



PROMISES AND PERILS OF AI IN PUBLIC SECTOR COMMUNICATION

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28 June 2024



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THE EVOLUTION OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY



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Source: <https://www.azom.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=22033>



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AI! AI! AI! WHAT IS AI?!

Artificial intelligence (AI) is the evolution of internet-enabled technology

The key difference with AI is that the technology is developed to perform humanistic functions and with little intervention or programming, continuously learning until becoming as close to human as absolutely possible for the task e.g. NLP

The data artificial intelligence is fed determines its evolution

Machine learning is the task of getting devices to learn as well, if not better than human beings



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EXAMPLES OF AI COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Voice assistants e.g. Siri, Alexa, Google
Chatbots

Generative AI e.g. ChatGPT, predictive text
Presentation generator

Image generators

Video generators

Virtual assistants e.g. MS Teams virtual
assistant

Robots e.g. front desk assistance

Automated newsletters



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THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION (4IR)

The 4IR evolution relies on each country's socio-economic conditions

The technology-powered 4IR or the digital revolution, is about merging technologies that blurs the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres – becoming seamlessly integrated and embedded into our daily lives

Internet access is critical to meaningful participation in the 4IR and access to AI

AI is key part of the 4IR, accelerating its pace

The promises of AI for a resource-constrained government such as ours are abundant

However, as with all new technology, AI brings with it serious perils



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PUBLIC SECTOR COMMUNICATION LANDSCAPE

Public Sector Communication Sources

The State (**Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary**)

Public agencies

State-owned enterprises

Chapter 9 Institutions
(Institutions supporting democracy)

Factors influencing public communication (internal/external)

Infrastructure

Literacy

Skills

Channels access

The media

Agency

Strategy(ies)

Basic service delivery

Political climate

Outcomes of effective public communication

Informed citizens at multiple levels of public sector

Increased public trust

Meaningful public engagement

Engaged and active citizenry

Public/private partnership



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PUBLIC SECTOR COMMUNICATOR'S ROLE

As part of building and maintaining relationships between public sector and their publics/stakeholders through communication, there are a number of responsibilities involved for communication professionals, which include:

- Media relations
- Community engagements and meetings
- Event management
- Crisis communication
- Social media
- Leadership image management
- Technical communication and reporting
- Ethics
- Public relations and communication strategy



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DIGITAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY'S ROLE

The adoption of new technologies in any organization through the process of digitalization must be informed by an overarching communication strategy

Embedded in a communication strategy should be the digital communication strategy, outlining how the communication goals will be achieved using digital communication technologies

The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) is tasked with central government communication in South Africa, however as yet, there is no unified central government communication strategy, leaving the task to individual ministries, departments and municipalities

A central communication strategy would include policy guidelines for various spheres of the public sector to digitalise and increase the adoption rate of AI



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DIGITAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY'S ROLE

With a national digital communication strategy, there would be opportunity for public sector communicators to:

- Take into account how to work in a converged manner with media to take into account existing challenges of connectivity
- The strategy would need to outline the required investment and resources required for meaningful digital stakeholder engagement
- Understand how to integrate new technologies to improve their professional delivery
- Have room to experiment with AI technologies through pilot projects and share best practice centrally
- Be trained to become competent in the use of AI



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THE PROMISES OF AI

Potential benefits and applications



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THE PROMISES

4IR technologies like AI have changed the communicative relationship between organisations and their stakeholder audiences

Technology has enabled participation of stakeholders, shifting the power of communication away from organisations

AI technologies have also enabled organisations to learn more about their stakeholders and communicate to them in a more personalized way



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THE PROMISES

Stakeholder audiences are now prosumers of organizational communication i.e. proactive/producing consumers

Public sector communicators' roles have grown exponentially in importance at all levels of government from local, provincial and national levels especially in the era of advancing digital communication technologies

Government communication stakeholders are heterogenous, with diverse expectations and are in masses

AI can facilitate service delivery communication outside of office hours e.g. billing enquiries, applications for housing/school



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THE PROMISES

Daily routine communication tasks can be eased e.g. meeting minutes, report writing, speech writing, press release preparation

Some public sector communication processes can be automated, for example municipal billing, service delivery updates and self-service terminals for citizens

AI tools can support public sector communicators with time-saving automation of routine tasks to allow them to focus on improving the quality of citizen engagements

Government processes large volumes of data and AI can be helpful in distilling the data in an insightful manner to inform actions e.g. content performance

Because AI is constantly learning, it is beginning to enable the public sector to conduct more efficient resource planning to bolster much-needed human capacity

As the integration of AI rises in public sector communication, professionals are being reskilled to meet the demands of citizen stakeholders



