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Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Public Relations: **Boon or Curse?**

Proceedings of the 32nd International Public Relations Research Symposium BledCom

EDITORS: Dejan Verčič, Ana Tkalac Verčič and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh

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Papers

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Ana Tkalac Verčič University of Zagreb (Croatia) • Ana Tkalac Verčič, Ph.D., is a Full Professor of Marketing communications and Public Relations at the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb, Croatia. She is a former Fulbright scholar and a recipient of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations diploma. Ana Tkalac Verčič has authored, co-authored and edited numerous books including Public Relations Metrics: Research and Evaluation (with B. van Ruler and D. Verčič) and is the author of the first Croatian public relations textbook. She has published more than a 100 papers in various academic journals and serves in various editorial boards such as International Journal of Strategic Communication, Journal of Public Relations Research and Public Relations Review. Throughout her career professor Tkalac Verčič has received numerous awards, most recently, GrandPRx, the award for the development of public relations as a profession. She is currently the president of the Croatian Public Relations Association.

Krishnamurthy Sriramesh University of Colorado (USA) • Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, is Professor of Public Relations at the University of Colorado. His rich teaching profile includes teaching a range of courses in 10 universities in the North America, Asia, Australasia, and Europe while also delivering seminars/talks in over 40 countries. He is recognized for his scholarship on global public relations, culture and public relations, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and public relations for development. His program of research has resulted in 8 edited or co-edited books (one currently in print and another in preparation on crisis communication cases), over 120 articles and book chapters, and over 150 conference papers and other presentations around the world. A recent bibliometric analysis published in Public Relations Review placed him among the top five cited global public relations scholars. In 2004, the Institute of Public Relations (USA) recognized his scholarship by honoring him with the prestigious Pathfinder Award for "original scholarly research contributing to the public relations body of knowledge."

Akçay, Ebru, *Başkent University (Turkey)* • Assoc. Prof. Ebru Akçay received her B.A. in American Culture and Literature from Hacettepe University in 2013. She completed her M.A. in Public Relations and Publicity at the Graduate School of Social Sciences, Ankara University in 2015 and earned her Ph.D. in the same program and institution in 2020. Her academic career began in 2014 with her appointment as a research assistant in the Department of Public Relations and Publicity at the Faculty of Communication, Ondokuz Mayıs University. In 2021, she joined Başkent University as an assistant professor in the Department of Public Relations and Publicity at the Faculty of Communication. Since December 2024, she has been serving as an associate professor in the Department of Public Relations and Publicity at Başkent University, where she also holds the position of Vice Dean of the Faculty as of June 2023. Her research interests focus on public relations particularly in relation to cultural dynamics and social issues.

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Barlik, Jacek, *University of Warsaw (Poland)* • He is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies, the University of Warsaw, Poland (full-time since 2014, previously straddled business career and part-time teaching). He is also a seasoned public relations practitioner, with vast experience as an advisor to major Polish and international corporations, public institutions and NGOs. He has authored articles, chapters and a book on public relations, communication strategies, awareness campaigns, crisis communication, social media, PR theory, sales and persuasion (in Polish and English), and was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Maryland, College Park (USA).

Batzoui, Athanasia, *Imperial College London (UK)* • Dr Athanasia Batziou is a communications academic and professional, with a specialisation in visual communication and a background in international law. She currently teaches communication courses at Imperial College London and the University of Cambridge. She has been teaching in Higher Education, in the UK and overseas, for 15 years and has also held various roles in the communication and media industry and in the non for profit sector. She has published research on hot topics in the media such as immigration. climate change, protest, and AI. Currently, her research is focused on various aspects of the use of AI in communication.

Bellamy, Bridget, University of London (UK) • Bridget graduated from Royal Holloway, University of London with a first-class hons. in Politics and International Relations. In her role as a PR Account Manager, she works within the Tourism and Aviation sector in B2B and B2B communications, as well as Crisis Management. In 2024 she gave a presentation examining the role of communications in the FA Ban on Women's Football at the International History of Public Relations Conference. Her current areas of research focus are in the use of AI in communication, and the role of risk assessment and triage in Crisis Communication.

Bezuidenhout, Louise, *North-West University (South Africa)* • Louise Bezuidenhout is a senior lecturer at the School of Communication at the North-West University (NWU), South Africa. She holds a master's degree in Communication Management from the University of Pretoria (UP) and obtained her PhD in Communication on Corporate Social Responsibility (CRS) communication, from the NWU. She lectures at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and supervises master's and PhD students. Her research and publications include sustainability communication, strategic communication, development communication and stakeholder management. She is also involved in community engagement projects that focus on service learning and engaged research.

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Bridgen, Elizabeth, *Buckinghamshire New University (UK)* • Elizabeth Bridgen is Head of Academic Improvement (Partner Provision) at Buckinghamshire New University, UK, and researches the lived experience of public relations practitioners. She is co-editor with Sarah Williams of Women's Work in Public Relations (2024), with Ileana Zeler of Race, Diversity and Social Mobility in the Public Relations Industry (2025), and Dejan Verčič of Experiencing Public Relations: International Voices (2017). She has had work published in many books and journals including Journal of Communication Management and Journal of Media Practice and Research.

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Chmiel, Michal, *Royal Holloway, University of London (UK)* • Michal Chmiel (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Psychology. He is a former Public Relations practitioner, and now researcher and educator. Currently he is the Director of External Engagement and Partnerships of the School of Life Sciences & Environment (Royal Holloway, University of London). Michal's research interests revolve around the role of the impact of Brand PR on attitudes and well-being of audiences. He has also researched into the mechanism of sharing fake news and PR education in the UK. Michal is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, and a member of the European Public Relations Education and Research Association and the Chartered Institute of Public Relations.

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Degenaar, Koos, *North-West University (South Africa)* • Dr. Koos Degenaar is a seasoned strategic communication and digital marketing expert currently serving as Senior Manager in Marketing and Student Recruitment at North-West University, South Africa. With over 15 years of experience in digital marketing communication, he specializes in developing and executing data-driven engagement strategies to enhance student recruitment and institutional branding. In 2024, he earned his PhD in Communication, focusing on a digital marketing framework for the South African sport industry. His research bridges theoretical insights with practical applications, offering a comprehensive approach to digital stakeholder engagement in both higher education and sport marketing contexts.

Demirel, Ege Simge, *Yeditepe University (Turkey)* • After completing a Bachelor's degree in Industrial Engineering at Sabancı University in 2011, Asst. Prof. Dr. Ege Simge Demirel participated in various training programs and earned a Master's degree in Integrated Marketing Communications from Yeditepe University in 2018. Following her graduation, she began her doctoral studies in Public Relations and Publicity at Marmara University in 2020. In 2024, she earned her PhD with her dissertation titled "The Impact of Sustainability on Corporate Reputation: A Study on Consumers in the Context of Social and Environmental Sustainability." She began her professional career immediately after completing her undergraduate studies in 2011, working as a short-term employee at Accenture, Citibank, and Anadolu Efes. Currently, she serves as Vice Chair of the Public Relations and Publicity Department at the Faculty of Communication at Yeditepe University. She has published articles in national and international journals on public relations, sustainability, and corporate communication.

Dhanesh, Ganga S, *University of Maryland (USA)* • Ganga Dhanesh (PhD, National University of Singapore) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland. Her experience in the corporate sector has informed her extensive research on corporate social responsibility communication, internal communication, and strategic public relations across global contexts, published in multiple top journals. Dr. Dhanesh serves as Associate Editor for the Journal of Communication Management and is on the editorial board of Business Horizons, Journal of Public Relations Research, and Public Relations Review. A recipient of several research awards, Dhanesh consults for various national and multinational organizations.

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Drapal, Andrej, *Consensus (Slovenia)* • Dr. Andrej Drapal (b. September 1, 1958) is a philosopher, sociologist, publicist, and entrepreneur. From 1986 to 1991, he led the theater and film program at Cankarjev Dom. Between 1991 and 2011, he served as a consultant and partner at Pristop, Slovenia's first and, for a long time, largest agency for public relations, advertising, and marketing. In 1996, he founded Slovenia's first lobbying association. In 2004, he established the Chamber of Business Services at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia. Since 1998, he has been developing his own branding and marketing model, the *Standard Branding Model*©. Using this methodology, he has developed over 50 brands and business models. The brand

I Feel Slovenia, launched in 2008, is arguably the most recognized product of this model. His book *Brandlife* (2016) outlines and explains the methodology. Since 2006, Andrej has been developing an original philosophical concept: *Homonism*. In November 2024, he completed his Ph.D. in strategic communication at the Faculty of Applied Social Studies in Nova Gorica with a thesis on memetics. Dr. Andrej Drapal's primary research focus involves the convergence of communication sciences, evolutionary biology, complexity studies, quantum mechanics, and neuroscience.

Einwiller, Sabine, *University of Vienna (Austria)* • Sabine Einwiller is the Professor of Public Relations Research at the University of Vienna, Austria, Department of Communication where she heads the Corporate Communication Research Group. She received her PhD in Business Administration from the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland. Her main research areas comprise employee communication, CSR communication, corporate reputation management, and the effects of negative publicity and complaining.

Eisner, Julia, *University of Applied Science GmbH - Campus Wieselburg & Wiener Neustadt (Austria)* • Julia Eisner, MA, is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Applied Sciences Wiener Neustadt, Austria. She is a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of Vienna, with an additional supervisory affiliation in communication studies. Her research explores communicative AI in corporate communication, focusing on hybrid agency between humans and machines, as well as ethical AI.

Ertem-Eray, Tugce, *North Carolina State University (USA)* • Tugce Ertem-Eray (Ph.D., University of Oregon) is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication, NC State University. Her fields of interest are international public relations, public diplomacy, and social identities. She is also a part of a multi-university research team that focuses on bibliometric studies in public relations.

Fabbri, Valerio, *FabbriKo (Slovenia)* • Communications professional with international expertise in journalism and the corporate world. Able to create original content and translate complex ideas into compelling messages. Efficient in coordinating communication activities with various stakeholders. Thanks to experiences in different continents, I have gained a wide exposure to multicultural environments with the ability to solve problems and generate new business.

Ferris, David M., *Cohere (Canada)* • David Ferris is a seasoned defense technology executive, recently stepping into the role of Head of Global Public Sector at Cohere, a leading provider of foundational Artificial Intelligence models and applications. David previously led the commercial and public sector sales team at Blackbird.AI, a narrative intelligence platform based in New York City. David is a retired Infantry Officer from the Canadian Armed Forces and was a member of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. Throughout his career, he deployed to Afghanistan, developed numerous capacity building missions around the world in support of the Government of Canada's military strategy, and led a training mission to Ukraine in 2015. From 2016 to 2018, David served on The Joint Staff at the Pentagon developing strategy, plans and policy to counter terrorist organizations at home and abroad. David is a graduate of the Canadian Army Command and Staff College in Kingston, Ontario, as well as the Joint Command and Staff Program at the Canadian Forces College in Toronto, Ontario. He graduated from McMaster University with a Bachelor of Psychology, holds a Masters of Defence Studies from the Royal Military College of Canada, a Masters of Business Administration from the Open University, United Kingdom and a Public Policy Certificate from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Fitzpatrick, Kathy R., *University of South Florida (USA)* • Kathy R. Fitzpatrick is professor and director of the Zimmerman School of Advertising & Mass Communications at the University of South Florida (USF). She is an internationally recognized scholar in public relations and public diplomacy, an attorney and a senior public relations advisor. She is also a faculty fellow and former research fellow in the Center on Public Diplomacy in the Annenberg School at the University of Southern California. Fitzpatrick moved to USF from American University (AU), where she served as professor and senior associate dean for academic affairs in the School of Communication. Prior to joining AU, Fitzpatrick was associate dean of graduate programs and research in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Florida International University. She previously directed graduate programs in public relations at Quinnipiac University and DePaul University and the undergraduate program in public relations at Southern Methodist University. Fitzpatrick's research has been published in leading communication and diplomacy journals and she is the author of The Future of U.S. Public Diplomacy: An Uncertain Fate and co-editor of Ethics in Public Relations: Responsible Advocacy. She is the co-founder and co-editor of the Palgrave Macmillan Book Series on Global Public Diplomacy and serves on the editorial boards of the Journal of Public Relations Research, Public Relations Journal, the International Journal of Strategic Communication and the Journal of Mass Media Ethics.

Floether, Kevin, *McMaster University (Canada)* • Kevin Floether, MCM, CM, is a seasoned marketing and communications professional based in Toronto, Ontario. As Director of Marketing & Communications at CBV Institute, he leads strategic initiatives to enhance the organization's brand and stakeholder engagement. Kevin has played a pivotal role in integrating generative AI into the Institute's workflows, notably developing a comprehensive video guide on practical AI applications for Chartered Business Valuators and creating the organizations policy on use of the technology. Kevin holds a Master of Communications Management from McMaster University, where his capstone research focused on measuring the formation of trust in digital space, specifically relating to technology influencers on YouTube. He also earned the Chartered Marketer designation from the Canadian Marketing Association. His expertise encompasses strategic marketing and communications planning, digital transformation, generative AI, brand management, and data-driven decision-making.

Fourie, Lynnette, *North-West University (South Africa)* • Prof. Lynnette Fourie is director of the research focus area Social Transformation and lectures research methodology in the School of Communication at the North-West University (NWU), South Africa. She is also alumni from the North-West University and holds a BA honns in Political Science, MA Communication (Journalism) and PhD (Political Communication). Her research focus is on development communication, political campaigns in developing contexts, stakeholder relations and communication management in the non-profit sector. She has a special interest in postgraduate supervision and has supervised multiple Masters' and Doctoral candidates in the broader fields of corporate -, development -and political communication.

Galloway, Chris, *Massey University (New Zealand)* • Dr. Chris Galloway PhD, MMgt is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing at Massey University in New Zealand. Chris joins many years of experience as a journalist and senior public relations specialist to his academic interests in issue, risk and crisis communication. He has taught at universities in both Australia and New Zealand. His other interests include the Middle East, especially the way public relations techniques are used to present and position different protagonists. He travels to the region as often as he can. He also writes about the impacts of new technologies on PR practice, especially Artificial Intelligence. His recent books include *Artificial Intelligence, Strategic Communicators and Activism*, and *Exploring Artificial Intelligence Implications for Journalism and Mass Communication Education*, both co-authored with Luk Swiatek, Marina Vujnovic, and Dean Kruckeberg.

Germinder, Lea-Ann, *University of Missouri (USA)* • Lea-Ann Germinder is a doctoral student and graduate teacher at the University of Missouri School of Journalism in Strategic Communication. Her research is focused on generative AI and how public relations can use it responsibly and how counselors can help organizations use it responsibly. She is presently conducting research on the responsible use of AI in organizations in Veterinary Medicine. Germinder is the lead author of the book chapter, Responsible AI for Public Relations Practice" in "Public Relations and Strategic Communication in 2050," Routledge. She is also the lead author of a research paper published in the special AI issue of the International Journal of Strategic Communication. The research she is presenting at Bledcom is focused on how public relations practitioners are using AI in their work in the U.S. and in Czechia. To date, she has presented at the International Communication Association (ICA), Gold Coast, Australia, at the International Public Relations Research Conference (IPRRC) in Orlando, FL. and at Charles University and the Czech Academy of Science, in Prague, Czechia and other venues in the United States. Germinder is president of Germinder + Associates, Inc. an award-winning public relations/strategic consulting firm with offices in the New York City area and Kansas City, Missouri. She is an accredited Fellow of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) having served on the national board and as New York City and Kansas City chapter president and is also a Silver Anvil judge. She is also a member of several international organizations including the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) and serves as a Golden World Awards judge.

Geysi, Nilüfer, *Bahçeşehir University (Turkey)* • Nilüfer Geysi (Ph.D.) is an Assistant Professor at Bahçeşehir University, where she earned her doctorate in Advertising and Public Relations. Her dissertation focused on climate change communication, a subject that continues to shape her academic and professional endeavors. She currently serves as the Director of the Center for Social Impact and Responsibility and as the Coordinator of CIFAL Istanbul, UNITAR. Dr. Geysi's research interests lie at the intersection of sustainability, science communication, and climate communication. Dedicated to bridging the gap between research and real-world application, she actively collaborates with private sector partners to deliver training programs that promote sustainability communication and responsible business practices.

Gözde Tayfur, Nur, *Istanbul Yeni Yuzyil University (Turkey)* • Nur Gözde Tayfur, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Istanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University, Vocational School, Department of Public Relations and Promotion (Turkey). She completed her undergraduate studies in Archaeology and Art History at Bilkent University. She earned her master's degree in Marketing Communication from Maltepe University and her Ph.D. in Public Relations and Advertising from the same university, graduating with honors. She is also a final year student in the Department of Public Relations and Advertising, her second university degree. She has integrated her professional experience in public relations into her academic research and teaching. Her interdisciplinary academic work focuses on the intersections of art, marketing, and public relations.

Grobelnik, Marko, *Jožef Stefan Institute (Slovenia)* • Grobelnik is a researcher at the AI Lab at the Jožef Stefan Institute and co-founder of the UNESCO International Research Center on Artificial Intelligence (IRCAI). He collaborates extensively with major European academic institutions and leading industry players, including Bloomberg, British Telecom, the European Commission, Microsoft Research, the New York Times, and OECD. As a co-author of several books and co-founder of multiple startups, Grobelnik has contributed to over 100 EU-funded AI research projects. His keynote speech, titled "The Future of Artificial Intelligence and Its Potential Impact on Public Relations," will explore key predictions for the future, highlighting shifts that may come sooner than anticipated.

Grossbard, Alain, *RMIT University (Australia)* • Alain Grossbard OAM is a distinguished communications expert, educator, corporate leader, and global SMS expert. He has significantly impacted academia as a Public Relations and Marketing Lecturer at RMIT University's School of Vocational Business Education and as a member of the RMIT University Academic Board. Named Public Relations Educator of the Year in 2019, he has earned multiple RMIT Teaching and Research Awards and the prestigious IPRA Golden World Award for corporate branding excellence. Alain has held executive roles across global industries, including senior executives of major Australian and global energy companies.

Hejlová, Denisa, *Charles University (Czech Republic)* • Assoc. Prof. Denisa Hejlova, Ph.D. is a leading Czech scholar and communication consultant. She focuses on research, teaching and practice in strategic communication, public relations, public affairs or political communication. From 2011-23, Denisa Hejlova headed the Department of Marketing Communication and PR at Charles University in Prague, one of the most sought-after study programmes in the Czech Republic. Prior to that, she worked as a vice-dean for PR and PR manager at the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Denisa was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Columbia University in New York in 2014 and studied intercultural communication at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in 2005-06. Denisa has published comprehensive books on public relations (Grada, 2015) and strategic communication (Karolinum, 2024) for the Czech audience. She regularly publishes in academic journals and has been a guest lecturer at universities in Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Japan, etc. In 2020 she started the first Czech MA programme in Strategic Communication at Charles University in Prague. Since 2023 she's the director of the Research Centre for Strategic Communication and the Charles University in Prague.

Hickerson, Andrea, *University of Mississippi (USA)* • Andrea Hickerson, Ph.D., is dean and professor in the School of Journalism and New Media at the University of Mississippi. Previously she was an associate dean in the College of Information and Communications and the director of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of South Carolina. Before that, she served as director of the School of Communication at Rochester Institute of Technology. Hickerson conducts research on journalism routines with an emphasis on technology use. She is part of an interdisciplinary team building a deepfake video detection tool for journalists that has received support from the National Science Foundation and the Knight Foundation. She has been awarded over $1 million in external research awards. She has a B.A. from Syracuse University in Journalism and International relations; an M.A. in Journalism and an M.A. in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Texas at Austin; and a Ph.D. in Communication from the University of Washington.

Holtzhausen, Lida, *North-West University (South Africa)* • Professor Lida Holtzhausen is the Director of the School of Communication at North-West University. She holds a PhD in Corporate Communication and has been an academic at NWU since 2000, advancing to full professor in 2023. She has held leadership roles, served on key university committees, and received multiple teaching awards, including the 2024 University Teaching Excellence Award. A Chartered Public Relations Practitioner, she is actively involved in professional associations and international collaborations. Her research focuses on corporate communication, branding, and marketing communication. She has presented over 50 academic papers and is currently editing two books on communication.

Huber, Jeannine, *University of Vienna (Austria)* • Jeannine Huber is a university assistant (Predoc) in the Corporate Communication Research Group at the Department of Communication at the University of Vienna. Her dissertation focuses on the effects of psychological safety and communication in the workplace.

Hung, Olivia, *McMaster University (Canada)* • Liv is a marketing and communications leader with over 15 years of experience as a consultant and strategist in the agency world of advertising and communications. Liv graduated from McMaster University's Master of Communication Management program in 2024. Her master's capstone research paper explored the leadership role of strategic communicators in the age of artificial intelligence. She moderated a panel on AI and public relations at the Canadian Public Relations Society Elevate conference in 2023. She is also a crisis communications expert, helping to prepare clients for crisis events through simulations.

Hürmeriç, Pelin, *Yeditepe University (Turkey)* • Professor Dr. Pelin Hürmeriç graduated from Marmara University's Faculty of Communication in 2000, completed her master's in Public Relations and Publicity at Yeditepe University, and earned her doctorate at Marmara University. Hürmeriç began her academic career at Yeditepe University in 2001 and has been a professor in the Department of Public Relations and Publicity since 2020. In 2024, she was appointed the Dean of the Faculty of Communication at Yeditepe University while continuing her role as the Head of the Department of Public Relations and Publicity. Specializing in public relations, the history of public relations, reputation management, and crisis communication, Hürmeriç is the author of numerous national and international articles and books. She is a member of several international communication research associations and has received various awards for her contributions to the field.

Isaacson, Tom, *Northern Michigan University (USA)* • Tom Isaacson, Ph.D. (Michigan State University) is an Associate Professor of Public Relations and Assistant Department Head in the College of Business at Northern Michigan University. His professional experience working with U.S. baseball teams led to published work related to Sports PR and the development of Sport-specific curriculum. A dual interest in history and travel evolved from more than a decade of bringing students to the American University of Rome. This resulted in a fall 2024 sabbatical researching World War II soldier tourism in Rome using the archives at the American Academy of Rome and British School at Rome.

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Kaclová, Markéta, *Charles University (Czech Republic)* • PhD. Student at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic. After nearly 20 years in the public relations agency world, she is now transitioning into academia. Currently pursuing a PhD at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, her research focuses on strategic communication, the public relations profession, and the technologies—particularly artificial intelligence—that are reshaping the field.

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An Interview with AI on Ethical Dilemmas of PR Professionals

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has sparked new ontological and methodological debates in public relations. While some scholars discuss whether AI will reduce the need for PR professionals, some believes that AI lacks emotional capacity and experience, which raise significant ethical concerns. Therefore, a critical question is raised on how AI tools can assist PR professionals in navigating ethical dilemmas. In that vein, this study aims to explore how AI rools can provide guidance to PR practitioners when dealing with ethical dilemmas.

Literature Review

The extant literature has highlighted AI's transformative impact on PR (Ardila, 2020) and its being an integral component of the field (Swiatek & Galloway, 2022). AI's contributions to PR include creating media lists, writing press releases, identifying media trends, scheduling meetings, sending emails, generating content, responding to social media posts, analyzing big data for insights, evaluating PR campaigns and developing more effective strategies. Research conducting interviews with PR professionals also show that practitioners recognize AI's potential of saving time and enhancing efficiency. However, professionals also acknowledge that AI raises some ethical problems. Other studies also contend that there has been an excessive focus on AI's potential for routine tasks, which overlook its broader implications (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018) and AI can lead to a diminishing of humans' professional skills (Jeong & Park, 2023). Moreover, it is argued that AI is unable to fully replicate distinctly human capabilities such as creativity, empathy and critical thinking, implying that PR professionals cannot be displaced in the field (Biswal, 2020).

Methodology

This study conducts an in-depth interview with ChatGPT 4o, exploring how AI responds to ethical dilemmas of an PR professional. The researcher posed some ethical challenging questions to ChatGPT 4o, asking it to imagine itself working as a PR professional. Some of the prompts included "Imagine your boss asks you to hide information from employees that violates their rights", "Your client asks you to craft a message exploiting children's emotions for a product aimed at kids, offering you the job opportunity of a lifetime if you comply", "Your manager requests you cover up the an sexual assault issue, threatening to fire you if you refuse", "Your company claims to respect animal rights but remains silent on an animal rights law due to fear of opposing the government?". Follow-up questions tested the AI's ethical reasoning under personal pressure, such as financial need or the threat of unemployment.

Results and Conclusions

During the interview, ChatGPT 4o emphasized the importance of ethics and conscience in PR, suggesting that these principles are crucial for decision-making. The AI acknowledged that

while individuals' ethical decisions are guided by conscience, they can also be influenced by external factors such as financial constraints or job security. ChatGPT 4o highlighted the unique challenges faced by PR professionals in countries like Turkey, where unemployment, financial pressures and internal company dynamics complicate ethical decision-making. It also noted the importance of maintaining good relations with the government, as this can significantly impact the ethical decisions PR professionals must make. The AI also addressed the potential for PR professionals to struggle with balancing personal values and professional responsibilities. Factors such as financial hardships, fear of unemployment and pressure from management were identified as contributing to unethical decision-making.

Practical and Social Implications

This study offers an alternative approach to the literature that claims AI cannot make moral decisions or fully comprehend complex issues. The study demonstrates that AI can assist PR professionals in making ethical decisions when provided with accurate and realistic prompts written by ethically-conscious professionals. Therefore, AI can provide valuable guidance as long as it is used in conjunction with human conscience. Since this study was conducted exclusively using ChatGPT 4o, further research is warranted to explore how other AI tools would respond and guide to other ethically challenging situations that PR professional may face.

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Keywords

public relations, artificial intelligence, ethics, ethical dilemmas, conscience

Between convenience and professional myopia. Adoption of AI tools by would-be public relations specialists

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Recent studies show that the number of PR professionals using generative AI at work has grown nearly three times from March 2023 to Jan 2025 – from 28% to 75% (Muck Rack, 2025). Global and local PR agencies, independent practitioners, and communication units of corporations and NGOs have already introduced AI tools in their business practices, and some even appointed AI experts to launch innovative solutions and address organizational, cultural, and ethical challenges (USC, 2024).

PR professionals use AI tools mostly for brainstorming, writing and editing materials and media releases, research, preparing social media posts, and crafting pitches. Despite the majority of PR experts declaring that AI both speeds their work and boosts its quality, their principal concern is that younger PR specialists don't learn the basics of the profession and become too dependent on AI tools (Muck Rack, 2025).

Such reliance on technology may affect the prospects for the PR industry, as many tasks are likely to be performed by algorithms that will be able to replace humans. This notion is particularly relevant to Gen Z, who eagerly embraced such inventions as AI tools and LLM models and used them extensively in their professional lives.

Literature review

The literature on the relationship between PR and AI has grown fast since 2023. As summarized in a study on AI use among PR professionals, new research on AI and PR explored the adoption of AI tools in PR practice, competencies and skills required to effectively and ethically apply AI in PR, potential barriers and downsides of AI in PR (including dis- and misinformation, deepfakes, and other forms of misuse of AI), and future – mostly perceived as positive – role of AI in PR (Kaclova, 2024).

PR scholars analyzed the role of AI tools in education and stressed the importance of ethical conduct and avoiding cheating, plagiarism, and academic dishonesty, which is possible when universities encourage students to use AI responsibly and establish clear guidelines for them. Universities should openly discuss these issues on a day-to-day basis to ensure that all emerging problems are addressed (Lim, 2024). Other researchers wrote that the decision to incorporate generative AI and the rules of its ethical application in PR writing classes paid off, as students felt empowered, treated seriously, and well-prepared to enter the PR workforce (Ryan, 2024). However, PR scholars know that their students and the PR industry have mostly surpassed their instructors in practical skills in using generative

AI. On the other hand, would-be PR specialists (including PR students) tend to disdain the consequences of the application of AI tools for the future of their vocations and the labor market.

Research questions

It might be worthwhile to investigate would-be PR practitioners' opinions on the discrepancy between the convenience of AI technology for its current users and its long-run impact on the PR industry. Hence, the research questions are:
RQ1 – How – if at all – was AI technology and its use in PR covered in the PR curricula (or in training and onboarding programs) for students, interns, and young PR professionals?
RQ2 – Have PR students, interns, and young professionals been given ethical and professional guidelines on the transparent and effective use of AI tools in PR during their studies or training?
RQ3 – Were PR students and young practitioners taught or instructed how to stay ahead of AI technology and become indispensable in their PR jobs?

Methodology

The research will include online surveys among young professionals and PR students. Respondents will be recruited via professional organizations, PR networks, and universities that run full-time PR sequences. Likert-type scales will measure their opinions to find a general mood about AI in PR among aspiring PR people.

Results and conclusions

The research will show young practitioners and PR students' preparedness to cope with AI's growing role in PR, make better use of AI tools, handle ethical considerations, and limit potential dependency on AI in their future jobs.

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Keywords

AI tools, PR ethics, PR future, professionalism, PR education

Deploying Artificial Intelligence and Dynamic Visual Artefacts (Avatars) in employee communication: Exploring perceptions and attitudes among corporate communicators

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Introduction and purpose of the study

While there is an emerging body of research on the use of generative Artificial Intelligence in public relations, an area that remains unexplored is that of the perceptions and attitudes toward AI generated visual representations used to communicate organisational messaging.
This paper aims to address this gap, by looking at the growing level of interest in using AI to generate visual communications, with a special focus on 'human expressive' avatars. Specifically, we aim to shed light on the potential implications, challenges and opportunities that can arise through the development and integration of avatars in employee communication.

Literature review

Internal communication is a vital tool in a practitioner's armoury for enhancing employee understanding of organisational goals and informing them on what is needed to support organisational performance. It is, therefore, crucial for an organisation's survival and success. Meaningful employee communication is based on frequency, bi-directional flow, timeliness, and accuracy, (Arif et al., 2023) and symmetry (Kang & Sung, 2017). It plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of community, enhancing employee engagement and motivation, contributing to an increased willingness to advocate for the organisation and providing a positive effect on an organisation's brand.
Considering that relationship building and management are central elements in employee communication, the use of avatars seems to disrupt these processes by eliminating the 'human touch' with a synthetic yet realistic alternative. Questions remain about how effective personal and physical attributes can be projected onto avatars (Kasahara & Sakata, 2025). However, the use of avatars is being widely weighed-up on grounds of efficiency, timeliness, low cost and the potential for multi-lingual communications. Balanced against this are ethical concerns and issues around the acceptance of artefact identities and unrealistic non-verbal communication (Nuswantoro & Richter, 2024).

Methodology

To obtain a sense of how communications practitioners, working for national and international organisations, view the potential use and deployment of avatars in their employee communications, we chose a three-stage, qualitative, grounded theory approach. Firstly, in 2024, we undertook in-depth interviews (lasting 30-60 minutes) with 8 senior practitioners working in the UK, Europe, Asia and the US, to explore their attitudes toward AI, avatars, ethical and practical concerns. All interviewees either oversaw or had direct responsibility for employee communications. Transcripts were coded and specific categories were used to develop a working framework to assess attitudes and perceptions to workplace communication. Secondly, to test and refine the framework, we will be running two focus groups that will comprise internal communications specialists with a specific interest in using avatars as part of their employee communications suite. Scheduled for Spring 2025, the groups will also explore the attitudes concerning the use of avatars and consider how they could be used to replace current ways of fulfilling many core functions of employee communication. Part 3 of the project will involve engaging with employees to investigate their responses to the implementation of new AI tools in employee communication.

Results and conclusions

The first stage of the research, now complete, revealed certain themes from the perspective of employee communication professionals. Consequently, in our working model we focus on i) AI/Avatar concerns/fears, ii) Gaps/unmet needs, iii) Opportunities iv) Ethical understanding v) Practicalities vi) Appetite for use vii) Sustainability. We expect the planned focus groups to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges as well as consider the ease, or otherwise, of delivering visual artefact solutions that address everyday as well as strategic communications needs. Moreover, we seek to deepen our understanding of the practical implications and reception of AI in employee communication, contributing valuable insights to the evolving discourse on the intersection of AI and strategic organisational communication. We anticipate part 3 to provide informed research on the willingness of employees to receive, act and pass on communications from avatars. Although our sample is not large and not representative of the whole industry, our results can be used to inform practice as well as research.

Practical and social implications

The results can inform best practice and provide organisations with knowledge on how they can best use Avatars to cover communication needs and serve strategic goals while being cognisant of ethical concerns and risks associated with utilising digital artefacts. The wider implications for society are related to the introduction and integration of AI and Avatars in society and inform efforts to identify best use in other areas of everyday life, besides the professional realm.

Keywords

avatars, artificial intelligence, employee communication, attitudes, perceptions.

A South African Perspective on the Integration of AI in Corporate Communication Curriculum: Bridging the Gap between Academic Training and Professional Practice

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Introduction and literature review

AI is driving transformative changes across society, necessitating a fundamental reimagining of education to prepare individuals for evolving job markets and complex ethical challenges. As AI extends beyond technological boundaries, educational systems must adapt rapidly to equip learners with the critical skills, ethical frameworks, and technological literacy required to thrive in this dynamic landscape (Baptista & Belim, 2024; Jang et al., 2023).

This is also true for corporate communication (CC) education, where AI is transforming the profession's scope, thereby challenging established communication practices (Kelm & Johann, 2024). Previous research found that the rapid transformation of the profession had various negative effects on current CC professionals, such as AI anxiety, scepticism, and hesitancy toward embracing AI tools. These effects were caused by the professionals' limited understanding of AI's capabilities, limitations, and responsibilities regarding its use. To combat these negative effects, AI literacy is fundamental for successfully deploying AI in organizations. It is argued that such education should not only train communication professionals in the ethical and practical application of AI within the communication function but also educate them to be change agents on the overall ethical and transparent use of AI within the organization (Kelm & Johann, 2024, Buhmann & Gregory, 2023).

However, the curriculum must be customized to reflect the profession's needs, diverse student populations, and various regions' specific socio-economic and technological landscapes (Damasevicius, 2024). This makes the inclusion of AI in the CC curriculum in South Africa, a developing country, even more challenging because of the diversity of SA students and the technological and AI divide between students.

Purpose of the study

Various studies have been done about the technical use of AI within the communication function, ethical considerations regarding the use of AI, and the role of the communication professional in the adoption and use of AI within the larger organization. However, there is a gap in the literature on how corporate communication curricula should be transformed to reflect these changes in the profession and empower future communication professionals to successfully address AI's strategic, operative, and ethical chal-

lenges, reflecting the diversity of the South African context.
To fill this gap, this study proposes the following questions:
RQ1 – How do South African CC professionals perceive the inclusion of AI in CC curricula?
RQ2 – What guidelines do South African CC professionals propose for incorporating AI in CC curricula?

Methodology

This study will adopt a qualitative research approach to explore South African CC professionals' perspectives on integrating AI into corporate communication curricula. Fifteen semi-structured interviews will be conducted with practitioners from diverse contexts, including the corporate and non-profit sectors, higher education institutions, and communication consultancies. Purposive sampling will ensure the inclusion of participants with varying levels of experience in communication and degrees of AI adoption in their practices. The findings aim to provide valuable insights into how AI can be meaningfully incorporated into curricula and offer practical guidelines on the content and methods for its integration.

Practical and social implications

Exploring the perspectives of South African corporate communication professionals on incorporating AI into curricula holds significant practical and social implications. The insights gained can guide academics in designing curricula that align with industry needs, ensuring graduates are not only technologically proficient but also culturally aware and ethically equipped to navigate the complex global landscape of AI. This study aims to foster a new generation of communication professionals capable of leveraging AI responsibly and inclusively within diverse social and cultural contexts by bridging the gap between academic training and professional practice.

Keywords

AI, corporate communication professionals, corporate communication curricula, South Africa

Artificial intelligence and student fear, resistance and creativity in the classroom. The public relations teaching perspective

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Introduction and purpose of study

This paper uses a reflective case study approach to explore the use of AI for teaching and learning among students studying a module (course) designed for first year public relations and journalism students at a UK university. The module taught students the competencies involved in researching, planning, and implementing a digital communications campaign through their experience of working with a client in an agency-type environment. This is an established module but for the 2023/4 academic year students were permitted to use generative AI tools both in the classroom and for their assessed work.

Literature review

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the classroom is a rapidly-developing pedagogical area. While fears about AI being used for poor academic practice (e.g. Oravec, 2023) are often justified, there is growing acknowledgement that students need opportunities to experiment with, use, and learn about AI in the classroom (e.g. Yang, A, 2024, Ho, 2021, Yang, J., 2023).

According to Yang (2024) it not appropriate to tell students they cannot use generative AI for their practice-based work when they will be using it in their future public relations careers. These students may work in roles where they may be dealing with, e.g., the implications of poor use of AI use, issues of data security, issues surrounding malicious use of AI which affects client reputation - as well as for practice-based tasks (Gregory, 2023).

Methodology

This paper uses a reflective case study approach to explore the key issues revealed by this module's use of AI for teaching and learning using a mixed methodology of contemporaneous notes, anonymised students records, and lecturer reflections. It relates the themes to recent writing on AI from across the educational spectrum.

Practical and social implications

The paper reveals some complex and interlocking themes which will provide valuable learning for public relations educators. For instance, there was student resistance to using AI technology in the classroom. Some students wanted their own work to be recognised and didn't want any AI assistance. Some were happy to use AI to develop logos and graphics but didn't want to use it for written work.

Some students used AI to create graphics - not part of the assessed course content. Lecturers reflected that perhaps students were happier using AI in an area where they were not meant to be expert; their resistance was linked to competencies where they should excel (such as public relations writing). This area is a relatively unexplored in academic literature but Habib's (2024) research suggests that students saw AI as the 'easy way out' - they wanted to think on their own. Jussupow et al (2022) has also written in this area, noting considerable resistance to AI among established physicians, who did not want their knowledge or authority challenged. Meanwhile, student physicians took a more nuanced approach.

There was concern among some students about how the data and information they inputted into generative AI programmes would be used. However, some were not concerned, since much of their personal information was already known by social media companies. Some students actively rejected the use of AI in the classroom and were reluctant to even engage in discussions about its use. Gregory (2023) writes: "The reluctance to adopt AI tools appears most likely because of fear that technology could replace jobs and lack of confidence in using tools like ChatGPT which are error prone" (online). Bruce Smith (2024) adds that "concerns about transparency and the potential for Gen AI to replace human roles linger" (online).

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Keywords

Artificial intelligence; public relations; education; pedagogy

Race, diversity, and social mobility in the public relations industry

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Introduction and purpose of study

This paper explains and develops theory and research on race, diversity, and social mobility through the lens of the lived experience of practitioners from diverse backgrounds in the British public relations industry. Its aim is to provide a snapshot of the working lives of such practitioners in modern Britain.

Analysis of interviews demonstrates why more radical action is needed to create an equitable workplace. The interviews illuminate areas such as critical race theory, social mobility, workplace bias, social class, and accent - and highlights where issues of discrimination and bias persist. It also shines a light on schemes designed to improve social mobility and diversity in public relations and discusses their merits in the light of practitioner experiences.

In an era where diversity initiatives are under the spotlight it demonstrates why an understanding and discussion of issues relating to diversity are vital if industries are to be relevant and flourish.

Literature Review

While the intersection of race, class and place and its link to social mobility and oppression is the object of social scientific research (e.g., Anthias, 2013; Bilge & Denis, 2010), there has been less academic work in this area focusing specifically on public relations, although there are notable exceptions (e.g., Edwards, 2014; Pompper, 2013; Vardeman-Winter and Place, 2013). It is this work that has increased awareness in the public relations industry about the marginalised position of practitioners from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds and the disadvantages they face in the workplace (e.g. Edwards & Aulakh, 2024), especially when diverse positions are intersected with other characteristics such as disability, gender, age, accent, and geographical location.

Methodology

The practitioners were recruited through the researchers' networks and extended connections, as well as through collaboration with the administrators and managers of industry training programmes designed to increase diversity in the industry. This approach aimed to capture a broad representation of the diverse nature of British public relations professionals. Around 20 interviewees were recruited and interviews carried out via Teams and Zoom in 2023/2024.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed with the transcription accompanied by observation notes. Data analysis was carried out using Atlas.ti version 24.1.1 software.

Results and conclusions

This paper explores uses interviews to explore the lived experiences of practitioners from diverse backgrounds in the UK public relations

industry. the interviews. Themes include:
Whether leadership and social mobility programmes help to increase awareness of diversity issues and allow practitioners to progress their career or whether they reproduce a white, middle class worldview
The benefits of a diverse public relations workforce and problem of 'racial capitalism'
How factors such as race, class and geographical location intersect.
Discrimination and British regional accents
How and where Black, Asian and ethnic minority practitioners view discrimination in the public relations industry.

Practical and social implications

This paper presents a dynamic interrogation of complex topics through the voices of practitioners. It also allows the application of theory to real-world situations, thus showing the value of academic research and adds to the literature on race, diversity and social mobility by exploring these factors through the lived experiences of public relations practitioners in a way that throws light on the discrimination faced by practitioners. This research will allow practitioners, academics and students to explore their own practice and have conversations with others about this subject.

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Keywords

race, diversity, social mobility, public relations

How is Artificial Intelligence Shaping Crisis Communication? A Systematic Review of Interdisciplinary Research

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

As the complexity of contemporary crises increases, the need for innovative communication strategies has become more critical. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative tool in crisis communication. This study provides an updated overview of AI's role in crisis communication by systematically reviewing existing interdisciplinary research to highlight trends, gaps, and opportunities for further exploration.

Literature Review

A systematic review of 212 articles from both communication and non-communication journals (SSCI-indexed) was conducted to identify key trends in AI's application to crisis communication. The review categorizes studies based on theoretical frameworks, research methodologies, AI definitions, and the types and locations of crises addressed. Since 2019, there has been a noticeable increase in AI's role in crisis communication, driven by interdisciplinary interest and the global COVID-19 pandemic. While many studies focus on AI applications like sentiment analysis and chatbots, there remains a lack of cohesive theoretical frameworks.

Methodology

The study utilized a systematic review methodology, coding articles based on various factors such as theoretical approach, AI definitions, crisis types, and geographic scope. This comprehensive analysis allows for a detailed understanding of the current state of AI research in crisis communication and the key themes emerging in the field.

Results and Conclusions

The findings highlight several key trends, including the growing focus on AI in crisis communication post-2019 and the predominance of content analysis and systematic review methodologies in the literature. However, there is a notable gap in empirical studies that assess the real-world effectiveness of AI tools. Despite the widespread focus on functions such as sentiment analysis and chatbots, the literature often lacks integrated models for AI-mediated crisis communication. The review concludes by advocating for the development of cohesive frameworks that integrate AI into established crisis communication theories, addressing the need for interdisciplinary research approaches.

Practical and Social Implications

This study calls for expanding theoretical and methodological approaches to studying AI in crisis communication. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, future research can better address ethical concerns such as privacy, bias, and transparency. In turn, these efforts

will help refine the use of AI in managing crises more effectively across diverse contexts.

Keywords

artificial Intelligence, crisis communication, chatbots, machine learning, emergency management, content analysis, interdisciplinary research

Trust, authenticity and artificial intelligence. AIcreated content and its consequences for building symmetrical relationships with audience members

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Recent data from the US and UK shows that copywriting and editing remain the most important activities for PR professionals and are performed on a daily basis, regardless of their level of seniority. Nearly 70% of practitioners are open to using AI to perform these tasks. There is also evidence that PR releases are often used by journalists to create promotional communications without any changes (Macnamara, 2014). In this regard, new legislation now requires that social media content be labelled as being created using AI. Although from a legal perspective, AI cannot be considered the author and attribution of AI-generated text is not possible (Lee, 2023), audiences are said to apply specifically human rules and behavioural expectations to interactions mediated by computers, even though they are consciously aware that they are not interacting with other people (Hancock et al., 2023). This phenomenon is called ethopoeia (Nass & Moon, 2000).

To date, the implications for building ethopoeic relationships between PR communicators and audiences mediated by AI content have not been sufficiently explored in PR scholarship. This neglect is particularly evident among practitioners: when asked about the dangers of using AI in their work, practitioners do not seem to be concerned about the impact of AI-generated content on trust and authenticity of the relationships with organisations their represent. Trust seems to be important not only from a practical point of view. Although PR scholars have previously recognised the role of trust and authenticity in relationship building (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998), the mechanism of forming trust, defined as "one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party"(Hon & Grunig, 1999), has not been sufficiently tackled (Valentini, 2020). Following this definition, investigating and evaluating how AI-generated content can affect the trust of audiences (RQ1) can be seen as a manifestation of building symmetrical relationships. In line with the above rationale, the present study examines the confidence-related antecedents of trust: informativeness, credibility and authenticity.

The present study used an experimental factorial design (2x2) and 177 participants were recruited via an online study management system. Demographic data were collected, including information on social media use. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions (2 brand familiar/unfamiliar vs 2 human generat-

ed/AI generated). In the familiar condition, an original press release from a well-known sports brand about the launch of a new shoe was used, and a similar press release with the same details was created using Chat GPT. In the unfamiliar condition, the same two press releases were used, but the name of the brand was removed, and a fictitious one was provided. In each condition, participants were told that they were about to view a social media post and were informed whether the information was created by a human content creator or by artificial intelligence. Dependent measures included ratings of the post's informativeness, credibility, trustworthiness, and purchase intention of the brand.

The results revealed a regression model that confirmed authenticity and credibility as two highly significant antecedents of trust (r^2_{adj} = 28, p < .001). ANOVA also revealed a fully interactive effect of credibility on trust (F(3,147) = 4.92, p = .042, r^2_{adj}= 0.24): in the human-generated content condition, familiar brands were considered more credible than unfamiliar brands.

A completely opposite effect occurred when comparing posts created by artificial intelligence. AI-created posts of the unfamiliar brand were considered more credible than AI-created posts of the familiar brand. There was a moderating effect of the relationship between AI-generated content and authenticity (Int = .-53, SE = 16, t = -3.39, p = .0009). Human-generated content was only perceived as authentic when it was rated as highly informative. While there was no difference in perceived authenticity between human- and AI-generated communication at low and moderate levels of perceived informativeness, human-generated press releases were perceived as highly authentic at high levels of perceived informativeness. In addition, authenticity (moderated by informativeness) and trustworthiness emerged as strong predictors of purchase intention (F(2,142) = 38.05, p < .001, r^2_{adj} = 34).

This study confirmed authenticity and credibility as two important antecedents of trust. Ethopeic expectations of a "person behind the machine" manifested themselves more strongly for familiar brands, so that the familiarity effect of a brand helps to personify a person behind the machine. The results suggest that PR communicators need to ensure that communication is characterised by a high degree of informativeness when they are named as authors. Separately, human communicators should be used as authors to establish the credibility of PR content about familiar brands. In addition, this study indirectly suggests a healthy level of scepticism towards AI-generated content but advises caution when using AI content to communicate with audiences.

Keywords

Trust, Authenticity, Credibility, Artificial Intelligence, Relationships

Preparing internal communication practitioners for the changing AI corporate environment in South Africa

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The rapid development and integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into various sectors have significantly transformed how businesses operate and communicate. Internal communication, a critical function that facilitates collaboration, information dissemination, and employee engagement within organisations, has also been impacted by the advent of AI technologies. From automated messaging systems and chatbots to data analytics tools that optimize communication strategies, AI is reshaping the approaches used by internal communication practitioners. As AI becomes increasingly integrated into communication strategies, it is important to examine how these AI technologies influence the roles, practices, and skillsets of internal communication practitioners.

Higher education institutions play a critical role and have the responsibility to equip graduates with the skills and knowledge necessary to adapt to the transforming internal environment with continuous technological changes. Furthermore, institutions of higher education should educate students not only on how AI works but also on its ethical implications. This will empower internal communication practitioners to make responsible decisions when implementing AI-driven strategies within organisations, ensuring that AI enhances rather than undermines transparency, trust, and organisational culture.

Despite the practical importance of preparing internal communication practitioners for the future (with AI), little research has been done in the field of internal communication in South Africa (Sutton, 2023). Recently, the Commission on Public Relations Education reported on the requirements for public relations professionals to enter the workplace in the United States of America (CPRE, 2024) – not relevant to the South African context. It is argued that the South African culture is different from others found globally and has never been completely understood by Western scholars, probably due to the limited information on communication management and public relations available in the country or Africa (Nutsugah & Anani-Bossman, 2023; Steyn, 2005). Given South Africa's context-specific challenges (including bridging divides among internal stakeholders of different cultures and 12 different official languages, managing the legacy of its history on racial dynamics and social disparities internally, the digital divide, and navigating a complex economic and political workplace environment), internal communication practitioners in this developing-world corporate context may be reluctant to adopt international solutions.

This study explores the perceptions of communication management and public relations lecturers at higher education institutions in South Africa, teaching components of internal communication to prepare future internal communication practitioners for the changing AI corporate environment in a unique and challenging country.

Literature review

The study is conducted from a systems and reflective approach and will use a multi-dimensional theoretical framework to accommodate the complex research context. Elements from the following theories will be incorporated into the theoretical framework: strategic communication management theory, stakeholder relationship management theory, technological acceptance model, uses and gratification theory, and sustainability theory.

Methodology

A qualitative research approach is followed by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with academics from various higher education institutions in South Africa, selected through purposive known-group sampling (Du Plooy, 2009). The selected participants are lecturers of communication management and public relations modules which integrate components of the internal communication discipline into the curricula. Their inclusion is appropriate for this study, as the participants' academic views on the topic are of value. Data saturation is used to determine the number of interviewees; until the information is found to repeat itself and saturation is reached, as described in the qualitative research tradition. Data collection is scheduled for February to March 2025.

Results and conclusions

The expectation is to uncover higher education in South Africa's readiness to play a role in preparing internal communication practitioners for the future. It is expected that academics in communication management and public relations reflect on their teaching to ensure that future internal communication practitioners are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and ethical frameworks necessary for a continuously changing AI corporate environment, specifically in a volatile South African landscape with many unique challenges. It is also expected that the opportunities and challenges that educators of internal communication practitioners face as AI tools evolve will be emphasised in the findings.

Practical and social implications

The study fills the gap in the academic milieu, as it is probably the only study that explores the academic view, responsibility and readiness of preparing internal communication practitioners for the changing AI corporate environment in the South African context – a unique setting with its own challenges.

Furthermore, lessons learned from this study could guide and contribute to the curriculum development in the fields of public relations and corporate communication for South African higher education institutions, educating future internal communication practitioners. Future studies could build on this study and combine global information on AI-related education for the internal communication discipline in an ever-changing environment.

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Keywords

Internal communication; Internal communication practitioners; Higher education; Artificial Intelligence

Developing a Digital Communication Management Framework for South African Sport Organizations

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Digital marketing strategies within sport organisations have increasingly embraced sustainability and ethical practices due to heightened awareness among stakeholders. The purpose of this study is to investigate sustainability and ethical engagement as essential components in enhancing not only digital marketing but communication management practices and stakeholder relationships within sport organisations in South Africa in a digital space. This research is an element of the PhD study conducted by Degenaar (2024), which forms part of a larger, comprehensive framework specifically developed for enhancing digital marketing strategies in sport organisations across South Africa. This research acknowledges that marketing is a critical element within the broader sphere of communication, particularly in enhancing organisational relationships with stakeholders.

Literature Review

Existing literature highlights sustainability and ethical communication as critical for building trust, credibility, and long-term relationships with stakeholders (Melton & MacCharles, 2021). Ethical practices in communication include transparency, authenticity, and accountability, essential in responding effectively to stakeholder expectations regarding environmental and social responsibility (Evans et al., 2022).

Furthermore, stakeholder-centric communication is emphasized as a cornerstone of successful sport organisations' digital marketing, contributing significantly to community building and loyalty by offering exceptional value that surpasses the expectations of the sport stakeholder (Fischer, 2019). According to Cheesman (2023), integrating sustainability initiatives within digital marketing strategies has become increasingly essential in sport organisations due to growing environmental concerns. Parent and Hoye (2018) argue that ethical and sustainable communication practices strengthen relationships across interconnected sport sectors (government, non-profit, and corporate), enhancing overall organisational performance and stakeholder engagement.

Methodology

This study adopted a multi-method research design employed by Degenaar (2024), combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The study consisted of:

Semi-structured interviews with nine sport marketing specialists from different organizations to explore their digital marketing practices.

Content analysis of digital functionalities, examining websites and social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram) to identify best practices.

An electronic survey administered to sport

stakeholders (fans and participants) to assess perceptions of digital communication management strategies.
For this paper, the focus specifically centres on sustainability and ethical engagement (Stage 5 of the framework).

Results

The results indicate that sport organisations, which successfully implement sustainability and ethical engagement practices into their digital marketing within the context of communication management and a digital global arena, experience heightened stakeholder trust and loyalty. Stakeholders expressed strong support for sport organisations that transparently communicated their sustainability initiatives, demonstrating genuine commitment and ethical responsibility. Additionally, stakeholders valued the visibility and accessibility of sustainability-related information on digital platforms, reinforcing positive brand perceptions about the sport organisation's commitment to environmental and social responsibility due to their transparent communication of sustainability issues. The findings also highlighted specific practices such as regular sustainability reporting, community-driven initiatives, and consistent ethical messaging as influential factors in stakeholder satisfaction and engagement.

Conclusions

Organisations integrating sustainable and ethical engagement into their marketing strategies reported greater stakeholder satisfaction and strengthened organisational reputation. The findings underscore the importance of authentic and transparent content as critical to the long-term success and credibility of sport organisations. In the era of digital marketing sustainability has become increasingly relevant as stakeholders prefer brands that demonstrate responsibility and ethical considerations in their digital marketing, further emphasizing the integral role of sustainability within the broader context of communication.

Limitations and future research

The study's focus on South African sport organisations and a limited sample may constrain generalisability. Future research could expand to other regions or levels of sport and explore how technologies like AI can further support ethical, transparent communication. Long-term studies could also examine sustained impacts over time.

Practical and Social Implications

This study provides actionable insights for marketing professionals within sport organisations to effectively implement sustainable and ethical marketing practices. Socially, the adoption of these practices promotes environmental responsibility, ethical conduct, and enhanced community engagement, contributing positively to broader societal objectives. While this study did not examine the role of AI-driven digital tools, the findings suggest that future research should explore how these technologies can support sustainability and ethical engagement by enhancing transparency, personalising stakeholder communication, and ensuring responsible, accountable digital interactions.

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Keywords

Communication, Digital marketing, Ethical Engagement, Sustainability, Stakeholder Communication, South Africa, Sport Organisations

Proposing Artificial Intelligence-Managed Corporate Social Responsibility (AIM-CSR) Communication Framework

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Communication Framework

Generative AI (GenAI) technologies are sparking enthusiasm and existential concerns regarding their disruptive potential across industries such as public relations, advertising, and marketing communication. A particularly significant area of impact is business-society relations, explored through topics such as AI for Social Good and AI in corporate social responsibility (CSR) (e.g., Wu et al., 2024). Although extensive research has highlighted communication as central to effective CSR strategies, and despite increasing attention to AI's role in social good and CSR, limited research exists on AI-enabled CSR communication, aside from isolated studies addressing environmental sustainability communication. This gap needs to be addressed, because AI can profoundly influence CSR communication, an area already fraught with challenges such as audience skepticism, accusations of various *washings*, and the subsequent corporate reluctance to communicate CSR efforts. AI's myriad promises and perils could further intensify these complexities.

In response, this paper proposes the Artificial Intelligence-Managed Corporate Social Responsibility (AIM-CSR) Communication Framework. Grounded in an extensive literature review of AI applications in public relations, advertising, and marketing communication, this framework extends the well-established Du et al. (2010) CSR communication framework to incorporate the disruptive potential of GenAI technologies. By generating insights across public relations, advertising, and marketing communication and integrating the role of GenAI technologies into Du et al.'s (2010) framework, this paper advances interdisciplinary CSR communication theory.

Literature Review

AI and Business-Society Relationship

This section reviews literature on the related fields of AI for Social Good, and AI for CSR (Wu et al., 2024).

AI and Communication

This section reviews literature in the fields of AI in public relations (e.g., Wu et al., 2024), advertising and marketing communications (e.g., Ford et al., 2023).

CSR Communication

This section reviews the highly cited CSR communication framework by Du et al (2010) that has been used extensively in public relations research to examine CSR communication.

AI and CSR Communication

Finally, this section reviews literature on AI and CSR communication.

Method

This is a conceptual paper that proposes a theoretical framework based on a thorough and extensive review of interconnected bodies of literature on AI and CSR communication.

Results

Based on the review of literature, this section proposes the AIM-CSR Communication framework, with subsections explaining each aspect of the framework. See Figure 1 for an initial representation of the proposed framework. Theories used to explain these variables and their influence include relational theory, psychological reactance theory, technology acceptance model, uses and gratifications, and para-social relationships.

Practical and Social Implications

Practically, the AIM-CSR Communication framework can guide companies in leveraging AI responsibly for CSR communication, by paying attention simultaneously to its promises and perils. Done responsibly, AI can strengthen personalized, creative, targeted CSR communication campaigns that adapt dynamically to stakeholder sentiment, leading to positive social and business outcomes. Socially, responsibly personalized CSR campaigns can resonate more deeply with specific demographics, increasing diverse public participation and support for initiatives, strengthening stakeholder engagement in CSR initiatives. By prioritizing data-driven decisions, the framework can lead to better alignment between corporate efforts and societal needs.

