



PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE AND THE ADVENT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE; A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology is revolutionizing the entire world and the field of public relations and marketing are not left out. This paper highlights the need for PR professionals to be prepared for the future of the field, this is because AI technology is capable of automating repetitive tasks and predicting and resolving crises. Scholars have recommended that PR practitioners as a matter of urgency should get themselves equip with all forms of AI software available in order to continue to maintain relevance in the industry. Apart from being your virtual assistants, AI technology is now driving cars, diagnosing cancer, detecting emotions, writing poetry, and beating humans in chess, poker, and IQ tests. Though, it is clear that AI intelligence cannot completely wipe out human participation in PR activities, but the fact remains that with time, human participation will drastically drop and if practitioners fail to upgrade to standard, the few who does, will become an elite and many would be left on the street.

Keywords: Public relations, practice, artificial intelligence, technology

Introduction

The field of Mass Communication both print, broadcast media, public relations and marketing has continued to move from one level of development to another just like every other field of study. Gone are the days when we rely solemnly on human capacity in and out, at all times. Today, communication and media organizations of all kinds in the developed and developing world use Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning technology for different purposes, such as to enhance their capabilities, to increase their market share and revenues, to maintain records of sales, to gather customers or product information, to develop effective business strategies, or to create hundreds of news stories faster, more cheaply, and most



probably with minimal errors than a human journalist. Artificial Intelligence technologies are different than traditional software; they are increasingly intelligent machines, and they are smart but a creation of human. Not only do they analyse the data at scale, but they also make predictions about what that data means (Kaput, 2021; Hancock, Naaman, & Levy, 2020).

The communications industry is undergoing a total shift in technology and PR is not left out. Artificial Intelligence, for example, is considered one of the most popular concepts in the communications profession (Peterson, 2019). Public relations practitioners are under great pressure to unlearn their old manual and traditional skills. In order to survive in the digital work environment, they are forced to learn new digital abilities. When we look at the manner which the implementation of Artificial Intelligence is going to impact the jobs of the communication profession, especially the field of public relations, we discovered that Artificial Intelligence is, still, in its nascent phase, and research on the impact of AI-powered algorithms that perform activities belonging to communications is not as slim as when it newly began, and its growing fast. Though not every angle of PR can be taken over by AI. The relationship that exist between these two is that, one aids or ease the work of the other. This forms the basis of this discourse.

Conceptual Overview: Establishing an Appropriate Platform for Discourse.

Before looking at the philosophical perspective of the advent of artificial intelligence in public relations practice, it is important to first look at the meaning of, and importance of the concepts relevant to the discourse. These terms include the following:

Communication: Our assumption is that we need to communicate because we physically need it, one learns who their identity is with communication and being that we are social beings we need others to provide stimulation (Adler & Proctor, 2014). Whenever the question of, what communication is coming up, the usual response is, “talking to one another.” Though, this theory of communication is and could be true, the understanding of communication goes far beyond words that are merely spoken with one another. The usual models of communications such as the linear model or the transactional model, go as thus: Sender/receiver, message, the channel in which it is coming through, the noise (the distractions that disrupt transmission), the feedback and the context of the entire communication. Communication goes way beyond the realms of just merely words. Communication can occur when there are no words at all, in the form of nonverbal communication. An example of this would be using head gestures to imply an answer to a question. Communication takes on different forms as it applies to each context. This example would be communicating cross culturally. I cannot communicate the same way with a person from my small town and a person from



a small tribe in the East. There would be too much noise (language barrier), that we would not effectively have a conversation.

The implications of this definition of communication is that, first of all, public relations practice just like every other aspect of communication requires sending and receiving messages either verbal or otherwise. One of the most important thing to note is that, language and understanding of sender and receiver of any form of message must be on the same level for proper comprehension. This is where the challenges of artificial intelligence come in as efforts would be in futility if PR is done to a community of people who have no idea of what AI is all about and the language of AI. For a community where the larger population has no formal education or has no knowledge of the internet, computer facilities or AI aided gadgets, getting them to key into the new system will require so much training and effort.

