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NITheCS WEBINAR:

Synergizing Emotional Intelligence with African Cultural Contexts for AI-Driven Mental Health Support

Gift Sontaga (North-West University)

Friday, 6 December 2024 | 14h00 – 15h00 SAST
Attend online

ABSTRACT

The integration of artificial intelligence or AI into mental health support offers unparalleled opportunities for accessible and personalized health care. However, to ensure inclusivity, trust, and relevance, AI solutions must align with the socio-cultural contexts of their target populations to be effective. This presentation examines the intersection of emotional intelligence, cognitive behavioral therapy, and Africa-centric contexts in designing AI-driven mental health systems for African communities. We propose combining culturally informed emotional intelligence with AI to address Africa's unique linguistic, socio-economic, and cultural dynamics. Emotional intelligence improves mental health support by allowing AI systems to recognize, understand, and respond empathetically to emotions in a culturally relevant manner, while cognitive behavioral therapy provides structured therapeutic techniques to address anxiety and depression. The Africa-centric perspective adds critical dimensions, including communal values, indigenous knowledge, spirituality, and culturally specific stressors that are often overlooked in global AI models and mental health frameworks. This initiative also addresses key challenges, such as data scarcity, ethical considerations, and linguistic diversity, while presenting results from a pilot implementation. Also, we believe that prioritizing African contexts and embedding emotional intelligence within this framework bridges the divide between technology and culturally sensitive mental health care.

BIOGRAPHY

Gift Sontaga is a Master's student in Computer Science at North-West University. Supervised by Prof Absalom Ezugwu and Dr Kevin Igwe, his research focuses on integrating Africa-centric emotional intelligence into AI-driven applications that also address culturally sensitive mental health challenges. Gift holds a BSc in IT (with distinction) and an Honours in Computer Science. He is also a Software Development Engineer Intern at Amazon Web Services.

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