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'I Need Every Word to Reflect My Voice': Navigating AI Adoption and Gendered Realities in African Newsrooms

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Executive
Summary

This study examined the adoption and impact of artificial intelligence (AI) in African newsrooms, with a particular focus on women journalists and the gendered realities of AI integration. It highlights how newsroom contexts shape the adoption of AI and its gendered implications.

A central finding is the significant, systematic, and unacknowledged invisible labour undertaken by women journalists in this study. This labour manifests as a threefold burden: the gendered negotiation of professional legitimacy, the complex work of preserving authentic storytelling amidst AI-driven demands, and the responsibility of safeguarding the profession's ethical standards against the risks posed by new technologies. Ultimately, this invisible labour represents a major, unaccounted cost that falls disproportionately on these women.

Recognising this burden is an essential step towards developing equitable, ethical, and sustainable AI integration practices in journalism.

Participants who we consider contributors to this research were engaged through surveys, focus group discussions, key-informant interviews, and paired interviews, ensuring their expertise shaped both the inquiry and its interpretation.

Drawing on insights from study participants (research contributors) across multiple regions in Africa, including East, Central, South, and West Africa, the study explored three interrelated questions:

The Extent and Nature of AI Adoption

Its Impact on women journalists' professional lives, and

The ways AI adoption reinforces, alters, or mitigates existing gender disparities

Findings reveal that AI adoption in African newsrooms is often individual-led as opposed to being guided by formal organisational initiatives and strategies. Research contributors described navigating AI tools independently, undertaking self-directed training and experimentation to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving digital environment.

The research found that in these newsrooms, AI adoption is shaped by structural barriers that disproportionately affect women journalists.

In practice, contributors note that as women journalists, they are often assigned "soft" tasks, such as editing, while simultaneously carrying the largely invisible responsibility of safeguarding professional and ethical standards from errors and biases in AI outputs.
Contributors also shared that caregiving and domestic responsibilities at home further limit opportunities for self-directed learning, constraining their ability to assume strategic roles or influence newsroom innovation.

AI tools can actively erode women's professional voice, generating outputs that echo and reinforce male-centric norms as well as Westernised aesthetics, making it even harder for women's perspectives to be recognised and valued in the newsroom.

A recurring theme among contributors was that they shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that AI tools reflect their professional voice, capturing both the effort required to assert authorship and the risk that their presence may be marginalised.

This gendered double bind demonstrates that AI adoption can inadvertently reinforce existing disparities, even as it offers opportunities for efficiency, innovation, and new platforms for visibility.

Some legacy newsrooms often perceive AI as inconsistent with journalistic ethics, sometimes framing its use as **"lazy journalism,"**

whereas newer digital media outlets adopt AI to keep pace with the rapid demands of the evolving media landscape. These differing rationales influence how contributors experienced AI: in some contexts, they navigate resistance and skepticism, while in others, they face the pressures of rapid technological adaptation.

The absence of formal policies and limited leadership understanding compounds these challenges, creating knowledge gaps that disproportionately affect women in the newsroom. Where organisational support exists, it often prioritises innovation or audience-specific initiatives rather than comprehensive, gender-responsive governance.

For instance, a newsroom in Central Africa integrated AI primarily to enhance efficiency and meet fast-paced digital news demands. Yet resource constraints limit their ability to scale these tools for broader impact. In contrast, a West African newsroom developed localised AI tools tailored to women's realities, emphasising inclusivity, representation, and responsiveness to community needs.

These examples from our study illustrate that AI adoption is shaped not only by technological possibilities but also by financial realities, strategic

priorities, and social contexts, and that these factors intersect with gendered inequalities, influencing who benefits from and who is burdened by AI in newsrooms.

This study reveals that despite these innovations, AI tools

continue to reproduce gender biases, including stereotypical representations in imagery and default assumptions about professional roles.

AI reshapes newsroom labour along existing gendered lines: routine reporting and bulletin tasks, often assigned to women, are increasingly automated, while men retain front-facing, high-profile roles. Virtual AI outputs, such as automated anchors, may further obscure women journalists' contributions, failing to credit human input and highlighting persistent structural and visibility gaps.

AI adoption in African newsrooms offers both opportunities and challenges. AI improves efficiency, multitasking, and the discovery of under-reported stories, boosting newsroom capacity and audience engagement.

However, as contributors note, over-reliance on AI can threaten journalistic originality, diversity of style, and long-term job security, emphasising the need for human oversight and ethical responsibility.

In this context, women journalists play a key role in reducing these risks, maintaining accuracy, and ensuring content reflects local and gendered realities.

The findings of this study contribute to feminist media scholarship and inform the development of a practical guideline derived from

contributors' recommendations to promote inclusive AI practices in African newsrooms.

Finally, this study underscores the urgent need for gender-responsive policies, targeted training, mentorship programs, inclusive leadership, and localised AI tools.

Adequate financial and resource support is essential to ensure equitable access to AI and prevent the widening of existing gender gaps.

By centering the experiences, labour, and agency of women journalists, this research offers actionable insights for newsroom managers, policymakers, and media development organisations seeking to foster ethical, inclusive, and effective AI adoption across African newsrooms.

Introduction

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in newsrooms is reshaping journalism globally, presenting both transformative possibilities and complex challenges **(Diakopoulos, 2019; Beckett, 2019).** In African newsrooms, where systemic gendered inequalities already shape professional experiences, the adoption of AI introduces new dynamics that may reinforce, alter, or mitigate these disparities **(Akinbobola, 2020)**.

Research by African Women in Media (AWiM) and others has documented persistent challenges for women journalists, including disparities in pay and promotion, unequal division of labour, limited access to decision-making, and exposure to safety risks ranging from sexual harassment to online and offline violence **(AWiM, 2024; 2021)**.

These longstanding structural inequalities intersect with emerging technological innovations, making it critical to understand how AI adoption may further impact women's professional trajectories, influence newsroom hierarchies, and shape the broader media ecosystem (AWiM, 2021).

AI tools, ranging from content generation, transcription, and editing software to data analytics, audience engagement platforms, and decision-support technologies, are increasingly present in African newsrooms.

Preliminary findings from this study indicate that these tools are not simply technological enhancements; they interact with existing newsroom practices in ways that amplify workload pressures, exacerbate gendered inequalities, or, in some cases,

offer new opportunities for efficiency and professional recognition. By foregrounding the experiences of African women journalists, this study sheds light on both the risks and opportunities inherent in AI adoption, situating their insights as critical for shaping ethical, equitable, and gender-sensitive practices in newsrooms.

Research Objectives

This research project was aimed at examining the adoption and impact of AI technologies in African newsrooms, with a particular focus on understanding how these changes influence existing gendered inequalities experienced by women journalists.

To investigate the extent and nature of AI adoption in African newsrooms and its influence on the professional experiences of women journalists, including workload, access to decision-making, and recognition of expertise.

To analyse how AI adoption may reinforce, alter, or mitigate existing gender disparities, including pay gaps, promotion opportunities, division of labor, and safety concerns both online and offline.

To develop policy guidelines aimed at promoting gender-sensitive AI integration in African newsrooms, informed directly by participants' insights and expectations for practical tools and guidance.

To explore these dynamics, participants were recognised as contributors throughout the research process.

Insights from their responses during pilot testing helped refine the data collection guides, informed the interpretation of results, and provided recommendations for improving the research process.

Their perspectives were recognised as central to the study and shaped how the findings were understood.

Through focus group discussions, paired interviews, key-informant interviews, and surveys, contributors reflected on their direct experiences with AI tools, highlighting both the opportunities these technologies provide and the challenges they pose in their day-to-day work in the newsroom.

These women also contributed their perspectives on what an equitable AI guideline or toolkit should include, highlighting practical considerations often overlooked in top-down policy discussions.

Preliminary findings from these engagements reveal patterns in AI adoption, variations in awareness and understanding of AI, and how these tools intersect with existing gendered inequalities in pay, workload, professional recognition, and safety.

These insights lay the groundwork for the analysis, highlighting how African women journalists are actively navigating AI tools, mitigating biases, and striving to maintain ethical and professional standards while asserting their voice in the newsroom.

Research Context

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Research
Context

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly reshaping newsrooms worldwide, automating tasks such as reporting, fact-checking, story idea generation, audience engagement, and analytics.

Scholars, including Diakopoulos and Beckett, have highlighted both the potential of these tools to improve efficiency and the ethical tensions they introduce, while **Marconi (2020)** and **Graefe (2016)** emphasise how automation is changing the very nature of journalistic work.

Kioko (2022) observes that in many newsrooms, AI tends to be integrated into front-facing workflows, such as news gathering, packaging, and distribution, without systematic guidance or oversight.

Yet, as **Simon (2024)** notes, these efficiency-focused narratives often leave unexamined how AI reorganises power, gendered labour, and safety dynamics within newsrooms.

In African newsrooms, adoption is frequently experimental and "bottom-up," with journalists individually navigating costs, technical challenges, and ethical decisions. Ogola (2023) highlights that broader structural issues, including technological divides and uneven internet access, shape how AI tools are used.

Mabweazara (2013; 2021); Nyirenda-Jere, and Biru (2015) have documented how the absence of organisational policies or training programs leaves journalists to make high-stakes editorial choices independently, a burden noted by Pavlik (2021) and Carlson (2025) as both ethically and practically significant.

For women journalists, these challenges are particularly acute. Several studies demonstrate persistent inequalities in pay, promotion, and access to decision-making,

as well as exposure to safety risks ranging from harassment to online abuse (Byerly, 2011; Akinbobola, 2020; Govender and Muringa, 2025; WAN-IFRA, 2020).

UNESCO (2025), Gray and Suri (2019) point out that unequal access to AI training and limited networks often leave women behind, particularly in contexts where adoption depends on individual initiative.

The invisible labour performed by women, often involving editing, verifying, and humanising AI outputs, is essential for journalistic quality yet remains systematically unrecognised and uncompensated.

As D'Ignazio and Klein (2024) argue, this labour is unequally distributed along gendered lines; tasks involving correction and contextual knowledge are routinely assigned to women, yet excluded from assessments of their technological "efficiency," and lack commensurate financial reward.

These gendered dynamics intersect with safety, trust, and exposure to harm. Buolamwini and Gebru's (2018) research shows that AI-generated content can reproduce societal biases, privileging male voices, while Noble (2018) and Osei-Appiah (2019) highlight how women in public-facing roles are particularly vulnerable to online harassment and misinformation campaigns.

Such patterns, according to Deloitte (2025), create a "technology trust gap," discouraging adoption or limiting women's ability to fully leverage AI tools in their work.

While scholarship on AI adoption in newsrooms is growing, it often treats "the journalist" as a homogeneous category, thereby obscuring the gendered dimensions of technological integration (Ogola, 2023; Solomons and Ndlovu, 2024).

This oversight is significant, given that baseline research consistently shows women journalists already navigate systemic inequalities in pay, career progression, and safety (Akinbobola, 2020; Byerly, 2011; WAN-IFRA, 2020).

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Consequently, without a deliberate, gender-sensitive approach, AI integration in African newsrooms risks exacerbating disparities rather than fostering equitable opportunities (Mabweazara, 2021; Gray and Suri, 2019; UNESCO, 2025; Erastus, 2023).

This study attempts to address these realities by centering African women journalists as active contributors.

Through participatory methods, it explores how AI adoption affects their professional experiences, workload, decision-making power, access to training, and safety.

Research contributors also provided insightful perspectives on what gender-sensitive AI guidelines and toolkits should include.

