

Google data: SA interest in AI at all-time high

Google says searches for artificial intelligence, or AI, are at an all-time high in South Africa. Search trends show that people have searched for AI more than ever in 2023 so far, with interest rising 230% since last year - and 700% over the last five years.



Source: www.unsplash.com

Searches for “what is AI technology?” (+1,700%), “how to invest in AI?” (+950%), “who created AI?” (+650%) and “how does artificial intelligence work?” (+500%) are all trending this year.

Responsible AI

Google, which released their conversational AI service Bard in South Africa in March, sees AI as having huge potential to help people, businesses and communities. Google has committed to pursuing AI responsibly, which includes advocating for responsible regulation, working in partnership with others to get AI right, and prioritising the technology’s purpose for public good.

As well as turning to Google Search to better understand AI, people in South Africa have begun to look to use AI to increase their productivity, capture their imagination and build their careers. Search interest in AI in relation to CV or resumes increased by 1,050%. Searches for “AI song generator” (+5,850%), “AI logo generator” (+5,560%), “AI photo editor” (+4,500%), “AI video editor” (+3,100%) and “AI story writer” (+1,400%) all also increased.

Alistair Mokoena, country director, Google South Africa said: "It's heartening to observe the surge of interest in AI among South Africans. As with many across the African continent and the world at large, South Africans are keenly exploring and reaping the benefits of conscientiously developed AI tools. The technological landscape is evolving at an unprecedented rate, bringing forth a myriad of innovations. As we navigate this transformative era, our focus in South Africa remains clear: to collaborate closely, act with utmost responsibility, and ensure that we harness the vast potential of AI to its fullest, always prioritising its responsible application.

The trends, released today, also show that people in South Africa are increasingly interested in building their careers and learning new skills.

Building careers

People in South Africa are also turning to Google looking for resources to build their careers. Searches for "how can I start a business with no money" have increased by 1,250% since last year - while searches for "how to make a website for your business" have increased by 200% and "how to start [an] online business from home" have increased by 150%.



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People in South Africa are also looking to gain new certifications, particularly in digital skills - with searches for courses in business management, teaching, health and safety and cyber security all trending in 2023. Searches for "digital marketing courses" have doubled in 2023 so far, while search interest in machine learning courses have increased by 1,500%.

Cybersecurity and misinformation

The trends released by Google today also show that people in South Africa continue to be concerned about protecting their cybersecurity. Searches for "spear phishing" (+4,050%), "SMS phishing" (+950%) and "rogue security software" (+350%) are all trending, having increased significantly over the past five years. People across South Africa are also taking active steps to protect their cybersecurity, with search interest in "internet safety" tripling this year alone.

Search interest in misinformation has also increased: with searches for "fact-checking" increasing by over 450% over the past five years, while South Africa is one of the top 10 countries worldwide searching most for misinformation and information literacy this year. Trending searches on misinformation include "what is fake news?", "how to spot fake news", and "why do people spread fake news?".

Google is using AI to address security challenges and misinformation. Gmail automatically blocks 99.9% of malware, phishing and spam, and protects more than 1.5bn inboxes using AI - while through the Google News Initiative, engineers are working directly with fact-checkers and publishers to use AI-enabled tools to find and tackle misinformation.

Meanwhile, Jigsaw, a team within Google that develops technology to counter online harms, has partnered with local experts and academics to develop approaches to both directly counter disinformation and help people more easily identify and refute it.