

“Digital sweatshops”: Does AI lead to neo-colonialism?

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Content



A brief introduction



Watch video- apprx.
13 minutes

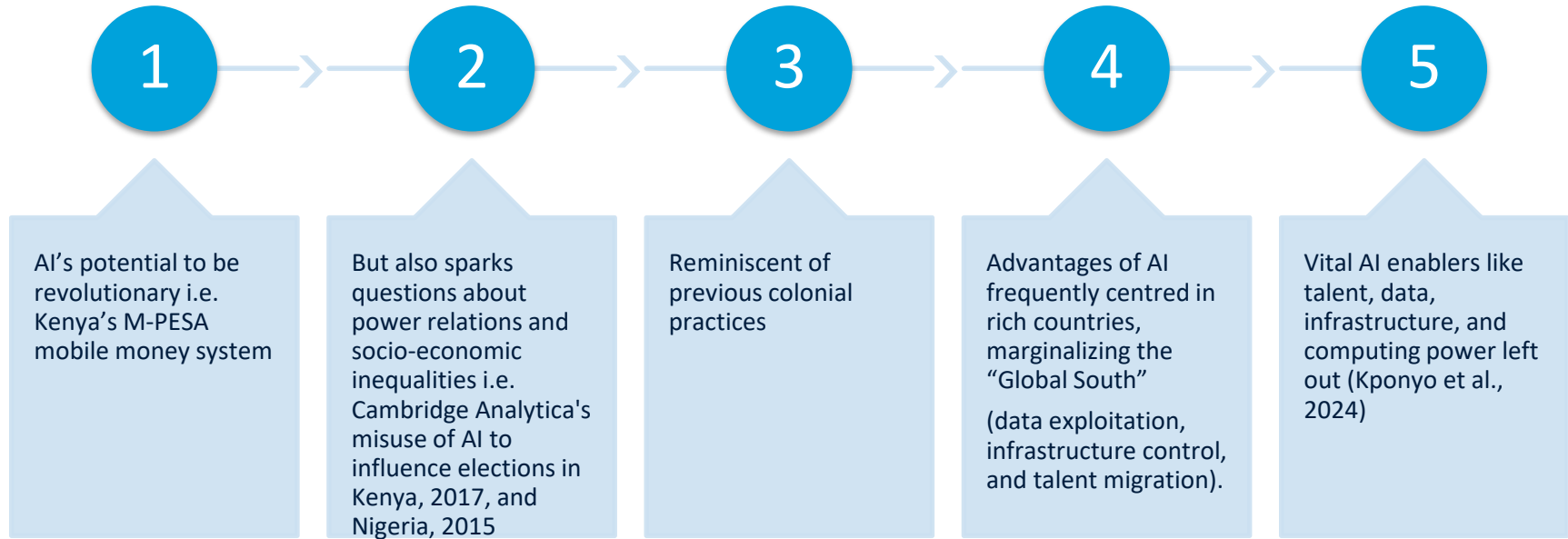


Discussion



Wrap up

1. Framing AI as a Neo-Colonial Project (?)



Example 1



Inside the Technology that Keeps M-PESA Running

Behind the scenes, teams are constantly monitoring the system health using Artificial intelligence tools and in network operations centers that run 24/7 to track every transaction



“The AI models look for unusual patterns, like someone trying to withdraw more than they usually do or making many transactions within a short span of time. When that happens, the system can flag or even freeze suspicious activity instantly”

Felix Rop, Safaricom’s Head of Financial Services Technology

Example 2

POLITICS

Here's how Cambridge Analytica played a dominant role in Kenya's chaotic 2017 elections

PUBLISHED FRI, MAR 23 2018-10:31 AM EDT

Justina Crabtree
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Senior executives boasted about psychological manipulation, entrapment techniques and fake news campaigns.

KEY POINTS

- The managing director of data analysis firm Cambridge Analytica was covertly filmed by U.K. broadcaster Channel 4 describing his company's sway over Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta's previous two election campaigns.
- The firm worked on "just about every element" of Kenyatta's bid to be elected, he said.
- Fake news and misinformation impacted Kenya's 2017 elections like never before, as exposure to smartphones and social media has grown quickly in the country, a Nairobi-based data analysis firm told CNBC.



Case

Kenyan context:

- Youthful population- approximately 75 percent under 35 years (2019 census)
- Youth (15-34 years) unemployment rate is as high as 67 percent (Federation of Kenya Employers)
- Youthful population is highly educated but low employment opportunities
- Youth end up being overqualified and under-employed
- Online labour has become attractive to the youth
 - E.g. online writing. Kenya is producing the highest number of academic workers globally (Prof. Patricia Kingori)
 - Role of Kenyans in training AI, teaching AI algorithms to recognize objects, faces etc.



2. Let's talk about vital AI enablers!

Techno-neocolonialism as a modern form of dominance and exploitation (extraction and extractivism) (Kponyo et al., 2024)

Dominant global powers and multinational corporations, primarily from economically advanced regions, exert control and influence over the technological sphere in less economically developed countries that were previously subject to colonialism (Stevenson, 2024)

Techno-neocolonialism, similar to traditional colonialism, which involved “territorial appropriation, exploitation of the natural environment and of human labour, and direct control of social structures” of weaker regions for the benefit of conquering nations” (Mohamed et al., 2020, p. 664)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZS50KXjAX0&t=81s>

Discussion- Group 1

Labor, Automation, and Invisible Work

- (How) Do these AI labor practices reproduce colonial patterns of exploitation?
- What responsibilities do researchers, developers, and institutions have?
- How can we overcome systemic disadvantages in the global AI ecosystem?

3. Discussion- Group 2

Ethics, Accountability, and Global Governance

- What would meaningful accountability to marginalized communities look like?
- What responsibilities do researchers, developers, and institutions have?
- How can interdisciplinary research challenge dominant AI narratives?

4. Wrap up

- Take-aways from each group
- Questions

“The future of AI must be built on equity and inclusion, ensuring that no region is left merely as a supplier of raw data or talent but as a full participant in the global digital economy” - Prof. Jerry John Kponyo

Further reads

- Kponyo, J. J., Fosu, D. M., Owusu, F. E. B., Ali, M. I., & Ahiamadzor, M. M. (2024). Techno-neocolonialism: an emerging risk in the artificial intelligence revolution. *Trayectorias Humanas Trascontinentales*, (18).
- Mohamed, S., Png, M. T., & Isaac, W. (2020). Decolonial AI: Decolonial theory as sociotechnical foresight in artificial intelligence. *Philosophy and Technology*, 33(4), 659–684.
- Stevenson, T. (2024). Navigating digital neocolonialism in Africa.