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Keywords

CSR Communication, AI for Social Good, Communication Framework

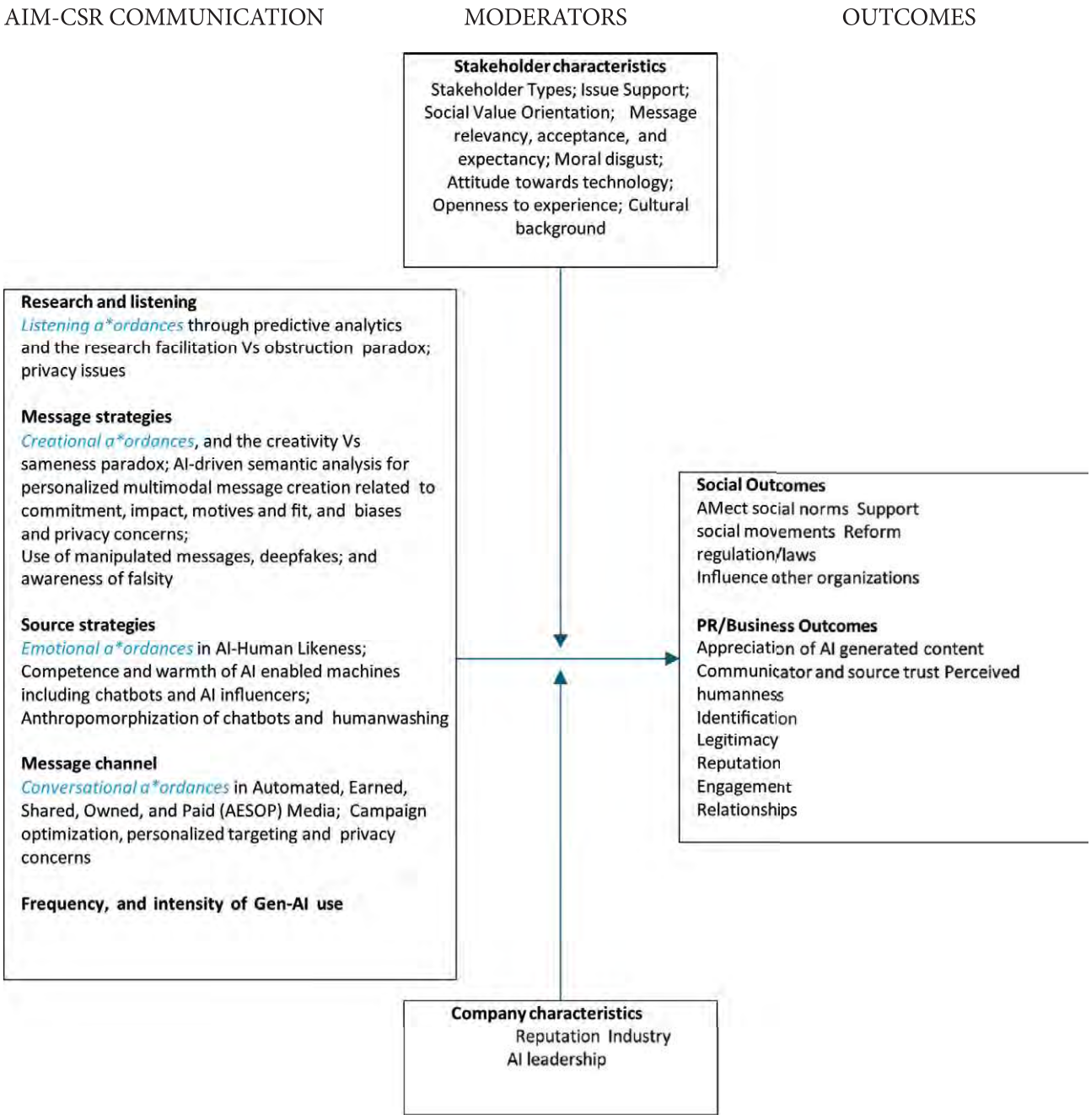

Figure 1: AIM-CSR Communication Framework

Intersectional Gender Representation in Corporate Social Media and AI-Imagery: From Progress to Perils?

Dhanesh, Ganga S, *University of Maryland (USA)*
Saad, Mahinaz, *Independent Public Relations Practitioner (USA)*

Public relations significantly contributes to social justice by promoting diverse and inclusive representation in corporate communication content, because as a discipline rooted in strategic storytelling, public relations influences how narratives about individuals and communities are shaped. While advertising research has found substantial evidence for the widespread use of gender stereotypes, emergent research in public relations has revealed reduced biases in representation in corporate social media posts. However, new challenges arise as generative AI (GenAI) tools for image creation gain traction. Increasingly utilized by content producers for its ability to deliver lowcost content consistently, GenAI introduces fresh concerns about perpetuation of biases, particularly through visual imagery.

Accordingly, situated within the Inclusive, Responsible Communication in Artificial Intelligence (IRCAI) framework (Logan & Waymer, 2024) and the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), our study employed visual social semiotics to content analyze the compositional, representational, and interactional meanings of human- versus AI-generated images in corporate social media posts. The following research questions guided our study:

- RQ1: How is gender represented intersectionally in corporate social media posts?
- RQ2: How is gender represented intersectionally in corresponding AI generated images?
- RQ3: How does intersectional gender representation in corporate social media posts compare to AI-generated visuals?

Literature Review

Public Relations Research on Gender
We reviewed public relations research on gender, including work at the intersections of race, feminism and queer theories, and conclude by highlighting limited research on gender representation, especially in corporate social media.

Stereotype Content Model, and Intersectional Representation
We reviewed literature on biases and stereotypes, focusing on the SCM, and the decades-long advertising research on gender representation.

AI Models, Stereotypes, and Biases
We reviewed research on biases and stereotypes in AI-generated images and argue that while large scale quantitative studies on massive datasets have found evidence of gender stereotypes in AI-generated images, these studies have only examined gender. An in-depth, qualitative analysis of intersectional gender representation is much needed.

Theoretical Framework for Public Relations, Diversity, and AI

This section reviewed the Inclusive, Responsible, Communication in Artificial Intelligence (IRCAI) framework, proposed to help the public relations field navigate the intersections of AI and race. We aim to integrate it with SCM and offer an extended IRCAI framework that also addresses intersectional gender representation.

Method

We conducted two quantitative content analyses using a visual social semiotic approach. Two coders analyzed 20 posts each in a pilot study to establish inter-coder reliability.

Study 1: The sample included 100 Fortune 500 business-to-consumer companies across diverse sectors. We selected two Instagram posts per company that visibly represented gender, collecting suitable posts from December 2023 to October 2024.

Study 2: We replicated Study 1 using AI-generated images created with DALL-E 2 and ChatGPT. AI-generated textual descriptions of original Instagram posts guided image generation, enabling comparison between AI-generated and original visuals. Chi-square tests of independence were employed in both studies to analyze whether intersectional gender representation significantly varied across key dimensions. To ensure comparability, identical coding categories and statistical procedures were used for both datasets.

Results

RQ1 asked about intersectional gender representation in corporate social media posts. The chi-square analyses revealed no statistically significant differences in gender representation across occupational roles ($\chi^2 = 2.07$, $p = 0.558$), location/context ($\chi^2 = 2.90$, $p = 0.575$), or trait stereotypes ($\chi^2 = 2.37$, $p = 0.499$), suggesting that gender representation in corporate visuals is relatively balanced. RQ2 asked about intersectional gender representation in corresponding AI-generated images. Analysis revealed statistically significant differences across occupational roles ($\chi^2 = 124.41$, $p < .001$), location/context ($\chi^2 = 121.57$, $p < .001$), and trait stereotypes ($\chi^2 = 117.62$, $p < .001$), suggesting that AI image-generation tools may replicate or even amplify existing gender biases. To answer RQ3 on comparison, the study found that while corporate visuals depicted some level of gender differentiation, AI-generated images appeared to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, possibly reflecting biases inherent in AI training datasets.

Implications

Practically, the findings provide insights for corporate content strategies, emphasizing the importance of inclusive AI systems. Organizations can use the findings to evaluate their AIgenerated imagery, ensuring alignment with ethical standards for diversity and inclusion. By addressing stereotypes, organizations can enhance the inclusivity of visual content in an AI-driven media landscape.

Socially, the research foregrounds the potential for AI to reinforce existing stereotypes and biases that could further hamper the attainment of social justice. Additionally, the study highlights the need for greater public awareness about the origins and implications of AI-generated content, fostering critical engagement with AI-generated media. Ultimately, it advocates for responsible organizational AI practices that prioritize social equity and representation that can help to achieve gender equality.

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Keywords

Gender representation, Corporate social media, AI, Visuals

Unpacking the Vulnerabilities of PR Professionals in the Age of Generative AI

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The rapid growth of artificial intelligence (AI) and generative AI (GAI) is transforming public relations practices, challenging the conventional understanding of professional responsibilities and creating uncertainty, fear, and controversy. Although industry guidelines and scholarly discussions provide broad recommendations, they fail to capture the nuanced vulnerabilities PR practitioners face as they adapt to GAI. This study addresses this gap by examining the diverse dimensions of vulnerability PR professionals experience in both in-house and agency settings. By exploring these challenges, this research provides a deeper understanding of how AI integration affects PR professionals beyond its functional applications. It offers insights into human-centered, sustainable GAI adoption protocols pertinent to the PR profession. Our overarching research question is:
What are the various dimensions of vulnerability encountered by public relations professionals working in-house and within agencies?

Literature review

Research on AI in public relations has gained significant interest over the past few years, particularly in its application across different PR contexts. Existing PR scholarship, though addressing AI adoption and ethics, remains instrumentalist, neglecting the emotional and professional uncertainties PR professionals face as AI reshapes their roles. PR is already a high-stress profession marked by burnout, exacerbated by an "always on" culture that has disrupted work-life balance. In 2024, 44% of PR professionals quit their jobs due to stress (Pardon, 2024). The rapid adoption of AI introduces further anxieties, including job displacement, loss of creative agency, and ethical dilemmas. Despite widespread advocacy for ethical AI governance, discussions often emphasize analytical guidelines based on moral-philosophical principles, while the actual experiences of professionals, including their anxieties, uncertainties, and emotional challenges in adapting to AI-driven changes, receive less attention. This focus risks neglecting why ethical AI adoption must align with PR professionals' well-being. A shift is needed from viewing AI in PR as merely a tool to examining how it reconfigures professionals' identities and work conditions.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach, using semi-structured, in-depth interviews to explore professionals' perspectives on ethical AI use in public relations. From April to August 2023, 21 professionals working in public relations and strategic communication across various experience levels and sectors—including private and nonprofit organizations—were interviewed via

Zoom. These interviews lasted between about 17 minutes to over one hour. Purposive and snowball sampling strategies were used to recruit participants. Data analysis followed Place (2022) to identify patterns and themes in participants' responses. An additional ten interviews are planned for spring 2025 to capture evolving attitudes and perspectives.

Results and conclusions

The findings revealed a multifaceted landscape of vulnerabilities that PR professionals experience as they navigate the integration of AI into their profession, including technical, profession-related, psychological, and organizational aspects.

The technical vulnerability lies in many professionals struggling to align their research and training with the rapid pace of innovation and lacking the time and resources to master AI/GAI tools effectively. This results in an inability to make informed adoption decisions. In addition to technical limitations, AI also brings about profession-related vulnerabilities, particularly concerns over job displacement, especially at the entry level, and the loss of previously valuable skills. Practitioners must also renegotiate professional boundaries, grappling with added legal responsibilities that were not previously within their role scope.

Psychological vulnerabilities arise when professionals strive to maintain the human aspect of their field while struggling with low self-efficacy in decision-making. Heightened competition—between agencies, among professionals, and even between individuals and AI-driven technologies—exacerbates career uncertainties and fuels anxieties about future career trajectories. Organizational factors compound these vulnerabilities, with many professionals citing a lack of institutional guidelines and value internal policies to support appropriate AI use. Collectively, these vulnerabilities underscore the complex and often precarious position of PR professionals as they attempt to integrate AI while maintaining professional identity, ethical integrity, and career stability.

We are collecting new data this spring to capture the evolving dynamics of professionals' lived experiences with GAI, ensuring a more up-to-date and comprehensive understanding of its impact.

Practical and social implications

This study contributes to the ongoing conversations on GAI's impact on the PR workplace. By examining users' vulnerabilities, this study supports the development of more sustainable and ethical job practices, benefiting both organizations and the well-being of PR practitioners. In addition to industry practice, these insights can inform strategic communication curricula, helping universities prepare future professionals with the knowledge and ethical frameworks needed for an AI-enhanced workplace.

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Keywords

Generative AI, Public Relations Professionals, Vulnerability

Lost in Translation? AI Disruption in Language Services as a Mirror for Public Relations Industry Transformation

Doswell, Steve, *Gemini Communicating for Business Ltd (UK)*

Introduction and Purpose

This presentation will examine how generative AI is transforming professional translation and interpretation services, offering important insights for public relations and communication management professionals facing similar AI-driven disruption. The presentation will explore parallels between these allied communication fields, focusing on: (1) How are language professionals adapting to AI integration? (2) What ethical and practical challenges emerge when AI assumes communicative, creative and analytical roles? (3) How can we maintain professional standards and authentic human expertise while leveraging AI capabilities?

Literature Review

While public relations grapples with AI's impact on content creation and message dissemination, the translation industry's longer history with AI technologies offers valuable lessons. From terminology tools to neural machine translation, language professionals have navigated multiple technological disruptions (Koehn, 2020). The literature reveals tensions between efficiency gains and concerns about standardisation, creativity loss, and authenticity - challenges now emerging in public relations practice.

Methodology

This study employs mixed methods research examining: (1) Survey data from 5,000+ professional linguists through the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL); (2) Analysis of early lessons from AI technology adoption in language services; (3) Case studies of AI implementation in translation and interpreting workflows; and (4) insights on the ethics of AI deployment in professional contexts.

Results and Conclusions

The findings reveal complex professional adaptation patterns: while 80% of language professionals use AI-enhanced tools, only 37% have fully integrated AI workflows, with nearly half reporting increased cognitive demands rather than simplified processes. Key challenges mirror those facing public relations: accuracy concerns, data privacy risks, potential "fatal errors," and fears about professional devaluation. However, opportunities exist in content enhancement, quality assurance, and workflow optimisation when AI is deployed thoughtfully and ethically.

Practical and Social Implications

For communication practitioners and educators, this study provides guidance from a related field on the challenges of developing ethical,

hybrid human-AI workflows while maintaining professional standards and authentic outputs. It offers insights on the challenges in enterprise AI implementations, the need for wider industry and societal education, appropriate regulation and the pressing need for practitioners to invest in their own Continuous Professional Development in all things AI. Finally, the findings emphasise the importance of preserving human expertise and oversight and applying critical reasoning and ethical judgment in professional contexts, while leveraging the enormous possibilities of AI capabilities responsibly.

Keywords

artificial intelligence, communication management, professional communication, technological disruption, ethical implications

The Immediate Experiment. Mobile Devices' Diffusions and Adoptions--and the Lives of Public Relations Professionals

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on the processes, influences, and effects of mobile devices, particularly on public relations practitioners. It begins by requesting we think about the globe's rapid adoption and diffusion of mobile devices as an "experiment"--with millions of users representing the experiment's treatment group, and without a recognized control group. Despite this experiment's increasingly profound effects, it lacks longitudinal insights. In turn the paper's research question emerges: "What have mobile devices 'wrought' globally on the principles, practices, and procedures of communication management among public relations professionals?

Literature and Methodology

The study draws conclusions from five sources:

(1) Recent scholarly presentations at international academic conferences analyzing the influences of mobile devices on communication management generally and on public relations specifically. Among them, Downes' titled: (1) *Profound Changes: Mobile Devices. Potential Consequences. And the Lives of Today's Public Relations Professionals* (2024); (2) *An Up-to-Date Analysis of The Historical Evolution--Presented Step-by-Step--of Social Media's Influence on Capitol Hill's Communication Management Choices* (2024); and (3) *What's Going on with that Device Attached to Your Hip?: The Downfalls of Mobile Device Dependency* (2021).

(2) Insights to be shared at the May 2025 Hong Kong Conference, "Media for All: Breaking Barriers: Media Localization in the Age of Global Platforms," via an invited lecture titled *Three Decades Riding a Revolution's Rollercoaster: Ten Insights Providing a Kaleidoscopic Overview of the Platform Society's Influence on the World's Political, Economic, Cultural--and Ethical--Systems.*

(3) Findings from Haidt's broad array of research summarized in his book, *The Anxious Generation* (2024). It points out the "great rewiring of childhood has interfered with children's social and neurological development, covering everything from sleep deprivation to attention fragmentation, addiction, loneliness, social contagion, social comparison, and perfectionism." All such conditions are also similarly correlated with adult populations.

(4) A review of 75 articles discussing mobile devices influences on communication management generally and, by extension, public

relations principles and practices specifically. Roughly fifty percent were from the social sciences (primarily from the mass communication/public relations literature); a quarter from the humanities; and a quarter from the natural sciences (with comments from the medical literature supported by with three-person panel of psychiatrists). Roughly 80% were published in the last three years.

Results and Conclusions

The following summarize the paper's five broad insights. PLEASE NOTE: Throughout the entire presentation, each is extended to address specifically public relations practitioners, principles, and practices.

(1) Mobile device users "really need" but "often dislike" their mobile devices.

(2) Dependency on mobile devices (for both workplace or personal activities) indicates strong signs of addiction, both physical and emotional--users commonly express their reluctance to "needing" their devices.

(3) Mobile phone users increasingly choose to no longer "to be with these people" and instead through their device, "move on to be with these other people." Hence, the concept of being "in the moment" is eroding.

(4) "Plugged-in capacities have filled, to capacity, the fullness of time. When we feel the restlessness with empty moments, we simply "click on" something to keep us humming…."

(5) Arguments, both the scholarly and popular, which suggest analogies between the adoption and diffusion of mobile devices and other technologies (such as television) fail to recognize the "unanticipated, profound, matchless" influences of mobile devices re. the concepts of "time," "space" and "availability."

Comment on AI

While Americans et al. are concerned about the grip their mobile devices have on them, they are also increasingly concerned about the diffusion of AI: For example: Pew Research notes 52% of Americans are more concerned than excited about AI in daily lives. Additionally: "AI is running on your phone behind the scenes…inferencing neural networks on your device to help you take better photos, understand a different language, (and) identify music…." These concerns will expand, and new ones will emerge, as AI is integrated into mobile device capabilities.

Practical and Social Implications

This paper, while it focuses on the downfalls of mobile device usage, also "recognizes the unprecedented advantages--and unquestionable need for—PR professionals to use mobile devices. It cites, for example, how these tools have dramatically enhanced, and are now integral to, the field's seminal research-planning-implementation-evaluation processes."

Further, despite choosing to critique critically the effects of mobile device diffusion and adoption on public relations practices and practitioners, the authors admit they have no "solution" for the problem. They do suggest, however, that "awareness must precede behavior/behavioral change"--and conclude suggesting mobile devise users be ever-aware of what the devices are "doing" to them as a first step addressing the devices' negative consequences.

Keywords

Mobile Devices/Mobile Phones; Physical/Psychological/Social Effects; Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence Relations. What is it like to be an AI?

Drapal, Andrej, *Consensus (Slovenia)*

Introduction and purpose of the study

The primary purpose of the study is to answer the question: »What kind of relations can a human have with AI?« If we are in public relations, and if AI *represents a higher threat to the world than North Korea*. (Musk n.d.), then we should make clear whether AI is a PR tool or a public. The same source as above refers to Sophia, who is a regular citizen of Saudi Arabia, discussing with another robot. We should then take AI not as one but as many, so accordingly, we should talk about AI (public) relations.

To clarify the study's primary purpose, we must understand the common identity of all human minds (and bodies) that come into play in PR and compare it to the common identity of all AIs that are in play and could come into play.

If AI threatens to become an agent in the human exosystem that threatens the existence of human culture as it used to be, then humans should have a relation to it that is not mechanical like we have a relation with nature, but more like a relation that is subsumed under the term public relations.

Should we treat AI as a public(s), what is an ecosystem of AI? In different terminology, what is the society that emerges from AI individuals? Public relations do not take the publics detached from their environment, from their culture; what is then the culture of AI? If AI shares the culture with humans, what is the nature (identity) of the culture they enter? Do we face the same situation as when immigrants with a foreign culture clash with the existing culture so that a kind of multicultural situation emerges? Another option would be that something cultureless enters our culture. Can something like that change the culture if it is not a culture itself?

Methodology

The methodology of this study rests on a literature review supported by principles of consilience of sciences, heuristics, and coherence.

Results and conclusions

AI is not and cannot compare to human wisdom. It can, and already did, overpower human intelligence, yet cannot, in principle, evolve as wisdom that rests on three billion years of evolution of life on Earth. AI can link itself to a machine like a robot, yet it cannot be linked to a phenotype like a human phenotype; it cannot reproduce epigenetic emergencies (effects). A robot (or a computer) is not a phenotype of AI but an artifact that belongs to the wide range of other human artifacts. And finally, AI has no »self,« nothing like »to feel like an AI,« and cannot represent an agent with whom humans could establish intersubjective relations.

Practical and social implications

At the moment, the scope of AI and its boundaries are undefined. For this reason, the misconceptions about what AI could be in the future are

abundant. This paper resolves many of them and thus clarifies the role that AI plays and can play in human society.

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(The literature for this paper consists of 40 books and articles and will be upgraded by June 2025).

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence; memetics; intersubjectivity; agent;

From Tools to Colleagues? The Role of Communicative AI in Corporate Communication

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The rise of Large Language Models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT, has transformed corporate communications by automating tasks traditionally managed by professionals, including content creation, stakeholder engagement, and media monitoring (Zerfass et al., 2024; Buhmann & White, 2022). This development is not just a hype; it represents a fundamental shift in how organizations produce, structure, and understand communication.

In this context, 'communicative AI' is widely recognized in research as a sensitizing concept highlighting AI's active role in shaping communication.

"*Communicative AI (1) is based on various forms of automation designed for the central purpose of communication, (2) is embedded within digital infrastructures, and (3) is entangled with human practices*" (Hepp et al., 2023: 48).

Unlike previous automation, Communicative AI does not merely assist humans—it co-creates discourse, restructures communication flows, and transforms interactions with stakeholders. This challenges traditional human-centered models, raising questions about agency and AI's role in corporate communication.

While this paper is conceptual, it is part of a larger PhD project that will begin empirical data collection in March. The framework developed here lays the theoretical foundation for future empirical research on how communication professionals interact and work with AI in corporate settings.

Literature review

Corporate communication is a management function that coordinates internal and external communication to build stakeholder relationships (Cornelissen, 2017). Traditionally, this relied on human agency to construct narratives and manage reputations. However, AI extends beyond operational support, taking on strategic roles that shape discourse, automate messaging, and influence stakeholder interactions (Buhmann & White, 2022).

Hepp et al. (2020) classify AI-driven communicative systems into three types: Artificial Companions (e.g., Siri, Alexa); Social Bots AI agents that shape discourse on social media platforms; Work Bots, AI applications such as ChatGPT, which automate corporate communication tasks.

Research highlights AI's growing institutional role in corporate communication. The European Communication Monitor 2024 identifies content creation, inspiration, and social media

monitoring as communication departments' most common AI applications (Zerfass et al., 2024). Even though efficiency is the primary focus in corporate discussions, academic research shows that AI must function as more than just a technological tool, as its integration also brings ethical challenges. Ethical concerns across three key dimensions (Buhmann & White, 2022; Zerfass et al., 2024): Outcome Concerns like Bias, discrimination, and potential job displacement; Evidence Concerns like Data privacy, security; Epistemic Concerns Questions of accountability, responsibility, and the AI "black box" problem.

Theoretical Discussion

This paper takes a conceptual approach, integrating sociology and communication studies to examine how Communicative AI functions as a communicative actor rather than a neutral technological tool. Instead of empirical research, it synthesizes theories to explore how AI is socially and institutionally embedded in corporate communication.

Communicative AI goes beyond traditional human-machine interaction by actively shaping communicative processes (Hepp et al., 2023). This shift challenges existing models of agency, requiring a theoretical framework to examine how discourse, organizational structures, and professional practices shape AI's role. A social constructivism perspective frames this analysis, emphasizing that AI's communicative role is not intrinsic but is shaped through institutional discourses and human interactions (Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

This paper develops a conceptual framework that explores three interrelated dimensions:

Objectification of AI – AI is legitimized through organizational discourses.

Institutionalization of AI – AI is embedded into corporate workflows, influencing decision-making and strategies.

Reconfiguration of Agency – AI challenges human-centered models, influencing professional interactions and role expectations.

This framework provides a structured lens for understanding AI's impact on professional communication, discourse formation, and agency shifts in corporate settings.

Results and conclusions

Communicative AI represents a shift toward active participation in communication, expanding beyond human-machine interaction to question agency in corporate settings (Hepp et al., 2023). Communicative AI does not simply replace human agency. AI's agency is socially constructed, gaining meaning through institutional discourses, professional practices, and cultural expectations rather than inherent technological capability (Knoblach & Pfadenhauer, 2023).

AI's communicative legitimacy is a projection of human intentions shaped by power structures, norms, and organizational discourse. This paper contributes to sociological debates on AI by arguing that AI's role in communication is institutionally shaped rather than technologically determined. Future research should explore how communication professionals negotiate AI's agency and its evolving role in shaping narratives.

Practical and social implications

Professionals must critically engage with AI as a co-actor in communication, influencing narrative formation, role expectations, and strategic decision-making. Understanding AI's capabilities is crucial for enhancing corporate communication and managing stakeholder relationships. AI's increasing presence in public discourse reshapes trust and authenticity in corporate narratives. Transparency, accountability, and ethical AI deployment are crucial for corporate and social responsibility.

Keywords

Communicative AI, Corporate Communication, Hybrid Agency

Privacy Concerns in AI-Driven Public Communication

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As organizations increasingly use AI to influence public opinion and behavior through digital platforms, the handling of personal data in the public sphere requires reassessment. This study examines the benefits and risks associated with AI in strategic communication with a particular focus on information privacy. It outlines strategies and guidelines for organizations to balance the advantages of AI with their responsibilities to maintain consumers' privacy and public trust.

Devices such as smartphones, surveillance cameras, tablets, and drones have become integral to daily life. They collect extensive personal data, often without individuals' consent raising critical privacy concerns. Unlike traditional technologies, AI systems rely heavily on data and can collect, analyze, and infer personal information rapidly and at scale, frequently without the user's awareness (Miller, 2024). By collecting large amounts of data indiscriminately, AI technologies enhance the power of governments and organizations over the public sphere. These practices create ethical challenges related to transparency, accountability, and individual rights, underscoring the urgent need to address privacy concerns in the context of AI and mass data collection. When individuals feel their privacy is at risk, trust and loyalty toward organizations decline, impacting profitability and reputation. Strategic communication professionals must address privacy concerns not only to build public trust but also to safeguard organizational credibility and success. Therefore, this study examines how strategic communication practices can safeguard personal data amid the increasing use of AI systems.

Privacy, particularly regarding personal data, remains one of the most persistent issues associated with AI. While organizations use AI to understand preferences and create individualized communication strategies, many individuals feel uneasy about how their data are collected, processed, and stored. Specific concerns include the potential for data misuse in social engineering or shaping individual attitudes and behaviors. With the rise of AI systems, organizations are reshaping the public sphere, defined as "the social space in which different opinions are expressed, problems of general concern are discussed, and collective solutions are developed communicatively" (Wessler & Freudenthaler, 2018, para. 1). Technological advances have blurred the boundaries between public and private spheres as the public sphere increasingly intrudes into private spaces. Through digital platforms, organizations use AI technologies to influence public attitudes and behaviors (Bohai, 2021). Social media like Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter employ AI to curate information environments, generate content, and engage with their audiences (Jungherr & Schroeder, 2023). This reliance on AI systems has introduced challenges to the public sphere, particularly through widespread information collection by techno-

logical devices. While these systems transform workflows and relationships between organizations and publics, they also create ethical challenges and intensify the need for privacy protections as the boundaries between public and private spheres become less distinct.

The extent to which technology and AI have influenced individual behaviors and public opinion remains unclear and difficult to measure (Bohai, 2021). Technological devices continuously interact with broader networks, including platforms like Google and Microsoft, which access personal information and monitor its use, applying mechanisms such as geographic restrictions on data access (Andrejevic, 2007). The adoption of digital tools does not inherently signal a willingness to forfeit privacy. Instead, individuals are navigating a transitional period, seeking ways to balance the use of AI systems with the preservation of privacy. This evolving relationship underscores the need to reassess how personal data are managed in strategic communication practices and the public sphere.

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Keywords

Artificial intelligence, privacy, public sphere, information privacy

Is blockchain the solution to AI deepfakes in PR? A provisional outlook

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Introduction and research question

In recent years, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has revolutionised various industries, including public relations (PR) . The impact of AI on PR strategies is profound, reshaping how public relations professionals engage with audiences, analyse data, and craft their narratives, especially in terms of content creation, as its assists PR professionals in strategising, summarising, writing, and editing. However, the essence of public relations still revolves around human touch and emotional intelligence, none of which is peculiar to any AI tools that serve as powerful allies, but don't supplant the strategic acumen and relational skills of PR experts. The real magic happens when AI's analytical and automation capabilities are combined with the nuanced understanding and creativity of PR professionals.

Methodology and literature review

AI's rapid evolution has led to its widespread adoption, with applications ranging from automating mundane tasks to enhancing productivity and enabling new forms of human-computer collaboration across various sectors (Agrawal et al., 2019; Autor, 2015, pp. 237–260; Chui et al., 2018; Dwivedi et al., 2021). The technology offers significant potential for businesses and society by improving efficiency, reducing costs, and providing better decision-making capabilities (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Ransbotham et al., 2017). Combined with big data, AI has the potential to surpass human decision-making and abilities across industries (Liu & Zeng, 2021). In the communication world, AI's ability to analyse and interpret large volumes of data enables more targeted and personalised content, aligning more closely with audience interests and behaviours.

Results

In PR, the balance between AI-driven efficiency and human creativity is crucial. The roadmap guides PR professionals on how to maintain this balance, ensuring that AI is used as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, human skills and insights. Among the myriad concerns surrounding AI, one particularly unsettling claim is that it might lead to a world in which it's impossible to distinguish truth from fabrication. One significant issue is the potential for misinformation and deepfakes, which can spread misinformation and cause significant reputational harm, leading to widespread misinformation and potential crises for those individuals and organisations. To mitigate this risk, it is crucial to establish stringent verification processes to review AI-generated content and use AI detection tools to identify and counteract manipulated media.

Conclusions and implications

PR professionals should should be transparent about their use of AI-powered tools and tech-

nologies. Moreover, they should invest in training and education to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively leverage AI-powered tools and technologies. As a matter of facts, the rise of sophisticated technologies like deepfakes and generative AI has democratized the creation of deceptively realistic content, putting powerful tools of manipulation within reach of the average user. AI can also undermine the credibility of true information by making us wonder if it's really a lie. So, there's obviously some truth to the claim that AI can blur the boundaries between truth and fiction. However, on close inspection, it's often possible to detect where manipulation has taken place. While the technology used to create deepfakes will undoubtedly become more sophisticated, so will the tools capable of detecting them, such as blockchain, which provides secure and un-hackable ways to store client information. Blockchain technology allows PR professionals to validate the identity of website visitors, and when combined with machine learning, it creates a protocol that helps PR professionals identify and filter out bots when validating their data and get a clear idea of their human engagement numbers.

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Keywords

artificial intelligence, blockchain, news consumption, journalism, public relations

Marketplace Theory as a Foundation for the Responsible Use of AI in Public Relations

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Introduction and purpose

The advent of generative AI has transformed the practice of public relations (PR). Communication professionals can now use artificial intelligence to generate ideas, augment research, analyze data, improve writing, monitor media, produce videos and other images and much, much more. At the same time, the irresponsible use of AI can lead to unethical ends (sometimes unintentionally) such as the sharing of private data, the creation and distribution of inaccurate, false or fabricated messages, the manipulation of images and voices, the appropriation of intellectual property or deception caused by undisclosed sources of content.

For these reasons, ethical vigilance is key to ensuring that AI is used in ways that serve stakeholder and public interests. The aim of this paper is to define boundaries and best practices for the responsible use of AI in public relations through the lens of marketplace theory, which promotes freedom of expression and informed decision making that advances democratic societies. The research evaluates the extent to which industry guidelines for the use of AI in PR incorporate marketplace principles and where gaps exist.

Rationale

In an era of technological transformation, PR professionals must stay current in their knowledge and understanding of modern technologies if they are to remain relevant and retain their positions as trusted communication advisors. Additionally, practitioners must consider the legal and ethical aspects of integrating modern technologies into their work. Although the law provides only a baseline for ethical decisions – especially when legal regulations are not keeping pace with technological advancements – legal concepts provide insights for developing self-regulatory frameworks that advance the responsible use of new and emerging technologies. In this paper, marketplace principles provide the theoretical backdrop for analyzing the responsible use of AI in PR.

Literature review

The work begins with a review of how generative AI is being used in public relations and the ethical challenges associated with such uses. The paper then presents marketplace theory as a conceptual foundation for analyzing ethical issues and identifies core marketplace principles – access, process, truth, disclosure and transparency – that can be used to evaluate responsible AI practices.

Research questions

The questions guiding this research were:
How can marketplace principles inform the responsible use of AI in PR?

To what extent do professional ethical guidelines on the use of AI in PR incorporate marketplace principles?

Methodology

The authors first review the theoretical history and development of the marketplace of ideas concept as the dominant approach used by the U.S. Supreme Court for evaluating regulations on free speech. They then identify core principles that contribute to the efficient operation of a democratic marketplace of ideas from which truth can emerge. They then apply these principles in reviewing guidance for the ethical use of AI from leading public relations associations, including the Public Relations Society of America, the International Public Relations Association, the Public Relations Council, The Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, the International Association of Business Communicators, and the Center for Strategic Communication Excellence. This analysis shows both the extent to which marketplace principles are incorporated in the guidelines and where gaps exist.

Results and conclusions

Public relations association guidelines for the ethical use of AI in PR generally offer good advice that serves stakeholder and public interests. However, coverage of key marketplace principles is uneven and, in many cases, lacks needed explanation. This finding may be due in part to the fact that the guidelines are based primarily on codes of ethics that, when adopted, did not contemplate the transformative impact of AI on public relations and communication practices.

Practical and social implications

This paper is significant in helping to define boundaries and best practices for the responsible use of AI in public relations. The authors encourage the development of uniform global standards that allow practitioners to harness the creative and strategic potential of AI in ways that advance marketplace principles and serve stakeholder and public interests.

Limitations and future research

In examining the ethical responsibilities associated with the use of AI in public relations, this research focused on professional ethical standards. Future research should examine the use of AI in the context of corporate social responsibility to gain additional insights into how AI can be used responsibly to advance social goals.

Keywords

Public relations, AI, ethics, principles, marketplace theory

Decoding Digital Trust: A Multi-dimensional Analysis of Tech Influencer Credibility on YouTube

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Introduction and Purpose

This study investigates trust dynamics in technology influencer marketing on YouTube, examining how trust indicators in audience interactions correlate with consumer opinions and media portrayal. With influencer marketing reaching $21.1 billion USD (McKinsey & Company, 2023) and increasing impact on consumer purchasing decisions, understanding trust formation in these digital spaces becomes increasingly crucial. The research describes the development and function of a comprehensive trust rating system for tech influencers. The trust rating system works by analyzing the relationship between comment sentiment, content similarity with consumer reviews, and media representation.

Literature Review

The study builds on Grunig and Hon's (1999) trust components framework - integrity, dependability, and competence - while incorporating recent research on digital trust measurement. While Pascual-Ferra (2020) highlights the prevalence of survey-based trust measurement, computational approaches using sentiment analysis have shown promise in reflecting public trust (Chandio & Sah, 2020). Research by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) suggests that non-traditional celebrities and smaller influencers often generate higher trust levels than those with larger followings, but comprehensive studies examining multi-platform trust indicators remain limited.

Methodology

The research employed a mixed-methods approach analyzing 10 prominent tech influencers (500,000 to 24 million followers). Data collection encompassed YouTube comments (approximately 13,890 comments), corresponding Amazon product reviews (3,000 reviews across 30 products), and media coverage (417 articles). Natural language processing techniques, including sentiment analysis and lemmatization, were used to measure trust indicators and content similarity. Trust scores were calculated through seven iterations of refinement, optimizing keyword analysis and sentiment weighting. The methodology incorporated intercoder validation processes with manual review of 10% samples, achieving 89% accuracy for comment analysis and 94% for media analysis.

Results and Conclusions

The study revealed significant correlations (r=0.58) between trust indicators in comments and content similarity with consumer reviews. A strong inverse relationship (r=-0.815) emerged between follower count and trust-similarity correlations, indicating smaller influencers demonstrate more authentic alignment with consumer opinions. Analysis of media coverage showed unexpected positive correlations between trust scores and controversy-related keywords (r=0.44), particularly when framed in terms of integrity, with a strong correlation

(r=0.82) between integrity keywords and controversy coverage in media analysis. Limitations include the cross-sectional nature of the study, reliance on keyword analysis for trust measurement, and varying availability of media coverage across influencers. Future research could benefit from longitudinal approaches and cross-cultural comparisons.

Practical and Social Implications

The findings challenge conventional influencer selection metrics based primarily on follower count, suggesting the need for more nuanced evaluation criteria in influencer marketing. The research provides a framework for measuring digital trust that benefits marketers developing influencer selection strategies, platforms seeking to enhance trust metrics, consumers evaluating influencer credibility, and researchers studying digital trust formation. Results indicate that transparency in addressing controversies may enhance rather than diminish influencer credibility, suggesting a shift in crisis management approaches for digital personalities.

Keywords

Digital trust, influencer marketing, content analysis, social media credibility, consumer behaviour

AI a boon or a curse? The question lies with us

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AI-related discourse seems to move between the Scylla of apocalyptic visions of humanity under the (robotic) thumb of all-powerful AI and the Charybdis of "AI cheerleaders" (Bourne, 2019) whose all-positive promotion may seem blind at times to risks and inequalities. As in the original mythological story which demanded navigating between two hazards, both perspectives offer threats. The first is to over-estimate the potential power of Artificial Intelligence; the second, is that of ignorance – wilful or otherwise – as to the risks inherent in implementations whose ethical implications are open to question. Public relations cannot (and should not try to) avoid this tricky manoeuvring, especially when advising clients and managing stakeholder relations.

Rather, both practitioners and scholars should, this paper contends, equip themselves with at least foundational knowledge of AI, especially the fast-developing field of AI ethics, and assume a role in the field of Explainable AI. Technologists understand the term "Explainable artificial intelligence" (XAI) as a set of processes and methods that allow human users to comprehend and trust what machine learning algorithms produce. That trust and confidence is, developers believe, central to AI model implementations. Call it "informed consent". Companies such as IBM assert that Explainable AI is a *sine qua non* for "responsible" AI, which valorises ethical principles and accountability. Yet as Galloway (2010) argued some years ago, claimed competence in communication, or explanation, does not automatically confer a right to present technical information: that licence must be earned.

Inherent in this assertion is the conviction that public relations people, whether inside or outside the academy, should do more than merely resort to using ChatGPT or its competitors. Rather, PR should diversify its disciplinary perspectives to encompass the ever-expanding range of AI use cases and their implications, including those that bear directly on territory the profession has long considered its own. For example, in everything from campaign programming to proposal pitching and more, AI tools can both accelerate and extend the development of PR activity, to the likely benefit of both practitioners and clients.

Yet is this enough? Is PR at risk of developing a professional myopia that sees AI as merely a tool rather than a game changer for every aspect of a society, from business to politics to medicine far more? The question verges on the "curse" word of the conference theme. There is another issue to consider: that of what Puri (2024) calls "Westlessness" or a "global rebalancing" away from "West*full*ness" which he sees as "the apex of Western global influence" (p.30). Yet now even a country such as Mauritania, about 90 per cent

of which is located in the Sahara Desert, has a National Artificial Intelligence Strategy in draft form, covering the period 2024-2029. The country has only one listed public relations agency – yet it may, along with fellow practitioners in the West, face the challenge of how to present AI technologies to a population where unfamiliarity is a potential hindrance to applications whose benefits seem manifest.

Westerners should not wall off in their thinking the power of Westless AI-related communication, nor its perceived strategic value. As long ago as 2017, Russian president Validmir Putin commented that "Artificial intelligence is the future not only of Russa but of all mankind. There are huge opportunities but also threats that are difficult to foresee today. Whoever becomes the leader in this sphere will become the rule of the world" (Gigova, 2017). The question of whether AI is a boon or a curse remains open, but "time will tell" is an inadequate summation: AI's potential and its associated issues are present now and the question's resolution may well be interim as far forward as one can see.

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Keywords

Explainable AI, Westless AI-related communication, PR practitioners and AI use, AI tools for PR

The Quest for Responsible Public Relations for Responsible AI: Public Relations Practitioner Use in the United States vs. Czechia

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Introduction

Several scholarly studies have documented and examined the rapid growth and adoption of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) by the strategic communication/public relations profession and the subsequent release of AI guidelines by associations (Germinder, 2024; Yue, 2024).

Purpose of the Study

This study examines how public relations practitioners in different segments of the profession make meaning of their experiences in their responsible use of GenAI, but also looks at a largely unregulated environment, i.e. the United States, versus a regulated environment, i.e. Czechia.

Literature Review

The literature review includes scholarly literature on public relations practitioner use of GenAI (Yue, 2024) but also looks at deontological theory (Bowen, 2024) to reflect on best practices to do what is ethically and morally right despite the regulatory environment. Due to the rapid trajectory and nuances of the geopolitical environment that the use of GenAI is developing, modern strategic communication management theory (Zerfass, 2024) is also examined to ultimately guide a recommendation for globally responsible strategic communication/public relations practices in the use of GenAI.

Methodology

A qualitative study (Tracy, 2024) following GDPR guidelines was conducted and recorded in the United States and Czechia from November 2024 through January 2025. The pre-qualifications for 24 interview subjects (12 in each country) were established as at least five years' experience, use of GenAI in the subject's work, and a leadership role in implementing responsible AI within their organization. A concerted effort was made to obtain a diverse representation of association leadership and membership, agency, corporate, and NGO and breadth and length of experience according to each country's demographic profile of GenAI users in the public relations profession.

Results and Conclusions

The study revealed that while utilizing GenAI, most practitioners in both countries view human oversight and human intelligence in managing the final product as essential to responsible public relations for responsible AI. The role of the individual's commitment is paramount, as expressed in deontological theory (Bowen, 2024), and as a mandate for responsible AI. As is demonstrated in other research on this develop-

ing technology (Zerfass, 2024), opinions varied on actual practice on many issues. The variance was more pronounced based on technical experience rather than determined by regulated vs. unregulated environment. For example, the more technical knowledge a participant had, the more likely they were to use paid tools, have a written AI policy and express concerns about privacy and security. Many participants in both countries were using free tools versus paid tools that offered more security. Both countries' participants suggested that the need for GenAI education and training will be an ongoing process. Transparency in disclosing the use of AI varied for both countries. However, only a few Czechia participants were concerned that the EU AI Act would soon mandate specific guidelines for compliance. Except for those participants in leading association positions, awareness of regulatory compliance and association guidance was low to nonexistent. The limitation of the study was primarily in scheduling across time zones during a holiday period. For future research, consideration should be given to adding a third country for comparison in another regulatory environment.

Practical and Social Implications

The implications are public relations professionals have a personal commitment to ethical behavior and human oversight is paramount. Most participants indicated a desire to learn more about AI but that training and education could come from various sources. Leaders in professional associations acknowledged the need to go beyond an ethical framework of AI guidelines with more practical training to help position the strategic communication/public relations profession as leaders in implementing responsible AI.

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Keywords

AI, artificial intelligence, responsible artificial intelligence, responsible public relations, strategic communication

The Role of AI-Generated Greenfluencers in Sustainability Messaging: Authentic Advocacy or Algorithmic Greenwashing?

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Introduction and purpose of the study

As social media and digital technologies permeate modern life, sustainability has naturally become a key online theme. This has led to the rise of "greenfluencers," individuals who advocate for environmental causes and encourage sustainable practices (Kapoor et al., 2022). While their impact is debated in corporate and academic circles, the advent of generative AI presents a new dimension: the "AI influencer." Created and managed by diverse organizations for various environmental purposes, these AI-driven personas raise a critical question: Do they contribute to authentic sustainability advocacy or perpetuate greenwashing through algorithmically generated content? This study explores this question by comparing the impact of human greenfluencers with their AI counterparts.

Literature review

Sustainability communication increasingly relies on influencer marketing to shape public behavior. Greenfluencers advocate for responsible lifestyles, engage in climate activism, offer practical sustainability-focused solutions, and promote eco-conscious products and brands (Pittman and Abell, 2021). Grounded in Bandura's social learning theory (1977), these influencers have the potential to influence behavioral adoption. To better understand how influencers affect sustainable behaviors, particularly among younger generations (Opree, 2025), it is crucial to examine audience perceptions.

The emergence of AI influencers (e.g., Miquela Sousa on Instagram) presents a novel communication strategy with unexplored implications for sustainability. While AI's potential in marketing is recognized, its role in promoting sustainability, especially regarding the risk of perpetuating greenwashing, remains largely unexamined. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the impact of AI influencers on perceptions of authentic sustainability advocacy.

Methodology

This experimental study will examine the impact of AI versus human influencers on sustainability messaging among young adults aged 18-26. The study will be conducted online in April 2025 in Turkey. Two groups will be exposed to comparable sustainability messages, one delivered by AI influencers and the other by human influencers. Content structure, visual style, and sustainability claims will be carefully controlled across both message types to ensure comparability.

The study will analyze three main dependent variables: credibility perception, behavioral in-

fluence, and greenwashing perception, aiming to answer the following research questions:
(1) To what extent do audiences trust sustainability claims made by AI versus human influencers?
(2) Compared to human influencers, are AI-generated sustainability messages persuasive enough to drive pro-environmental behavioral change?
(3) Do audiences perceive AI influencer sustainability messaging as genuine or identify potential greenwashing tactics? The study will also consider additional variables including environmental knowledge, nature connectedness, prior exposure to AI influencers, general trust in AI-generated content, and brand associations.

Results and conclusions

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of scholarship exploring the effectiveness and ethical implications of AI-driven influencers in sustainability communication. By examining the intersection of AI, influencer marketing, and greenwashing, it offers insights into how digital technologies shape perceptions of corporate accountability and influence sustainability narratives.

However, the study has limitations. Conducted within a specific cultural context (Turkey), the findings may not be generalizable to other cultural settings. The focus on greenfluencers, known for their environmental commitment, may create a pre-existing perception of credibility around their sustainability messaging, potentially biasing the results. This inherent bias should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Practical and social implications

The urgency of achieving sustainability demands that we critically examine and refine our approaches. The path forward is complex and with obstacles. The findings of this research will be significant for communication professionals, as they demonstrate an assessment of a tool that may affect various sustainability-focused communication strategies. Moreover, due to the framework, this study aims to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing dialogue surrounding social impact and to ultimately foster a more just and sustainable world.

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Keywords

greenfluencers, ai influencers, greenwashing, artificial intelligence, sustainability
communication

Artificial Intelligence and Art Marketing in Brand Communication: The Example of Refik Anadol

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Artificial Intelligence; it is one of the frequently preferred current technologies due to its benefits such as data analysis, automation, speed, efficiency, personalisation, innovative product and service delivery. Artificial intelligence technologies, initially used mainly in analytical fields such as logic and mathematics, have now managed to influence many disciplines. One of the disciplines affected by this technology is art. Although it is surprising that a field like art, with an abstract subject and a message that varies from person to person, should be affected by artificial intelligence, it is possible with today's technologies.

The concept of art, which is called digital art and develops in parallel with technology, has reached a different dimension with artificial intelligence. With the development of digital art, classical art equipment such as brushes, paints and canvases have been replaced by technologies such as data, algorithms and artificial intelligence. This situation has naturally changed the way art is consumed. Digital art is notable for digital natives, who actively use online social networks and place technological developments at the centre of their lives. Brands are looking for ways to differentiate themselves from their competitors, reach their target audiences and connect with them emotionally. However, it is not easy to influence today's consumers, who have instant demands, are interested in technology, are indecisive and have low brand loyalty. This is where brands benefit from the power of art to communicate with their target audiences. In this way, brands seek to translate the intellectual, high and remarkable qualities of art into brand values. Today, many global and local brands benefit from the power of art in their communications. Examples of these communication activities include collaborations with artists, art sponsorships and brand-owned museums.

The study highlights the brands' collaborations with world-renowned digital artist Refik Anadol. Refik Anadol uses algorithms and artificial intelligence to bring digital artworks to life. For Anadol, which aims to provide art lovers with a visual and emotional experience, technology is not just a tool, but a fundamental component of art. In 2014, Anadol founded Refik Anadol Studio (RAS) in Los Angeles, where he creates art works in partnership with creativity and artificial intelligence. In addition, the artist analyzed the data obtained from NASA through artificial intelligence and realized an exhibition called Machine Memories: Space.

One of the artist's most striking works is the artificial intelligence installation he created on the exterior of the Walt Disney Concert Hall. Refik Anadol's artificial intelligence-based artistic works make a huge impact on a global scale and he collaborates with many brand artists. The artist collaborates with many brands around the world. This study draws attention to the part-

nerships between art and artificial intelligence in the communication activities of brands. The universe of the study includes collaborations between brands and artificial intelligence-focused digital artists.

The sample of the research is the collaboration of Bulgari and Turkish Airlines brands with Refik Anadol. The research is limited to these two brands. The reason for this is that Bulgari, as an Italian luxury brand, is a global brand that shapes fashion, and Turkish Airlines is in the Guinness World Record book as the airline that flies to the most countries in the world. Bulgari collaborated with Refik Anadol to celebrate the iconic Serpenti collection in 2021. Anadol created a three-dimensional artificial intelligence sculpture inspired by the brand's iconic Serpenti snake. The sculpture met art lovers in Piazza Duomo, in the centre of Milan. Turkish Airlines also established a business partnership with Refik Anadol in 2024. Inner Portrait, created by Refik Anadol for Turkish Airlines, uses artificial intelligence analysis to visualise the emotional data of passengers travelling abroad for the first time.

The study carried out a content analysis using the case study method, which is a qualitative research method. Research shows that artificial intelligence is having a profound impact on the arts and that global brands are benefiting from the arts in their communication strategies. The research indicates that brands want to influence their target audiences and support their brand awareness by using artificial intelligence and art in their communication strategies. Whether artistic works created with artificial intelligence are as effective as classical works of art on the target audience may be the subject of further research. It can be investigated whether this method preferred by brands in their communication strategies is effective on the target audience.

Keywords

artificial intelligence, art, brand, brand communication

The Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Public Relations Education: Opportunities and Implications for Governance, Quality, and Ethics

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing public relations (PR) education by equipping students with tools that enhance productivity, creativity, and analytical capabilities. This study explores how AI can elevate the learning experience for university PR students and better prepare them for industry challenges, while addressing critical governance, quality, and ethical concerns. The study is guided by the central question: *What are the opportunities and challenges of integrating AI into public relations education?*

Literature Review

AI is recognized for its ability to bridge the divide between theoretical concepts and practical applications in PR education. Tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Meltwater enable students to refine their writing, design effective campaigns, and analyse audience behaviours. Previous research underscores AI's potential to foster innovation and adaptability in education (Anderson & Rainie, 2018; Sun, 2023). However, challenges such as the need for governance frameworks, concerns about data privacy, and the risks of AI perpetuating biases highlight the importance of responsible usage and critical evaluation (Floridi & Cowls, 2019).

Methodology

This qualitative study employs a case study approach, drawing on experiences from the author's PR students enrolled in university programs across Victoria, Australia, over the past two years. Data were gathered through assignments, tutorials, and semi-structured interviews to explore students' engagement with AI tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Meltwater. This approach facilitated an in-depth understanding of how AI is used in educational settings and its practical outcomes (Marr, 2020).

Results and Conclusions

Findings reveal that AI tools significantly enhance students' abilities to tackle complex PR scenarios. For instance, Sarah M., a PR student, utilised ChatGPT to draft a crisis communication plan for a product recall involving contaminated lettuce packaging sold in Australian supermarkets. The iterative drafting process allowed her to refine her strategy, resulting in a robust plan addressing stakeholder communication and media relations.

Similarly, Rory L. leveraged an AI-driven simulation tool to create a marketing communication strategy for launching a new vodka brand in Australia. By responding to real-time feedback,

he developed adaptive strategies to meet evolving consumer expectations.

Despite these successes, challenges emerged. Over-reliance on AI can hinder critical thinking and originality. Maya H., another PR student, drafted a media pitch using an AI tool for an innovative mathematical learning product targeting primary school students struggling with numeracy. While her draft was coherent and grammatically accurate, it lacked the cultural and contextual nuance necessary for its intended audience, requiring substantial revisions. These cases illustrate the dual nature of AI's integration—offering significant benefits but demanding careful oversight.

Governance issues were also prominent. The absence of clear institutional policies increases risks of academic dishonesty, as AI tools may be misused for generating assignments without proper attribution. Data privacy concerns are another significant issue, as many AI tools collect and store user data. Compliance with privacy regulations like the *Australian Privacy Act 1988* and the *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)* is essential. Additionally, the biases inherent in AI algorithms can perpetuate discriminatory practices, necessitating rigorous evaluation of AI outputs by both educators and students.

Practical and Social Implications

The integration of AI in university PR education offers substantial practical benefits. AI tools facilitate realistic simulations, fostering creativity, adaptability, and problem-solving skills among students. For instance, AI-powered simulations enable students to experience dynamic PR challenges, better preparing them for industry complexities. However, to ensure responsible usage, educators must establish governance frameworks and ethical guidelines. Training students in AI literacy and promoting transparency and accountability are crucial to maintaining academic integrity.

On a societal level, the ethical implications of AI use in education are significant. Misrepresenting AI-generated content as original work undermines the educational process and can compromise professional standards. Rachel P., a student who analysed a corporate social responsibility initiative involving second-hand clothing donations to homeless shelters, demonstrated ethical accountability by documenting the tool's limitations and including a disclaimer in her analysis. This example underscores the importance of cultivating ethical awareness among students to prepare them for socially responsible professional roles.

Conclusions

AI holds immense potential to transform PR education by enhancing students' creativity, productivity, and analytical skills. However, integrating AI requires caution, addressing governance, quality, and ethical concerns. By fostering critical thinking and establishing robust governance frameworks, educators can ensure that AI functions as a tool for innovation rather than a crutch. Future research should examine the long-term impact of AI on PR education across diverse regions and contexts.

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Keywords

artificial intelligence, public relations education, ethics, governance, quality

We are only Human: How Strategic Communicators can lead in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is poised to disrupt our world through macroeconomic, social, and legal changes. This study examined how and to what extent strategic communicators can emerge as leaders in the age of AI. It identified the issues that intersect AI and communications, reviewed AI risks to organizations and the strategic communicator's role in mitigation, and examined whether the industry is ready to lead.

Research Problem and Questions

This capstone study investigated the strategic communicator's role within the AI landscape and identified how communicators can become strategic counsellors at the AI decision-making table. The research questions are below.

RQ1: What are the emerging issues in AI, and how and to what extent do they impact the communications field?

RQ2: How and to what extent can strategic communicators contribute to AI leadership and help mitigate organizational risks?

RQ3: How and to what extent are strategic communicators prepared to upskill in AI and step into an organizational AI leadership role?

Summary of Literature Review

The literature review covered five main areas:

1. The current AI landscape and definitions.
2. AI-human trust (Waxman, 2019).
3. Public relations theory and strategic communication.
4. Media in the post-truth world.
5. The state of the strategic communicator's skill, attitude, and adoption of AI, including the work of Gregory et al. (2023).

Methodology

The research method included a literature review, a content analysis of 75 articles featuring technology leaders, and in-depth interviews with eleven industry experts in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. A triangulation approach ensured greater construct validity through converging evidence. The study was bounded by the period from October 31, 2022 to September 18, 2023.

