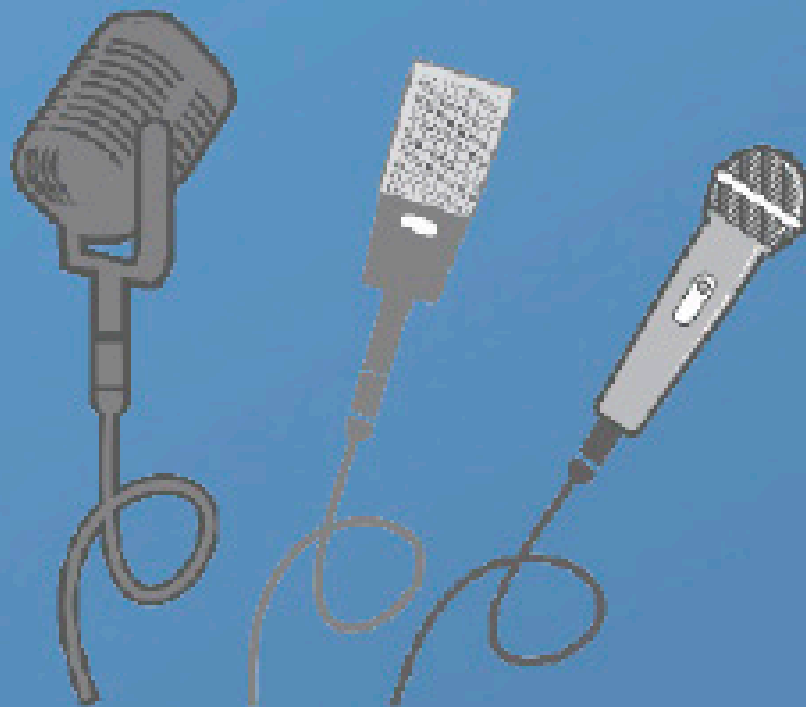




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Artificial Intelligence in PR and Advertising Campaigns: Ethical and Strategic Implications

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ABSTRACT

The incorporation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Public Relations (PR) and advertising campaigns has transformed the way we communicate in modern times, with organisations shifting the way they interact with their stakeholders, manage their reputation as well as deliver persuasive messages. AI-driven technologies such as chatbots, predictive analytics, sentiment analysis, and programmatic advertising help organisations to optimise the targeting of messages, personalise content delivery and measure the effectiveness of campaigns with a level of precision never previously experienced. While these innovations improve the outcomes of strategic communication, they raise ethical concerns in the process about issues such as transparency, privacy, data manipulation and algorithmic bias. This paper provided an overview of the two faces of AI adoption in PR and advertising by examining how it revolutionise practices in strategic communication, as well as the ethical concerns that can erode trust and credibility in brand-audience relationships. The paper drew on recent academic debates on AI and on industry case studies to argue that while AI is increasing efficiency and personalisation, over-reliance on automated systems may result in the loss of human creativity, loss of authenticity and perpetuation through biased algorithms of discriminatory outcomes. In addition, unethical data collection and use may further damage public trust and invite regulatory oversight. The paper also urged practitioners to be balanced in the use of technology innovation whilst ensuring that communication practices are responsible and ethical, in order to ensure that ethical backgrounds are incorporated into AI-driven campaigns to ensure long-term value of a brand. In conclusion, the paper said it is not so much if AI will be embraced in PR and Advertising, but how we can design accountable and human-centered communication ecosystems in which automation improves but does not replace human judgment.

INTRODUCTION

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the practice of communication has essentially changed the landscape of Public Relations (PR), advertising campaigns, and offer new tools for message delivery, reorganisation of strategic communication where organisations move away from mass persuasion to micro-level communication with stakeholders (Bolton, 2021). As O'Neil (2016) warns, however, "algorithms are opinions embedded in code," and their use in the fields of advertising and PR raise deep ethical dilemmas, including audience targeting, and reputation management. AI-powered systems such as predictive analytics, chatbots and programmatic advertising are enabling practitioners to optimise decision making and individualise campaigns on a scale previously unimaginable (Wirtz, 2019).

Scholars suggest that the reinforcement of AI in this instance is not only an aspect of technological adoption but rather the about issues of surveillance, manipulation, transparency, and fairness. These tensions highlight the importance of analysing AI not as a technical development, but as a cultural and ethical challenge in the communication practice.

