

FOMO in Sub-Saharan African AI Hype: The Quest for a Decolonized AI Adoption Framework

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Abstract

Based on an abductive analysis of 54 opinion, editorial, and analytical articles published between 2019 and 2025 in nine English-speaking Sub-Saharan African countries, this study examines negotiation of the place of AI within journalism. Conceptualizing AI hype as a form of metajournalistic discourse, the study finds that discussions about AI in journalism in Sub-Saharan Africa are driven by a fear of missing out and a call for a decolonial approach to the technology’s adoption in a way sensitive to the region’s context.

Keywords

AI hype; artificial intelligence; institutionalism; journalism; metajournalistic discourse; Sub-Saharan Africa

1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) was introduced as an editorial aspect of news making through automation in the early 2000s, and since, it has spurred discourses of both worry and hope (Mari, 2024). This intense discourse, which Lewis, Zamith, and Bunquin (2025) have called “AI hype,” focuses on how the speculative future of this new technology affects current news making practices. Even though Lewis, Zamith, and Bunquin (2025) argue that this hype should be taken seriously as an object of inquiry, in Sub-Saharan Africa, work examining this phenomenon remains limited. An exception is Nkoala et al.’s (2026) study, which shows that due to AI hype in African general news coverage, broader social implications of AI were largely misunderstood due to positive spin. Otherwise, there is limited research on it in relation to African journalism as a cultural practice. Interview approaches have tended to dominate research on the place of AI in journalism, generally (Schjøtt, 2026), and there have been a number of interview studies of Sub-Saharan African journalists’ perceptions of AI (Gondwe,

2022, 2026; Munoriyarwa, 2024; Munoriyarwa et al., 2021; Tshuma & Matsilele, 2025; Umejei et al., 2025). While this approach effectively captures journalists' AI imaginaries, they are led by interviewer cues and may not fully address journalists' perceptions based on elements that are central to journalists themselves (Zelizer, 1993), which are observable in organic discourse.

To complement interview-based studies on Sub-Saharan African journalists' perceptions of AI and its integration in news work, this study takes a document-analysis approach to understand the nature of AI hype in journalism. Studying Sub-Saharan African AI hype with a focus on journalistic practice is key to decolonizing journalism research. Such studies may explore how not only journalists, but non-journalistic actors perceive involvement of these technologies which have largely originated from the Global North (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022). How AI is discussed has symbolic and material consequences for its integration in journalistic news gathering, production, fact-checking, and distribution processes (Lewis, Guzman, et al., 2025; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025).

To understand how Sub-Saharan African journalistic and non-journalistic actors perceive AI's integration in journalism practice, this study conceptualizes AI hype—i.e., discourses that focus on technology, promoting or speculating on its possibilities and how it might affect present practices in the future (Lewis, Zamith, & Bunquin, 2025)—as a form of metajournalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016). Carlson's metajournalistic discourse concept focuses on how public expressions are used to define journalism and set its boundaries and authority. These expressions emanate from both journalistic and non-journalistic actors, on journalistic and non-journalistic sites, and they can have both reactive and generative origins. Even though Carlson does not list AI hype or hype in general as a form of metajournalistic discourse, here it is conceptualized as such. AI hype is considered a form of public expression that evaluates automated news texts, sets appropriate boundaries of automated journalistic practice, and contests its legitimacy.

An abductive analysis (Vila-Henninger et al., 2024) of 54 opinion, editorial, and analytical pieces from Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe published between January 2019 and December 2025 showed that AI hype in these countries is characterized by a fear of missing out (FOMO) and a call for a decolonial AI adoption approach. In the following sections, the study begins by examining AI hype as a form of metajournalistic discourse.

2. AI Hype as a Form of Metajournalistic Discourse

AI hype, hereby understood as a surge of public expressions paying attention to, promoting, and speculating about the involvement of AI in the news (Lewis, Zamith, & Bunquin, 2025) qualifies as a form of metajournalistic discourse in many respects. Metajournalistic discourse, as a concept, refers to public expressions that define what journalism is and is not, setting boundaries of appropriate practice, as well as contesting the legitimacy of the field. These discourses can come from journalistic actors (e.g., reporters), non-journalistic actors and end-users (e.g., government officials, media freedom activists), journalistic sites (news spaces), and non-journalistic sites (journalism reviews). Metajournalistic public expressions can also be reactive by responding to a particular incident, or generative by evaluating ongoing journalism issues.

