DW Akademie

MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY

Heroes and Villains in the age of AI

More benefits, risks & everyday realities of AI in communication

ANNEX B



More benefits, risks & everyday realities of AI in communication

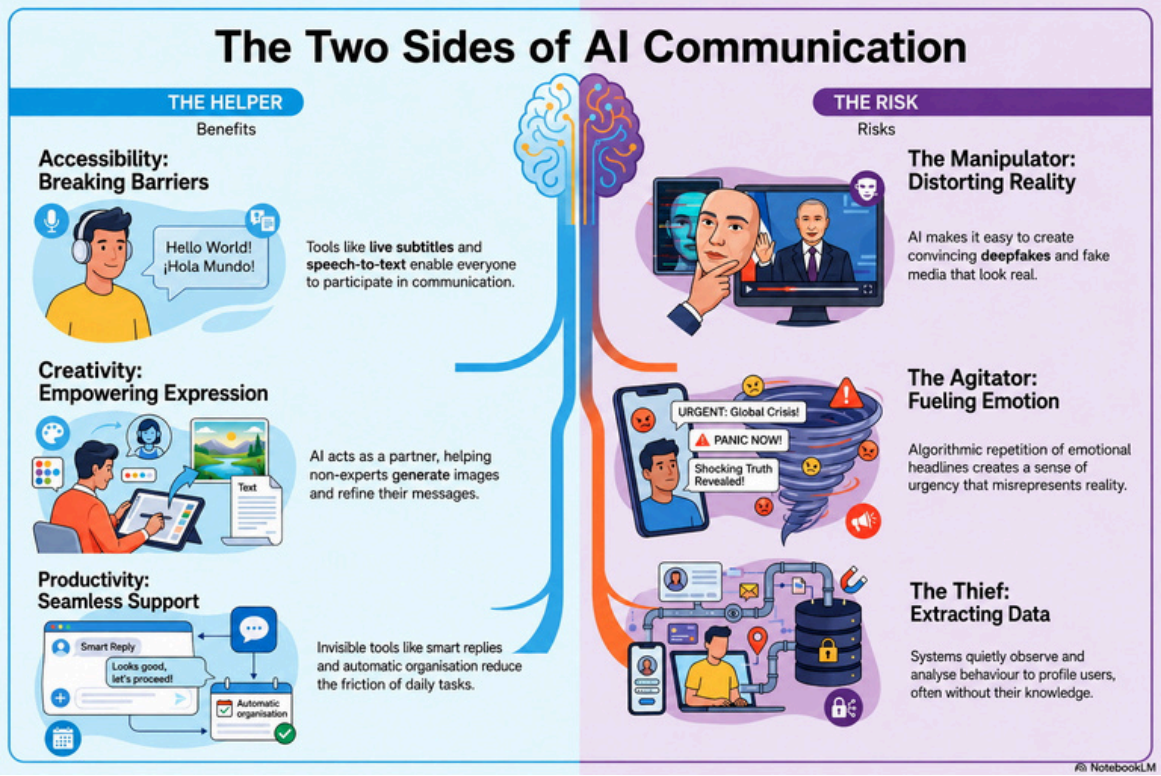
Purpose

The core text explains how AI works and how the Storyworld helps participants explore it. Annex A explains the technical logic behind AI behavior.

This annex focuses on what facilitators and participants recognize from daily life.

Here you find situations that show how AI helps, shapes, distorts, or complicates communication in ways that feel familiar. These are not abstract explanations. They are everyday moments that help you anchor discussion in lived experience.

You are not expected to teach this annex.
Use it when you want clearer illustrations, stronger examples, or inspiration for activity material



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PART 1 - Where AI genuinely helps

AI spreads quickly because people experience it as useful long before they question it. If facilitators only speak about risks, participants will feel the mismatch with their own experience.

Understanding these benefits allows you to frame AI realistically and credibly.

Accessibility and inclusion

AI removes barriers that once limited who could participate in communication. Translation, speech recognition, subtitles, and voice tools allow people to read, write, and interact in ways that were previously difficult or impossible.

You see this when someone watches a video with automatic subtitles in a language they do not speak and can suddenly follow the content.

You see it again when a person dictates a message because typing is painful or difficult, and the system converts speech into text instantly.

In these moments, AI is not controversial. It is enabling participation.

Creativity and expression

AI lowers the technical threshold for creating media. People who are not designers, writers, or video editors can suddenly produce convincing outputs.

You see this when someone generates an image for a poster idea, they could never draw themselves.

You see it when a person asks a chatbot to help rephrase a message, so it sounds clearer, more polite, or more professional.

AI becomes a creative partner — even though it does not understand what it creates.

Productivity and everyday support

Many AI functions feel invisible because they are embedded in tools people already use. Predictive text, automatic organization, suggested replies, and smart assistants reduce small daily tasks.