By foregrounding these perspectives, the study positions African women journalists as experts shaping how AI can be ethically and equitably integrated into newsroom practices, providing actionable knowledge for policy, guidelines, and awareness initiatives.
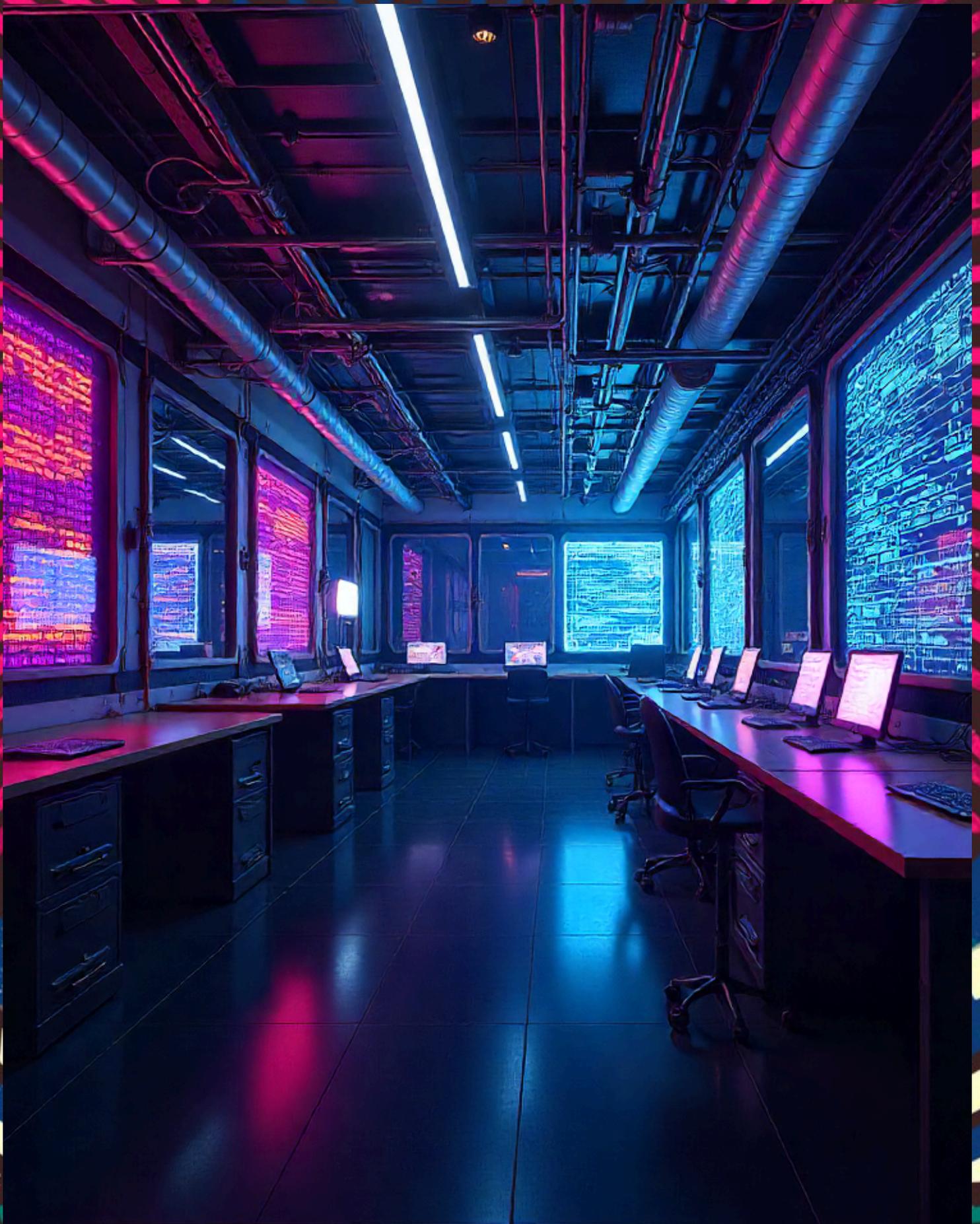
Methodology

Methodology

To understand how AI is shaping newsroom practices, this study adopted a qualitative, participatory approach guided by a feminist epistemological framework, centering the lived experiences of African women journalists.

It aimed to capture not just what AI tools are being used, but how these journalists navigate, negotiate, and sometimes resist their effects, especially in relation to gendered power dynamics.

Contributors were recruited through the African Women in Media

(AWiM) network, media unions, and partnerships with newsrooms across Africa, spanning West, East, Southern, and Francophone regions.

Twenty-four (24) journalists were engaged through paired interviews and virtual Focus Group Discussions, complemented by nine survey responses to capture and triangulate broader patterns and perceptions.

This combination allowed the study to explore both detailed experiences and trends in AI adoption.

During these discussions, contributors shared how they use AI tools for writing, editing, fact-checking, image generation, and other newsroom tasks, often without recognising these everyday interactions as forms of AI adoption. They were asked to reflect on what they would want to see in AI guidelines or toolkits, ensuring the research captured actionable insights grounded in their realities.

Analysis was iterative and reflexive. Drawing on verbatim transcripts and survey responses, themes were identified,

coding both inductively and deductively to ensure that participants' voices remained at the center of the interpretation.

Throughout the research process, the positionality of the researcher and organisation commissioning the research were considered for

the potential influence on the interactions with the participants and the interpretation of findings.

This reflexivity helped maintain the perspectives of African women journalists at the center, recognising them as experts in their own experiences while questioning dominant techno-centric and male-centered narratives in AI and media.

In keeping with a feminist and participatory approach, the study intentionally also refers to the women journalists in this study as contributors rather than merely participants. This framing recognises their expertise, acknowledges the collaborative nature of the inquiry, and challenges hierarchical traditions in research where knowledge is extracted rather than co-produced.

Several limitations of this research are acknowledged. The novelty of AI in these journalists' work meant that some did not recognise everyday tools, such as transcription software or grammar checkers, as AI, which constrained discussions of broader adoption. I clarified what counts as AI with contributors using concrete examples and complemented interviews with documented evidence in academic articles and research reports to address this.

While AI uptake remained uneven and often experimental, this approach helped capture a more holistic picture of practices. As a qualitative study, findings are transferable rather than statistically generalisable, offering rich insights into similar contexts.

Other limitations include self-reporting biases and the digital divide, which may have excluded journalists in low-connectivity areas or with limited exposure to AI.

Despite these constraints, the methodology was intentionally participatory, iterative, and reflexive, ensuring that the insights reflect the realities and priorities of African women journalists while contributing to practical guidance for AI adoption in media.
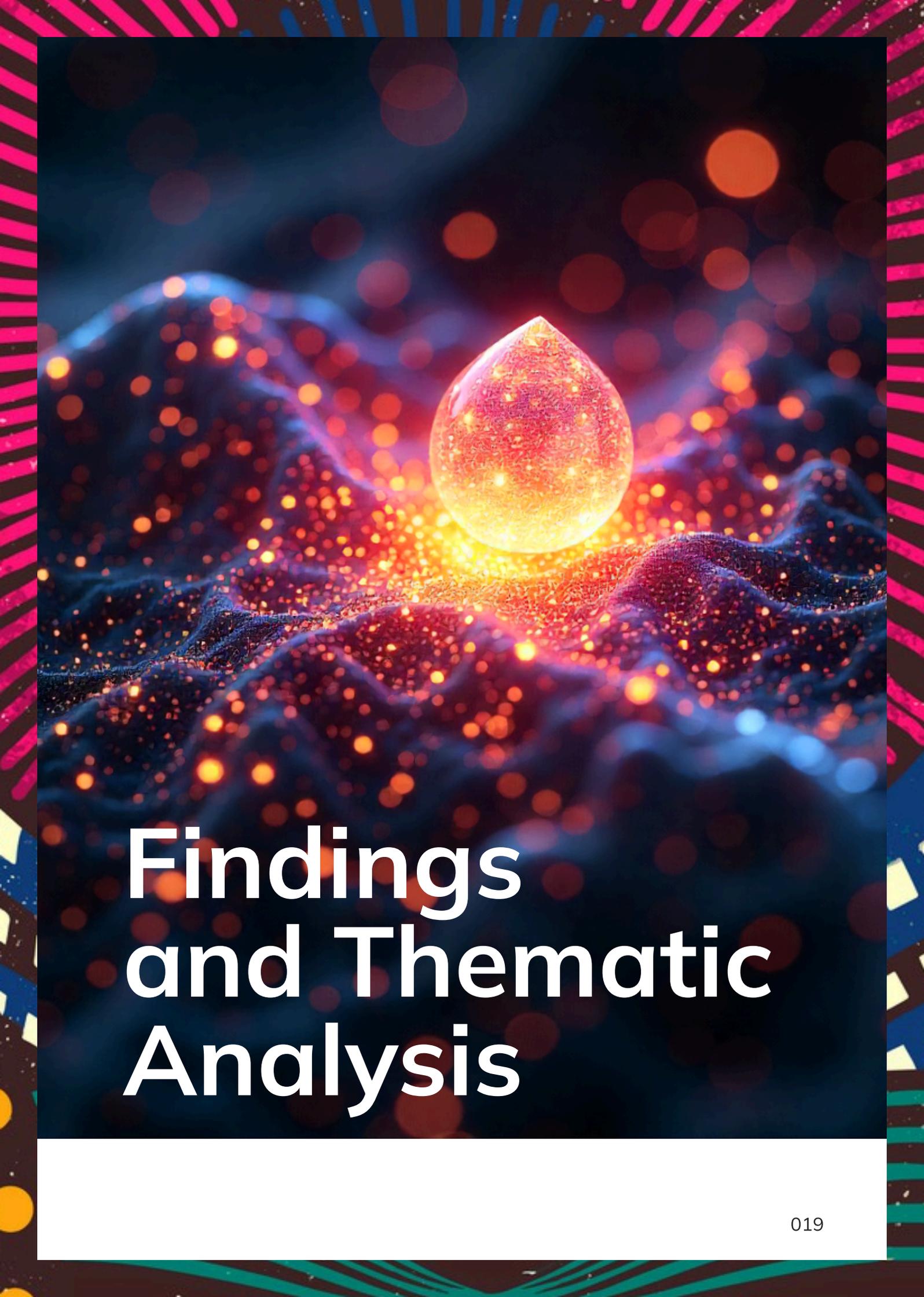
Findings and Thematic Analysis

Findings&
Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: AI Adoption, Organisational Policies, and Training

AI adoption in African newsrooms is uneven and often driven by individual journalists rather than organisational initiatives. Women journalists described taking the initiative to train themselves on AI tools, navigating a fast-paced digital environment to remain competitive.

> One contributor reflected: ... most of us journalists, it is not the organisation that did the training for us. We did it personally at our own level.
>
> (Speaker 1, FGD, Nigeria)

This self-directed approach highlights both the resourcefulness of the contributors in this study and the gaps in newsroom support.

Such dynamics exacerbate existing inequalities: men are more likely to be seen as "innovators," while women's self-training and ethical oversight remain invisible **(UNESCO, 2024).** This self-directed upskilling, undertaken in a policy vacuum, constitutes a critical form of invisible labour. Far from a neutral act of professional development, this individual burden is a direct consequence of organisational failure.

This dynamic reflects what **Wajcman (2004)** identifies as the co-construction of technology and social relations, where a lack of institutional support ensures new tools are absorbed into, and exacerbate, preexisting gendered power structures.

This process effectively downloads the organisational cost of the digital transition onto women journalists, a pattern that echoes findings on the gendered burdens of precarious knowledge work **(Gregg, 2011; Unwin, 2017)**.

It represents a privatisation of technological adaptation, whereby the systemic cost of integrating AI is offloaded onto the women who contributed to this study, thereby reinforcing existing inequities through uncompensated work that widens, rather than closes, the gendered gap **(Brandusescu, 2025).**

Another contributor explained:

we don't even have policy in our newsroom. We just go about using them.

(Speaker 1, Paired Interview, Djibouti)

In practice, this fragmented adoption leaves many ethical, gendered, and labour-related concerns unaddressed.