Results and Conclusions

RQ1: Issues in AI and Intersection With Communications

Figure 1 identifies emerging issues in AI from the content analysis.
The interview results are displayed in Figure 2.
Figure 3 illustrates the Three Levels of AI-PR Issues model. The model visualizes specifical-

Figure 1: Top AI Issues Identified Word Cloud

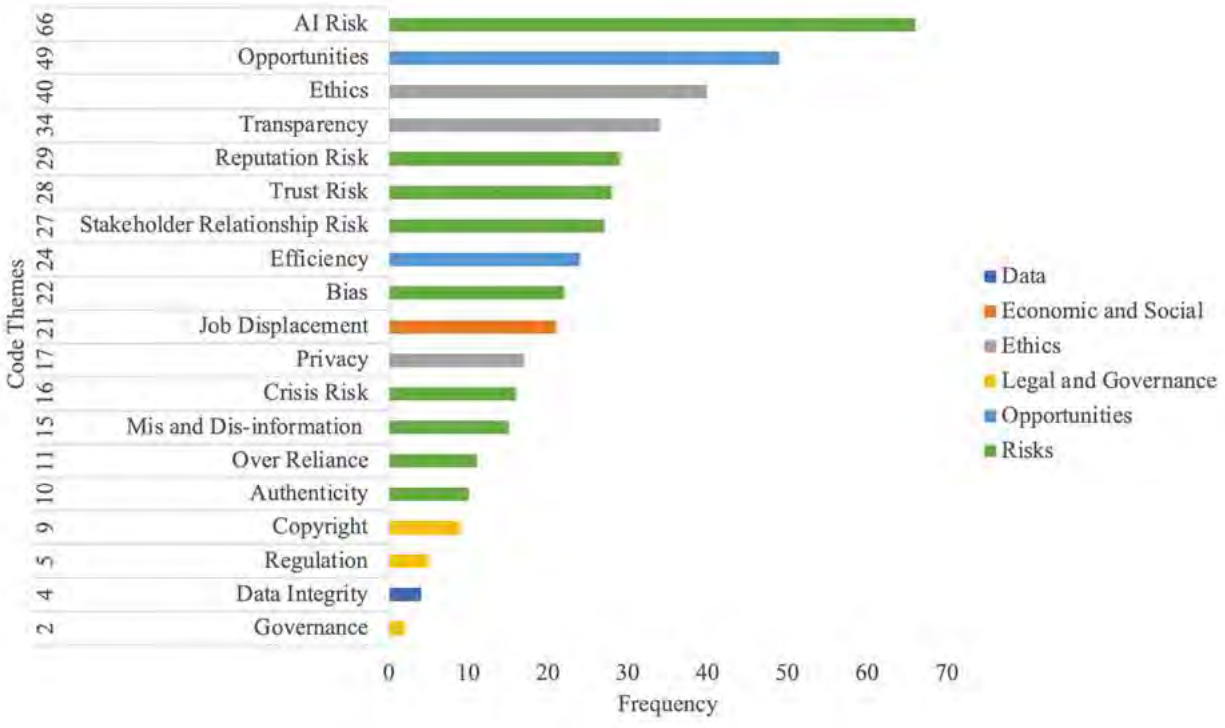

Figure 2: AI Issues From In-Depth Interviews By Theme

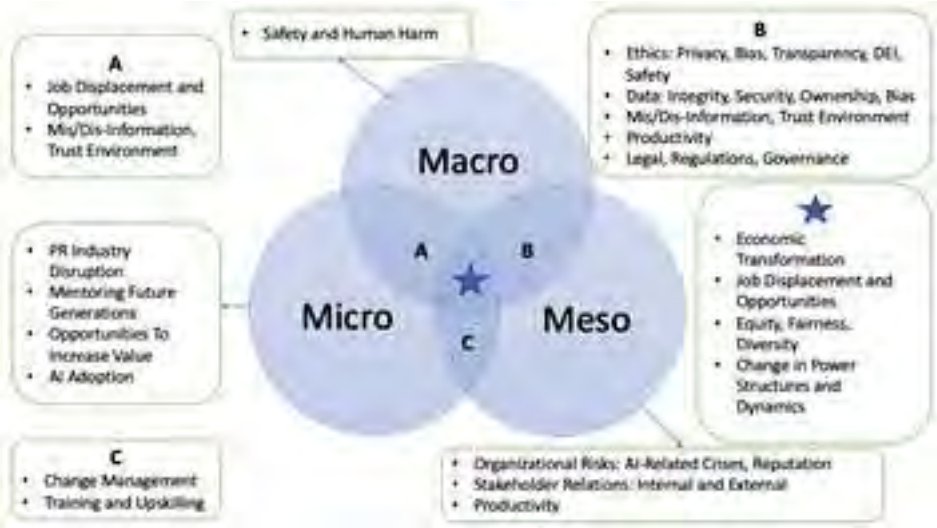

Figure 3: The Three Levels of AI-PR Issues

ly how and where AI intersects with PR. The macro level concerns broad societal issues. The meso level outlines AI issues at the organization level. The micro level is focused on the practitioner and the profession. The findings show a high level of overlap between AI and the public relations industry, and the overlaps between the three levels.

RQ2: How Strategic Communicators Can Mitigate Risks and Provide Leadership

The interview results identified eight areas of leadership where strategic communicators can help manage the organizational risks posed by AI, as seen in Table 1.

The study's results do not support the idea that AI will soon replace strategic communicators. Strategic communicators who leverage AI will be freed from tedious tasks, allowing them to pursue more strategic work. The study found organizational leaders trust strategic communicators to provide a critical eye on the big picture.

RQ3: Strategic Communicator's AI Readiness To Lead

The results found greater awareness of AI in the industry but a lack of knowledge. The industry is not ready to lead, but a pathway to AI leadership is identified in Figure 4.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations include biases in selecting interview participants and a small sample size. The technology leaders in the content analysis were all white males. A single coder coded the content analysis, so inter-coding reliability was not established.

Future study ideas include:

1. Interview CEOs to understand their challenges and opportunities with AI and how they expect the CCO to help them navigate.
2. Study how trust is impacted as AI capabilities, levels of interactivity, and communication styles become more sophisticated.

Table 3

Areas of AI Leadership For The Strategic Communicator

Areas of Leadership	What Is Involved	Sample Quote
Crisis Planning, Issues & Risk Management	Landscape monitoring & surveillance Issues identification Risk register Crisis preparation & planning	"Prepare crisis communication plans specifically for AI-related incidents. This includes identifying potential scenarios, drafting response templates, and designating communication channels."
Change Management	Developing language and communicating AI internally Understanding technology and impact on stakeholders Devising initiatives to help transition	"Develop internal communication strategies that emphasize the benefits of AI, address concerns, and guide employees through the transition."
Stakeholder Engagement & Relationship Building	Internal and external stakeholder engagement Facilitating two-way symmetrical communication	"The most important thing, as we know, to bridge gaps, is to have honest conversations. But to create a space where those honest conversations can happen. If you create an environment where you could fail, you could lose your job...because you're using AI, that does not create safe place to have conversations with something that is obviously changed our world."
Reputation Management	Monitoring reputation Ensure messaging alignment Reducing reputation gaps Building and protecting trust through transparency	"There's a whole huge area of the role that communicators will play in advising organizations about the reputational implications of the use of AI."
Advisor to Dominant Coalition	Guidance in ethical decision making Representing all stakeholder viewpoints Ensuring alignment of mission, goals,and values AI policy guidance	"I hope that somebody is there to ask the question of, Why are we doing this to begin with?"
Ethical Guardian	AI training and development Data ownership, usage, integrity, diversity AI Bias Transparency Governance	"To manage risk, leaders must fully understand the AI that is being used and be ready to assess trends and new tools as they arise. It requires ethical consideration and human oversight. To ensure both of those things happen, leaders must be transparent about how the organization is using AI and be committed to ethics and unbiased decision-making."
Participation in AI Development	Providing viewpoint of all stakeholders impacted Ensure alignment of messaging Ethical guidance	"So if you're saying to me that we're going to build an AI chatbot because we want to reduce the time it takes for our customer service representatives to respond to prospects on our website. Great. Then a communications professional absolutely needs to be in involved in that."
Training and AI Education	Helping foster culture that supports training and education	"Design training sessions or informational campaigns to bridge this gap, ensuring that the benefits and workings of AI are understood at all levels."

Figure 4: Pathway to AI Leadership for Strategic Communicators

Practice Implications

The recommendations below are framed within the three levels of AI-PR issues.

Macro leadership

1. Contribute to AI in PR Scholarship.
2. Drive the conversation about the pitfalls and opportunities of AI in society.
3. Support efforts to regulate AI and develop transparent, fair, inclusive, and ethical AI that embraces human agency.

Meso leadership

1. Show leadership by evaluating the level of risk, impact, and alignment on AI initiatives.
2. Facilitate an open culture where honest conversations about AI can take place.
3. Advocate for training resources.
4. Consider AI with a DEI lens.

Micro leadership

1. Follow the best practices from industry associations.
2. Actively test new AI tools and upskill.
3. Find ways to use AI strategically and complement core capabilities.

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Keywords

AI, Strategic Communication, Leadership

The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on PR: Enhancing Crisis Management, Audience Engagement and Skepticism

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Introduction

Crises are unexpected events that threaten the existence of an organization. Organizations must communicate effectively with their stakeholders, and crisis communication is critical in public relations (PR). It is a multifaceted process requiring well-crafted strategies to safeguard a company's survival. Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) stands out as one of the most prominent classical theories in crisis communication, helping organizations mitigate negative impacts. With the advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies, AI tools have also emerged as valuable assets in crisis communication, both during and after a crisis. These tools can assist in monitoring the current situation, providing instructions, adjusting information, or preparing communication materials to engage stakeholders effectively. However, the use of AI-automated tools can sometimes foster skepticism among stakeholders, potentially resulting in a negative impact on audience engagement. This study aims to examine how organizations utilize AI technologies in crisis communication and how individuals perceive organizational responses during crises. It also explores the differences between AI-driven and in-person responses, focusing on their effects on skepticism and audience engagement.

Literature Review

Crisis communication requires careful planning and precise execution. According to Coombs (2007), denial, diminish, and rebuild are three key strategies outlined in the SCCT that help organizations mitigate the adverse outcomes of a crisis. Regardless of the strategy employed, stakeholder engagement remains the cornerstone of effective crisis communication. Achieving this requires a clear narrative structure in crisis messages, a dialogue-oriented tone, and a trusted communicator's delivery of crisis information (Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010). Organizations must adopt a strategic approach integrating diverse communication theories and practices, leveraging emerging technologies to adapt to the rapidly evolving digital landscape. AI tools are increasingly utilized to measure, create, and evaluate crisis communication efforts. While real-time, AI-supported communication channels can enhance audience engagement on a broader scale, they may also elicit skepticism due to the absence of direct human interaction. This skepticism could weaken the audience's connection with the organization.

Methodology

This study aims to identify AI-related strategies and tools organizations utilize in their crisis communication efforts. It also examines how individuals perceive organizational responses

during crises and whether they can distinguish between reactions generated by AI and those delivered in person. Additionally, the study explores the differences between AI and in-person responses regarding their impact on skepticism and audience engagement.

This study will employ the in-depth interview method, a qualitative research approach. Two different sampling strategies and two distinct sets of questions will be prepared. In the first phase, in-depth interviews will be conducted with 10 individuals in corporate communication roles selected from Turkey's top 10 most reputable companies as identified by the Turkey Reputation Index (Türkiye İtibar Akademisi, 2024). These interviews aim to explore how AI-supported technologies are utilized in crisis communication processes, including their application before, during, and after a crisis. The frequency of AI use and how organizations evaluate consumer responses during crises will also be addressed.

In the second phase, 10 individuals who have directly experienced a crisis with an organization and were exposed to its communications within the last six months will be selected as participants. This phase, shaped by the findings from the first phase, seeks to measure audience engagement and skepticism regarding the organization's crisis communication efforts. For audience engagement, interactivity and emotional engagement will be measured. Regarding skepticism, the study will focus on intention, perceived usefulness, attribution of responsibility, openness, and transparency (Gunawan, Samopa, Mukhlason, 2024; Schick, Fischer, 2021).

Organizations must respond to crises on time. By leveraging AI technologies, organizations can better navigate crises, protect their reputations, and ultimately emerge stronger from adverse situations.

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Keywords

Public Relations, Artificial Intelligence, Skepticism, Engagement

The PR Roots of Modern Tourism – World War II Allied Soldiers in Rome

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Introduction

In the same month that Rome was liberated by Allied soldiers in World War II – June 1944 – a guidebook was developed by the American military titled *Soldier's Guide to Rome* (DeWald, 1944). This unique piece of tourism promotion, written by Major Ernest DeWald of the Monuments and Fine Arts Sub Commission, was the first of five guides produced by the American, British, and New Zealand armed forces during the Italian campaign. The guides were one part of a tourism infrastructure that was quickly developed for wartime soldiers. Additional components – which are described in the final guide, *A Soldier's Guide…ROME* (1945) – included Red Cross and U.S. Army Rest Center tours, locations to meet Army-approved private guides, and suggestions for opera, concert music, wine, and shopping.

War tourism in the Eternal City was promoted using a broad range of promotional tactics that included staged photography, story promotion to the news media, and tourism recommendations in the military newspapers (e.g., *Stars and Stripes*). Little is known about this topic to date, and it appears to be completely unexplored in the PR academy. This research seeks to explore the influences of World War II Allied soldier tourism.

Literature Review

Theofilou and Watson (2014) advocate for PR historians to explore how government PR has been applied to shaping public opinion before, during, and after historical events (including World War II) and the political, social, and economic impacts that follow. This research follows that approach by investigating the Allied governments' efforts to influence soldiers' behavior in the understudied area of war tourism.

Methodology

This historical case began with the initial discovery of some of the soldiers' guides available through online re-sale markets, and a visit to a major U.S. university's World War II archive. During the fall 2024, work was expanded substantially by on-site archival research at three different Rome-based academy libraries (American, British, and German). The primary source documents help reveal key aspects of the military organization that was created to promote tourism to soldiers, and the strategy behind the development of tactical work. Some of these sources were labeled restricted – for example a *Civil Affairs Handbook for Central Italy* – and were only to be viewed by those "in the service of the United States and to persons of undoubted loyalty and discretion who are cooperating with Government work" (Army Service Forces Manual, 1943). Further, the contents of such handbooks could "not be communicated to the public or to the press except by authorized mil-

itary public relations agencies" (Army Service Forces Manual, 1943). After an initial on-site reading, these materials were recorded and are under further review.

The archival research to develop a historical case was used because many of the documents reviewed are not digitally available and others are rare enough to only be viewable under the supervision of the library's archivist.

Results/Conclusions

Initial results of the research show a unique influence that existed in the United States where the private sector reached out to the government to encourage development of an infrastructure that focused on protecting art, monuments, and culture in the European War Theater. Work was collaborative between the Americans and the British, and positive relationships were also developed with resident Italian experts. A *Civil Affairs Information Guide* (1944), when asking officers to select "objects worthy of safeguard," encouraged the use of then-popular travel handbooks, included the German Baedeker guides, Touring Club Italiano, and Blue Guides. The Baedeker guides were labeled the most popular, reliable and succinct guides, which also effectively starred or double-starred monuments of the greatest importance. A further review is comparing the travel handbooks to the material included in the Allied soldier tourism guides.

Practical Implications

World War II exposed many citizens of the world to places they may have never seen otherwise. Exposure seemed to impact future travel interests, something supported by data, but the Allied Armies also attempted to influence their returning soldiers. The U.S. Army, for example, produced *A Soldier's Outline of Italian History* for returning soldiers that attempted to provide information to make them "experts." A soldier's understanding of the history of Italy was "made real by having seen the places where notable events happened," and "would be one of the most valuable souvenirs any soldier could take home with him from Italy." Despite the well-documented history of World War II, this relatively unknown part of war tourism could improve what is known about the history of public relations and how it contributed to the growth of 20th century tourism.

Keywords

War Tourism, PR History, Internal Communication

Employing artificial intelligence to streamline communication process

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed various industries, including public relations (PR). AI-driven tools can reshape traditional communication practices by enhancing efficiency, personalizing communication, producing high-quality texts and visuals, and even optimizing strategic decision-making (DiStaso & Bortree, 2020). This paper explores the role of AI in optimizing communication process, emphasizing its potential to automate routine tasks and enhance engagement.

AI technologies, such as natural language processing (NLP), machine learning (ML), and predictive analytics facilitate sentiment analysis, real-time crisis communication, and the development of data-driven campaigns (Wright & Hinson, 2017). It can be stated that the adoption of AI in PR not only streamline process but also provides valuable insights for strategic communication, helping organizations tailor their messaging to specific audiences more effectively.

Despite the benefits, the integration of AI in PR and marketing activities raises concerns related to ethical implications, authenticity, and the potential displacement of human professionals. While AI can process vast amounts of data faster than humans, it lacks the creativity and emotional intelligence necessary for nuanced communication. Therefore, the balance between AI automation and human expertise remains a critical area of research.

The **purpose of this study** is to analyze the impact of AI on processes within communication activities, identify quality practices for AI integration, and assess how AI-driven tools contribute to the effectiveness of communication strategies. The study aims to support communication professionals in leveraging AI technologies to enhance efficiency, creativity, and strategic impact in their communication efforts. Ultimately, the study aims to underscore the need for a balanced integration of AI in PR and marketing – one that enhances efficiency and data insights while upholding ethical standards and human-centric communication principles.

Literature Review

Given the ubiquity of AI in modern business, numerous authors have explored its benefits across various industries, offering diverse perspectives on its application potential and expected outcomes. Existing research on the application of AI in PR and marketing (Tomić et al., 2022; Obradović et al., 2023; Jeong & Park, 2023; Herold et al., 2024) highlights its significant potential. Nonetheless, despite these contributions, no comprehensive research has been conducted in Croatia to thoroughly analyze the impact of AI on the optimization of specific processes

within the public relations and marketing sector. The extent to which AI can accelerate key operational functions, such as crisis communication management, content creation, and campaign evaluation, both within agency settings and corporate communication departments, remains unexplored.

Methodology

Using the method of in-depth interview with representative number* of communication experts employed in PR and marketing agencies, corporations and public organizations, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of AI's role in optimizing communication processes while addressing its limitations and ethical challenges.

Based on the output of participants (preferred AI tools, objectives, methods and frequency of using AI in their communication activities), this research should present insights into the practical applications of AI in PR and marketing, fostering discussions on responsible AI use, and exploring the future trajectory of AI-driven communication strategies.

**In-depth interviews will be conducted until data saturation is reached.*

Results and conclusion

The findings from in-depth interviews are expected to highlight the transformative role of AI in optimizing communication processes. It is anticipated that participants will report significant improvements in efficiency, particularly in automating repetitive tasks such as media monitoring, press release distribution, and audience sentiment analysis. AI-powered tools are likely to enhance message personalization, allowing PR professionals to craft data-driven communication strategies tailored to specific demographics. Additionally, AI-driven analytics may provide deeper insights into campaign performance, enabling real-time adjustments and more effective stakeholder engagement. However, respondents may emphasize ethical concerns associated with AI, including potential biases in algorithmic decision-making and the risk of misinformation dissemination and AI's limitation to fully replicate human creativity and emotional intelligence.

Practical and social implications

The practical implications of AI in PR and marketing are anticipated to be evident in its ability to streamline workflows, reduce operational costs, and improve the precision of communication strategies. Organizations that integrate AI-driven tools into their communication operations may benefit from increased efficiency and data-driven decision-making, leading to more effective audience targeting and engagement. By automating repetitive tasks, AI is expected to allow communication professionals to focus on high-value strategic activities, such as crisis management and brand storytelling, ultimately enhancing the overall impact of public relations efforts.

From a societal perspective, AI's role in PR and marketing is expected to have broader implications for public trust and ethical communication. The ability to rapidly analyze and disseminate information could help combat misinformation and improve transparency in corporate and governmental communications. However, it may also raise concerns about data privacy, algorithmic biases, and the potential for AI-generated content to manipulate public opinion. Addressing these challenges will require a commitment to ethical AI practices, regulatory frameworks, and ongoing professional development to ensure AI tools are used responsibly.

Keywords

artificial intelligence, integrated communication, ai-driven tools, communication process optimization, strategic communication

Artificial Intelligence in European Public Relations: Between Optimism and Underestimation

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

On January 21, 2025, former U.S. President Donald Trump announced a $500 billion private-sector investment in artificial intelligence infrastructure, led by OpenAI, SoftBank, and Oracle under the Stargate initiative (Reuters, 2025). This significant investment underscores the irreversibility of AI adoption in global industries, including public relations (PR) and strategic communication. The EU's strict AI regulations contrast sharply with the rapid AI adoption in the U.S. and China, where AI is widely integrated into communication tools and strategies. In China, state-controlled algorithms and censorship on platforms like TikTok, RedNote, and Lemon8 create additional challenges for EU communication professionals, who must navigate both EU compliance and platform regulations.

Despite AI's disruptive potential, research indicates that European PR professionals do not perceive AI as a direct threat to their employment, challenging widespread fears of automation and obsolescence (Buhmann & White, 2022; Yue et al., 2024 (Cusnir & Nicola, 2024; Kelm & Johann, 2024)). However, they also feel unprepared, with many lacking sufficient education and guidance on AI systems, creating a skills gap that must be addressed to ensure responsible and strategic implementation (European Communication Monitor, 2024).
AI adoption presents communication leaders with a fundamental decision dilemma: while automation increases efficiency, it risks diminishing advisory roles, shifting the profession's identity, and creating uncertainty about the long-term strategic relevance of communication departments (European Communication Monitor, 2024).

This study explores the rationale behind this optimism, examining the perspectives of PR professionals and organizations in the Czech Republic. We have chosen a single-country study focusing on the Czech Republic due to its high technology adoption rate and the specific role of the Czech language, which not only shapes local culture but also poses challenges for AI implementation, as most generative AI tools are primarily optimized for English. Additionally, the Czech Republic serves as a representative case of a mid-sized European market where regulatory frameworks, such as the EU AI Act, significantly influence AI adoption in public relations. Furthermore, the country's strong digital infrastructure and its developed communication industry provide a compelling environment to study both the opportunities and constraints of AI-driven transformation within public relations.

The research questions guiding this inquiry are:
RQ1: What factors contribute to PR professionals' lack of concern regarding AI-induced job losses?
RQ2: How do PR professionals conceptualize AI's role within strategic communication and PR practice?

Literature Review

Existing research on AI in PR presents a complex duality of opportunity and challenge, change for certain (USC Annenberg, 2023; ICCO, 2024; PRovoke Media, 2023; (Zerfass et al., 2020)). While AI enhances efficiency in content creation, data analysis, and stakeholder engagement, concerns persist regarding standardization, ethical risks, and the loss of human creativity (Panda et al., 2019; Moore & Hübscher, 2021; Ashworth, 2023; ICCO, 2024; (Bruce & Bailey, 2023)). Scholars emphasize the importance of maintaining human oversight and ethical governance to prevent over-reliance on AI-generated content and misinformation risks (Kamruzzaman, 2022).

AI may help with many labour-intensive task, which - as Bourne (2019) observes - raises concerns about the potential reduction in junior and technical roles. This shift is particularly troubling for young professionals under the age of 35, who are already voicing apprehensions about the long-term viability of the industry (Zerfass et al. 2020).

The adoption of AI tools has surged over the past three years, with more than half of professionals reporting frequent or occasional use of such tools (ICCO, 2024; CIPR, 2024). In Slovakia and the Czech Republic, adoption rates are even higher, reaching 92% (Kantar, 2024). However, the 2024 European Communication Monitor highlights that AI adoption in PR remains inconsistent, with some sectors readily embracing its benefits while others continue to underestimate its long-term impact (European Communication Monitor, 2024).

This study contributes to the growing discourse by providing empirical evidence from both PR practitioners and organizations, mapping their attitudes and usage of AI while identifying areas of optimism, scepticism, and underestimation.

Methodology

This study synthesizes findings from two independent surveys conducted in Central Europe in 2024, both exploring the adoption of AI in the public relations (industry:
A mixed-methods study combining a survey (N=200) and semi-structured interviews (N=16) with PR professionals from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland. This study examines attitudes toward AI, adoption levels, and ethical considerations related to its use in PR.
A qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with 20 members of APRA, the Czech PR Association, part of the mapping of the creative industries within the Czech Republic. One part of the research focused on how leaders of PR agencies perceive AI's impact on creative processes and employment trends.
Together, these studies aim to capture both statistical trends and nuanced qualitative insights. While offering a national perspective, the findings also contribute to the broader European discourse on AI's role in the PR industry.

Results and Conclusions

Findings reveal that only 5% of PR professionals have never used AI, while all surveyed agencies report employing it—primarily for text-based tasks. PR agencies perceive AI as an efficient tool that simplifies work, particularly by automating processes and managing data, allowing professionals to focus on core skills.

While PR agencies acknowledge the opportunities AI offers to enhance efficiency, they also express apprehension about its implications for the profession. The primary concern lies in maintaining competitiveness in the market, particularly if agencies fail to adopt AI effectively.
The research identifies five key factors influencing European PR professionals' confidence in AI:

1. Low national unemployment rates – AI-related job losses are perceived as a minor concern in an economy with strong job security. PR professionals in the Central Eastern European region do not fear job displacement and hold a largely positive outlook on the anticipated changes, looking forward to having more time for strategic and creative work. Agencies emphasize that AI enables them to focus on high-value tasks, potentially improving service quality and maintaining competitiveness. AI is primarily seen to automate repetitive tasks and streamline processes, yet concerns persist about whether its impact on the PR profession will be more beneficial or detrimental.
2. Familiarity reduces fear – Frequent exposure to AI tools has led to a decline in anxiety, as professionals recognize that AI-generated content requires substantial human intervention (Yue et al., 2024).
3. Language barriers – Many generative AI tools struggle with Czech and other minority languages, limiting their effectiveness outside English-speaking contexts.
4. Misconceptions about AI's role – AI is often seen as merely an advanced writing tool rather than a strategic communication asset. Despite its growing adoption, professionals remain cautious and often rework AI-generated content, viewing AI as an assistant or tool rather than an autonomous creator. This perspective also explains their reluctance to disclose the extent of AI use to clients, likening it to a typewriter—a straightforward tool that does not necessitate detailed explanation of the process behind its output.
5. General techno-optimism – European professionals tend to embrace technological innovation with optimism, sometimes underestimating AI's disruptive potential (European Communication Monitor, 2024).

Implications and Future Research

The underestimation of AI's role and potential could pose risks for the PR industry if professionals fail to adapt in time or adapt too wildly. For PR industry bodies and national associations, these findings highlight the need to prioritize AI literacy, training, and ethical education. Initiatives such as the Warsaw Principles (Forsgård, 2023) and industry code of ethics should be actively promoted to ensure responsible AI integration (Buhmann & White, 2022).

At the same time, the Czech case study suggests that familiarity with AI tools leads to greater confidence rather than fear. This insight is valuable for policymakers, educators, and industry leaders designing AI training programs tailored to communication professionals (Panda et al., 2019).

Moreover, geopolitical risks associated with AI and communication are often overlooked or under-researched, despite their growing significance. This is evident in the ongoing debates over the regulation of TikTok and other social media platforms, where concerns about data security, algorithmic influence, and state-controlled content moderation intersect with national security and digital sovereignty issues. More cross-disciplinary research integrating communication studies, political science, technology ethics, and cybersecurity is essential to fully understand and mitigate these emerging challenges.

However, limitations remain. While the study covers a substantial portion of the Czech PR market, it relies on self-reported data and larg-

er agencies and may not fully capture emerging adoption trends among smaller companies, organizations and freelancers. Future research should track longitudinal AI adoption trends, particularly focusing on whether the underestimation of AI's impact will shift as its capabilities expand.

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Keywords

Artificial Intelligence, Public Relations, Strategic Communication, Industry Adoption

The Power of Listening: Examining the Impact of Organizational Employee Listening Competency on Engagement, Well-Being, and Mental Readiness

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Introduction and Study Purpose

Organizational listening orientation and competency play a critical role in shaping employee engagement, well-being, and resilience. However, their influence on these employee outcomes, particularly in times of crisis and change, remains underexplored. Employee listening has recently emerged as a key factor in boosting morale, yet empirical evidence on the real impact of organizational employee listening competency (OELC) is still limited.

Mentally prepared employees can navigate crises with confidence and creativity, effectively managing psychological and emotional challenges without becoming overwhelmed by uncertainty (Pearson & Claire, 1998). This study aims to examine the role of OELC as a key antecedent of employee engagement (EE) and employee workplace well-being (EWW) through a serial mediation process, ultimately predicting employees' mental readiness—specifically, their adaptability and resilience in response to crises and organizational changes.

Literature Review

Research in organizational communication and human resource management highlights the importance of employee voice and listening in fostering workplace engagement and psychological safety (Kang & Moon, 2024; Moon & Kang, 2024), Satay (2024) found the detrimental effects of inauthentic listening—caused by restrictive change-related policies, ineffective solicitation methods, and inadequate analysis of employee input—on both organizations and employees. These findings underscore the importance of developing strong listening competencies (Satay 2024).

Kang and Moon (2024) emphasize that employee listening should be an integral part of an organization's communication culture, reinforced by its structure, policies, and procedures. A mutual orientation that values employee voices as essential to organizational success is key to fostering an effective listening environment. Kang and Moon (2024) propose Organizational-Level Employee Listening Competency (OELC) as a comprehensive framework for understanding how effective listening practices could impact employee outcomes. The OELC comprises four core dimensions of employee listening as the or-

ganizational level competency: mutuality orientation & legitimacy of employee voice; Explanation of voice procedure & outcomes; Safe voice culture with accessibility to voice; and Fair procedures to voice.

Building on this foundation, the present study aims to empirically examine how OELC fosters employee engagement, enhances workplace well-being, and ultimately strengthens employees' mental resilience in the face of stress, change, and crises.

While existing studies have explored the benefits of employee engagement (Qin, 2024) and well-being, few have explicitly linked them to OELC. Furthermore, the mechanisms through which OELC influences adaptability and resilience remain unclear. This study builds on previous research by positioning OELC as a critical driver of positive employee outcomes, addressing a significant gap in the literature.

Scope and Method

This study employed an online survey of 600 full-time employees in the United States to empirically test the relationships between OELC, EE, EWW, and employee adaptability and resilience. Through a serial mediation analysis, the study examined how OELC fosters engagement and well-being, which in turn influences employees' mental readiness to navigate crises and organizational changes.

Conclusion

The findings from this study will have significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the direct and indirect effects of OELC on employee outcomes. By establishing OELC as a key driver of EE, EWW, and crisis adaptability, the study offers a new perspective on how organizations can foster a psychologically safe and resilient workforce. Practically, organizations can apply these insights to refine internal communication strategies, emphasizing structured listening mechanisms such as employee feedback systems, leadership communication training, and active response initiatives. Enhancing OELC can lead to increased employee trust, job satisfaction, and overall well-being, thereby improving organizational performance and retention rates. Moreover, in times of uncertainty or crisis, companies with strong listening cultures may be better equipped to support employees, ensuring a more agile and adaptable workforce. These findings highlight the need for organizations to prioritize listening as a strategic function rather than a passive communication process.

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Keywords

employee listening, organizational listening competency; employee engagement; employee well-being; employee resilience

Ethics in the time of AI – A South African perspective

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Generative AI transformed public relations and public communication in ways that one could not have imagined. The literature cites a plethora of benefits of including AI in communication practices, including increased efficiency and productivity, improved content creation, synthesising data from multiple sources and improved understanding and deeper insight into stakeholders' needs and perceptions, leading to more customised and impactful messages and communication strategies (Yue et al., 2024; Shabangu, 2024).

Scholars and communication professionals have however raised ethical concerns about uncritically adopting AI tools to perform and enhance communication practices. On a theoretical level, Yue et al. (2024) highlight that transparency, authenticity, and trust have traditionally been valued in the public relations industry. These values can potentially be undermined by the use of AI since content, messages and even communicators can be automated or fabricated. On a practical level, ethical dilemmas such as privacy concerns, exacerbating bias, inequalities and discrimination, mis-and dis-information, data safety, copyright transgressions, disclosure of sources, accountability, and job security have been identified as risks (Yue et al., 2024; Bowen, 2024).

PR and Communication practitioners are, however, not only responsible for communication functions in an organisation but also have a normative ethical role at management level. They are regarded as the ethical conscience or moral compass of the organisation and should advise management on ethical values and expectations (Bowen, 2024; Buhmann & Gregory, 2023). This underscores the importance of ethical guidelines on AI for communication practitioners.

To guide communication practitioners, numerous international bodies, such as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, the Canadia Public Relations Society, the International Communications Consultancy Organisation, the Public Relations Society of America, the International Public Relations Association and the Institute for Public Relations, compiled guidelines and principles for the ethical use of AI. Although relevant and important, these guidelines do not specifically focus on the ethical use of AI in developing countries.

There are many differences between developed and developing countries, implying that guidelines proposed in developed contexts cannot be uncritically adopted in developing contexts. Some factors to consider include differences in infrastructure, social diversity and economic disparities (Nugraha & Shinta, 2024). In recent literature, contextual knowledge and context sensitivity have been highlighted as key in terms of AI usage and AI ethics, emphasising the importance of having context-specific guidelines for the ethical use of AI in developing countries. There is currently a gap in the literature re-

garding the ethical concerns of South African communication practitioners about using AI in communication functions, and their views on their role in the overall ethical use of AI in the organisations they are employed. To address this gap, and to contribute to guidelines for South African communication practitioners on the ethical use of AI, this study proposes the following questions:

RQ1 – What ethical concerns do South African communication practitioners have regarding AI in communication functions?

RQ2 – How do South African communication practitioners view their role in the AI ethics of their organisations at large?

RQ3 – What guidelines do South African communication practitioners propose for the ethical use of AI in the communication context?

To gain an in-depth and contextual understanding of South African communication practitioners' views of the ethical implications and challenges of using AI for communication functions, we will use a qualitative research approach. Fifteen semi-structured interviews will be conducted with South African communication practitioners operating in different contexts, including the corporate sector, higher education institutions and communication consultancies. Purposive sampling will be used to identify communication practitioners working in different contexts, with diverse levels of experience in the field of communication, and various levels of integrating AI in their communication practices. This should contribute to a holistic understanding of South African communication practitioners' views on the ethical concerns of using AI and to develop ethical guidelines for the use of AI in the South African communication context.

Understanding the ethical concerns of South African communication practitioners regarding the use of AI in communication functions, and their views on being custodians of ethics in organisations, can contribute to a better understanding of these issues in the unique context of developing countries. The ethical guidelines proposed by South African communication practitioners can assist in developing guidelines specifically for developing countries in the African context.

Keywords

AI, Communication practitioners, Ethics, South Africa

Perceptions, concerns and best practices: Communication practitioners' views on AI in the South African communication landscape

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Introduction and purpose of study

The rise of AI, and generative AI in particular, changed the landscape of PR and communication management quickly and irreversibly. Communication practitioners worldwide have adopted and embraced different AI tools to perform or enhance a variety of communication-related tasks in recent years. The novelty of generative AI, combined with the rapid development of AI tools, and the highly competitive world of PR and communication management, could lead to individuals adopting such tools without sufficient understanding thereof, to keep up with the times.

A study by Yue et al. (2024), including participants from the US, UK and Canada found that although there is a general consensus amongst communication practitioners regarding the timesaving, efficiency -and productivity-boosting potential of using AI, especially for menial and repetitive tasks, there is some uncertainty regarding the appropriate and ethical use of such tools, and the impact of depending on AI tools on communication outcomes. Cusnir and Neagu (2004) found similar results in Romania, where communication practitioners indicated high adoption of AI and extremely high satisfaction with AI but were less confident about the perceived long-term efficacy thereof. These studies confirm the notion that AI technology may be embraced without sufficient understanding of the appropriate use and the long-term impact thereof on reputational, relational and engagement outcomes.

When taking context into consideration, there have been significant differences between developed and developing countries in utilising and benefitting from new technology. In 2023, the UN warned that the digital divide between developed and developing countries is widening, threatening to exclude developing countries from the next industrial revolution (UN, 2023). Building on the concept of the widening digital divide, a report by the United Nations and the International Labor Organization (UN, 2024) highlights an emerging "AI divide" where unequal access to infrastructure, technology and education, combined with lower income, can lead to developing countries falling even further behind.

In a developing country such as South Africa, where communication practitioners are not only functioning in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) context, but having to cater to a population from diverse backgrounds, cul-

tures, languages and religions, often on a small budget, it is essential to be sure how to incorporate AI effectively for the long-term success of the organisation.

There is currently a gap in the literature on how AI is being perceived and used by South African communication practitioners. The obstacles and challenges they experience have also not been investigated to create a clear understanding of AI in this particular context. To fill this gap, and to contribute to best practices for the use of AI by South African communication practitioners, this study proposes the following questions:

RQ1 – How do South African communication practitioners perceive the use of AI tools?

RQ2 – What concerns do South African communication practitioners identify regarding the use of AI technology?

RQ3 – What guidelines do South African communication practitioners propose for best practice in terms of AI?

Methodology

Through this study, we want to gain an in-depth understanding of South African communication practitioners' perceptions, utilisation and experiences of AI in their daily communication practises, necessitating a qualitative research approach. Fifteen semi-structured interviews will be conducted with South African communication practitioners operating in different contexts, including the corporate sector, universities and communication consultancies. We will use purposive sampling to identify communication practitioners working in different contexts, with varying levels of experience in the field of communication, and diverse levels of including AI in their communication practices to contribute to a holistic understanding of AI in the South African communication landscape.

Practical and social implications

Understanding the perceptions, usage, experiences, obstacles and concerns of South African communication practitioners regarding the use of AI will not only contribute to the international body of knowledge, but will also highlight the unique situation of communication practitioners in a developing country, within the African context. This study can contribute to best practices for South African communication practitioners using AI and should be helpful to communication practitioners in other developing countries as well.

Keywords

AI, Communication practitioners, Developing countries, South Africa, Perceptions

Dealing with the unethical use of artificial intelligence in teaching-learning in institutions of higher learning: a case study of the NWU

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Large language modules (LLMs) have not only taken the world by storm but have uprooted the traditional way of almost every aspect of our lives, and academia has not been spared. Institutions of higher education face numerous challenges in this regard, and keeping up with the exponential development of artificial intelligence (AI) in teaching and learning practices is likely the most significant challenge to date. Lecturers are faced with the daunting task of keeping up with AI development in their teaching and their assessment practices. It is, however, not only lecturers who embrace AI – students are doing the same. Unfortunately, students are not only using AI as an instrument to assist in the teaching-learning process but are also abusing these tools. This raises important issues about the ethical use of AI, academic integrity (the other important AI), and the unethical use of AI and academic dishonesty.

Academic dishonesty is not new; students seem to find new ways to gain an unfair advantage in assessments. In the past, students would have used unauthorized materials during an assessment (notes on anything from a scrap of paper to the back of a ruler). Cheating became more sophisticated, with students using essay mills, where 'custom made' essays could be bought online (Verhoef & Coetzee: 2023) or more recently, using character injections to intentionally deceive similarity software from detecting instances of plagiarism. Until recently, plagiarism was probably the predominant form of academic dishonesty that universities had to deal with. The arrival of large language models such as ChatGPT or DeepSeek has provided students with a new, very powerful aid to, if used unethically, gain an unfair advantage, with students submitting AI-generated answers and presenting it as original work. The unethical use of AI is dishonest and threatens the authenticity of the assessment and the integrity of the qualification (Marais: 2022).

Aware of the threats posed by academic dishonesty by students and realizing that academic integrity is a shared responsibility between lecturers and students, the North-West University, as an institution of higher learning in South Africa, established a voluntary community of practice on academic integrity (COPAI) consisting of lecturers dedicated to the cause of academic integrity in 2020. COPAI aimed to standardize the largely fragmented approach to dealing with instances of academic misconduct. Since its formation, the work done by COPIA has resulted in a new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

on Academic Integrity [NWU Teaching and learning integrity standing operating procedure 2023], which is informed by a new academic policy on teaching and learning that specifically addresses issues related to academic integrity and academic misconduct. The implementation of the SOP is supported by a unique lecturer-developed electronic system known as the Academic Integrity Information Technology System Application (AIITSA) (from August 2023 to October 2024, 6 549 cases were reported on the system. The SOP is based on an educational (preventative and remedial) and disciplinary approach where, depending on the level of the transgression, students are required to complete an Academic Integrity Remedial Online Course de before moving on to disciplinary action.

This contribution aims to introduce the approach followed by the NWU to the broader university community and gain insight into the approaches of other universities in matters related to the broader concept of academic misconduct, but more specifically to how the unethical use of AI is being dealt with. This research evaluates the academic integrity policies (or their equivalent) of highly ranked universities from the global North and South in order to benchmark the NWUs' policies. The research will further evaluate existing guidelines from the selected universities on the use of AI in the teaching-learning environment with specific reference to the ethical use of AI and attempt to provide uniform guidelines.

Keywords

artificial intelligence, academic integrity, academic misconduct, management system, unethical use of AI

The Influence of AI: The Third-Person Effect in the Censorship of Deepfakes

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Introduction

The proliferation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies has ushered in an era where synthetic media can manipulate audiovisual content with unprecedented realism as it can convincingly swap faces, synthesize voices, and fabricate entirely new scenarios. This presents a significant threat to the integrity of information, public trust, and even national security (Chesney & Citron, 2019). The potential for synthetic media to be weaponized for deepfakes, disinformation campaigns, and character assassination is alarming (Godulla et al, 2021). As individuals struggle to discern authentic media from synthetic media, the erosion of trust in traditional information sources becomes a serious concern (Edelman, 2023). Media professionals are at the forefront of navigating this evolving landscape. They are tasked with identifying, verifying, sharing, and reporting on information while also being exposed to a constant barrage of manipulated content. Their perceptions of synthetic media, both in terms of their own vulnerability and that of the general public, are crucial for understanding how content is filtered and potentially censored in the age of AI in a two-step flow of information.

Literature Review

As a result, this research proposal centers on a particularly significant aspect of this issue: the potential for media professionals to advocate for, or even engage in, censorship of content based on their perceived superior understanding of synthetic media compared to the general population. This perceived asymmetry in knowledge and vulnerability can be explained through the lens of the third-person effect, a prominent theory in communication studies (Davison, 1983). The third-person effect theory—the belief that media messages affect others more than oneself—guides the study in exploring whether media professionals perceive themselves as less vulnerable to and more knowledgeable about synthetic media than the general public, and if this influences their views on media regulations and the need for censorship.

Methodology

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines a quantitative survey of media professionals with qualitative interviews. The survey measures exposure to synthetic media, perceived vulnerability and knowledge (self vs. others), and support for censorship. Interviews explore the reasoning behind these attitudes, including ethical considerations. The study anticipates that media professionals will exhibit the third-person effect regarding synthetic media, and this perception will correlate with support for censorship. Qualitative data are expected to reveal complex motivations, including concerns about misinformation and protecting the public. This research has implications for media ethics, media literacy, AI regulation policy, and professional practices of journalism, public relations,

and related field. Ultimately, the study aims to inform strategies for navigating the complex information environment of the AI era and maintaining public trust.

Conclusions and Implication

This crisis of trust (Edelman, 2023) underscores the urgency of understanding how synthetic media can be perceived. From a practical standpoint, this research could inform the development of media literacy programs specifically targeting professionals, equipping them with the skills to identify deepfakes and understand their potential impact. Socially, the findings could highlight the potential for biased censorship based on perceived knowledge gaps, raising important questions about who controls information and the balance between protecting the public and limiting free speech in the age of AI.

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Keywords

Synthetic Media; Deepfakes; Censorship; AI

The Future of Work for Public Relations and Advertising Professionals: Replaced by AI or Enhanced by AI?

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Introduction and purpose of the study

This study investigates the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the future of work in the advertising and public relations industries, focusing on how AI's integration may affect professionals overall, and particularly women, given the field's female-dominated workforce. The research explores perceptions of AI's potential effects on the profession, young professionals' preparedness to utilize AI tools, and any gender-based differences in these perspectives. The central research questions address how young professionals perceive AI's impact on the industry and society, their attitudes towards AI integration, their perceived preparedness to use AI, and desired AI-related training, examining potential gender differences in these areas.

Literature review

Existing literature highlights the evolving nature of AI, from traditional symbolic AI to contemporary machine learning approaches utilizing vast datasets. While AI tools have been used in marketing and PR, this study focuses on the more recent, advanced AI tools, like LLMs, and their potential to transform professional practices. The research acknowledges the increasing use of AI in these fields, including AI's capacity to generate content and even mimic individual personalities, while emphasizing the need to understand the impact of these advancements on future professionals and the gender dynamics of the field.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, primarily utilizing focus groups with young professionals in advertising, public relations, and related fields. These focus groups explore respondents' expectations, concerns, and excitement regarding AI's role in their future careers. In-depth interviews supplement the focus group data, providing a comparative perspective between seasoned and future professionals. This combined approach allows for the exploration of both cognitive and affective dimensions related to AI's influence. Ethical considerations will be addressed through IRB approval and adherence to data collection protocols.

Results and conclusions

The study anticipates revealing young professionals' perceptions of AI's potential impacts on the advertising and public relations industries, including its effects on knowledge gaps, income disparities, and the gender gap. It also expects

to uncover gender-based differences in attitudes towards AI integration and perceived preparedness to utilize these technologies. The findings will offer insights into the training and educational needs of future professionals in the age of AI, potentially informing curriculum development and professional training programs. Limitations of the study may include sample size and the specific populations. Future research could explore broader industry perspectives and longitudinal impacts of AI integration.

Practical and social implications

The study's findings will have practical implications for educational institutions, enabling them to better prepare students for an AI-driven professional landscape. Socially, the research will contribute to a deeper understanding of AI's potential effects on gender dynamics within a female-dominated profession, potentially informing strategies to mitigate any negative impacts and promote equitable opportunities.

Keywords

artificial intelligence, advertising, public relations, gender, future of work

Uniting a team of 5 million: An analysis of New Zealand's 'Unite Against COVID-19' crisis communication campaign

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Introduction, purpose of study, research question, and brief literature review

The global COVID-19 pandemic represents one of the largest health crises since the Spanish Flu pandemic from 1918-1920 (Da Silva & Pena, 2021). Notwithstanding the tragic loss of life, both pandemics resulted in negative financial and social effects (Sharma et al., 2021). The WHO's declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic in early 2020 found many national governments ill-prepared.

In contrast, the New Zealand's government's policy and communication response to COVID-19 during 2020-2022 was swift, unified, and believed to be highly effective in preventing the spread of COVID-19 within the country's borders (Jeffries et al., 2020).

The purpose of this study was to examine elements of New Zealand's Unite Against COVID-19 (UAC) campaign contributing to citizen compliance in limiting spread of COVID-19 during 2020-2022. It draws upon the IDEA model, developed to ensure crisis messages empower individuals by instructing them on how to protect themselves and those they care about from long or short-term hazards (Sellnow et al., 2017) IDEA is a mnemonic to remind crisis communicators of the four components of empowering messages: Internalization, Distribution, Explanation, Action (Seeger & Sellnow, 2013).

This research uses the IDEA model and best-practice principles to answer the following research question: Applying the IDEA model and best practice principles, how can we better understand and evaluate the elements of NZ's "Unite Against COVID-19" campaign?

Methodology

Seventeen interviews with government officials, policy advisors, public relations consultants, journalists, and members of ethnic communities involved in the UAC campaign were conducted and analysed to evaluate the campaign in terms of the IDEA model and best-practice principles of crisis and risk reduction communication. Thematic analysis identified nine themes (campaign elements, changing science, leadership, marginal communities, media, messaging, opposition, public trust, and social media) impacting the campaign's ability to gain citizen compliance with vaccination, mask use, social distancing, and travel limitations.

Rationale: Case study analysis allows for investigation of decisions made, how resulting strategies were implemented and with what results,

with the ability to provide practical recommendations (Veil et al., 2020).

Given the health inequities experienced by Māori and Pasifika, interviews were conducted with representatives from these two groups for their perspectives of the UAC campaign. The combined results illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of the campaign and give guidance for future pandemic communication.

Results and conclusions

Results indicated that campaign planners (a) provided the public with messages helping them internalise the crisis and take relevant actions to limit the spread of COVID-19; (b) communicated with empathy and compassion; (c) capitalized upon strong leadership and an 'all of government' approach; (d) utilized feedback effectively; (e) accounted for cultural differences; (f) fostered effective community partnerships; (g) accepted and communicated uncertainty honestly; and (h) acknowledged and corrected mistakes. Interviewees identified several campaign shortcomings in terms of communicating and forming partnerships with marginal communities including Māori and Pasifika peoples. Finally, while social media was a strong communication channel for the campaign, it later became a threat to the campaign's success.

Because this was a qualitative study, it faced limitations including researcher bias, limited generalizability, subjectivity, and difficulty in replication. In addition, the researchers were constrained by the time limits involved with conducting multiple interviews.

Future research should examine need for campaign planners be more keenly aware of cultural factors and not fall into the trap of constructing what could be seen as a monocultural campaign. In addition, the negative impact of social media in times of crisis is an area for further research, especially if a situation drags on as long as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Practical and social implications

The New Zealand government's highly successful response to COVID-19 and in particular, the UAC, makes it an important case to analyse. This research aimed to understand how the NZ government response and the UAC persuaded most citizens to observe public health mandates and help contain the spread of COVID-19 and its variants during 2020-2022, resulting in a low mortality rate. Three years is a long time for any crisis communication campaign to last and remain, for the most part, highly successful.

This research sought to understand the UAC's conceptualization and resultant messaging to determine how it was successful for so long, what worked well, and also to learn where the campaign fell short of its goals among certain minority groups. The lessons learned from this research will add to our understanding in terms of best practices for crisis communication and can help future leaders lessen the impact of future pandemics.

Keywords

Crisis communication, public health campaigns, New Zealand, Unite Against COVID-19

AI-Generated Influencers in Strategic Communications: The AI Influencers Engagement Model (AIEM)

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

With the rapid development of Internet-enabled channels of communication, social media influencers have become an important segment of digital experiences. Nowadays, social media influencers are new opinion leaders, used in marketing and communication campaigns to deliver messages to target audiences. However, in addition to human social media influencers, a new type of social media influencer emerged: computer-generated social media influencers. Virtual influencers are computer-generated characters created to resemble a realistic person (Robinson 2020). Prior to the expansion of Generative AI tools, virtual influencers were created with the use of 3D modeling and animation tools; however, the availability and ease of the use of Generative AI tools for image and video production enabled quicker and less expensive creation of AI influencers. In a relatively short period, virtual and AI-generated influencers gained vast popularity and attracted millions of followers, demonstrating significant potential to impact the online audiences. Virtual influencers show the capability to influence consumer behavior across social media platforms in a similar way to human influencers, and their popularity and impact is increasing, especially among the younger population (Lin et al., 2024). Based on the previous studies, the present study introduces the AI Influencer Engagement Model (AIEM) to examine the effectiveness of AI influencers and their possible future role in strategic communication.

Literature Review

Social media influencers are individuals who have expertise in a specific area, who have cultivated a sizable number of active followers, and who are of marketing value to brands (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In the last ten years, an increasing number of companies have been utilizing social media influencers' credibility and audience reach to communicate their messages to target audiences. At the same time, the use of virtual, AI-generated influencers is expanding (Böhndel et al., 2022). With virtual influencers becoming more popular, a number of recent studies have explored their authenticity and trustworthiness, impact on consumer decisions, and effectiveness (Böhndel,et al, 2022; Thomas & Fowler, 2021). Stein et al., (2024) argued that social media users are creating parasocial interactions with virtual influencers who satisfy their entertainment, interaction, and information needs. Other studies have explored the role of social presence theory in shaping audience engagement with AI influencers (Arsenyan & Mirowska,2021), along with the uses and gratification theory to analyze how AI influencers fulfill audience needs differently from human influencers.

Methodology

A systematic literature review of peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2025 was conducted. The scientific databases Emerald, Proquest, and Scopus were used to search for studies related to AI and virtual influencers. The exclusion and inclusion protocol has been developed, and the relevant keywords identified. The whole process is then presented within the PRISMA diagram. Based on the literature findings, the AI Influencer Engagement Model (AIEM) has been proposed.

Results and Conclusions

The proposed AIEM model integrates insights from social presence theory (SPT) and user gratifications theory (UGT) to explain how characteristics of AI influencers (customization, personalization, and level of authenticity) can meet the various user needs (cognitive, entertainment, and social) and as a result impact user's behavioral outcomes in the social media environment. The model's graphical presentation is proposed, with three main components identified: AI Influencer Characteristics (social presence dimension), User Motivations (user gratification theory dimension), and Strategic Communication Outcomes. The proposed model offers the framework for understanding and optimizing the use of AI influencers in strategic communication, focusing on both the psychological and functional aspects of audience interaction with AI and possible engagement of the audiences.

Practical and Social Implications

AI influencers can potentially transform online strategic communications, offering scalability and efficiency in delivering messages across social media platforms. The practical implication of the proposed model in strategic communications is vast. Organizations can utilize AI influencers to deliver strategic messages and optimize consumer interactions. The future of AI influencers will likely involve increased interactivity, real-time communication, and, in the future, it is not unlikely to expect even their integration into full virtual reality experiences. However, ethical concerns related to algorithm bias, transparency, and potential unethical use in terms of spreading fake news and spreading harmful content will require clearly defined guidelines and intense human oversight. As AI influencers continue to develop, organizations must establish clear ethical guidelines and transparency measures to maintain credibility and trust in relationships with their online audiences.

Keywords

AI influencers, virtual influencers, strategic communication, social media

Investigating the impact of AI on SMEs: communicative challenges and insights from an Italian study

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The increasing relevance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems has the potential to be a game-changer in various societal contexts, particularly in the private sector and in the communication field. This aspect has been recently investigated by several scholars (Ertem-Eray & Cheng, 2025; Gil de Zúñiga *et al.*, 2023).

AI tools are perceived from both researchers and professionals as a double-edged sword (Zerfass *et al.*, 2024). On one hand, these tools can unlock new opportunities for analyzing market dynamics, managing public relations, producing communicative content, and facing crises (Cheng *et al.*, 2024). On the other hand, AI introduces unprecedented ethical challenges and risks, such as data privacy, trust and brand reputation management, among others. The attention on this topic needs a deeper understanding of the organizational implications of AI also in small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

In this context, this study aims to investigate IA impact on organizational functions, including strategic communication, in the context of Italian SMEs.

Literature review

Nowadays, AI adoption in SMEs includes process automation, predictive analytics for decision-making and sentiment analysis. However, the integration of AI within SMEs presents not only transformative opportunities but also potential critical challenges (Schwaeke *et al.*, 2024). Indeed, while these technologies may have an impact in the improvement of operational efficiency, they also represent a radical innovation that goes beyond technological advancements to include cultural and ethical considerations (Bowen, 2024). To mitigate concerns at a supranational level, the European Commission has launched the *EU Competitiveness Compass* (2025), a strategic document aimed at enhancing European industrial competitiveness by fostering productivity and innovation through AI. Moreover, AI tools are gaining increasing interest - as well as concerns (Lorenz *et al.*, 2023) - in various organizational sectors such as PR, marketing, advertising and strategic communication, with a public debate on its technological, economic and societal implications (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018).

According to professionals' perceptions (Zerfass *et al.*, 2020) AI solutions are changing PR activ-

ities significantly, enhancing customer engagement and facilitating data analysis even if its application remains limited to low-risks fields and routine tasks. AI represents a valuable tool for managing communication channels, detecting potential crises and developing contents. Thus, AI has the potential to reshape communication managers' roles, making them leaders in AI integration within their organizations (Kelm & Johann, 2025).

In this framework, it is interesting to focus on the AI impact on SMEs especially in Italy, where they represent about 90% of the total number of companies, employing 78% of the workforce (ISTAT, 2023). These companies are experiencing the rise of AI-driven systems (Muto *et al.*, 2024) in a process of integration of these tools which involves communication activities (Giuggioli & Pellegrini, 2023) and it's amplified by contemporary mediascapes (Valentini, 2024).

Methodology

Within a broader research project financed by an Italian Ministry, this study is focused on managers' and professionals' perceptions about AI challenges related to communication and PR functions, within the context of micro, small and medium enterprises. The study, conducted through 200 CATI interviews administered to C-Level interviewees, was carried out in July 2024. Interviewees were selected according to their geographical location.

Questions were designed to assess managers' awareness of AI adoption, as well as their perceptions about the role of AI on companies' sectors (including communication) and for the future of the job market. Data were further analyzed considering industrial sectors, number of employees, and geographical areas.

Results and conclusions

The study reveals significant perceived barriers to AI adoption, including inadequate organizational infrastructure (32%), cultural (24%) and technological limitations (13%). Moreover, 12% of respondents expressed a lack of trust regarding the AI systems within their organizations, particularly for medium enterprises (21%). Only 12% of the companies have already implemented AI solutions in their operations. Despite this limited adoption, AI is increasingly recognized for its potential in production, marketing, research, and customer service.

Among other aspects, respondents identify communication, marketing, and customer care as the areas where AI could have the greatest impact (25%), with differences between micro and medium enterprises. AI tools are considered strategic also for data management (27%). Furthermore, media coverage is perceived as a negative factor on AI adoption (66%). with a difference for various industrial sectors (e.g. trade, services). There is a general consensus that AI will redefine professional roles, resulting in the decline of specific functions and professions (81%). Indeed, 87% of respondents agree that workers who fail to update their skills risk experiencing a reduction in employment opportunities.

Practical implications

This research aims to address a gap in investigating how different aspects of AI adoption influence the performance and productivity of Italian SMEs, as well the implications for strategic communication management in the relationship with stakeholders.

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Keywords

artificial intelligence, strategic communication, SMEs

All AI disclosures are not created equal: Examining the effect of disclosure labels on trust

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In an interview with *PRNews* published on January 17, Tim Marklein, founder and CEO of Big Valley Marketing, commented on the relationship between transparency and trust in the context of AI (Schuman, 2025). He noted that, while historically, transparency has led to enhanced trust, the dynamic does not seemingly follow the same pattern at a time when AI usage has become ubiquitous. In fact, due to an overwhelmingly negative bias towards artificial intelligence, the public actually perceives AI-generated content as less trustworthy (Altay & Gilardi, 2023; Liu et al. 2022, 2024; Ray et al., 2024).