Artificial Intelligence: Artificial Intelligence (AI), a term coined by emeritus Stanford Professor John McCarthy in 1955, was defined by him as “the science and engineering of making intelligent machines”. Much research has humans program machines to behave in a clever way, like playing chess, but, today, we emphasize machines that can learn, at least somewhat like human beings do. Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence is AI that seeks to augment the abilities of, address the societal needs of, and draw inspiration from human beings. It researches and builds effective partners and tools for people, such as a robot helper and companion for the elderly. (Liew, F.E 2021).

The question is no longer about whether AI will play a role in everyday life, but rather which roles it can and will play. Apart from being your virtual assistants, AI technology is now driving cars, diagnosing cancer, detecting emotions, writing poetry, and beating humans in chess, poker, and IQ tests. As more and more imaginations of technology go from science fiction to feasible reality, it is simply not possible to imagine a future without AI (Liew, F.E 2021).

(Lee & Cho, 2020, p. 332), Valin (2018, p. 5) says that Artificial Intelligence is “a sophisticated application of technology” that has the ability to learn, improve itself, identify images, read and understand texts or hear and understand sounds. At its core, Artificial Intelligence is programmed to make intelligent machines capable of solving problems better than people could, by assessing large sets of data with detailed algorithms (Peterson, 2019). What we know as Artificial Intelligence is largely machine learning; it has the ability to mimic human intelligence and make use of big data shared by humans online (Bourne, 2019). To sum up, Artificial Intelligence could be defined as “computational systems that involve algorithms, machine learning methods, natural language processing, and other techniques that operate on behalf of an individual to improve a communication outcome” (Hancock, Naaman, & Levy, 2020, p. 90).



The above definition shows that, artificial intelligence is a machine made by human to solve issues faster and easier, and not without limitations. Each society has its culture and values that guide the wellbeing of the populace, these machines are configured with certain languages and numbers. The languages of these machines cannot be understood by all, especially the uneducated members of the society, for effective PR practice, the said society must be able to comprehend the message in a clear terms and interpret, a task that might be difficult for AI because it is configured, it doesn't speak all languages, it has no idea of cultures and values of the people, it does things it has been programmed to do. PR practitioners are capable of learning and adjusting to fits into the cultural system of any society. This means, both AI and PR will have to exist symbiotically for effective output.

Public Relations: Public relations is better described than defined. It is an applied professional practice and an academic field, and both offer communication centered and research based ways to understand, inform, and intervene to adjust relationships between ideas, individuals, groups, and societies. The practice seeks to influence the building, maintenance, and restoration (or, on occasion, destruction) of reputations and also to integrate different perspectives and groups, particularly through its enactment of activities such as issues management, crisis resolution, and risk communication. Because the field's major arena of social action is the public sphere, especially in media (online and offline), politics, and public opinion, public relations activities can impact significantly on democracy. Public relations practitioners have, for example, helped mobilize populations to participate, or cease participating, in wars. Individuals and organizations who use public relations range from CEOs, corporations, governments (local and national), and think-tanks through to activists, charities, educational institutions, health organizations, NGOs, and ordinary people. Academic public relations are involved in some of the above. In its own right, it seeks to generate relevant theory; to improve the field's academic and social standing; and to undertake research, which is designed to contribute to effective and ethical practice, to inform teaching, to expand the body of trained practitioners, and to extend knowledge.

Public Relations has a vital role to play in improving the quality of decision making and influence their time of implementation, because it is human, AI exhibit these roles but faster and with less error. Like philosophy, it provides a comprehensive interpretation of stakeholders' expectations establishing the relationship between PR and AI brings about the relevance of philosophy as it concerned the true nature of humans and that of a machine. Philosophical discourse in this context could bring the importance of human existence and the need to adjust to change, as well as attempting to highlight the flaws in relying completely on machine for PR activities. **Philosophy:** philosophy is concerned with how human being view and explain reality, it is about thinking above ordinary that is capable of bringing



development both in science, technology, social life, economic life and other spheres of life. Omoregbe (2002:19) defined philosophy as follows:

Philosophy can be defined as the discipline that studies the ultimate principles of things; or as the discipline which studies the universal aspects of things; as a critical reflection on reality or as a critical reflection on human experience; an intellectual and reflective search for the ultimate meaning of reality i.e the ultimate meaning of things.