Some unwritten newsroom rules focus narrowly on transparency, acknowledging AI use in editing news articles but largely overlooking or failing to address its use in the research or story generation, including activities such as sourcing and verifying information,

summarising content, generating story ideas, or supporting investigative work, which remain unacknowledged, unregulated, and unsupported by newsroom policies.

This narrow scope not only leaves ethical, accountability, and skill-related issues unresolved they also fall short of supporting women journalists to safely, equitably, and effectively integrate AI into their work.

but also exacerbates gendered inequities: women journalists often have uneven access to AI tools, face increased unrecognised labour, and are more exposed to risks associated with unregulated AI use.

These challenges are compounded by caregiving responsibilities, unequal workload distribution, and the need to train in AI, often after long working hours, since organisations rarely provide structured support or formal guidance.

> ...most of us journalists, it is not the organisation that did the training for us. We did it personally at our own level.
>
> (Speaker 1, FGD1, Nigeria)

This reliance on personal initiative reflects a complex reality: women journalists often face structural gaps in professional support while simultaneously navigating gendered expectations around care and domestic responsibilities.

Yet, their proactive engagement with technological learning also highlights agency and resilience, demonstrating that they are not passive recipients or disadvantaged users but active shapers of their own professional trajectories, challenging stereotypes about women's technical competence in the process. The result is a gendered digital labour landscape in which women must simultaneously sustain households, deliver journalism, and carry out the invisible ethical and technical corrections that AI adoption demands. Despite these challenges, African women journalists who contributed to this study are actively navigating these gaps, asserting their expertise, shaping AI

use in ways that safeguard professional standards, and ensuring their voices remain visible in the newsroom. In taking ownership of their professional growth, they actively challenge stereotypes about women's technical competence, shaping their careers on their own terms.

In newsrooms where AI adoption was guided by organisational initiatives or strategies, the focus often prioritised innovation or audience-specific needs rather than comprehensive governance. For example, CITE in Zimbabwe integrated AI as part of a tech-driven mandate but continues to struggle with huge financial costs and long-term sustainability. In contrast, Women FM in Nigeria developed a localised AI tool tailored to women's realities, addressing gaps left by

Western-designed systems. These examples highlight the different rationales for AI adoption across contexts, efficiency versus local relevance.

Despite the foregoing, newsroom leadership continues to play a decisive role in shaping these dynamics. In some legacy newsrooms, managers' unfamiliarity with AI creates a disconnect between decision-makers and journalists experimenting with the tools. Some newsroom leaders even dismiss AI adoption as "lazy journalism," a perception that discourages formal uptake and limits organisational support.

Contributors to this study note that this knowledge gap at the leadership level compounds the challenges they face as African women journalists, who are left to adopt AI individually while managing the risks of invisibility and undervaluation of their labour.

Existing global scholarship frames AI adoption in journalism as an issue of automation, efficiency, and cost-saving (**Carlson, 2023; Beckett, 2019)**. However, these debates are largely gender-neutral and Western-centric.

This study highlights the gendered dimension of invisible labour in African newsrooms: women are adopting AI individually, without organisational support, while simultaneously safeguarding ethical standards.

This finding challenges techno-deterministic assumptions in the literature that frame adoption as a purely technical or organisational decision **(Sagan and Leighton, 2010; Brookings, 2024)**;

Kioko, 2022) Marconi (2020); and **Graefe, (2016)** Instead, drawing on feminist science and technology studies (**Wajcman, 2004; Wajcman, 2007; Suchman, 2007)**, it reveals AI adoption as a socially situated and gendered process, where contributors in this study undertake significant invisible labour to negotiate their professional legitimacy and identity within pre-existing power structures. This means that the integration of AI in newsrooms forces these women into a labor-intensive negotiation of professional legitimacy and identity. They are not merely learning new tools; they are performing the invisible, compensatory work required to fit their identities and expertise into a technological system that was not designed with them in mind, a dynamic that echoes the burdens of precarious knowledge work more broadly **(Gregg, 2011)**.

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Theme 2: Gendered Negotiation of AI in Journalism: Preserving Authentic Voice and Journalistic Values

For the research contributors, AI adoption is not only about efficiency; it is a gendered negotiation of voice, ethics, and legitimacy. While they experiment with AI for routine tasks, they engage in significant invisible labour to preserve their authentic storytelling and professional credibility. This involves re-checking, refining, and reshaping AI outputs to ensure accuracy and alignment with their journalistic voice.

A contributor stressed:

I need every word to reflect my voice.

(Speaker 1, Zimbabwe, Paired Interview)

This invisible work, often unrecognised by organisations, is gendered because the extra labour of refining and reworking AI outputs is not simply about correcting technical errors; it is a form of negotiation within unequal newsroom structures. By insisting on preserving their distinctive voice, women are not only resisting the homogenisation that AI imposes but also carving out a professional niche in contexts where their authority is often questioned. This insistence goes beyond stylistic preference: it is an assertion of authorship and legitimacy in a profession where women's contributions are frequently minimised or dismissed.

Furthermore, another contributor noted, **"We have to always do two or three layers of double-checking on anything that we put out." (Speaker 1, FGD2, Djibuoti)**. This vigilance, though undervalued, is precisely what ensures that

journalism in Africa remains credible, diverse, and accountable to the general public.

As a contributor explained:
"AI is not an excuse to become mentally lazy... you still need to read it again."

(FGD 1, Speaker 2, Nigeria)

Here, the correction is not just a technical oversight; it is about upholding professional ethics and resisting narratives that could erase women's perspectives.

The invisible, unpaid work of "fixing" AI is deeply gendered because women are already expected to perform additional labour in both professional and domestic spheres **(Gregg, 2009; Duffy, 2017)**.
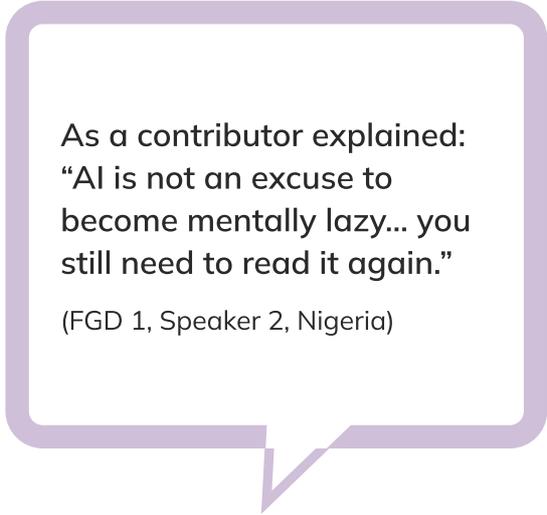
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> (FGD 1, Speaker 2, Nigeria)

In the newsroom, this labour extends to protecting journalistic integrity when AI threatens to collapse diverse voices into standardised outputs. This negotiation mirrors what feminist scholars describe as "boundary work" (Gieryn, 1999), the everyday practices through which marginalised professionals secure legitimacy in contested fields. For contributors, refining AI outputs is a form of boundary work that asserts their credibility in male-dominated spaces. The use of tools like ChatGPT's paid version to retain individual tone, as

> One contributor noted: (this) is a strategy to "make sure my tone is the same
>
> (Speaker 1, Paired Interview, Zimbabwe)

Such practices highlight that women are not only

compensating for AI's flaws but actively shaping its role in the newsroom to protect their professional identities. Research on emotional and aesthetic labour helps explain this further **(Hochschild, 1983; Elias, Gill, and Scharff, 2017)**. Just as women in other professions are expected to perform additional affective work to sustain their organisational legitimacy, the correction of AI outputs by the contributors in this study represents a gendered expectation to safeguard credibility, a task less visible but no less essential. This task of preserving their voice, which women journalists perform with AI, resonates with broader feminist critiques of unpaid digital and cultural labour: it is simultaneously undervalued by organisations yet remains crucial to sustaining journalistic integrity.

African feminist scholarship provides further insight into why this negotiation is both necessary and overlooked. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (1997) reminds us that colonial and patriarchal structures have historically devalued African women's knowledge, rendering their authority invisible within formal institutions. Within journalism, this manifests as women's "correction work" being dismissed as peripheral rather than central to innovation. Sylvia Tamale (2020) and Ifi Amadiume (2015) similarly argue that African women often bear the dual burden of resisting imported, Eurocentric frameworks while asserting locally grounded forms of expertise. In the newsroom, this translates into women pushing back against AI systems that privilege Western linguistic norms, beauty ideals, and male-centric defaults. For example, when AI outputs defaults to male to represent professional women or generates avatars that erase

African women's identities. One contributor reported her interactions as follows:

> I prompted it that I want.. a picture of an African woman. It gave me a white woman instead. I also prompted it to give me names of prominent African women, then it gave me some woman from University of Zimbabwe...
> (it was) so suspicious...
> (I discovered) that woman does not exist. I had to prompt it again.
>
> (Speaker 2, Kenya, Paired Interview)

Seen through this lens, women journalists' insistence on preserving their own voices is not only professional boundary work but also a decolonial act. By reshaping AI outputs to reflect African realities,

they challenge both technological imperialism and patriarchal newsroom hierarchies. Their invisible labour thus sustains not only journalistic integrity but also the cultural legitimacy of African women's perspectives in a rapidly digitising newsroom.

The responsibility of safeguarding professional standards in the face of unregulated AI use thus falls disproportionately on women. Women also framed themselves as ethical guards of journalism, emphasising that responsible AI use demands active human oversight. One of the women in this study argued:

Especially on statistics, you really need to verify...so that you don't rely on it.

(Speaker 1, Paired Interview, Kenya)

African women's identities. One contributor reported her interactions as follows:

Another noted: "responsible use of AI means we just have to narrow it to the ethics of the journalism profession... you are first a journalist, and we have our ethics, accuracy, and the rest. So you have to be able to internalise that while you are using AI... when you remember that you are a journalist... knowing your ethics as a journalist, knowing your house style... You have to do the work.

(Speaker 2, FGD1, Nigeria)

This ethical vigilance is not only about accuracy, but also about resisting AI's structural biases, such as hallucinated outputs or stereotyping.

Several contributors recounted how AI defaulted to male figures when asked to generate content about professionals or political leaders, thereby erasing women's representation. Others pointed to how AI's Western-trained datasets misrepresent African women, producing images or avatars that reinforce Eurocentric beauty ideals and marginalise African identities. The case of "Alice," an AI anchor at CITE critiqued for embodying slender, Western aesthetics, exemplifies a tension. To navigate these issues, contributors reveal that they take up the role of corrective custodians for AI's gendered failures. This custodianship is a double-edged sword, manifesting as a significant burden of invisible labour, from correcting biased outputs and protecting their professional voice to balancing these new technological demands with existing caregiving responsibilities.

Paradoxically, this very burden becomes a source of agency. In some legacy newsrooms where the leaders dismiss AI as **"lazy journalism"** or remain unfamiliar with its potential, women journalists in this study stated that they have become the de facto custodians of responsible adoption. By insisting on transparency, human oversight, and ethical standards, these women are not merely fixing problems; they are actively shaping the foundations of responsible AI integration to ensure the technology serves the profession's values.

It is important to note that in these Newsrooms, AI is not creating new inequalities but creatively amplifying pre-existing ones.

The same structural issues that limit women's access to training and reinforce stereotypes casting them as unsuited for technical leadership now dictate who bears the cost of AI's adoption and who is empowered to guide it.

As one contributor observed

> "...women... are regarded as people who like homely things, who are wives... who like family things and not really the office jobs. I have worked for more than three newsrooms..many times even the trainings, let's say it's in AI training....mostly men are chosen to take part in that training and women are left out, are left behind. And this makes me think ..people still, they play with the gender stereotypes..
>
> (Speaker 3, FGD2, Zimbabwe

This relegation to "soft" tasks means men are more likely to be positioned as visible innovators, while women's self-training, ethical

oversight, and behind-the-scenes experimentation remain invisible.