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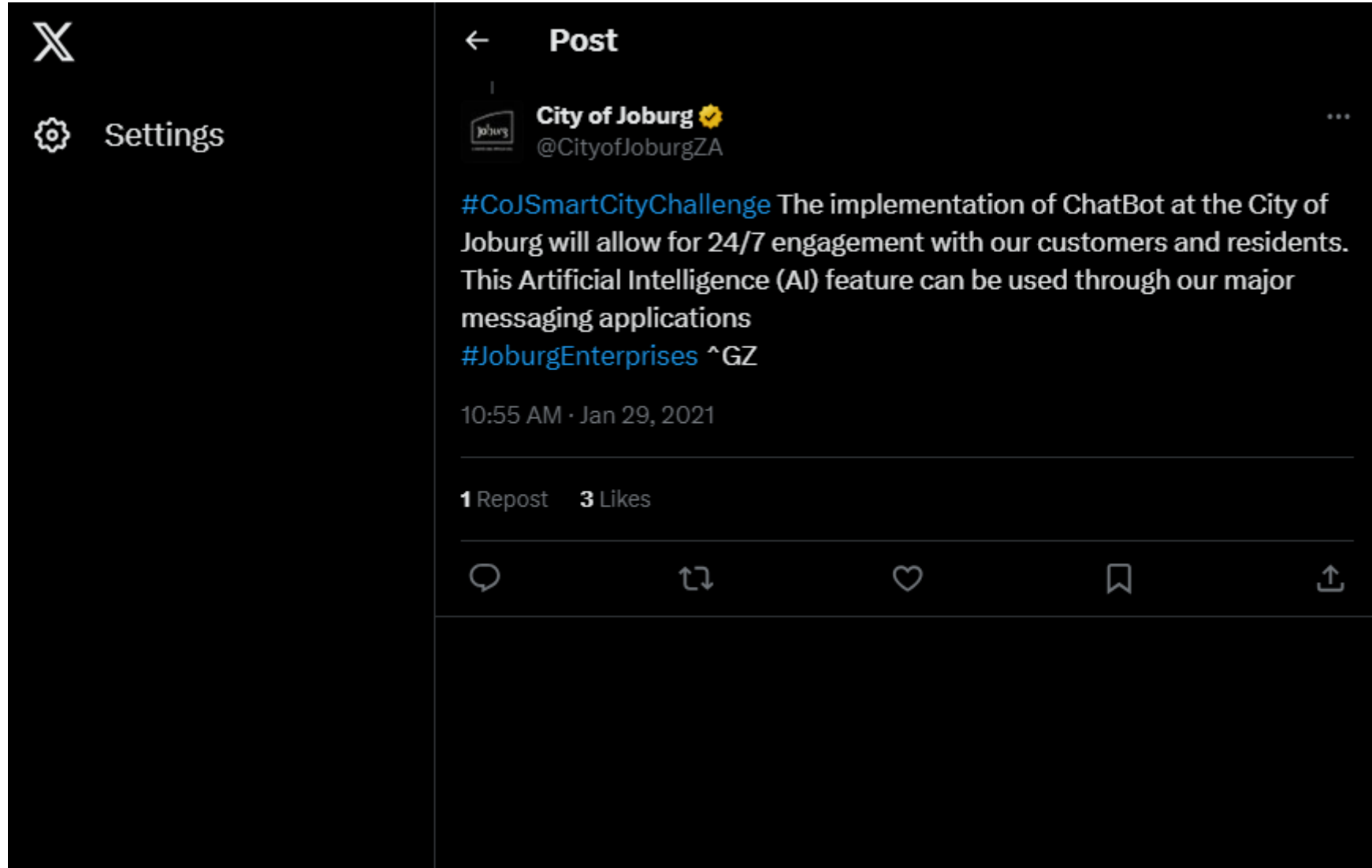
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THE PROMISES - SARS

BI AND DATA ANALYTICS 

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SARS doubles down on AI, machine learning after revenue gains

By  Simnikiwe Mzekandaba, IT in government editor
Johannesburg, 03 Apr 2024



SARS commissioner Edward Kieswetter.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are assisting the South African Revenue Service (SARS) to weed out criminality and non-compliance.

Source: <https://www.itweb.co.za/article/sars-doubles-down-on-ai-machine-learning-after-revenue-gains/rxP3jqBEyeoMA2ye>



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THE PERILS OF AI

Potential harm and shortcomings



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THE PERILS

The implications for the media of the rise of AI has been reduced circulation, information inaccessibility through digital privilege, and closure of publications – less ways for public sector communicators to reach citizens

Economic affordability cannot be ignored in South Africa, which further complicates the adoption of AI technologies by public sector communicators – differentiation across three spheres of government

There is reluctance/resistance by public sector communication professionals to integrate AI into their professional practices possibly because of job security concerns – this perpetuates service delivery inefficiencies in public sector communication



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THE PERILS – WHOSE SPEECH IS IT ANYWAY?

South Africa Investigating if President's Speech Was Written by ChatGPT

COMPUTER LANGUAGE?

The address in question was delivered at a conference about education.



Dan Ladden-Hall
News Correspondent

Published Nov. 28, 2023 6:48AM EST



Siphwe Sibeko/Reuters



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THE PERILS

There are almost no direct government regulations pertaining to AI, leaving citizens vulnerable to owners of AI tools and platforms re. online privacy threatening breaches of privacy e.g. POPI Act, because **security≠privacy**

Personal information of 4IR brings up **ethical** questions between “data analysis” and “data privacy”

South Africa’s development of a national AI is in the early stages, led by the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies

AI demands increased data gathering to improve the user’s online experience, but this should not compromise privacy of personal information

There are issues of citizens lacking different levels of skills, especially those required for meaningful participation using AI



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THE PERILS

AI is not perfect and multiple scandals have raised moral and ethical questions about its application

The technology has demonstrated infringement of laws and rights of individuals

There have also been reports of racial and gender discrimination experienced by AI users due to bias

AI brings with it numerous ethical risks and dilemmas, some of which have not yet been considered because of the rapid changes of the technology



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WHAT NEXT

Choosing an approach for AI



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Now what?

AI has the potential to serve as a public good when effectively used by public sector communicators, but they need to be supported through a national communication strategy

The promises cannot lead to the ignoring of the perils of AI among communication professionals, especially in public sector

Investing in training of professionals to grasp the full power of these tools is critical for their meaningful integration

Need to be very conscious and deliberate in taking along ***all*** citizens on the journey of AI advancement to make it a public good

Government must develop **meaningful** policies for the protection of data, privacy and information of citizens and the country as a whole



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“I’m increasingly inclined to think that there should be some regulatory oversight, maybe at the national and international level, just to make sure that we don’t do something very foolish. I mean with artificial intelligence we’re summoning the demon.” - Elon Musk



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QUESTIONS

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