has become one of most valuable tools for journalism. OSINT used for journalism builds on a wide range of digital sources deriving from new camera technology and Internet services. The right analytical tools, satellite images, social media posts, pictures, and videos provide the means to uncover the truth about events. Contemporary investigative journalism requires practitioners to understand the way information is structured on the Internet and how to use tools and information online for verification, fact-checking and deep investigative research to uncover evidence that would never otherwise be available. Independent international groups of researchers, investigators and citizen journalists such as *Forensic Architecture* and *Bellingcat* are using open source and social media investigation, reconstruction techniques and audio analysis to conduct in-depth research on a variety of subjects. Some established media outlets like *The New York Times*, the BBC, and Der Spiegel have collaborated with these groups to execute a number of eye-popping investigative projects using OSINT, and this trend is gaining increasing attention. Examples that the audience at the Annual Media Convention might be familiar with include such BBC's *Africa Eye* investigative journalism products as: 'Three Killings in Kampala', 'Faith Under Fire', 'Game of Drones', 'Anatomy of a Killing', and 'Racism for Sale', among others.

However, while OSINT is quickly gaining a foothold within traditional journalism institutions, the field is still characterized by structural imbalances of race, class and gender—where the majority of practitioners is white middle-class male from the Global North, often investigating the Global South, replicating colonial power dynamics (Ganguly, 2022). More and more journalists in the Global South need to be introduced to OSINT techniques and tools; and training journalists in this field ought to be a priority.

4. Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is generally defined as "a collection of ideas, technologies, and techniques that relate to a computer system's capacity to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence" (JournalismAI, 2022). AI is an umbrella term for technologies that enable machines to perform cognitive tasks – like seeing, writing, moving, reading, or analyzing data – as well or better than humans. AI technologies can be trained in tasks by humans or, in the case of machine learning, learn to improve on their own (Kaput, 2021). The concepts of AI and machine learning are often used interchangeably, but machine learning is in fact a subfield of AI. In simple terms, machine learning uses data to answer questions. More formally, it refers to "the use of algorithms that learn patterns from data and are able to perform tasks without being explicitly programmed to do so" (JournalismAI, 2022). A defining feature of machine learning systems is that they improve their performance with experience and data. That is, they learn (*ibid*).

4.1 AI in Journalism

In the context of media and journalism, AI is used as a collective term to refer to the use of algorithms and automation usually to make journalists' work more efficient or to deliver more relevant content to audiences. AI technologies are used in journalism across the news production process – from newsgathering to news production and news distribution. In particular, media organisations use AI to automate news production, for journalistic investigations, to understand what the audience wants, for fact-checking and verification, and to mitigate risks of bias, among others roles (JournalismAI, 2022)

Newsrooms around the world are embracing various forms of artificial intelligence as part of the newsgathering, production and distribution process. With Western countries and China at the forefront, the Global North is leading the innovation of AI in media organisations. Newsrooms are using technologies that include machine learning, automated content creation and moderation and speech-to-text programs. But Africa is lagging behind. Although some countries on the continent have begun incorporating AI into various sectors, including health, education and finance (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022), the use of AI technologies in African newsrooms is still largely foreign.

4.2 AI in strategic communication and public relations

Similar to journalism, Artificial Intelligence and intelligent user interfaces (IUIs) are gaining traction in strategic communications and public relations globally. IUIs which are the junction where users and technology meet – i.e. via computers, phones, robots, public displays, etc., use AI and machine learning methods to control how those systems interact, exchange data, learn from, and develop relations with users (Moore & Hübscher, 2021). Human/machine engagement is at the heart of new trends in a wide range of areas from consumer goods, healthcare, and entertainment to community relations, crisis management, and activism (Moore & Hübscher, 2021). In crisis communication, for example, AI-powered systems can scan social media and are smart, intelligent and experts in handling queries; they can post responses on

social media in real time for the client and manage the crisis. In many ways, AI and can are improving the effectiveness of public relations activities (Panda et al., 2019).

Despite the exponential growth in the number of AI tools available for communications and PR professionals, the impact of this technology on the industry has not been fully understood and appreciated. For example, the USC 2019 Global Communications Report compiled by the University of South California (USC 2019) showed that 86 percent of PR professionals and students considered themselves "somewhat" or "not at all" knowledgeable on the application of artificial intelligence in communications. A significant portion of PR specialists, though, reported they were using tech services to conduct media monitoring, website analytics, social media management and social listening, all of which are likely using some form of AI. These findings suggest that there currently exists a significant misunderstanding —perhaps a knowledge gap— about the actual state of AI technology advancement as it can be applied to supporting or evolving the capabilities within the PR industry (Maldonado 2020A & 2020B).

Development and adoption of artificial intelligence in Africa has occurred slowly relative to developed countries. Presently, no sub-Saharan African country is listed in the top ten countries expected to benefit most from AI. The continent struggles with structural challenges that hamper the development of a healthy AI ecosystem, including problems around universal access to electricity, mechanisation of production, automation of industries, and education systems that need to adapt quickly, to impart that skills that workers and citizens need to thrive Maldonado 2020A.

5. Focus areas for the Annual Media Convention 2024

In view of the background presented above, the Annual Media Convention 2024 will focus on the following questions, among others:

(i) What are the opportunities that AI and OSINT might offer to journalists in Uganda where information is heavily regulated and guarded?
(ii) Integrating OSINT and AI in journalism and communication training:
- What knowledge, skills and tools do media and communication professionals need in order to go beyond Google and access information and open source intelligence that is freely available online but is often hidden?
- What practices (and knowledge, skills and tools) do communications/PR professionals and organizations need to adapt to effectively perform their duty to society?

(iii) What research is necessary to advance the scholarship and understanding of the use of OSINT and AI in media organisations in Uganda and its implications for journalism in the country?
(iv) What opportunities and challenges does investment in OSINT and AI present to democracy and the rule of law in Uganda?
(v) In what ways can the public and private sectors support the development and use of OSINT and AI in the media and communication sector?

6. Activities

The main activities at the Annual Media Convention 2024 will include:

i. Keynote address
ii. Paper presentations arising from the theme
- On research and training

- On investigative journalism
- On public relations and communication
- On democracy and the rule of law

iii. Students gallery (moderated panel of DJC students to discuss the theme)
iv. Professionals' session (moderated panel comprising industry academia and regulators)
v. Plenary
vi. Recognition of Tebere-Mudin and Cranimer Mugerwa journalism awards
vii. Refreshments

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