Over time, these risks translate into fewer promotion opportunities, persistent pay disparities, and deeper structural exclusions in African newsrooms **(Akinbobola, 2020).**

Safety risks further compound these inequities. Women journalists already face disproportionate harassment offline, and AI's generative capacities introduce new forms of harm **(Posetti et al, 2021)**. Its ability to produce deepfakes, misinformation, or hallucinated outputs heightens reputational vulnerabilities. In societies where women's credibility is already fragile, the possibility of AI-generated fabrications carries consequences for their personal and professional lives.

This aligns with global findings that online abuse and misinformation disproportionately target women journalists (ibid), but here it is exacerbated by the layered vulnerabilities of gender, class, and race in African contexts.

The research contributors also voiced concerns about AI's tendency to homogenise editorial voice, threatening the diversity and richness that women have historically brought into newsrooms. For them AI cannot replicate the emotion of being on the ground. The risk of collapsing nuance into a standardised, machine-like output erodes the editorial diversity that African women journalists fought to carve out in male-dominated media spaces. To resist this, some of the contributors deliberately use AI tools only as assistants while maintaining human-authored storytelling.

This allows them to leverage efficiency while ensuring that their journalistic voice remains intact. Despite unequal structures, women are innovating around AI in ways that reflect their dual accountability to audiences and ethics. Outlets like Women FM in Nigeria demonstrate a community-driven approach:

> Nimi reads news at 3 pm, but I still do 6 pm live, our listeners need that human connection.
>
> (Speaker 2, Paired Interview 3, Women FM)

Every AI feature at the station is tested with a community advisory group before full adoption: **"If grandmothers in villages say it feels cold, we redesign until it feels right." (Speaker 1, Paired Interview 3, WomenFM).** This highlights a uniquely gendered and localised approach to AI integration which is grounding technological adoption in community care, cultural resonance, and ethical oversight.

Ultimately, this study revealed that the contributors approach AI with both optimism and apprehension. While recognising its potential to enhance efficiency, they carry the dual burden of ensuring outputs meet professional standards while defending the credibility of journalism itself. As one contributor noted:

> I feel like my job is being taken for granted....AI is now making it easier for people to feel like they're journalists... they just write... people don't care.
>
> (Speaker 4, FGD2, Zimbabwe)

Yet others insisted on the enduring value of creativity and human judgment:

> I don't have a fear of job loss... it still takes creativity and intelligence to use [AI] for what it's intended... There's still that relevance for journalism.
>
> (Speaker 3, FGD2, Ghana)

Global research on AI in journalism often emphasises automation, efficiency, or abstract ethical risks (Carlson, 2023; Marconi, 2020). This study contributes a distinctly gendered perspective: women journalists in African newsrooms are not passive adopters but active negotiators, carrying unpaid and unrecognised labour while shaping responsible practices.

They resist AI's biases, safeguard authentic voices, and root technological adoption in cultural accountability. In doing so, they show that AI's future in African journalism is not merely technical but deeply social, gendered, and negotiated within unequal newsroom structures.

Theme 3: Impact of AI in African Newsrooms

Redistribution of Labour, Job Insecurity, and the Political Economy of Automation

Many contributors have located AI's impact within a broader trend of newsroom restructuring, where the technology is used to justify reducing the workforce size. One of the women noted that "For a newsroom that has maybe 50 people, it will end up with five" (Speaker 2, Mini FGD2, Zimbabwe). This reflects deep-seated fear: AI reconfigures labour costs and staffing models in ways that can produce large-scale layoffs. These shifts are not neutral; rather, they reflect organisational strategies that prioritise efficiency and cost-reduction over professional development and public-interest journalism (McChesney, 2008; Wasserman, 2018). This redistribution also threatens professional identity. As one contributor observed:

Feminist labour theory illuminates how such devaluations disproportionately affect women, who are often concentrated in junior, editorial, and verification roles (Hochschild, 1983; Moyo and Nyamnjoh, 2019).

Automation, therefore, risks undermining both headcount and pathways to leadership, reinforcing gendered inequities in African newsrooms.

> For a newsroom that has maybe 50 people, it will end up with five"
>
> (Speaker 2, Mini FGD2, Zimbabwe)

Impact on Journalistic Depth and Quality

Beyond competition, contributors raised concerns about AI's effect on journalistic depth and quality. They critiqued the prioritisation of speed over insight in digital journalism:

> The story must come out and must come at the right time. We must get the numbers that we must be the first to report it, you know, all eyes must be on our space....They don't care...There's no insight
>
> (Speaker 1, Paired Interview 2, Ghana)

While recognising AI's utility for efficiency, one contributor emphasised the need to balance technology with professional standards: "Meet up the digital space with practical journalism."

(Speaker 1, Paired Interview 2, Ghana). Concerns also centred on the limitations of AI in producing contextually reliable knowledge.

On issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM), contributors noted a scarcity of accurate data

> One of the biggest areas whenever we're trying to use AI that we see that there is truly a lack of, you know, concrete and reliable information and data.
>
> (Speaker 1, Paired Interview 2, Djibouti)

These gaps risk reinforcing epistemic inequalities where African stories remain underrepresented in global information systems.

Contributors further stressed the irreplaceable role of human connection in reporting.

The **"human factor"** was seen as essential to preventing journalism from becoming **"less human and more automated, like the news is kind of getting manufactured."** Ethical frameworks were therefore advocated to guide AI adoption, with emphasis on combining **"reporting, fact-checking, and confidentiality"** while preserving **"the human touch."** Such concerns resonate with broader debates about the erosion of critical inquiry in AI-mediated news production **(Lewis and Westlund, 2014)**.

Shifting Newsroom Routines: Efficiency Gains, Time-Economies, and the Fragile Value of "Authenticity"

Beyond the challenges, many contributors found AI to be a valuable asset, significantly accelerating their research and aiding with multitasking. One contributor reflected that AI "gave me quite a number of... areas [on female GBV]... **I had never thought of... female kayayei... They were like one of the hot spots**" (Speaker 1, FGD, West Africa), while one of the contributors, Dam noted AI's ability to "carry out several tasks at the same time." These insights align with media studies research on how technology is expanding news agendas and uncovering overlooked beats, demonstrating its function as both a new factor shaping media content at the routine level **(Shoemaker and Reese, 2014)** and a transformative agent within a deeply mediatized

news environment, altering what issues become visible to the public **(Couldry and Hepp, 2016).** However, the push for efficiency creates a fundamental tension with the journalists' need to preserve their unique storytelling style and authenticity. This tension was summarised by one contributor: **"I think about it as well....If I was to use AI to do my writing, then why would my organisation need me?"** She continues that AI is "a good tool," but worries about "the lack of authenticity in work...the main thing is authentic information and content." She insisted on preserving her authorial tone:

> I would still want to use... the way that I've always written my tone... so that my space is not ideally taken by AI.
>
> Peaker 1, Mini FGD, Zimbabwe).

From the accounts of the contributors, it became clear that women frequently absorb the ethical and mentoring labour that is required to maintain standards, and this is a redistribution of invisible labour rather than its elimination (Hochschild, 1983; Fricker, 2007; Moyo and Nyamnjoh, 2019). While AI creates time for exploration,

> **By 2:00 PM, I'm mostly done... I get to explore... I have extra time.**
>
> (Speaker 3, Mini FGD, Nigeria)

this benefit is contingent on controlling how that time is allocated, especially within gendered professional hierarchies.

Credibility Risks, Hallucinations, and the Burden of Verification

Contributors highlighted recurrent challenges with credibility when AI outputs are accepted uncritically. Lynnette's account of a fabricated MP profile is telling:

> If AI is supposed to make my life easy... and then IT tells me lies, that's very frustrating... it mentioned this MP studied law (and we published an article saying that)... people started fact-checking and insulting the MP... it compromises your integrity... the damage was already done."

> We have to always do two or three layers of double-checking on anything that we put out."
>
> (Speaker 1, Paired Interview, Zimbabwe)

The "hallucinatory" nature of AI does not merely introduce factual errors; it systematically generates a new layer of epistemic labour aimed at repairing the credibility it undermines. As with this contributor's experience of a fabricated MP profile illustrates, the consequence of an uncritically accepted AI output is a direct assault on journalistic integrity: "the damage was already done." In response, journalists are forced into exhaustive verification rituals, "two or three layers of double-checking", which expands routine fact-checking at the expense of investigative depth.

This critical work of verification and credibility management is not neutrally distributed. It aligns with feminist theories that frame such correction and maintenance as a form of epistemic care work **(Fricker, 2007; Hochschild, 2012)**, a responsibility for upholding knowledge and trust that is disproportionately assigned to women.

This dynamic reinforces the insights of African feminist scholarship, which documents how the burden of maintaining social and institutional integrity often falls on those positioned lower in the newsroom's gendered and racial hierarchy, those with the least institutional power to shape the technology, yet the most to lose from its failures thereby reproducing systemic inequities **(Amadiume, 2015; Nnaemeka, 1998; Moyo, (2020)**. Thus, the labour of correcting AI's "lies" becomes a modern, technological manifestation of a longstanding pattern: the downloading of epistemic responsibility onto women to safeguard systems they did not design, a labour that remains largely invisible and uncompensated.

Theme 4: The Future of AI in African Newsrooms – Fears, Expectations, and Perceptions

The introduction of AI into African newsrooms is being experienced as both an opportunity and a challenge, shaping the professional landscape in complex and gendered ways.

Discussions with contributors revealed that in the newsroom, AI is not merely a technical tool but a site of negotiation where ethics, cultural representation, professional legitimacy, and job security intersect.

AI as an Opportunity and the Pitfalls

Contributors acknowledged AI's potential to enhance reach and efficiency but consistently pointed out its structural and operational limitations. One contributor, for instance, contrasted this reality with her vision for a truly inclusive technological adoption:

We are trying to see that Nimi is able to reach everybody...we are working on having many different languages go through it.

(Speaker 1, Women FM, Nigeria).

At the same time, she acknowledged the pitfalls:

Right now, when you speak to Nimi, Nimi is only able to reply in English...we want everybody included.

(Speaker 1, Women FM, Nigeria).

These statements capture the dual nature of AI adoption: it promises increased access and innovation, but it is still limited by the existing systems, requiring active intervention by journalists to ensure inclusivity and relevance. Similarly, technical limitations like CITE's Alice's inability to "pronounce local names," which particularly frustrated audiences who were "very particular about names," were noted.

Over time, listeners adapted. Ensuring that AI tools recognise African contexts is a persistent challenge, given that most technologies are designed in the West and rarely account for the cultural, linguistic, and gendered realities of African newsrooms.

This lack of contextual recognition, evident even in AI avatars that appear Westernised and fail to reflect local women's features, reflects what **Birhane (2020)**

describes as the "coloniality of AI," where tools developed in the Global North reproduce Eurocentric norms and marginalise African identities. Such biases go beyond symbolic exclusion; they shape how technologies are received and whose realities are made visible. For the women in this study, this cultural erasure feeds into deeper concerns about professional legitimacy and value within newsrooms. As **Akpan (2024)** notes, technologies are not neutral; they embed the priorities and power relations of those who design them. When Western-centric systems dominate African media spaces, efficiency gains risk amplifying inequalities rather than distributing benefits equitably. These concerns naturally feed into broader fears about job security and professional competition, as the adoption of

AI privileges those whose identities, skills, and access are aligned with dominant technological frameworks.

Job Security and Professional Competition

Job security emerged as a recurrent concern in these discussions, with contributors articulating the dual impact of AI. On one hand, AI was seen as a tool that could streamline newsroom tasks and enhance efficiency; on the other, it posed significant risks to editorial integrity and employment stability. Several contributors framed this tension around agency and skill acquisition, noting that journalists who quickly adapt and acquire AI competencies are more likely to remain relevant, as newsrooms increasingly privilege technological proficiency. This reflects what **Gray and Suri (2019)** describe in Ghost Work as the new **"digital precariat,"** where workers are compelled to

continually upskill to avoid displacement, often without institutional support or recognition.