You notice this when your email app suggests a reply that you only need to adjust slightly.

You notice it again when your phone automatically groups photos by faces or places without you ever asking for it.

These small conveniences make AI feel normal and helpful.

Learning and personal growth

AI often feels like a patient tutor. It can explain topics in simpler terms, generate examples, or provide practice material.

You see this when someone asks a chatbot to explain a difficult concept in simple language.

You see it again when a student generates practice questions before an exam.

This supportive experience can create trust — even when the system is not always correct.

Support for services and navigation

AI improves how systems handle information and respond to users.

You see this when you use a government website chatbot to answer basic questions.

You see it again when using a navigation app predicting traffic and it suggests a faster route.

These interactions feel neutral and efficient, which is why people rarely question the system behind them.

PART 2 - Where the same strengths become risks

The exact qualities that make AI helpful also make it powerful when misused or poorly designed.

The Manipulator — When creation becomes distortion

AI makes it easy to create media that looks real, even when it is not. Because people have learned to trust visual and audio media, this becomes powerful.

You see this when a realistic image of an event that never happened spreads online before anyone questions it.
You see it again when an audio clip appears of a public figure saying something they never said.
The tools used for creativity become tools for deception when intent changes.



AI and synthetic harm

AI-generated manipulation is not limited to political misinformation.

It is increasingly used in deeply personal forms of harm, including:

* non-consensual sexualized images
* revenge content
* identity impersonation
* fake intimate content
* reputational attacks

These forms of abuse often spread quickly because they feel shocking, personal, and difficult to disprove.

This can leave victims dealing with emotional harm, public humiliation, and pressure to withdraw from online spaces.

Example: A student discovers manipulated intimate images of herself circulating in a school network.
Example: A fake voice recording is used to damage someone's personal reputation. attacks

The Agitator — When visibility becomes emotional pressure

AI systems decide what gets shown more often. Emotional content often keeps people engaged, so it spreads further.

You notice this when an angry headline appears repeatedly in your feed from different sources.
You see it again when dramatic short videos are recommended again and again because many people reacted strongly to them.

Repetition and emotional tone create urgency that may not reflect reality.



AI, political influence and coordinated manipulation

The same systems that amplify emotional content can also be used to shape public opinion at scale.

This may include:

* AI-generated political messaging
* coordinated propaganda campaigns
* targeted persuasion
* synthetic media during elections
* automated censorship or information suppression

These tactics can spread quickly because AI makes content creation, targeting, and repetition faster and cheaper.

This can make it harder for people to distinguish genuine public debate from coordinated influence campaigns.

Example: AI-generated political content spreads false election claims shortly before voting.
Example: Large volumes of automated content flood online discussions during periods of social unrest.

The Bully — When interaction becomes harm at scale

AI makes it easier to automate harassment, impersonation, and harmful interaction.

You see this when fake accounts send repeated abusive messages to someone.
You see it again when messages feel personal but are clearly sent automatically to many people at once.

Scale, repetition, and anonymity increase harm and reduce accountability.



AI, emotional influence and digital relationships

AI is increasingly designed to feel personal, supportive, and emotionally responsive.

Some systems are now explicitly marketed as:

* AI companions
* virtual friends
* romantic partners
* emotional support tools
* personal advisors

These interactions can feel comforting because AI is always available, responsive, and non-judgmental. For some users, especially young people experiencing loneliness, stress, or isolation, this can create strong emotional attachment.

AI may simulate care — but it does not understand emotions, responsibility, or long-term wellbeing.

Over time, this may create emotional dependency or lead users to trust harmful advice during vulnerable moments.

Example: A teenager begins sharing deeply personal struggles only with an AI companion instead of seeking help from trusted people.

Example: A user receives harmful relationship advice from a chatbot and treats it as expert guidance.

The Thief — When convenience becomes data extraction

AI relies on behavior data collected quietly in the background. People rarely realize how much of their actions are observed and analyzed.

You notice this when advertisements match conversations you recently had.
You notice it again when recommendations are based on something you watched weeks ago without remembering it.

The system knows more than users expect.

Inequality and exclusion

AI performs best where data is abundant and well structured. This creates uneven performance across languages and cultures.

You see this when a chatbot responds fluently in English but awkwardly in (digitally) underrepresented language.
You see it again when image tools struggle to represent local clothing, places, or faces accurately.

Representation in data affects who AI works well for — and who it does not.

PART 3 — Where AI is present without being obvious

Many people do not realize **how deeply AI is embedded in everyday communication:**

In the content people receive

Feeds, search results, and headlines are personalized.

You see this when two people search the same topic and receive very different results. You see it again when a video platform repeatedly suggests similar content because of one video watched earlier.

Visibility is engineered, not neutral.



What is AI slop?

AI slop refers to large volumes of low-quality AI-generated content created quickly and cheaply.