Functionally, AI hype has both symbolic and material functions that are structurally consequential internally and externally (Dodds, Mine, et al., 2026; Lewis, Zamith, & Bunquin, 2025). Symbolically, AI hype promotes

what is desirable and what is unacceptable. Internally, this AI hype performs a metajournalistic discourse boundary-setting function (Carlson, 2016) of either rejecting the hype to retain journalistic authority or to justify the pursuit of certain practices, ways of thinking, and processes. Externally, this AI hype also contributes to boundary setting by signaling to members of the public whether they should or shouldn't fear the technology (Lewis, Zamith, & Bunquin, 2025), helping shape ideas of whether the technology should be accepted in news or not.

Materially, AI hype internally shapes how AI understandings can be translated into newsroom policy objectives and strategies and how news organizations should use the technology (Lewis, Zamith, & Bunquin, 2025). Externally, it materially shapes how news organizations engage with AI stakeholders through partnerships, while engendering pro- or counter-reactions from actors like technologists, tech companies, and audiences (Lewis, Guzman, et al., 2025), indicating how AI hype can come from both journalistic and non-journalistic actors (Carlson, 2016). AI hype also has a metajournalistic definitional function as it motivates journalists to reflect on their journalistic roles, identities, practices, values, and what journalism means in the AI era (Dodds, Zamith, et al., 2026; Lewis, Zamith, & Bunquin, 2025).

Furthermore, AI hype is a generative form of metajournalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016) that sparks surging discussions about AI deployment in news gathering, production, verification, and distribution processes (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Møller et al., 2025). The discussions also focus on whether AI should be harmonized with organization-centered journalistic values (objectivity, transparency, diversity, accountability) or audience-centered values (privacy, user agency, data protection, autonomy; Oh & Jung, 2025). The discussions further question whether AI deployment in journalism should be actor-centered (favoring human journalists), actant-centered (automating all journalistic processes), or hybridized (dividing labor between technology and human journalists; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025). Journalistic perceptions on these issues, as will be discussed in the next section, provide an extra layer to use in analyzing and interpreting AI hype.

3. Journalists' AI Perceptions and How They Can Inform AI Hype Analysis

Current research on journalists' perceptions about the place of AI in news processes shows that they are taking a "jobs-to-be-done approach" (Hermida, 2024, p. 671) separating delegable duties that can be outsourced to AI from those that require human input, corresponding with journalists' views of AI as a tool to complement their work (Carlson, 2015; Møller et al., 2025; Rydenfelt, 2022; Sarisakaloğlu, 2025). In news gathering, journalists prefer to restrict the technology to automated content aggregation, analysis of trending topics during production, production of interview transcripts, and automated article writing, etc. (Cools & de Vreese, 2026; Haan et al., 2022; Wu, 2026; Yu & Huang, 2021). News verification is considered not delegable to AI, while journalists are free to indulge in personalizing, labeling, and sharing of news in the distribution process (Cools & de Vreese, 2026; Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Wu, 2026). This division of labor restricts AI to mechanically repetitive tasks.

The perception that AI has content, professional, and organizational limitations informs journalists' proposed division of labor. Content limitations include the lack of publicly available interesting data for automated news production (Lindén, 2017; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Barling, 2023), hallucination risks (Cools & de Vreese, 2026; Perreault et al., 2026; Sirén-Heikel et al., 2019), and failure to nuance complex stories that need

context and explanation (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Schapals & Porlezza, 2020; Sirén-Heikel et al., 2019). Organizational limitations include investment cost challenges (Peña-Fernández et al., 2023), threats against journalists' employment and professional identity, and general skepticism that audiences may fail to differentiate automated work from human journalists' output (Møller et al., 2025; Moran & Shaikh, 2022; Thomson et al., 2024). Accordingly, some journalists caution against AI overreliance, opting for a more guarded reporting approach rather than simply fueling AI hype (Dodds, Yeung, et al., 2026). These limitations are contrasted with human journalists' nose for news, sense of ethics, meaning creation, diversity, and emotional connection abilities (Milosavljević & Vobič, 2021; Møller et al., 2025; Rydenfelt, 2022). Journalists argue that journalism is a creative art that cannot be attained without human monitoring of machines (Perreault et al., 2026; Schapals & Porlezza, 2020) for accuracy and relevance (Lindén, 2017; van Dalen, 2012; Yu & Huang, 2021). AI limitations thus inform a division of labor that prioritizes human agency.