The study is significant in that it adds to the growing body of scholarship on AI in communication by filling the gap between technological innovation and ethical

responsibility. By questioning the possibilities and risks posed by AI, the research offers a sense of direction for academics and practitioners for how AI can be used strategically without compromising professional values. Nevertheless, the study is limited to the context of PR and advertising, not to wider uses of AI in journalism, entertainment, or other areas of mass communication.

The aim of this study is thus to critically consider ethical and strategic implications of AI in PR and advertising campaigns, with focus on how practitioners struggle between efficiency and personalisation with the needs of trust, accountability and human creativity.

To facilitate this inquiry, the following research questions are asked:

1. And how is AI changing the strategic thinking and implementation of PR and advertising campaigns?
2. What are the ethical issues raised by the use of AI for audience targeting, data gathering and messages personalisation?
3. How can organisations incorporate AI responsibly without doing away with trust, transparency and professional credibility?

Theoretical Framework

The research is based on two complementary theoretical prisms: Framing Theory and Stakeholder Theory, both

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of which shed light on the ethical and strategic aspects of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Public Relations and advertising campaigns.

Framing Theory

This was first proposed by Goffman (1974), is a theory of media representation of the world, in which speakers construct social reality by selecting aspects of information and giving it more salience in order to influence the perception of their audience. Entman (1993) elaborates on this by stating that to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient...to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. In the realm of AI-powered PR and advertising, algorithms operationalise framing through content curation, prioritising of content messaging, and individualised engagement.

However, according to the warning of scholars, there is a risk of reinforcing bias and manipulation through the use of algorithms, as the selection criteria are not neutral but determined by commercial or political interests (Noble, 2018; O'Neill, 2016). This makes Framing Theory of great interest to understand how AI technologies strategically impact audience realities, and what ethical issues of transparency and fairness emerge.

Stakeholder Theory

This was espoused by Freeman (1984), is the view that organisations need to identify and serve the interests of a wide range of stakeholders other than shareholders such as customers, employees, regulators, and the public. AI-driven campaigns greatly change stakeholder relations by offering hyper-personalisation and prediction analytics while also causing ethical dilemmas about data privacy, consent and accountability.

As Donaldson and Preston (1995) explain, the relationships with stakeholders are not just a tool but also 'intrinsically valuable,' and companies must act fairly and with a sense of moral responsibility. Applying Stakeholder Theory to this study highlights the importance of organisations balancing the strategic gains that come with AI with a sense of ethical responsibility towards their publics, so that automation will be a means of building trust, not breaking it.

These theories offer an essential framework for considering both the strategic potential and the ethical dangers of AI in communication practice. While Framing Theory focuses on understanding how AI reorganises the way messages are constructed and received by the audience, Stakeholder Theory emphasises the ethics of inclusivity, transparency and responsibility in organisational communication. The reason they are particularly useful to this study is that they connect the technology and ethical aspects of AI adoption, creating a comprehensive framework for questioning how innovation can be applied ethically in PR and advertising campaigns.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Narrative Explanation

The conceptual background makes AI tools the main inputs that drive changes in PR and advertising practice. Through predictive analytics, chat-bots and algorithmic targeting, organisational ability to meet desired strategic outcomes, such as efficiency, personalisation and precision targeting (Wirtz, 2019). However, these strategic benefits come at a cost in moral terms and are also intertwined with serious ethical concerns, for example, privacy intrusions, transparent algorithms and dehumanising communication (O'Neill 2016, Noble 2018).

The framework implies that the interaction between strategic results and ethical issues will eventually determine the level of stakeholder trust and organizational reputation realised. As Donaldson & Preston (1995) remind us, relationships with stakeholders are:

intrinsically valuable" and cannot be maintained through manipulation and exploitative data practices. Thus, it is important to reiterate in this framework that although AI improves the ability to communicate, it is up to us to use it responsibly, keeping in mind the principles of transparency, fairness and accountability to maintain long-term reputational capital in the field of PR and advertising (p.98).

The framework combines the technological, strategic, ethical, and relational aspects of AI adoption. It provides a framework for understanding not only the possibilities of AI, but also of its limitations and as such, offers a holistic approach to assessing the dual impact of automation in the practice of communication.