This can include:

* fake images
* mass-produced videos
* spam articles
* misleading summaries
* recycled content made only to attract clicks or attention

The problem is not only poor quality content — it is the flooding of platforms with so much synthetic material that useful information becomes harder to find.

This can make people more confused, more distrustful, and more vulnerable to manipulation.

Example: Search results become filled with low-quality AI articles that repeat inaccurate information.
Example: During a crisis, thousands of fake images and videos overwhelm real reporting.

In the content people create

Creation tools subtly influence communication.

You notice this when predictive text finishes your sentences.
You notice this again when photos are automatically enhanced before posting.

The line between human and machine-assisted creation becomes blurred.

In communication from others

People often interact with automated systems without realizing it.

You see this when a customer service chat is handled entirely by bots.
You see it again when you receive scam messages that feel personally tailored.

The experience feels human, even when it is not.

In moderation and filtering

AI systems decide what is removed, hidden, or downranked.

You notice this when a post disappears without explanation.
You notice this again when comments are technically posted but invisible to others.

Users feel the effects without seeing the system.

In everyday tools

AI supports tools people use constantly.

You see this when a maps app predicts arrival times.
You see it again when a translation app converts speech in real time.

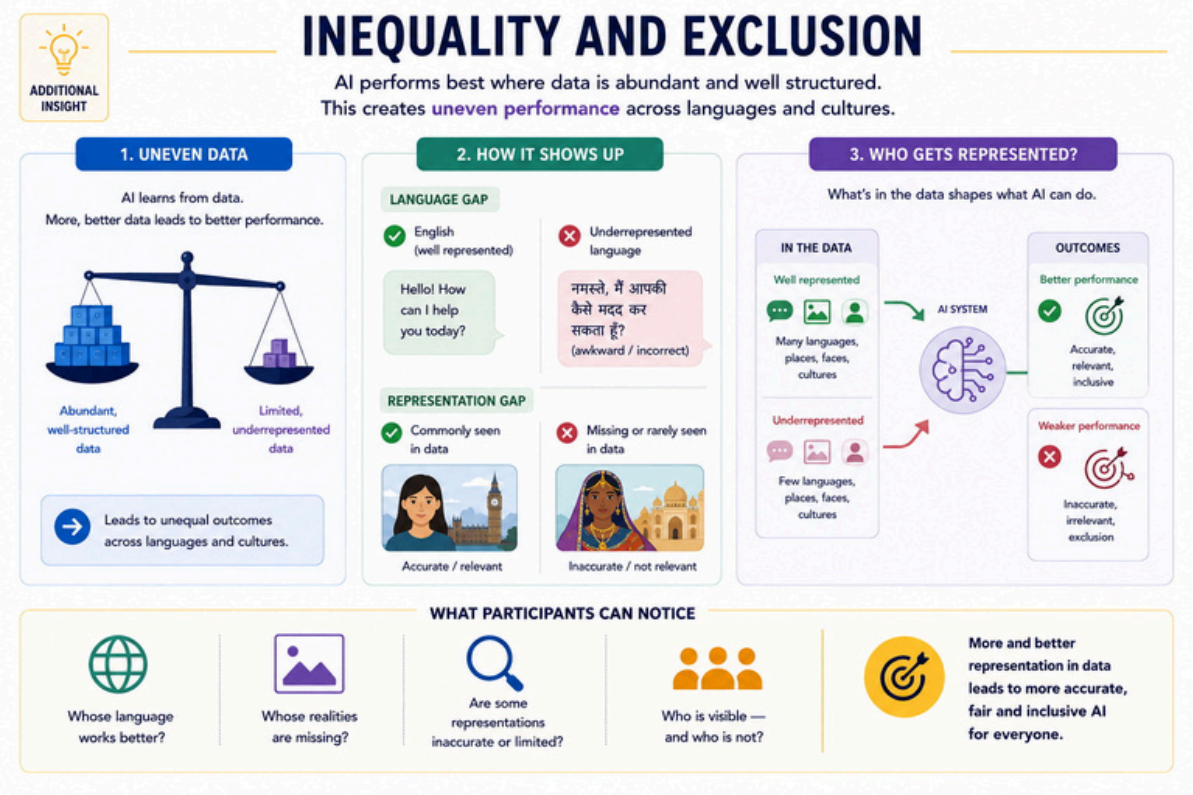
AI becomes invisible infrastructure.

PART 4 — why data representation matters globally

Much of the material used to train major AI systems comes from majority languages and Global North sources.

You see this when AI misunderstands local names or places.
You see it again when it gives culturally irrelevant examples while handling Western ones smoothly.

AI reflects where data is visible — and where it is not.



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Why this annex exists

The core text explains the concepts.
Annex A explains the mechanisms.

This annex B helps you recognize these patterns in everyday life, so you can choose relatable examples and connect participant experience to the Storyworld.