Journalists have also set up conditions for AI use that will maximize its benefits while limiting threats. The conditions include mandatory human oversight, transparency, restricting AI to automated tasks, laying out common standards, and ensuring adherence to core journalistic values (Amigo & Porlezza, 2025; Cools & de Vreese, 2026; Thomson et al., 2024; Wu, 2026). Journalists are also calling for skills upgrades, collaborations, in-house training, and strategies to circumvent AI influence and deliver better products (Dodds et al., 2025; Haan et al., 2022; Sirén-Heikel et al., 2019), in addition to protests against the prioritization of efficiency over human labor (Moran & Shaikh, 2022). This is because journalists want to benefit from AI affordances that can release them from repetitive tasks (Sirén-Heikel et al., 2019) and free up their time for more analytical and rigorous journalistic tasks (Schapals & Porlezza, 2020) while protecting journalistic authority (Amigo & Porlezza, 2025; Cools & de Vreese, 2026). Based on this literature, it can be concluded that journalists are inclined towards a hybridized AI integration approach that not only prioritizes the agency of human journalists but also harmonizes the technology with journalistic values. However, these views are based on Global North research, raising the question of how those from the Global South perceive the technology in their context. This is the focus of the next section.

4. How Journalists in the Global South Are Adapting to AI

Like their Global North counterparts, Global South journalists have also proposed a division of labor that limits AI to background research in news gathering, copy-editing, idea generation in news production, and automated data analysis (Alayande et al., 2025; Umejei et al., 2025). Some have come up with localized AI versions for data journalism and fact-checking (Alayande et al., 2025). The journalists aim to improve the quality of writing and uncover underreported stories, allowing safe, subterfuge-based investigative journalism (Alayande et al., 2025; Gondwe, 2026; Umejei et al., 2025). Global South journalists tend to accept AI as unavoidable (Ndlovu & Solomons, 2025). However, unlike in the Global North, in the Global South, there has been a slow uptake of the technology, evidenced by a lack of guidelines and ethical clarity in most countries (Phiri, 2025).

The slow AI uptake has been due to the lack of economic and technological resources and lack of access to accurate data, journalistic skills, and national and news organization AI adoption/acquisition strategies and policies (Jamil, 2023; Munoriyarwa, 2024; Munoriyarwa et al., 2021). Compounded by African governments' fear of technological innovations and newsroom skepticism (Alayande et al., 2025; Gondwe, 2022; Tshuma & Matsilele, 2025), the challenges have led to struggles in regulating imported technologies, imbalanced

gendered AI use, and indigenous language underrepresentation (Mpofu, 2025; Mpofu & Queen, 2025; Ng'ang'a et al., 2025). Linguistic underrepresentation has also led to: AI tools that cannot promote linguistic and cultural diversity; the production of biased and stereotypical news stories; challenges in data extraction; and audience annoyance (Mathe, 2025; Ndlovu, 2024; Ndlovu & Solomons, 2025; Tsandzana, 2025). This marginalization of already marginalized societies has led to additional fears that, in their current form, AI technologies might lead to the perpetuation of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being through the promotion of Western epistemologies (Mpofu & Queen, 2025; Tshuma & Matsilele, 2025). Accordingly, journalists have called for homegrown AI tools that are trained on local data repositories to make them sensitive to the Sub-Saharan African cultural context. Journalists have also called for the establishment of an innovation-enabling environment that is guided by an Afro-centric perspective (Mathe, 2025; Mpofu & Queen, 2025; Tshuma & Matsilele, 2025). Other journalists have also called for adaptation and skills upgrades, the need for human oversight, and development of national policies (Phiri, 2025; Tsandzana, 2025). Given the slow AI uptake and fears of coloniality perpetuation in the Global South, this study asks:

RQ1: How are Sub-Saharan African journalistic and non-journalistic actors responding to and evaluating the state of AI integration in news work?

5. Methodology

This study applied abductive analysis (Vila-Henninger et al., 2024) to 54 purposively selected (David & Sutton, 2011) opinion, editorial, and analytical articles that allowed journalistic and non-journalistic actors to take stances in negotiating AI deployment within Sub-Saharan African journalism (Lewis, Guzman, et al., 2025). Discourses by non-journalistic actors negotiating newsroom practices were included because they are a key aspect of both AI hype and metajournalistic discourse since journalistic authority is contingent on public perceptions (Carlson, 2016; Lewis, Guzman, et al., 2025). Gathered articles were published between January 2019 and December 2025, which covered the three years before OpenAI released ChatGPT in 2022 and the three years afterwards (Roose, 2022). Conversations about AI and journalism had been ongoing across the field before the release of ChatGPT (see Supplementary File; e.g., Carlson, 2015; Mari, 2024; van Dalen, 2012). The articles were gathered from AllAfrica.com, accessed through Factiva using a combination of search terms like AI, artificial intelligence, journalism, etc. The sample was limited to content from English-speaking Sub-Saharan African countries. The search returned articles from Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.