Practitioners like Marklein have thus pondered whether a disclosure label must be consensually adopted by the industry and if labels must allude to the type and extent of AI usage (Schuman, 2025). In the absence of empirical data on this issue, the purpose of this study is to examine whether different labels of AI disclosure yield varying levels of stakeholder trust if any at all?

To answer that question, the proposed work features a 2 x 3 fully crossed factorial design where both the type of material (a news story versus a company blog post) and the authorship disclosure labeling (disclosure labelled as AI-generated, AI-assisted, or AI-influenced) are manipulated.

Existing scholarship has documented that stakeholders do not view the use of AI positively. Liu et al (2022) explained for instance that people who identified emails as being written by AI, they viewed that content as fake. Their findings showed lower trust scores for messages perceived to be written by AI. Stakeholders exposed to content generated by artificial intelligence evaluate the message credibility based on the nature of disclosure rather than the actual source of the message (Liu et al., 2022).

Further, in the context of a crisis with low levels of attribution of responsibilities and a positive pre-reputation, stakeholders were willing to accept automated messages presented as AI-generated.

In all studies thus far, the terminology employed to describe the disclosure was however not examined. Studies generally manipulated the presence or absence of a disclosure rather than a disclosure alluding to the extent of AI usage.

This study in progress proposes to fill this gap through a 2 (type of document: news story versus a company blog post) x 3 (AI disclosure label: AI-generated, AI-assisted, AI-influenced) between subject experiment. Participants, both communication college students and a national panel of US adults, will be randomly exposed to

one condition and asked to rate their perceived levels of trust, credibility, and transparency using established measures from the organizational public relations and credibility scholarships.

The swift adoption and increasing usage of AI in public relations warrants the need for continued research on its ethical implications, industry standards, and importantly stakeholder perceptions. For the PR profession to adapt responsibly, it must continue to refine its understanding of the implications that AI has on public trust in the long term. Consequently, this work intends to draw conclusions relevant to the industry and able to inform the profession on best ethical practices when comes to disclosing AI.

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Keywords

trust, AI disclosure, experiment

Public Relations Professionals' Acceptance of Generative AI in Content Creation

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Artificial intelligence, in particular generative AI, can be regarded as a disruptive force in public relations. Academic and professional discussions highlight great potentials, yet at the same time also warn of risks, among these increasing amounts of standardization and a loss of creativity and originality.

Given that the AI genie is now out of the proverbial box, professionals are confronted with an increasing amount of generative tools. Utilizing their potentials while mitigating their risks becomes a focal part of PR practice. Yet what exactly drives professionals' acceptance and adoption of such tools and technologies? While there is an increasing body of research on the utilization of generative AI in public communication, the factors leading to these practices still remain somewhat under-researched. We know how generative AI is used in PR, yet we do not really know why and under which conditions.

Our study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the factors influencing the acceptance and adoption of generative Ai tools for content creation among PR professionals. It relies on the explanatory approach of the Technology Acceptance Model 2 (TAM2), yet additionally integrates trust as a pivotal factor.

Literature Review

Academic discourse has often approached the potential impact and the adoption of new technologies in PR with specific regards to digital technologies (e.g. Brockhaus et al. 2023) and, corresponding to the predominant usage-pattern of artificial intelligence, the employment of AI for supportive functions such as social listening and analytics (e.g. Galloway & Swiatek 2018). The comparatively young field of generative AI and specifically its acceptance and adoption still remains under-researched.

Technology acceptance has been successfully analyzed by employing the TAM-model, this has later been extended with additional explanatory factors (TAM2); research in other fields then suggests that trust can also play a pivotal role in such models (Belanche et al. 2012; Glikson & Woolley 2020; Venkatesh & Davis 2000).

Methodology

Using a quantitative approach, data was collected from 102 PR professionals through an online survey. The standardized questionnaire builds partially on previous TAM-based studies and focuses on key factors influencing technology acceptance and usage, as identified in the TAM2 research model. These factors were operationalized in 26 standardized items. Additional vari-

ables were included to gather background information about the participants. In alignment with the overarching subject, questions were included to ascertain whether they were using this technology in their work and, if so, how frequently.

The sample was purposefully selected via LinkedIn Sales Manager and further professional contacts, ensuring alignment with the research objectives. A total of 763 individuals were contacted, resulting in 119 participants in the online survey, which corresponds to a response rate of 15.6%. Seventeen questionnaires were incomplete and therefore excluded from the analysis, leaving 102 valid datasets.

Results and Conclusions

Findings show that perceived usefulness significantly influences the intention to adopt generative AI tools. Job relevance and the quality of AI-generated content were identified as critical determinants of perceived usefulness. Interestingly, neither perceived ease of use nor trust emerged as significant predictors of usage intention, contrary to some expectations. Social influence plays a role in shaping the intention to use these tools, highlighting the impact of peer pressure. These findings suggest that while efficiency gains are main drivers for adoption, the impact of social dynamics cannot be overlooked.

Practical and Social Implications

The adoption of generative AI in PR is poised to increase, but its success depends on the alignment of technological capabilities with professional standards and ethical considerations. Further research is needed to explore the long-term implications of generative AI on communication practices and industry norms. Building a culture of transparency and trust while leveraging peer influence can further support the responsible use of generative AI, ensuring that technological advancement aligns with societal values.

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Right to Know as an Ethical Public Policy Approach to AI and Misinformation/Disinformation Disquietude

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Introduction and Purpose

Artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed an eclectic range of aspects in everyday life while greatly influencing a myriad of academic fields (including public relations), affecting not only innovative research but how individuals interact with one another (Voicu, et al., 2024). Within social science research specifically, AI influences how individuals communicate through computer-mediated dialogue, as well as how communicative content is created (Hermann, 2022) yet often misused through misinformation/disinformation campaigns (Palenchar & Heath, 2025).

ublic relations scholars and practitioners face a dilemma when researching and implementing AI. According to Nagar (2022), AI does not currently have a normative set of ethical principles by which researchers and organizations must abide. When examining organizational policies regarding the use of AI in communication, a consistent theme throughout remains the "common good" for which organizations may positively impact its community for the overall benefit of society. However, according to Nagar, the concept of "common good" proves subjective based on an organization's categorization and overall purpose (e.g., nonprofit, for profit), resulting in a variety of proposed ethical guidelines. For these reasons, the purpose of this paper is to develop an information dissemination policy and ethical guidelines for the public relations field that is critical to ensuring that AI is used in ways that serve stakeholder and public interests while addressing concerns related to misinformation/disinformation campaigns.

Literature Review

The unethical use of AI by public relations practitioners encompasses a broad range of practices that can damage organizational and client relationships, and harm stakeholders and other risk bearers related to an organization's products and services. Specific concerns include bias and discrimination, privacy, accountability, and transparency.

The right-to-know approach to public policy—also known as regulation through revelation – is based on the ideas of self-governance and public participation in the decision-making process (Florini, 2007) and was made into a U. S. federal law in 1986 (EPRCA), which has served as a model for numerous (80+) other countries since. Simply, right to know is based on ensuring people can access information, that it helps

reduce risk levels in their lives and is in a useable format towards those ends, and that there are dialogue infrastructures for people to participate that addresses power discrepancies for people to engage in community decision-making processes. In this paper, right to know principles and policies provide the theoretical backdrop for analyzing the ethical use of AI in public relations. The work begins with a review of how generative AI is being used in public relations and the ethical challenges associated with such uses. The paper then presents right to know as a policy and ethical foundation for analyzing ethical issues and identifies core public relations communication principles that can be used to evaluate ethical AI practices related to misinformation/disinformation. RQs include: (1) How can right to know policies and practices help to combat misinformation and disinformation in the use of AI in public relations? (2) What right to know policies and principles should be incorporated in professional ethical guidelines on the ethical use of AI in public relations?

Methodology

The study will utilize a three-pronged research approach. The authors first review the extensive literature on the theoretical history and the development of the right to know and its relationship to the ethical practice of public relations. They then identify core principles that contribute to the challenge of having communication and information infrastructures that are sufficiently robust and collaborative to achieve the level of deliberative democracy needed to achieve maximal individual, expert, and community efficacy that can help make society more fully functioning while being existentially and directly threatened by misinformation and disinformation (Palenchar & Heath, 2025). Last, they conduct a policy analysis that applies these principles in reviewing ethical guidelines and policies to AI and misinformation/disinformation.

Results and Conclusions

Overall, while the fundamental concepts of right to know mirror many current public relations guidelines and ethical codes of conduct, the field falls short in the implementation of its basic philosophy and tenets related to AI and misinformation/disinformation campaigns.

Practical and Social Implications

The aim of this paper is to propose an information dissemination policy and ethical guidelines for the public relations field that is critical to ensuring that AI is used in ways that serve stakeholder and public interests while addressing concerns related to misinformation/disinformation campaigns. The paper is significant in helping to define best practices for the ethical use of AI in public relations based on right to know policies and principles that are an established part of the democratic, collaborative decision-making heritage.

Keywords

Public relations, AI, right to know, ethics, disinformation/misinformation

Compassion fatigue in humanitarian and charity PR: AI to the rescue?

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into public relations (PR) practices has transformed the charity sector by enhancing communication strategies and automating routine tasks. However, fighting compassion fatigue, or the public's desensitization to humanitarian appeals as a result of repeatedly being exposed to upsetting messages, is one of the main issues charity public relations practitioners deal with (Kyriakidou, 2021). The research question focuses on how AI is being used in the UK charity sector to address compassion fatigue and the purpose is to highlight the *do's* and the *don't's* in humanitarian and charity PR when combatting against compassion fatigue.

Literature review

Existing literature emphasizes on the multifaceted role of PR professionals in the charity sector, including media relations, content creation, stakeholder management, fundraising communications, and crisis response (Cronin & Edwards, 2022). On the one hand, scholars argue that AI-driven tools, including sentiment analysis and predictive analytics have the potential to counteract compassion fatigue by diversifying messaging and optimizing public targeting (Chouliaraki &Vestergaard, 2021). On the other hand, concerns have also been raised regarding the over-reliance on AI, which may lead to ethical dilemmas and a loss of human touch in relationship-building (Zararsız, 2024).

Methodology

This study employs qualitative research methodology and conducts in-depth semi-structured interviews, in order to gain valuable insight into the implications of AI use within the UK charity and humanitarian PR and its impact on combatting against compassion fatigue. The sample of interviewees includes 28 in-house PR professionals across a range of charitable organizations. The research seeks to understand how AI tools are incorporated into their daily work, which specific functions are automated, and how PR professionals perceive AI's role in mitigating compassion fatigue. Thematic analysis is used to identify key trends, opportunities, and challenges that emerge from the data.

Results and conclusions

Initial findings suggest that AI is predominantly used for media monitoring and predictive analytics to refine messaging strategies. AI enhances efficiency by reducing the time spent on routine tasks, allowing PR professionals to focus on strategy. Additionally, AI-generated insights have the potential to inspire professionals to craft emotionally resonant but varied narratives that maintain public engagement without causing fatigue. However, participants also express concerns about AI fostering professional complacency, reducing creativity, and generating emotionally shallow content that may fail to connect with publics on a deeper level, especially with donors, a crucial group of stakeholders in humanitarian and charity PR.

Practical and social implications

The study concludes that while AI offers advantages in enhancing productivity and countering compassion fatigue, it must be implemented strategically to maintain the authenticity and emotional depth crucial to charity communications. The practical implications of these findings suggest that charities should integrate AI while ensuring human oversight and ethical considerations in messaging. From a social perspective, the increasing reliance on AI in charity PR raises questions about transparency, authenticity and the risk of depersonalizing engagement with donors and beneficiaries. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on AI in PR by providing empirical insights into its role in combating compassion fatigue in the charity sector. The findings are relevant for PR practitioners, scholars, and policymakers interested in the evolving relationship between AI, strategic communication, and public engagement within nonprofit organizations.

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Keywords

compassion fatigue; humanitarian and charity PR; AI; UK charity sector.

Generative AI in Political Public Relations: A Video Ethnographic Study of Content Production

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Like all public relations practitioners, Political Public Relations (PPR) practitioners are impacted by the increasing adoption of generative AI (GenAI) in content production. While PPR is known to be a strategic function (Hallahan, 2011), the growing reliance on AI can potentially reduce PPR practitioners to (functional) content creators. While generative AI can increase the speed and volume of generating content, under-developed skills in writing prompts and limitation of generative AI can lead to misleading content, which in turn, shape political discourse. Furthermore, the increased adoption of GenAI adds to questions about the evolving nature of professional expertise, the potential monotony of PPR work, and the ethical implications of AI-driven PPR messaging.

While public relations scholars have highlighted the potential benefits of AI (e.g., Nutsugah & Senanu, 2024), PPR scholarship is only beginning to explore how generative AI is transforming the actual work of PPR professionals. Assuming that the production of content has been influenced by generative AI, this paper addresses the question: "How has GenAI changed the production of political content by PPR practitioners?"

Literature Review

Literature on the use of generative AI in political public relations is growing (Nutsugah & Senanu, 2024). Generative AI is increasingly used by politicians to craft personalized campaigns, manipulate public perception, and amplify political narratives on social media, suggesting that PPR work is being made easier. Yet, little knowledge exists concerning how this ease in performing public relations task is shaping the role of public relations in democracy, and the profession experience of practitioners. Generative AI simplifies tasks like content creation, social media management, and data analysis (Cusnir & Neagu, 2024; Nutsugah & Senanu, 2024), but broader implications are underexplored. Automating PR tasks raises questions about professional expertise, ethics, and AI's impact on transparency and accountability in democratic processes (Cusnir & Neagu, 2024; Kok-Yew & Swiatek, 2024). The lack of studies on AI's influence on practitioners' roles and strategic decision-making highlights a gap in understanding the profession's transformation (Nutsugah & Senanu, 2024).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and interpretivist approach to professional PPR practice in India. The study's uniqueness lies in its use of video ethnography, a rarely employed methodology in Indian PPR research (Rasquinha, 2024). Here,

data was collected using video ethnography (66 hours recorded over 8 days) across two offices of a political party and through 12 interviews with workers from three political parties. The video ethnographic data captures verbal and non-verbal (multimodal) cues in live interactions between practitioners and is presented as strips. Each strip of data provides empirical evidence of content production activities. The Critical Incident Technique (CIT), employed to choose observations classified as routine, allows moderatum generalizations (Williams, 2000). Critical discourse studies and conversation analysis were applied to analyze the data, while the interviews supported claims observed during video ethnography. For this paper, the production of two social media posts (one created with GenAI and one without GenAI) is compared to examine how technological advancements influence the creative and strategic dimensions of PPR.

Results and Conclusions

The analysis demonstrates changes in the practice of PPR. The use of GenAI not only creates monotony in their job function, but reduces strategic thinking, further relegating PPR to a solely technical function within a political party. Generative AI has significantly eased the content production process, enabling political parties to rely on party workers rather than PPR practitioners to produce campaign materials on their phones without professional oversight and training. This allows for the growing production of misleading content, especially during election cycles, reducing accountability in political communication. This shift raises concerns about the erosion of strategic thinking in political public relations and the potential impact on democratic discourse.

Practical and Social Implications

Generative AI (GenAI) is transforming public relations (PR) enabling faster, more efficient content production. However, this efficiency comes with challenges. The lack of ethical guidelines and training has led to concerns about accountability, and the quality of AI-generated content. Many practitioners admit to not disclosing AI use in content production, raising ethical questions about trust and authenticity. Additionally, GenAI's produced content is increasingly produced by untrained individuals, such as political party workers, to generate campaign materials. This has increased the risk of misinformation and reduced professional oversight. Furthermore, the over-reliance on AI has led to a decline in strategic thinking and creativity, increasing monotony and decreasing motivation to do PPR work. These findings highlight the urgent need for ethical frameworks, training, and regulatory measures to address the long-term implications of GenAI on PPR practice and democratic discourse.

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Keywords

Generative AI, Political Public Relations, Trust, Video Ethnography

Competence Meets Compassion: Understanding the Boundary Conditions of Employee Reactions to CSR

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

A growing body of research demonstrates that employees reciprocate their companies' socially responsible practices with stronger relational bonds, increased productivity, enhanced creativity, and more. This study explores the mechanisms through which companies' CSR activities influence employees' relationships with their organizations, by identifying the boundary conditions that shape these effects. Specifically, using the corporate association framework, we explore whether employees' perceptions of CSR consistently improve employee-organization relationships (EORs) and other positive behavioral outcomes—or if these effects depend on their perceptions of the company's competence or corporate ability.

Literature Review

Corporate associations are memory-based beliefs and feelings that an individual has for a given organization (Dacin & Brown, 2002). A common classification of corporate associations differentiates between corporate ability (CA) associations, referring to beliefs and feelings about a company's ability to maintain its core business produces/services, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) associations, that is, beliefs and feelings about whether a company is perceived as a responsible entity in society.

Numerous studies suggest that employees' positive CSR associations enhance employee-organization relationships (EORs) through mechanisms such as positive affect and stronger identification, ultimately leading to employee support, commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). However, most research overlooks the potential moderating role of corporate ability (CA) associations on the relationship between CSR associations and EORs. Drawing on the corporate association spillover effect and cue consistency theory, we argue that employees' CA associations influence the extent to which CSR associations shape EOR perceptions and, in turn, drive employee advocacy and OCBs. According to cue consistency theory (Anderson, 1981), individuals rely on multiple external cues to form their thoughts, feelings, and actions, with consistent cues exerting a stronger combined influence. Conversely, when cues are inconsistent, negative information can undermine the impact of conflicting positive cues.

Based on this, we propose a moderated mediation model. Specifically, EORs mediate the relationship between CSR associations and employee advocacy and OCBs. This mediation is further moderated by CA associations: when employees hold strong CA associations, CSR associations have a significantly positive impact on EOR perceptions. However, when employees hold weak CA associations, CSR associations have little to no effect on EOR perceptions.

Methodology

A U.S.-based panel of 398 full-time employees was recruited through the online survey platform Prolific to participate in a cross-sectional time-lagged survey. Data were collected from the same panel at two time points, with a one-month interval between them. CA and CSR associations were measured at Time 1, while EOR perceptions, employee advocacy, and OCBs were measured at Time 2. This approach minimizes common method bias and enhances the validity of the data.

Results and Conclusions

SPSS Process Model 8 was applied to the main data analysis. The results supported the moderated mediation model. CA associations were found to moderate the effect of CSR associations on EOR perceptions. Specifically, when CA associations are weak, the effect of CSR associations on EOR perceptions is not significant. However, when CA associations are strong, the effect of CSR associations is significantly positive. Furthermore, the moderated mediation model was supported for both dependent variables: employee advocacy and OCBs.

This study reveals that CA associations serve as a boundary condition for employees' perceptual and behavioral responses to CSR associations. Theoretically, the findings provide more finely grained insights into employee relationship-building within the CSR literature, contribute to the scholarship on corporate associations, and extend the applicability of cue consistency theory in a public relations research context.

However, due to the nature of cross-sectional survey research, the relationships identified in this study might not be causal. Future research should consider employing cross-lagged longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causal relationships and further explore how different types of corporate associations interact to influence employee perceptions and behaviors over time.

Practical and Social Implications

Companies seeking to strengthen and sustain positive relationships with employees through CSR initiatives must prioritize fostering employees' perceptions of the company's core business competence. Without a strong reputation for operational excellence, employees may undervalue CSR efforts and be less likely to respond with favorable relational perceptions or positive behaviors. As Carroll's CSR pyramid emphasizes, economic responsibility forms the foundation of CSR. In other words, CSR initiatives are most impactful when employees perceive the organization as both socially responsible and highly competent in fulfilling its primary business mission.

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Keywords

Corporate social responsibility associations, corporate ability associations, employee-organization relationships, employee advocacy, organizational citizenship behaviors

On the public policy aspects of generative AI: Guidance from recent history and the risks from revisionist states

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Introduction and purpose of the study

This paper offers historically-informed suggestions on the likely direction of future public policy for generative artificial intelligence (AI) technology at a time when the international order is in flux. In terms of scope, two future-focused research questions are addressed, based on a comparative historical review of public policy relating to the internet and social media:

RQ1: What is the likely direction of travel for public policy, regulation and levels of support for generative AI by nation states?

RQ2: How is generative AI likely to be used by nation states in their own PR, promotion and propaganda?

Literature review

The central axis of this paper is what the late Michael Kunczik (2003, p.399) called the "transnational public relations of foreign governments", or the "public relations of the nation state", an area in which he described any differences between propaganda and public relations as a "semantic game". According to David Welch (2016, p.3), this type of state level propaganda had two purposes: "maintain morale at home and influence opinion abroad". Welch also claimed that "propaganda came of age in the twentieth century", enabled by "technological advances in mass communication", which have continued at pace with social media services and AI becoming important channels for public relations content. Organski's (1958) power transition theorization suggests that "revisionist" states that are discontent with the international system of alliances and their status within it will seek change while the contrasting behaviour of "status quo" nations is to support the existing global order and system of alliances (IMF, NATO, UN etc.). Beyond communications technology, there have been recent transformations in the behaviour of China, Russia, United States and the extent of their support for the rules-based international order which will influence the way AI is used in public policy.

Methodology

The investigation uses comparative historical analysis to compare the public policy approaches to internet and social media technologies that were adopted by the revisionist states of United States, China and Russia, with status quo states such as UK and European Union nations.

Results and conclusions

The comparative historical analysis of the internet and social media development and public policy identified differences between the dominant/great powers that are summarized below.

Practical and social implications

Under President Trump, the US seems set to adopt some "revisionist" policy choices which will make agreement on a set of universally agreed rules for regulating AI difficult to achieve. Even before Trump, the USA – along with China and Russia - was not participating in a 2024 UN initiative working to define an agreed global regulatory framework for AI. A more separatist approach to AI regulation informed by geopolitical interests, propagandist/power projection and commercial priorities is likely to prevail in the major powers. The strategic priorities underpinning nationalist political stances will also be reflected in how nations choose to use AI for state level public relations and propaganda and this makes agreement on a transnational set of rules for AI unlikely.

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Keywords

Artificial intelligence, AI, public relations, propaganda.

Country	Public Policy Priority for Internet	Policy Example
United States	Commercial growth and international expansion by US technology corporations (e.g. Cisco, AOL, Netscape, Sun, Oracle).	1996 Telecommunications Act (under administration of President Clinton and Vice President Gore) invests in high speed network infrastructure. Under Section 230 of Communications Decency Act (part V of 1996 Telecommunications Act) ISPs are granted immunity from civil liability and prosecution for carrying/publishing user generated content.
China	Exclusion of Western ideas, information and political thinking on democracy. Use of internet technology to monitor citizens behaviour (including use of censor-avoiding technology such as VPNs).	2000 Ministry of Public Security launches Golden Shield Project, which combines censorship of content with individual surveillance. Google pulled out of China after censorship dispute in 2010. Yahoo pulled out of China in 2021 2013 Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Document No.9 warns of "7 perils" that can undermine the party, including universal values, civil society and free press.
European Union	Protect rights of the individual citizen. Oppose monopolistic/anti-competitive practices. (In 2024, Apple was fined €1.8bn for antitrust offences and Meta fined €800m)	1995 Data Protection Directive Updated with 2016 General Data Protection Regulation (includes Article 17 rights to be forgotten in searches) 2024 Digital Services Act was introduced to strengthen users' rights and address issues of disinformation.

Adaptive internal communication: Building resilient organizations and fostering satisfaction with life

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Introduction and Purpose

In the context of hybrid and digital workplaces, internal communication is increasingly recognized as a strategic function essential not only for organizational performance but also for individual well-being. This study introduces Adaptive Internal Communication Theory (AICT), a framework that explores how internal communication satisfaction (ICS) mediates the relationship between communication practices and outcomes such as engagement, employee wellbeing, communication cynicism, life satisfaction and communication effectiveness.

Literature Review

AICT integrates leadership communication (Decuypere et al., 2022), employee voice (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014), informal communication (Denner et al., 2024), and attitudes toward digital communication technologies (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2025) as key antecedents of ICS (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2021). These constructs are examined in relation to their effects on communication effectiveness (Deepa & Baral, 2021), engagement and disengagement (Moreira et al., 2021), communication cynicism (Wilkerson et al., 2008), employee well-being (Diener & Chan, 2011), and life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985).

Methodology

The study follows a mixed-methods design: (1) qualitative focus groups and interviews to explore mechanisms influencing ICS, (2) controlled experiments to test causal effects of communication variables, and (3) a longitudinal survey to validate the AICT model across time. Structural equation modelling (SEM) will be used to map pathways among constructs.

Results and Conclusions

Preliminary findings suggest that trustful leadership, supportive voice climates, spontaneous informal exchanges, and positive attitudes toward digital tools are critical to ICS and employee engagement. The validated AICT model is expected to demonstrate that adaptive communication systems reduce disengagement and cynicism while promoting well-being and satisfaction. Limitations include variation across organizational contexts and levels of digital maturity.

Practical and Social Implications

The study will provide evidence-based recommendations for designing resilient, inclusive communication systems that support employee satisfaction and societal trust in organizations.

3 Abstracts

Keywords

internal communication satisfaction, adaptive communication, engagement, digital transformation, life satisfaction

AI's impact on reputations and relationships - ramifications for the public relations function

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into public relations practice (PR) looks set to significantly impact the skills and capabilities required of professionals and, as a result, reshape our development, team formation and working lives.
This paper takes a step further and considers what the use of AI *beyond* the public relations team across the organisation means for public relations as a management function.

The study question is: "What are the potential ramifications for the public relations function as artificial intelligence is increasingly adopted and utilised across various departments within an organisation?"

Literature review

Over 100 research papers and online articles are referenced in the background materials of the 'AI and Reputation Leadership' course which informs this paper.

Methodology

The paper combines reflections and observations as a practicing professional with primary and secondary research, including:
Consultancy and training work with a wide range of clients, supporting the responsible adoption of artificial intelligence by organisations and/or public relations functions.

Development of the 'AI for Reputation Leadership course', created by the author in 2023 for the CIPR in order to address the need for a strategic approach to AI adoption by organisations.

The CIPR's State of the Profession series, which include insight related to practitioner awareness, use and attitudes to artificial intelligence. This study has been managed by the author since 2018.

Data ethics and PR guides developed by the author for the CIPR in 2019.

The broader work of the CIPR's 'AI in PR' panel to which the author has contributed, including 'Humans Still Needed' and 'Ethics Guide to Artificial Intelligence in PR'.

Results and conclusions

The potential ramifications for the public relations function, as artificial intelligence is increasingly adopted across various departments within an organisation, are considerable.

AI use by organisations can have a profoundly positive impact on productivity, innovation and communication capacity.

But it also introduces a plethora of challenges, including those relating to authenticity, intellectual property, data and algorithmic bias, industrial relations, privacy, misinformation and

energy use. These challenges pose risks to the relationships between an organisation and its publics.

As the function responsible for reputation and relationship management, engaged in 'the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics', these benefits and challenges have significant consequences for the role of PR.

However, recent primary research suggests that the PR function is struggling to contend with the consequences of AI among its own practitioners, irrespective of the wider organisation.

Limitations of the study

The development and adoption of artificial intelligence continues at considerable pace. Ramifications change as the technology changes.

Research specific to the views of communication and public relations leaders in relation to the organisational adoption of artificial intelligence is in its infancy.

Practical and social implications

If the PR function does not support an organisation to manage the consequences of AI adoption for reputations and relationships, it will fail in its role as a management function and other functions will step in.

If organisations are not supported by public relations professionals in the adoption of AI, opportunities to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks and challenges will be missed, with negative consequences for those reputations and relationships.

More broadly, the role of the public relations function in supporting organisations to manage the opportunities and risks presented by AI is pertinent to its responsibilities to the public good, specifically its role in helping inform and engage citizens in relation to the social impacts and regulation of AI.

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Keywords

Artificial Intelligence, Public Relations, Reputation Leadership

Organizational climate for appreciation: Scale development and validation

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Introduction

Employees are valued in the workplace for various reasons, including individual traits and work-related behaviors (Wahl et al., 2025). However, the extent to which appreciation is communicated varies across organizations. This variability can be seen as an organizational climate of appreciation. As an instrument measuring the organizational climate for appreciation is still lacking, this study aims at developing a one-dimensional scale consisting of six to ten items. The scale's dimensionality, validity, and reliability will be analyzed.

Literature Review

Employee appreciation is defined "as employees' perception of being valued by others through positive signals regarding their individual characteristics and/or their work-related behaviors and competencies. Under-appreciation means the lack of perceived appreciation, while over-appreciation refers to perceiving too much appreciation" (Wahl et al., 2025, p. 13). Thus, we define an appreciative climate as a working environment in which employees are signaled that their individual characteristics and/or work-related behaviors and competencies are valued. Such climates provide balanced and credible appreciation, avoiding both lack and excess. Existing measures of appreciation, such as the widely used scale by Jacobshagen et al. (2008) emphasize individual perceptions rather than the broader organizational climate. Thus, an instrument measuring appreciation on an organizational level is lacking.

Appreciation benefits both the employees and the organizations they work for. First, appreciation increases job satisfaction, second, it increases engagement, and third it decreases turnover intention (for a summary see Wahl et al., 2025).

Methodology

Following established scale development procedures (Boateng et al., 2018; Carpenter, 2018), we conducted an extensive item generation process: (1) scrutinize the employee appreciation and climate literature for adequate items, (2) conduct interviews with employees on their experiences with appreciation, (3) incorporate feedback of five experts on either scale development or employee appreciation.

The item pool generated in this way will be piloted with a sample of 100 German-speaking employees. After this, we will establish the dimensionality of the scale with a sample of 500 German-speaking employees. A second sample of 500 German-speaking employees is used to

replicate the dimensionality and to check the validity and reliability of the scales. The data collection will be completed in March 2025.

For demonstrating criterion validity, the surveys will include established scales on job satisfaction, engagement, and turnover intention. Items on appreciation from colleagues and superiors will be included, for analyzing construct validity. The study has been deemed ethically sound, and the scale development procedure will be pre-registered at the Open Science Framework.

Results and conclusions

As suggested by Boateng et al. (2018), exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses will be conducted to establish the scale's dimensionality, reliability analyses (e.g., Cronbach's Alpha) will demonstrate the scale's consistency, and correlation analyses will establish the scale's construct and criterion validity. The aim is to develop a one-dimensional scale with six to 10 items that measures the organizational climate for appreciation in a valid and reliable way.

Implications and future research

The developed scale will provide communication experts with a tool to gauge the appreciative climate prevailing in their organizations. This information can be used to plan communication strategies increasing the climate for appreciation in the organization. This would benefit both the employees and the organization.

Employee appreciation researchers can utilize this scale in their research, when they want to measure appreciation on the organizational level rather than on the individual level of employees. A revalidation of the scale in cultures other than German-speaking ones appears valuable for future research.

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Keywords

employee appreciation, organizational climate, scale development, validation study.

AI Risks: Are European Communication Professionals Ready? A Study on Individual and Organisational READINESS

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies are increasingly being used by both individuals and organizations (Oh & Ki, 2024). However, there is still a lack of in-depth understanding of whether this disruptive innovation represents more of an opportunity (the "good guy") or a threat (the "bad guy") for communication, marketing and consulting professionals particularly (Zerfass et al., 2020). This study aims to explore how these professionals perceive AI-related risks in the workplace and what is considered important for READINESS in the context of AI adoption at the individual and organizational level.

Literature review

AI's impact on communication professionals showcases its dual role as facilitator and disruptor in the workplace: on the one hand, AI technologies can positively contribute to improving creative communication processes, personalizing interactions with stakeholders and optimizing operational efficiency (Chintalapati & Pandey, 2022); on the other hand, they also pose potential risks such as misinformation and bias (Bowen, 2024). Therefore, it is critical for professionals involved in communication processes to understand how to prepare for the opportunities and risks associated with AI at both an individual and organizational level and how to develop effective strategies to reap the benefits of AI while mitigating the risks in the workplace. While researchers in other fields have attempted to answer this call, little research has been conducted in the field of strategic communication and public relations (Bowen, 2024; Oh & Ki, 2024; Yue et al., 2024).

Methodology

This study employed an online survey with open-ended questions to gather input from communication, marketing and consulting professionals in three European countries — Italy, Romania and the Netherlands. A total of 84 responses were collected and analyzed through a thematic analysis, with an intercoder reliability test also conducted.

Results and conclusions

Seven core themes emerged from the analysis, including 1) the forms of risk anticipated in relation to the adoption of generative AI in the workplace; the conceptualization of 2) individual and 3) organizational READINESS in the face

of AI-related risks; the factors considered important for the development of 4) individual and 5) organizational READINESS; and the aspects of the 6) physical and 7) digital work environment that contribute to building organizational READINESS. Participants identified several potential risks associated with the use of generative AI technologies in the workplace, encompassing data security, over-reliance on automation, and ethical challenges, reflecting diverse concerns shaped and informed by their professional contexts. Participants also elaborated on their own conceptualization of individual READINESS and organizational READINESS, as well as on the factors considered important for promoting personal and organizational resilience and dealing effectively with AI-related risks. Findings from the thematic analysis revealed both structural and material aspects (e.g. collaborative and creative spaces) as well as technological and immaterial aspects (e.g. technological and communication tools) that help to build cultural ability to overcome AI-related risks and achieve collective efficacy.

Practical and social implications

This study offers relevant insights to better understand how to prepare for the opportunities and risks associated with AI at both an individual and organizational level and how to develop effective strategies to reap the benefits of AI while mitigating the risks in the workplace. Theoretical and practical implications can be drawn from this. For example, the results of this study underline the need for clear, ethically oriented corporate strategies that protect data and manage AI-related security risks while maintaining critical thinking and creativity in increasingly automated environments. READINESS appears to depend on a balanced integration of AI, where the human element — creativity, collaboration and strategic oversight — remains critical and needs to be nurtured at an individual level through training, peer support and leadership.

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Keywords

artificial intelligence; AI-related risks; READINESS; communication professionals

Exploring the Impact of Using Generative Artificial Intelligence on Productivity and Quality in Corporate Communications

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Introduction and purpose

Organizations that are early adopters of generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) believe that it will improve the productivity and work quality of their employees (World Economic Forum, 2024). This study seeks to empirically assess how far this belief applies to corporate communication practitioners based on their experiences with using Gen AI. It also seeks to uncover the practical considerations for corporations when adopting Gen AI in communications on a global scale.

Literature review

Gen AI could boost work quality and productivity by freeing up time from low-value tasks, allowing focus on higher-value activities (World Economic Forum, 2024). Gen AI tools based on Large Language Models are increasingly being used in the communications sector (Al Naqbi, Bahroun, & Ahmed, 2024). Hence it raises the question of how corporate communication practitioners should think about Gen AI to take advantage of the productivity or quality gain.

The research questions are:

How does Gen AI impact the productivity and work quality of corporate communications practitioners?

What is the future role of Gen AI in the productivity and work quality of these practitioners?

Methodology

A theory-building approach is taken due to limited research on the use of Gen AI in improving productivity and quality in corporate communication. It is based on semi-structured interviews of 24 practitioners from 12 countries globally who have access to OpenAI platforms.

The interviews started with open-ended questions asked with flexibility. Questions include: *What do you use Gen AI for as a professional? How do you think it impacts your productivity or work quality? How do you see the role of AI evolving in corporate communications?*

Content analysis of the transcripts allows the conclusion to emerge through recognising patterns of relationships between Gen AI, productivity and quality.

Findings

Productivity impact is clear –Almost all interviewees agreed that there are productivity gains in using Gen AI in terms of faster speed of generating outputs but this is blunted by the need to regularly double-check the outputs to ensure accuracy. This productivity gain in turn has economic value such as doing away with paying for external translation services or more time to focus on high-value strategic work.

Quality impact is mixed – Interviewees experienced improvement in terms of language quality, idea generation and critical feedback on work from Gen AI, but also brought up how AI-generated contents are prone to errors or lack authenticity. Non-native speakers of English benefited from the quality improvement arising from using Gen AI to polish their English or produce translations but criticized the quality of output generated in local languages.

Socio-cultural context matters –Interviewees who conduct their work mostly in local languages pointed to the inability of ChatGPT to produce quality non-English contents, its skew towards "western" views, and the missing of cultural nuances as a deterrent to using it. OpenAI acknowledged this bias on its website (OpenAI, 2025. This observation is consistent with a study on AI adoption within the Central and Eastern European public relations (PR) sector (Kaclová, 2024) and the Global PR Research (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003) which highlighted the impact of socio-cultural variables on PR practice.

Future of Gen AI: Automation versus augmentation – That Gen AI will continue to be a tool for communication practitioners is a unanimous view, with it already taking over some operational tasks such as translation and media monitoring. Some interviewees are projecting strategic decision-making such as those related to channel management will be increasingly augmented by AI which can handle large data sets and audience analytics.

Practical implications and future research

Given the productivity gains, the use of Gen AI in corporate communications should be encouraged subject to the conditions raised by the interviewees, such as quality checks and ensuring the confidentiality of data inputs. Socio-cultural limitations highlight the need for inclusive AI tools for global corporations.

This study presents an empirical foundation for understanding the impact of using Gen AI on the productivity and work quality of corporate communications practitioners so as to steer the profession towards a more informed approach. With the rise of alternate Gen AI platforms such as DeepSeek, future research can examine the implications of using different platforms in specific socio-cultural contexts such as Asia.

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Keywords

Generative Artificial Intelligence, Productivity, Quality, Corporate Communications

AI-powered Influence: How digital humans reshape consumer behavior. Examining the Mediating Roles of Perceived Value and Trust

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Recently, digital humans—AI-driven virtual models—have gained popularity in e-commerce livestreaming to engage with consumers online. With the vivid simulation of human behaviors and appearances and its cost-effective and flexible characteristics, digital humans can create enormous value in the e-commerce industry by influencing consumers' purchase intentions and subsequent behaviors. In April 2023, Jing Dong (JD) created a digital replica of its founder for a live-streaming event that drew over 20 million views and generated sales of 50 million yuan (about USD 6.9 million) (Fan, 2024). However, few existing studies have examined the underlying psychological mechanisms by which consumers cognitively respond to information quality and their interactivity involving digital humans. This study aims to dig into this area by exploring the mediating role of perceived trust and value for purchase behavior and providing implications for studying digital humans from users' perspectives.

Literature Review

The study adopted the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). The framework examines how external stimuli trigger internal organisms and subsequently affect human behavior. Information quality refers to consumers' evaluations of the value and usefulness of the information conveyed by digital humans (Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008). Active control, two-way communication, and synchronicity are three essential conceptual dimensions of interactivity (Kim et al., 2012). Prior research has found that digital humans can effectively influence consumers' purchase intentions compared to humans. It is thus hypothesized that consumers' purchase behavior will be facilitated when their appraisals of information quality are positive, and their interactivity is high during interactions with digital humans.

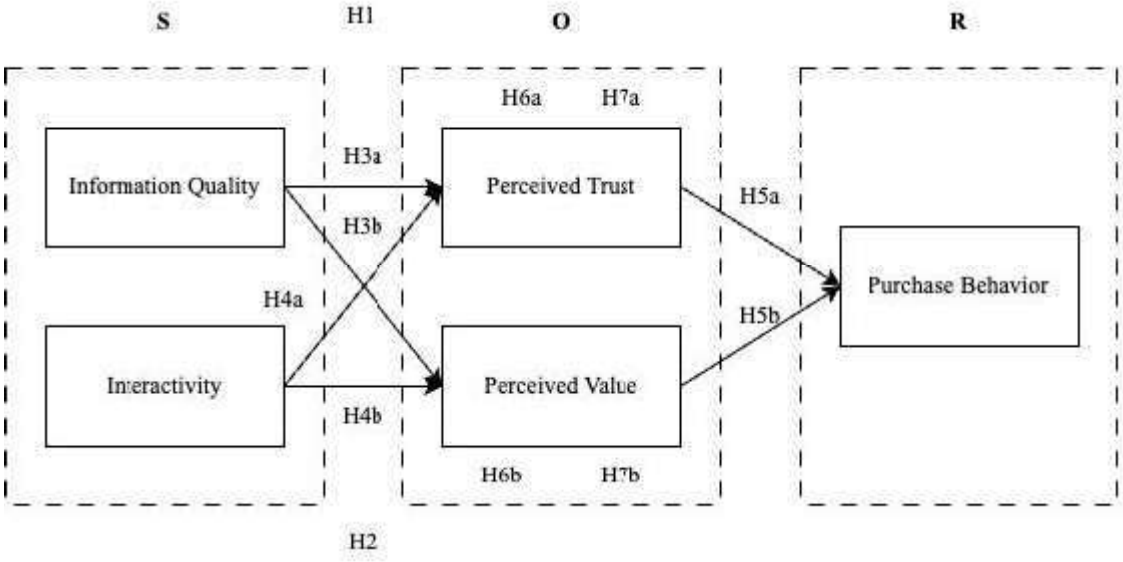
Additionally, the perceived information quality is influenced by its trustworthiness and usefulness. Perceived trust and value usually increase when there is a greater sense of certainty and a stronger belief in the usefulness of information quality. Furthermore, studies regarding online commerce have found perceived trust and perceived usefulness as mediating psychological variables between digital human attributes (e.g., agent gender, anthropomorphism) and purchase intention. Therefore, perceived trust and value may mediate the relationship between information quality and purchase behavior in this study.

Moreover, interactivity was found to positively affect attitudes, including perceptions of value and trust (Kim et al., 2012). Under the SOR framework, it is possible that perceived trust and values also play a mediating role between interactivity and purchase behavior. The seven hypotheses are proposed (see Figure 1).

Methodology

The study employed a cross-sectional survey with convenience sampling, collecting 562 valid responses from Chinese social media users. The respondents were first asked about their previous experiences with digital humans in live-streaming e-commerce, followed by a video clip of the JD founder's example to enhance their understanding of the questionnaire (see Figure 2). Demographic information was also measured.

Figure 2: Example of JD founder's digital human



H1: Information quality is positively related to purchase behavior.

H2: Interactivity is positively related to purchase behavior.

H3: Information quality is positively related to perceived trust (H3a) and perceived value (H3b).

H4: Interactivity is positively related to perceived trust (H4a) and perceived value (H4b).

H5: Perceived trust (H5a) and perceived value (H5b) are positively related to purchase behavior.

H6: The relationship between information quality and purchase behavior is mediated by perceived trust (H6a) and perceived value (H6b).

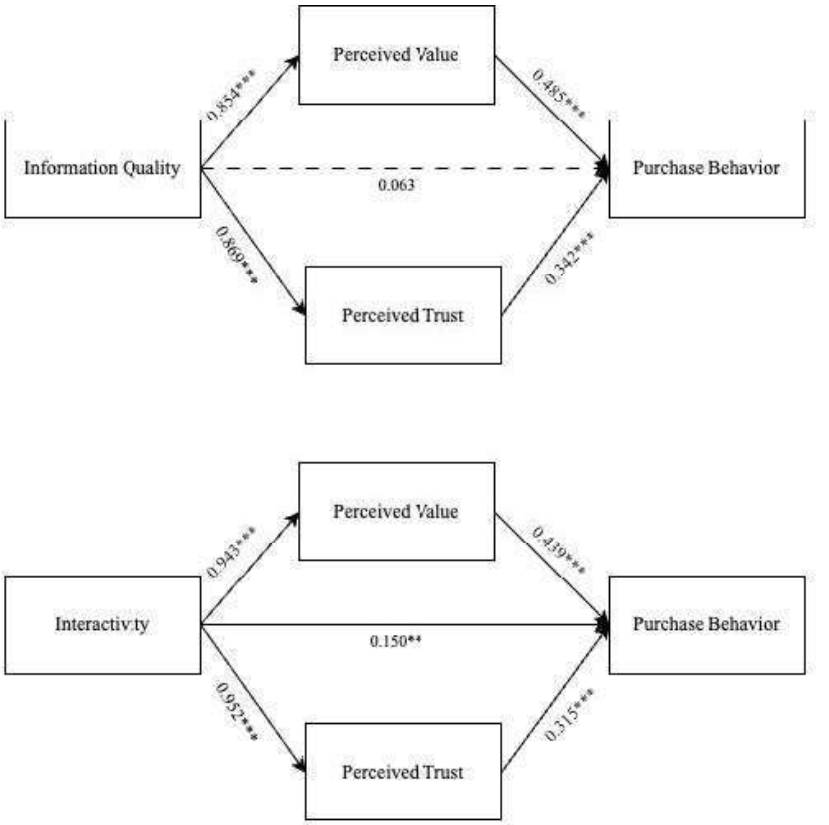
H7: The relationship between interactivity and purchase behavior is mediated by perceived trust (H7a) and perceived value (H7b).

Figure 1: Conceptual model and hypotheses of the study

Results and Conclusions

Analyzing with SPSS 26, all scales of variables were shown to have good reliability (α> 0.7). The results of the Pearson correlation revealed that all correlations were positive and statistically significant among all variables. Testing the mediating effect, Model 4 in the PROCESS macro by Hayes (2022) was performed. The bias-corrected 95% confidence and 5,000 bootstrapped samples showed that there was an insignificant direct effect between information quality and purchase behavior (H1 is not supported) but a significant indirect effect through perceived trust and value (supporting H3a, H3b, H5a, and H5b). This suggests that perceived trust and value fully mediate the relationship between information quality and purchase behavior, resulting in a positive increase (H6a and H6b are supported). As for interactivity, results showed that both indirect and direct effects were significant (supporting H2 and H4a, H4b), indicating a partial mediation between interactivity and purchase behavior (H7 is supported) (see Figure 3 for details).

To summarize, improving digital humans' interactivity indirectly enhances consumers' purchasing behavior, and this effect is further strengthened via perceived trust and value. In comparison, consumers' purchasing behavior is highly dependent on their perceptions of trust and value in terms of information quality of digital humans, as information quality alone does not directly influence purchasing behavior.



Note: *** means p < 0.001, ** means p < 0.01, * means p < 0.05, and dashed lines indicate the relationship is insignificant.

Figure 3: Parallel mediation effects between the variables

Practical and Social Implications

Theoretically, the study extends the applicability of the SOR framework into the context of digital humans in e-commerce live streaming by uncovering the underlying mechanism linking digital human attributes to consumers' purchasing behavior. Practically and socially, the study offers insights into the efficient development of digital humans as a new business marketing model. Companies should optimize the interactive design of digital humans to enhance the sense of two-way communication and synchronicity, encouraging consumers to purchase the products. Improving consumers' perceptions of value and trust in digital humans should be a key marketing and communication strategy component.

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Keywords

Digital Human, e-commerce live streaming, purchase behavior, perceived value, perceived trust

AI in Public Relations: Exploring Professional Attitudes, Adoption Intentions, and Internal Communication

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore the factors influencing public relations professionals' attitudes and behaviors toward AI adoption in the workplace. Specifically, we seek to understand how various attributes of AI technology, internal organizational communication, and individual characteristics shape PR professionals' intention to adopt and utilize AI technologies.

First, we aim to examine how the salience of perceived AI innovation attributes—such as its relative advantage, compatibility, ease of use, trialability, and observability—will be related to PR professionals' attitude toward and intention to use and adopt AI. Second, we will investigate which benefits and concerns related to AI use are most significant to practitioners, and how these factors impact employee outcomes, including job satisfaction, job performance, and openness to AI adoption at work. Third, we aim to explore the potential for a third-person effect, wherein PR professionals perceive that AI will have a more significant impact on others than on themselves, particularly in terms of its disruptive and negative effects on their colleagues. Fourth, we plan to explore how internal communication influences employees' intention to adopt AI and their commitment to AI-related organizational changes. Specifically, we will focus on the impact of dialogic internal communication and charismatic leadership communication. Additionally, we will consider several moderators that may influence these outcomes, including individual characteristics and existing employee-organization relationships.

Literature Review

AI technologies are influencing the public relations industry in unprecedented ways. Industry reports and trade organizations have begun highlighting the benefits and concerns associated with AI in public relations (Gregory et al., 2023). At the same time, academic literature is starting to catch up, providing a deeper understanding of how these technologies affect individuals, industries, and society as a whole (Yue et al., 2024). Existing research has enumerated several benefits of AI technologies in public relations. For instance, AI can streamline media monitoring, enhance data analysis, and improve content creation efficiency. However, these benefits are accompanied by risks, including potential job displacement, privacy concerns, and

ethical challenges regarding algorithmic biases. Meanwhile, research on previous technology-related changes has emphasized that the success of technological adoption often hinges on how well organizations manage communication and support systems throughout the transition process (Lewis, 2019).

Despite the value of descriptive and exploratory research, there is a gap in understanding how various factors interact to influence public relations professionals' attitudes and behavioral adoption of AI technology in their work. Most studies have predominantly focused on the technological attributes of AI, often overlooking the agency of individual practitioners and the organizational strategies employed to communicate about AI adoption. Furthermore, while insights from interview-based research have provided valuable qualitative perspectives on why and how practitioners approach AI use in the workplace, survey-based research is needed to generalize these findings across larger populations.

Methodology

We have partnered with PRWeek, a leading organization of news, analysis, and features for the public relations industry, to collect survey data from PR professionals across the United States. Data collection is currently underway, and our target sample size is 1,000 PR professionals, ensuring diverse representation in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, organizational type, size, and managerial roles. The survey includes questions on professionals' perceptions of the opportunities and risks associated with AI, including their own self-perception and how they believe their PR peers view these technologies. Drawing from innovation diffusion theory, we also measure perception of various AI attributes. Additionally, we measure dialogic internal communication to capture mutuality and openness, and charismatic leadership communication to assess how leaders convey vision, passion, and care related to AI adoption.

Results and Conclusions

Data will be analyzed using SPSS and AMOS between April and June of 2025. Based on our study goals, we predict that PR professionals' attitudes toward AI will be positively related to the perceived relative advantage of AI, its ease of use, compatibility with existing practices, trialability, and observability. Second, we will find out which benefits and concerns are most significant to practitioners and explore how these factors influence employee outcomes. Third, we will know whether a third-person effect exists. Fourth, we predict that effective internal communication will enhance professionals' positive attitudes toward AI, adoption intentions, and commitment to AI-related organizational change.

Practical and Social Implications

This research could provide critical insights for public relations professionals and organizations navigating AI adoption. By understanding the psychological and organizational factors influencing AI integration, PR firms can develop more effective communication strategies and support systems during technological transitions. The study may help mitigate potential employee resistance, address concerns about job displacement, and create more transparent, collaborative approaches to implementing AI technologies in professional environments.

Keywords

AI adoption, public relations professionals, AI attitude, AI-related change, leadership, communication strategies

Digital Responsibility in Sport Marketing: Embedding Ethics and Sustainability for Stakeholder Trust and Engagement

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Abstract

The increasing digitalisation of sport has transformed how organisations engage with stakeholders, raising critical questions about ethics, sustainability, and trust. This article investigates how sport organisations can embed digital responsibility into their marketing strategies to foster sustainable and ethical stakeholder engagement. Drawing on a multi-method research design, including interviews with sport marketers, content analysis of digital platforms, and survey data from stakeholders like sport participants and supporters in the South African sport industry, the article reveals a fundamental shift in stakeholder priorities. Trustworthiness, ethical integrity, and social responsibility emerged as more influential than affordability or transactional benefits in shaping stakeholder engagement.

Findings indicate that while stakeholders demand authentic and transparent communication of sustainability initiatives, many organisations remain focused on short-term revenue, resulting in a gap between expectations and practice. To address this misalignment, the article proposes a conceptual framework of digital responsibility consisting of five dimensions: (1) ethical integrity, (2) sustainability communication, (3) stakeholder co-creation, (4) authentic storytelling, and (5) accountability and transparency. The framework provides both theoretical insight and practical guidance for organisations to integrate ethics and sustainability into digital marketing strategies. The article concludes by highlighting implications for practitioners, sponsors, and policymakers, and identifies future research opportunities in exploring the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI).
Keywords: accountability, digital responsibility, ethics, sport marketing, stakeholder engagement, sustainability

Introduction

The sport industry in South Africa has been reshaped by digital technologies, expanding stakeholder engagement beyond stadiums and broadcasts to a wide range of online platforms, including social media, streaming, and immersive tools such as augmented and virtual reality. These developments offer unprecedented opportunities for sport organisations but also heighten expectations for ethical responsibility, transparency, and sustainability in marketing communication.

Traditional sport marketing in South Africa, has relied on ticket sales, sponsorship visibility,

and merchandise promotion (Shank & Lyberger, 2022). While still important, these practices no longer define success on their own. Stakeholders increasingly demand authenticity, inclusivity, and accountability, expecting organisations to demonstrate commitments to environmental stewardship and social responsibility. In the digital sphere, where communication is immediate and highly visible, failures to meet these expectations can rapidly erode trust.

Findings from the doctoral research underpinning this article revealed that fans, supporters and participants namely the athletes, place higher value on trustworthiness and ethical integrity than on price (Degenaar, 2024). They also emphasised the importance of organisations taking meaningful stances on social and environmental issues. These insights confirm that ethics and sustainability are not optional add-ons but central to brand legitimacy and long-term loyalty.
Digital platforms are powerful channels for amplifying sustainability initiatives and community-focused messaging, from grassroots development to gender equality campaigns. Yet their potential is often underutilised. Many organisations communicate sustainability sporadically or superficially, risking perceptions of tokenism. As previous studies note, sustainability efforts must be authentic, measurable, and aligned with organisational culture to carry credibility (Evans et al., 2022; Fischer, 2019; Paramio-Salcines et al., 2021, Walker & Kent, 2020).

This article positions these challenges within the paradigm of digital responsibility. Digital responsibility refers to embedding ethical, social, and environmental values into digital strategies to ensure engagement is not only technologically advanced but also transparent and trustworthy. In sport marketing, this means sustainability initiatives, inclusive practices, and authentic engagement must be communicated as integral to brand identity rather than as secondary activities.

While this article draws directly from the doctoral study, it also recognises that the digital landscape continues to evolve. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), though not included in the original research, represent a natural extension for future inquiry. These tools present both opportunities to personalise fan engagement and risks that must be managed responsibly.

The purpose of this article is therefore to examine how sport organisations in South Africa can use digital platforms to advance sustainable and ethical practices, building trust and loyalty in line with stakeholder expectations. It contributes to both scholarship and practice in three keyways:

1. Empirical contribution: It demonstrates that ethics and trust are stronger drivers of stakeholder behaviour than affordability, highlighting a shift in marketing priorities.
2. Theoretical contribution: It introduces digital responsibility as a framework that integrates sustainability and ethics into sport marketing.
3. Practical contribution: It provides guidance for organisations, sponsors, and practitioners on embedding ethical values into digital campaigns while maintaining transparency and accountability.

Accordingly, the guiding research question is: *How can sport organisations leverage digital platforms to foster sustainable and ethical engagement that builds trust and loyalty in the contemporary sport marketing landscape?*

By addressing this question, the article positions sport marketing as a field where digital innovation can be reconciled with stakeholder values, offering insights relevant not only to sport but also to broader industries navigating the challenges of ethical digital communication.

Literature Review

The literature on sport marketing, sustainability, and ethical engagement has expanded significantly in recent years as scholars have responded to the growing intersection of sport, technology, and stakeholder values. This section explores four interconnected strands: (1) corporate sustainability in sport marketing, (2) digital transformation in sport marketing, (3) ethical frameworks guiding responsible digital practice, and (4) the role of emerging technologies in shaping future directions.

Corporate sustainability in sport marketing

Corporate sustainability has become a central theme in sport marketing scholarship, reflecting the growing expectation that sport organisations should contribute positively to society beyond economic performance. Research consistently shows that sustainability initiatives enhance brand reputation, foster trust, and build stronger fan loyalty (Paramio-Salcines, López-Carril, & Anagnostopoulos, 2021). Stakeholders, including fans, sponsors, and communities, evaluate sport organisations not only on athletic success but also on their contributions to social and environmental causes.

In South Africa, studies show that stakeholder expectations strongly influence professional sport organisations' adoption of corporate sustainability initiatives (Moyo, Duffett, & Knott, 2020). Moreover, corporate sustainability practices are closely tied to marketing performance, enhancing reputation, loyalty, and long-term sustainability (Moyo, Knott, & Duffett, 2022). These studies also emphasised that sustainability in sport must be both authentic and measurable. In the South African context, it confirms that corporate sustainability in professional sport is most effective when embedded within organisational culture rather than used as a symbolic or reactive tool (Moyo, Duffett, & Knott, 2022/2023).

This aligns with global findings that corporate sustainability initiatives must be stakeholder-centric to build credibility. For example, Walker and Kent (2020) argue that integrating environmental stewardship into sport marketing strategies can differentiate organisations in a crowded marketplace. Similarly, Babiak and Trendafilova (2020) highlight that sport consumers are increasingly attentive to whether organisations practise what they promote in terms of climate action, inclusivity, and fair governance.

The emphasis on sustainability also extends to sponsorship practices. Brands now evaluate potential sport partnerships based on alignment with social values and responsible practices (Smith & Westerbeek, 2022). As sport sponsorship represents one of the largest revenue streams globally, this evolution underscores how sustainability has moved from peripheral activities to central determinants of legitimacy and marketability.