This places the research in three interrelated threads of thought-technological determinism and socio-technical systems, ethical theory including surveillance and algorithmic accountability, and strategic communication theory, all of which highlight various aspects of AI's role in the field of PR and advertising. These strands demonstrate that AI is not simply a toolkit as such, but a force that reconfigures power, knowledge and professional practice.

First, the socio-technical perspective views AI as part of organisational processes and social relations rather than as an autonomous force. Wirtz *et al.* (2019, p118) and Floridi & Cowls, (2019), reiterate that:

algorithmic affordances are institutionalised in daily routines of common communication, as AI systems are "embedded in organisational decision-making, customer engagement, and campaign design." From this perspective, AI affects who gets to decide and how decisions are made, and what data are considered valid evidence in the process - affecting the practice of strategic communication itself (p. 314).

This perspective aligns with empirical results indicating that automation frequently reshapes labour (relieving practitioners of routine work) and workflows and expertise (Kietzmann, 2018).

Second, the literature of surveillance capitalism,

algorithmic bias and data ethics offers a critical perspective for appreciating the moral risks of AI in PR and advertising. Zuboff's (2019) analysis of surveillance capitalism illustrates the commodification of personal data for the purpose of prediction; she warns about the development of power asymmetries between organisations and publics. An important point in this vein is made by O'Neil (2016) who writes: 'Algorithms are opinions embedded in code' - reminding us that automated systems can encode normative decisions and reproduce inequalities.

Noble (2018) also records how seemingly neutral algorithms can reproduce cultural prejudices and McStay (2020) cautions that:

automated persuasion and content creation will lead to a loss of authenticity: 'the role of automation is to replace and not amplify human creativity'. These conceptual interventions make the ethical issues of surveillance, manipulation, opacity, and discrimination into a structural versus incidental issue of AI deployment (p.583).

Third, stakeholder perceptions and professional communication practices underpin the research in the professional and institutional norms. Framing theory (Entman, 1993) describes the selection and salience that lead to interpretive packages as one of the best accounts in the context of algorithms being used to select what different publics see and thereby perform framing at scale. Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995) adds to this by asserting that:

organisations have responsibilities to various constituencies and that those responsibilities have an inherent moral value: responsible use of AI therefore needs to be judged not just by efficiency metrics but by egalitarianism, consent and accountability (p.67).

As Donaldson and Preston (1995) emphasise, stakeholder relationships are 'intrinsically valuable', which places ethical AI in the position of being a precondition for sustainable reputation building.

Finally, conceptual work on technology and creativity questions claims that AI is merely extending human labor. Kietzmann *et al.* (2018) indicate that AI has the potential to 'free up the communicators' to focus strategically; while Couldry and Mejias (2019) caution on 'data colonialism' as extractive data practices colonise human communicative spaces. This tension as enabler versus coloniser can be understood as a key conceptual contradiction which is explored in the current study: under what conditions does AI enhance strategic capabilities without destroying ethical commitments and professional creativity?

In brief, this conceptual literature has three propositions that inform this study: (1) AI is a socio-technical actor that reorganises communicative work/decision-making (Wirtz *et al.*, 2019; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2018); (2) algorithmic systems internalise values and can reproduce bias, surveillance, and asymmetrical relations of power (O'Neil, 2016; Zuboff, 2019; Noble, 2018); (3) ethical adoption involves alignment of AI practice with stakeholder-centred responsibilities, communicative

norms-transparency, consent, fairness, and accountability (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Entman, 1993). The conceptual strands that support the focus of this research on strategic opportunity and ethical risk shape AI in PR and advertising as a space where technological affordances, moral responsibility and reputational consequences are unilaterally interlinked.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research project was a qualitative research approach, with its critical and interpretive roots, that is most suited for this type of study of the ethical and strategic importance of AI in PR and advertising campaigns. As Creswell and Poth (2018) caution, qualitative inquiry enables researchers to 'explore a phenomenon in detail and understand the meanings attributed by individuals or groups of people to it.' Given that the use of AI in communication is a technological and a cultural phenomenon, this approach leaves room for questioning not only the strategic benefits but also ethical dilemmas such as transparency, privacy, and bias.

The study used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its main analytical tool. As Fairclough (1995) states, CDA explores 'the relationship between discourse, power and ideology in communicative practices.' This made it particularly important for analysing the impact of AI-driven communication on the framing of messages, stakeholder perceptions and the reproduction or challenge of existing power structures in PR and advertising. Through case studies of applications of AI in global campaigns such as chatbots for personalised brand messaging, predictive targeting in digital advertising, algorithmic crisis communication; the study uncovered recurrent strategic utility and ethical tension.