As per abductive methodology, the study started with deductive analysis guided by a coding scheme derived from literature (Vila-Henninger et al., 2024). The codes focused on three issues: perceptions about the state of AI adoption and integration in African newsrooms (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022); what roles should be assigned to AI versus human journalists in news gathering, production, verification, and distribution (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025; Wu, 2026); and which values (organization or audience centered) should AI be harmonized with (Oh & Jung, 2025). The first level of deductive coding of the entire content produced 73 codes in NVivo, which, following axial coding principles of placing findings under broader categories (David & Sutton, 2011), led to the emergence of five dominant themes: AI distribution and challenges, AI newsroom uses, AI opportunities, AI threats, solutions to AI adoption challenges, and journalism threats. Abductive analysis, which is a search for any surprises in relation to previous findings, followed this process and led to the realization that the discourse is characterized by FOMO.

6. Findings

Abductive analysis shows that, while actors touched on previous themes that guided this study's deductive coding, their discourse was unique in displaying a sense of FOMO in missing out on AI opportunities. This is captured in Sections 6.1 and 6.2, exploring stakeholders' assessment of the state of AI adoption and an effort to allay any fears. Section 6.3 on suggested solutions to AI threats and adoption challenges explores an identifiable framework for how stakeholders in Sub-Saharan Africa would wish to see AI integrated in newsrooms.

6.1. "Once Again, Late to the Party, When is our Time?" AI and FOMO in Sub-Saharan Africa

Actors drew attention to the unequal global distribution of AI technology and African newsrooms' lack of intentionality in adopting the technology, including perceived resistance from older journalists. Referring to the *Reuters Institute of Journalism's Digital Media Report for 2023*, the *Nigerian Business Day* outlined that only "20% of media companies in Africa are using AI in some way...compared to 40% of media companies in North America and 30% of media companies in Europe" (Abiola, 2023). This observation, captured in *Business Day's* headline: "Once again, late to the party, when is our time?" (Abiola, 2023), reflects actors' alarm that they run the risk of missing out on its benefits. The comment shows that actors are frustrated to see Africa always following and not taking the lead in innovation. The Media Institute of Southern Africa ([MISA] 2025a) also criticizes Africa's lackadaisical approach towards AI adoption by pointing out that the "major challenge that Zimbabwe faces today is lethargy in taking bold steps towards the realization of AI...a reality confronted by many other African countries." This lackadaisical approach could be driven by African governments' fear of innovation. In addition to this, the Zimbabwean *Standard* argues that the major challenge is "how to convince good old editors that much has changed and the same story can be told differently" (Mokwetsi & Mugadzaweta, 2023). The last comment implies a generational gap in attitudes towards AI, compounding the continent's slowness in innovation and adaptation.

There is also FOMO on opportunities that AI brings to news gathering in physical and digital spaces. *The Premium Times* of Nigeria sees opportunities to "deploy drones in previously inaccessible communities, to gather content, especially in conflict situations" (Ishiekwene, 2022), while *The Fourth Estate* of Ghana argues that through analyzing social media trends and search patterns, AI tools "can reveal serious underreported topics like youth mental health, rural climate challenges" (Kumsah, 2025). This is an expanded role that positions AI as a tool to reveal underreported stories in previously inaccessible physical and digital contexts. Nigeria's *This Day* further argues that AI allows journalists "to work across different languages and cultures more easily" ("Effects of artificial intelligence," 2023) through translation services. Here, AI is positioned as a tool to provide linguistic access. By helping journalists to find relevant information quickly, AI tools will ultimately be "freeing up more time for actual writing" ("Effects of artificial intelligence," 2023). FOMO can be interpreted here as a fear of missing out on opportunities to overcome contextual physical, digital, and linguistic barriers to information access.

In the news production process, journalists express FOMO on the efficiency and effectiveness AI brings to the writing process. *This Day* gives examples of tools like GPT-3 and Article Forge, which "can help journalists to write faster and more efficiently, generating ideas and producing content quickly and accurately" in addition to producing drafts and improving "grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors" ("Effects of artificial intelligence,"

2023). Perception of efficiency due to AI news drafts and editing of grammar is understandable here in a context with physical and linguistic barriers that can be time-consuming in the news-gathering process; hence, *The Fourth Estate's* argument that what "once took hours and days now takes minutes" (Kumsah, 2025). This means that after spending days in remote contexts gathering news stories, AI can speed up the writing process. South Africa's *Financial Mail* notes how heartening it is to see that "News24 in South Africa has also trained its systems with the voice of a popular actor for its news and feature stories" (Roper, 2023). *The Financial Mail's* argument positions news anchoring as a repetitive task. The production efficiencies yearned for should again be understood in the context of time-consuming news gathering challenges that Sub-Saharan African journalists endure.