> One contributor noted, "People that know how to use it are the ones that will take over your jobs...organisations are looking for people who can work smarter now.
> (Speaker 2, Paired Interview, Nigeria)

AI adoption, therefore, introduces a competitive and exclusionary dimension to professional practice, rewarding those with access to training while marginalising those less equipped or systematically denied such opportunities. Contributors' warnings about **"lazy journalism"** and shrinking newsrooms echo broader

debates about automation and the erosion of labor standards. **Pasquale (2020)** argues that over-reliance on automated systems risks prioritising speed and scale, at the expense of accuracy, accountability, and depth. In this context, the concerns raised by contributors to this study highlight a gendered form of technological precarity: when newsrooms prioritise efficiency, the risks of job losses disproportionately fall on those excluded from technical training pipelines.

> We do not still have access to tech tools because some of these tools are being bought online.. for very huge sum of money. ...We cannot afford some of them even if you are somebody that wants to, you know, get (it) by yourself.. Some of us might be left behind because of this.... We are not given the chance to grow. We are not in an enabling environment
>
> (Speaker 2, FGD, Cameroun)

Another contributor pinpointed the core issue, warning that "the system isn't built for us to succeed with these tools." This statement perfectly captures how technological innovation is not a neutral force but one that intersects with and amplifies pre-existing gendered inequalities in access, mobility, and recognition. Srnicek (2017) notes in his work on platform capitalism, the integration of digital technologies into labor markets often reproduces existing inequities rather than dismantling them. For these women, then, AI is not only a technical tool but also a site where gendered struggles over opportunity, recognition, and professional survival are being renegotiated.

Gendered Newsroom Hierarchies and AI Adoption

The journalists who contributed to this study also reflected on how AI intersects with entrenched gendered hierarchies in the newsroom. As one contributor observed, women were frequently relegated to "supporting roles" such as editing scripts rather than taking on front-line reporting, prompting fears that AI could reinforce these divisions:

> One contributor noted: "It can either widen the gaps or close them
>
> (Speaker 1, FGD, Kenya)

Instances of sexism were striking.

> Another contributor recalled:
>
> My first day, I was told, 'There are no ladies of the press. It is gentlemen of the press, full stop.
>
> (Speaker 1, FGD3, Nigeria)

Women were systematically denied high-profile assignments and promotions, with structural inequalities rationalised through stereotypes about maternity or perceived lack of commitment. In this context, AI often became a scapegoat for discrimination:

> If women are losing jobs, it's not because of AI, ... the bias (is) already there.
> (Speaker 3, FGD3, Zimbabwe)

These insights suggest that AI adoption in African newsrooms does not occur in a vacuum but is mediated by existing patriarchal hierarchies. The risks are twofold: technology may either exacerbate exclusion or provide opportunities for women to challenge entrenched roles through skill acquisition and

cultural localisation of tools. This reflects broader scholarship on how digital innovation can both reproduce and contest gendered power relations in media spaces (Byerly, 2020; Milan and Treré, 2019).

Agency, Training, and Cultural Localisation

Despite structural and gendered barriers, contributors articulated strategies for exercising agency in the adoption of AI in African newsrooms. They emphasised the enduring value of human creativity and judgment, with one contributor asserting:
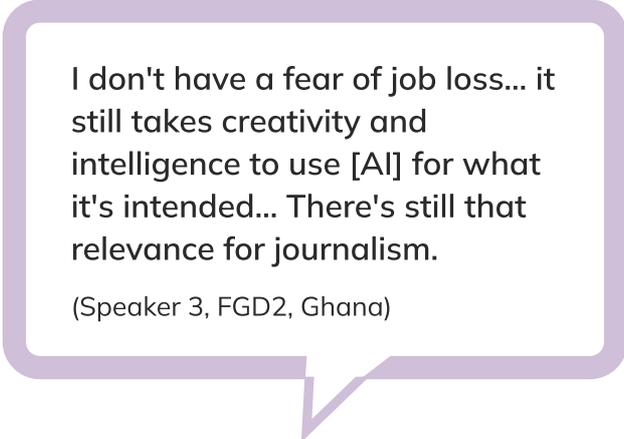
> I don't have a fear of job loss... it still takes creativity and intelligence to use [AI] for what it's intended... There's still that relevance for journalism.
>
> (Speaker 3, FGD2, Ghana)

This perspective aligns with Couldry and Mejias (2019), who argue that access to technological tools alone does not equate to professional empowerment; critical skill-building is essential for navigating AI responsibly. Waisbord (2013) similarly underscores that journalistic agency shapes how news is produced and interpreted, highlighting the irreplaceable role of professional judgment even amid technological change. Training was repeatedly highlighted as essential for responsible AI adoption.

As one contributor explained: "I think it empowers, but it needs training. The people that are going to use it need training, if they are going to embrace it, it really needs training. Because you really don't want to lose the values (journalistic).
(Speaker 2, FGD 2, Sierra Leone)

This reflects the need for deliberate upskilling to ensure AI enhances rather than undermines journalistic standards, consistent with arguments that professional education must evolve alongside technological innovation (Couldry and Mejias, 2019; Bosch, 2021)

Cultural and ethical concerns were also prominent. Localisation was central to the strategies employed by the research contributors. One contributor emphasised that Africanising AI was a priority because it ensures that audiences can recognise themselves in the news articles: this involves shaping the look, persona, and presentation of content to reflect African contexts. This underscores the need to tailor AI outputs for African audiences. Building on observations from the literature, technological tools are likely to be more meaningful when they draw on local knowledge and cultural context, and media technologies are often shaped by social and

cultural factors (Brokensha, 2020; Brantner and Saurwein, 2021; Nkoala et al., 2025). Deliberate localisation is therefore essential for ethical, relevant, and effective AI adoption in African contexts (Hepp, 2017). Contributors also highlighted AI's susceptibility to misinformation, hallucinations, and misrepresentation, reinforcing the ethical labor required for responsible use:

> All other AI tools that you are using, it has data hallucination that's why we say AI is a collaborative tool that we use in journalism field.
> (Speaker 1, FGD 1, Nigeria)

Ethical vigilance was emphasised:

These concerns reveal that AI-generated content is not neutral; hallucinations and misrepresentations actively shape news production, influencing which stories gain prominence and how they are framed for audiences. Journalists must engage in ongoing verification and boundary-setting practices that constitute ethical labor and mediate the interaction between technology and professional norms. This highlights the role of journalists as critical gatekeepers in algorithmically mediated news ecosystems, where the potential for rapid dissemination of false or manipulated content can affect public understanding and trust. Moreover, these practices underscore the tension between efficiency and accuracy, showing that AI's integration requires not just technical competence but a deliberate negotiation of professional standards, cultural context, and audience expectations

(Floridi and Cowls, 2019; Lazer et al., 2018).

Education and skill-building were identified as key strategies to mitigate these risks. One contributor stressed the need for integrating AI and machine learning into journalism curricula:

We need machine learning in journalism schools now...students are already using ChatGPT for assignments without understanding its limits,

warning that uncritical adoption could normalise misinformation:

> AI hallucinations treated as facts in academic work.
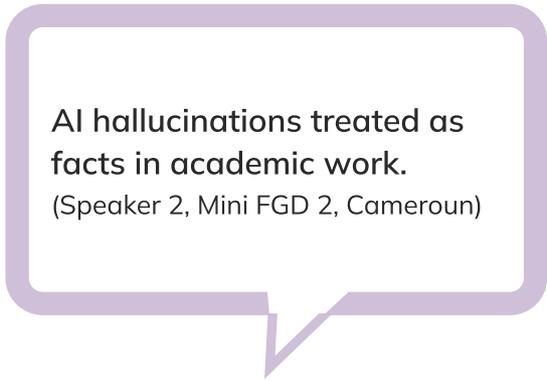> (Speaker 2, Mini FGD 2, Cameroun)

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These observations highlight that without structured training and oversight, AI adoption risks reinforcing epistemic inequalities and the spread of false information, which is particularly salient in African media contexts where newsrooms often face resource constraints and uneven access to technology **(Nyamnjoh, 2005; Mutsvairo, 2016)**.

From a media analysis perspective, this underscores the ongoing importance of professional gatekeeping in algorithmically mediated environments, where education and policy guidance are crucial to maintain journalistic integrity **(Couldry and Mejias, 2019; Bosch, 2021)**.
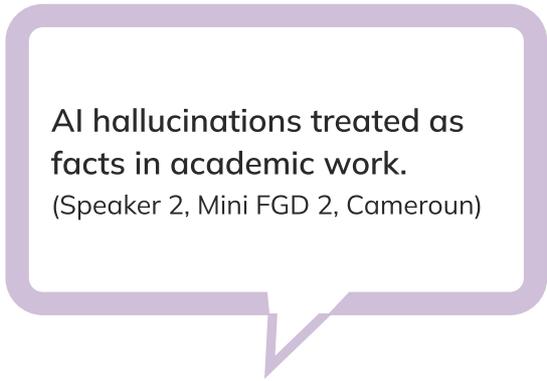
(Floridi and Cowls, 2019; Lazer et al., 2018).

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Conclusion

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The findings from this study reveal that AI adoption in African newsrooms is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. It simultaneously presents opportunities for efficiency, reach, and innovation while introducing ethical, professional, and gendered challenges. The women in this study are performing the invisible labour of ethical oversight, monitoring AI outputs, correcting errors, and mentoring peers, yet organisational structures have not evolved to recognise or support this critical work. This imbalance underscores the urgent need for deliberate, gender-responsive strategies that reduce the burden on individual journalists and create equitable pathways for participation in technological innovation. A major concern raised by contributors was the absence of formal newsroom policies guiding AI use.

In such contexts, the responsibility of ensuring ethical deployment falls disproportionately on women, who are also managing caregiving and professional correction duties. Developing structured, gender-responsive policies would institutionalise ethical oversight, redistribute labour more equitably, and explicitly recognise the additional "voice work" that women perform, ensuring that it is valued rather than rendered invisible.

Training and capacity-building emerged as another critical need. Many women reported relying on self-directed learning, which demonstrates resilience but also highlights structural neglect.

Formal training programs, designed with flexibility, mentorship, and sensitivity to care-giving responsibilities, would close the gendered knowledge gap and enable women to fully participate in AI innovation, ensuring that professional development does not become an unpaid extra burden.

Leadership and representation were also pressing concerns. Women are often overlooked for leadership roles in AI adoption, with stereotypes framing them as better suited for domestic rather than technical or decision-making work. Inclusive leadership structures that prioritise women's participation in decision-making, pilot projects, and innovation teams are essential to prevent AI adoption from replicating historical exclusions and to ensure that women's contributions are visible and valued.

Contributors further stressed the importance of embedding ethical oversight into newsroom processes. The women in this study are already informally correcting AI errors and safeguarding reporting quality. Institutionalising this vigilance by integrating ethical review into editorial systems would protect integrity while relieving individuals of unpaid corrective labor. The local adaptation of AI tools was another key theme. AI systems designed outside Africa often reproduce Western cultural assumptions and gender biases, erasing local realities. Supporting localisation, through multilingual capabilities, African aesthetic representation, and culturally responsive content, ensures that technological adoption reflects the contexts in which women journalists work. Financial constraints also impede equitable AI adoption. Subscription costs for AI tools were described as prohibitive, privileging well-resourced outlets and excluding smaller, often women-led organisations. Shared funding models, consortia, or subsidised access could level the playing field and support inclusive participation. Long-term strategies emphasised the integration of AI literacy, ethics, and gender into journalism education. Embedding gender awareness and ethical oversight into AI training would equip future journalists to use these tools responsibly, challenge biases, and uphold professional standards. Across these recommendations, one theme is clear: women journalists in this study are already innovating ways to adapt AI responsibly, through ethical corrections, community-driven oversight, and locally grounded practices. However, without formal structures, training, and financial support, their labor remains

invisible and under-supported. Gender-responsive policies, inclusive leadership, targeted capacity-building, localised tools, and resource-sharing mechanisms are not optional; they are essential to ensure AI adoption strengthens newsroom diversity, integrity, and inclusivity.

