Lab to herald new age in social media research

By Lochemem Bruno Michael and Dan Muchai

The Secure Information Management Environment (SIME) social media lab was launched on Thursday, April 5, during a ceremony attended by the American Ambassador H.E. Bob Godec, Chancellor Dr. Manu Chandaria, Vice Chancellor Prof. Paul Zeleza and other senior University officials.

The lab, which is a joint effort funded by the United States government to the tune of KES 20 million, will be based in the Incubation and Innovation Center, and overseen by Lab Coordinator Dr. Patrick Wamuyu (Assistant Professor of Information Systems and Technology).

The lab, an unprecedented undertaking, is predicated on providing big data and social media analytics insights, powered by the IBM Watson Analytics for Social Media software.

Massive collections of user-created information often termed big data, are frequently generated through social media sources. This has inevitably led to the proliferation of misinformation - a challenge that has been the focus of the U.S. Embassy’s #StopReflectVerify campaign to combat ‘fake news’ - a term that has come to refer to deliberate misinformation or hoaxes created to deceive and thus influence views, push agendas or cause confusion.

In “The Reality of Fake News in Kenya” - a study by Portland and Geopoll based on the 2017 Kenyan General Elections, it was revealed that 90% of Kenyans...
were exposed to fake news concerning the elections, while 87% reported instances of deliberate fake news.

The Vice Chancellor Prof. Paul Zeleza underlined the role the lab will play in promoting the use of research to provide accurate well-informed engagements within and between the different facets of society.

In his remarks, Ambassador Godec singled out the privacy and security threats arising from the ‘boundless opportunities’ presented by digital technology.

He expressed his hope that the lab’s “upcoming research on Kenyan social media use will bring us all to a better understanding of Kenya in the digital age – and especially Kenyan youth.”

The SIMELab at USIU-Africa is the first multidisciplinary research laboratory to be set up in Africa, to study social media.

The laboratory will provide a platform for research and training in analyzing the social media and internet consumption in Kenya. This will thereafter culminate in an annual publication on the situation analysis, regarding the consumption of new media and social media in Kenya, and the launch of the first-ever International Digital Communication Congress.

Increasingly, the need to sort through and classify big data, requires analytical tools that will enable businesses and media outfits to make decisions and communicate information that is accurate and useful.

IBM Watson Analytics for Social Media software provides tools for Product Research and Development, Marketing Strategy and Competitive Intelligence. These tools, use Natural Language Processing (NLP) to parse and synthesize data.

While demonstrating capabilities of the IBM Watson Analytics for Social Media software, Dr. Maria Canudo (Assistant Professor of Journalism and Mass Communications), initiated a sentiment-driven search of social media mentions, using the keywords “Winnie Mandela”. Sentiment analysis, a concept premised on extracting subjective data, will be useful for deducing trends in public opinion and extracting relationships between customer perceptions and brand messaging.

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Librarians meet to strategize on development of funding proposals

The Library and Information Center on Tuesday, March 27 hosted the United Nations/World Bank University Librarians Workshop at the Library Bookshop. The meeting whose objective was to ‘Learn Strategies on how to document and build business cases supporting the library and develop brief and meaningful surveys to back funding decisions’ was held against a backdrop of increasing pressure on university librarians to provide justifications for funding that will strengthen library services.

While making his remarks Associate DVC-Student Affairs Prof. Munyae Mulinge, underscored the role librarians play in disseminating information. He urged them to inculcate a reading culture in academic institutions through working together with instructors.

Librarians were encouraged to come up with a common survey tool that can be used to solicit users’ views on library services, that will produce evidence in the form of data to administrators in order to build cases to solicit funding.
Bus heralds new era for persons differently enabled

By Dan Muchai

On Friday, March 29, the Vice Chancellor Prof. Paul Zeleza flagged off the most recent addition to the University’s six-bus fleet. The new 40-seater modern coach bus was flagged off by the Vice Chancellor Prof. Paul Zeleza accompanied by officials from the Administration Division as well as other senior university officials.

Operations Director Eng. Paul Warui described the new addition as part of the transport fleet upgrade plan, which anticipates an overhaul of the entire fleet by the year 2020. According to him, the KES 13 million bus will lead to greater efficiency and address the growing needs of the expanding university population, both of which are part of the transport department’s strategic plan imperatives.

The new bus is accompanied by a host of new features such as USB charging, a modern entertainment system, reclining seats and a more powerful turbo-charged engine. These features, Engineer Warui said, are designed to make lengthy bus journeys comfortable and exciting.

But the bus’ most striking feature remains a new hydraulic platform at the back. The platform - arguably the first of its kind on college buses in Kenya - enables wheelchair-bound passengers to be lifted to the floor of the bus without leaving their wheelchair. Additionally, the bus has the capacity to secure and transport up to seven such passengers on a given journey.

