TECHNOLOGY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SPORTS

With the increased advancements in Artificial Intelligence in the world, some experts have held the view that humans will be replaced by cyborgs and robots in the near future. However, a majority believe that the benefits from Artificial Intelligence will make life better and easier for humans. The role of technology in the modern world is however so innately entrenched that it cannot be wished away. Technology has been key in the development and advancement of sports as has been in other areas of life therefore cannot be wished away. Sports engineering has been used as a term by many experts in describing the technological advances that have simplified sports and challenged the limits of human performance.

In light of the above, there are certainly some key ways in which technology is and will increasingly affect the sports industry and its players. This article is certainly not conclusive, bearing in mind that the very nature of technology is not static and the author cannot cover all areas conclusively. Nonetheless, this article will highlight a few key areas where technology has and will continue impacting the sports industry.

Virtual Reality
Virtual Reality (VR) is the term used to describe a three-dimensional, computer generated environment which can be explored and interacted with by a person. That person becomes part of this virtual world or is immersed within this environment and can be able to manipulate objects or perform a series of actions whilst within this 'reality.' The sports industry has harnessed VR by creating events where viewers take place virtually. An example of this is the European Football Championships where fans experienced live games in 360 VR. With the growing global population, rise in ticket prices and busy schedules, VR might offer the best alternative to sports viewing in future as it will still get fans closer to the matches/games. In line with the growth of online gaming over the last decade, FIFA organized has already successfully organized a FIFA Interactive World Cup Competition which attracted over 2.2 million participants. This was largely in recognition of the rise in Fantasy Football and virtual sports as a whole globally. This is certainly an area to look out for, with *SuperData Research* reporting that in 2017 the VR market was worth 1.8 billion USD.

Broadcast
Despite the preference of television by many sports fans, the advent of Twitter, You Tube, Facebook and other streaming platforms cannot be ignored. Further, the accessibility of online content beyond the computer on smartphones and other devices introduces another angle to this debate. Increasingly, more households prefer curated channels to cater to their sporting needs; online or through subscription services as compared to the traditional 'linear paid-for TV. TV broadcasters have then been forced to sell rights to a specific online broadcaster operating globally instead of limiting the rights to a specific territory. This does not mean the complete death of TV, but it then challenges any broadcaster worth their salt to venture out into the online space to ensure that the content is accessed on every platform that the fans are connected to.

ESports

E sports has been seen as a threat to 'real' sport with some experts predicting that it may be more popular among future generations. The industry has thrived so much that it has an all-inclusive strategic brand consulting, team marketing, sales, media distribution, event activation and dispute resolution mechanism. It is indeed booming business such that FIFA President, Gianni Infantino committed to expanding FIFA's presence in eSports in his strategic roadmap, aiming to capture a greater share of the market by leveraging the popularity of the FIFA video game and the FIFA Interactive World Cup (now known as the FIFA eWorld Cup) which took place last year. It is estimated that the revenue from eSports will reach over 300 million USD by 2020. It is no wonder that eSports will also be a medal

sport at the 2022 Asian Games, with discussions to include them on the Olympic programme currently underway.

Predictive Analysis
Teams are already using predictive games to drive advertising revenue. Fans on the other hand are able to receive probabilities regarding certain outcomes which then assists them make informed decisions about their Fantasy Leagues. This also has affected how fans bet on players, spilling into the betting and gambling industry.

From the above highlighted technological advancements and a reading of the previous article on **Big Data and Sports**, one may then wonder..Is technology all good in the sports industry? What are the negatives, if any? The author will continue this discourse with a specific focus on the negative impact of technology in the sports industry, opportunities in technology for sports and how Kenya can tap into technology to benefit its sports industry.