The above definition shows that philosophy is a rational attempt to look at the world as a whole. It seeks to combine the conclusions of the various sciences and human experience into some kind of consistent world view. By implication, the advent of AI in PR is as a result of human thinking beyond ordinary, even though one makes the work of the other faster and easier with less error, PR practitioners have roles that cannot be carried out by machines. Subjecting both to philosophical analysis means trying to establish the relationship between them, their true nature and essence of being. To philosophically analyse their true nature and being, we would have to look at it from the perspective of each of the five principal branches of philosophy.

These branches include; Metaphysics; Metaphysics maintains that, true and objective knowledge has its roots in the supernatural, it enquires into subject matter such as God, the gods, angels and others. Metaphysics developed into the school of idealism insisting that perfect knowledge of anything of study can be contacted in the world of ideas through pure and critical thinking. Epistemology; this is the branch of philosophy that focuses on knowledge, the theory of knowledge, epistemology enquires into nature, origin, method, extent and limits of human knowledge. Ontology; ontology is popularly known as the science of being (Unah, 2002). It is the thought about all kinds and structures of objects, properties, events, processes, and relations in every area of our lives (Smith, 2003). Logic; this is the branch of philosophy that deals with consistent and sequential reasoning. Logic comprises reasoning at all times as well as making judgments. Axiology; axiology is the branch of philosophy that studies judgments about values including both of ethics and aesthetics (Chopra, 2005). Philosophical implications of the advent of Artificial Intelligent in Public Relations Practice. Against the background of the different branches of philosophy, a philosophical examination of both Public Relations and Artificial Intelligence will now be explained as an attempt to examine their true nature and relevance.

The use of AI in public relations:

Public Relations supervises and assesses public attitudes, maintaining mutual relations and understanding between an organization and its public. It improves channels of communication and to institute new ways of setting up a two-way flow of information and understanding. The advent of AI cut across all spheres of life



and PR is not excluded. AI is now everywhere, from turning on the TV with Alexa, asking Siri about the traffic, using autocomplete search suggestions on Google, getting personalized recommendations on Netflix, AI has taken everyday life to a whole new level even though many are yet to realize it. The question everyone probably should be asking now is, will robots wipe out the human race one day? Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to machines that simulate human intelligence (Liew, 2021). In simple words, AI enables machines to learn, reason, and act like humans. If this is true, then philosophically, there is a flaw in metaphysics, the belief that, the origin of existence is supernatural, a robot can reason, act and behave like human being, carryout several activities without error, which makes the AI even better, and yet, it is the creation of man not by any supernatural being. If truly man loses touch with his origin, can we now say that, AI is the perfect version of man existence? Broadly speaking, there are two types of AI, namely artificial narrow intelligence and artificial general intelligence. Artificial narrow intelligence, also known as weak AI, performs a single task because it is only equipped with a specific dataset (M. Rosa et al 2016). Andrejkovics, 2020 explained that, artificial general intelligence, also known as "strong AI," is so much more capable because it is equipped with human intelligence to do any task. It is self-aware, sentient, and human-like. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact time, but the popular idea is that AI existed way earlier than people realized. One of the most influential inspirations for AI came from Alan Turing.

If you watched the Imitation Game or have a £50 note, you probably know of Alan Turing, the mathematician who invented the Bombe machine that deciphered the Enigma code in World War II. In 1950, Turing published the famous paper, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," in which he explored the potential of machines to simulate human intelligence and ways to create and test intelligent machines. Today, the Turing test that he created 70 years ago is still a benchmark to assess a machine's intelligence. As a result of man's freedom to doubt other knowledge, Turing was able to set the wheels in motion, but the world only heard of the term artificial intelligence for the first time in 1956. It happened when computer scientist John McCarthy hosted the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence, which marked the birth of AI and inspired a dedicated research field (Mijwell 2015).

However, AI soon experienced its first winter in the 1970s because of funding cuts and technological limitations. In the 1980s, a new wave of interest in AI resurged, although it was followed by its second winter that lasted until the 1990s. Since then, others continued to develop upon it, and today we have machines that is capable of working beyond human expectation and it has been unstoppable, thanks to a series of major breakthroughs in computing and, particularly, the emergence of Big Data. And as you know, the rest of the story is still in the making as we continue



to witness the milestones in the development of AI. Fast forward to today, the question is no longer about whether AI will play a role in everyday life, but rather which roles it can and will play. Apart from being your virtual assistants, AI technology is now driving cars, diagnosing cancer, detecting emotions, writing poetry, and beating humans in chess, poker, and IQ tests (Liew, 2021).