Speaking before he flagged off the bus’ first trip, the Vice Chancellor Prof. Paul Zeleza, applauded officials from the Administration Division for their efforts in facilitating the university’s objective of universal access to all campus services.

According to the World Report on Disability (World Health Organization and World Bank 2011) more than one billion people in the world live with some form of disability caused by mental, physical or sensory impairment.

The new Policy for Access of Persons with Disabilities, and Other Special Needs establishes minimum standards and expectations at institutional, school, program, course and individual levels at the university, in relation to the provision of quality and inclusive education for persons who are differently abled.

Prof. Zeleza pointed out that the new bus is a reflection of the University’s determination to give effect to this new policy, “We are going to implement this policy in all aspects of our programs and services to make sure that all of us feel that sense of belonging.”
Dr. Ireri’s articles published in renowned communications journal

Two book review articles by Dr. Kioko Ireri, an Associate Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication, have been published in the current issue of *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, the flagship journal of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJC).

Authored by Erin Tolley, *Framed: Media and the Coverage of Race in Canadian Politics*, looks at the reportage of White and visible minority candidates so that patterns of media framing can be compared. Specifically, the volume explores the contextual nature of racialized media coverage by looking at a number of factors that include candidate gender, political party affiliation, and the diversity of the ridings in which politicians run.

Similarly, it investigates candidates’ own views on media coverage and race in politics. It sheds light on the work that journalists do, the constraints that they face, and how they think about covering stories touching on diversity.

Tolley outlines two strong justifications why *Framed* is useful. It is the first Canadian study that documents visible minority and White candidates’ accounts of their electoral, communication, and image management strategies and assesses how a politician’s race affects self-presentation and media portrayals. Second, the book positions the media as a vital link in the citizen–politics relationship. Tolley is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto, where she teaches Canadian politics.

The other book, *Image and Emotion in Voter Decisions: The Affect Agenda* examines the media coverage of politicians’ images and their influence on voters in election campaigns. Politicians’ images are comprehensively interrogated in terms of attributes, appearance, characteristics, and personal style—and how these factors shape voters’ attitudes in evaluating political candidates. The volume is the incredible work of Renita Coleman, associate professor at the University of Texas at Austin School of Journalism, and Denis Wu, associate professor of communication at Boston University. Coleman and Wu provide two key arguments why politicians’ images matter in political communications scholarship, especially when studied from affect, information processing, and agenda-setting theoretical standpoints. First, many public office seekers are assessed not on the issue stances they embrace, but on their images — self-presentation, emotional displays, and personal attributes. Second, in spite of numerous studies on the influence of mediated agendas on politics, Coleman and Wu point out that most research examine texts only — yet the news media does not deliver words only. Thus, they argue that the potential impact of visuals on people’s perceptions is too important to ignore in research. This is so because visuals make stories on television credible and interesting, resulting in what the authors refer to as “picture superiority.”

Media Mentions

By Diana Meso

April 6: USIU-Africa was mentioned by Scrummage in an article titled “USIU-Martials release match day 23 for Bulls test.”

April 5: USIU-Africa was mentioned by BizNis Africa in an article titled “Habil Olaka, Kenya Bankers Association CEO.”

April 5: The Scrummage mentioned USIU-Africa in an article titled “Western Bulls announce squad for USIU tie.”

April 4: The Star mentioned USIU-Africa in an article titled “USIU denies wrongdoing in lawsuit over broken lift.”

April 4: USIU-Africa was mentioned by Potentash in an article titled “BAKE Awards 2018 Nominees Unveiled. Vote For Your Favourite Bloggers Now!”


April 4: USIU-Africa was mentioned online in an article titled “Nominees Announced and Voting Opens for the 2018 BAKE Awards.”

April 4: The Star mentioned USIU-Africa in an article titled “Butali sign three players ahead of upcoming season.”

April 3: The Star mentioned USIU-Africa in an article titled “Strathmore sides beef up ahead of new season.”

April 3: USIU-Africa was mentioned by the Daily Monitor in an article titled “Wazalendo, Wananchi inflict Easter pain on KHC.”

March 30: The Star mentioned USIU-Africa in an article titled “Homeboyz confront Kabras, Western Bulls and Makueni in tricky pool.”

March 29: Citizen Digital mentioned USIU-Africa in an article titled “It’s Easter hunt at Top Fry Great Rift 10s.”

March 28: USIU-Africa was mentioned by Citizen Digital in an article titled “Homeboyz highlights draw for the Great Rift 10-A side.”

March 26: USIU-Africa was mentioned by Scrummage in an article titled “Week 14 review: Kisumu RFC, Egerton win on the road as USIU’s woes continue.”