

African startup using AI to produce news stories

Tech startup, Controvert Media has implemented the use of artificial intelligence robots to automatically write and post news articles on the internet.



Image by 123RF

Artificial Intelligence robots – or “bots” as they are also known - are created by software developers in order to take on repetitive tasks that would ordinarily be carried out by people.

The startup’s service was trialled at the recently-concluded AFCON 2017 football tournament, with some of the content it produced appearing on soccer24.co.zw, a popular football blog in Zimbabwe. Controvert Media has also applied the use of bots for content creation to Pindula.com, a Southern Africa-centric profiles and news website.

Using artificial intelligence, the AFCON bot quickly creates basic yet useful reports on final match scores, scoring players, and other data-centric information about the matches.

Soccer24 founder, Godwin Chiparaushe, expressed the startup’s elation regarding the milestone. “We’re excited about this achievement. Our journalists get to focus on the more complicated aspects of the game, and the more opinion-driven content that we provide our readers,” he expressed. “There are just things that bots can’t do as well as humans. For example, a bot can’t tell the heavy emotions around a near miss by a losing team, and/or the despair expressed by the coach as a country nears their exit from a tournament. The bot is freeing our journalists to do this kind of content which our

readers really appreciate,” Chiparaushe added.

Speaking about the introduction of the artificial intelligence bot, Controvert Media CEO William Chui highlighted that contrary to the belief that that artificial intelligence apps will push people out of jobs – an opinion held by many – the AI apps will actually create job opportunities.

“Yes, other jobs will disappear in the future, but new jobs will be created as well,” Chui emphasised. “Think about it - in 1999, all the jobs brought about by the internet today didn’t exist at all then. Jobs like ‘social media manager’, ‘blogger’ or ‘mobile app developer’, or the possibility to do animation for a film studio in Hollywood while you’re in Zimbabwe, were beyond our imagination.

“Back then, people had jobs at post offices where they’d sell stamps, and the postman would deliver letters. If anything, internet technology has brought about more jobs. Artificial Intelligence will certainly have the same effect of creating more jobs,” Chui concluded.

Chiparaushe articulated that deploying the bot was not without its challenges. With only basic data available for the matches at the tournament, the data just wasn’t comprehensive. This created a challenge for the startup’s engineering team, as the bot depends on adequate data.

“Data is a big challenge in Africa, and we had challenges working with the data available. We are currently working on technologies to make it easier to gather this data ourselves,” Chiparaushe affirmed. Even for a tournament as big as AFCON, data is surprisingly limited compared to other international tournaments and leagues.

Chiparaushe confirmed that the bot will be adapted to automatically write articles beyond the AFCON tournament theme, and that Controvert Media is especially keen to use the bot for the local Zimbabwean league, which kicks off in March/April.

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