When we look at the activities of AI, the branch of philosophy which deals with ethics and morality (axiology) has been flawed here, because, AI isn't aware of cultural values and morality, it gives what it has been programmed to give whether it is in line with the societal value and the culture of the people or not. This is where the human value supersedes AI, in the discharge of Public Relations activities, the culture and beliefs of such society is as important as the PR itself.

Uses and applications of AI. There is potential for misuse of legitimate AI-assisted tools to misinform (misinformation: mistakes being amplified. Disinformation: false information being deliberately spread). Huge amounts of data about individuals is already being used to 'target' them in order to persuade. This is made even more potent if combined with psychological personality profiling. Unethical emotional manipulation is possible, and it can be tempting to try to persuade others, often without them realizing it. Caution, and a reminder that the first guiding principle is working in the public interest, as well as causing no harm, should be top of mind (Necic, N. 2021). AI in work processes; It is possible to streamline work processes and practices significantly using AI. But that has consequences for human beings: both for the type of work they undertake, how they work with machines, and for the numbers that are employed. It is important that humans drive the machines, not the other way around (Stone et al 2022)

Use of bots, chatbots and personal assistants, mobile and virtual agents. Chatbots have particular challenges. They are the most human-like of AI empowered agents. They 'listen' and they 'talk' to people who reveal all kinds of information to them which is permanently stored, aggregated with other information, and used intelligently for further 'conversations' to make their interactions more human-like and personalized. They are not neutral; they are there to assist, but also to gather data. This applies to voice and text-based bot applications. There is potential for bias because they collect data only from those people they interact with; they are not sensitive to issues around diversity because the way algorithms work, further marginalizes minority voices; or they can be supplied with, or generate, incorrect information and have no powers of discernment to identify this (Turksoy,2022). When we look at it in epistemology, this is plausible, but in axiology as one of the branches of philosophy, this is a flaw.

Turksoy further to say that, AI will radically change the way we live and work. Those who are able to use, take advantage of, and engage with AI will benefit. Those who are unable to do so, for whatever reason, will become disenfranchised. This means that organizations and individuals who have the resources and



knowledge to capture leadership in the AI space will be the new elite, have the leading edge and hold significant power. This includes not just the big tech companies, but potentially governments, NGOs, large corporations, and traditional media who have adopted AI, as well as non-traditional media organizations. Big questions arise over the governance of these developments at the organizational, national and international levels and we need to be involved and informing and guiding those debates. Those most likely to be negatively affected by AI will be the lower skilled, those with lower educational attainment and, potentially, new entrants to work. But AI will affect all work and all professions. Logically what then happens to such people? Supposing AI finally takes over the entire work space. This is logically weak.

The success or failure of PR is determined by the manner in which the message is perceived. As more and more imaginations of technology go from science fiction to feasible reality, it is simply not possible to imagine a future without AI. While AI technology may feel "science", it concerns the PR industry just as much as almost any other field. Panda et al, (2019) call AI a "strategic disruption" in the PR field. In the context of PR, they conceptualize AI as "technologies showing humanoid cognitive abilities and performing humanoid functions in undertaking public relations activities, independently or together with public relations practitioners". An existing AI technology in public relations is capable of automating repetitive tasks, interpreting online conversations, designing data-driven campaigns, and even predicting a crisis, this technology's advancements aren't stopping there. With AI, PR activities now require less work and time while producing higher value and accuracy and this is why AI is of high relevance and significance to the industry and deserving of attention. For a future PR practitioner, he should and must care.