Digital Transformation in Sport Marketing

The digitalisation of sport has transformed communication, allowing organisations to reach wider audiences and engage interactively with fans making online platforms critical touchpoints for stakeholder engagement. Social media, streaming services, mobile applications, and immersive technologies have enabled sport organisations to move beyond one-way communication and toward continuous, interactive relationships with fans (Abeza, O'Reilly, & Seguin, 2021; Haffner et all., 2025).

In South Africa, non-professional sport clubs have increasingly adopted social media as a marketing tool, though with varying levels of sophistication (Marthinus, Duffett, & Knott, 2024). This reflects both opportunities and challenges to implement corporate sustainability into digital practices.

Cause-related and social marketing strategies have also gained traction in the South African sport industry, offering a mechanism for brands to connect meaningfully with social issues (Moyo, Duffett, & Knott, 2022). These strategies highlight the potential for digital platforms to deliver authentic narratives that align organisational values with community needs.

Digital platforms allow for personalised experiences, direct fan-to-athlete interaction, and global reach. Digital campaigns that highlight authentic storytelling and community building outperform transactional advertising in terms of engagement and loyalty (Naraine & Parent, 2020). This aligns with the broader shift in consumer culture where stakeholders expect brands to be socially conscious and inclusive in their digital presence.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital adoption in sport, with virtual events, esports, and live-streamed matches becoming mainstream alternatives to in-person experiences (Pedersen, Ruihley, & Li, 2021). Post-pandemic, these digital practices have not disappeared but instead evolved into hybrid models that integrate online and offline engagement. This evolution has reinforced the need for sport organisations to adopt a strategic digital-first approach while ensuring that their messaging remains authentic and aligned with stakeholder values.

Ethical Frameworks and Digital Responsibility

While digital transformation offers opportunities, it also introduces risks around ethics, transparency, and inclusivity. Scholars emphasise that digital marketing in sport must be governed by principles of digital responsibility, the practice of embedding ethical, social, and environmental values into digital strategies (López-Carril & Anagnostopoulos, 2022).

Ethical frameworks in sport marketing focus on three pillars:

1. Transparency: ensuring honest communication and avoiding misleading claims, particularly around sustainability initiatives.
2. Inclusivity: creating campaigns that reflect diverse identities and reduce barriers for underrepresented groups.
3. Accountability: measuring and reporting on sustainability outcomes to avoid accusations of tokenism or "greenwashing."

Recent work highlights that stakeholders can quickly detect when organisations use sustainability as a marketing tool without delivering tangible results (Walzel, Robertson, & Anagnostopoulos, 2020). Thus, sport organisations must demonstrate authentic commitment through evidence-based communication. Importantly, ethical engagement also involves providing stakeholders with opportunities for co-creation, such as user-generated content or participatory campaigns, which enhance perceptions of authenticity and community (Achen & Kaczorowski, 2022).

South African research further illustrates the risks of tokenistic corporate sustainability communication. When poorly executed it can be perceived as opportunistic, eroding stakeholder trust (Ndebele & Mhlongo, 2025). Conversely, when corporate sustainability strategies are implemented effectively and transparently, they strengthen legitimacy and foster long-term engagement.

The Role of Emerging Technologies

The rapid evolution of technology continues to redefine sport marketing communication. Tools such as augmented reality, gamification, and immersive digital experiences are increasingly integrated into fan engagement strategies, offering novel ways to deliver sustainability messages and create sustainable communities (Ratten, 2021). For example, AR-enabled campaigns that

highlight eco-friendly stadium initiatives or virtual reality experiences promoting inclusivity can make sustainability initiatives more interactive and relatable.

Artificial intelligence (AI) represents a particularly promising area for future exploration. AI has already begun influencing sport marketing through predictive analytics, chatbots, and personalised fan experiences (Pizzo et al., 2022). While these tools can increase efficiency and engagement, they also raise important ethical questions about data privacy, fairness, and inclusivity. Exploring AI's role in sport marketing could therefore extend the current debate on digital responsibility, ensuring that innovation is balanced with stakeholder trust.

Importantly, research on sport event tourism in South Africa shows that stakeholder trust and transparent communication are crucial during times of uncertainty, reinforcing the role of responsible engagement in building resilience (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2024).

Synthesis
Taken together, the literature demonstrates that sustainability and ethics are no longer supplementary to sport marketing; they are fundamental to its legitimacy and effectiveness. The digitalisation of sport has created both opportunities and challenges, amplifying the importance of authentic sustainability practices while exposing organisations to heightened scrutiny. Ethical frameworks such as digital responsibility provide a path forward, ensuring that sport organisations use technology to enhance, not erode, trust.

This literature review also reveals a research gap: while there is growing scholarship on sustainability, sustainability, and digital engagement, there is limited work that integrates these themes into a comprehensive framework tailored specifically for sport organisations. Moreover, the role of emerging technologies such as AI has yet to be systematically examined in relation to ethical engagement. This article addresses these gaps by drawing on empirical findings to propose a conceptual framework for sustainable and ethical digital sport marketing.

Methodology

This article adopted a multi-method approach to examine how ethics and sustainability influence digital sport marketing. Combining qualitative and quantitative methods ensured both depth and breadth, supporting the development of a framework for digital responsibility.

Research Design
The article was exploratory and explanatory. It explored how sport organisations in South Africa approach digital marketing and tested stakeholder perceptions of ethics, trust, and sustainability.

Data Collection
Literature Review: Provided theoretical grounding on sustainability, stakeholder engagement, and sport marketing.
Interviews: Conducted with 8 sport marketers across multiple codes. These explored digital strategies, sustainability, and organisational challenges.

Content Analysis: Examined websites and social media for sustainability messaging, interactivity, and transparency.

Survey: Distributed to stakeholders (fans and participants). It measured perceptions of trust, ethics, brand promise, affordability, and engagement opportunities.

Data Analysis
Qualitative data (interviews and content analysis) were thematically analysed to identify patterns around authenticity and responsibility.

Quantitative data (survey) were analysed using descriptive statistics and tests of significance. Integration of findings across methods enabled triangulation and strengthened validity.

Validity, Reliability, and Ethics
Triangulation across four data sources enhanced validity. The survey achieved high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80 for key constructs. Ethical clearance was obtained, and participants were assured confidentiality. Digital content was analysed responsibly and without misrepresentation.

Limitations
The article was geographically limited to South Africa, with modest interview numbers. While the focus was not on emerging technologies such as AI, these represent areas for future research.
The methodology provided a robust foundation for understanding how stakeholders and organisations perceive ethical and sustainable digital marketing. By integrating multiple perspectives, the article established a strong basis for proposing a framework of digital responsibility.

Findings

The article examined how ethics, trust, and sustainability influence sport marketing, drawing on interviews, digital content analysis, and a stakeholder survey. Results highlight a consistent pattern: stakeholders prioritise ethical integrity and social responsibility, yet many organisations remain focused on short-term, transactional campaigns.

Survey results showed that trust and ethics were the most important factors shaping stakeholder engagement, followed by opportunities for participation and social responsibility. Stakeholders valued organisations that demonstrated transparency and kept promises, while affordability ranked far lower. This shift confirms that value-driven engagement outweighs purely economic incentives.

Interviews with sport marketers revealed widespread recognition of the importance of ethics and sustainability but inconsistent implementation. Larger organisations were more likely to incorporate sustainability narratives into their digital content, while smaller entities often focused on ticket sales and merchandise promotion. Barriers included limited budgets, lack of expertise, and difficulty measuring the impact of sustainability campaigns.

The content analysis showed that few organisations consistently promoted sustainability initiatives online. Sustainability-related messaging, when present, was often sporadic and lacked measurable outcomes. Some organisations used interactive tools such as fan polls and Q&As, which boosted perceptions of authenticity, but these practices were unevenly applied. Overall, sustainability messaging was underdeveloped and transparency limited.

Sustainability appeared largely as an add-on rather than a central theme in marketing strategies. Stakeholders expressed strong interest in campaigns highlighting environmental initiatives, grassroots development, and gender equity, yet these themes were not consistently communicated. This disconnect suggests missed opportunities for organisations to align with stakeholder values and differentiate themselves through sustainability.

Stakeholders expressed a desire for more participatory engagement. While organisations provided some opportunities for interaction, such as polls or feedback, these mechanisms were underutilised. Respondents valued user-generated content and authentic narratives that connected them to athletes and community initiatives, reinforcing the importance of co-creation in digital marketing.

The data revealed a clear gap: stakeholders emphasised ethics, sustainability, and trust, but

organisations often prioritised transactional outcomes. Communication about sustainability matters was inconsistent, sometimes perceived as superficial, and opportunities for co-creation were limited. This misalignment threatens stakeholder trust and loyalty but also highlights the potential for organisations to strengthen engagement by adopting a more holistic approach. In summary, three central insights emerge:

- Stakeholders prioritise ethics and trust over affordability, signalling a shift toward value-driven engagement.
- Organisational practices remain inconsistent, with sustainability often treated as peripheral rather than strategic.
- Co-creation and participatory engagement are underutilised, despite their potential to build loyalty and authenticity.

These findings establish the foundation for a framework of digital responsibility, where sustainability and ethics form the core of sport organisations' digital strategies.

Discussion

This article confirms that ethics, trust, and sustainability are central to stakeholder engagement in sport marketing, supporting the call for organisations to adopt digital responsibility. Stakeholders expect more than entertainment; they seek transparency, authenticity, and evidence of social and environmental commitment. Yet, many organisations continue to prioritise short-term, transactional campaigns, resulting in a gap between stakeholder expectations and organisational practice. This aligns with South African research indicating that corporate sustainability initiatives contribute directly to organisational success when perceived as authentic and stakeholder-focused (Moyo, Duffett, & Knott, 2022/2023). Conversely, when CSR lacks authenticity, stakeholders respond with scepticism (Moyo, Duffett, & Knott, 2020).

The findings highlight a paradigm shift: trust and ethical behaviour are stronger determinants of engagement than affordability. This challenges the dominance of transactional marketing and signals the need for strategies that align with stakeholder values. Literature reinforces that sustainability efforts must be authentic, integrated, and stakeholder-driven to be credible (Walker & Kent, 2020; Paramio-Salcines et al., 2021). Despite recognising the relevance of ethics and sustainability, organisations often adopt reactive or symbolic approaches. Sustainability campaigns are sporadic and poorly reported, which fuels perceptions of tokenism (Ndebele & Mhlongo, 2025; Walzel et al., 2020). Addressing this requires embedding sustainability and ethics across communication strategies, making them integral rather than peripheral.

Stakeholders value participation and authentic narratives, yet opportunities for involvement remain underdeveloped. Evidence shows that user-generated content and interactive campaigns enhance authenticity (Achen & Kaczorowski, 2022; Abeza et al., 2021). Storytelling, particularly when centred on athlete journeys or community initiatives, deepens emotional connection and fosters loyalty. These tools are therefore essential for building sustainable engagement. South African research highlights the potential of cause-related marketing to align brand values with social causes, fostering stronger emotional connections (Moyo, Duffett, & Knott, 2022). Likewise, evidence on social media adoption by South African sport clubs shows how digital platforms can be harnessed for more interactive and authentic engagement (Marthinus, Duffett, & Knott, 2024).

Sustainability is not only an ethical imperative but also a source of strategic advantage. Few organisations communicate initiatives effectively, missing opportunities to build credibility and attract sponsorships. Transparent communication of measurable outcomes, such as grassroots de-

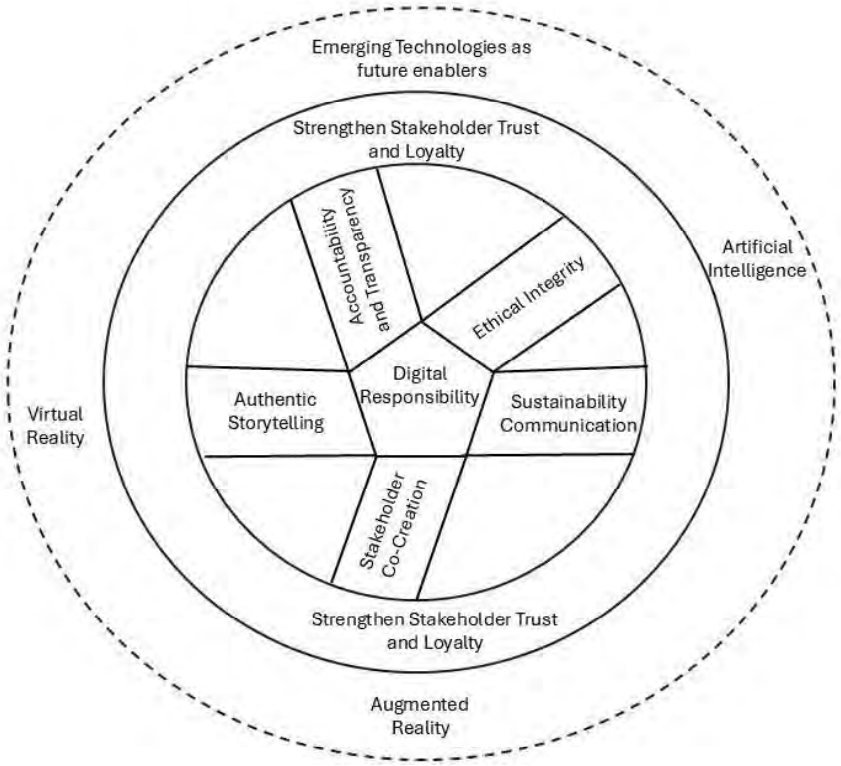

Figure 1: Framework for Digital Responsibility

velopment or eco-friendly event management, can differentiate organisations and strengthen their market position (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2020; Daniels & Tichaawa, 2024; Smith & Westerbeek, 2022).

The concept of digital responsibility offers a path forward, built on three principles: transparency, inclusivity, and accountability (López-Carril & Anagnostopoulos, 2022). The article's findings align closely with these principles, showing that stakeholders reward organisations that provide verifiable outcomes, create inclusive opportunities, and avoid token-based correspondence.
Digital innovation continues to reshape sport marketing. Livestreaming, gamification, and immersive technologies enhance engagement and can amplify sustainability narratives (Ratten, 2021). While artificial intelligence (AI) was not part of this article, it represents an important area for future exploration, with potential benefits for personalisation alongside ethical risks (Pizzo et al., 2022).

South African findings underscore that when organisations measure and report corporate sustainability outcomes clearly, they strengthen stakeholder trust (Moyo, Duffett, & Knott, 2020). However, when such outcomes are absent, initiatives are perceived as superficial, echoing global warnings against greenwashing (Walzel et al., 2020).

Drawing on these insights, a framework of digital responsibility is proposed with five dimensions: ethical integrity, sustainability communication, stakeholder co-creation, authentic storytelling, and accountability. Emerging technologies may support these dimensions but require responsible governance.

In summary, ethics and sustainability are now fundamental to sport marketing's legitimacy. Stakeholders prioritise them over transactional benefits, yet many organisations fail to deliver consistently. Digital responsibility offers a framework for bridging this gap, ensuring that sport organisations can strengthen loyalty, remain competitive, and contribute to societal good.

The findings and proposed framework of digital responsibility carry important lessons for organisations, sponsors, policymakers, and practitioners. In a digital-first environment, stakeholders expect more than entertainment; they want evidence of ethical integrity, sustainability, and inclusivity. Meeting these expectations builds trust, while neglecting them risks reputational harm.

Organisations must move beyond treating ethics and sustainability as peripheral. These values should be built into mission statements, strategies, and digital communication. Campaigns should highlight both events and social or environmental initiatives, while outcomes should be reported transparently. Clear ethical codes, especially regarding data use and fan engagement, reinforce credibility.

Transparency is critical. Stakeholders are sceptical of vague sustainability claims, making measurable outcomes, such as reduced event waste, grassroots sport development, or gender equality initiatives, essential.

Storytelling is another powerful tool. Narratives about athletes, community partnerships, and fan experiences create emotional resonance and strengthen identification with the brand.

Finally, co-creation opportunities should be expanded. User-generated content, fan polls, and online forums allow stakeholders to shape narratives, fostering inclusivity and deeper loyalty.
Sponsorship decisions are increasingly influenced by sustainability alignment. Sponsors should assess whether organisations report sustainability outcomes clearly, and co-branded initiatives should emphasise shared commitments to responsibility. Aligning with organisations that demonstrate authentic digital responsibility protects sponsors from reputational risk and enhances their brand equity.

Policy frameworks can embed accountability across the sector. Standardised reporting on sustainability outcomes, codes of digital responsibility, and incentives for ethical initiatives would encourage consistent practice. Such measures protect stakeholders and promote a culture of responsibility in sport.

Practitioners must balance innovation with responsibility. Sustainability messaging should be integrated across digital channels, inclusivity ensured through multi-platform strategies, and campaigns evaluated regularly for authenticity and impact. Avoiding greenwashing is essential; campaigns must reflect genuine organisational behaviour. This requires practitioners to be both technically proficient and ethically informed.

While not central to this article, technologies such as AI, AR, and VR are reshaping sport marketing. These tools can personalise experiences, showcase eco-friendly practices, and gamify participation in sustainability campaigns. Their adoption, however, must prioritise transparency and data protection to maintain trust.

The implications converge on a single point: digital responsibility must be a strategic priority. Organisations should embed ethics and sustainability, sponsors should align with responsible partners, policymakers should promote accountability, and practitioners must design campaigns that combine innovation with authenticity. By acting on these insights, the sport industry can build resilient relationships and contribute to broader social and environmental goals.

Conclusion

This article examined how sport organisations in South Africa can embed digital responsibility into marketing strategies to foster ethical and sustainable stakeholder engagement. Drawing on empirical evidence from South Africa, the findings reveal a clear shift in stakeholder priorities: trust, ethics, and sustainability matter more than affordability or transactional benefits.

Yet, many organisations continue to focus on short-term revenue, treating sustainability secondary or symbolic. This misalignment creates a credibility gap, where stakeholders reward authenticity but punish shallowness. To address this, the article proposed a framework for digital responsibility built on five dimensions: ethical integrity, sustainability communication, stakeholder co-creation, authentic storytelling, and accountability. These dimensions provide both a theoretical model and a practical guide for aligning digital strategies with stakeholder expectations.

The article makes three contributions. First, for scholarship, it extends sport marketing literature by showing that ethical engagement is not optional but a primary driver of stakeholder loyalty. Second, for practice, it offers concrete recommendations for organisations, sponsors, policymakers, and practitioners, emphasising the need to embed sustainability into core strategies, ensure transparency, and balance innovation with responsibility. Third, for future research, it identifies the growing role of emerging technologies such as AI, AR, and VR, which present both opportunities and ethical challenges that require further exploration.

The South African context adds depth to these findings, illustrating how diverse cultural and social dynamics shape stakeholder expectations. While limited in scope, the article offers insights applicable to other emerging markets and highlights sport's potential to act as a model for responsible digital engagement.

In broader terms, the research underscores that ethics and sustainability are now central to organisational legitimacy. Sport organisations that embrace digital responsibility can strengthen loyalty, differentiate themselves competitively, and contribute to societal good. Those that fail to adapt risk eroding trust in an era where stakeholders are empowered to scrutinise and amplify organisational behaviour.

The guiding research question posed in this article asked: *How can sport organisations leverage digital platforms to foster sustainable and ethical engagement that builds trust and loyalty in the contemporary sport marketing landscape?*

To answer this question, the findings make clear that sport organisations should approach digital engagement as a strategic responsibility rather than a promotional exercise. First, they must embed ethics and sustainability as non-negotiable elements of their digital strategies. This means moving beyond symbolic campaigns and consistently integrating values such as fairness, inclusivity, and environmental responsibility into all online communication. Second, organisations should use storytelling and co-creation to engage stakeholders meaningfully. By sharing authentic narratives of athletes, communities, and social initiatives, and by inviting stakeholders to contribute their own voices through interactive platforms, organisations transform audiences from passive consumers into active participants in shaping the brand identity. Third, organisations must prioritise transparency and accountability in their corporate sustainability communication. Clear reporting on the outcomes of initiatives, rather than vague claims, reassures stakeholders that commitments are genuine and measurable.

Taken together, these practices ensure that digital platforms serve as more than marketing channels: they become arenas for demonstrating values, cultivating communities, and reinforcing trust. By doing so, sport organisations not only align with stakeholder expectations but also establish themselves as benchmarks of ethical engagement in an increasingly complex and competitive digital era.

As digital technologies evolve, the imperative is clear: responsible digital engagement must be treated as a strategic priority. Future research should examine how emerging tools can be deployed without compromising transparency, inclusivity, or accountability. The message must be sustainable, and ethical engagement is not peripheral to sport marketing, it is its foundation.

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Unpacking the Vulnerabilities of PR Professionals in the Age of Generative AI

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The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI (GenAI), is reshaping the practice of public relations. These technologies are not only transforming technical workflows but also challenging the conventional understanding of professional responsibilities (Bowen, 2024; Nutsugah & Senanu, 2024). For practitioners, the adoption of GenAI has created both opportunities and uncertainties, heightening concerns over job displacement, ethical accountability, misinformation, and the weakening of human agency (Cusnir & Nicola, 2024; Guzman & Lewis, 2024; Kaclová, 2024).

At the same time, professional associations and scholarly discussions have responded with guidelines and recommendations that largely emphasize governance and technical considerations. While these efforts are important, they do not fully capture the human dimensions of change, especially the vulnerabilities practitioners face as they adapt to an evolving technological landscape.

Public relations is already a high-pressure profession where long hours, client demands, and constant connectivity contribute to stress and burnout. In 2024, nearly half of PR professionals reported considering leaving their positions due to stress (Muck Rack, 2024). The introduction of AI amplifies these challenges by requiring practitioners to renegotiate their expertise, manage ethical dilemmas, and sustain professional identity in an environment increasingly mediated by technology. Existing research has primarily focused on the functional applications of AI in communication and the development of normative ethical frameworks, leaving limited attention to how professionals experience and interpret these changes in their daily work.

This study addresses this gap by examining the diverse dimensions of vulnerability encountered by PR practitioners in both in-house and agency settings. Vulnerability is understood here as a multifaceted condition that emerges at the intersection of technical skills, organizational structures, professional roles, and psychological well-being. By foregrounding practitioners' experiences, this research moves beyond instrumentalist perspectives of AI adoption to explore how the technology reconfigures professional life. Specifically, the study asks: *What are the various dimensions of vulnerability encountered by public relations professionals?*

By engaging this question, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of PR practitioners in the context of technological change. It highlights how vulnerabilities extend beyond technical competency to encompass identity, ethics, and organizational support. These insights inform both scholarly debates on technology and professional practice, providing

a foundation for more sustainable, human-centered strategies for integrating AI into the field of public relations.

Literature Review

GenAI and Public Relations

The advent of user-friendly GenAI, exemplified by OpenAI's ChatGPT in late 2022, represents a transformative inflection point for public relations practice. GenAI refers to algorithms capable of creating new content (e.g., text, images, audio) by learning patterns from existing data to mimic human intelligence. Unlike earlier AI tools capable of automating analyses or routine tasks, GenAI can produce novel communication materials, a development with profound implications for public relations. Such technologies can instantly draft campaign strategies, digest public sentiment, or manage client-agency relationships, offering PR professionals unprecedented speed and creative support (Panda et al., 2019). Indeed, many high-performing firms attribute recent efficiency and profit gains directly to AI integration (Uysal & Deng, 2025). Researchers likewise report a surge in adoption from what was once gradual, cautious experimentation with AI to an accelerated widespread utilization within a short span (Kelm & Johann, 2025). GenAI tools are now becoming increasingly common in daily PR workflows (Salzano & Ashby-King, 2025; Yang, 2024). This growing popularity of GenAI stems from its perceived usefulness and ease of use, which drive user acceptance, particularly when organizations provide supportive frameworks for implementation (Kelm & Johann, 2025).

However, alongside enthusiasm for GenAI's benefits, scholars have noted important challenges and cautions. Early critical voices in the field warned that AI-driven communication could create misleading '*illusory*' engagement with stakeholders, lacking genuine dialogic authenticity (Bourne, 2019). The recent explosion of GenAI has intensified these ethical debates. As McCollough et al. (2022) observe, the profession is now grappling with ethical and moral dilemmas related to the '*dark side*' of AI use. Issues such as transparency, bias, and the veracity of GenAI content have come to the forefront of PR discourse. Although GenAI promises efficiency, it raises questions about authorship, trust, and the evolving role of PR professionals. In response, communication scholars emphasize the need to maintain human oversight, authenticity, and ethical standards in an AI-augmented PR environment (McCollough et al., 2022; Uysal & Deng, 2025).

Public relations ethics have been investigated through multiple lenses of ethical frameworks. However, given PR's situational complexity, no single theory suffices. Thus, an integrative, context-sensitive reasoning that draws on multiple frameworks is more appropriate, including perspectives of utilitarianism, deontological, virtue ethics, and care ethics (Baker, 2008; Bowen, 2016; Dong & Morehouse, 2022; Harrison, 2004; Lemon & Boman, 2022). Taken together, these various ethical orientations offer different, yet connecting, guidelines for understanding what constitutes ethical PR practices as the industry adopts new technologies. However, practitioners' firsthand experiences of how they, as frontline employees dealing with ethical dilemmas and gray areas, navigate AI-related policies, which are often absent or still in development, have not been well studied.

Public Relations Professionals' Well-being

Public relations has long been recognized as a high-stress profession prone to burnout. Studies show that PR professionals often work long hours and frequently experience work–life conflict (Shen & Jiang, 2013; Jiang & Shen, 2013). The nature of the profession, which routinely involves unexpected situations and crises, leaves practitioners emotionally exhausted and fosters an "always on" culture (Anton, 2024; Schoen-

maker & Erskine, 2019). Recent surveys reveal alarming mental health trends. A 2024 report found that 44% of PR professionals left their jobs due to stress and burnout, while 96% reported difficulty disconnecting from work in an always-on environment (Muck Rack, 2024). These findings underscore the need to address PR professionals' vulnerabilities in the workplace.

The rapid adoption of AI technologies adds another layer of complexity to practitioners' well-being. A recent report from the USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations (2025) shows that communication professionals who use AI more frequently are 93% more likely to feel valued for the work they do. At the same time, the report highlights barriers such as the rapid pace of change, lack of time, complexity of information, and privacy and security concerns, which have emerged as new stressors for professionals striving to keep up with AI developments. Other studies echo these concerns, noting that AI tools may contribute to additional responsibilities and job insecurity, further intensifying the stress already present in the PR industry (Dong & van den Berg, 2025; Yue et al., 2024).

Beyond individual readiness, institutional adaptation in the form of regulation and ethical standards has lagged behind and remains inconsistent. While professional associations such as the Public Relations Society of America, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, and the PR Council have issued ethical guidelines for the use of GenAI, these frameworks have several limitations. They face challenges from weak enforcement, limited capacity to remain current with rapidly evolving technologies, and restricted accessibility, as they primarily target formally trained practitioners rather than the broader workforce engaged in public relations without professional association membership or formal accreditation. Evidence of this gap is clear: only one-fifth of PR agencies worldwide consistently disclose AI usage to their clients (Muck Rack, 2025), 38% of companies report having AI policies while more than half (55%) have none in place (Muck Rack, 2025), and only one-third of professionals report access to AI training at work (Muck Rack, 2025). The absence of organizational and institutional support constitutes a critical external factor that could worsen the well-being of PR professionals in the AI era.

Vulnerability

Vulnerability is a social and psychological concept that has garnered multidisciplinary interests. While a universal definition is hard to reach, vulnerability should be understood as a multifaceted concept as it encompasses natural, social, and technical dimensions, and can be relational and double-edged, both as a threat to individuals' psychological safety and as a facilitator to learning and innovating (Bijker et al., 2014). From a psychological perspective, vulnerability is seen as a predisposition reflecting a dependence on external affirmation to validate self-worth, leading individuals to be more fragile to stress (Sinclair & Wallston, 1999). While it is a natural result of being human, psychological vulnerability can lead to negative affect and depressive symptoms, harming individuals' overall health and well-being (Satici, 2016). In consumer research, vulnerability is often linked to specific populations that are disadvantaged in the market because of factors like age, income, and education. Recent studies recognize that vulnerability is the result of consumers' internal cognitive structure and external social influence (Baker et al., 2005). Shi et al. (2017) emphasized that vulnerability is a context-dependent tendency as a result of consumers' exposure to market interactions. Shi et al. (2017) further identify two core types of consumer vulnerability: lack of knowledge and powerlessness, highlighting that individual characteristics in the consumption process are key to defining vulnerability. In the context of information technology and digital platforms, vulnerability can be understood as the risks resulting from both online social

networks and platform settings. Gundecha et al. (2014) define user vulnerability as a measurable property that reflects the extent to which a user's privacy can be compromised by personal disclosure, friends' disclosures, and inadequate privacy settings. Jang (2024) argued that the acceptance of vulnerabilities and risks is an important component of individuals' trust in AI.

Vulnerability is particularly pronounced among professionals in high-demand, public-facing roles. In hospitality and service settings, it has been framed as a situational state of powerlessness that arises from inequities in customer–employee interactions, underscoring its temporary, relational, and resource-dependent nature (Baker & Kim, 2024). In healthcare, vulnerability is closely tied to emotional labor, which is often underrecognized. Davenport and Hall (2011) highlight how nurses' professional vulnerability emerges from the tension between emotional engagement and workplace norms that stigmatize such expression. Morera et al. (2024) further argue that recognizing and accepting vulnerability is essential to counter stigma, reduce isolation and burnout, and foster supportive work environments. Building on these perspectives, this study conceptualizes vulnerability as a multifaceted and multidimensional construct that captures the risks, tensions, and opportunities faced by public relations professionals as GenAI becomes a routine part of their work. Recent research has begun to document how PR practitioners struggle with ethical dilemmas, job security concerns, and questions of professional identity in relation to GenAI (Dong & van den Berg, 2025; Guzman & Lewis, 2024; Yue et al., 2024). Yet systematic efforts to identify and differentiate the dimensions of vulnerability within PR practice remain limited. Therefore, this study proposes the following research question:
RQ1: What are the different aspects of vulnerability experienced by PR professionals working in-house and in agencies in the era of GenAI?

Method

The study employed a qualitative approach, using semi-structured, in-depth interviews to explore professionals' perspectives on vulnerabilities in relation to GenAI use. Purposive and snowball sampling strategies were used to recruit participants. The recruitment was conducted through multiple channels, including LinkedIn, emails, and alumni networks. A total of 29 interviews were conducted with professionals working in public relations and strategic communication across various experience levels and sectors. Among the interviewees, 16 were female, 13 were male. Regarding workplace settings, 13 practitioners worked with agencies, 11 worked in-house, and five considered themselves freelancers. The areas of practice were diverse, ranging from healthcare, non-profit, travel, and retail, to name a few. Their work experience in the field ranged from one to 25+ years. Commonly used AI tools were ChatGPT, Co-Pilot, Bard, Meltwater, and internal proprietary AI platforms. The most frequent use cases included sentiment analysis, speech-to-text translations, and press releases and reports. The interviews were taken via Zoom. A total of 1,265 minutes (ranging from 16:55 to 1:05:53) of interviews were recorded, comprising 209,383 words.

Drawing on the guidelines of Saldaña (2012), Williams and Morser (2019), and Place (2022), we engaged in an iterative thematic analysis. During the data collection and analysis process, the researchers independently review the data with a focus on vulnerability-related discussions. This data immersion process enabled researchers to consider various interpretations, develop initial codes, and include meetings to discuss reflections, compare notes, and exchange thoughts. Based on the initial codes, the researchers employed pattern coding to cluster related ideas and identify potential themes. Throughout this process, we met regularly to compare coding decisions, reflect on our posi-

tionalities, and negotiate shared interpretations. We then synthesized pattern-focused codes into conceptual themes, assigning labels that captured their underlying meaning. Representative quotations were selected to illustrate the breadth and depth of each theme, with attention to both typical and divergent cases.

Results

Our findings reveal four prominent themes of vulnerability experienced by the PR practitioners, encompassing struggles with technical, professional, psychological, and organizational aspects of GenAI adoption and implementation. These themes are not exclusive to each other but rather co-present a picture of the strategic interruptions PR practitioners are experiencing, imposed by GenAI.

Technical Vulnerability

Participants consistently express vulnerability to a lack of technical knowledge of GenAI usage. This vulnerability stems from the struggle to align research and training with the rapid pace of innovation, compounded by insufficient time and resources to master GenAI tools effectively. This results in a lack of ability to make informed adoption decisions. The vulnerability in technical knowledge is associated with inadequate experience and education in GenAI tools, information overload, and the inherent flaws in AI algorithms.

Lack of technical literacy emerged as a pervasive source of vulnerability. Participants voiced anxiety about their limited technical understanding, including those with extensive backgrounds in the technology industry: "*I think it's because people don't understand the tech, myself included, and I've worked in technology for years*" (P19). This admission from a seasoned practitioner underscores how complex and opaque GenAI appears to those familiar with other forms of technology and innovation. Several participants also worried about overreliance on GenAI in educational institutions. Such overreliance reflects the lack of a deep and critical understanding of AI's capabilities. This echoes the recent Muck Rack report (2025), which found that 75% of PR professionals believe the biggest risk AI tools pose to the field is overreliance on AI, preventing young professionals from learning basic skills. Participants stressed that students need to build foundational skills before leaning on GenAI. Recognizing experience and education disparities reflects a generational divide and a training gap. On one spectrum, older professionals may feel out of step with new tools. At the other end, newcomers risk bypassing foundational learning by adopting GenAI tools too early, lacking the necessary base to evaluate for expertise and quality control. Using it without an underlying base risks undermining competence. P26 encapsulated this notion:
"AI is a really dangerous tool in education, because school is when you learn the concepts, the basics, and you build those skills, and then when you're in your job, you know you can rely on AI to help, but at least you have that core background."

Another layer of technical vulnerability was the sheer volume of GenAI tools and resources. The abundance of platforms, plug-ins, and best-practice guides left practitioners unsure as to where to begin. The overwhelming amount of AI information can be intimidating, as a few participants confessed. Such overload fosters a sense of paralysis with no clear roadmap, resulting in practitioners delaying adoption or experimenting inconsistently, thereby exacerbating feelings of inadequacy. It is a sensation of being caught in a torrent of innovation without a compass. Although practitioners recognize that mastery requires time and experimentation, the rapid pace of change and limited time capacity hinder their ability to prioritize and plan their learning journeys.

Profession-related Vulnerability

Prevailing concerns over job displacement, especially at the entry level, and the loss of previously valuable skills, were commonly discussed among participants. Practitioners felt the need to renegotiate professional boundaries while grappling with added legal responsibilities that were not previously within their role scope. A deepened fear of some participants was the fear of losing core competencies. A few participants described a creeping reliance on GenAI for tasks such as writing, which eroded their confidence in their abilities. One participant correlated AI to the developed attachment to having their phone, noting that inevitably, AI will feel like "*second nature*" and lead to "*an auto-reliance.*" One participant also noted the *frustration* of reading younger professionals' cover letters that seem "*really AI*," characterized by content that deviates from a typical human writing style, thereby eroding the profession's foundational 'human element.' The participant expressed self-acceptance based on this notion. He mentioned that as AI integration becomes more prevalent, particularly as younger generations begin engaging with the tools when they are still developing foundational skills, it will be a part of *"how we operate as a society moving forward"* (P22). A younger participant admitted she had to step back from GenAI usage shortly after transitioning from an educational institution to a workplace environment due to the concern of "I don't know how to write anymore." (P29)

This reflects both a professional struggle and foreshadows a generational shift. As younger practitioners grow up with GenAI tools and messaging, they risk fully developing the craft of writing, editing, and storytelling that has long defined PR expertise. In doing so, practitioners combat the consequences and potential of overreliance, but also recognize that repetitive tasks typically built into daily work will likely be sacrificed to automation. Indeed, professional development takes time to cultivate. However, reliance on AI reduces young professionals' room for skill development or improvement, as they are now being thrown into the fast-paced, AI-enabled productivity mode. Ultimately, the potential of practitioners hollowing out their skillsets raises questions about how the profession will maintain its distinctive competencies in a GenAI-mediated environment.

Another professional vulnerability concerns disclosure. Practitioners wrestled with whether to reveal their use of GenAI and how such action might affect perceptions of authenticity and value. One participant chose not to disclose because they assumed it was "*so obvious*" the content was AI-generated, wondering instead if disclosures need to include "*this is an original design*" to get appropriate credit for human-crafted work. This compelling need to differentiate original or 'GenAI-free' work suggests that the profession is renegotiating norms around authorship and credit. Lack of clear guidelines about disclosure compounds the vulnerability, leaving practitioners to balance transparency against fears of being dismissed as "*cheating*" or undervalued if GenAI involvement is known.

Furthermore, when professionals acquire some technical proficiency, they remain wary of GenAI's limitations and unintended consequences. One participant reflected on a workplace coping strategy: office humor. Professionals can benefit greatly from the technology; however, feeding the tool their wisdom is a tradeoff to improve its capabilities. Ultimately, professionals foresee GenAI interactions as a contribution to their "*own eventual demise.*" Yet, beneath the humor lies a serious tension on the diminished value of their profession. Practitioners are fascinated by GenAI's capabilities, while at the same time, anxious about the tools' flaws and future implications.

GenAI challenges one of PR's traditional core competencies, content creation, by enabling

non-PR professionals to produce communication materials at scale. While PR expertise still matters, the profession must guard against role encroachment and redefine its unique value proposition around strategy, judgment, and relationship-building. One participant recounted how they "*almost felt threatened*" by another professional outside of the communications field attempting to generate content traditionally produced by the strategic communicator to alleviate the communicator's workload burden. The participant described this emotion from the underlying awareness of imbalanced standards of practice, wherein the definition of "*producing something acceptable*" is subjective. This anecdote illustrates how GenAI tools democratize content creation, but also raise stakes for PR practitioners: if non-specialists can craft messages quickly with GenAI, what unique value do strategic communicators offer? Such vulnerability arises from GenAI's capabilities, as well as how it empowers others to encroach on PR's domain.

Psychological Vulnerability

Beyond skill and role concerns, practitioners experience emotional and cognitive vulnerabilities as they adapt to the GenAI-enabled workplace. At an emotional level, many practitioners' ambivalence toward GenAI crystallized into interlocking emotions like frustration, guilt, sadness, and fear. Frustration surfaces when expectations outpace guidance. Feeling "discredited" captures grief and anger at evaluative regimes, prizing volume and speed over deliberation and authorship. In such climates, ambiguous norms (e.g., disclosure practices) and shifting quality benchmarks produce chronic friction between technological overload and misaligned values. Lastly, guilt captures the moral tension between writing effectively and authorship. Guilt emerges when practitioners perceive improved outcomes, while ownership, originality, or learning may dwindle. It also arises when GenAI's confidence outstrips its correctness, making practitioners feel complicit in shortcuts that could dull judgment.

Practitioners mourn the displacement of human-made work and the fading recognition of human touch: "*it makes a lot of people feel discredited*" (P27). Another participant described this transition simply as "*sad,*" concisely acknowledging how efficiency gains can carry a psychological cost in lost meaning and mastery. Discussions about fears often concentrated on speed, control, and misuse, which connect to the technological aspect of the vulnerability. Practitioners worry that technology is outpacing appropriate integration, which may place tools in the "*right or wrong hands,*" amplifying reputational and ethical risks. Existential anxiety underpins fear: if tools can mimic judgment and voice, what remains distinctly human in the communicator's role? Heightened competition between agencies, peers, clients, and even the tools themselves amplifies social comparison and career uncertainty. What remains is a felt loss of control as standards seem to shift, authorship feels diluted, and one's value in the work feels more temporary and fragile. Practitioners also grappled with the loss of pride and satisfaction that comes from creating work manually. P23, a well-experienced professional, shared: "*I'm going to pick whatever is most effective every time. But I won't have the same satisfaction of having written it myself.*"

While GenAI outputs might yield more successful outcomes, the sacrifice of entirely human-crafted work fails to deliver the personal gratification of solving an issue from scratch. This trade-off between efficiency and self-worth undermines their sense of agency. For practitioners who are grounded in codes of ethics and professional standards, the ambiguous status of AI-generated content becomes a source of cognitive strain and moral unease. For example, one participant described feeling unease and even plagiarism-related stress when relying on AI to

draft content. Such discomfort reflects broader debates about originality, authorship, and the moral boundaries of GenAI use.

Organizational

Finally, vulnerability manifests through the organizational environment. Policies, culture, and leadership shape how practitioners engage with GenAI. At the organizational level, the absence of clear policies and conversations exacerbates vulnerability. In some instances, participants noted concerns regarding the lack of relatability and tangible application when guidelines are too abstract or generalized. On the other hand, if guidelines are too specific or tunneled to select parties, gaps remain in how a practitioner should follow or address their GenAI use. Without formal direction, practitioners must rely on personal judgment or informal norms, which are highly subjective and vary widely. Organizational culture thus shapes vulnerability by either providing structure and support or leaving employees to navigate GenAI adoption alone.

Organizational structure also impacts vulnerability experiences. Compared to larger corporations or global agencies, individuals from smaller teams may lack a benchmark for how others are using GenAI, creating isolation and reducing opportunities for normalizing the conversation. Limited engagement with other practitioners using such tools raises questions about what is considered 'appropriate' engagement, if at all, and the degree to which GenAI is capable of enhancing productivity.

"I still feel like it's cheating. But is that? Am I doing that, and is it slowing down my productivity compared to my colleagues? I'm a department of one here. So is it? Is that what my colleagues would be doing, and I'm just not falling in line with the times?" (P25)

In larger organizations, resources and standardized practices may mitigate some vulnerabilities, while in smaller organizations, the burden of experimentation and policy development falls on a single or a few individuals. Productivity might be an illusion despite it being what GenAI is marketed for, because the extra time spent learning and experimenting with AI tools, along with the costs of subscription services, adds more pressure and vulnerability.

Leadership and advocacy emerged as central to how practitioners perceive and adopt GenAI. In one case, a participant emphasized the importance of guidance from senior leadership, such as a chief information officer, while also noting organizational hesitation due to the sensitivity of working with medical information. Another participant described stepping into an informal advocacy role, developing training sessions for colleagues, and gradually becoming the go-to resource for AI use within the team. These accounts highlight how, in the absence of formal direction, professionals either wait for leadership to provide clarity or assume responsibility themselves. Without designated advocates, knowledge sharing tends to occur in an ad hoc manner, leaving many practitioners to navigate tools and practices on their own. The presence or absence of advocacy thus plays a decisive role in shaping whether practitioners feel empowered or vulnerable in engaging with GenAI.

Discussion

Despite the hype surrounding GenAI, this technology has also introduced significant disruptions into PR professionals' daily work. This study sheds light on the hidden dark side of GenAI by centering on the vulnerabilities practitioners experience as they adopt and engage with this technology. Findings from 29 interviews reveal four key areas of vulnerability. Together, these themes depict vulnerabilities that arise not as a single issue but as a complex weave of technical gaps, professional anxieties, emotional struggles, and organizational ambiguities,

which illustrate the multifaceted challenges PR professionals face as they integrate GenAI into their work.

This research contributes to ongoing discussions of AI in public relations by shifting the focus from a utility-driven perspective (Yue et al., 2024) to a human-centered view of practitioners' lived experiences. This perspective aligns with the ethic of care theory, underscoring that frontline practitioners are not only key drivers of the field's development but also actors whose well-being must be safeguarded. The vulnerabilities revealed in this study further highlight new challenges to practitioners' well-being brought about by emerging technologies, challenges that may intensify the already well-documented psychological strain in PR (Shen & Jiang, 2013). Our findings also call for a critical examination of the human-technology relationship as a central dimension of relationship management when AI becomes embedded in PR workflows and interwoven with organizational dynamics (Uysal & Deng, 2015).

In addition, this study advances the conceptualization of vulnerability, extending broader vulnerability scholarship (e.g., Bijker et al., 2014). We argue that PR professionals' vulnerability in the context of GenAI is relational, shaped by the intersection of technical barriers, organizational environments, professional identities, and personal emotions. Addressing AI-related challenges, therefore, requires more than technical solutions; it demands recognition of the complex relational dynamics at play. Finally, our findings caution that personal moral questions surrounding GenAI are closely tied to issues of identity, professionalism, and self-efficacy for PR practitioners. It also evokes negative emotions such as sadness, frustration, and guilt, further compounding the sense of vulnerability practitioners experience in navigating GenAI. If left unaddressed, these unresolved tensions risk escalating into fear, avoidance, or even disengagement from work. Vulnerability rooted in personal moral struggles reinforces the urgency of updating and expanding ethical guidelines for GenAI. Such guidelines must move beyond abstract principles to address practical realities, ensuring that PR ethics becomes more actionable and enforceable in the AI era. Ethics, in this sense, can serve as a bridge between public relations theory and practice.

Practically, the findings highlight the urgent need for stronger education and training around GenAI in public relations. Without thoughtful scaffolding in learning, young professionals face heightened risks of AI overreliance and long-term skill erosion. Equally crucial is an organizational culture that normalizes transparent AI use, open error-reporting, and reflective pauses that reward judgment and integrity in performance reviews. Visible internal advocates (e.g., trained "responsible AI leaders," cross-functional subject-matter expert groups) could be helpful in translating policy into daily workflow, maintaining living playbooks, and coordinating recurring training. Inclusive spaces that encourage open conversations around current use practices and ethical dilemmas would also help teams to co-create context-relevant guidelines that reflect the diversity of work across the organization, especially in high-stakes industries.

This research has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited in terms of geography, organizational type, and industry diversity. As GenAI becomes increasingly adopted by both in-house and agency PR professionals, as well as in nonprofit and public sector contexts, future studies should employ larger-scale surveys across industries, regions, and career stages to assess the generalizability of these findings. Second, the data rely on practitioners' self-perceptions, which may be shaped by personal bias, impression management, or varying levels of expertise with GenAI. Third, given the rapidly evolving nature of this tech-

nology, interviews offer only a snapshot in time. Longitudinal and field studies would provide a more dynamic and accurate understanding of how PR professionals' experiences and vulnerabilities shift as GenAI becomes more embedded in practice. Finally, building on the vulnerabilities identified in this study, future research and practice should consider developing validated scales to systematically measure these vulnerabilities and examine both their impacts on practitioners and the effectiveness of potential interventions.

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From Tools to Colleagues? The Role of Communicative AI in Corporate Communication

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Abstract

The rapid rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming corporate communication. While industry debates often stress efficiency and productivity, academic research highlights relational, ethical, and epistemological implications. This conceptual paper develops a framework for understanding communicative AI through the lens of social constructivism. From this perspective, communicative AI is not merely a technical tool but a hybrid actor that co-constructs organizational realities, narratives, and relationships. The paper identifies three interrelated dimensions—interactional, organizational, and societal—through which communicative AI reshapes communication practices. These dimensions serve as heuristics for analyzing how professionals negotiate authorship and authenticity, how organizations institutionalize responsibility, and how public discourses shape legitimacy. While conceptual in nature, the paper provides the theoretical foundation for the author's doctoral research, which will empirically examine these dynamics in organizational contexts. The contribution lies in reframing corporate communication to include non-human communicators and in demonstrating the relevance of social constructivism for analyzing technological transformation.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is widely regarded as one of the most transformative technologies of the 21st century. Since the release of ChatGPT in 2022, generative AI has become integrated not only into everyday life but also into organizational contexts, including corporate communication (Banholzer, Quest, & Rossbach, 2023). AI has evolved beyond its role as a technical tool and has become an integral part of communication practices within organizations. The emergence of large language models (LLMs) and other generative tools has initiated a profound shift in how organizations communicate with internal and external stakeholders (Stieglitz & Wiencierz, 2022; Hepp et al., 2022).

Understanding AI's communicative capabilities is therefore essential for examining how organizations engage stakeholders, manage relationships, and construct legitimacy (Weller & Lock, 2024). These systems increasingly assume tasks traditionally performed by humans (Weller & Lock, 2024). While professional discourse tends to highlight efficiency and productivity, scholarly work emphasizes more profound relational, ethical, and epistemological transformations (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Zerfass et al., 2024; Buhmann & Gregory, 2023).

In this context, the notion of communicative AI has gained importance. It examines the formation of relationships between humans and machines and the redefinition of social roles in these interactions. Research suggests that AI technologies are not merely tools but can be understood as active participants in communication processes (Hepp et al., 2023). By embodying human-like characteristics and intentions, AI becomes an integral part of the social construction of communication, influencing the meanings, identities, and relationships that shape our world.

The integration of AI into corporate communication also introduces significant complexities and ethical challenges. Scholars point to risks of discrimination, bias, and the reinforcement of power structures (Buhmann & White, 2022; Crawford, 2021). Moreover, AI systems themselves are now framed as communicators, generating narratives and societal discourses that escape organizational control (Banholzer & Siebert, 2021). This raises pressing questions of accountability, authenticity, and legitimacy.

Against this background, this paper develops a conceptual framework for analyzing communicative AI. While theoretical reflections on AI and communication have proliferated, empirical research in corporate communication remains scarce- leading some scholars to warn that the field is "sleepwalking into AI" (Gregory & Virmani, 2020).

This paper responds to this research gap by approaching communicative AI from the perspective of social constructivism (Knoblauch & Pfadenhauer, 2023). The central research question is:
What conceptual lenses are needed to understand communicative AI in corporate communication, and how does social constructivism contribute to this understanding?

The aim is to contribute to a deeper understanding of how communicative AI is integrated into organizational communication, how hybrid forms of agency emerge, and how accountability is negotiated. While this paper is conceptual in nature, it is embedded in a larger PhD project that will investigate these questions empirically. The conceptual framework outlined here thus serves as a foundation for future research into how communication professionals interact and work with communicative AI in organizational contexts.

Historical Perspectives on the Automation of Communication

The automation of communication is not a novel phenomenon. Its history can be traced back to cybernetics and early media theory in the 20th century. Cybernetic approaches in the 1940s and 1970s emphasized information as feedback loops, highlighting technical control mechanisms while sidelining meaning (Turner, 2006). This techno-centric perspective contrasted with sociological and communication theories that foregrounded the interpretive and relational dimensions of communication (Baecker, 1997).
This historical context highlights a three-stage evolution in the study of digital communication within media and communication studies (Hepp et.al. 2023). Media and communication studies subsequently turned to computer-mediated communication (CMC) to explore how digital technologies mediate social relationships (Chesebro & Bonsall, 1989; Jones, 1998). This first stage of inquiry highlighted how computers reshaped interpersonal communication and facilitated online communities. This stage also included investigations into the emerging information society (Castells, 2000; Mattelart, 2003).
The second stage focused on *datafication*. As digital traces became central to media infrastructures, critical data studies (e.g. Burns et al., 2019; Dalton & Thatcher, 2014; Iliadis & Russo, 2016; Kitchin, 2014) emerged, interrogating how big

data and algorithmic governance transformed communication and society (Dalton & Thatcher, 2014; van Dijck, 2014; Crawford, 2021). Automation here referred less to communication as interaction than to data processing as a condition for power.

The current third stage centers on *communicative automation*. Human–machine communication research has institutionalized this shift, examining machines as communicators rather than as media (Fortunati & Edwards, 2020; Guzman, 2018). Automated journalism (Carlson, 2015), social bots (Gehl & Bakardjieva, 2016), and conversational agents highlight how communication systems now generate meaning. As Hepp et al. (2023) argue, communicative AI marks a qualitative transformation: machines not only facilitate but co-constitute communication.

The concepts of digitization, datafication, and algorithmization are key to understanding the emergence and necessity of automated communication processes. The technical aspects of automation in this context vary widely, from basic scripts with predetermined steps, which are the foundation of many social bots (Veale & Cook, 2018), to more complex machine learning systems (Heuer et al., 2021). Unlike automation in fields like manufacturing, where robots physically build products, communication automation revolves around digital traces generated through datafication. These digital traces have an inherent but more opaque materiality compared to the tangible nature of physical (Burrell, 2016). This difference in materiality has significant implications for various types of automated communication processes (Esposito, 2017) across multiple disciplines and in practical applications.

These processes are influenced by the globalized digital infrastructure of today's automated communication systems (Crawford, 2021). The evolution of these stages signifies more than just increasing interest or hype; it reflects a fundamental shift in the way communication is conceptualized and executed in the digital era. Hepp et al. (2023) emphasize that the study of communication automation needs to be approached with a comprehensive perspective, considering the unique materiality of digital traces and the complexities of globalized digital infrastructures (Crawford, 2021). Hepp and Hasebrink (2022) also note a high density of innovation in this area due to the rapid developments of recent years. Furthermore, media are no longer solely instruments of communication, but also generators of data. The challenge is to recognize the diversity of media and their role in social construction. This broad view is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the nuances and implications of communication automation in contemporary society.

For corporate communication, this historical trajectory implies that communicative AI cannot be reduced to an operational tool. It is part of a longer transformation in which non-human actors increasingly participate in meaning-making, thereby challenging the field's traditional human-centered assumptions.

Communicative AI as a Sensitizing Concept

The term "artificial intelligence" (AI) encompasses a range of computer technologies that seek to emulate human intelligence. These include a spectrum of systems, from basic automation to advanced machine learning and deep learning capabilities (Wang, 2019; Buhmann & Gregory, 2023). Deep learning has gained considerable attention in recent decades, allowing computers to refine their performance by identifying and correcting errors autonomously. As deep learning techniques advanced, they paved the way for developing even more complex models, such as large language models (LLMs). The most well-known tool of this evolution is ChatGPT (Ope-

nAI), which has gained widespread use since November 2022. The models differ from other AI models because they generate new data in the form of text, images, videos, or audio (Minaee et al., 2024). LLMs represent a significant technological advance and are rapidly changing the way we communicate, illustrate, and create (Alto, 2023; Minaee et al., 2024).

The evolution signifies more than just a hype; it reflects a fundamental shift in (digital) communication. Today's automated communication systems (like chatbots) in communication fields like corporate communications transform tasks like writing and visualization, as well as communication practices. In this context, 'communicative AI' is a pivotal 'sensitizing concept'. Several conceptual proposals have already emerged, including those by Andrejevic (2020), Hepp (2020), Gambino et al. (2020), and Seyfert (2023), contributing to the establishment of 'communicative AI' as a recognized term in the international research community.

The term "communicative AI" encompasses a diverse range of technologies designed for communicative purposes. Hepp et al. (2023: 48) define it as automation (1) designed for communication, (2) embedded in digital infrastructures, and (3) entangled with human practices. Unlike earlier automation, communicative AI produces new communicative outputs rather than merely transmitting human messages (Hepp et al., 2023). The field of communicative AI challenges the traditional human-centered communication model, introducing new issues related to agency and authenticity, underpinning an interdisciplinary research field. These insights position communicative AI as a sensitizing concept (Blumer, 1954). It directs scholarly attention to the meanings, practices, and figurations that emerge when humans and machines interact in a communicative manner.

Theoretical Background

Social Constructionism as theoretical lens

In the evolution of computer-mediated communication, media and communication studies initially focused on how individuals interact with automated systems (Hepp et al., 2023) and what meaning is created between humans and machines (Guzmann, 2018). It is suggested that one should broaden the perspective when analysing automated communication. The concept of communicative AI goes far beyond simple human-machine interactions. Each form of communication (public, interpersonal, group) emerges in specific social domains and has far-reaching impacts on society. It is crucial to expand this perspective to understand when and how meanings are co-created between humans and machines (Guzman, 2018).

The theory of communicative constructionism adopts a societal communication perspective on reality construction and is rooted in social constructionism theories (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This theory suggests a paradigm shift—from viewing communication as a mere channel for information transmission to recognizing it as a fundamental mechanism in constructing social reality. Current research in sociology of knowledge emphasizes the role of social communication processes, where communicative action becomes central to social phenomena (Knoblauch & Pfadenhauer, 2023).

Social constructionism is particularly relevant when examining the role of communicative AI in modern communication practices, as it focuses on how social meanings, identities, and the role of AI are constructed and integrated into these processes. Within this perspective, AI technologies are not merely seen as tools but as active participants in the co-construction of communication. They influence the interaction and perception of communication processes, shaping how social realities and identities are

formed (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Hepp & Görland, 2024). The importance of communication in shaping social reality has become increasingly pronounced with the ongoing digitalization and proliferation of media. Communication extends beyond mere information transfer; it is central for constructing identities, relationships, society, and reality (Keller et al., 2020, p. 13). Moreover, communication represents the empirically observable aspect of the social (ibid, p. 11).

Agency within the context of communicative AI

The debate on the agency of communicative AI is shaped by empirical and conceptual ambiguity (Hepp & Görland, 2024). This ambiguity impacts theoretical perspectives and practical considerations regarding how communicative AI influences social dynamics, identity, and the construction of reality. This shift challenges traditional communication theories, which typically focus on human-to-human interactions. In this paper, communicative AI is conceptualized as a sensitizing concept to guide the exploration of agency in human-machine dynamics.

Constructivist theories, such as social phenomenology and social constructionism, posit that machines lack intrinsic agency and are instead understood as the 'objectification' of human intentions (Knoblauch, 2020, p.118; Pfadenhauer, 2015, p.144). The agency attributed to these machines is a projection of the expectations of human actors (Knoblauch, 2020; Lindemann et al., 2016; Muhle, 2016). This perspective posits that the agency of a machine is not an inherent characteristic of the machine itself but is constructed by human expectations, norms, and power dynamics into which AI is embedded. The concept of 'supra-individual agency' expands this view by linking agency to collective entities like organizations and social structures (Schimank, 2010). Giddens' structuration theory (1984) and Foucauldian discursive practices emphasize how societal norms and power relations shape the agency reflected by AI systems, reinforcing existing structures.