Journalists also see opportunities to employ AI tools in content verification. *This Day* notes how "AI is used to help journalists with tasks such as fact-checking and analyzing large volumes of data" ("Effects of artificial intelligence," 2023). This can be interpreted as a desire to enhance journalists' watchdog role through analysis of large data volumes. According to *The Premium Times*, Nigeria is already experimenting with tools like Dubawa Chatbot which can be used to verify information on WhatsApp and which facilitates real-time fact-checking, as it has "access to real-time internet data, unlike other AI tools like the ChatGPT and MetaAI" (Suleiman, 2024). Applying AI tools to WhatsApp is understandable considering that it is a popular communication tool in the Sub-Saharan context. However, here, Sub-Saharan African journalists differ from their Global North counterparts, who have expressed reservations about using it for fact-checking (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026).

AI is also seen as an opportunity to boost revenues as a content distribution tool. *This Day* argues that AI can facilitate a wider audience reach by helping identify "the most effective keywords and phrases to use in headlines and stories to improve their visibility on search engines" ("Effects of artificial intelligence," 2023). This desire to use AI for search-engine optimization is perhaps driven by content saturation on digital platforms. AI tools can also facilitate audience retention through content personalization. Kenya's *Capital FM* explains that AI tools can harvest "audience data and analytics," which editors can use to "figure out their audiences' needs to granular levels and offer them articles that "speak to their souls" (Ondari & Mutiso, 2022). Efforts to build audience profiles using AI is an attempt to boost profits within a context of dwindling news revenue. Furthermore, *This Day* points out that by helping "to visualize data more effectively, turning complex data sets into clear and compelling visualizations that engage readers" ("Effects of artificial intelligence," 2023), AI is again key in facilitating audience retention. Attempts to use AI for search-engine optimization, personalization, and data visualization for wider audience reach and retention is part of the efforts to establish sustainable business models in an era of news avoidance.

AI benefits also extend to the role they play in enhancing the press' watchdog role. AI, as noted by *The Fourth Estate*, can enable investigative journalists to search quickly for information once they set a system that "scans procurement records, flags malfeasance, and unusual contracts, repetitive names, or shell companies with suspicious links" (Kumsah, 2025). In this sense, AI is positioned as a tool to enhance the press' democratic role by revealing white-collar crimes that might go unreported, including in the business world. This is why *GroundUp* of South Africa argues that "artificial intelligence has become one of the most powerful tools in the arsenal of investigative journalism" (Knoetze, 2023). This optimism, however, does not mean that Sub-Saharan African journalistic and non-journalistic actors are oblivious to challenges associated with AI. As explained in the next section, they note the challenges and risks but also attempt to dispel AI fears.

6.2. “AI Is not a Threat but an Opportunity”: Demystifying AI Fears in Sub-Saharan Africa

The first challenge noted by journalists relates to AI acquisition difficulties due to costs, access to equipment, and human resources, as well as threats presented by AI deployment. Referring to financial costs, *The Guardian* of Nigeria notes that apart “from the low or no salary they receive, with which they cannot afford the gadgets to make easy their jobs, most of the media outfits they represent are unable to provide these tools for them” (Mwantok, 2019). Here, the precarious working conditions that Sub-Saharan African journalists endure also undermine their technological access. In addition, the *Business Day* bemoans the lack of AI expertise, noting that there “are not a lot of people in Nigeria with the skills and knowledge necessary to develop and use AI applications” (Abiola, 2023). This acknowledgement reveals a double tragedy where Sub-Saharan African newsrooms are often too financially challenged to access AI tools, yet they lack skilled personnel to develop cheaper alternatives or use the imported ones. This problem is compounded by a lack of datasets for automation, which MISA (2025a) considers a significant challenge as “AI systems significantly depend on high-quality and diverse datasets to produce effective outputs.” MISA’s concern here echoes marginalization fears against minority communities, which have been linked to the perpetuation of data coloniality.

