PRESS RELEASE
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New Study Finds South African Newsrooms Rapidly Adopting AI – But Without Adequate Training, Policy or Local Tools

A groundbreaking report reveals that artificial intelligence (AI) is already widely embedded in South African newsrooms, offering significant efficiencies but raising urgent concerns about training, ethics, and trust.

The report, authored by Karen Allen, Herman Wasserman and Nande Mbekela, provides one of the first comprehensive snapshots of how South African journalists across print, broadcast and digital media are using AI in their daily work.

AI is widespread but unevenly understood

The study finds that journalists are actively using AI tools for tasks such as research, summarisation, transcription, translation, and drafting headlines and social media content. These tools are valued for saving time and improving workflow efficiency. However, adoption remains uneven and largely informal, often driven by individual journalists taking the initiative to use the technology, rather than institutional strategy.

Critically, most journalists report that they feel ill-equipped to use AI responsibly, with little to no formal training provided by their organisations. As a result, many rely on self-teaching and peer learning, creating inconsistencies in how AI is used across newsrooms.

Lack of policies and training creates risk

One of the report's most significant findings is the absence of formal AI policies in most South African news organisations. This lack of guidance leaves journalists to navigate complex ethical and professional challenges on their own.

The study warns that this gap increases the risk of:

- Inaccurate or misleading content due to AI "hallucinations"
- Plagiarism and copyright violations
- Erosion of journalistic standards and skills
- Declining public trust in news media

While journalists are aware of these risks, many compensate by double-checking AI outputs manually, ironically reducing the efficiency gains that AI promises.

Trust, ethics and local relevance are major concerns

A strong theme across the research is a "trust deficit" around AI. Journalists expressed concern about the reliability of AI-generated content and its potential impact on credibility. There are also widespread fears that over-reliance on AI could lead to "bland" or generic reporting that lacks nuance and context, which in turn threatens credibility

The report highlights particular challenges in multilingual South Africa. AI tools currently struggle with African languages such as isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sepedi, limiting their usefulness and raising concerns about linguistic and cultural accuracy.

Balancing opportunity and threat

Despite these concerns, journalists recognise the potential of AI to strengthen journalism, especially in resource-constrained environments. AI can assist with data analysis, verification, and content production, including complex investigations, potentially expanding newsroom capacity.

However, this optimism is tempered by fears of job displacement and the weakening of core journalistic practices, particularly among more experienced reporters and editors.

Recommendations

The report concludes that the key question is no longer whether AI **should** be used in newsrooms, but **how** it can be used responsibly.

It calls for:

- Structured, practical training programmes for journalists
- Clear editorial guidelines and AI policies in news organisations
- Development of AI tools tailored to African languages and contexts
- Stronger ethical frameworks to safeguard accuracy, accountability and public trust

"South African journalists are navigating AI with both curiosity and caution," Wasserman notes. "But without the necessary support systems in place, the risks may outweigh the benefits."

Journalists have traditionally embraced innovation, Allen points out, but AI presents a mixed bag of both opportunities and risks. What's needed now is urgent collaboration and on the ground training, so our newsrooms can harness the best AI practices globally and industry-wide.

Hendrik Sittig, Director of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's Regional Media Programme Sub-Saharan Africa, said: "AI offers enormous opportunities for better journalism – it can strengthen research, verification, and data analysis. But without training, clear guidelines, and tools adapted to local contexts, it also carries significant risks. That is why this study is such an important foundation for providing targeted support to journalists and newsrooms across Sub-Saharan Africa."

About the study
The research is based on a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and in-depth interviews with journalists across South Africa's media landscape. The study was conducted by the Centre for Information Integrity in Africa (CINIA) and Karen Allen International (KAI) for the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's Media Programme Sub-Saharan Africa.   It forms part of CINIA's broader work on information integrity and the impact of emerging technologies on journalism.

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