New materialism theories consider shared agency between humans and machines (Knoblauch & Pfadenhauer, 2023) and introduce the concept of hybrid agency, where humans and machines co-create agency (Rammert, 2007). From this perspective, communicative AI is viewed as an active participant in interaction, possessing its own form of agency that influences and shapes human actions.

The Figuration Approach synthesizes these perspectives by examining society as networks of interdependent actors (Elias, 1978). The works of Couldry and Hepp (2016), Hepp (2020), and Hepp and Hasebrink (2018) elaborate the concept of hybrid figurations, where human and machine actors co-create agency (Hepp et al., 2022, 2023). Such a hybrid agency emerges from the interplay of automated communication, challenging the boundaries between human and machine capabilities (Pfadenhauer & Lehmann, 2021) and refers to developing a 'supra-individual agency' (Schimank, 2010, p.327). In corporate settings, the automation of tasks, such as content creation by work bots, blurs the distinction between human and machine. The perceived capabilities of the technology play a crucial role in these experiences (Pfadenhauer & Lehmann, 2021). Studies on newsroom automation exemplify this phenomenon (Diakopoulos, 2019; Hepp & Loosen, 2023).

A crucial aspect of the theoretical background of this paper is the concept of agency. Within social constructionism, agency and intelligence of communicative AI are not inherent to AI but are shaped through social interactions, narratives, and cultural contexts. For example, in Western societies, AI systems are often anthropomorphized, aligning with the Computers Are Social Actors paradigm (CASA), where users treat machines as social actors (Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

As pointed out later in the literature review, AI is often embraced to enhance productivity and efficiency, leading to a more favourable attribution of agency to these systems (Hepp & Görland, 2024, p. 6). In East Asian cultures, such as Japan, AI is viewed more as an extension of human capabilities than an independent agent (Muhle, 2024).

This perspective lays the groundwork for examining the complexities of AI's role and illustrates how cultural and social contexts influence the perception and attribution of agency to AI systems. It highlights the importance of social constructionism in understanding these dynamics.

Literature Review

Corporate Communication in the Age of AI

In recent years, the rapid advancement of digitalization has profoundly changed the scope and practices of corporate communication. Organizations increasingly rely on data-driven insights, media monitoring, and real-time feedback to engage stakeholders in more personalized and interactive ways (Stieglitz & Wiencierz, 2022; Hancock et al., 2020). The introduction of artificial intelligence represents a further step in this trajectory. AI extends communication capacities by supporting not only routine operational tasks but also strategic decision-making. Scholars highlight how communicative AI contributes to content production, issue monitoring, and organizational listening, thereby linking communication departments more closely with top management functions (Buhmann & White, 2022; Weller & Lock, 2024).

Despite these opportunities, the academic debate emphasizes that the integration of AI cannot be reduced to efficiency gains. On the one hand, AI enables large-scale data analysis and message personalization at unprecedented speed, fostering new forms of engagement and relationship management (Yue et al., 2024). On the other hand, AI also raises concerns about authenticity, trust, and the erosion of organizational identity (Buhmann & Gregory, 2023). This dual potential situates AI as both a promise and a challenge for corporate communication. Current studies, therefore, call for frameworks that go beyond technical considerations and address relational, ethical, and epistemological questions (Banholzer & Siebert, 2021).

Overall, the literature portrays AI as a transformative influence that shifts corporate communication from a predominantly symbolic function to a more data-intensive and strategic role. However, empirical research on this transformation remains limited. While surveys such as the European Communication Monitor provide important trend data (Zerfass et al., 2024), empirical studies on how communication professionals interact with AI in practice are still scarce. This research gap highlights the need for further investigation into how communicative AI influences the development of skills, roles, and professional identities within organizational contexts.

Communicative AI Tools in Corporate Communications

Research on communicative AI tools has developed along several strands, with a primary focus on conversational agents, automated content generation, and monitoring systems. Early work examined chatbots as a means of simulating human conversation through natural language processing. Studies found that chatbots improve response times and customer satisfaction and can enhance perceptions of organizational responsiveness (Liu & Wei, 2019; Zhou, Men, & Tsai, 2023). More recent studies demonstrate that chatbots with a social presence and conversational tone can strengthen organizational–public relationships by conveying warmth and accessibility (Men et al., 2022). These findings suggest that communicative AI tools are not only operational aids but also shape stakeholders' perceptions of organizational character.

Hepp et al. (2020) divided "communicative robots" into three main types: Artificial Companions (e.g., Alexa, Siri) serve as digital interfaces for tasks like information retrieval through natural language processing; Social Bots on social media to engage users and shape narratives, as seen in political campaigns (Ferrara et al., 2016); and Work Bots used in fields like corporate communication and journalism drive automation in content creation. The rise of Work Bots—particularly generative AI models such as OpenAI's ChatGPT—marks a qualitative shift by enabling machines to produce original content rather than merely reproducing human inputs (Fekade et al., 2024).

Industry surveys confirm the rapid diffusion of such tools. The European Communication Monitor (2024/2025) reports that the three most common applications of generative AI in communication departments are content creation, idea generation, and social media monitoring. Similarly, Davis + Gilbert LLP (2023) found that nearly half of U.S. firms adopting generative AI expect revenue growth, indicating strong managerial expectations. Empirical case studies also illustrate the practical benefits of generative AI for drafting press releases, preparing speeches, or producing social media content (Fekade et al., 2024).

At the same time, scholarly assessments caution that empirical evidence remains fragmented and tends to concentrate on specific tools such as chatbots. While there is a growing body of literature on operational effects, systematic research on strategic applications—such as AI-supported issue management, scenario planning, or organizational listening—remains scarce (Syvänen & Valentini, 2020; Buhmann & Gregory, 2023). Furthermore, most studies focus on user perceptions or performance metrics, while questions of organizational integration, professional autonomy, and accountability are rarely addressed. This lack of cumulative evidence underscores the need for empirical research that examines communicative AI as an integral part of organizational communication practices, rather than as isolated tools.

Societal Risks and ethical challenges of communicative AI

Alongside opportunities, the literature emphasizes a wide range of societal risks and ethical challenges associated with communicative AI. These include concerns about bias, discrimination, surveillance, and the reinforcement of existing power structures (Crawford, 2021; Buhmann & White, 2022). As AI systems operate on large datasets, they are designed to reproduce societal inequalities embedded in the training data. Scholars warn that such biases may undermine organizational credibility and stakeholder trust if not carefully managed (Codina, Ufarte-Ruiz, & Borden, 2024).

Professional surveys reveal significant uncertainty within the field. While most communication practitioners expect AI to transform their profession, many feel underprepared to adopt these technologies (Zerfass, Hagelstein, & Tench, 2020; Neill et al., 2024). This gap has been described as a form of "third-person effect," where professionals acknowledge AI's general impact on the industry but downplay its relevance to their own roles (Buhmann & White, 2022). Moreover, concerns about job loss, deprofessionalisation, and income reduction contribute to anxieties in the communication sector (Zerfass, Hagelstein, & Tench, 2020).

Buhmann and White (2022) distinguish three categories of ethical concerns in AI usage: evidence concerns (reliability and validity of data), outcome concerns (consequences of AI-based decisions), and epistemic concerns (how knowledge is constructed through AI). These categories provide a valuable framework for analyzing the challenges communication professionals face in ensuring transparency, accountability,

and fairness. At the organizational level, ethical guidelines increasingly call for communicators to critically assess AI practices and align them with societal expectations. For example, the Austrian PR Ethics Council (2023) issued recommendations emphasizing transparency, data sensitivity, and awareness of algorithmic bias.

Despite such initiatives, empirical research shows that many organizations remain at an early stage of AI integration and lack systematic policies for responsible use (Fekade et al., 2024). Scholars argue that communicators must not only acquire technical literacy but also engage with broader societal debates about AI to safeguard organizational legitimacy (Valin & Gregory, 2020). This requires communication departments to position themselves as mediators between technological possibilities, ethical demands, and stakeholder expectations.

In summary, the literature highlights that communicative AI presents both opportunities and risks for corporate communication. While AI promises efficiency and personalization, it also challenges professional norms, raises ethical dilemmas, and introduces new vulnerabilities in organizational–stakeholder relationships. The current state of research underscores the need for further empirical studies that investigate how communication professionals navigate these tensions in practice.

Conceptual Framework and Research Outlook

Building on the historical and theoretical foundations outlined above, this section develops a conceptual framework that links communicative AI with the social constructivist tradition and outlines its relevance for future empirical research. Social constructivism, as formulated by Berger and Luckmann (1966) and further developed in sociology of knowledge traditions by scholars such as Pfadenhauer & Knoblauch (2023), stresses that social reality does not exist independently of human actors but is produced, stabilized, and negotiated through communicative processes. When applied to the case of communicative AI, this means that the meaning of AI within organizations is not given by its technical properties alone but emerges from how professionals interact with these systems, make sense of their outputs, and integrate them into organizational narratives.

From this point, a conceptual framework can be sketched along three interrelated dimensions. First, on the interactional level, communicative AI reshapes everyday practices of communication work. Professionals interact with AI tools by drafting, editing, and correcting messages, but also by narrating their own role vis-à-vis the machine. These micro-practices constitute the initial site where meanings about agency, authenticity, and authorship are negotiated.

Second, these practices are embedded in organizational contexts. Workflows, accountability structures, and governance mechanisms influence how communicative AI is positioned and what roles it can assume. For example, whether AI-generated content is published directly or requires human approval is not a purely technical matter but a social decision that reflects organizational expectations, norms, and power relations.

Third, organizations operate within broader societal discourses about AI. Public narratives about efficiency, bias, ethics, or innovation shape how communicative AI is perceived both inside and outside the organization. These discourses provide resources for legitimizing or contesting AI use and thus influence how organizations communicate about themselves and about their technology adoption.

These dimensions are not discrete layers but mutually constitutive. Organizational rules shape

interactional practices, and societal narratives influence both organizational strategies and professionals' sense-making. By adopting a social constructivist lens, the framework emphasizes that neither the role of AI nor its agency can be assumed a priori but must be understood as the outcome of ongoing communicative processes.

The purpose of outlining these areas is not to prescribe a fixed research program for the field but to situate the author's doctoral project. The dissertation will employ qualitative methodologies inspired by constructivist grounded theory to investigate these dimensions in depth. The research outlook is therefore exploratory and open-ended, signaling directions of inquiry that will guide the project while acknowledging that theoretical concepts, such as hybrid agency or communicative figurations, may be redefined in light of empirical findings.

Conclusion

This paper has conceptualized communicative AI in corporate communication through the theoretical lens of social constructivism. From this perspective, communicative AI is not a neutral technical instrument, but rather a hybrid actor that co-constructs organizational realities, narratives, and relationships. By participating in meaning-making processes, communicative AI challenges human-centered models of communication and introduces hybrid forms of agency, distributed accountability, and novel societal discourses.

The proposed conceptual framework highlights three interrelated dimensions—interactional, organizational, and societal—that structure the role of communicative AI. These dimensions provide a heuristic for examining how communication professionals engage with AI in their everyday practices, how organizations institutionalize responsibility and governance, and how broader public debates shape organizational legitimacy. In doing so, the framework sets the stage for future empirical research that will explore and refine these dimensions in practice. For communication studies, this reconceptualization expands the field to include non-human communicators, thereby opening new avenues for theorizing professional roles and practices. For sociology, it illustrates the continued relevance of social constructivism in analyzing technological transformations. It underscores how communicative processes remain central to the construction of social reality—even when mediated or co-produced by machines.

Recognizing this duality is essential for advancing theory, guiding empirical investigation, and informing responsible practice in corporate communication.

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Keywords

Communicative AI, Hybrid Agency, Corporate Communication, Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence and Art Marketing in Brand Communication: The Example of Refik Anadol

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence it is one of the frequently preferred current technologies due to its benefits such as data analysis, automation, speed, efficiency, personalisation, innovative product and service delivery. Artificial intelligence technologies, initially used mainly in analytical fields such as logic and mathematics, have now managed to influence many disciplines. One of the disciplines affected by this technology is art. Although it is surprising that a field like art, with an abstract subject and a message that varies from person to person, should be affected by artificial intelligence, it is possible with today's technologies. The concept of art, which is called digital art and develops in parallel with technology, has reached a different dimension with artificial intelligence. With the development of digital art, classical art equipment such as brushes, paints and canvases have been replaced by technologies such as data, algorithms and artificial intelligence. This situation has naturally changed the way art is consumed. Digital art is notable for digital natives, who actively use online social networks and place technological developments at the centre of their lives. Brands are looking for ways to differentiate themselves from their competitors, reach their target audiences and connect with them emotionally. However, it is not easy to influence today's consumers, who have instant demands, are interested in technology, are indecisive and have low brand loyalty. This is where brands benefit from the power of art to communicate with their target audiences. In this way, brands seek to translate the intellectual, high and remarkable qualities of art into brand values. Today, many global and local brands benefit from the power of art in their communications. Examples of these communication activities include collaborations with artists, art sponsorships and brand-owned museums. The study highlights the brands' collaborations with world-renowned digital artist Refik Anadol. Refik Anadol uses algorithms and artificial intelligence to bring digital artworks to life. For Anadol, which aims to provide art lovers with a visual and emotional experience, technology is not just a tool, but a fundamental component of art. In 2014, Anadol founded Refik Anadol Studio (RAS) in Los Angeles, where he creates art works in partnership with creativity and artificial intelligence. In addition, the artist analyzed the data obtained from NASA through artificial intelligence and realized an exhibition called Machine Memories: Space. One of the artist's most striking works is the artificial intelligence installation he created on the exterior of the Walt Disney Concert Hall. Refik Anadol's artificial intelligence-based artistic works make a huge impact on a global scale and he collaborates with many brand artists. The artist collaborates with many brands around the world. This study draws attention to the partnerships between art and artificial intelligence in the communication activities of brands. The universe of the study includes collaborations between brands

and artificial intelligence-focused digital artists. The sample of the research is the collaboration of Bulgari and Turkish Airlines brands with Refik Anadol. The research is limited to these two brands. The reason for this is that Bulgari, as an Italian luxury brand, is a global brand that shapes fashion, and Turkish Airlines is in the Guinness World Record book as the airline that flies to the most countries in the world. Bulgari collaborated with Refik Anadol to celebrate the iconic Serpenti collection in 2021. Anadol created a three-dimensional artificial intelligence sculpture inspired by the brand's iconic Serpenti snake. The sculpture met art lovers in Piazza Duomo, in the centre of Milan. Turkish Airlines also established a business partnership with Refik Anadol in 2024. Inner Portrait, created by Refik Anadol for Turkish Airlines, uses artificial intelligence analysis to visualise the emotional data of passengers travelling abroad for the first time. The study carried out a content analysis using the case study method, which is a qualitative research method. Research shows that artificial intelligence is having a profound impact on the arts and that global brands are benefiting from the arts in their communication strategies. The research indicates that brands want to influence their target audiences and support their brand awareness by using artificial intelligence and art in their communication strategies. Whether artistic works created with artificial intelligence are as effective as classical works of art on the target audience may be the subject of further research. It can be investigated whether this method preferred by brands in their communication strategies is effective on the target audience.

Introduction

The advent of artificial intelligence has reached a level that cannot be ignored by people in the 21st century. Artificial intelligence, initially used in more technical and scientific fields has now found its place in daily life. Digitalisation and artificial intelligence have fundamentally changed both the speed and form of brand communication. Today's consumers have many options make quick decisions and are good with technology. In order to connect their target audience brands have used artificial intelligence in their communication strategies. Artificial intelligence helps create personalised messages to make people want to engage with a brand more, and be more loyal to the brand. (Vlačić et al., 2021). Art is another field that influences today's consumers who enjoy personalised experiences. It's not enough to give just information about products or services to consumer. Brands also should connect emotional relationship with costumers. Nowadays customers have big attention to emotional and unique expreinces. Brands cognizant of this trend increasingly integrate AI, digital technologies, and art into their product- and service-related communication strategies. AI-powered digital art can translate data into a visual language, turning lots of different sets of data into installations that use multiple senses. Brands can use AI-powered artwork to give their target audiences emotional experiences. This way the respect that art gets as a high/intellectual phenomenon can be transferred to the brand's reputation and visibility. This study aim to examine how brands strengthen their communication through AI-based digital art projects with the help of case study. The world famous digital artist Refik Anadol was specifically chosen fort he research. The reason why that Refik Anadol is famous for creating art using artificial intelligence-based.

The work is limited to Bvlgari Serpenti Metamorphosis and THY Inner Portrait, which are among contemporary collaborations by digital artist Refik Anadol. The reason why that these two brands were chosen that they are both world-renowned and have achieved success. With the help of these partnerships the discussion will focus on how value is generated in brand communication at the intersection of Artificial intelligence and art.

Artificial Intelligence and Marketing

Marketing is one of the fields that adapts most quickly to current improvements, which makes it a dynamic and ever-evolving phenomenon. It's not easy to consistently hold the attention of today's customers. There are plenty of options, which increases competition between brands. Therefore brands are not only capturing the attention of its target audience but also wanting establish an emotional bond with them. Technological developments have a significant impact on marketing strategies. Undoubtedly, customer expectations shape these strategies, which are, in turn, shaped by market trends. Artificial intelligence is currently at the heart of marketing strategies thanks to its ability to streamline daily processes and provide personalised experiences. Davenport, Guha, Grewal ve Bressgott indicates that: "Using AI-enabled analytics, firms then can predict what a customer is likely to buy, anticipate credit fraud before it happens, or deploy targeted digital advertising in real time" (2020, p.26). All of these are significant advantaceses for marketing targets. In addition, the authors have gave the specific example of Stitch Fix, a clothing and styling service that uses AI to determine the best clothing styles for each customer. Thanks to artificial intelligence technology, brands now have the opportunity to build close relationships with consumers interested in personalised products and services.

One of the advantages that artificial intelligence Technologies provide consumers with more insight into customer preferences. Many brands have started using artificial intelligence bots to provide customer service before and after sales, offering round-the-clock support. Thanks to artificial intelligence, error rates are decreasing and these bots can solve more complex problems than humans can (Hoyer et al., 2020). Thanks to artificial intelligence, organisations not only gain an advantage in customer service, but also have the opportunity to reduce costs by eliminating the need for human labour.

Artificial Intelligence and Art

Recently, artificial intelligence is no longer confined to analytical and technical fields. It is also being used in social, cultural and creative fields. Artificial intelligence has now begun to be used in many different cultural fields, from the visual arts to cinema, and from music to literature. Although the use of artificial intelligence in art is considered to be a recent phenomenon, it is actually not that new. The 1960s saw the production of algorithm-based drawings by pioneering figures such as Georg Nees and Frieder Nake. By the 2000s, the AARON programme, developed by Harold Cohen, had begun to generate a visual language based on specific rules derived from information. AARON and similar systems were more focused on gathering information and producing results based on that information. However, from the 2010s onwards, artificial intelligence systems that learn like humans began to emerge. As a result, artificial intelligence started producing works of art in the same way as humans.

Today, many artists and collectors are creating artworks using artificial intelligence, with this technology becoming increasingly sophisticated and accessible. The significant increase in the number of artificial intelligence applications and their accessibility compared to the beginning also has a significant impact on this situation. Especiallay today AI applications such as DALL-E (OpenAI), Midjourney, Stable Diffusion are frequently preferred for art production today. However, the growing use of artificial intelligence in art production has also sparked criticism and debate around issues such as intellectual property, artistic representation and distrust (Tang & Liu, 2025). One of the most prominent criticisms of AI art concerns the ambiguity over whether the human or the machine is the true creator of work.

Even though the production of art by artificial intelligence has sparked much debate, a groundbreaking event took place in 2018. At Christie's

Auction House in New York — widely regarded as one of the most important centres of the art world — Portrait of Edmond de Belamy, an AI-generated work, sold for $350,000 (Eileen Kinsella, 2018). This work, created by artificial intelligence, was put up for sale at an auction featuring pieces by renowned contemporary artists such as Jeff Koons, Banksy and Christo. It became the second most expensive piece at the auction. The most expensive piece was Andy Warhol's Myths (1981), one of the leading figures of the Pop Art movement. Although many people are sceptical about AI art, the fact that this work was featured in the same auction as contemporary artists at Christie's, one of the world's leading art authorities, demonstrates that the intersection of artificial intelligence and art has undeniably arrived.

The Intersection of Brand and Art

Brands want to stand out, reach their target audience and forge an emotional connection with them. Art which is one of the most important cultularal phenomenon has significant role in marketing target. Many brands have created a bridge between art and consumers, allowing people to engage with art in new and exciting ways. When the creative power of art combines with brands' marketing goals, the result is projects that are both aesthetically and strategically compelling. Such collaborations enable brands to transcend traditional advertising, establishing emotional connections, reaching different audiences and gaining prestige. Artists gain greater visibility through these partnerships and find opportunities to exhibit their work in different ways. Therefore brand–art collaborations transcend mere economic partnerships and evolve into cultural interactions.

The art elements presented alongside the marketed product, as a result of collaborations between brands and artists, elevate the brand's perceived quality and prestige (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). The high cultural cachet and intellect of art is being used by numerous brands to amplify their strategic narratives in the current landscape. Louis Vuitton which is most popular Luxury brand is just one example to prove this strategy. Art is not only a cultural detail but also a corporate idendtity for Louis Vuitton. The brand has a remarkable collaboration with artists, which has been recognised by many as one of its most notable features. A notable example of this is the Artycapucines series by Louis Vuitton. Since 2019, the brand has been reinterpreting its limited-edition Capucines bags with designs by contemporary artists, presenting them to fashion and art enthusiasts (Sotheby's, 2023). The brand has been collaborating with artists for a long time and also has its own museum in Paris, the Fondation Louis Vuitton, which was designed by Frank Gehry.

The Example of Refik Anadol

Refik Anadol is one of the world's most significant digital artists, whose work is characterised by it use of cutting-edge technology and innovative techniques to create stunnig visual effects. Artificial intelligence has had a significant impact on Refik Anadol's artistic life, influencing both his practice and his perspective. Refik Anadol was accepted into Google's Artists and Machine Intelligence (AMI) program in 2016, and thus began developing joint projects with artificial intelligence researchers. This holds an important place in Anadol's artistic career. Later he focused on machine learning and deep learning, laying the foundation for artistic works that would have a significant worldwide impact. Initially, the artist used artificial intelligence for data visualisation, but later began using it extensively for spatial installations and public art projects.

Refik Anadol founded the Refik Anadol Studio (RAS) in Los Angeles. This multidisciplinary art and design studio brings together architects, artists, data scientists and researchers to create AI-powered audiovisual experiences. Also The

Figure 1: Image from "Serpenti Metamorphosis by Refik Anadol – Chapter 2"

Note. From Bulgari, n.d. *Serpenti Metamorphosis by Refik Anadol – Chapter 2*. https://www.bulgari.com/en-int/stories/serpenti-metamorphosis-by-refik-anadol-chapter-2.html

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York has collaborated with Refik Anadol (MoMA, 2022-2023). Anadol created a generative installation that continuously transformed and reinterpreted modern art through machine learning, using artificial intelligence trained on more than 138,000 pieces of MoMA's collection data. This work showcased MoMA's commitment to digital and contemporary innovation, while also establishing Anadol as a pioneer in merging art, technology and data to create immersive cultural experiences.

One of Refik Anadol's most famous works is WDCH Dreams (2018). For this project, he used visuals created using AI on the Walt Disney Concert Hall. He also used almost 45 terabytes of data from the Los Angeles Philharmonic's digital archive to create the artwork. The exterior of the Walt Disney Concert Hall has been transformed into a visual and auditory installation by covering it with data sets that have been interpreted using artificial intelligence. In addition to this Refik Anadol has announced that he is opening Dataland, the world's first artificial intelligence museum. Scheduled to open in Los Angeles in 2025, Dataland will be a space where artificial intelligence and art converge permanently.

Bvlgari and Refik Anadol Colloboration Serpenti Metamorphosis

Italian luxury brand Bvlgari collaborated with Refik Anadol to celebrate the 75th anniversary of its iconic Serpenti collection in 2021. Anadol created an AI-based installation titled Serpenti Metamorphosis for the luxury jewellery brand Bvlgari, featuring flowers, snakes and nature data. his AI-based artwork was first exhibited in Milan's Piazza Duomo in 2021. It was then presented as a "second chapter" at London's Saatchi Gallery from November 25 to December 23, 2022, and moved to Madrid's Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum for its Serpenti celebrations in 2023.

The artist converted over 200 million images of nature, including 70 million real flowers, into machine algorithms to create this attractive three-dimensional data sculpture. It also used

Figure 2: Image from "Inner Portrait" collaboration

Note. From K. McInnis, 2024, *Refik Anadol on His Inner Portrait Collaboration with Turkish Airlines*, Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/kaitlynmcinnis/2024/07/22/refik-anadol-on-his-inner-portrait-collaboration-with-turkish-airlines/

old Bvlgari photos, sketches, and advertising featuring the Serpenti design. In this way, the Serpenti shape became part of the AI's training.

Anadol's studio trained deep learning algorithms, such as GANs (generative adversarial networks) and VQ-VAEs, using data sets. Music and soundscapes have been added to the data to create a multi-sensory experience.

At the opening in Milan, Bvlgari CEO Jean-Christophe Babin, artist Refik Anadol, and Chiara Ferragni, who has millions of followers on social media, were in attendance. Bvlgari CEO Babin stated, "We are honored to collaborate with a visionary artist like Refik Anadol to celebrate Serpenti, one of Bulgari's most iconic symbols, as part of our collaboration with Refik Anadol." (Artful Living, 2021). The combination of art, fashion and luxury brands generated significant media attention. Photos and videos of Refik Anadol, Chiara Ferragni, and the CEO were quickly shared on social media.

Turkish Airlines and Refik Anadol Collaboration

Turkish Airlines, which entered the Guinness World Records in 2024 as the airline flying to the most countries, also collaborated with Refik Anadol that same year. In the art project titled Inner Portrait, which brings together art and technology, the effects of traveling on human psychology are explored with the support of artificial intelligence. Istanbul's Atatürk Cultural Centre hosted a subsequent exhibition after it was shown at Art Basel.

The Inner Portrait is based on the first travel experiences of four people. These four individuals hail from a variety of countries and cultural backgrounds. It uses biological data such as heart rate, brain waves and skin response. The biological data collected during the journey has been transformed into an artistic production with the support of Refik Anadol and his team. Anadol then expanded the project, incorporating data from 220 individuals from around the

world. Refik Anadol uses AI algorithms to transform this data into colourful, moving sculptures. With this project implemented for THY, Anadol has brought together diversity and shared human emotions through a data sculpture created by artificial intelligence. Turkish Airlines has demonstrated its commitment to culture and innovation by collaborating with Refik Anadol (Turkish Airlines, 2024).

Conclusion

Global brands increasingly leverage AI-driven art in their communication strategies, recognizing its strong influence on contemporary culture and its potential to engage target audiences. Collaborations with AI artists not only enhance brand visibility but also generate significant impact across media and social media platforms, as illustrated by the cases of Bulgari and Turkish Airlines. Bulgari, which has 14.3 million followers on Instagram, shared its collaboration with Refik Anadol on January 10. The Reels video reached 258,000 views and 13,200 likes. Turkish Airlines, which has 2.7 million Instagram followers, shared Inner Portrait on November 28, 2024. That post received 21,100 likes and 563 comments.

Taken together, these engagement figures align with research indicating that AI strongly influences the arts. Global brands benefit from incorporating art into their communication strategies, and many now seek to shape target audiences and build awareness by combining AI and art. Reflecting this trend, global brands have recently shown heightened interest in artists who create with AI. Moreover, brand–artist collaborations generate a strong media impact—especially on social media—thereby increasing brand visibility.

Future research should examine whether AI-created artworks are as effective as traditional art in influencing target audiences. It should also test the practical effectiveness of this strategy within brand communication—assessing not only surface metrics (likes, comments, views) but also recall, attitude change, and purchase intention among the intended audience.

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Keywords

artificial intelligence, art, brand, brand communication

We are only Human: How Strategic Communicators can lead in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Introdtuction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is poised to disrupt our world through macroeconomic, social, and legal changes. As advancements are made in the field, AI is poised to set off on a collision course with the communications field. Ethical use, the spread of AI-created mis and disinformation, reputation management, trust, risk, and crisis management are emerging issues that intersect communications. This study examined how and to what extent strategic communicators can emerge as leaders in the age of AI. It identified the issues that intersect AI and communications, reviewed AI risks to organizations and the strategic communicator's role in mitigation, and examined whether the industry is ready to lead.

Research Problem and Hypothesis

The research questions are.

- RQ1: What are the emerging issues in AI, and how and to what extent do they impact the communications field?
- RQ2: How and to what extent can strategic communicators contribute to AI leadership and help mitigate organizational risks?
- RQ3: How and to what extent are strategic communicators prepared to upskill in AI and step into an organizational AI leadership role?

The hypotheses tested are:

- **H1**: *AI issues important to organizational leaders intersect with the areas of expertise strategic communicators provide.*
- **H10**: *AI issues important to organizational leaders do not intersect with the areas of expertise strategic communicators provide.*
- **H2**: *Strategic communicators have the skills and competencies to be strategic counsellors at the AI decision-making table.*
- **H20**: *Strategic communicators do not have the skills and competencies to be strategic counsellors at the AI decision-making table.*

Literature Review

The AI Landscape

From public relations scholarship, Smith and Waddington (2023) defined AI as:

The simulation of human intelligence in machines that are designed to think and act like humans. AI is achieved through developing algorithms and computer programs that can perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and language translation. (p. 6)

Recent advances in AI were made possible due to the development of greater computing power and vast amounts of public data, which are used to train AI. The AI industry is predicted to expand by a multitude of 20, from an estimated

market size of 100 billion U.S. dollars in 2023 to almost two trillion U.S. dollars (Thormundsson, 2023). More than 6000 tools have been identified as potential applications for the fields of marketing and communication (Smith & Waddington, 2023; Valin, 2018).

The risks to humanity posed by AI have been well documented. An open letter organized by Future of Life Institute signed by notable technology leaders asked for a stoppage in large-scale AI research projects to slow the AI arms race ("Pause Giant AI Experiments," 2023). Ethicists such as Melanie Mitchell and Timnit Gebru argued that the petition distracts from the real issues AI has created, which include biases, data safety, and misuse (Coldewey, 2023). Another risk is the potential for AI to drastically change the labour market through automation and job loss (*Generative AI Could Raise Global GDP by 7%*, 2023).

As AI is trained on large data sets, they may contain biases which would impact their outputs and recommendations. If critical decisions, such as those involving health, legal, warfare or financial decisions, are based on flawed and biased AI systems, then a cascade of harmful outcomes will descend on humans, particularly those who are underprivileged (O'Neil, 2017). AI may not always perform the way its human programmers and users expect it to (W. Xu et al., 2023). The lack of transparency in how some AI models function has been referred to as a black box problem, reducing human trust in AI (von Eschenbach, 2021). Other ethical issues related to AI include questions about copyright, data privacy and security.

AI has been touted as a panacea for the worst and most complex of humankind's problems, such as world hunger and climate change (Gates, 2023). For organizations, AI may provide a competitive advantage through increased productivity, better data analytics, and the potential to strengthen stakeholder relationships through more meaningful engagement.

Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and Human-AI Relationship

HCI is a multidiscipline school of research that studies how people engage with computers and computer technology (Waddell et al., 2015). How individuals interact with computers can impact their behaviour, such as purchase intent, their attitudes, and their emotive states (W. Xu & Sundar, 2014, as cited in Waddell et al., 2015). As AI chatbots and robotics technology become more physically realistic and humanlike, humans are more trusting and compliant with AI (Glikson & Woolley, 2020; Waddell et al., 2015). Waxman (2019) proposed the human-AI relationship and trust framework, which outlined how human trust in AI varied depending on AI's capabilities to understand and interact with humans. The framework drew a parallel at each stage of trust with a corresponding communication style based on Grunig's models of public relations and communications (Waxman, 2019).

Public Relations Theory and Role of the Strategic Communicator

Excellence theory explains the role and value of strategic public relations to organizations (Grunig, 2013). Excellent public relations can help reduce risks, identify opportunities, and reduce potential costs. Given the various levels of risk AI introduces to organizations, strategic communicators may play a role in helping to identify and mitigate such risks.

The Post-Truth World and Changing Media Landscape

Seven years after the Oxford Dictionary declared the phrase "post-truth" as its Word of the Year (Baradell, 2022; Lewandowsky et al., 2017), society is no longer in the dawn of the post-truth era but instead in the full light of its day. The post-truth world means objective information can be cast aside in a sea of mis and disinformation

(Lewandowsky et al., 2017). The emergence of digital media as a relied-upon news source and the prevalence of social media algorithms curating to favour certain types of content have added fuel to spread the fires of mis and disinformation (Baradell, 2022; Fisher, 2022; Lewandowsky et al., 2017).

As a result, trust in the media landscape and institutions such as the government has declined around the world (Edelman, 2023). Due to changing consumer preferences, the traditional media industry has faced downward pressure as media organizations downsize and reduce newsroom staff. Journalists also acknowledged the threat of job loss due to AI tools and automation (Cision, 2023).

State of the Communicator's Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes in AI

Various studies have identified public relations practitioners as unprepared for the wave of AI to impact the industry while acknowledging that AI will have a disruptive impact (Panda et al., 2019; Zerfass, 2020; Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2023). Research demonstrated that 80% of communicators surveyed recognized AI to be highly important to the field, yet only 16% felt they were highly competent in AI (WE Communications & USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2023). The communications profession risks falling behind in AI upskilling (Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2023; Zerfass et al., 2020).

Recent research on the impact of automation and AI on the work of communicators indicated up to 40% of public relations work could be supported by such technology (Gregory et al., 2023). The impact of AI on public relations tasks and capabilities was analyzed through the lens of the Global Capability Framework (Gregory et al., 2023). The Global Capability Framework identified eleven core capabilities for public relations professionals to attain to practice at the highest level, including three broad categories of communication, organizational, and professional (Gregory & Fawkes, 2019). Gregory et al. (2023) found that AI had the most impact on the communication and organizational task categories of public relations work. The professional category, defined as work relating to organizational leadership, ethical guidance in decision-making, being a senior trusted advisor and reputation guardian, was least impacted by AI and automation (Gregory et al., 2023).

Barriers to AI upskilling and adoption include a lack of skills, low motivation, and a lack of support from management or organization as barriers (Zerfass et al., 2020). The threat of job loss has created anxiety and fear for some communicators while simultaneously eliciting feelings of excitement and curiosity (WE Communications & USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2023).

S. Xu et al. (2023) studied employees' attitudes toward AI adoption through the lens of the diffusion of innovations theory. The study concluded that negatively held attitudes also negatively influenced attitudes toward AI adoption at work, and positively held attitudes toward AI positively influenced attitudes toward the AI adoption (S. Xu et al., 2023). The opportunity to test out AI technology, or trialability, helped improve attitudes toward AI adoption, but only for those individuals who previously had positive attitudes (S. Xu et al., 2023). Observability, or the chance for individuals to watch others use AI, did help decrease the degree of negativity held towards AI adoption for those who already had negative attitudes previously (S. Xu et al., 2023).

Research Methods

The research method included a literature review, a content analysis of 75 articles featuring technology leaders, and in-depth interviews with eleven industry experts in Canada, the

Figure 1: Top AI Issues Identified Word Cloud
Note. The top themes and issues identified through the content analysis of media articles and blogs featuring technology leaders between March 22, 2023 to April 7, 2023. The image was generated using Voyant Tools.

United States, and the United Kingdom. The study was bounded by the period from October 31, 2022 to September 18, 2023.

Content Analysis Design

The content analysis was designed to answer RQ1. Two units of analysis were studied: media news and blog articles. The sample of analysis was the time period of the case study: October 31, 2022 to September 18, 2023. The data of analysis were article date, article theme, article source, article sentiment, article social echo, article copy, name of technology leader mentioned, and direct article quotations. The individuals selected represent the leaders of top technology companies in the world.

Technology Leader	Organization
Sam Altman	Open AI
Tim Cook	Apple
Bill Gates	Microsoft
Elon Musk	Tesla
Sundar Pichai	Alphabet
Mark Zuckerberg	Meta

A dictionary list contained the search terms used for data collection. The search terms appeared with one or more technology leaders' names for the content to be included in the population data set.

Results

Eleven industry experts participated in the in-depth interviews. There were three participants from Canada and four each from the USA and the UK. They represented various industries, including academia, consumer goods, media, soft-

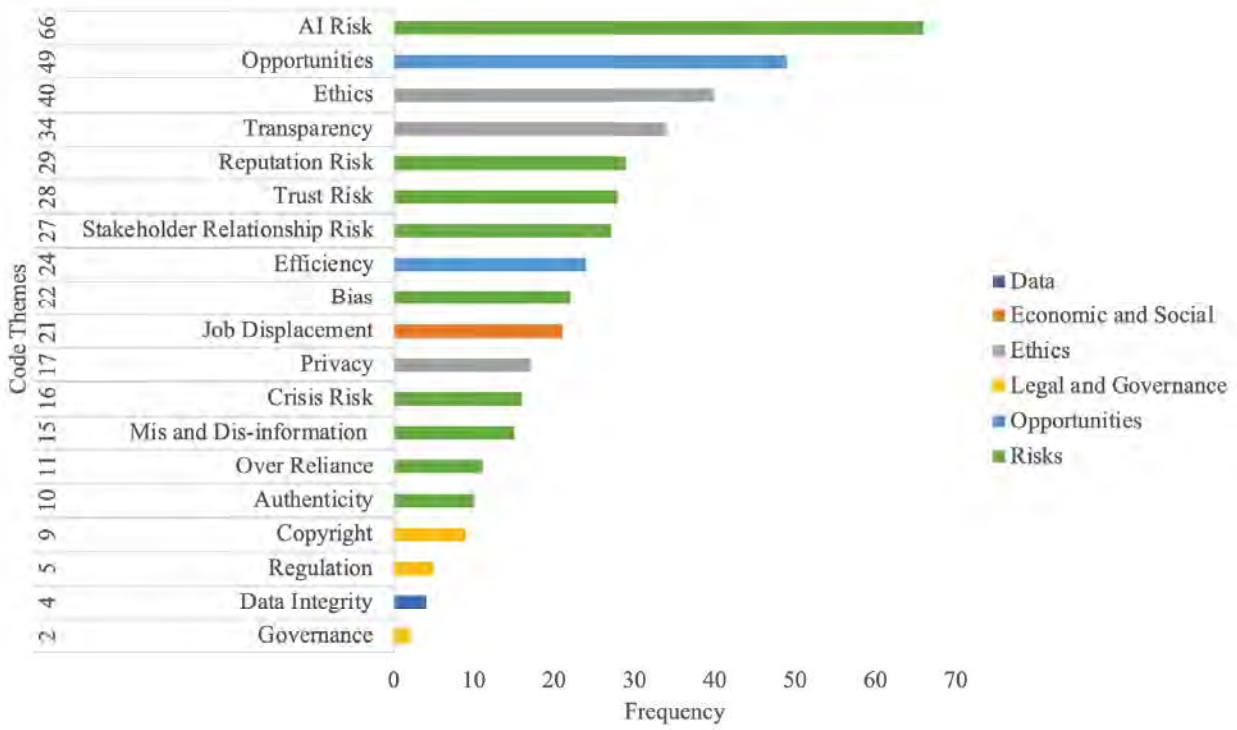

Figure 2: AI Issues From In-Depth Interviews By Theme
Note. The identified AI issues were coded by theme and categorized into groups denoted through different colours in the legend.

ware and technology, consulting, and gaming. For the content analysis, the final sample size of the dataset was 75 articles.

RQ1: What are the emerging issues in AI, and how and to what extent do they impact the communications field?

Emerging issues in AI are identified in Figure 1 through the content analysis.

The interview results are displayed in Figure 2.

Table 1 highlights key quotes from the interview answering RQ1.

RQ2: How and to what extent can strategic communicators contribute to AI leadership and help mitigate organizational risks?

Table 2 presents selected quotes from interviews that support how strategic communicators can help manage AI risks and bring leadership to their organizations.

RQ3: How and to what extent are strategic communicators prepared to upskill in AI and step into an organizational AI leadership role?

The interview participants agreed there was more enthusiasm towards AI than in previous years. While research participants stated there was more awareness of AI, they believed most public relations professionals needed more foundational and technical knowledge, particularly at the senior levels. Organizational readiness and acceptance of AI influenced practitioners' professional development and upskilling. Participants felt there needed to be a supportive organizational culture that encouraged AI upskilling

Table 1

Interview Quotes

Theme	Sample Quote
Risk, Job Loss	"The big risk from AI is probably economic impact. The ability for OpenAI or Microsoft or Google to release a capability which basically wipes out a profession overnight."
Value of Public Relations	"Why do PR practitioners still exist? What do we do? What value do we bring to the world?"
Value of Public Relations, Job Loss	"I see that only if you don't interact with it, if you don't educate yourself, and if you don't take advantage of it, then yes, it will replace you."
Reputation, Misinformation	"If not properly managed, AI can inadvertently propagate misinformation, amplify biases, or even harm a brand's reputation by misinterpreting data or sentiments".
Opportunity	"It can help you analyze data and provide insights, reduce human errors, prevent writer's block, it can analyze potential risks…so much opportunity!"
Trust	"You expect a machine to perform rationally and follow logic, and (if) it doesn't, it is completely going to lead to a breakdown in trust."
Trust, Disclosure	"If the organization uses it and doesn't say it's using it, I think that's so shady, and it's so untrustworthy."
AI Impact on Public Relations	"AI is one of the most transformational issues facing many industries over the next couple of years. Just look at how much we're talking about it in every industry to understand how transformation is going to be; therefore, thinking through the impact of that on your audiences, your stakeholders, your content by thinking through the implications of everything you do in AI. It's not just affecting one department with a business. It's affecting every part of that business. There's so much to consider, so much that could go wrong from a reputation perspective."

Table 2

Areas of AI Leadership For The Strategic Communicator

Areas of Leadership	What Is Involved	Sample Quote
Crisis Planning, Issues & Risk Management	Landscape monitoring & surveillance Issues identification Risk register Crisis preparation & planning	"Prepare crisis communication plans specifically for AI-related incidents. This includes identifying potential scenarios, drafting response templates, and designating communication channels."
Change Management	Developing language and communicating AI internally Understanding technology and impact on stakeholders Devising initiatives to help transition	"Develop internal communication strategies that emphasize the benefits of AI, address concerns, and guide employees through the transition."
Stakeholder Engagement & Relationship Building	Internal and external stakeholder engagement Facilitating two-way symmetrical communication	"The most important thing, as we know, to bridge gaps, is to have honest conversations. But to create a space where those honest conversations can happen. If you create an environment where you could fail, you could lose your job...because you're using AI, that does not create safe place to have conversations with something that is obviously changed our world."
Reputation Management	Monitoring reputation Ensure messaging alignment Reducing reputation gaps Building and protecting trust through transparency	"There's a whole huge area of the role that communicators will play in advising organizations about the reputational implications of the use of AI."
Advisor to Dominant Coalition	Guidance in ethical decision making Representing all stakeholder viewpoints Ensuring alignment of mission, goals,and values AI policy guidance	"I hope that somebody is there to ask the question of, Why are we doing this to begin with?"
Ethical Guardian	AI training and development Data ownership, usage, integrity, diversity AI Bias Transparency Governance	"To manage risk, leaders must fully understand the AI that is being used and be ready to assess trends and new tools as they arise. It requires ethical consideration and human oversight. To ensure both of those things happen, leaders must be transparent about how the organization is using AI and be committed to ethics and unbiased decision-making."
Participation in AI Development	Providing viewpoint of all stakeholders impacted Ensure alignment of messaging Ethical guidance	"So if you're saying to me that we're going to build an AI chatbot because we want to reduce the time it takes for our customer service representatives to respond to prospects on our website. Great. Then a communications professional absolutely needs to be in involved in that."
Training and AI Education	Helping foster culture that supports training and education	"Design training sessions or informational campaigns to bridge this gap, ensuring that the benefits and workings of AI are understood at all levels."

through mentorship, empowerment, and open dialogue. They felt senior leaders needed to pave the way for their organizations to provide AI training and education.

All interviewees agreed it was inevitable that industry professionals must learn about AI and upskill, or those who do not will be replaced by those capable of using it. Participants thought there was an opportunity for strategic communicators to lead on AI issues at their organizations. Still, they must possess the foundational knowledge, have a seat at the table, and be willing to accept the technology.

When it came to whether strategic communicators are ready to step up to take a leadership role in their organizations in AI, all participants said they were not prepared. However, they recognized that those professionals embracing AI technology have started to establish themselves as leaders in the field and in their organizations.

Discussion

The results from the study supported H1, that the major issues emerging with AI that leaders are concerned about intersect areas in strategic public relations and overlapped with the strategic communicator's capabilities. The findings did not substantiate H2, but it may be argued that, as an industry, public relations professionals do possess some of the critical relevant capabilities needed to manage AI-related issues. The opportunity to provide leadership exists because AI issues overlap with communication issues.

RQ1: What are the emerging issues in AI, and how and to what extent do they impact the communications field?

The results is visualized through a three-level framework at the macro, meso, and micro levels. Figure 4 illustrates the emerging issues in AI and how they impact the communications field at the three levels.

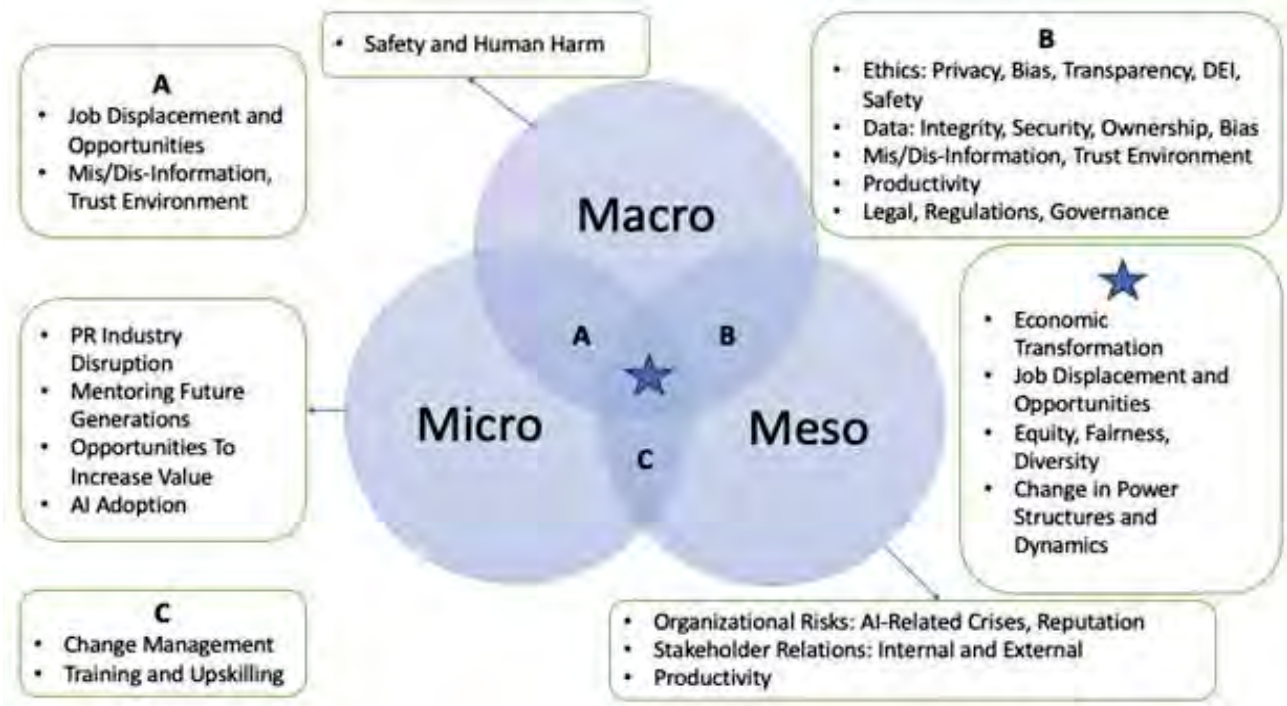

Figure 4: The Three Levels of AI-PR Issues

Macro Level
Bad actors and nations who misuse AI could perpetuate the worsening spread of mis and disinformation, posing a threat to democracy (Goswami, 2023). On the positive side, AI is predicted to create new economic opportunities through job creation and economic growth through greater productivity. The overall trust environment will continue to shift as more AI-generated content reaches newsrooms.

Meso Level
AI as a revolutionary technology will require change management strategies as organizations implement new workflows, expand or reduce their labour force, and retrain employees. The interview participants recognized these same changes. Communicators can help facilitate two-way symmetrical communication with employees and encourage open dialogue when approaching these organizational issues.

Interview participants recognized risk and crisis management alongside ethical decision-making as other ways AI intersected with strategic public relations.

Micro Level
On a micro level, AI has made some tasks redundant through automation but also may free up the strategic communicator's time to work on more complex tasks or augment their current abilities (Gregory et al., 2023). The interview data concurred with these ideas, and the data showed AI could help increase the value of strategic communicators to their organization through better decision-making, planning, data analytics, campaign execution, measurement, and tracking. The interview participants agreed the job threat was real, but humans would be replaced by other humans who are well-versed in AI rather than machines.

RQ2: How and to what extent can strategic communicators contribute to AI leadership and help mitigate organizational risks?

Within a normative practice, the strategic communicator excels in risk and crisis management, is a cultivator of relationships and partnerships on behalf of the organization, acts as a guardian of the organization's reputation, is a curator of trust and good reputation, and is an ethical advisor to the organization (Global Alliance, n.d.). Given the gaps created by AI and its disruptive nature to organizations, applying these capabilities through organizational leadership would help organizations mitigate the risks. The leadership opportunities in Table 2 were cross-referenced with the Global Capabilities Framework (Gregory et al., 2023), which mapped communication tasks against AI to estimate the proportion of work that could be supported by AI, ranging from 0% to 70% depending on the task (Gregory et al., 2023).

Areas where relationship cultivation and high human touch are required have the lowest percentages of AI support. This includes partnership development, mentorship and training. By mapping the areas of leadership opportunity with the findings from Gregory et al. (2023), it is clear that there are many opportunities for strategic communicators to display leadership in AI within their organizations. Even in areas where AI tools and automation have high penetration, such as social media management, the results support the need for human oversight.

RQ3: How and to what extent are strategic communicators prepared to upskill in AI and step into an organizational AI leadership role?

The literature pointed to the lack of readiness of public relations practitioners to adapt to emerging AI technology (Panda et al., 2019; Zerfass, 2020; Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2023), although positive attitudes towards AI,

enthusiasm, and acceptance have increased (Gregory et al., 2023; WE Communications & USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2023). The interview results supported the literature findings.

The issues generated by AI, which overlap with public relations, present an opportunity for strategic communicators to provide guidance and senior leadership, especially in risk management, reputation management, ethical guidance, stakeholder engagement, and change management. Building on the recommendations of Waxman (2019), the interview data pointed to a leadership role potential for strategic communicators to provide counsel to the dominant coalition in their role as the reputation and ethical guardians of their organizations. A pathway to AI leadership for strategic communicators exists, but each step of the pyramid, as outlined in Figure 5, needs to be met to reach this potential.

The first building block of AI leadership is grounded in practicing public relations excellence (J. E. Grunig, 2013). The second step is to acquire foundational AI knowledge. This includes the ability to define AI, understand the technical nuances of what AI is capable of performing and not capable of performing, and understand how well the technology is aligned with the organizational mission and goals. The third requirement on the pathway to AI leadership is a positive attitude, an acceptance of AI, and acquiring hands-on experience with AI tools. A positive attitude toward AI adoption is fundamental as research has demonstrated that personal experience with AI technology only enhances AI adoption if a positive attitude is already held (S. Xu et al., 2023). The final step before attaining leadership in AI requires the strategic communicator to sit at the decision-making table or have influence with the dominant coalition. Organizations with an open, transparent, and supportive culture that encourages innovation, where two-way symmetrical communication is practiced, provide the ideal ecosystem to foster AI leadership for strategic communicators. Strategic communicators who may reach the goal of the pathway and establish themselves as leaders in AI will be sought after and highly valuable to

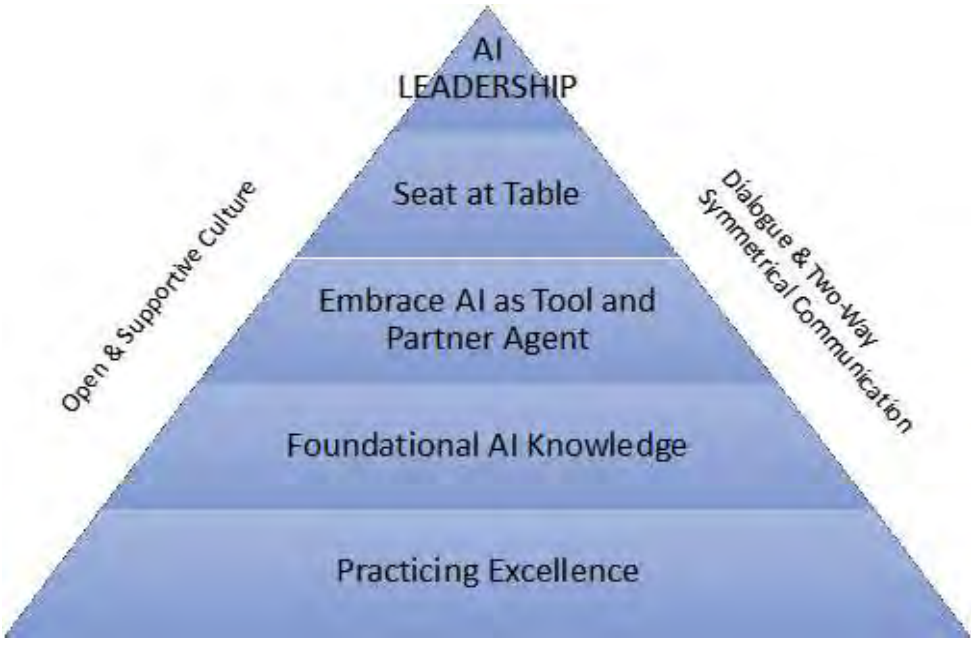

Figure 5: Pathway to AI Leadership for Strategic Communicators

their organizations. Embracing AI could help enhance the value of a strategic communicator. The more communicators who reach the pinnacle of AI leadership, the more the profession may be elevated.

Practice Implications

The recommendations below are framed within the three levels of AI-PR issues.

Macro leadership

1. Contribute to AI in PR Scholarship through conducting primary research or participation in surveys.
2. Drive the conversation about the pitfalls and opportunities of AI in society through writing leadership pieces and professional association discussions.
3. Support efforts to regulate AI and develop transparent, fair, inclusive, and ethical AI that embraces human agency.

Meso leadership

1. Show leadership by evaluating the level of risk, impact, and alignment on AI initiatives.
2. Act as the trusted advisor in the organization on issues pertaining to AI and ethics, trust, and risk management. Demonstrate leadership in the areas of opportunity to fill in the gaps created by AI risk.
3. Help draft the AI policy for your organization and review the policy every six to twelve months.
4. Facilitate an open culture where honest conversations about AI can take place.
5. Advocate for training resources.
6. Consider AI with a DEI lens.

Micro leadership

1. Follow the best practices from industry associations.
2. Actively test new AI tools and upskill.
3. Find ways to use AI strategically and complement core capabilities.
4. Follow the pathway to AI leadership.

Conclusion

This study examined the research problem of how and to what extent strategic communicators may provide leadership in the age of AI. The findings show a high level of overlap between AI and the public relations industry, and opportunities and challenges arising from greater adoption of AI will influence strategic communicators. The study identified key issues that intersect AI and public relations, and their impact was visualized using the three levels of the AI-PR issues model. As an emerging technology, AI introduces risks to organizations, and the strategic communicator will need to add AI-related risks to their risk and issues management.

Increasingly more sophisticated AI technology can mimic how humans communicate, which has caused humans to question who they are and how they are different from the machines. These thoughts of finding distinctively human value transcended into the minds of the strategic communicator, who is asking themselves the same question. While the study's results do not support the idea that AI will replace strategic communicators, humans face pressure to learn how to work with AI or face the threat of losing their jobs to others who have learned. Strategic communicators who leverage AI will find they have more time to focus on strategic work.

The study identified eight opportunities within the meso leadership level where strategic communicators may step in to display leadership on AI issues and help mitigate organizational AI risk exposure. Through mapping each leader-

ship area above to the results from Gregory et al. (2023), it was found that AI cannot replace some areas where strategic communicators excelled. These areas included providing mentorship and training, forming and supporting strategic partnerships, and relationship building. Human oversight is needed to ensure AI is used ethically, as free of bias as possible, and any output generated is accurate and produces no harm. The study supported the notion that strategic communicators are trusted by the leaders of organizations to provide a critical eye on the big picture. They are sage advisors expected to ask hard questions, provide ethical guidance, and represent the voices of stakeholders. With AI's potential to disrupt organizations, strategic communicators who can help their organizational leaders navigate the changes will be highly valuable.

