



Artificial Intelligence and the legal profession in Nigeria: Friend or Foe?

Abigail Benjamin Kahuwai

Lecturer, Department of Professional Ethics and Sills, Nigerian Law School, Abuja, Nigeria

Abstract

Artificial intelligence has, in the last decade taken the corporate world by storm affecting sector such as retail, manufacturing, and even medicine. Their utilization has, to a large extent produced positive impact and improvements on how these sector function. Although the legal profession is one that does not quickly embrace change, AI, has somewhat found an appreciable acceptance especially in advanced climes. The same can however not be said about Nigeria mainly because of some concerns on possible breaches of professional ethics or that its utilization could encourage laziness thus affect professionalism. This paper seeks to answer the question of whether Artificial intelligence is a foe or friend of the Nigerian lawyer in his craft. It looked at the history of AI, types, applications, and advantages of the use of AI. We also discussed some advantages that the Nigerian lawyer would enjoy from the use of AI. Recommendations for responsible utilization of AI devices by the Nigerian lawyer were also made. The doctrinal approach was used in writing this article.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Nigerian Lawyer, legal ethics, professional responsibilities

Introduction

The phrase ‘artificial intelligence’ (hereafter AI) was coined in 1956 by John McCarthy, an American computer scientist, at the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence [1]. At this conference, widely considered the birthplace of AI, Mr. McCarthy referred to AI as ‘...the computational part of the ability to achieve goals in the world’ [2]. Although this, by way of definition, does not say much, it however gives one an idea that central to the development of artificial intelligence is the desire to help users achieve set goals. AI has also been referred to as ‘...the automation of activities associated with human thinking, such as decision-making, problem-solving, and learning’ [3].

It can be gleaned, from the foregoing that there is no universally adopted or accepted definition of AI. Each of the definitions was dependent on a person’s appreciation or understanding of what it is or ought to do or how it is utilized. In this article, we describe AI as an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of technologies, that, in conjunction with human prompting or instigation make it easy to achieve, or even surpass set goals. The effect and extent of AI on daily living, either in business or private lives cannot be overstated, as without fear of contradiction, it can be said to be the driving force of a lot of innovations, emerging technologies thus affecting almost all spheres of human existence.

Although the initial conceptualization of AI was as a tool that could stimulate human intelligence with learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and language comprehension in its cognitive abilities [4], technological advancements have led to the integration of statistical analysis, machine learning and search algorithms features to it.

Types of AI

Professor Arend Hintze, placed AI machines into 4 categories, [5] viz:

a. Reactive Machines: these are AI built to react to what is before them in a given moment, and within a limited

context [6]. Examples of reactive AI tools include Netflix’s recommendation engine and IBM’s Deep Blue used in chess games [7].

- b. Limited Memory Machines:** These AI tools are built with the capacity to store data from which they can make predictions or decisions. Examples of such are found in self-driving cars that have already stored data for speed adjustment, observe approaching vehicles, and for making turns as may be necessary [8].
- c. Theory of Mind Machines:** these are AI system that can perceive and understand human emotions, make decisions on their own and use information to predict future actions [9].
- d. Self Representation Machines:** these are AI machines that are aware of their past and present self. They are considered as the most advanced AI because they have an understanding of the world, others, and self [10].

AI Language

AI communicates with users and could give results in either:

- a. Natural Language Processing (NLP):** Where the AI reads text, listens to speeches, interprets, transcribes and transmits same requisite feedback in the same way as humans.
- b. Machine Learning:** This follows a pattern or system to arrive at a conclusion. It is commonly used in facial recognition devices, email automation, spam filtering, social media optimization and healthcare advancement [11].

Common AI tools in use today include:

- i. Generative AI:** this AI is trained on vast amount of data and from which it generates information in response to instructions given by way of an input or a ‘prompt’. A generative AI, could, because of the wealth of data available, suggest new prompts on the same

subject and can also make suggestions on images, designs, and software codes on the prompt. Generative AI has gained massive popularity in the past few years. Examples of popular generative AI include ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude and Grok ^[12].

- ii. **Translation AI:** is used to translate text from one language to another. Examples of such AI include. Google Translate, Quilbot, Smartling, Microsoft Bing Translator and DeepL ^[13].
- iii. **Personal AI assistants:** These AI receive instructions from users to perform a variety of tasks. Examples of such personal AI are Alexa and Siri ^[14].