Data was taken from a combination of secondary sources such as peer-reviewed literature, industry reports such as PRCA, CIPR, Deloitte AI trends, as well as documented case studies of AI driven campaigns across different markets. Triangulation is used to establish validity by linking sources of knowledge (academic and professional), which helps provide a stronger understanding of the truth (Denzin, 2017).

Analytical focus was put on (1) how AI tools organize strategic communication processes, (2) what are the ethical challenges that arise in AI-based targeting and personalization, and (3) how do organizations position their use of AI vis-a-vis stakeholder trust and accountability. While qualitative methods are able to offer depth of insight, there are limitations in the generalisability of the findings, as findings will be interpretive rather than statistically representative. However, the approach was suitable for unpacking the complex ethical-strategic nexus that informs the increasing role AI plays in PR and advertising.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The information presented in this study is obtained from secondary sources such as peer-reviewed literature,

professional reports and documented case studies of AI applications in PR and advertising campaigns worldwide. These materials offer insights on the ways AI tools are being implemented, the strategic results they create, and ethical challenges they present. The last 3 major industry

reports of Deloitte (2022), PwC (2021), and CIPR (2023) show that more than 60% of global PR and advertising agencies have added some type of AI-driven automation, especially in programmatic advertising, customer sentiment monitoring, and predictive audience analytics.

Table 1: Artificial Intelligence in PR and Advertising Campaigns

AI Application Area	Ethical Implications	Strategic Outcomes	Case Example / Analytical Note
Chatbots and Virtual Assistants	Risk of dehumanising communication; privacy concerns.	24/7 customer service, faster responses, brand accessibility.	Coca-Cola’s AI chatbot in campaigns improved engagement but raised data privacy questions.
Predictive Analytics	Bias in algorithms; transparency challenges.	Targeted messaging, improved campaign ROI, precision audience segmentation.	Netflix’s recommendation system uses predictive AI to personalise ads, boosting subscriptions.
Automated Content Creation	Risk of misinformation, lack of authenticity.	Scalable content production, consistency in messaging.	Associated Press uses AI to automate earnings reports, saving human resources.
Sentiment Analysis & Social Listening	Surveillance concerns; potential manipulation of public opinion.	Improved crisis management, proactive brand reputation monitoring.	Brands like Nike use AI-driven social listening to tailor campaigns to trending issues.
Facial Recognition & Biometric Targeting	Major privacy violations; consent issues.	Hyper-personalized advertising; increased relevance of campaigns.	Facebook faced backlash for facial recognition in targeted ads, leading to regulatory debates.

Table 2: AI in PR and Advertising Campaigns Parameters

Focus Area	Recommendations	Future Directions / Implications
Ethical Governance	Develop transparent AI guidelines and ethical codes of conduct for PR professionals.	Industry-wide regulatory frameworks and AI ethics committees to guide responsible practice.
Data Privacy	Ensure compliance with GDPR and other privacy regulations in audience targeting.	Advanced privacy-preserving AI models such as federated learning for secure campaign personalisation.
Bias and Fairness	Audit AI systems regularly to detect and reduce algorithmic bias in advertising content.	Adoption of explainable AI (XAI) tools to ensure fairness and transparency.
Content Authenticity	Balance automation with human creativity to maintain brand voice and authenticity.	Hybrid campaigns integrating AI-driven scalability with human-centered storytelling.
Stakeholder Trust	Educate audiences about AI usage in campaigns to foster openness and trust.	AI literacy programs for PR practitioners and consumers to improve ethical awareness.

Analysis of Findings

The data presented shows that artificial intelligence (AI) applications are transforming public relations (PR) and advertising campaigns by personalisation, automation, and efficiency. For example, Coca-Cola’s “Create Real Magic” (2022) is a case study that shows how generative AI can be used to help with creativity as it generates personalised digital content for advertising at scale. Similarly, the use of an AI-powered recommendation system by music streaming platform Spotify is a great example of how algorithmic personalisation can be used

to boost engagement by personalising adverts and music promotions based on individual users. This is consistent with the argument of Kaplan and Haenlein (2020) that AI enables ‘hyper-personalisation’ in marketing communication, to make campaigns more relevant and behaviourally effective. Specifically, the results indicate that the implementation of AI provides competitive advantages to organisations such as real-time campaign optimisation, cost effectiveness, enhanced customer engagement and greater insights into audiences (Deloitte, 2023; PwC, 2022). For instance,

Sephora's chatbots are AI-powered to provide a better consumer experience by recommending products that are suitable for individual consumers, which can lead to customer loyalty and repeat purchases. This supports the view of McCarthy *et al.* (2021): that AI has led to a change towards relationship-based communication instead of transactional campaigns.