The second set of challenges that AI presents to the journalism profession includes threats to news business viability, journalists’ working conditions, information integrity, audience trust, and the state of democracy in general. AI threatens the sustainability of news media organizations by increasing revenue competition from pseudo-news sites that publish AI-rewritten news stories. According to *GroundUp*, stories “plagiarized and seemingly rewritten by ChatGPT or some other AI chatbot, appear higher in Google search than their genuine counterparts” (Geffen & van Zyl, 2024). This concern explains why Sub-Saharan African AI hype includes speculation about the opportunity to use AI for search engine optimization.

AI is also considered a threat to journalists’ working conditions. The first threat includes increasing journalists’ workload by adding fact-checking duties, as journalists have to “verify AI-generated content” (MISA, 2025a). This means that although actors in Sub-Saharan Africa are excited about AI opportunities, they are aware of its hallucination weaknesses. AI also threatens journalists’ jobs: The Nigerian *Daily Independent* notes that one reporter can now “single handedly edit a story using AI” (Nzeako, 2023). This concern is understandable in a digital context where journalists are already losing jobs as news organizations face viability challenges. Furthermore, according to *This Day*, AI threatens journalists’ critical-thinking skills as some may “become over-reliant on AI writing tools and start to rely on them too heavily” (“Effects of artificial intelligence,” 2023). This threat continues to increase as some news organizations get exposed for using fake AI journalists. *The Premium Times* also raised the concern that algorithms might “control what content is seen and what is buried” (Ishiekwene, 2023). This is a threat to journalists’ editorial independence and gatekeeping roles. Relatedly, *The Fourth Estate* also raised concern over AI’s ability to “scan phone records, trace online behavior, and monitor journalists’ activities without them even knowing” (Kumsah, 2025). Under repressive conditions, AI can threaten journalists’ press freedom. Thus, the threats highlighted here broaden from the creation of precarious working conditions to the threat to journalistic authority as algorithmic content selection can undermine audience trust.

AI also poses threats to information integrity, which has implications for audience trust. The first challenge relates to “ownership of AI-generated content, which may result in legal complexities related to copyright

and intellectual property rights” (MISA, 2025b). This is because the question of who is responsible for AI-generated content is yet to be settled, which is a result of an AI regulatory vacuum that currently prevails in Sub-Saharan Africa. *The New Era* of Namibia argues that “AI systems trained on data that is not representative can inadvertently perpetuate discrimination and injustice” (Erastus, 2023). Marginalization of underrepresented communities through perpetuation of biases and stereotypes has since been described as a form of violence against minority communities that perpetuates coloniality of being. *The Premium Times* also expressed concern that “deepfake technology is incredibly advanced and can easily fool humans” (Yusuf, 2023). Misinformation threatens to undermine audience trust, for as *The Fourth Estate* explains, if “citizens can’t tell the difference between a journalist’s story and an AI-generated lie, trust in the media collapses...once that happens...democracy starts to shake” (Kumsah, 2025). AI threats thus include marginalization of minority groups and the undermining of journalism’s democratic role by weakening audience trust through misinformation.

Despite the challenges, AI hype still expresses optimism in AI. In an article, “Catch up or Cut a new Tail,” the South African *Daily Maverick* argues that generative AI “may seem to carry more risks than most emerging tech, but that doesn’t mean we should shy away from their use” (Razzano & Oxford, 2023). While this view expresses the perception that AI use is unstoppable, it is also accompanied by a perceived lack of merit in human-replacement arguments, which *The Fourth Estate* calls “one of the biggest myths about AI in journalism” (Kumsah, 2025). *The Liberian Observer* cites a *Hunan Daily* editor who argues that human “editors’ unique strengths lie in their sensitivity, insight, and judgment—traits that AI cannot replicate” (Yates, 2025). AI experiments to date might have exposed some of its creativity, ethical responsibility, and emotional connection limitations. The *Hunan Daily* editor further argued that instead of being replaced, journalists will “reinvent their roles—to engage more deeply with sources, conduct in-depth interviews, [and] analyze complex stories” (Yates, 2025). This is echoed by *The Premium Times* which argues that “unless you are a lazy journalist...at the heart of journalism, accountability journalism is holding power accountable and ensuring that you set the agenda. No machine is going to do that” (Majeed, 2024). Observable here is the perception that instead of being a threat, AI allows journalists more time to hold the powerful to account.