AI and the Corporate World

Although AI has been around for decades, technological advancements has led to its utilization in almost every facet of life. An enumeration of the benefits of AI can never be exhaustive. Some of which are:

- i. The ability to analyze vast amounts of data quickly leading to tasks being performed on time.
- ii. Some AI devices do not need human supervision or contribution to perform given tasks the vast amount data at their disposal is all they need to deliver the required result. They can therefore work independent of human control or contribution thus helping organization save cost on staff remuneration and training.
- iii. AI, because of their use of algorithms and automation (that follow the same processes every single time), can produce error free results.
- iv. Accessibility: Provided there is internet connection, AI can be used at anytime thus making it a dependable device.

AI is now being utilized in almost all sectors of the economy to improve efficiency, accuracy, and accessibility to services and products. Industries where AI has made impressive impact are:

- a. **Finance:** AI has moved the banking hall from the conventional corporate office to people's phones, providing customer service support to 24/7 all year round ^[15]. The financial sector also use AI devices such as Cloud GPU ^[16] to examine patterns and anomalies suggestive of fraudulent financial dealings ^[17].
- b. **Retail:** The retail sector use AI to recommend or make possible alternative recommendations on products and services, provide more convenient way for payment for goods and services ^[18].
- c. **Customer Service:** AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can understand and respond to customer inquiries in human-like way. They can therefore handle routine customer inquiries, provide product recommendations and troubleshoot common issues in real-time, thus improving overall satisfaction while reducing response times ^[19].
- d. **Healthcare:** AI is used to improve the accuracy of medical diagnoses, facilitate drug research and development, manage sensitive healthcare data and automate online patient experiences. AI is also a driving force behind medical robots that provide

assisted therapy or guide surgeons during surgical procedures ^[20].

- e. **Manufacturing:** AI is used to drive factory and warehouse robots. These robots are often used to handle tricky or dangerous tasks ^[21].
- f. **Military:** Military establishments use AI on and off the battlefield to gather and process intelligence, detect and deflect cyber warfare, automate military weaponry, defence systems and vehicles. Drones and robots are also utilized by the military for combat or search and rescue missions ^[22].

AI in the Legal Profession

Although, the legal profession has a penchant of sticking to old traditions and norms, AI has made an inroad into the profession. According to Legal Trends Report, about 79% of legal practitioners interviewed have used AI in the course of their practice ^[23]. This is definitely an impressive number considering how lawyers can be on acceptance and utilisation of new things into the practice of law.

Lawyers use AI majorly for following purposes:

- a. **Legal Analysis:** AI such as Amto, Detangle ai, and Lex Machina ^[24], can and have been used to determine the viability of litigation or quantifying the value of a lawsuit. This have helped lawyers to determine the proper or alternative means of resolving legal issues. AI tools such as *Casetext* and *ROSS Intelligence* ^[25] have been developed with sophisticated semantics that understand, not just legal opinions, but can decipher and highlight the relationship between cases or their relevance to each other.
- b. **Legal research and drafting:** a lawyer may be engaged to draft contracts, deeds, petitions, etc. When that happens, there will be the need to conduct research to access relevant source materials. Leverton, an AI device is said to be capable of reading contracts at high speed, and in up to twenty (20) languages ^[26]. Latch, another AI tool, can be used to summarize agreements, and create custom checklist. It is also very useful when drafting contracts and such similar documents ^[27].
- c. **Name Search:** There are AI that help in name search for Trademark registration. A prominent example of such is *TrademarkNow*. It is designed to '...search and manage trademark searches and logos helping manufacturers solve the confusion of new names and existing trademarks' ^[28]. This has helped in reducing the time and resources usually utilised for such service. Trademark Clearance platform is used to shorten long searches for patents and trademark and does not only return search results in less than fifteen (15) seconds but also same and ranks the search results in accordance to their relevance.
- d. **E-discovery:** software, such as CloudNine Law, an 'all-in-one eDiscovery engine' can scan, import, and produce all potential evidentiary documents needed during legal discovery'. This AI tool can also upload, review, and produce documents in minutes ^[29]. AI tools such as these, apart from giving instant responses are

significantly faster than scanning hard copies thus making the lawyer more efficient.