This study underscores three urgent implications

Newsroom policies must move beyond treating AI as a neutral tool, explicitly addressing the gendered burdens it creates

Leaders require targeted capacity-building to bridge knowledge gaps and reinforce organisational governance of AI

Feminist and decolonial perspectives must guide AI adoption, ensuring that African women's voices and realities are embedded both in tool design and newsroom practice

When these measures are implemented, AI can enhance journalism without compromising professional integrity, diversity, or societal relevance

AI will not rescue or ruin journalism on its own; its effects depend on who governs its use, who is trained to shape it, and who is compensated for the invisible labour of keeping news truthful and locally resonant.

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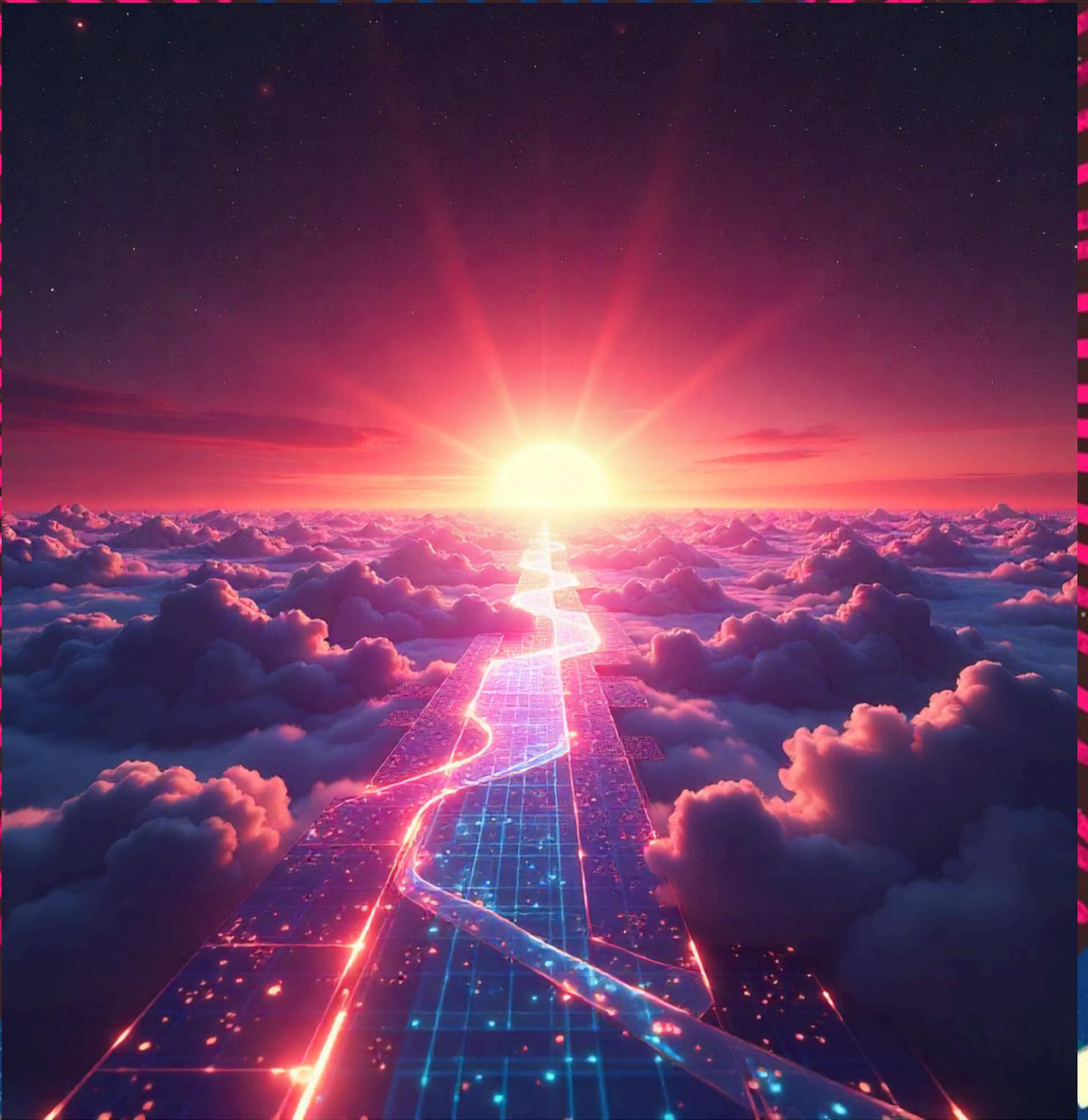
Further Research and Programs Recommendations

Further Research
Programs Recommendations

AI Literacy and Empowerment Fellowship for Women Journalists

A hands-on program to create a cohort of female AI leaders, teaching advanced skills like prompt engineering and data annotation.

Rationale

Many women journalists learn AI tools informally, facing barriers to confidence and access. Structured mentorship and community learning can help build technical and ethical leadership.

Action Steps/Implementation Ideas

- Launch annual fellowships for women journalists to learn AI literacy, prompt engineering, and data ethics

- Include mentorship, collaborative learning, and regional showcase events.

- Develop open online courses for broader accessibility

Building Our Own Tools' Incubator and Open-Source Toolkits

Grant-based programs to support the development of open-source, African-centric AI tools (e.g., for transcription, avatars, fact-checking) and an "AI Audit Toolkit" for newsrooms.

Rationale

AI tools often exclude African languages and contexts. Supporting African women journalists to build context-driven tools fosters autonomy and inclusivity.

Action Steps/Implementation Ideas

❋ Provide small grants and mentorship for building open-source transcription, translation, and fact-checking tools.

❋ Develop an AI Audit Toolkit to evaluate bias in newsroom technologies.

Train-the-Trainer and Executive Leadership Initiatives

Programs to create a cohort of AI-literate journalism trainers and to equip media managers with the skills to implement gender-sensitive AI policies.

Rationale

Media managers and trainers often lack AI awareness, hindering institutional transformation. Building AI leadership capacity ensures sustainable newsroom integration

Action Steps/Implementation Ideas

✻ Establish AI-in-media leadership workshops for editors, executives, and trainers.

✻ Develop gender-sensitive policy frameworks for AI ethics in newsrooms.

Legal Defense and Support Fund

A dedicated fund and hotline to provide immediate support to journalists targeted by AI-facilitated harassment.

Rationale

AI-enabled harassment and deepfakes disproportionately target women journalists. A legal and psychosocial response system is crucial for safety and justice.

Action Steps/Implementation Ideas

✻ Create a rapid-response legal hotline for victims of AI-facilitated harassment

✻ Partner with digital rights lawyers and feminist legal clinics for ongoing support

Continental Policy Dialogue and Knowledge Exchange

Convening media leaders to develop continent-wide principles and creating platforms for sharing best practices and case studies among African newsrooms.

Rationale

AI governance in African journalism lacks shared frameworks. Coordinated dialogue can shape continental standards rooted in gender equity and African agency.

Action Steps/Implementation Ideas

✻ Host annual continental forums to develop Gender-Responsive AI Principles for media

✻ Create an online repository of best practices and newsroom case studies

Action Steps/Implementation Ideas

✿ Create a rapid-response legal hotline for victims of AI-facilitated harassment

✿ Partner with digital rights lawyers and feminist legal clinics for ongoing support

Curriculum Modernization Initiative

Partnering with journalism schools to integrate AI ethics and skills into core curricula.

Rationale

Journalism curricula often lag behind technological realities. Integrating AI, data ethics, and digital safety will equip future journalists with relevant skills.

Action Steps/Implementation Ideas

✿ Revise journalism curricula to include AI ethics, data feminism, and critical algorithm studies

✿ Develop open-source syllabi and teaching resources

Action Steps/Implementation Ideas

✺ Create a rapid-response legal hotline for victims of AI-facilitated harassment

✺ Partner with digital rights lawyers and feminist legal clinics for ongoing support

AI Gender and Bias Observatory

Rationale

Gender bias in algorithms and media outputs reinforces stereotypes. Monitoring and research are key to evidence-based advocacy and reform.

Action Steps/Implementation Ideas

✺ Establish a hub to track bias in AI tools used by newsrooms

✺ Publish annual 'State of Gender and AI in African Media' report

Community-Based AI Literacy Hubs

Rationale (Why It Matters)

Urban-rural divides limit women's access to AI knowledge. Localized, language-accessible education can democratize learning.

Action Steps/Implementation Ideas

� Establish community learning centers (physical and online) for rural journalists and youth.

✧ Translate AI literacy materials into local languages and formats.

Further Research Directions

Algorithmic Harassment Mapping Project

Goal:
Systematically map and analyze incidents of **AI-facilitated harassment, impersonation, and reputational harm** targeting women journalists across Africa.

Methods:
Digital ethnography, incident tracking, and survivor-centered storytelling.

Emotional Labour and AI Adoption in Legacy vs. Digital Newsrooms

Examine how differences in AI adoption between legacy and digital newsrooms shape the emotional, ethical, and cognitive labour of journalists, particularly women.

Focus:
Investigate how newsroom culture, hierarchies, and institutional adoption practices influence workload, stress, creative autonomy, and inclusion during AI integration.

Methods:
Interviews, policy document analysis, and ethnographic observation to map adoption pathways and identify best practices.

Decolonising AI Narratives in African Media

Goal:
Investigate how AI-generated narratives reproduce or challenge colonial and patriarchal discourses.

Focus:
Representation, voice, and visibility of African women in AI-assisted storytelling.

Trust and Safety in AI-Moderated Journalism Platforms

Goal:
Assess how AI content moderation systems used by media organisations or platforms affect women journalists' trust, safety, and freedom of expression

Focus:
Algorithmic decision-making, error bias, and emotional impact on journalists.