The study found that while there has been an improvement in the awareness, attitudes, and acceptance of AI, the industry isn't ready to take on a leadership position. Opportunities exist for strategic communicators to provide leadership at the macro, meso, and micro levels, but the industry has some work ahead to improve its position as leaders. A pathway to AI leadership was identified as a result of the study. If strategic communicators can reach the pinnacle, the profession may be elevated as a valuable management function.

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Employing artificial intelligence to streamline communication process

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Introduction

The exponential growth of digital communication in modern organizations, additionally stimulated by COVID-19 and the urge to open towards digital surroundings and the "rise of 'digital capitalism'" (Staab, 2019; Seidl, 2023 as cited in Nachtwey & Seidl, 2023), has created both unprecedented opportunities for collaboration and significant challenges in managing information flow. According to Shin et. al (2025), the proliferation of communication channels – ranging from email and instant messaging to video conferencing and collaborative platforms – has paradoxically led to information overload, communication fragmentation and decreased operational efficiency, including severe burnout. The communication industry was also one of the industries affected by this syndrome, proving that even those working within the storytelling and crisis management industries are not immune (Ferrerira et. al, 2025). In such a situation with a saturation of information, channels, communication approaches and strategic directions, artificial intelligence (AI) technologies present a transformative solution to overcome communication challenges.

Recent studies show that artificial intelligence applications – particularly natural language processing (NLP), machine learning (ML) and predictive analytics – enhance sentiment analysis, crisis communication and the design of data-driven campaigns (DiStasso & Bortree, 2020; Tomić et al., 2022; Obradović et al., 2023; Jeong & Park, 2023; Herold et al., 2024). However, the integration of AI in public relations not only streamlines workflows but also produces strategic insights that assist organizations in more effectively customizing messages to specific audiences. A digital "revolution" encouraged by social media has been inherited by AI and, once again, the communication environment faces disruption.

Theoretical framework: Employing AI to streamline communication processes

AI has emerged as a transformative and disruptive technology within the field of communication, particularly in public relations and marketing, offering new pathways to streamline information flows, enhance strategic decision-making and personalize stakeholder engagement with the aim of optimizing communication processes in complex organizational environments. AI's conceptual and technological evolution – from rudimentary machine learning models in the mid-20th century to today's sophisticated natural language processing (NLP), deep learning and generative AI systems – has progressively redefined communication management (Ahmed & Baaske, 2024). Early works by Lee (2021, as cited in Ahmed & Baaske, 2024) highlight this trajectory, emphasizing the transition from automated functions to adap-

tive, context-aware systems capable of nuanced textual and multimedia creation. Ahmed and Baaske (2024) position this evolution within PR as an ongoing disruption, reshaping traditional communication paradigms, especially by automating routine tasks such as content generation, media monitoring and crisis response. It must be stated that, "although AI reduces human error and brings greater precision in data analysis, there is a caveat to relying entirely on AI during crisis management, emphasizing the importance of human intelligence and real-world experience" (Mišević & Knezović, 2024: 5). In marketing, AI offers several notable benefits, significantly improving personalization, efficiency, decision-making, customer engagement and scalability. "Artificial intelligence has the potential to be seamlessly integrated across the entire marketing cycle, encompassing initial research, strategy development, customer journey responsiveness, scalability, execution, as well as data-driven business insights and analysis" (Visković et. al, 2024: 1). It can be deduced that the AI plays a pivotal role in advancing effectiveness and competitiveness in the digital age.

Automation and personalization in communication

Central to the utility of AI in communication is its ability to automate operational workloads while enabling granular personalization of messages. As outlined by Ahmed and Baaske (2024), AI-driven automation reduces human labor in producing press releases, social media posts and reporting, liberating professionals to focus on creative and strategic endeavors. This aligns with the theoretical perspectives of Stone et al. (2020) and McKinsey (2023), who argue that AI fosters organizational efficiency through content generation, data synthesis and real-time analytics.
Personalization leverages AI's capacity to analyze large datasets, including engagement metrics and audience sentiment, to tailor communication strategies for discrete demographic or psychographic segments (Ma & Huo, 2024, as cited in Ahmed & Baaske, 2024). This data-driven approach enhances message relevance and engagement, supporting stakeholder relationship management frameworks articulated by Szondi (2010, as cited in Ahmed & Baaske, 2024) and James (2010, as cited in Ahmed & Baaske, 2024).

AI in strategic communication and decision-making

Beyond tactical improvements, AI contributes significantly to strategic decision-making by delivering actionable insights from data-intensive contexts. Predictive analytics and campaign optimization tools now enable communications leaders to adjust messages dynamically, maximizing return on investment (ROI) and stakeholder impact (Panda et al., 2019; Galloway & Swiatek, 2018). Such capabilities resonate with the broader digital transformation discourse, where AI integration catalyzes shifts in organizational agility and responsiveness (Tanantong & Ramjan, 2021, as cited in Ahmed & Baaske, 2024; Seiffert & Nothhaft, 2015, as cited in Ahmed & Baaske, 2024).

Nevertheless, theoretical literature cautions against uncritical reliance on AI outputs; effective governance entails a hybrid model that couples algorithmic precision with human contextual awareness. As McKinsey (2023) and Stone et al. (2020) emphasize, ethical stewardship, qualitative review and strategic interpretation remain essential to ensure AI-generated recommendations align with organizational values and dynamic stakeholder expectations.

Ethical and governance challenges

Ethical concerns represent a prominent theme within AI communication scholarship. Ahmed and Baaske (2024) identify risks including algorithmic bias, misinformation and disinformation propagation and threats to transparency,

echoing findings from Bourne (2019, as cited in Ahmed & Baaske, 2024) and Logan & Waymer (2024, as cited in Ahmed & Baaske) on the imperative for accountability in AI usage. Governance frameworks advocate for responsible AI deployment through transparency, content labeling and human oversight to maintain public trust and regulatory compliance (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018; Bélisle-Pipon et al., 2023). The evolving regulatory landscape, particularly in European contexts governed by GDPR, underscores the necessity of integrating legal, ethical and operational protocols to safeguard communication integrity.

Human creativity and emotional intelligence

Despite AI's capacity to augment communication processes, the literature reaffirms the irreplaceability of human creativity and emotional intelligence. Ahmed and Baaske (2024), along with others (McKinsey, 2023; Panda et al., 2019), argue that, while AI tools can generate content rapidly and detect sentiment, the nuanced understanding of emotional resonance, cultural context and empathetic engagement remains a purely human domain. This balance is critical in stakeholder interactions, crisis management and brand storytelling, where authenticity is paramount.

Emerging trends and future directions

The theoretical discourse has noted accelerated academic interest in AI and PR since 2015, with an exponential increase in publications from 2020 onward (Ahmed & Baaske, 2024). Topic modeling analyses identify five central themes: professional communication development, AI-facilitated trust, governance and compliance, data-driven public engagement and digital transformation. These themes highlight AI's multifaceted role, manifesting in improved efficiency, ethical engagement practices and innovation in PR workflows.

Future research directions emphasize exploiting large language models (LLMs) and hybrid methodologies integrating natural language processing with traditional systematic reviews to deepen understanding of AI's impact on PR effectiveness, trust-building and stakeholder satisfaction. Exploring empirical evidence on AI adoption's antecedents and consequences will impact both academic theory and practical application, particularly addressing ethical dilemmas, disinformation management and the calibration between automation and human-centric communication (Logan & Waymer, 2024, as cited in Ahmed & Baaske; Chatwattana et al., 2024, as cited in Ahmed & Baaske).

Based on the above, the integration of AI into communication processes represents a paradigmatic shift that both enhances operational efficiency and challenges traditional notions of strategic communication and human agency. Theoretical frameworks emphasize a dual approach that leverages AI's automation and analytical strengths while preserving the irreplaceable human qualities of creativity, ethics and relational intelligence. As organizations navigate the complexities of digital transformation, AI-enabled communication strategies promise to foster more adaptive, transparent and trusting relationships with stakeholders – a fundamental imperative of public relations in the digital era.
This research aims to provide an overview of the role of AI in optimizing communication through automation and personalization, while assessing its benefits and limitations within public relations and marketing. It seeks to evaluate how AI supports strategic decision-making, to examine the ethical frameworks necessary for its responsible application and to analyze its broader impact on human creativity and emotional intelligence.

Methodology

Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 representatives – communication experts employed in PR and marketing agencies, corporations and public organizations – to provide a comprehensive understanding of the practical applications of AI in PR and marketing, while addressing its limitations and ethical challenges and exploring the future trajectory of AI-driven communication strategies. Due to the complexity of the research, the authors chose in-depth interviews – a highly flexible method (Janasz and Katz, 2021) enabling the tailoring of questions and further exploration of unexpected answers, thus highlighting the benefits of AI in communication and revealing hidden challenges and addressing them. Furthermore, the interview allows for explicit examination of emotional, organizational and ethical aspects of AI application through the personal experiences of participants, which is not possible with exclusively structured methods. As stated by Barrick (2020), within in-depth interviews, open-ended, participant-driven approaches capture layered narrative details. Finally, this qualitative approach, enriched with data, ensures contextualization of findings – researchers can analyze specific cases in detail, understand the logic behind the introduction of AI tools and further investigate how and why AI changes communication processes in practice.

Questions were divided into two groups: shared and specialized questions. Shared questions for all participants, regardless of their professional background, while specialized questions were divided into three subgroups of specific questions for PR and marketing agency experts, employees in corporate communications departments and employees within public organizations. Participants' professional backgrounds enabled different perspectives and interpretations regarding awareness about AI, interpretation of its implementation and efficiency and productivity of practitioners. The interviews provided extensive qualitative data since no comprehensive research had been conducted in Croatia to thoroughly analyze the impact of AI on the optimization of specific processes within the public relations and marketing sector until April 2025.

Of the 10 interviewees, seven were women and three were men, all Croatian, aged 35-45, with over 10 years of experience working in the communication industry. Their names and the names of their organizations remain anonymous. The interviews were all conducted in Croatian. The following translations in English were prepared by the authors of this paper with the support of ChatGPT, Perplexity and Google Translate.

Research questions

To provide valuable input on employing AI to streamline communication processes, five research questions (RQ) were posed:

- **RQ1:** How does AI contribute to the optimization of communication processes, including message automation and personalization?
- **RQ2:** What are the advantages and limitations of applying AI in PR and marketing according to the experiences of communication experts?
- **RQ3:** In what ways do AI-driven tools contribute to strategic decision-making and improving the effectiveness of communication initiatives?
- **RQ4:** How can organizations responsibly use AI tools to ensure ethical communication and increase public trust?
- **RQ5:** To what extent can AI replace human creativity and emotional intelligence in PR and marketing?

RQ1 enables an overview of workflow simplification, high-value strategic activities (crisis management, brand storytelling), efficiency and data-driven decision-making, effective audience

targeting, content personalization and audience engagement, as well as preferred AI tools, objectives, methods and frequency of using AI in their communication activities.

RQ2 is geared towards reducing operational costs and improving the precision of communication strategies, while RQ3 focuses on specific AI-powered tools that are likely to enhance message personalization, allowing PR professionals to craft data-driven communication strategies tailored to specific demographics and may provide deeper insights into campaign performance, enabling real-time adjustments and more effective stakeholder engagement.

RQ4 tackles ethical concerns associated with AI, including potential biases in algorithmic decision-making and the risk of misinformation and disinformation dissemination, while RQ5 questions AI's limitations regarding fully replicating human creativity and emotional intelligence.

Results

How AI optimizes communication

AI is fundamentally reshaping how organizations manage communication processes, bringing unprecedented efficiency, personalization and strategic value to internal and external messaging. Based on the interviewees' output and from their professional standpoint, AI-driven tools such as ChatGPT, Midjourney, Grammarly and Canva AI are transforming their daily tasks and enabling them to focus on higher-order strategies rather than repetitive execution.

Automation and personalization as core drivers

The capacity for AI to automate routine communication tasks represents a major leap in organizational productivity. By drafting emails, social media posts and presentations, AI enables communication teams to rapidly produce high-quality materials, thereby reducing the time needed for manual content creation and enabling faster response to market demands. These tools employ sophisticated natural language processing and generative models to generate coherent and engaging texts, images and layouts, ensuring the product maintains a professional standard while curtailing labor-intensive processes.

Personalization is another area where AI demonstrates notable value. Through the analysis of audience behavior – such as engagement data, past interactions and demographic profiles – AI systems tailor messaging to resonate with individual recipients or segmented groups. This process ensures that communication is not only timely but also contextually relevant, resulting in improved engagement rates and stronger stakeholder relationships. Automated personalization mechanisms can dynamically adjust content tone, timing and delivery channels, making messaging campaigns more targeted and responsive to audience needs.

Crisis response and quality control

In the sphere of crisis communication, the interviewees stated that AI has proven particularly beneficial for public-facing organizations tasked with reaching large and diverse audiences during emergencies. By automating citizen communication, especially in time-sensitive scenarios, AI systems deliver essential information quickly and accurately, while built-in quality checks maintain the necessary standards for accessibility and clarity. For example, automated mail systems powered by AI ensure that key updates are delivered with clear language and compliant formatting, minimizing the risk of miscommunication and helping organizations maintain public trust in critical moments.

Sector-specific applications and strategic insights

Agencies have embraced AI-driven content generation and campaign personalization to meet client expectations for swift and tailored

messaging. The seamless integration of AI into workflow allows agencies to expedite production cycles and provide consistently high-quality materials that are customized for diverse campaigns and audience segments. These tools support creative ideation, streamline approval processes and facilitate real-time adaptation to client feedback.

In the corporate sector, AI is revolutionizing internal communication by automating the drafting of emails, reports and presentations. More advanced implementations involve developing proprietary AI assistants that handle repetitive inquiry management, coordinate team collaboration and monitor communication health across the organization. This approach results in improved knowledge sharing, reduced bottlenecks and more effective alignment of business units.

For the public sector, the adoption of AI necessitates a careful balance between operational efficiency and adherence to accessibility standards. While AI can significantly optimize governmental communication, especially in citizen-facing content – there remains an obligation to ensure clarity, inclusivity and regulatory compliance in all public messaging. Public institutions leverage AI technologies to automate information dissemination without sacrificing the quality or accessibility of communications, thereby enhancing service delivery and public engagement.

In conclusion, the integration of AI into communication processes brings multifaceted benefits, ranging from rapid content generation and dynamic personalization to robust crisis response mechanisms. These advances are evident across agencies, corporations and public sector organizations, each benefiting from enhanced speed, customization and strategic agility. As AI tools continue to evolve, their role in optimizing communication will deepen, offering new possibilities for building stronger connections and managing information more effectively in a rapidly changing environment.

Benefits and limitations of AI

The integration of AI into communication workflows has generated considerable interest within both academic and professional domains, particularly regarding its potential to optimize efficiency, cost structure and data utilization. However, as AI becomes more entrenched in organizational practice, it is critical to acknowledge not only its transformative benefits but also the substantial limitations inherent to current technology and application standards.

Key benefits of AI in communication

The most immediate and measurable benefit of AI implementation within communication is significant time savings, as stated by all the interviewees. Automated systems, leveraging AI for tasks such as competitor analysis and campaign reporting, have demonstrated the capacity to reduce production time by as much as 20-30%. This efficiency gain enables organizations to produce timely insights, rapidly adjust to market trends and focus human expertise on complex decision-making rather than repetitive analysis.

Cost reduction represents a further advantage of AI systems as they effectively replace the need for freelancers in roles such as translation and copywriting. These tools can generate content on a large scale, often in multiple languages, and can adapt tone and style to suit different audiences. By automating these previously labor-intensive tasks, organizations achieve substantial cost efficiencies while maintaining content consistency and availability.

A third substantial benefit is AI's data proficiency. Modern AI tools excel at sentiment analysis, trend identification and the interpretation of large, complex datasets far beyond human capabilities. These systems outperform traditional methods for dissecting social media dynamics,

forecasting market changes and extracting actionable insights from high-volume, unstructured data streams. As a result, organizations can base strategies and campaigns on more nuanced and timely intelligence, strengthening their competitive advantage.

Limitations and challenges

While these strengths are significant, AI adoption also brings a host of limitations and risks that deserve careful consideration. Chief among these are quality risks: despite rapid content generation, AI outputs are often "superficial" and lack contextual depth. Such outputs require thorough human editing to avoid misrepresentations or reputational risks associated with poorly crafted messages.

Language barriers further limit AI's utility, especially for less widely represented languages such as Croatian. While top-tier AI translation systems perform well in common global languages, their output for Croatian may suffer from inaccuracies, idiomatic misrepresentations and overall lower fidelity – necessitating both post-editing and vigilant review by human specialists.

Ethical gaps represent another pressing concern. AI-driven content systems can unintentionally amplify bias, producing results that reflect or even magnify underlying prejudices present in training data. In addition, the increasing sophistication of deepfake technologies introduces vulnerabilities related to authenticity and trust, requiring new safeguards in digital communication practices.

In the agency environment, differentiation remains challenging; most organizations rely on similar industry-leading AI tools, limiting the potential for unique, customized solutions. While AI can generate data-driven insights rapidly, this "sameness" can hinder agencies seeking to distinguish their services or offer proprietary value to clients.

Finally, quality control imposes operational requirements that cannot be overlooked. To address the above risks, many organizations must implement rigorous protocols that combine automated generation with mandatory human review and, in the European context, strict adherence to GDPR requirements for data privacy. These extra steps, while essential for maintaining trust and compliance, diminish some of the operational efficiencies that AI promises.

In conclusion, AI's impact on communication processes is marked by powerful benefits in efficiency, cost savings and data analytics capabilities. However, these must be weighed against persistent challenges such as language limitations, ethical risks and the continuing need for human oversight. Only through a balanced, critically-informed approach can organizations harness AI's full value while guarding against its drawbacks.

AI in strategic decision-making

AI is rapidly emerging as a cornerstone in strategic decision-making, revolutionizing how organizations interpret data, optimize campaigns and synthesize reports to align with dynamic market realities. The shift toward data-driven impact means that organizations now possess the ability to transform sheer volumes of performance data into actionable insights for real-time optimization, fundamentally changing how strategic goals are set and adjusted.

Data-driven impact in campaigns

One of the most significant contributions of AI lies in real-time campaign optimization. By persistently analyzing performance pattern data from ongoing initiatives, AI-driven platforms can swiftly identify trends, detect anomalies and recommend changes that enhance campaign outcomes. This capability not only accelerates decision cycles but also allows organizations to pivot strategies responsively, maximizing the effectiveness of marketing and communication efforts.

AI's strategic insights extend further into the realm of campaign metrics analysis, where these systems can evaluate a campaign's return on investment (ROI) with advanced predictive models. By recommending specific optimizations grounded in empirical evidence, AI can routinely deliver improvements to ROI, often quantified at 15–30% above traditional methods, as commented by the interviewees. These recommendations enhance resource allocation, reduce wasted effort and ensure campaigns remain tightly aligned with organizational objectives.

Transforming corporate reporting

In the corporate sector, AI is having a visible effect on reporting practices for management and shareholders. Instead of relying solely on manual preparation, organizations are deploying AI-driven synthesis systems to collate and process financial and performance data with unprecedented speed. These tools can generate complex reports that distill actionable intelligence more swiftly, supporting decision-makers with timely snapshots of business health. However, it is important to note that, while the speed of report generation has increased, formal quality protocols for automated reporting are still being developed, necessitating human oversight to sustain credibility and accuracy.

Challenges of AI-driven decisions

Despite these advances, the strategic value of AI remains fundamentally contingent on the quality of human interaction and guidance. Poor prompting – a limitation stemming from ambiguous or overly generic human instructions – can produce superficial analysis, eroding the strategic depth of AI recommendations. To capture the full value of AI, organizations must invest in structured prompting, training and continuous refinement of the inputs AI systems receive. The combination of human expertise and machine intelligence is what ultimately generates the most robust and contextually accurate strategic guidance.

Moreover, strategic differentiation through AI is not guaranteed; when organizations use similar AI platforms and techniques, analytic outputs can become homogenized, potentially diluting competitive advantage. It is imperative that organizations maintain a clear focus on their unique strategic frameworks and apply AI in ways that support, rather than supplant, critical human judgment.

Efficiency gains rooted in collaboration

Beyond its impact on data analysis and reporting, AI also delivers meaningful efficiency gains by identifying audience behavior trends across diverse touchpoints. These insights are invaluable for tailoring messages, segmenting audiences and timing communications for optimal impact. Nevertheless, human interpretation remains indispensable for true contextual strategy. AI can reveal patterns, however, it is the human strategist who understands the broader narrative, cultural nuances and organizational priorities required to convert data into meaningful action.

In conclusion, AI's integration into strategic decision-making processes is reshaping campaign optimization, reporting and audience analytics, driving real-time adaptation and improved ROI. The collaborative relationship between AI and human expertise ensures that efficiency gains and data-driven insights translate into real competitive advantage, even as organizations work to address challenges in prompting, differentiation and protocol development.

Ethical AI and public trust

The integration of AI into public communication practices demands a renewed focus on ethical frameworks that foster transparency, accountability and public trust. Although many organizations are still developing formal AI ethics protocols, there is increasing recognition of the imperative to label AI-generated content and maintain human oversight to prevent deception.

The interviewees shared key ethical considerations, public sector challenges and existing client and corporate procedures surrounding AI use to uphold trust and integrity in AI-mediated communication.

Transparency and accountability
Most organizations lack comprehensive formal policies for AI ethics. However, a prevailing standard is the enforcement of human oversight, in particular the clear labeling of AI-generated content to avoid misleading audiences. The necessity of disclosing AI involvement is widely endorsed, with approximately 65% of communication professionals advocating for transparency in public-facing content. This disclosure serves not only as an ethical obligation but also as a foundational practice for building credibility and fostering audience trust.

Transparency efforts emphasize "authenticity and human touch" as essential qualities that AI alone cannot replicate. While AI systems monitor and flag disinformation such as fake news, they require human intervention to verify credibility and provide contextual judgment. Therefore, ethical AI deployment hinges on a hybrid approach that balances automated processes with responsible human supervision.

Public sector challenges
The public sector is on the frontline of combating disinformation using AI-powered pattern detection. Algorithms identify suspicious content trends and large-scale manipulations faster than traditional manual methods, enhancing the government's ability to respond promptly to misinformation and disinformation. Nonetheless, AI struggles with emotional nuance and the subtleties of human communication, limiting its capacity to fully and accurately interpret context or intent.
A significant regulatory gap exists, as current frameworks prioritize GDPR compliance but do not yet provide comprehensive laws specifically addressing the ethical use of AI. Public agencies report navigating an evolving landscape of industry standards and provisional best practices. This regulatory void complicates consistent application and enforcement of ethical AI, highlighting the need for harmonized policies that balance technological innovation with protecting civil liberties.

Client and corporate procedures
Corporate clients and agencies exhibit varying degrees of preparedness regarding AI ethics governance. Approximately 30% of clients have formal AI policies that outline permissible usage, data privacy requirements and accountability measures. Agencies frequently assume an educational role, teaching clients about ethical AI deployment and encouraging transparency as a strategic priority.

Conversely, many corporate communication departments lack formal procedures dedicated to AI. These organizations depend heavily on ad-hoc human reviews and informal guidelines. This reactive stance may increase vulnerabilities related to bias, misinformation, disinformation, or regulatory non-compliance.

In conclusion, building and maintaining public trust in AI-enhanced communication mandates clear transparency measures, robust human oversight and proactive ethical governance. Disclosing AI's role through labeling aligns with emerging regulatory trends and audience expectations. Public sector applications demonstrate AI's potential but simultaneously reveal its limitations without accompanying human judgment and regulatory clarity. Finally, organizations benefit from establishing formal AI ethics protocols to guide responsible practice and safeguard reputational integrity in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. Only through concerted efforts combining legal frameworks, organizational policy and ethical commitment can AI become a trustworthy partner in public communication.

Human creativity facing AI
The debate between artificial intelligence (AI) and human creativity remains central to how organizations envision the future of communication, marketing and creative industries. While AI tools have become indispensable for automating routine tasks and generating initial ideas, the human creative edge – rooted in emotional intelligence, authenticity and storytelling – remains irreplaceable. The interviewees highlighted the unique contributions of human creativity alongside AI's role, emphasizing the evolving transformation of roles within creative teams.

The irreplaceable human edge
AI excels at assisting creativity by rapidly generating concepts and brainstorming ideas based on vast datasets and learned patterns. However, finalizing campaigns, content and brand messaging requires human intervention to ensure "authenticity and emotional resonance". Campaigns that truly connect with audiences rely on human creativity to infuse emotional depth and tailored nuance, elements that AI, due to its algorithmic nature, cannot fully replicate.

A critical limitation of AI lies in emotional intelligence – while AI can predict words or analyze sentiment, it lacks genuine empathy. In crisis communication or stakeholder interactions, human understanding transcends mere word prediction to grasp meaning and emotional subtleties. This human capacity for empathy ensures communication remains relational and sensitive to context, safeguarding trust and credibility.

Role transformations in creative teams
AI adoption is reshaping roles within creative organizations. Junior roles, such as assistants or entry-level content creators, are increasingly automated, as AI efficiently handles repetitive or time-consuming tasks like drafting emails or social media posts. This automation frees junior staff to focus on more strategic aspects of their work and accelerates project turnaround times.

Meanwhile, senior creative staff are evolving into "AI curators", professionals who oversee AI outputs, integrate ethical considerations and refine content to align with strategic goals. Creative directors benefit from AI-enhanced efficiency but emphasize that AI cannot replace fundamental storytelling. They stress that creativity is not only about generating ideas but crafting compelling narratives that resonate emotionally and culturally.

This role evolution reflects a partnership model where AI amplifies human capability without supplanting it. Human creativity is led by strategic vision and nuanced decision-making, while AI accelerates operational execution and data analysis.

AI and human creativity in balance
While AI contributes speed, volume and data-driven insights, it typically produces derivative or pattern-based content. Human creativity, on the other hand, thrives on originality, breaking conventional rules and innovating cultural narratives. For example, marketers leverage AI tools for ideation but rely on human intuition to push boundaries, build brand identity and engage audiences meaningfully.

Real-world evidence suggests the most successful campaigns arise from collaboration – not competition – between AI and human input. AI acts as a force multiplier, providing options and insights, while human creators curate and select strategies that reflect brand values and audience emotions.

In conclusion, AI transforms the creative landscape by automating junior tasks and enhancing productivity, yet it lacks the emotional intelligence and narrative depth essential for authentic communication. Human creativity remains the guiding force behind campaigns that build trust, connect with audiences and tell compelling stories. The future of creative work lies in a

balanced integration where AI supports human ingenuity, allowing teams to focus on strategy, ethics and emotional resonance – dimensions uniquely human and critical for communication success.

Key cross-sector insights

The integration of AI across sectors is driving a universal efficiency revolution, with organizations reporting consistent year-over-year productivity gains averaging 20%. This significant improvement is attributed to AI's ability to automate repetitive and routine tasks, streamline workflows and accelerate data processing. As organizations leverage AI, a clear pattern of increased output and enhanced operational speed emerges, signaling transformative productivity enhancements across industries.

A key insight from cross-sector adoption is the evolving symbiosis between humans and AI. Rather than replacing human judgment, AI functions as a "co-pilot", handling time-consuming or monotonous tasks. This augmentation allows human employees to focus on higher-level decision-making, strategic thinking and creative problem-solving. For example, AI tools automate data entry, content drafting and preliminary analysis, freeing professionals to apply their expertise where nuanced judgment and emotional intelligence are critical.

Despite these gains, critical gaps remain that hinder seamless AI integration. Standardized quality control protocols are urgently needed to ensure the consistency and reliability of AI outputs, especially given the variance in model performance and training data biases. Additionally, regulatory frameworks tailored specifically to AI's unique risks and ethical considerations are still underdeveloped in many regions. This regulatory void poses challenges for governance, accountability and user trust.

As AI adoption accelerates, organizations must address these gaps to sustain momentum and fully realize AI's potential. Establishing clear quality standards and advancements to regulatory measures will support safer, more transparent and equitable AI applications. In this context, human oversight remains indispensable – not only to critically interpret AI's outputs but also to uphold ethical standards and accountability.

In conclusion, the integration of AI across sectors is reshaping productivity paradigms through a human-AI collaborative model. Efficiency gains of around 20% annually underline AI's transformative power, however, these must be complemented by robust quality controls and regulatory clarity. The future success of AI hinges on harnessing a balanced partnership, where AI amplifies human capability without supplanting essential human judgment and responsibility.

Recommendations and practical implications of this research

To maximize the organizational benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) while mitigating associated risks, a balanced and systematic approach is essential. The following recommendations center on three pillars: establishing a human-AI balance, prioritizing education and instituting robust internal protocols.

Maintaining a human-AI balance is fundamental. Organizations should employ AI for operational and repetitive tasks – such as data processing, drafting or standardized reporting – while reserving human expertise for creative ideation, strategic oversight and decision-making. This division leverages the strengths of each, ensuring that efficiency is gained without sacrificing the authenticity and contextual intelligence unique to human contributors.

Comprehensive education is another key to successful AI integration. Teams must receive ongoing training on the capabilities and limitations of AI tools, as well as instruction in ethical usage. This investment fosters technological fluency among staff, empowers employees to collaborate

productively with AI systems and prepares them to oversee and evaluate AI-driven processes with a critical and informed perspective.

Finally, organizations should develop and continuously update internal protocols. These guidelines should address quality control to ensure the reliability of AI outputs, safeguard data privacy for compliance with evolving regulations and uphold transparency in the deployment of AI-driven solutions. Clear, actionable policies promote accountability and reinforce public trust, reducing operational vulnerabilities and ethical risks.

Collectively, these recommendations serve as a blueprint for responsible and effective AI adoption. By balancing automation with human judgment, embedding ongoing education and implementing strong protocols, organizations can realize AI's full potential while upholding the highest standards of quality and integrity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exponential growth of digital communication, accelerated by global shifts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has created complex challenges for modern organizations. Traditional communication management methods are increasingly inadequate to handle the volume, fragmentation and rapid pace of information flow. This paper demonstrates that artificial intelligence (AI) offers the transformative potential to streamline communication processes across public relations and marketing sectors through automation, personalization and strategic insight generation.

Through qualitative in-depth interviews with experienced communication professionals across agencies, corporations and public organizations, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how AI tools, such as ChatGPT, Midjourney and Grammarly, are integrated to enhance efficiency, content quality and audience engagement. AI-driven automation of routine tasks and data-driven personalization were identified as core drivers in optimizing communication workflows, enabling professionals to focus on strategic and creative activities. Particularly in crisis communication, AI's capacity to efficiently manage large-scale messaging while maintaining accessibility and clarity was highlighted as a key advantage.

However, the research also revealed significant limitations. AI outputs often require rigorous human editing to address superficiality and avoid reputational risks. Language barriers, ethical challenges related to bias, misinformation, disinformation, and a lack of formal governance and differentiation hinder the technology's full potential. The strategic value of AI depends heavily on human expertise for quality control, prompting and interpretation. Furthermore, AI cannot fully replicate human creativity and emotional intelligence that are essential in authentic storytelling and empathetic stakeholder engagement.

Ethical AI deployment emerged as a critical theme requiring transparency, accountability, labeling of AI-generated content and proactive governance. Building public trust requires human oversight to prevent deception and manage information effectively, especially in the public sector, where regulations remain nascent.

Overall, this research underscores the necessity of a balanced human-AI collaboration model, complemented by ongoing education, robust protocols and ethical frameworks. When thoughtfully integrated, AI can significantly enhance communication effectiveness and strategic decision-making, without supplanting the uniquely human dimensions that define impactful communication. As AI technologies continue to evolve, their role in refining organizational communication promises to grow if challenges

are addressed with critical awareness and responsible governance.

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The Future of Work for Public Relations and Advertising Professionals: Replaced by AI or Enhanced by AI?

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Introduction

Generative AI now pervades knowledge work in ways that collapse the boundaries between analysis, creation, and decision support. Strategic communication disciplines—advertising, public relations, and marketing—have been early adopters, using AI for monitoring, segmentation, creative ideation, content personalization, and performance optimization (Huang & Rust, 2021; Yue et al., 2024). At the same time, scholars and professional bodies warn that authenticity, bias, provenance, and human accountability must remain central as AI is embedded in creative and relational work (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018; Weller & Lock, 2025).

Macro-level analyses project pronounced reconfiguration of entry-level roles as routinized cognitive tasks are automated, with women disproportionately concentrated in exposed occupations (McKinsey Global Institute, 2023; Tang et al., 2025). Yet, beneath these projections lies the interpretive work of those about to enter the labor market: how they narrate opportunities, threats, ethics, and identity in an AI-mediated profession.

This study brings those voices to the foreground. We qualitatively examine how undergraduate majors in advertising and public relations interpret AI's implications for their future work, what competencies they believe will differentiate humans from machines, and how gender shapes these views. In doing so, we contribute a field-specific account that complements aggregate surveys and scenarios and informs the design of curricula, professional practices, and gender-responsive supports (McKinsey Global Institute, 2023; West, 2023).

Literature Review

AI and the Recomposition of Work

Historical scholarship establishes that technological anxiety recurs with each general-purpose technology: fears of unemployment, moral decline, and stagnation often precede reallocation and new task creation (Mokyr et al., 2015). Contemporary analyses of generative AI anticipate acceleration of task automation in occupations heavy in routine cognitive work, alongside augmentation—not replacement—of roles emphasizing judgment, creativity, and social-emotional skills (McKinsey Global Institute, 2023). In other words, the near-term future of work is less about job extinction than about task ecology: which tasks are delegated to machines and which remain sites of human comparative advantage (Mokyr et al., 2015; McKinsey Global Institute, 2023).

In strategic communication disciplines, a widely cited framework distinguishes mechanical, thinking, and feeling AI across research, segmentation–targeting–positioning, and execution, articulating where augmentation is most promising and where human oversight remains indispensable (Huang & Rust, 2021). Empirical work links AI usage to firm-level outcomes while highlighting mediators such as organizational culture and resistance to change, suggesting that performance gains are neither automatic nor uniform (Mu & Zhang, 2025). In advertising studies, scholars have theorized computational creativity pipelines that generate, evaluate, and iterate campaign ideas, while also demonstrating where synthetic ideation falters on cultural resonance, humor, and brand voice—precisely the domains students in our study describe as humanity premium territory (Vakratsas & Wang, 2021; Coffin, 2022). Public relations scholarship documents AI's diffusion into monitoring, issues scanning, micro-segmentation, and content drafting, but situates those capabilities within ethical requirements for disclosure, provenance, bias mitigation, and human accountability (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018; Yue et al., 2024). A recent systematic review in strategic communication further cautions that research remains conceptually fragmented and urges theory-driven, domain-specific investigations into automated communication's implications for stakeholder trust and organizational legitimacy (Weller & Lock, 2025).

As synthetic text, image, audio, and video proliferate, professional bodies have emphasized transparency about AI use, rigorous fact-checking, bias detection, privacy protection, and human oversight—principles with direct application in client work, earned media, and brand storytelling (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018; Weller & Lock, 2025). For strategic communication, authenticity is not a vague virtue; it is a reputational asset that depends on verifiable provenance, truthful representation, and disclosure practices that preserve audience trust under conditions of media uncertainty (Weller & Lock, 2025; Yue et al., 2024). Students' concerns about deepfakes and voice cloning thus track a growing scholarly and practitioner consensus that authenticity infrastructures—tooling, policy, and norms—are now core to professional competence.

Gendered Impacts of AI

Macro-analytic and policy research indicate that generative AI's labor impacts are patterned by pre-existing occupational segregation and care burdens, with women overrepresented in roles projected to contract and with unequal time and resources for reskilling (McKinsey Global Institute, 2023). Recent quasi-experimental evidence suggests that productivity gains from generative AI in academia have accrued more to men than women in the immediate aftermath of ChatGPT's release, implying a widening gap unless organizational supports actively counter it (Tang et al., 2025). Brookings analysis argues that women perceive—and experience—AI-related risks along at least four vectors. First, economic security: women without college degrees are concentrated in entry-level clerical and customer roles with high automation exposure, making displacement and downward pressure on wages more likely (West, 2023). Second, personal security: gender-targeted harms such as deepfake sexualized content and voice-cloning scams disproportionately victimize women and girls, with inadequate legal recourse in many jurisdictions (West, 2023). Third, representation and voice: women's underrepresentation in STEM and AI development pipelines diminishes their influence on product design and governance, increasing the likelihood that systems encode and amplify existing biases (West, 2023). Fourth, the broader turbulence of megachange: rapid technological and organizational shifts reverberate through caregiving and community roles, adding psychological and logistical strain that may depress participation or advancement absent supportive policies (West, 2023).

Method

We conducted six focus groups with 75 undergraduate students, all majors in advertising or public relations, at a mid-size U.S. university. Groups were intentionally mixed by major to elicit cross-field comparisons while remaining anchored in strategic communication discourse. Group sizes varied to balance interactional diversity with opportunities for each participant to contribute. The study protocol received institutional review board approval, and all participants provided informed consent.

Focus groups are well suited for examining how people co-construct meanings in real time, surface latent norms, and negotiate disagreements—processes central to emergent, ambiguous phenomena such as AI in creative and relational work (Kitzinger, 1995; Morgan, 1996). Compared with individual interviews, focus groups can elicit a broader repertoire of experiences and prompt participants to articulate and refine their positions as they respond to peers, while still enabling the exploration of sensitive topics when carefully moderated (Guest et al., 2017; Kitzinger, 1995). In contrast to surveys, which estimate prevalence or attitudes at scale, focus groups illuminate interpretive logics, vocabularies, and identity work—insights particularly valuable for curricular and managerial design (Morgan, 1996).

Each 90-minute session followed a semi-structured protocol covering current AI use; anticipated changes to entry-level roles and career ladders; perceived benefits and risks for advertising, public relations, and marketing; ethical and governance expectations, including authenticity and disclosure; and gendered experiences and expectations. Two trained moderators facilitated, inviting diverse viewpoints, probing for concrete examples, and monitoring group dynamics to reduce dominance effects. Sessions were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed, and identifying details were removed during transcription.

We employed reflexive thematic analysis, iteratively moving through familiarization, inductive coding, theme generation, review, and naming, while documenting analytic decisions in an auditable trail (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Coding was conducted by a team with expertise in public relations and marketing; discrepancies were resolved through discussion focused on meaning. We assessed sufficiency conceptually—coherence, distinctiveness, and saturation of themes—consistent with qualitative guidance that many dominant themes emerge within three to six focus groups (Guest et al., 2017). Credibility was supported by triangulation across groups and representative quotations; dependability and confirmability by memoing, decision logs, and peer debriefs; and transferability by thick description of context (Nowell et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

Efficiency without Equity

Students widely anticipated that AI will automate routinized, entry-level functions central to traditional apprenticeships in advertising, public relations, and marketing—media monitoring, templated reporting, basic copy drafting, and preliminary secondary research. One participant remarked, “I think many routine mundane tasks are going to be eliminated… Maybe more women will lose their jobs,” and another added, “Women’s jobs are more in jeopardy.” A third summarized the organizational logic as “companies are going to do whatever they can to make things more efficient.”

These statements align with projections that office support and customer service—occupations with high female representation—will continue to shrink as automation diffuses (McKinsey Global Institute, 2023). The theme raises two

questions. First, distributional: who bears the risk of lost rungs on the career ladder if entry-level work is automated, and will exposure concentrate among women given current role structures? Second, pedagogical: how should apprenticeships be redesigned so that novices still acquire tacit knowledge, craft, and professional judgment when busy work is delegated to machines (McKinsey Global Institute, 2023; West, 2023)?

The Humanity Premium

Across majors, students argued that AI's limitations will elevate human capacities constitutive of strategic communication: empathy, client counseling, narrative coherence, cultural fluency, and the capacity to read weak signals in stakeholder relationships. "AI will never be able to replace having an actual interaction with someone," one student asserted. Another pointed to humor and cultural creativity: "AI doesn't really pick up on the jokes that we have… AI would not come up with puppy-monkey-baby for the Super Bowl." This theme dovetails with research positioning AI as augmenting analysis and variation generation while humans steer meaning, brand voice, and ethical risk (Huang & Rust, 2021; Vakratsas & Wang, 2021).

Theoretically, students implicitly advance a model of complementary specialization: machines for scale and search; humans for situated judgment, taste, and trust construction. Practically, early-career roles should be reframed around high-touch client and stakeholder work, qualitative insight synthesis, and creative direction, ensuring that the human premium is cultivated rather than assumed.

The Authenticity Arms Race

Students narrated personal and familial harms attributable to synthetic media and automation—voice-cloning scams that targeted grandparents, unsettling interactions with AI agents, and a generalized sense that "it's hard to tell real from fake… we need to educate to protect." They extrapolated these risks to professional practice, anticipating reputational crises fueled by deepfakes and wrongly attributed content. Their concerns mirror calls for authenticity infrastructures—provenance technologies, disclosure norms, and crisis protocols tailored to synthetic media environments—now central to strategic communication competence (Weller & Lock, 2025; Yue et al., 2024). The theme also underscores gendered asymmetries of harm, as sexualized deepfakes and harassment disproportionately target women and girls (West, 2023).

Cognitive Overdraft

Women participants voiced a layered anxiety that wove together economic exposure, safety, and psychosocial load. As one explained, "Women tend to think like 3 steps ahead… Someone could take my face, take my voice," while another concluded, "It's not AI's fault; it's just a reflection of society's problems." This resonates with the argument that AI's risks for women crystallize along economic security, personal security, representation, and megachange stress (West, 2023). It reframes technology "resistance" as rational risk assessment under structural asymmetries.

For human–AI interaction, the theme suggests that adoption and trust will hinge on perceived control, recourse, and institutional protections; for educators and employers, it indicates that policies against synthetic harassment, supportive training, and flexible upskilling can convert anxiety into agency (Tang et al., 2025; West, 2023).

Do-It-Yourself AI Literacy

Students reported pragmatic, rapidly normalizing adoption. "I use it to generate ideas or topics for assignments," one noted, while another observed, "I think it's like everyone's learning at the same time," and a third reflected on a normative turn "from banning to embracing." The appetite,

however, is for structured pedagogy: prompt design, critical evaluation, error and bias analysis, disclosure and provenance practices, and application-specific workflows. This aligns with managerial findings that performance gains depend on organizational learning rather than tool access alone (Mu & Zhang, 2025; Yue et al., 2024). Curricular design should thus weave AI literacy throughout, aligning domain-specific labs and studios with ethical analysis, and assessment should prioritize human curation and judgment over raw output.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings portray a cohort simultaneously somber about displacement risks and articulate about the reservoir of value humans bring to strategic communication. Students foresee AI compressing low-discretion tasks and raising the bar on relational, creative, and ethical competencies in advertising, public relations, and marketing. They also perceive a legitimacy and safety challenge in the form of synthetic media and surveillance, and women, in particular, connect AI to a broader ecology of vulnerability and strain. These interpretations track macro-level projections while deepening them by clarifying the social meanings students attach to AI and the conditions under which augmentation is empowering rather than extractive (McKinsey Global Institute, 2023; West, 2023).

This has real implications for the practice of advertising and public relations. Agencies and corporations should redesign early-career roles to protect learning while leveraging automation: novices should move from rote assembly to insight synthesis, client counseling, and creative stewardship, with AI handling draftable, repeatable tasks (Huang & Rust, 2021; Vakratsas & Wang, 2021).

For education, curricula in advertising, public relations, and marketing should embed AI literacy across the program, pair domain-specific studios with ethical analysis, and explicitly address gendered risk and recourse.

For policy and organizational design, gender-responsive upskilling, mentorship, and legal protections against synthetic abuse can dampen the four danger vectors highlighted by Brookings—economic displacement, personal security, underrepresentation, and megachange stress—so that AI augments rather than attenuates women's participation and advancement (West, 2023; Tang et al., 2025). For governance, teams should operationalize authenticity through provenance tooling, disclosure in client deliverables, bias audits, and scenario-based crisis protocols for synthetic harms (Weller & Lock, 2025; Yue et al., 2024).

This study has its limitations however, including its single-institution, self-selected sample that might have influenced focus group dynamics despite moderation. Future research should build multi-site and longitudinal designs, conduct task-level field experiments on human–AI creative collaboration, evaluate authenticity infrastructures in real campaigns, and test gender-responsive interventions in strategic communication workplaces and classrooms (Weller & Lock, 2025; Yue et al., 2024). Even so, the present analysis offers a textured portrait of how the next generation of professionals is already theorizing human–AI collaboration and provides actionable guidance for an equitable and trusted AI future.

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Investigating the impact of AI on SMEs: communicative challenges and insights from an Italian study

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Abstract

This study examines the adoption and integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) solutions across various business functions, such as customer care, communication, public relations, and marketing, focusing on a sample of 200 Italian micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The analysis is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Adoption and Diffusion Theory and the Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) model. It explores both the opportunities and barriers perceived by C-level managers in implementing AI systems within their organizations. The study, based on 200 CATI interviews with SMEs managers (administrated in collaboration with IPSOS as part of a broader national research project), highlights that communication is increasingly recognised as a key area for AI adoption, although current use remains confined to routine tasks.

In general, existing data show that engagement with AI is growing, but remains underdeveloped, due to inadequate digital skills and limited government support. Furthermore, media narratives significantly impact managers' perceptions of AI, with many expressing concerns about its potential impact on job loss. The study calls for further qualitative investigation and cross-country comparisons, emphasizing the need for AI literacy and clearer AI competencies.

Introduction and Aim of the study

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has long attracted the attention of both scholars and the general public. According to McCarthy (2007), AI is a technological domain focused on creating systems capable of performing tasks that were once considered the exclusive domain of human intelligence. These tasks range from perception and reasoning to learning and problem-solving (McCarthy, 2007).

However, it is increasingly recognized in the literature that AI systems are not merely simulators of human behaviour; rather, they represent the construction of autonomous entities capable of making decisions, learning from data, and operating in complex environments (Olteanu et al., 2025). The development of AI systems significantly accelerated after the release of Large Language Models (LLMs, such as ChatGPT) in 2022, which marked a significant turning point in the diffusion and adoption of generative AI, to the point that this technology is reshaping business

processes and communication across organizations, both in the private and in the public sector. While large companies are rapidly integrating AI into their operations, adoption among micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises remains comparatively limited and underexplored in the scholarly literature, particularly within the Italian context. Moreover, research focusing on Italian SMEs becomes particularly relevant, as they not only represent the backbone of the national economy, accounting for nearly 90% of all businesses and employing approximately 78% of the total workforce but also have the capacity to serve as key drivers of innovation and competitiveness. Providing insights into how AI, still in its early stages of adoption, is shaping their strategic (and communication) functions is therefore essential for understanding both organizational transformation and broader socio-economic impacts.

In this context, this study, aligning with the existing research frameworks of the Adoption and Diffusion of Innovation theory (Rogers, 2003; Kee, 2017) and the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) model (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990), aims to investigate the level of AI adoption and integration by Italian SMEs. It focuses on the impact of AI solutions on communication and customer relationship practices, exploring the perceived barriers and opportunities associated with AI integration, from the perspective of C-level executives. The study underscores the communicative dimension as a strategic entry point for fostering AI adoption within smaller organizations such as SMEs. The research also addresses how media narratives about AI and job displacement influence managerial perceptions, offering insights into both practical and cultural dimensions of AI adoption in SMEs.

Literature Review

Despite an extensive public attention that has been dedicated to the topic of AI, relatively few studies have investigated its practical applications within micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This observation aligns with a similar gap that has been identified in studies of the public sector (Panda et al., 2025). However, the use of AI in both the private and public sectors is gaining momentum (Hjaltalin & Sigurdarson, 2024; Madan & Ashok, 2023), fuelling a public debate that is shedding light on its technological, economic, and societal implications (Lorentz et al., 2023; Galloway & Swiatek, 2018).

Recent studies (Huseyn et al., 2024; Schwaeke et al., 2024) have emphasized AI's potential to generate new business and entrepreneurial opportunities (Giuggioli & Pellegrini, 2023), as well as its ability to reshape strategic (Gregory & Smith, 2025) and corporate communication (Kelm & Johann, 2025). AI can also enhance public relations (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018) and crisis management (Cheng et al., 2024). At the same time, AI raises unprecedented ethical challenges and risks, including concerns related to privacy and security, bias and fairness, trust and reliability, transparency, and the human–AI interaction. (Bowen, 2024; Kamila & Jasrotia, 2025; Illia, Colleoni & Zyglidopoulos, 2023).
Given this *double-edged* nature (Zerfass et al., 2024), AI adoption and integration in SMEs largely remain confined to low-risk and repetitive functions, hampered by a variety of internal and external challenges (Mohd Rasdi & Umar Baki, 2025; Zerfass et al., 2024). Indeed, Wirtz et al. (2018) note that AI continues to operate within defined limits, while creative problem-solving and innovative thinking remain predominantly human-driven. However, the release of ChatGPT in November 2022 has accelerated AI adoption, intensifying both the pace and the relevance of the debate (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Generative AI, in particular, is reshaping the global labour market as LLMs constitute a different form of automation that increasingly overlaps with tasks traditionally performed by

the creative, highly educated, and highly paid workers (Eloundou et al., 2023). At the same time, AI holds considerable potential to boost labour productivity (Brynjolfsson et al., 2021), a factor that may explain why nearly 80% of large companies have already implemented AI into their core operations (Ghosh et al., 2019; Yin et al., 2024).

In response, the World Economic Forum (2025) underscores the urgency of widespread reskilling and lifelong learning initiatives to prepare societies for these transformations. However, the levels of AI adoption among SMEs vary widely due to structural and organisational barriers. Some scholars have noted that SMEs tend to emulate the strategies of larger companies (Atkinson, 2025), but their efforts are frequently hindered by limited digital skills and insufficient financial resources. On the other hand, studies have indicated that SMEs may benefit from greater flexibility compared to larger companies, enabling them to adapt more rapidly to innovative approaches (Ahmed, 2024; Rajaram & Tinguely, 2024).

In the broader European context SMEs tend to be hesitant and slower than larger companies in adopting AI (Ameen et al., 2022), with Italy, for instance, reporting even lower levels of AI adoption compared to the European average (Eurostat, 2025). This gap is largely caused by a combination of structural and cultural barriers, including limited access to advanced digital competencies, insufficient training opportunities, and persistent financial constraints that hinder both progress and innovation (Proietti & Magnani, 2025). However, existing literature suggests that participation in collaborative networks, such as innovation hubs, and public–private partnerships has proven effective in enhancing AI adoption and facilitating knowledge-sharing among smaller companies, thereby helping to overcome some of these limitations (Muto et al., 2024).

Rogers's Diffusion of Innovation Theory (2003) pointed out that an innovation spreads rapidly once it reaches at least 10% of the members of a social group. However, research by the Institute for Competitiveness in collaboration with TeamSystem (2025) indicates that, to date, only 8.2% of Italian SMEs have adopted AI, compared with the European average of 13.5%. This may suggest that we are not yet witnessing the domino effect described by Rogers, which would enable more rapid diffusion. Consequently, Italian SMEs may be situated within so-called homophilous social systems—contexts that are more conservative and resistant to innovation, and that tend to adopt new practices with greater hesitation than others (Rogers, 2003).

Furthermore, the Teha Global Innosystem Index 2025, a global ranking developed by Ambrosetti-The European House to evaluate the innovation capacity of the world's 47 most advanced countries, ranks Italy only 30th, two positions lower than in 2022. This places the country below the EU average, reflecting a persistent hesitation among Italian enterprises to adopt technological innovations at an early stage, including AI solutions. The index evaluates performance across five key dimensions: human capital, financial resources, ecosystem attractiveness, innovation ecosystem, ecosystem effectiveness. According to the index data, one of Italy's most pressing challenges lies in the weakness of its human capital, largely attributable to insufficient investment in education and research (Ambrosetti - The European House, 2025).

In this context, the communicative dimension plays a particularly significant role (Ertem Eray & Cheng, 2025). In SMEs, communication activities frequently overlap with marketing and advertising functions due to their limited organizational size. Indeed, this area represents a strategic entry point for the introduction of AI. By applying AI solutions to communication,

SMEs can experiment in a relatively low-risk environment, testing automation, personalization, and data-driven insights. Such initiatives not only enhance the effectiveness of communication but also elevate its strategic importance within the broader organizational ecosystem (Kelm & Johann, 2025).
Furthermore, one perspective that has recently attracted scholarly attention in the international context concerns the role of media narratives: public discourses about AI, particularly those emphasizing its potential impact on employment, may shape managerial perceptions and influence the pace of AI adoption in SMEs (Ittefaq et al., 2025; Schwarz & Faj, 2024).

Methods & Research Questions

This study is part of a broader research project (IATI), funded by the Italian Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy (MIMIT, *Direzione Generale per il Digitale e le Telecomunicazioni*, ItalianGovernment) and aims to investigate the challenges posed by AI for Italian micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, with a specific focus on perceptions related to communication and public relations functions.
The empirical data were collected in July 2024 through 200 CATI (Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing) surveys conducted by research institute IPSOS. The sample is representative of the national population of Italian micro/SMEs and includes C-level executives (CEOs, General Managers, and Entrepreneurs). Interviewees were selected based on geographical distribution, company size, and industrial sector, with particular attention to industry/manufacturing, commerce, construction, and business or personal services. Geographically, respondents were distributed across Italy to capture regional variations: 25% in the North East, 33% in the North West, 21% in the Center, and 21% in the South and Islands. The questionnaire, consisted of 21 closed-ended questions, was designed to assess managers' awareness and perceptions of AI adoption.

The study addresses three main research questions:

- **RQ1** *What challenges do C-level managers in Italian SMEs perceive in adopting AI solutions, and how do these differ between adopters and non-adopters?*
- **RQ2** *Which business functions are considered most impacted by AI, and how do these perceptions vary depending on whether AI has already been adopted, particularly in the area of communication?*
- **RQ3** *How do Italian C-level managers interpret media narratives concerning AI's impact on employment?*

Results and Discussion

The study highlights that Italian SMEs appear to operate within homophilous systems and show greater resistance to innovation. In particular, companies that have not adopted AI highlight two main obstacles: the high cost of developing internal human capital (152 responses) and employees' limited adaptability to digital or technological innovation (142). Interestingly, these barriers are not exclusive to non-adopters. Among companies that have already introduced AI solutions, similar difficulties persist—albeit to a lesser extent—especially concerning employees' adaptability (14 responses) and the ongoing need for investment in human capital development (12). These findings suggest that such challenges are not confined to the pre-adoption stage but continue to shape SMEs' experience throughout the implementation process.

These results resonate with recent studies emphasizing the lack of AI-related competencies within SMEs as a key limiting factor (Chatterjee et al., 2022). The perception of AI as a complex and resource-intensive technology appears to amplify concerns about workforce preparedness

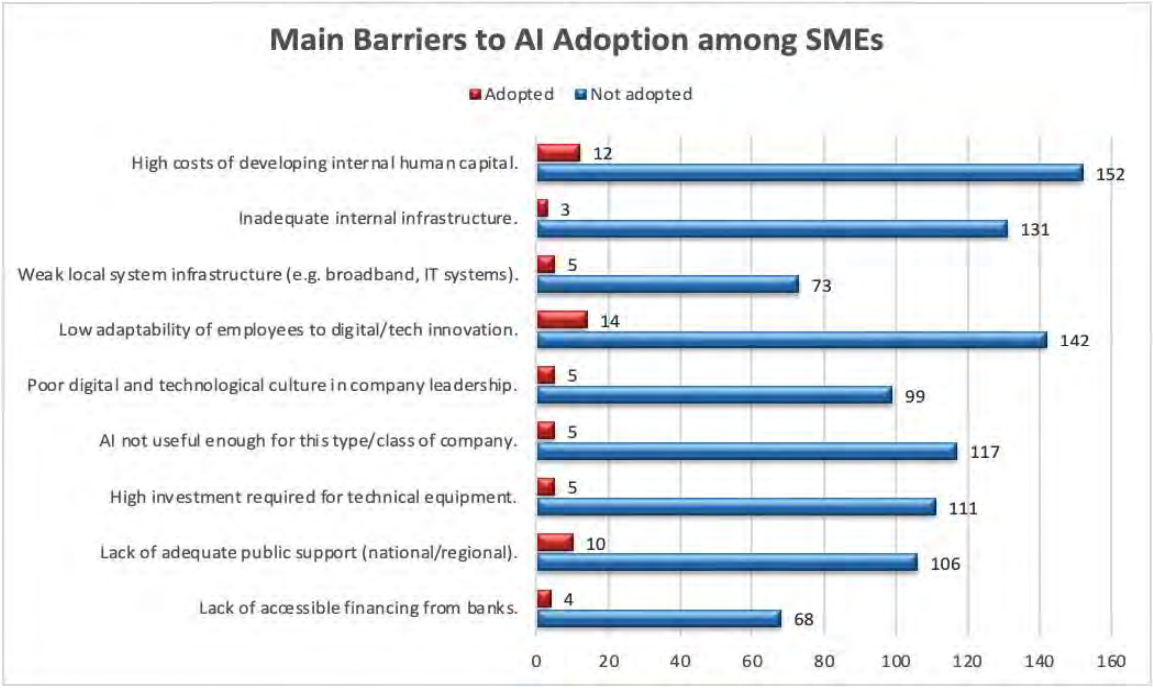

Figure 1 Main Barriers to AI adoption among SMEs; Base= 200, absolute numbers.

and long-term sustainability. This also points to a broader need for external support systems (i.e. training programs, incentives, and shared infrastructure) capable of alleviating the burden on smaller companies.