- e. **Document automation:** AI can be used for document automation. AI tools like MyCase IQ is used for document summarisation and text editing^[30]. LEAP, is a ‘...library of AI prompt templates that enables attorneys to create comprehensive matter specific legal documents’. It can also be used for document review and drafting, preparation of Affidavits, Dispositions, Statements and Briefs^[31]. Genie AI^[32] is an AI legal assistant with templates that a lawyer can pick and fill requisite information relevant to the job at hand. This, apart from saving time and bringing consistency to the lawyer’s work, is a centralized and efficient process for producing letters, agreements, motions, pleading, bills, invoices, etc.

AI in Nigerian law practice

Nigerians, to a large extent, are receptive to emerging technologies. Reports in January 2024 show that about 103 million Nigerians are internet users^[33]. This is an impressive figure especially considering the fact that the population of the country, is estimated to be 226.5 million in the said January 2024^[34]. It is heart warming to state that as at March 2024 that number of internet users increased to 143 million^[35]. Nigeria also has the 6th and 25th highest search interest on AI in Africa and and the world respectively^[36]. Searches on how to use AI and the use of AI devices is on have not waned^[37], thus showing how receptive Nigerians are to incorporating AI to private lives and businesses.

Although AI’s incursion into the Nigerian legal practice is slow, it is gradually gaining ground and acceptance. Companies like Grace Infotech Limited (GIT) revolutionized legal research and law reporting in Nigeria with the launch of the Law Pavillion Electronic Report in 2003^[38]. This platform has made access to appellate courts decisions, to as far back as the 1950s easier^[39]. TIMI, reputed as Nigeria’s first AI legal assistant was introduced into the Nigerian legal market in 2018^[40]. It is designed to assist lawyers with ‘...legal research, legal opinions, litigation, and legal drafting’^[41]. It can also guide a lawyer on how to get authorities to support civil procedure principles^[42]. This has in no small way made legal research easier and faster thus helping to boast productivity while reducing stress and the amount of time spent on these tasks. Being open to utilizing AI tools would give the Nigerian lawyer to, outside the benefits already discussed above, enjoy the following:

- a. **Increased productivity:** AI will help the lawyer get more work done within short periods of time, thus increasing his productivity, credibility and professionalism.
- b. **Cost-saving:** The use of AI will be a cost-saving measure as it will reduce the number of staff the lawyer may need to employ. A lot of these AI can undertake tasks faster than human. Although this may lead to the lawyer employing less staff, hence not good for the economy as it will reduce the number of employed persons, it is good for the lawyer as it will reduce the law office’s’ running cost.

AI and law practice in Nigeria, Friend or Foe?

Although concerns have been raised about AI taking over the lawyer’s job and thereby driving them out of business, while these concerns are appreciated, they are, for lack of a better phrase, misguided. The use of AI, it is humbly submitted will rather make lawyers more efficient, professional, facilitate growth and may even unfold new areas of practice for the legal practitioner. There will, for example, be need to amend our laws and Rules to legislate on the use of AI by the legal practitioner, issue of intellectual property rights infringements, penalty for misconduct on material generated by AI, evidential value of AI generated evidence, etc. also have to be provided for.

Another area of concern is the cost for the use of AI and its effect on professional fees on client. Granted that AI can only be accessed via internet connectivity for which electronic data is required, it is gladdening to note that the cost of data, have to a large extent, and for a number of years remained stable. When compared to the cost of going on physical quests for research material, etc, accessing required information using AI is cheaper. Nigerian lawyers have professional duties and responsibilities to their client. These includes the duty to represent their client competently^[43], and with utmost dedication and devotion^[44]. Where the free or cheaper version of AI or data plan does not give access to the desired information, it is prudent and a show of dedication for a lawyer to explore the paid version even if it means charging the client additionally for doing all that was needed to competently represent them. Haven said that, it is hereby humbly advised that in exploring paid AI, lawyers should be conscious of their client’s financial stand, so should, as much as is practicable utilized AI tools that are within their client’s budgets.

It is obvious that AI has now become a necessity in the corporate world so much so that some expert believe that, AI will be able to perform task more cheaply and better than humans within the next 5 years^[45]. There are even predictions that they will outsmart human intelligence in the next decade. Ardent believers of their capabilities, like Elon Musk have shortened that to the next 2 years^[46]. Be that as it is, there are concerns about the intrusion of AI into the legal profession in Nigeria.