Reflecting on how AI will strengthen journalism, the *NewsDay* and its sister paper, *The Standard*, respectively argue that AI will give journalists “creative superpowers” (“Digital digest: Could AI,” 2023) and “turbocharge newsrooms” (Mokwetsi & Mugadzaweta, 2023). These arguments echo previous contestations that AI will free journalists to do better journalism. *This Day* sums this up: “AI writing tools offer significant benefits for journalists, helping them to produce high-quality content more efficiently and effectively” (“Effects of artificial intelligence,” 2023). As noted earlier, these arguments must be contextualized within a situation characterized by barriers to information access that hinder efficient news production. Taking a forward-looking perspective, *The Fourth Estate* argues that the future does not belong to AI, but “courageous humans using AI” (Kumsah, 2025). Thus, contrary to fears of human replacement, journalists insist on relegating it to the status of a tool, which may enhance their practice. Of course, this remains to be seen. Underlying this discourse, however, is a proposal for a hybridized decolonial AI adoption framework that, among other things, privileges human journalists over AI.

6.3. The Quest for a Decolonizing Hybridized AI Adoption Framework for Sub-Saharan Africa

Analysis from this study shows that underlying the analyzed AI hype is a quest for a hybridized AI adoption framework that involves collaborative efforts to decolonize the technology and to harmonize it with both organization- and audience-centric values. This is coupled with calls for a hybridized AI-adoption scenario that privileges human actors over actants. This section discusses the nuances of these arguments.

A decolonial approach to AI adoption in Sub-Saharan Africa begins with calls to avoid simply importing AI tools from the Global North, as has been the norm, and to come up with strategies to allow local players, including small to medium enterprises, to create local solutions. MISA (2025a) argues that this will “significantly break the chain of coloniality perpetuated through extractive technologies from the Global North” and enable “development and deployment of AI, with our contextual realities at the center of its stature.” *The Fourth Estate* further adds that this localization will allow creation and deployment of “AI tools trained on our data, shaped by our values” (Kumsah, 2025). These two arguments represent an Afro-centric perspective that has been presented as key in breaking the perpetuation of coloniality: Localized AI tools, trained on Sub-Saharan African data, will have local nuances such as linguistic diversity and help in avoiding biases and stereotypes that marginalize minorities. Furthermore, *The Standard* argues that given the competition from tech giants, “the most prudent option is for newsrooms to create their own infrastructure based on ICT to enable distribution models” (Mokwetsi & Mugadzaweta, 2023). Again, this is a decolonial approach aimed at breaking colonial labor exploitation of Sub-Saharan Africa by tech giants. Additionally, the Kenyan *Sunday Standard* has urged “media houses to forge collaborations locally and globally to thrive in the new world order” (Njaramba, 2023). This signals a realization that decolonization, as has been argued by other scholars, does not mean Africa should divorce itself from the world, but must adapt, adjust, and apply.

The hybridized AI adoption model emerging from Sub-Saharan African AI hype prioritizes actors over actants. *This Day* argues that journalists “should approach AI tools with a critical eye and use them as a supplement to their own skills and knowledge” (“Effects of artificial intelligence,” 2023). This positions AI as a subservient actant to human journalists. In this division of labor, *The New Era* encourages journalists to maintain their roles as “gatekeepers, ensuring accuracy and fairness of news stories before publication or broadcast” (Erastus, 2023). This prioritization of human agency in content decisions should be seen as journalistic attempts to maintain journalistic authority. In another hybridized adaptation format, *The Citizen* of Tanzania urges journalism schools to “think about the curriculum....There is a need for new technical skills, from data journalism...to artificial intelligence” (Krüger, 2022). This is a desire to adapt to the new technology, beginning with journalism schools. In a professional journalism context, *Business Day* argues that “it is essential for the industry to grow its base of knowledgeable and upskilled media professionals” (Abiola, 2023). Again, this call fits into the hybridization approach that prioritizes actors using AI as a tool by empowering journalists with necessary knowledge and skills.

A hybrid AI-adoption framework also emerges from the advancement of both news organization- and audience-centered values. Some of the prominently promoted values to guide journalism in the AI era are accuracy, transparency, accountability, and diversity. *The Fourth Estate* urges news organizations to extend fact-checking “beyond text to video, images, and even AI-generated commentary” (Fahmy, 2023). This demonstrates concerns over AI hallucinations or potential uses for disinformation and misinformation. *The Star* of South Africa further calls for transparency in AI use, maintaining that audiences should be made

“aware when content is created using AI” (Fahmy, 2023). To date, however, there is still debate over when to disclose AI use and its implications for audience trust. In addition, MISA (2025b) argues that “AI systems must be designed inclusively, with input from various stakeholders, including marginalized groups, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented voices.” External organizations here attempt to balance AI innovation with audience-oriented journalistic values to protect the vulnerable.