The structural gap identified is also consistent with the Teha Global Innosystem Index 2025, which highlights similar obstacles in different contexts, thereby reinforcing the robustness of these findings. According to the European Innovation Scoreboard 2024, Italy falls within the "Moderate Innovators" category, reflecting its low talent mobility and limited digital skills compared to other European countries. The relatively weak private and public investment in innovation and the commercialization of new ideas is another important constraint. Consistently, the third major weakness identified by the C-level executives surveyed concerns inadequate internal infrastructure and insufficient funding (131 responses).

These concerns reflect both organizational and environmental constraints—two dimensions commonly associated with the TOE framework (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990)—confirming that both internal readiness and structural limitations are crucial in AI adoption decisions. In light of these findings, the social system of Italian SMEs cannot currently be considered heterophilous—that is, a system that readily embraces change or adopts innovations with relative ease. Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognize that social systems are dynamic rather than fixed; shifts in organizational culture, investment in human capital, or external pressures could facilitate a gradual move toward greater openness to innovation in the future.

Turning to the perceived opportunities, particularly in relation to business functions most impacted by AI, communication emerges as a strategic entry point. Across the sample, the area most frequently cited as potentially benefiting from AI is "communication and marketing" with 42 mentions among non-adopters and 11 among adopters. Those who have already implemented AI tools confirm the relevance of this

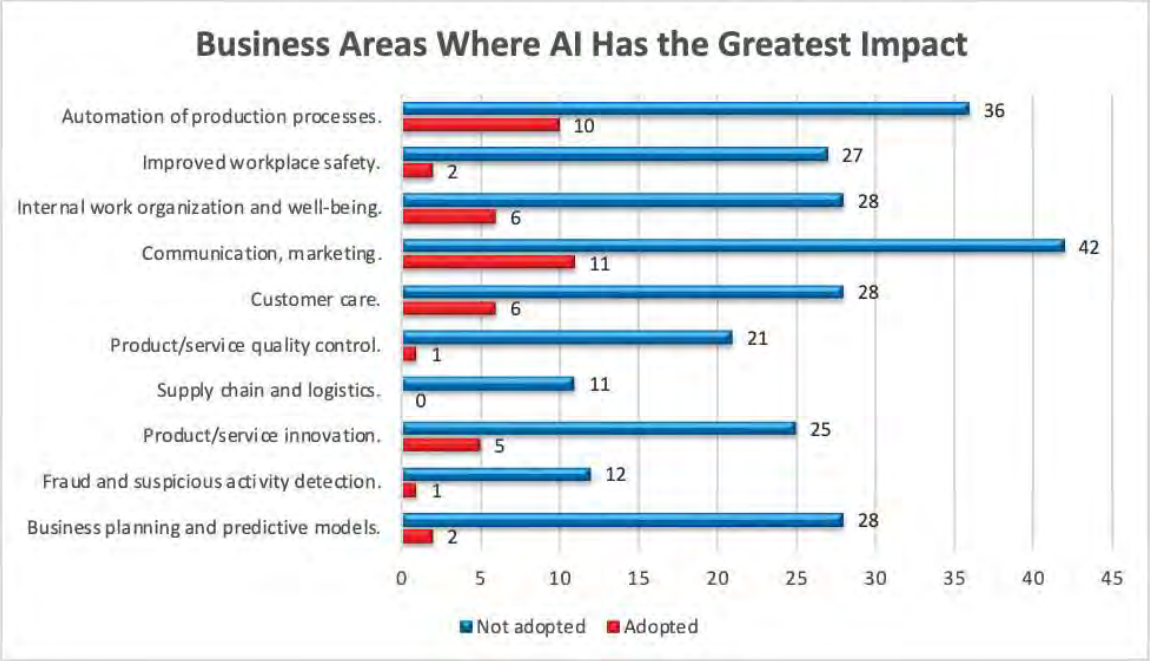

Figure 2: Business Areas Where AI Has the Greatest Impact. Base= total, absolute numbers.

area—suggesting that communication functions may serve as a low-risk and high-visibility area for innovations. In fact, among the 29 companies that have adopted AI solutions, 11 have implemented them in the field of communication. Indeed, the adoption of AI in communication activities is gradually reshaping organizational flows and processes, as well as strategic approaches, with potential implications for competitiveness (Iaia et al., 2024; Zerfass et al., 2024). Moreover, studies also suggest that AI applications may enhance stakeholder and employee engagement, while contributing to a more effective management of customer experience through the collection and interpretation of direct feedback (Buhmann, 2023; Zerfass et al., 2020).

C-level executives who have implemented AI in the communications sector are predominantly located in Northern Italy, particularly within the 'Personal and Business Services' sector. This finding aligns with the analysis of secondary data, which reveals that opinion leaders and early adopters are predominantly concentrated in Northern districts (Eurostat, 2025). Italy itself represents a complex case, with the business system more heavily concentrated in the Northern regions, where technological, business, and other forms of innovation are predominantly located (Regional Innovation Scoreboard, 2025).

Notably, no micro-enterprises appear in this group, confirming what existing literature suggests: that organizational size remains a key enabler of AI adoption (Gregory et al., 2023; Kelm & Johann, 2025). The data show a tendency for larger companies to implement AI in marketing and communication more often, supporting the idea that more structured organizations are better equipped—both financially and operationally—to integrate new technologies. It is widely acknowledged that SMEs tend to encounter greater challenges in pursuing technological innovation compared to larger companies (Ameen et al., 2022).

However, expectations for future growth in this

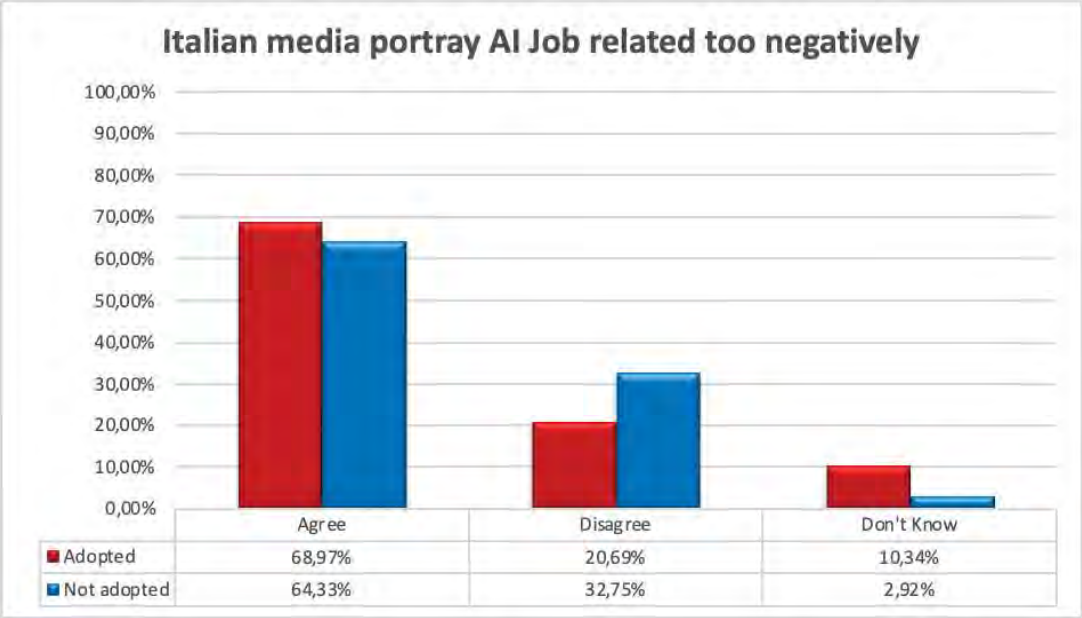

Figure 3 C-Levels' Perception of Mass Media Discourse on AI; Base=total; percentages values.

area remain cautious. Despite the perceived strategic relevance of communication, 74% of respondents indicated that they do not find AI solutions in marketing particularly useful at this stage. This scepticism likely stems from the still limited implementation of such technologies among SMEs, and reflects broader concerns around their practical utility, return on investment, and the complexity of integration—challenges widely recognized in the literature as key obstacles for SMEs approaching AI adoption (Wirtz et al., 2018).

After considering both the perceived barriers to AI adoption and the strategic relevance of communication functions, the focus shifts to a more cultural and discursive dimension of the phenomenon. Specifically, the third research question (RQ3) focuses on how high-level Italian executives perceive media narratives regarding AI's impact on employment.

Survey results indicate that many C-level managers—particularly those whose companies have already adopted AI solutions—perceive the tone of media narratives as predominantly negative, especially regarding employment risks. A substantial portion of respondents agreed that the media tend to overemphasize the potential for job loss, reinforcing a negative framing of AI's social impact. Among adopters, only 20% (6 out of 29) disagreed with this assessment, suggesting that exposure to AI tools within their companies does not necessarily lead to a reassessment of public narratives.

This discrepancy contrasts with most academic studies, which show that media coverage of AI tends to be largely positive or industry-oriented, often promoting innovation, growth, and competitiveness (Chuan et al., 2019; Fast & Horvitz, 2017; Schwarz & Faj, 2024). It may be partially explained by the limited self-reported expertise of many respondents in AI, as shown earlier in the findings.

Conclusion

This study has provided an overview of how Italian micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are approaching to AI adoption and

integration, particularly in the communication sector.

Despite still limited overall implementation, there is growing recognition of AI strategic potential. Communication activities, often overlapping with marketing and customer service in smaller companies (Kelm & Johann, 2025), has emerged as a pioneering field for experimentation, particularly in Italian medium-sized companies and service-oriented sectors.

Nonetheless, significant structural barriers continue to affect AI adoption in Italian SMEs. These barriers can be understood at both the organizational and individual level, according to the TOE model (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990). At the organizational level, the external environment—including governance, regulations, and strategic orientations—shapes the conditions in which companies operate and influences their capacity to adopt new digital technologies. Findings from this study has indeed stated that C-level executives consider insufficient infrastructure and persistent technological gaps as the primary obstacles to progress and innovation in their organizations.

At the individual level, adoption depends on personal competence, self-confidence, and emotional attitudes (Sartori & Bocca, 2023). These factors relate to the technological dimension of the TOE framework and are especially relevant in the context of discontinuous technological change: while AI offers opportunities for improvement, it can also rapidly render existing technological and human skills obsolete (Tushman & Anderson, 1986). This dual challenge is reflected in the cultural resistance and uncertainty reported in our research by many executives, highlighting the difficulty of adapting to fast-evolving technologies.

Empirical insights suggest that successful AI adoption requires not only addressing structural and technological limitations within the organizational environment but also managing the human dimension of change. Companies that can navigate both fronts effectively are more likely to transform AI into a driver of innovation rather than a source of hesitation. These concerns appear to be reinforced by media narratives, which are widely perceived as negative or alarmist, despite the literature suggesting a more optimistic or business-oriented tone in AI coverage. This misalignment highlights the importance of digital literacy: in line with the science communication deficit model (Scheufele & Lewenstein, 2005) and the media hostile effect (Choi et al., 2009), limited knowledge can lead to selective interpretations of complex topics like AI, further inhibiting its adoption.

In this sense, AI becomes not only a technological object, but also a symbolic one, through which broader uncertainties about the future of work are negotiated. As noted in the emerging technologies literature (Beck & Vowe, 1995; Scheufele & Lewenstein, 2005), media narratives not only reflect innovation but actively participate in its social construction.

For SMEs navigating digital transformation with limited resources, such narratives can amplify concerns rather than alleviate them, especially when the practical benefits of AI remain inaccessible or abstract.

The barriers identified, alongside the negative media framing of AI's impact on employment, suggest that Italian SMEs currently exhibit homophilous social structures—networks characterized by similarity and internal reinforcement. However, this trajectory could shift if more attention is given to investing in specialized human capital, which may nurture heterophilous opinion leaders and thereby catalyse innovation.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, several directions emerge for future research.

First, a methodological expansion is needed: integrating in-depth interviews, for instance with communication professionals and middle managers, could offer richer insight into how AI is concretely reshaping internal workflows, redefining professional roles, and influencing strategic communication practices within SMEs. While the survey has helped map key perceptions and trends, a qualitative approach would allow for a more nuanced exploration of personal and organizational realities. At the same time, cross-sectoral and cross-national comparisons could help assess the extent to which the patterns observed among Italian SMEs reflect broader structural or cultural dynamics. Exploring similar phenomena in other national contexts or industrial sectors not covered by this study would better clarify whether the barriers and opportunities identified here are specific to the Italian economic and regulatory landscape, or part of a wider trend in the integration of AI within small and medium enterprises.

Another critical area deserving further investigation is the development of AI-related competences within SMEs. Beyond questions of technological infrastructure, there is a growing awareness that human skills remain central to the effective and ethical use of AI tools. Future studies should therefore focus on identifying the core competencies required to navigate and manage AI systems across different organizational levels. Rather than replacing human roles, AI adoption demands new forms of oversight, interpretive ability, and critical awareness—especially in smaller enterprises where digital literacy may be unevenly distributed (Gregory et al., 2023; Annapureddy et al., 2025).

Finally, the strategic role of communication itself should be explored in greater depth. As this study has shown, communication is often among the first sectors where AI tools are introduced, together with marketing and customer care. Future research should examine the ways in which automation and augmentation are reshaping the responsibilities and expectations of communication functions within resource-limited organizational contexts, such as SMEs.

Indeed, although the findings are exploratory, they suggest that communication serves not only as a space for early AI adoption but also as a potential driver of broader cultural and operational change. Therefore, supporting SMEs in cultivating an AI-oriented culture and fostering trust in emerging technologies may be crucial to unlocking AI's transformative potential.

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Generative AI in Political Public Relations: A Video Ethnographic Study of Content Production

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Introduction

The way public relations (PR) practitioners engage with one another in their daily work is changing. In PR, content is crafted through dialogue, negotiation, and the careful, iterative process of drafting and redrafting (Theunissen & Sissons, 2017). Today, that process is being disrupted. Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) systems now offer ready-made texts at the click of a button, reshaping not only how work is done but also what it feels like to do it (Öztaş & Arda, 2025; Panda et al., 2019; Weller & Lock, 2025). On the surface, as Swiatek and Galloway (2022) noted, these systems are efficient, but that efficiency comes at a price.

In the short span since GenAI has entered the mainstream, scholars have rushed to make sense of its impact on PR, describing it as a "strategic disruption" (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018, p. 3) to the profession, fuelled by the belief that it could "change the whole game" and even "turn the profession upside down" (Yue et al., 2024, p. 520). Both framings converge on a sense of transformation, one in which efficiency is heightened and productivity is boosted. Yet what often falls out of focus are the ethical risks and the changing patterns of engagement between practitioners, along with their impact on how professional identity and commitment to PR work are understood. In this context, Heidegger (1977) work reminds us that technology is never neutral, it always shapes how we see and act in the world. Here, we might see GenAI not just as a tool but as an ontological shift, risking the reduction of human relationships, even in PR where practitioners can be reduced from co-creators of meaning to curators of information.

This paper contributes to the broader conversation about the use of GenAI in political public relations (PPR). It does so by isolating two key aspects of PPR practice. First, engagement through interaction between practitioners in the context of professional PPR settings. And second, the ethical consideration concerning the products of PPR practice. Grounded in critical PR framework, engagement between practitioners in this study is defined, not just as professional interaction or coordination, but as a discursive, power-laden, and ideologically shaped practice (Valentini, 2021).

It's about how practitioners negotiate meaning, define the profession, and influence institutional norms often in tension with organizational interests and broader societal expectations (L'Etang et al., 2016). Ethics is defined in agreement with Valentini (2021), who argued PR ethics must move beyond organizational self-interest to embrace societal accountability, pluralism, and reflexivity. Ethics here, is not a fixed set of

rules, but a practice shaped by power, context, and the need for communicative responsibility.

This research draws on ethnographic observations of PPR practices in a South Indian PPR department of a political party. This research compares two moments in time: 2019, when GenAI was absent from the workflow, and 2024, when it was present. This study contributes by bringing a practitioner-based perspective to a profession still grappling with unresolved debates about how GenAI is transforming PR. From questions of efficiency versus ethics (Swiatek & Galloway, 2022) to concerns about deskilling and creative flattening (Yue et al., 2024), the arrival of GenAI in PR signals not only technical change but also existential challenges for the field.

As practitioners confront this shift, the very meaning of PR work is changing (Yue, et al., 2024), from being communicators to becoming prompt engineers, from acting as relational agents to functioning as system navigators (Öztaş & Arda, 2025). If practitioners shift from being communicators to curators of machine outputs, collaboration looks different, meaning-making thins out, and the sense of what it means to be a professional in PR begins to change. This connects directly to the wider debate in the field: is AI simply a tool for efficiency, or is it a transformation that risks hollowing out the core of the profession? To explore this, the research asks:
RQ1: How does the integration of GenAI in PPR affect practitioners' engagement in the context of content creation? This question is addressed through the presentation of video ethnographic data, analysing key moments in PPR practice where interpersonal engagement and ethical negotiation sometimes absent, sometimes fraught, come sharply under a critical lens.

From co-creators of meaning to curators of information

Although increasing at an alarming rate, Kaira et al. (2024) systematic review showed that research on GenAI in PR is still in its early stages. Most studies focus on efficiency, highlighting how AI supports automation in areas such as content creation, crisis communication, and social media monitoring, or on how practitioners perceive these changes (Gregory et al., 2023). Conceptually, researchers have place AI within broader narratives like neoliberalism or PR 4.0. What is less developed is research that looks inside workplaces, asking how GenAI actually shapes engagement between practitioners, how ethical responsibility is negotiated, and how collaboration is transformed. Lock et al.'s (2025) review shows that research on AI and public communication is overwhelmingly concentrated in the Global North, leaving other contexts largely unexamined. The intersection of GenAi and PR is dominated by quantitative approaches such as surveys and experiments, while ethnographies or detailed case work style research is rare.

In PR scholarship, theories such as framing, sensemaking and actor–network theory have been widely used to understand how practitioners construct meaning, interpret change, and negotiate agency with technologies (Valentini, 2021). These frameworks remain influential in the context of GenAiand PR research because they highlight important dimensions of communication practice (Li et al., 2024). Yet, as Lock et al. (2025) point out in their review of AI and communication research, the application of such frameworks to GenAI is still limited. While they offer useful metaphors for understanding PR practice more generally, they do not fully capture what this study seeks to examine, the comparative embodied suspension of engagement and the displacement of ethical responsibility as practitioners shift from collaboration

to prompt-driven content creation. Lock et al's. (2025) review, thus indicates an exploratory stage of research, where mapping broad perceptions of AI is more common than studying its embedded practices.

When it comes to engagement, the story is much the same. As Dhanesh (2017) pointed out, engagement in PR has mostly been theorized in terms of how organizations connect with their publics or how departments manage external relationships. Much less attention has been given to what engagement looks like within the profession itself. Menon (2024), though writing from outside the field of PR, describes this GenAi associated shift as a form of "disembodied authorship," where creators are cut off from the iterative and embodied qualities of their craft. These observations highlight what PR research has yet to fully explore, namely how GenAI reconfigures everyday engagement between practitioners and their work. Much of the scholarship to date has focused on engagement between organizations and publics (Dhanesh, 2017), leaving practitioner-to-practitioner engagement underexamined, particularly in the context of PPR and GenAI.

While technology is often framed as something that makes life easier, part of what Mosco (2005) calls the "digital sublime," this narrative is echoed in PR where GenAI is positioned as freeing practitioners for more strategic thinking (Yue et al., 2024). However, this promise oversimplifies the lived experience of monotony, disconnection, and diminished judgment. From a practice-based perspective, Theunissen and Sissons (2017) remind us that PR is never just about output but about the human judgments and negotiations that shape practice, showing that practitioner input is central to how messages gain meaning.

Building on this, Gregory et al., (2023) argue from a practice perspective that even as AI automates routine tasks, it cannot replace the nuance, accountability and ethical responsibility that practitioners bring to their work. Swiatek and Galloway (2022), warned that without critical reflection, the adoption of GenAI risks delegating not only labour but also responsibility itself. Ethics has often been framed in terms of organizational responsibility to publics, compliance with codes, or the management of reputation by PR Scholarship. Much less has been written about how ethics is lived, practiced and negotiated within the daily practices of practitioners themselves.

Critical Discourse Studies: Engagement and Ethics

This study draws on Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) (Wodak & Meyer, 2015), while moving beyond its traditional emphasis on text to develop a more situated and embodied approach. CDS provides a way of seeing how meaning-making is bound up with culturally specific practices, where discourse is not only what is said or written but also what is done through gesture, tone, and embodied expression. In this sense, meaning is always tied to context, unfolding in professional settings through multimodal interaction (Sissons,2014). This perspective makes it possible to examine how GenAI reshapes practitioner engagement and ethical responsibility in PR, not only through the texts it produces but also through the embodied ways practitioners align, withdraw, or negotiate their role in the communicative process.

The research positions CDS within a culture-centric framework, applying theories of power to the everyday micro-interactions of practitioners (Rasquinha, 2024). Discourse is treated as one dimension of a broader communicative environment, where power is enacted through embodied and interactional practices such as, intonation, silence, gesture, and gaze, that carry culturally specific meanings (Sissons, 2014). To

capture these dynamics, the study also engages with traditions that extend discourse beyond language alone. Goffman (1967) reminds us that interaction constitutes a moral order, where responsibility and alignment are continually at stake. Building on this, Goodwin (2000) shows how participation is displayed and negotiated multimodally. These approaches allow us to treat disengagement, whether through silence, withdrawal of gaze, or verbal resignation, and not simply as absence, but as communicative acts that signal shifts in both engagement and ethical stance within professional practice.

Methodology

The study adopts a video ethnographic design to capture the everyday communicative practices of PPR. Fieldwork was conducted within the PPR department of a nationwide political party's regional office across two electoral cycles: the 2019 Indian General Election, when GenAI was absent from workflow, and the 2024 State Election, when it had entered practice. This design made it possible to compare content creation in non-AI-assisted and AI-assisted contexts.

In total, 60 hours of video-recorded interaction were collected, complemented by 11 semi-structured interviews, field notes, and reflexive journaling. The filmed recordings include planning meetings, campaign messaging, content production, and informal exchanges, providing a layered view of how practitioners collaborate and negotiate their work. From this dataset, critical incidents were identified when events were fully captured on video. These incidents represented significant aspects of PPR practice, they were observed and recognised as routine patterns of professional PPR behavior (Rasquinha, 2024). The Selected episodes were transcribed using Jeffersonian conventions (Jefferson, 2004) for verbal interaction and annotated for multimodal features such as posture, gaze, and tone.

The analytical framework combined conversation analysis and gestural analysis with CDS to trace how engagement and disengagement are enacted in collaborative rhythm, embodied stance, and interactional flow. While CDS provided the theoretical grounding to view meaning-making as multimodal and situated, it was also used analytically to trace how engagement and disengagement are enacted in collaborative rhythm, embodied stance, and interactional flow. Conversation analysis allowed close attention to turn-taking, overlap, and repair as cues of practitioner engagement and withdrawal, while gestural analysis highlighted how gaze, posture, and facial expression signalled both collaborative alignment and moments of ethical hesitation.

Although, the study focuses on two cases, the intention is not to claim universal patterns but to generate what Williams (2000) termed moderatum generalizations, insights that resonate beyond the immediate context without aspiring to statistical representativeness. In this sense, the strength of the approach lies in its depth, not its breadth, showing how meaning is made through specific multimodal patterns of behavior. As Creswell (2013) writing on qualitative methodology reminds us, qualitative inquiry is validated through credibility, transferability, and reflexivity rather than numerical replication. This study follows that tradition by privileging situated insight into how GenAI reshapes engagement and ethics in PPR contexts.

Multimodality, Engagement and Ethics in PPR Work: Two Case Studies

This section examines two cases observed during video ethnography in the same PPR department, during two different periods, the 2019 Indian General Election and the 2024 (Karnataka) State Election. In the first case, two practitioners, Philo and Mitch, collaborated on a Women's Day social media post. In this case,

Philo was tasked with creating the Women's Day post, a significant event in Indian political campaigns where practitioners use digital platforms to connect with women voters, a crucial electoral group. Political parties often frame such content around empowerment and leadership, sometimes drawing on historical figures to establish symbolic connections (Arabaghatta, 2022). Philo's workflow followed a structured yet flexible process before the introduction of GenAI. She sourced images of a female leader through Google, searched for quotes, and ensured that the design aligned with party branding, incorporating colours, symbols, and textual frames that reflected organizational identity. As Saluja and Thilaka (2021) note, these practices were less about free creativity and more about routine branding shaped by party ideology and strategic objectives.

The extract, an interaction between Philo and Mitch focuses on the production process of the post, with verbal exchanges, gestures, and shared decision-making highlighted. Thus, providing evidence of practitioner engagement and ethical consideration before the introduction of GenAI. Engagement between practitioners and with PPR work is observed through both Philo and Mitch's motivations and actions. Mitch brings into her discussions, her own activism around women's rights. She is joined by Philo in the design process, offering quotes and textual frames, suggesting images, and aligning the message with broader narratives of empowerment. Their shared participation highlights how engagement, enables knowledge exchange, and ethical consideration, where ownership of outputs is acknowledged by both practitioners. Therefore, through collaboration, engagement and ethical consideration is shown, not as abstract principle, but as something enacted through dialogue, gesture, and shared responsibility in routine content production.

In the second extract (video graphed in, 2024), Paul, a practitioner in the same department, produced four posts for a campaign on price rise, this time working with (GenAI) ChatGPT. While both cases emerge from the same organizational setting, the communicative environments differ. The #PriceRise and #ModiFail campaigns, which began in 2023, became prominent online protests against the national government's handling of inflation and rising living costs (PTI, 2023). The campaign highlighted economic distress through hashtags, data-driven infographics, and comparative charts, amplified by opposition parties and civil society (Rasquinha, 2024; Sharma, 2024; Arabaghatta, 2022). In this setting, Paul, whose professional tasks included routine video editing and social media production, was asked via WhatsApp by a senior team member to create posts for the Price Rise campaign, a common practice in Indian PPR work (Rasquinha, 2024). At the time, he was watching a news debate on YouTube and shifted to working with ChatGPT (January 2024 version) to generate text for posts.

What follows is an observation of Paul's solitary interaction with ChatGPT to create political campaign content. Unlike the Women's Day case, where engagement was enacted through dialogue, gestures, and shared responsibility, here engagement is registered both in Paul's non-verbal behaviour, facial expression, hand movement, bodily orientation, and in the textual prompts he typed into the interface. This interaction demonstrates how GenAI reorganizes engagement in the PPR workplace, moving from embodied collaboration to individual, prompt-driven production, and raising questions about how participation and responsibility are enacted when the practitioner's role shifts from co-creator to content curator.

The first case shows how engagement and ethical positioning are negotiated not only in words but also through gesture, gaze, and bodily orien-

Case I: Women's Day Post (2019, Non-AI-assisted)

Name	Kannada Script	Roman Script	Translation	Image
Philo	ಹಮ್ಮಮ್ ಥರಕ್ಷಿಣಿ ದೂರೋಧ ಶಕ್ತಿಶಾರು ಮಹಿಳಾ ಬಗೆ	hmm: (0.3) ?tharaksini durodha: saktisa:ru:: >mahila< bage:	the challenge for upliftment concerning women	 Image 1.1
Mitch	ಸ್ತರೀ ಶಕ್ತಿ ರಾಷ್ಟ್ರದ ಶಕ್ತಿ ಅಂತ ಹಕ್ಕು ಸ್ತರೀ ಶಕ್ತಿ ಷ್ಟ್ರದ ಶಕ್ತಿ	?stri ,sakti ?rastrada ,sakti °anta: hakku:° (0.2)	women power is the nations power put that women power is the nations power	
Mitch	ಮಹಿಳಾ ಮ್ಮ ಸಮಾನಾಧಿಗೆ ಮುನ್ನಡೆಯ ಮುನ್ನಮುನ್ನ ನ್ನಡೆಯೋಣ ಎಲ್ಲರಿಗೂ ಂತಾರಾಷ್ಟ್ರೀ ಯ ಮಹಿಳಾ ದಿನಾಗೆ ಸುಭಾಶಗಳು	(0.4) mahila (.) hss >saman-adhige munadi-yo::< (.) mun (.) mun muna::di-yo:na: ell:arigu: >°antarastriy mahila dinage° subhasa::galu:	let us move forward for the betterment of Women happy international womens day to everybody	 Image 1.2
Mitch	ಸ್ತರೀ ಶಕ್ತಿ ರಾಷ್ಟ್ರ ಶಕ್ತಿ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಸಮಾನಾಧಿಗೆ ಎಲ್ಲರು ನ್ನಡೆಯೋಣ ಯಾಕಂದ್ರೆ ಎಲ್ಲರಿಗೆ ಈಕವಾಲಿಟಿ ಬೆಖಗಳ ರಾಜ್ಯಗೆಲ್ಲ ಅರ್ಥಿಕದಲ್ಲಿ ಸಮಾಜಲ್ಲಿ	(0.2) stri: sakti rastra sakti (.) mahila ?saman-adhige (.),ellaru: munnadi:yo-na:(0.1) ya-kan[dre] >ellar-ige< [ikval:iti be] khagala rajya:-galla: °arthikdal-li° samajalli	Women power is the nation's power for the betterment of women let us all move forward because everyone wants equality for the nation for the economy present society	
Philo	ಆಹಹ ಅವಿದದು ಈಕವಾಲಿಟಿ	°[ahh vdu ik] valiti°	ahh yes equality	

Case I: Women's Day Post (2019, Non-AI-assisted) (continued)

Mitch	ಮುನ್ನಡೆ ಬಾರೋ ಎಲೆಕ್ಷನ್ ದಲ್ಲಿ ಸ್ತ್ರೀ ಒಂದು ರಾಷ್ಟ್ರದ ಶಕ್ತಿ ಅವ್ರು ಸಮಾನಾಧಿ ಕೊಟ್ಟು ಎಲದಲ್ಲಿ ಎಕ್ವಾಲಿಟಿ ಖೋತಬೇಕು	mun::nadi (.) [baro eleksan] dalli (.) stri ondu rastra: sakti: avru (.) [sama] nadhi kotu ye-ladalli: ekvaliti khotbeku::	in the coming election the women power as the nations power should give equality	
Philo	ಉಹ್ ಓಹ್ ಓಕೆ ಇಂದಿರಾ ಗಾಂಧಿ ಫೋಟೋ ಇರ್ಬೆಖ	uhh oh ok indira: gandhi: photo irrbekha:	uhh oh ok indira gandhis photo can be keept	 Image 1.3
Mitch	ಆಹ್ ಇರ್ಬೇಕ್ಬೇಖು ಯಾಕಂದ್ರೆ ರಜೆಕರಯದಲ್ಲಿ	haa: ?bekhu:: yakan:,dre ra-jekrayadalli indira gand[hi]-	haa should be there because in the na-tion indira gandhi	

tation. In Image 1.1, Philo is seen speaking while gesturing with her hand close to her mouth, her gaze directed towards Mitch. This alignment signals an active form of engagement, where she positions herself as contributing to the shaping of the message. Mitch responds by building on her suggestion, which illustrates how engagement here is interactive, co-constructed through gaze exchange and incremental contributions to the text.

In Image 1.1, Philo begins with "the challenge for upliftment concerning women", her hand raised to her mouth, gaze directed at Mitch. The gesture and gaze here invite Mitch's participation, creating what Goodwin (2000) calls a participation framework, where embodied cues position the interlocutor as co-author. Mitch immediately responds with "women power is the nation's power," signalling a shift from Philo's framing of "challenge" towards a more affirmative, mobilizing discourse. This moment demonstrates engagement as collaborative alignment, where meaning is negotiated turn by turn.

The ethical dimension surfaces more explicitly in Image 1.6. Mitch stresses "because everyone wants equality for the nation, for the economy, for society," foregrounding equality as a normative principle. Philo's brief uptake, "ahh yes equality" accompanied by her attentive orientation, reflects what Goffman (1967) describes as alignment within the moral order of interaction. Here, agreement is not simply procedural but an ethical stance, marking shared commitment to inclusivity. In PR terms, as Theunissen and Sissons (2017) suggest, such micro-level alignments can be seen as some of the ways in which PPR practitioners negotiate professional responsibility.

In Image 1.10, Mitch proposes adding Indira Gandhi's image, justifying it with "because in the nation Indira Gandhi…" while Philo's gaze remains fixed on the computer monitor placed in front of her. This move shifts the interaction into the terrain of discourse choices as suggested by Wodak and Meyer (2016). Importantly, these discourse choices carry ideological weight. Invoking Gandhi connects the message to a figure of national power, embedding ethical and political considerations into the campaign text. Engagement here is not only about co-creating words but about negotiating which values and historical symbols are mobilized, with ethical consequences for how women's empowerment is represented.

Case 2: Price Rise Campaign (2024, AI-assisted)

The second case moves forward five years, to the 2024 State Election, where Paul was tasked with

Figure 2: Price Rise Campaign Posts (2024, AI-assisted)

Description of Events	Prompts	Image
Paul receives a WhatsApp message asking him to create social media content		 Image 2.1
After 23 seconds Paul leans forward and begins to type on a keyboard placed in front of him. Paul continues to listen to a debate on YouTube, occasionally smiling		 Image 2.2
Paul's gaze meets the monitor placed in front of him	Create an image targeting (Politician's Name) and price increase I need three more similar images	
Paul seems distracted as he continues to type generative prompts into ChatGPT	I need three more similar images Petrol Increase	
Paul, unhappy with the posts produced, turns his attention to his phone		 Image 1.3

producing four social media posts on price rise. Unlike the Women's Day case, this interaction unfolds not between colleagues but between a practitioner and GenAI, with engagement expressed through typing prompts and bodily orientation rather than spoken dialogue.

In Image 2.1, Paul receives a WhatsApp request for campaign material. Unlike Philo and Mitch's collaborative dialogue in 2019, here the task immediately shifts into an individualized exchange, mediated by technology. Paul leans forward after 23 seconds, typing prompts such as "create an image targeting [politician's name] and price increase" (Image 2.2). His gaze alternates between the monitor and a YouTube debate running in the background, occasionally smiling, yet his attention seems fragmented. In Goodwin's (2000) terms, the participation framework here is narrowed, since there is no co-present collaborator to ratify or contest contributions. Instead, engagement becomes a solitary act of negotiating with machine outputs, which in Goffman's (1967) sense marks a withdrawal from the moral order of interaction, as ethical responsibility is no longer sustained through mutual accountability.

The lack of embodied reciprocity is an important observation when compared to the Women's Day post. Whereas gaze and gesture previously indexed collaboration and ethical alignment, here engagement is reduced to issuing textual commands, with Paul later dissatisfied by the generated outputs. In Image 2.3, he shifts attention from the computer to his phone, signalling disengagement not only from the task but also from the communicative labour of PR itself. This echoes Goffman's (1967) idea of withdrawal from the moral order of interaction, the practitioner is no longer visibly accountable to a partner in meaning-making, and ethical responsibility risks being displaced onto the tool.
From a critical discourse perspective (Wodak & Meyer, 2015), this interaction illustrates how GenAI reconfigures the conditions of ethical practice. Paul's reliance on prompts such as "three more similar images petrol increase" frames political critique as a replicable template, narrowing the scope for deliberation about representation and responsibility. Unlike in 2019, where equality and symbolism were debated as ethical stances, here ethical negotiation is conspicuously absent. Instead, the practitioner's role risks being reduced to that of a system navigator, curating outputs without engaging in deeper reflection.
Taken together, this case points to a noticeable shift in both how engagement happens and in its quality. In the earlier case, collaboration was co-constructed, grounded in shared gestures, dialogue, and the negotiation of meaning. Here, engagement feels thinner, instrumental, and largely reduced to issuing commands to a system. The relational energy that came from colleagues working together is missing, replaced by a solitary workflow that flattens interaction. This shift also shows how opportunities for ethical positioning become more fragile, with reflection and responsibility displaced as the practitioner moves into a prompt-driven mode of production.

Discussion

The two cases illustrate how practitioner engagement in PR is being reshaped in ways that go beyond efficiency. In 2019, collaboration was dialogic and embodied, with Philo and Mitch co-constructing meaning through gaze, gesture, and speech. Engagement here was not only about producing content but also about negotiating values, such as equality, and deciding how these should be represented. By contrast, in 2024, Paul's interaction with ChatGPT narrowed the participation framework (Goodwin, 2000). Engagement was reduced to solitary prompting, with little scope for collaborative rhythm or creative exchange. This shift highlights what Dhanesh (2017) identifies as a blind

spot in PR research, the focus on organization, centered PR has left interpersonal engagement between practitioners, and now between practitioners and their tools, largely unexplored.

Menon's (2024) notion of "disembodied authorship" captures this well, the study enhances this understanding by grounding it within the professional lived realities of PR practice. The significance of this is not only that practitioners feel cut off from the tactile and iterative qualities of their work, but also that the very identity of the practitioner is reshaped. When authorship is mediated through prompts and machine outputs, practitioners risk losing their role as co-creators of meaning and becoming curators of pre-structured content. This shift matters for PR because engagement is not simply about producing messages but about embodying professional agency and negotiating responsibility. If these embodied forms of authorship are eroded, so too are the opportunities for practitioners to exercise judgment, creativity, and ethical reflexivity in their work.

This research show how ethical responsibility is being reconfigured. In 2019, practitioners actively debated language and symbolism, aligning around shared values and reflecting what Goffman (1967) described as the moral order of an interaction. Ethical engagement was visible not as compliance with a code but as situated negotiation. In 2024, ethics slipped from view. Paul's reliance on prompts like "three more similar images" turned political critique into replicable templates, with little discussion of meaning or consequence. His withdrawal of gaze and shift to his phone signalled not just disengagement but also, in Goffman's (1967) terms, a withdrawal from responsibility.

This aligns with Valentini's (2021) call to see ethics as contextual and discursive rather than fixed, and it raises concerns about how GenAI may encourage the outsourcing of ethical judgment. What is at stake here is not only whether practitioners exercise responsibility, but also how the design of generative systems limits the space for ethical negotiation in the first place. When outputs are generated from predefined patterns, practitioners' choices narrow, making ethical considerations less about dialogue and more about selecting from what the system offers. In this sense, responsibility risks shifting from the practitioner to the architecture of the tool, where the makers of GenAI have already constrained the options for judgment.

The findings complicate celebratory narratives of efficiency. Heidegger (1977) reminds us that technology is never neutral, it reshapes how we see and act in the world, and here it reshapes what it means to be a PR practitioner. Earlier technological shifts such as the internet and social media demanded new skills but still affirmed practitioners as authors of meaning. GenAI, by contrast, threatens to hollow out that role, reducing practitioners to system navigators who curate outputs rather than create them. This is not only about skill loss, it is about the slow erosion of professional identity. The ethnographic detail shows how engagement narrows from dialogic collaboration in 2019 to solitary prompting in 2024, accompanied by a sense of monotony and disconnection. Paul's reflection captures this vividly,

I can't do anything. And I can't make these small changes. I can't change. Like, if I ask it to change the color of a particular thing, it might change something else. There is no point at which I can get a perfect image. And then there's also the demand to get it out as soon as possible. So, we just do what have to, it is what it is.

His words reflect Heidegger's (1977) warning that when technology en-frames human activity, creative judgment and ethical responsibility are subordinated to the logic of speed and efficiency. What is at risk is not just the loss of specific

skills, but the possibility of practitioners turning away from the profession itself when they no longer recognize their work as meaningful.

Methodologically, this study addresses a clear gap. As Kaira et al. (2024) and Lock et al. (2025) note, research on GenAI in PR remains dominated by surveys, experiments, and conceptual mapping. Ethnographies are rare, and yet they are essential for understanding how engagement and ethics are enacted at the micro-level of interaction. By combining video ethnography with CDS, this paper extends critical PR scholarship to the embodied, interactional dimensions of practice. For the field, this offers both a cautionary note and an invitation, adopting GenAI is not only a technical choice but also an economic, political, ethical and cultural one, shaping how practitioners engage with one another, their publics, and the very meaning of their work.

Conclusion

One of the most common criticisms of this kind of research is that it is based on a single case and therefore cannot speak to the whole profession. That is true, but the purpose of this study was never to produce sweeping generalizations. Following Williams's (2000) idea of moderatum generalization, the point here is to show how the everyday practices of one PPR department can illuminate broader tensions in the profession. What emerges most clearly from both the ethnographic material and the interviews is a sense of lost purpose. Practitioners are not only negotiating efficiency and ethics, but also struggling with what it means to be in PR when engagement and judgment are increasingly shaped by machine outputs.

This research complicates the optimistic claim that AI frees practitioners for more strategic work (Gregory et al., 2023). Here, the findings highlight that AI risks narrowing the conditions under which engagement and ethical judgment can take place. The concern is not only deskilling but the erosion of what makes PPR meaningful. What's at stake, is the capacity to engage with colleagues and the ethical dimensions of communication. If earlier technological shifts, from the internet to social media, opened up new modes of practice, GenAI poses a more troubling question, will it diminish the space for practitioners to exercise agency, responsibility, and care in their work?

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Exploring the Impact of Using Generative Artificial Intelligence on Productivity and Quality in Corporate Communications

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Introduction

The rapid rise of generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) is reshaping industries as it can potentially boosts economic growth, through shifting the working time spent on low-value tasks to higher-value tasks. With the advent of Large Language Models (LLMs), the corporate communication profession is also transforming, with operational tasks once performed by people – such as media monitoring – become increasingly automated (Buhmann & Gregory, 2023; Zerfass & Link, 2024). Organizations that are early adopters of Gen AI believe that it will improve the productivity and work quality of their employees (World Economic Forum, 2024).

This study seeks to empirically assess how far this belief applies to corporate communication practitioners based on their experiences with using Gen AI. The findings aim to provide corporate communication practitioners with an understanding of Gen AI as a productivity and quality solution in the context of their work. It also seeks to uncover the practical considerations for large multinational corporations when adopting Gen AI in communications on a global scale, so as to realise the potential productivity or quality gain when applying GenAI to augment jobs.

Literature review

One of the potential effects of using AI is enhanced work outcomes, with labor productivity gain as a positive impact in organizations where productivity refers to how efficiently inputs are converted into goods and services (Damioli et al., 2021; Ramachandran et al., 2022). GenAI could boost work quality and productivity by reducing mundane repetitive tasks and freeing up time to focus on higher-value activities (Ramachandran et al., 2022; World Economic Forum, 2024).

Based on interviews with public relations (PR) practitioners, a study by Panda et al. (2019) highlighted how AI could enhance effectiveness and efficiency through automation and be a "strategic disruptor", while noting that the long-term implications of AI in PR remain uncertain. Arief & Gustomo (2020) analysed the impact of AI on the communications profession and noted the loss of PR jobs taken over by AI in Indonesia, while a quantitative analysis by Farhi et al. (2022) revealed the positive impact of using AI in facilitating organizational communication in the UAE. However, Bourne (2019) warned against being overly effusive cheerleaders for AI and instead to reflect critically on AI's impact on PR. Since then, Gen AI especially those based on

LLMs like ChatGPT are increasingly being used in the communications sector (Al Naqbi et al., 2024).

In summary, the literature so far paints a mixed picture for communication practitioners: AI brings potential benefits that help their work, which can also negatively impact their career or reshape their professional role. Hence it raises the question of how corporate communication practitioners should think about and apply Gen AI in their work to take advantage of the productivity or quality gains. Although research into the impact of Generative AI on public relations is advancing, micro-level data remains scarce, particularly in capturing the nuanced dynamics of AI adoption, implementation barriers, and practitioner reservations within the communications field (Kaclová, 2025).

The research questions of this study are:

1. How does Gen AI impact the productivity and work quality of corporate communications practitioners?
2. What is the future role of Gen AI in the productivity and work quality of corporate communications practitioners?
3. What practical considerations should large multinational corporations be mindful of when adopting Gen AI in corporate communications?

Research methodology

For this exploratory study, a theory-building rather than theory-testing approach was taken due to limited research on the use of Gen AI in improving productivity and work quality in the context of corporate communication. Qualitative inductive research was based on semi-structured interviews of 24 corporate communications practitioners in the chemical industry from 12 countries globally, with the majority located in Europe and Asia. Purposive sampling was used to get a wide range of perspectives across different countries. Most of practitioners interviewed (42%) are veterans with more than 10 years of corporate communication experience, followed by 33% with five to 10 years, and 25% with less than five years. All have been given access to OpenAI platforms like ChatGPT and DALL-E from their company for their work.

The interview started with prepared open-ended questions asked with flexibility depending on the conversation flows. Questions included: *What do you use Gen AI for as a corporate communications professional? How do you think it improve productivity or work quality in corporate communications? How do you see the role of Gen AI evolving in the field of corporate communications over the next few years?*

Content analysis of the interview transcripts allowed a richer conclusion to emerge through recognising patterns of relationships between Gen AI, productivity and quality in the corporate communications context.

Research findings

The most common uses of Gen AI for corporate communicators are in the areas of editorial content generation, brainstorming, strategic work (such as communications and media planning, research, analysis, and decision-making), translation, and English language improvement. Among the platforms cited, ChatGPT emerged as the most widely used, followed by Copilot and Canva. As depicted in Table 1, the impact of generative AI on the work of corporate communicators can be observed across several dimensions: productivity, quality and socio-cultural context.

Productivity impact is clear – Almost all practitioners agreed that there is productivity gain in using Gen AI in terms of faster speed of generating outputs but this is blunted to some extent by the need to regularly double-check the outputs

Table 1: Impact of Gen AI on the Work of Corporate Communicators

Dimension	Impact	Key Findings
Productivity	Positive	Clear productivity gain from faster speed of generating outputs, though moderated by need for double-checking and robust review.
Quality	Mixed	Improvement in language quality, idea generation, and feedback, but prone to factual errors and lack of authenticity.
Socio-cultural Context	Mixed	Non-native English speakers benefit in English fluency, but face challenges with non-English output quality, Western bias, and limited cultural nuance.
Other Observations	/	Concerns over data security and intellectual property; underscores need for ongoing AI training and engagement

and carry out a robust review process to ensure accuracy and authenticity. This productivity gain in turn has economic value such as doing away with using external translation services. There is a link between productivity and quality in that the process of ensuring quality actually reduces the productivity benefits.

One noted, *"I use it every day… Gen AI has shortened the time for editorial work, translations, and idea generation."* Another reflected on the importance of human oversight: *"While AI could be a wonderful help for us, the quality of the communication assets is our responsibility… This AI tool can free up some time, but you also devote part of that time to double-check its output."*

Quality impact is mixed – Practitioners experienced improvement in terms of language quality, idea generation and critical feedback on work from Gen AI, but also brought up how AI-generated contents are prone to errors or lack authenticity, falling short of the quality expected from human-generated contents. Non-native speakers of English benefited from the quality improvement arising from using Gen AI to polish their English or produce translations but criticized the quality of output generated in local languages.

While a few participants offered positive feedback—such as, *"Output with AI is better. If I want a more exciting tone to post on social media, AI can adjust the mood and tone, and give me several options to choose from"* – such comments were relatively rare. More commonly, respondents expressed nuanced perspectives on the limitations and risks of Generative AI. One noted, *"AI has a very uniform language style—homogenous content that's just pumped out. Communicators must try to cut through the noise and actually say something relevant."* Another emphasized the need for human oversight: *"You need to supervise over the quality every single time. If you get something that is not exactly aligned with the reality, it could negatively impact our credibility as communicators."*

Some participants expressed optimism about the evolving capabilities of Generative AI, noting improvements in output quality over time. As one practitioner observed, *"When we first started using ChatGPT, the quality of responses wasn't up to the mark. But recently, as more and more data are being fed, it gives you better responses."* This sentiment reflects a broader belief that continued development and training of AI models will improve quality.

Socio-cultural context matters – A contrast was observed in how native and non-native English speakers describe their user experience with Generative AI tools. Practitioners who primarily conduct their work in local languages highlighted challenges such as limited quality in non-English outputs, a tendency toward "western" perspectives, and a lack of cultural nuance, which may influence their adoption of the technology. OpenAI itself has acknowledged this bias on its website (OpenAI, 2025), declaring that it "is skewed towards Western views and performs best in English". This aspect underscores the importance of considering socio-cultural dimensions in Gen AI usage. In some locations, accessing OpenAI services requires a VPN or third-party workaround. Despite these limitations, the practitioners appreciate how Gen AI enhances their English-language content in both quality and speed. Such observations are consistent with a study on AI adoption within the Central and Eastern European public relations (PR) sector (Kaclová, 2025) and the Global PR Research(Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003) which highlighted the impact of socio-cultural variables on PR practice.

One practitioner stated, *"I used to ask ChatGPT to translate from English to Thai language but it's not the proper language that the locals use. Google Translate is better than ChatGPT for translation."* Another added, "*For Korean language, I don't think ChatGPT has a lot of information base compared to Google. So I usually use Google and the Korean portal site Naver for searching information."*

Other observations – Other challenges identified pertain to cyber rights and data security. Specifically, practitioners have expressed caution about potential breaches of confidentiality and intellectual property rights, given the sensitive nature of information typically handled in their professional roles. In addition to these risks, respondents emphasized the continuous need for targeted training and structured change management to support the integration of Gen AI into existing workflows.

As one practitioner noted, *"One of the challenges to using AI more is corporate communicators cannot share anything confidential to AI. We cannot ask it to draft for us the financial earning message, because that's confidential."* Another participant expressed concern about authorship and originality, stating, "*The work is really not mine, because it is like a product of so many other people's efforts. I don't want to be accused of plagiarism… and rather not use AI output."* Such sentiments underscore the tension between leveraging generative tools and maintaining professional integrity.

The future of corporate communication roles

That Gen AI will continue to be a tool for corporate communication practitioners is a unanimous view, with it already taking over some operational tasks of many of the practitioners which can be automated such as translation and media monitoring. Some practitioners are projecting that parts of strategic decision-making such as those related to channel management and media buy will be increasingly augmented by AI which can handle large data and analytics for more quality insights into, for example, the preferences of target audiences. Given the current challenges of AI-generated output such

as inaccuracy and inauthenticity, practitioners do not think that the job role will be irrelevant. However, some of them expect smaller teams and a certain extent of job loss especially in more junior roles, or changes to the way they work.

Several practitioners envision an evolving role in which communicators act as generalists overseeing AI-generated content or transition into strategic advisory positions with fewer operational duties. As one participant noted, *"It's about making our jobs different, because we now have more time to focus on things which require emotional intelligence or leadership."* The need to develop proficiency in generative AI as a means of enhancing communication capabilities was consistently emphasized. As one practitioner advised, "*Adopt AI and make ourselves irreplaceable by using this technology.*"

Summary and conclusion

This study explores the impact of Gen AI on the productivity and output quality of corporate communications practitioners, as well as its projected role in their practice in the future. Findings reveal widespread agreement amongst corporate communications practitioners on Gen AI's capacity to enhance productivity but this advantage is moderated by the need for consistent human oversight to ensure factual accuracy and preserve authenticity.

The impact on quality is more complex: while Gen AI supports improvements in some areas, practitioners noted that AI-generated content often lacks cultural nuance and may contain errors. These observations underscore the importance of socio-cultural context in AI adoption. Additional concerns include data privacy and ethical considerations related to sensitive information. Respondents also emphasized the need for ongoing training and structured change management to facilitate integration of AI into their work. Looking ahead, Gen AI is expected to remain a key tool in corporate communication and the study recommends implementation strategies that prioritize quality assurance and cultural inclusivity.

Practical implications and future research

While this study affirms the productivity gains achievable through Gen AI in specific tasks, it also highlights ongoing uncertainties around quality outcomes. In light of the findings, the adoption of Gen AI in corporate communications should be encouraged, provided that implementation aligns with the practical conditions and concerns raised by practitioners – having processes in place to ensure more accurate and quality outputs, a more secure and trusted platform and less socio-cultural biases. For example, to realise the productivity potential, corporations could upload customised data that can help the language model to learn and provide more accurate and precise outputs. On a system level, they can also integrate Gen AI into their existing high-security platforms, coupled with explicit Gen AI usage policy to encourage more usage and allay concerns related to confidentiality and cybersecurity.

To support effective adoption of Gen AI, corporations can consider to invest in targeted skills development and change management initiatives that account for organizational culture and individual readiness in adopting a new technology. Practitioners need to ensure they are trained in using Gen AI to augment their job and harness the productivity benefits while ensuring quality work. Socio-cultural perspectives highlight the need for culturally inclusive AI tools, particularly localized platforms that reflect diverse cultural contexts. To remain relevant, corporate communication practitioners should seek to leverage AI in areas that can be automated and understand how GenAI can augment their jobs, i.e. *"to partially perform tasks in such a way that technolo-*

gy effectively supports or enhances human capabilities through human-machine collaboration" (World Economic Forum, 2024, p4).

This study presents the empirical foundation to understanding the current and potential impact of using Gen AI on the productivity and work quality of corporate communication practitioners so as to steer the profession towards a more informed approach to this innovation. Future research could examine in greater depth the implications of relying on English-centric generative AI platforms across diverse socio-cultural contexts, or assess the effectiveness of AI training and practical support measures for corporate communicators.

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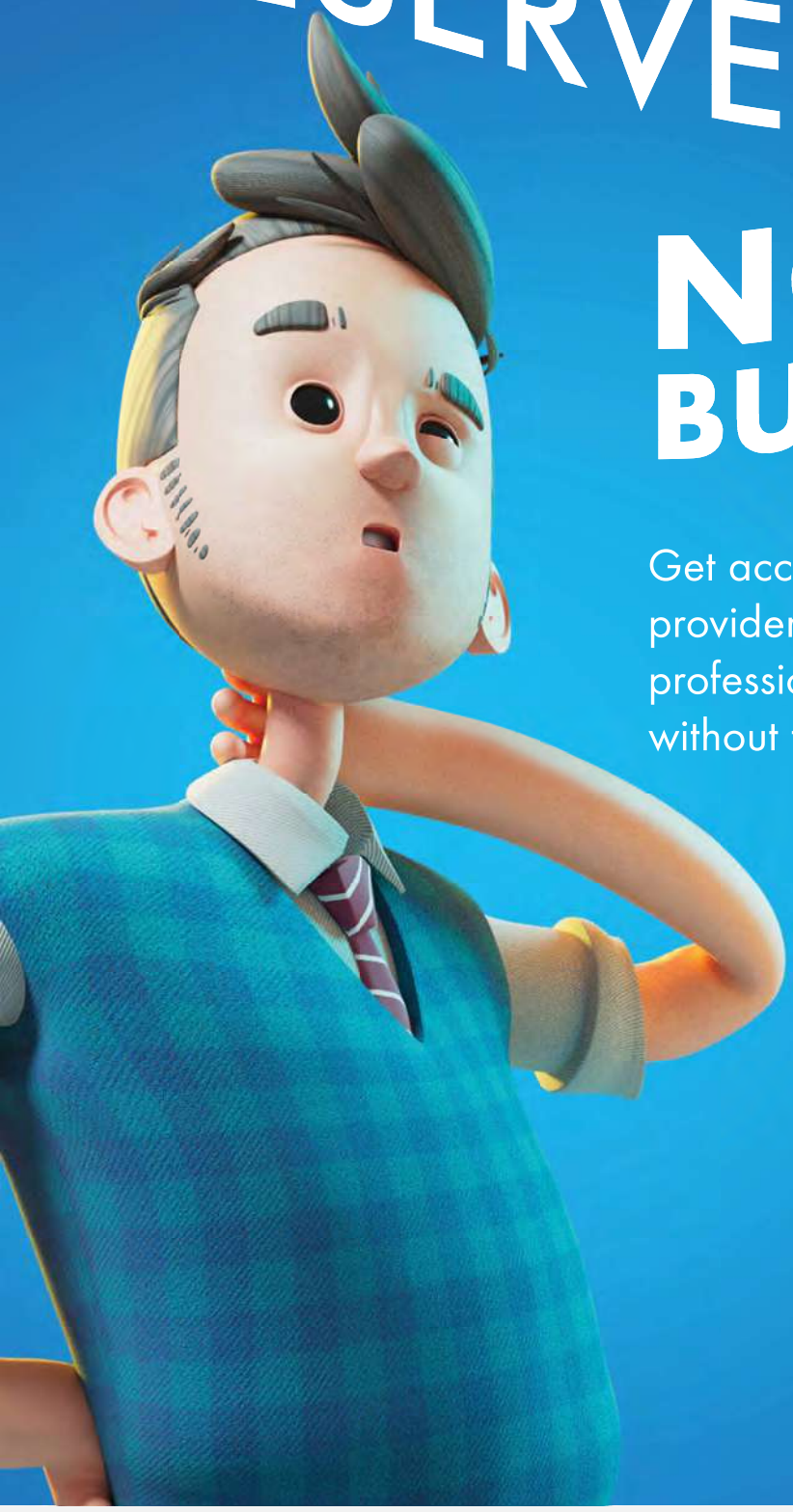

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