Some of these concerns are:

- a. **Privacy:** One of the cardinal duties of a legal practitioner is the protection of every professional communication with his client^[47]. Client’s, in the course of professional relationship, divulge sensitive and often very private information to their lawyers confident that such information, would not, without their express permission or in circumstances allowed by law, be divulged to a 3rd party^[48]. The use of AI may jeopardise this especially where the lawyer does not know how to protect his client’s privacy in the course of surfing the internet. A lawyer may, inadvertently while inserting a prompt, divulge privileged information about his client or a matter he is handling. It is therefore advised that lawyers be, not only discreet in their search, but conduct same in ways that would not be easy to access or decipher the subject or intent of such search. It is also advised that private internet or secured access be utilised at all times. Safety mechanism such as firewalls and passwords should be inserted and regularly updated on electronic devices to protect them from being hacked.

- b. Bias in algorithm:** It is important to state here that any results or information from an AI is generated from the data available and the search prompt imputed by the researcher. Algorithms develop overtime because of the training data supplied by the developer or acquired by the program based on the data available ^[49]. AI bias is said to happen when ‘...an artificial intelligence system ... disproportionately favours or discriminates against certain groups, due to the inequalities and prejudices in its training data’ ^[50]. This occurs when the AI had been trained on unfavourable information. A bias algorithm can may not favour the cause of justice especially in areas such as consideration of bail conditions, sentencing and even when it comes to application of judicial principles. This will, overtime, undermine public trust in the legal system. This issue can however be remedied if lawyers do not put complete reliance on AI to do their job but should also put their legal nose to the grind so as the sniff out any bias that could affect the course of justice.
- c. Dearth of relevant information:** Online information are dependent on available data. It is common knowledge that a lot of information on Nigeria are not available online. Another issue is that information gotten from AI, (that was trained on this insufficient data), maybe accurate, incomplete, or not be relevant to what a Nigerian lawyer may need. There is therefore the need for more reportage of our laws, courts decisions, rules of court, etc, online. This will help program developers have access to information and data on which to build their applications, tools or platforms.
- d. Loss of jobs:** Advancement in AI technology, and especially the development of different chatboxes and Applications and tools have made information available to all and sundry. Potential clients can ask legal AI questions on legal issues and get the information to resolve their problems thus dispensing with the need for lawyers. We are however of the opinion that AI is not a competition to the trained and industrious lawyer. Lawyers go through intense training before they are qualified to practice the profession. Most clients are not lawyers. Their being aware or knowledgeable about law jargons to the extent of knowing what prompt to send the AI to get accurate solution will be minimal. A majority of any such promptings will therefore be done on a ‘trial and error’ basis. This cannot be compared with the proficiency of a lawyer who, when exploring the same AI device, will give precise prompts so get a better result. Clients asking AI for help to resolve legal issue should not be considered as threats to lawyers. After all a lot of these people will not know how to implement whatever they got from the AI so will still need the lawyer at some point in their quest.
- e. Accountability:** There is the fear on where to place blame when a client suffers damage because of advice given to him by a lawyer and which said advice was obtained from an AI. One can, humbly suggest that the AI be accorded the same status as the lawyer’s employee since the AI is helping the lawyer in his job. Since AI is not a juristic person, the juristic person

using same should do so with the consciousness that any act done could affect people’s livelihood or even life. The lawyer is therefore advised to use his best professional acumen when utilising these tools.

Conclusion

This article took a cursory look at the emergence and effect of AI in the corporate world especially how it is improving the way people perform tasks and how this has positively impacted on professionalism and proficiency. We have also shown that the utilization of AI into the practice of law is gaining ground globally. It’s use by Nigerian lawyers, though slow, is gradually gaining ground and should be encouraged.

Our humble opinion is that AI should not be considered as an enemy of professionalism or something that would make the Nigerian lawyer lazy. Conscientious and professional use of it should be encourage. While appreciating the effort of the Nigerian Bar Association on its efforts at sensitizing members on AI, such sensitization should not stop at the national level but should extend to branches and should, as much as is possible, be incorporated into different programs organized at the branches. Faculties of Law and the Nigerian Law School should incorporate the teaching of modern technologies, their importance, possible effect and advantages to the legal profession should be addressed.

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