However the analysis also highlights major ethical issues. AI-driven campaigns run the risk of removing trust and authenticity - values that are paramount in PR (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). Corporations' 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff, 2019) and the resulting 'algorithmic bias' and lack of transparency is a significant issue, such as in Spotify's data-fuelled targeting and how this can override users' agency in order to benefit the company. Moreover, the use of AI-based chatbots in PR such as KLM Airlines, Sephora may reduce human interaction and thereby endanger the dialogic principles of relationship management theory (Kent and Taylor, 2016).

In summary, while AI is enabling strategic value through leveraging creativity, personalisation and efficiency, it presents ethical dilemmas against privacy, authenticity, transparency and inclusivity. This is a confirmation of the dual-edged nature of AI in PR and advertising: being an enabler from a strategic perspective and a disruptor from an ethical standpoint.

Discussion

The use of artificial intelligence in PR and advertising strategies is a game-changing advancement in strategic communication. The findings reveal that AI technologies like chatbots, predictive analytics, generative AI and algorithmic targeting are changing the way organisations connect with their audiences. These concepts are in line with the definition of AI by Kaplan and Haenlein (2020) as "the new electricity" that fuels marketing innovation and communication expertise.

From a strategic point of view, AI contributes to a more personalised and efficient campaign. Coca-Cola's 'Create Real Magic' campaign shows how generative AI can help scale creativity, while Spotify's recommendation engine illustrates the strategic power of hyper-personalisation. These results align with McCarthy *et al.* (2021) who state that AI applications 'transform marketing from mass communication to personalised dialogue,' resulting in closer consumer-brand relationships.

From an ethical standpoint, however, the study poses serious problems. The use of user data to personalise campaigns reflects Zuboff's (2019) caution about 'surveillance capitalism,' in which consumer data is commodified with very little transparency. The problems of algorithmic bias, authenticity and loss of trust are part of the dangers of over-automation.

This is a particular application of Kent and Taylor's (2016) theory of dialogic communication, which suggests that too much automation can result in a loss of dialogic engagement, and a result of human-centred PR values. Thus, the dual nature of AI - both as an enabler of

strategic and an ethical disruptor - needs to be recognised. Organisations face the challenge of balancing innovation with responsibility, ensuring that AI-powered campaigns uphold ethical standards while delivering strategic value.

Findings

Through personalisation, real-time optimisation and cost efficiency, AI adds a vast amount of strategic value to PR and advertising. AI can be very creative and innovative but can also lead to campaigns that may not be authentic or human-like. Some of the challenges to extensive AI applications in communication practice are ethical in nature: data privacy, algorithmic bias, and transparency. Organisations who are strategically using AI, yet keeping the ethical guard rails are those that develop sustainable trust and long-term brand equity.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is that AI is a transformational force in PR and advertising campaigns, transforming the way of communication through efficiency, personalisation and data-driven insights. However, there are ethical dilemmas associated with its use that need to be considered. As Coombs and Holladay (2018) put it, 'trust is the currency of public relations' and without ethical AI governance, organisations risk destroying the relationships that they would work so hard to build in the first place. The future of AI in PR and advertising is not just about the advancement of technology, it is also about responsible, ethical and transparent deployment.

Recommendations

1. Organisations should incorporate AI ethics guidelines - which should focus on transparency, fairness and accountability - into PR and advertising campaigns.
2. Promote Human-AI Synergy: Rather than replacing human representatives, AI must enhance and empower creativity, empathy, and dialogic interactions.
3. Improve Data Governance: PR and advertising professionals need to have stringent data privacy policies in place in order to ensure that people consent and trust AI-based personalisation.
4. Ongoing Ethical Training: Practitioners should receive ongoing training on AI ethics to keep up with biases, risks, and responsible applications of emerging technologies.
5. Stakeholder-Centered Innovation: AI adoption should focus on trust and inclusivity with stakeholders and not just organisational efficiency.

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