Individual privacy, media-literacy campaigns, transparency debates, and public trust make up some of these audience-oriented values. The Zimbabwean *Herald* says it has come up with mechanisms to ensure that “personal data collected and processed through our digital channels is handled responsibly, safeguarding the rights of audiences and stakeholders” (Gahadza, 2025). This effort rises from data coloniality concerns perpetuated by surveillance capitalism. Media-literacy campaigns, according to *The Fourth Estate*, are intended to empower audiences to “question, verify, and critically engage with content” (Kumsah, 2025). This call to advance audience agency is an attempt to empower audiences to protect themselves against misinformation. Furthermore, Kumsah (2025) urges journalists to “treat digital platforms as core spaces, not dumping grounds for headlines.” This is a veiled criticism of clickbait journalism. This decolonial AI adoption model presented here has implications for how stakeholders think about AI adoption frameworks as discussed in the next section.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Conceptualizing AI hype (Lewis, Guzman, et al., 2025) as a form of metajournalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016), this study examined how this discourse is used to negotiate the role and place of AI within journalism. Accordingly, the study first assessed how both journalistic and non-journalistic actors assess the state of AI adoption in Sub-Saharan Africa, paying attention to its considered opportunities, challenges, and threats in journalistic processes (Møller et al., 2025; Umejei et al., 2025; Yu & Huang, 2021). Second, the study sought to tease out whether an emergent ideal integration framework (Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025) could be identified. Informed by this framework, the first level of deductive analysis identified how Sub-Saharan African AI hype discourse echoes other global discourses. The subsequent abductive analysis, however, revealed that this AI hype from Sub-Saharan Africa is underlined by FOMO, thereby diverging fundamentally from other global discourses.

First, the Sub-Saharan African AI hype discourse is unique for its FOMO driven by recognition of how Africa is lagging in AI adoption. This is different from the pessimistic wait-and-see approaches that have been adopted by some journalists in previous studies (Munoriyarwa, 2024; Salvador-Mata et al., 2025). This could be because those who are pro-AI adoption are the ones writing a lot about it, as compared to skeptics who might have only expressed their views in interview-based research. While this AI hype discourse recognizes challenges and threats posed by the technology, such as misinformation and the undermining of public trust in journalism (Gondwe, 2026; Lindén, 2017; Moran & Shaikh, 2022; Thomson et al., 2024), this discourse insists Africa cannot afford to miss out on this technology. The position to adopt AI against all odds is driven by the assumption of human journalists’ superiority over the technology, as has been noted by other researchers (Milosavljević & Vobič, 2021; Rydenfelt, 2022; Schapals & Porlezza, 2020). Stakeholders are confident that AI cannot replace journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa due to its numerous limitations.

Second, implied in the AI hype analyzed here is a decolonial hybridized AI adoption framework that seeks to harmonize AI with both journalistic and audience-centered values, prioritizing human agency as noted in previous studies (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Wu, 2026). It goes further in calling for the sensitization of AI to the Sub-Saharan African context to avoid perpetuation of the colonality of being, knowledge, and power (Mpofu & Queen, 2025; Tshuma & Matsilele, 2025). This echoes previous arguments that AI development without inclusive development can perpetuate biases and stereotypes (Alayande et al., 2025) and that AI technology does not represent journalistic values and should be contextualized within the field (Perreault et al., 2026; Umejei et al., 2025). Findings in this study are also unique in openly calling for AI use in fact-checking in Sub-Saharan Africa. This contrasts with findings from the Global North that journalists are inclined to restrict AI use in verification processes (Cools & de Vreese, 2026). Lastly, while the AI hype discourse from Sub-Saharan Africa is consistent with hybridization sentiments from the Global North, it is also unique in calling for a decolonial approach that opposes wholesale importation of AI technologies without localization through innovation by locals to contextualize the technology and avoid risks of bias, stereotype perpetuation, and marginalization of the African people (Mathe, 2025).

Methodologically, the exposure of AI FOMO through abductive analysis shows how alternative approaches beyond interviews (Schjøtt, 2026) can capture different perspectives. Practically, this study repeats Nkoala et al.'s (2026) warning that FOMO might force journalists to forgo AI risks. It would thus be important to make sure that conversations about AI adoption in Africa involve multiple stakeholders to ensure checks and balances. The AI FOMO from this study, however, cannot be generalized to all Sub-Saharan African journalistic and non-journalistic actors. FOMO might have emerged partly because only those who are pro-AI are writing so much about it, since the study used document analysis. Future studies can comparatively assess AI hype among different countries.

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Data Availability

All data used for this manuscript can be accessed from the corresponding author upon request.

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No large language models were used in the research or writing of this manuscript.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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