Ardila, (2020) noted that in day-to-day functions, AI has started to assist PR professionals in many repetition-based tasks such as drafting press notes, transcribing speeches, creating media lists, writing emails, and producing reports. The list goes on, but this is not even the most impressive part. The real asset is AI-powered analytical tools. These tools are able to identify trends, quantify sentiments, and generate accurate insights in real-time. These data-driven insights will specifically inform PR professionals' approaches and allow them to proactively strategize their campaigns. In two years as a PR professional, the PR practitioner should be able to leverage AI technology when developing communication proposals and quarterly reports for the clients. In some consultancy firms, they have Relevance Radar, a powerful artificial intelligence listening platform that helps predict, mitigate, and measure opportunities for clients. For example, if a PR practitioner is developing a PR communications proposal for a brand that is in the automotive industry, with the aid of AI, he will be able to monitor the chatter online from their users, capture the amount of coverage the



brand has received from the media, and understand as well as outweigh the positive, neutral, and negative sentiments towards the brand. This will help him create an impactful and relevant strategy for the brand moving forward. Liew, 2021 noted that, when it comes to monitoring and measurement in PR, AI-powered tools are the obvious winner, with an impressively high level of accuracy and efficiency that humans cannot compete with. And this brings us to the ultimate question today: how will PR professionals survive the wave of AI? PR professionals are not replaceable, yet. The remarkable capabilities of AI are one of the main reasons the technology is perceived as a threat to humanity by many, including Bill Gates and Steven Hawking. Kaplan suggests that the proactive nature of the name "artificial intelligence" is attributable to its "PR problem," as it creates a false impression that machines are ambitious to replace humans, (Liew 2021).

Mukherjee, (2022) note that, industry experts claim that the two fundamental elements of public relations, trust and storytelling, rely heavily on intuition and a human touch, which AI robots cannot do, at least not yet. Likewise, a PR practitioner said AI does not pose any threats to PR professionals. This is a "human" industry that strives to harness the power of storytelling, which requires human intelligence and cultivating relationships with those we engage with, such as our clients, editors of different publications, and on-ground target audiences, a PR practitioner said. "The depth of having meaningful conversations and building relationships with everyone we PR professionals engage with by taking the time, energy, and empathy to really connect with one another-that is not replaceable with AI technology," the PR practitioner said. The PR practitioner added that effective public relations and storytelling require emotional intelligence in addition to human trust. "Our creativity goes beyond imagination, humor and banter, unique and impactful storytelling and empathy, which is the core of our business, is why clients hire us to help be the bridge between them and their target audience," the PR practitioner said. Fundamentally, PR needs human input, and that is how we will ride the wave of AI. As industry experts foresee, human oversight is likely to remain relevant and essential for the next five years, even in the event of a radical transformation due to technological advancements.

Liew, (2021) further insist that, there is no other way than to say that, AI in PR is powerful. According to the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), at least 12% of PR activities can be undertaken or enhanced by AI. While AI may not be a replacement for PR professionals (for now), it is certainly a powerful complement to PR activities and it is important, we learn how to use it to our advantage. Though, the 2019 Global Communications Report shows that about 40% of PR practitioners are not very knowledgeable about the potential of AI in communications, while another 46% are only somewhat knowledgeable. This indicates a skill gap that requires immediate attention and response before it widens any further as



technological advances continue to transform the world. A PR practitioner said that proficiency in AI technology essentially benefits PR professionals by allowing them to access data more efficiently. With the support of all AI powered platforms/tools, PR professionals can leverage on accessing relevant information in a timely manner, which allows PR practitioners the ability to focus on other activities such as creative thinking, strategic planning, and human instinct attributes that AI technology is not able to comprehend.

Conclusion

We are left with the question of, what can be done to better prepare ourselves as future PR practitioners. Without mincing words, PR practitioners needs to be ahead of the news, hijack the latest trends, and cultivate the audience objectively. Therefore, one of the skills we need to have is the ability to think outside of the box and act effectively. When coming up with a communication plan or campaign for clients, one must be able to envision their presence and future, as well as take into consideration the past. Forward-thinking and coming up with bold and impactful ideas is what will set you apart in the industry and place you ahead of AI. Most importantly, stay up to date on industry knowledge by participating in industry conversations, reading what key opinion leaders have to say, and staying up to date on current news and situations locally and regionally. PR practitioners as a matter of urgency should get themselves equip with all forms of AI software available in order to continue to maintain relevance in the industry.

Suggestions of the Study

1. In the course of using AI in public relations practices, measures should be put in place to ensure that ethical violation is minimal.
2. Proper guidance and training should be in place for practitioners using AI.

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