Methods:
Mixed methods: content analysis and digital safety audits
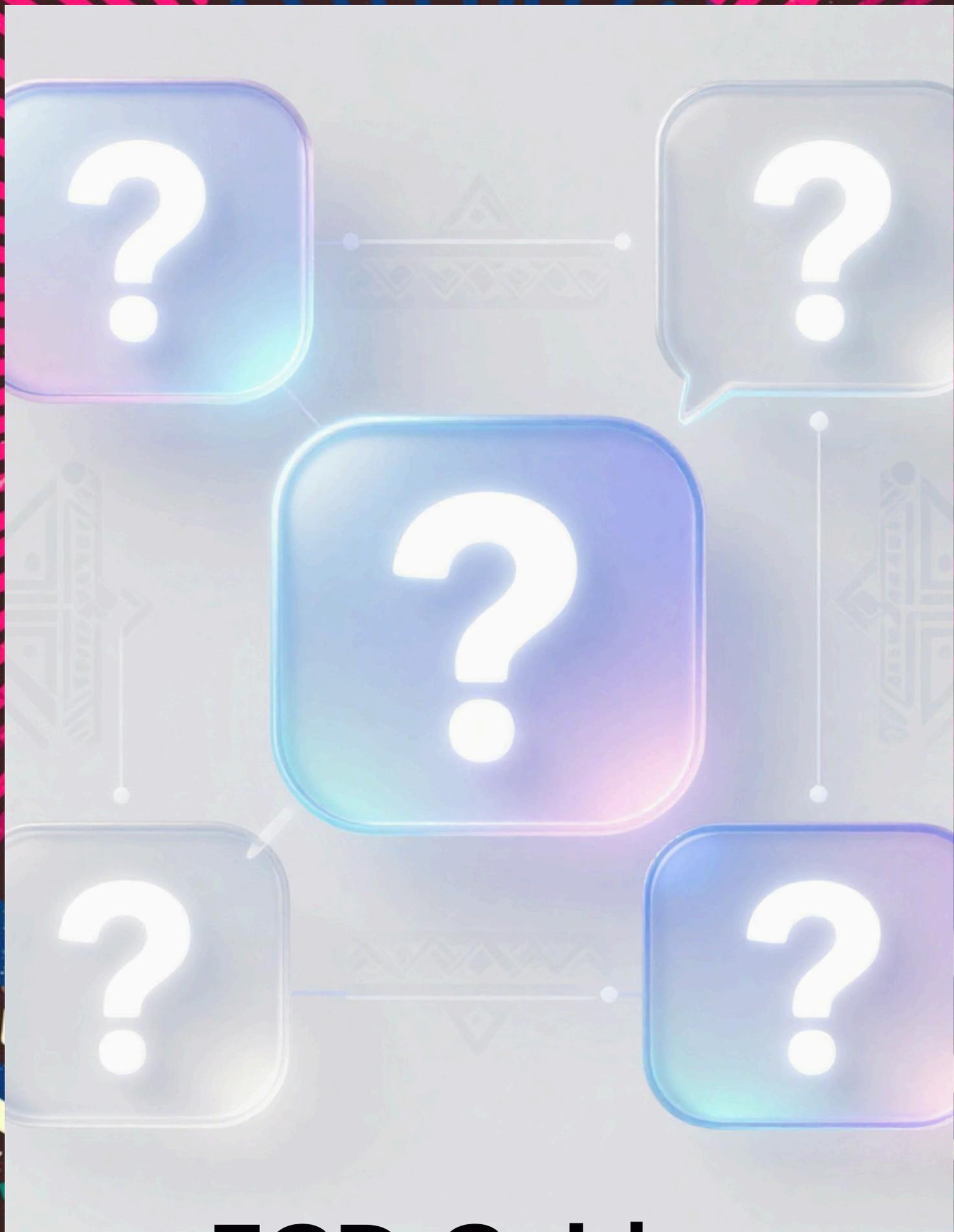
FGD Guides

FGD Guides

Objective One:

To investigate the extent and nature of AI adoption in African newsrooms and its influence on the professional experiences of women journalists

Experience, Awareness, Use, and Interaction with AI tools in African Newsrooms

Introduction:

You mentioned in the Google form that you use AI tools for various purposes. Let's start by exploring those experiences a little more.

✦ Can you list some of these tools and what you use them for?

✦ Can you walk me through your decision to use these tools?

Probe for: who suggested the AI tools, reason for adoption, how decision making was coordinated, who was involved in the decision making - including gender, did participants have a say?

✦ How did/do you feel about using these tools?

Probe for: If participants welcomed the initiative, any doubts participants may have had, if such doubts still persist and steps taken to address doubts - if any

✦ In what ways has this (use of AI tools) impacted your work?

Probe for: journalism style, nature of stories told etc.

❇ Are there any formal newsroom policies or guidelines on how these AI tools should be used in your newsroom?

❇ What sort of trainings or support structure exists in your organisation to support the use of these tools?

❇ If trainings exist: (Probe: who typically receives this training? How frequently?)

If participant doesn't mention themselves, ask

Did you receive training?

If yes, what kind of training did you receive and what was the content?

If not, how did you learn to use these tools?

Objective Two:

To analyse how AI adoption in newsrooms may be reinforcing, altering, or mitigating existing gender disparities, including pay gaps, promotion opportunities, and safety concerns.

Perceptions of Impact

✺ How well do you feel the AI tools you use respect or understand these? Are there ways the AI supports or differs from your journalistic style or values?

✺ Can you share an example where the AI tool either aligned well with your approach or where you felt like it missed or ignored what you consider important in your journalism?

✺ How did you handle this?

Probe for: steps taken to address the issue, if the issue was flagged with organisation, in cases of Media rooms where AI use was influenced by management. If it was, how was it received?/feedback

✺ Generally, in the media sector, have you noticed any changes in how stories are written or presented since the introduction of AI tools?

(Probe for: challenges or benefits noticed).

✺ Do you think there are certain experiences more likely to be left out or misrepresented where AI tools are involved?

Probe: Are there situations where AI has reproduced sexist biases in the stories you have read/seen/told? How did you navigate this?

✺ What do you think could be the reasons for this, and how might it affect women journalists in particular?

✺ Are there any fears you have regarding the introduction of AI tools in journalism?

Probe for: reduction in job opportunities and security, pay, promotions, etc.). Reflecting on your gendered identity, as a woman, do you think these experiences may be different for you than others? If yes, how? If no, why not?

✿ Do you think some people in the newsroom (e.g., junior staff or women) might be more affected than others? Why?

✿ Have you seen any shifts in who gets what kind of assignments?

Gender-specific questions to further explore the gendered dimensions of AI.

✿ Are there particular challenges or opportunities that AI creates for women journalists in Africa?

✿ Do you think AI tools are designed with gender in mind? Why or why not?

✿ Are there differences in how men and women in your newsroom engage with or benefit from AI tools?

Objective Three:
To develop thought-leadership content, policy guidelines, and an awareness campaign aimed at promoting gender-sensitive AI integration in African newsrooms.

Future Guidelines, Toolkits, and Action

Decision-making and Participation

✺ What would a gender-equitable and inclusive use of AI in journalism look like to you? What values or principles should guide how AI is used in African newsrooms?

✺ What would you need to feel supported in using AI

trainings, resources, policies

✺ If you were designing an AI tool for your newsroom, what would you prioritize? What would you do differently?

✺ What would you like to see in a toolkit aimed at ensuring that the use of AI is gender-sensitive? If AWiM or others built a toolkit, what should it include?

✺ What would a good newsroom guideline look like to protect women journalists using AI?

Closing

✺ Would you be interested in reviewing or discussing some of the findings from this project later?

General Guide

Guide for Newsrooms with AI News Presenters

General Guide

❂ Why did your team decide to develop a specific tool rather than adopt an existing AI tool? And what made an AI companion feel like the right solution?

> *Probe:*

❂ What problem were you trying to solve that existing tools didn't?

❂ How did you design the tool's **"personality"**? Was there a discussion around gender, tone, and emotionality?

❂ How is the tool being used in practice now?

❂ Can you walk me through a typical scenario or interaction, support?

❂ Has using the tool changed any part of your workflow (e.g. how you assign stories, how you brainstorm)?

> *Probe: Are there ways in which it has made your work easier or harder?*

❂ Did you consider gender dynamics when designing the tool? For example, how women and men might differently experience or relate to it?

> *Probe: Were women involved in defining Nimi's tone or functionality?*
>
> *Is there a policy around the use of Nimi and other AI tools in your news room?*
>
> *Probe: Can you tell me about the key things in this policy? Is this something you can share with us?*

✿ Can you tell me how you and your colleagues learned to use the tool?

✿ Have you noticed if the tool influences who gets access to information or support in the newsroom?

Probe: Do junior women journalists engage with Nimi differently than senior editors or male colleagues?

✿ In your experience, does the tool align with how you (or women on your team) approach storytelling and ethics?

Probe: Are there ways that the tools suggestions or tone reflect, or clash with, how women journalists work?

✿ Has this tool ever influenced the angle of a story or the kind of sources chosen?

Probe: Do you think it might subtly reinforce dominant (male or Western) narratives?

✿ When you designed and now use this tool, do you think gender plays a role in shaping interactions with it?
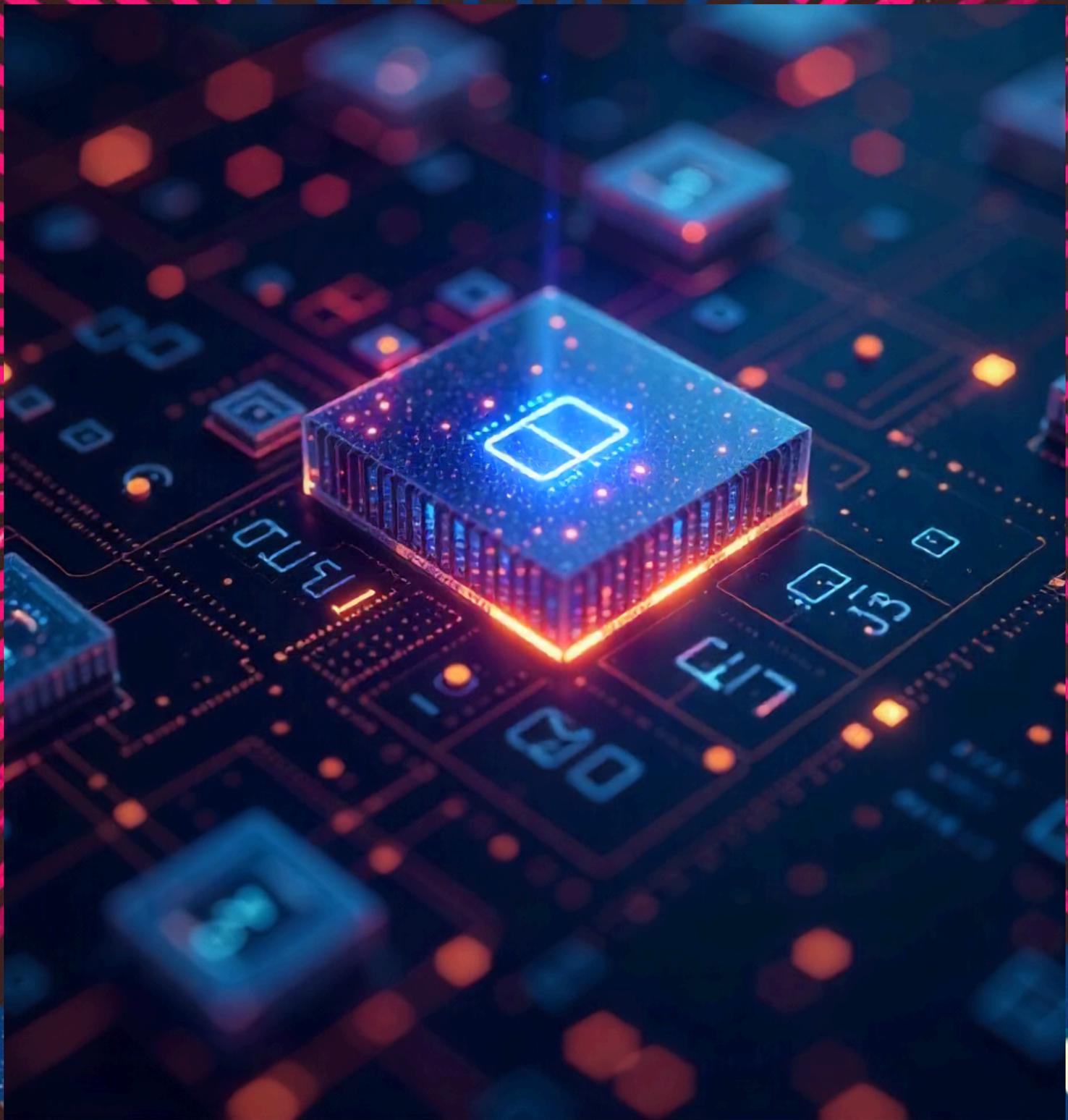
Survey

Guide for Newsrooms with AI News Presenters

Survey

Section A

Demographics and Professional Profile

Age Range

☐ Under 25

☐ 25 - 34

☐ 35 - 44

☐ 45 and above

Years of Experience in Journalism/Media

☐ 0 - 5 Years

☐ 6 - 10 Years

☐ 10+ Years

Gender Identity

☐ Woman

☐ Man

☐ Prefer not to Say

Country of Residence/Work

....

Primary Language Used at Work

....

Current Media Role(s) (Select all that apply)

☐ Reporter

☐ Editor

☐ Producer

☐ Social Media Manager

☐ Freelance Journalist

☐ Newsroom Manager

☐ Other ....

Type of Media Outlet

☐ Print

☐ Radio

☐ Television

☐ Online-only

☐ Community/Grassroots Media

AI Awareness, Access and Use

AI Tools Used in Journalism Work (Select all that apply)

- ☐ ChatGPT
- ☐ Grammarly
- ☐ Canva AI
- ☐ Transcription / Voice-to-Text Tools
- ☐ AI-Powered Photo Editing / Headline Generators
- ☐ Gemini
- ☐ Deepseek
- ☐ Other ....

How Respondents First Learned About These Tools

- ☐ Colleagues
- ☐ Personal Research
- ☐ Formal Training in the Newsroom
- ☐ Training by External Organisation
- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ Other ....

Has the Newsroom Provided Any Formal Training on AI Tools?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not Sure

Recipients of AI Training, Licenses, or Paid Versions

....

Barriers to Adopting or Using AI Tools (Technical, social, financial, cultural, etc.)

....

Gendered Experiences with AI

Do AI Tools Reflect the Lived Experiences of African Women?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Somewhat

☐ Not Sure

Explanation of Response

....

Experience Correcting/Reframing AI Output Due to Bias or Inaccuracy

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't use AI that way

Example of Correcting/Reframing AI Output

....

Gender Dynamics in the Newsroom Regarding Tech or AI Adoption

....

Impact of AI on How Ideas or Writing Are Received in the Newsroom

....

Experiences with AI-Generated Content Misrepresenting Gender, Race, or African Identity

☐   What happened?

☐   How it was handled?

Effect of AI on Work Distribution in the Newsroom

Section D

Safety, Surveillance and Emotional Labor

Feeling of Safety Using AI Tools at Work (Privacy, Surveillance, Judgment)

☐   Yes

☐   No

☐   Sometimes

Concerns About Using AI Tools

Experiences of Monitoring, Judgment, or Surveillance Related to AI Use

----

Use or Avoidance of AI When Covering Emotionally Sensitive or Trauma-Informed Stories

Section E

Feminist Futures and AI Policy

Presence of Ethical AI Policy in the Newsroom

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not Sure

Factors Guiding Current Use of AI in the Newsroom

Involvement in Conversations or Decisions About AI Use

☐ Yes

☐ No

Role or Experience in AI Decision-Making

Desired Future of AI in Newsrooms from a Gender Equity Perspective

Measures to Support Equitable AI Adoption (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Inclusive Training for Women and Gender-Diverse Journalists

- ☐ Feminist-Centered AI Guidelines

- ☐ Representation of African Women and Non-Binary People in Training Data

- ☐ Collaborative Newsroom Policies

- ☐ Open-Source African Datasets

- ☐ Accountability for Biased AI Outputs

- ☐ Other ....

Impact Assessment Table

Impact of AI Adoption on Women and Gender-Diverse Journalists

Rate each factor from

*1 [**Worsened significantly**] to **5** [**Improved significantly**]*

Factor	1	2	3	4	5
Access to promotions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Participation in tech/AI decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Representation in media outputs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Job security	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Work-life balance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Final Reflections

What Policymakers and Media Owners Should Understand About AI and Gender in Journalism

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Additional Insights on Being a Journalist and Using AI as a Woman

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☐ **Consent Statement**

By submitting this questionnaire, participants confirm their understanding of the research purpose and voluntary participation. Responses may be used for analysis, reporting, and related activities by African Women in Media and research partners. Confidentiality is maintained, and no personally identifiable information will be shared without consent.
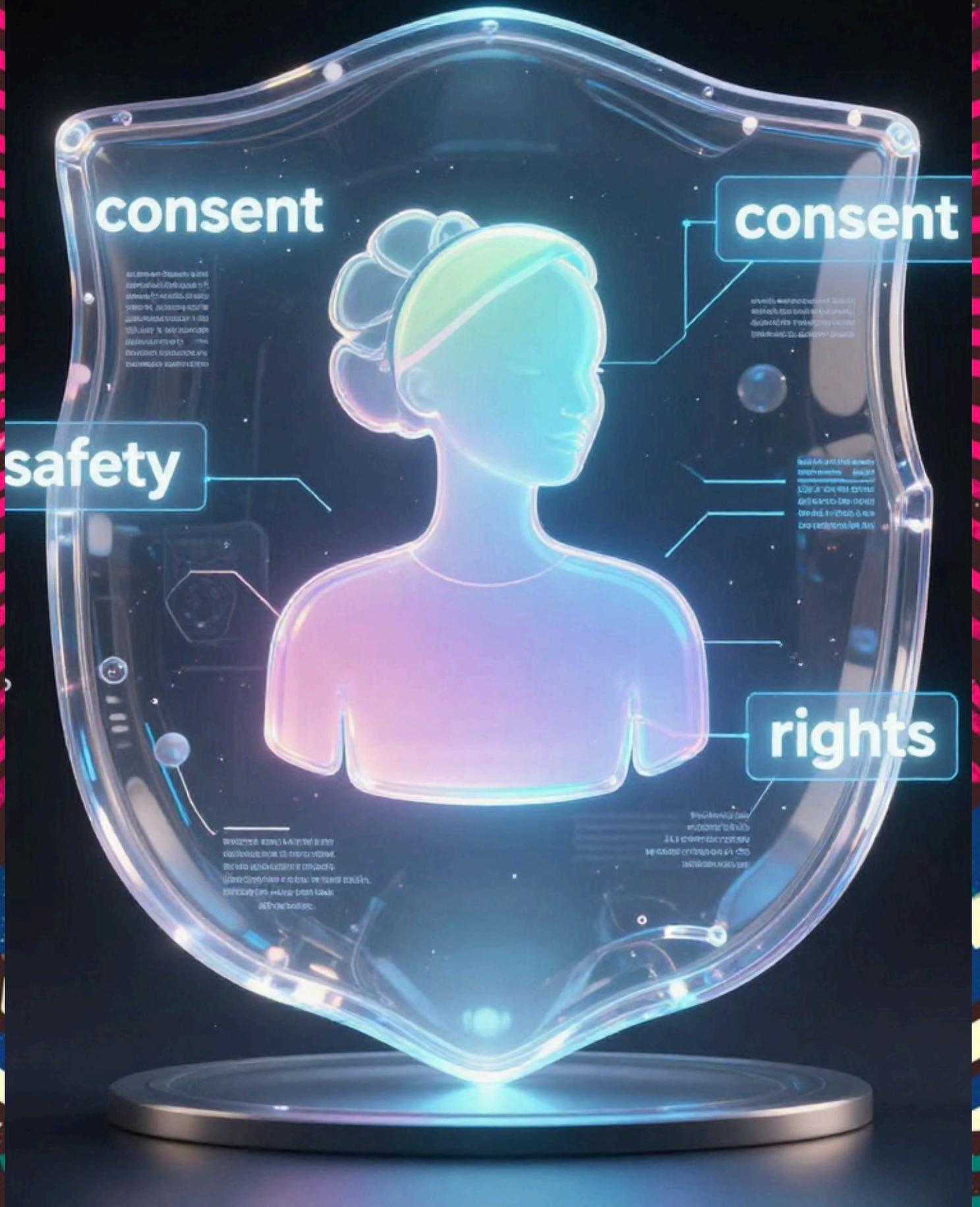
Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of Study

Gendered Impact of Artificial Intelligence in African Newsrooms

Principal Investigator(s)

Dr Yemisi Akinbobola and Emaediong Akpan

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as part of a research study titled Gendered Impact of Artificial Intelligence in African Newsrooms. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about the study and to obtain your informed consent to participate. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate.

Purpose of the Study

Project Summary and Objectives

This project seeks to understand the current state of adoption and use of AI in African newsrooms and the perceived and actual impact of this on existing gendered inequalities experienced by African women journalists. The outcome will lead to a series of thought-leadership content for newsrooms and policy creation on the AI use in newsrooms, and an awareness campaign.

The project builds on several projects delivered by AWiM, including its range of research on the lived experiences of women journalists.

It is also timely as research shows a significant rise in the use of generative AI in the newsroom, thus necessitating the need to understand how such adoption might exacerbate existing gender inequalities.

Gender sensitivity in this context is important because research by AWiM and others demonstrated that the gendered experiences of women journalists in newsrooms include to disparities in pay, promotion, division of labour, access, and significant safety issues ranging from sexual harassment to online and offline violence among others.

Project Goal

To assess the adoption and impact of AI technologies in African newsrooms, with a focus on understanding how these changes influence existing gender inequalities experienced by African women journalists, and to use these insights to inform policy, newsroom practices, and public awareness initiatives.

Overall Objective

To explore the relationship between AI integration in African newsrooms and the perpetuation or mitigation of gendered inequalities affecting

women journalists, and to promote gender-sensitive AI practices through research-driven advocacy and policy recommendations.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to join a focus group discussion with **6-8 other participants**. The discussion will be facilitated by a researcher and will last approximately **60- 75 minutes**. During the FGD, you will be asked to share your thoughts, opinions, and experiences on a range of topics related to AI and AI adoption in your newsroom.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you choose to withdraw, any data you have provided up to that point will be removed from the study records or be retained and anonymized and combined with other data, but your individual contributions will not be identifiable.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

We are committed to protecting your privacy and confidentiality to the fullest extent possible.

Anonymity: We will take all reasonable steps to ensure your anonymity in any reports or publications resulting from this research. This means that your name and any directly identifiable information will not be linked to your responses.

Confidentiality: While we will make every effort to ensure the confidentiality of your individual responses, it is important to note that in a focus group setting, other participants will hear your contributions. We will ask all participants to respect the confidentiality of what is discussed during the FGD and to refrain from sharing information outside of the group. However, we cannot guarantee that all participants will adhere to this request.

Data Handling:
Your contributions during the FGD will be audio-recorded and/or transcribed. These recordings/transcriptions will be used for research purposes only.

Data Storage and Use

Data Collection: The data collected from the FGD will include audio recordings of the discussion and/or written transcripts.

Data Storage: All audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes will be stored securely on AWiM's encrypted cloud storage. Only the research team will have access to these files.

Data Retention: Data will be retained until the completion of the research project and subsequent publications, after the completion of the study, after which it will be securely erased.

Data Use: The data collected will be used for academic research purposes, including:

- Analysis to identify themes, patterns, and insights related to the study's objectives.

- Preparation of research reports, presentations, and other organisational outputs.

- Inform training development at AWiM

No Identifiable Information: In all reports, publications, and presentations, your responses will be presented in an aggregated or anonymised form so that no individual can be identified. Quotes from the discussion may be used, but they will not be attributed to specific individuals.

Risks and Benefits

Risks: The risks associated with participating in this FGD are minimal. There is a small risk that sensitive topics may be discussed, which could cause temporary discomfort.

You are not obligated to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. As mentioned, there is also a limited risk to confidentiality within the group setting.

Benefits: While there may be no direct personal benefit to you, your participation will contribute valuable insights to our understanding of AI adoption in newsrooms in Africa. This research aims to develop thought-leadership content, policy guidelines, and an awareness campaign aimed at promoting gender-sensitive AI integration in African newsrooms.

Compensations

There is no financial compensation for participating in this focus group discussion.

Questions and Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact:

Principal Investigators

Dr Yemisi Akinbobola and Emaediong Akpan

Email Addresses

yemisi@africanwomeninmedia.com and
akpanemaediongofonime@gmail.com

☐ **Consent Statement**

I have read and understood the information provided in this consent form. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time. I consent to participate in this focus group discussion under the conditions described above