

An assessment of artificial intelligence integration in the practice of public relations in Nigeria

Chuddy Christian Oduenyi

School of Media and Communication, Pan Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria. Email: leadergest@yahoo.com

Etumnu Emeka Williams

Department of Mass Communication, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria. Email: etumnuemeka@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The study main objective amongst others was to investigate the impact of AI integration in the practice of PR in Nigeria while exploring the benefits, challenges, and implications of AI in PR, as well as how organizations can effectively utilize this technology to enhance their communication strategies. The study anchors its assertions on the Agenda setting theory and users and gratification theory. The study adopted a qualitative research method applying an in-depth interview research strategy, with a population of PR practitioners in Owerri Nigeria summing up to 99 registered public relations practitioners, applying the purposive sampling technique, the sample of the study consisted of 10 well known public relations practitioners of Imo State. It was revealed that AIs in world of communication is a veritable tool that have transcended time and age adding positive to the day-to-day operations of communication practitioners. It was recommended that with the right approach and strategies in place, AI integration in PR in Nigeria has the potential to transform the industry and drive success for organizations in the digital age.

Keywords:

Artificial intelligence, integration, public relations, practitioner.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become increasingly prevalent in various industries, including public relations (PR), the use of AI in PR offers several potential benefits for organizations in Nigeria as seen in Abayomi, (2020). AI technology can automate repetitive tasks, such as media monitoring, data analysis, and content creation, allowing PR professionals to focus on more strategic and creative aspects of their work. Chaffey, & Patron, (2019) didn't vary much as they are cited that AI tools can also help organizations to analyze audience sentiment, predict media trends, and personalize communication strategies, thereby improving the effectiveness of PR campaigns. The integration of AI in public relations in Nigeria is a topic of increasing importance for several reasons as stated by Ardila, (2020) who revealed that AI technology has the potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of communication strategies, allowing organizations to reach their target audiences in a more tailored and impactful manner. In same vein, Chloé (2021) stated that by utilizing AI tools such as chatbots, sentiment analysis, and predictive analytics, public relations professionals can gain valuable insights into audience behavior and preferences, enabling them to craft more relevant and engaging messaging. In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, staying ahead of the curve in terms of technology is crucial for the success of any organization as stipulated by Cohen, (2017) who questioned if AI can make PR practitioners super heroes. By embracing AI in public relations efforts, Nigerian companies can gain a competitive edge and enhance their reputation as innovative and forward-thinking entities. Additionally, the use of AI can help organizations navigate the challenges of the digital age, such as managing online reputation, responding to crises in real-time, and monitoring social media conversations (Ekeanyanwu, 2021).

In recent years, the field of public relations has witnessed significant advancements in technology, particularly with the integration of artificial intelligence (AI). AI technology has revolutionized the way organizations communicate with their stakeholders, allowing for more personalized and efficient messaging (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018). In Nigeria, the use of AI in public relations is still in its infancy, but there is growing interest in its potential to enhance communication strategies and improve stakeholder engagement (Haitham, 2021). AI technology has revolutionized the way public relations professionals interact with their target audiences. Through the use of AI-powered tools such as chatbots, sentiment analysis, and data analytics, PR practitioners can now streamline their communication processes, personalize their messaging, and measure the impact of their campaigns more effectively. Ogunleye & Akinbolowa (2018). Believes that in Nigeria, where the digital landscape is rapidly expanding, the integration of AI in public relations has gained significant traction. Tetteh & Adegbite (2020) stated that although PR agencies and organizations are increasingly leveraging AI technology to enhance their communication strategies, engage with stakeholders more efficiently, and gain a competitive edge in the market, there is more to be done in the full integration of AI in the world of communication and public relations (Singh & Sood, 2020). This research

study sought to investigate the impact of AI integration in the practice of PR in Nigeria while exploring the benefits, challenges, and implications of AI in PR, as well as how organizations can effectively utilize this technology to enhance their communication strategies.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing interest in the integration of AI in public relations, there is a lack of empirical studies examining its impact on communication outcomes in the Nigerian context. While there is anecdotal evidence of the benefits of AI tools in public relations, more research is needed to provide concrete evidence of their effectiveness in achieving communication goals. Nigeria is a diverse and dynamic market with unique cultural, social, and economic factors that influence communication strategies. Understanding how AI can be effectively deployed in this setting can offer valuable lessons for other emerging markets facing similar challenges. As AI technology becomes more sophisticated, questions arise about its impact on issues such as privacy, data security, and transparency. Public relations professionals need to consider these ethical concerns when adopting AI tools in their communication strategies, and research that addresses these issues is essential. Additionally, an investigation on the attitudes and perceptions of Nigerian stakeholders towards AI in public relations. Understanding how different audiences perceive and interact with AI-driven communication can help organizations tailor their messaging to better engage their target demographics.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To identify the benefits and challenges of integrating artificial intelligence in PR in Nigeria.
- To explore the attitudes and perceptions of PR professionals towards artificial intelligence in Nigeria.
- To provide recommendations for the effective integration of artificial intelligence in the practice of public relations in Nigeria.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Tools and strategies of AI integration in the practice of PR in Nigeria

Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerful tool in the field of public relations (PR), particularly in Nigeria, where technology adoption is increasingly becoming mainstream as (Abayomi, 2020). AI has the potential to revolutionize the way PR professionals work, by enabling them to automate repetitive tasks, analyze data at a faster rate, and make more informed decisions (Chaffey & Patron, 2019). One of the key tools of AI in PR is natural language processing (NLP), which allows machines to understand and generate human language. This tool is particularly useful in the field of media monitoring and sentiment analysis (Ardila, 2020). In Nigeria, where social media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, NLP can help PR professionals track conversations about their clients or brands in real-time, and analyze the sentiment behind these conversations (Chloé, 2021). By

understanding how people perceive a brand or issue, PR professionals can tailor their messaging and strategy accordingly (Deal et al., 2010).

- Chatbots are AI-powered virtual assistants that can interact with users in real-time. In Nigeria, where customer service is a critical aspect of PR, chatbots can help PR professionals provide instant support to clients and customers (Ealham & Surridges, 2020). These chatbots can answer frequently asked questions, provide updates on products or services, and even collect feedback from users. By using chatbots, PR professionals can streamline their communication process and provide better service to their clients (Ekeanyanwu, 2021).
- Predictive analytics, which uses AI algorithms to analyze data and forecast future trends. In PR, predictive analytics can help professionals identify potential crises before they escalate, anticipate media coverage, and assess the effectiveness of their campaigns (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019). By using predictive analytics, PR professionals can make data-driven decisions that can lead to better outcomes for their clients.

2.2 Challenges and drawbacks to AI integration into PR practices in Nigeria

Artificial intelligence (AI) technology has been rapidly evolving in recent years and has the potential to revolutionize many industries, including the field of public relations (Johnson & So, 2018). In Nigeria, the integration of AI into PR practices has become increasingly common as organizations seek to streamline their communication efforts and enhance their outreach to stakeholders (Ogunleye & Akinbolowa, 2018). However, while AI offers many advantages, there are also several challenges and drawbacks to its integration into PR practices in Nigeria. Some of which are;

- Lack of awareness and understanding of the technology among PR professionals. Many PR practitioners in Nigeria may not be familiar with how AI works and how it can be leveraged to improve their work (Ogunleye & Akinbolowa, 2018). This lack of knowledge can hinder the effective implementation of AI tools and strategies in PR practices, limiting the potential benefits that AI can offer (Omojuyigbe, 2018).
- Another challenge of AI integration is the cost associated with implementing and maintaining AI systems. AI technology can be expensive to develop and purchase, and it may require ongoing maintenance and updates to keep it running smoothly (Panda et al., 2019). For many organizations in Nigeria, especially smaller companies with limited resources, the cost of implementing AI technology may be prohibitive, leading to a reluctance to adopt AI in their PR practices (Singh & Sood, 2020).
- As AI systems become more advanced and capable of performing tasks that were previously done by humans, there is a concern that some PR jobs may be at risk of being replaced by AI technology (Tetteh & Adegbite, 2020). This could lead to job loss and unemployment among PR professionals in Nigeria, posing a significant challenge to the industry (Valin, 2018).
- Ethical implications of AI in the practice of public relations raise concerns about data privacy and security (Dignum, 2018). AI systems have the potential to gather and analyze vast amounts of personal data, which could be misused if not properly regulated. Maintaining ethical standards while using AI technology in public relations is crucial to building trust with clients and stakeholders (Chartered Institute of Public Relations).

Despite these challenges and drawbacks, there are also many potential benefits to integrating AI into PR practices in Nigeria if proper and ethical standards and measures are being put in place by all stakeholders involved (Chartered Institute of Public Relations). AI technology can help PR professionals analyze data more effectively, identify trends and insights, and automate routine tasks, allowing them to focus on more strategic work (Okpara, 2019). AI can also help PR practitioners personalize their communication efforts, tailor their messages to specific audiences, and enhance their outreach to stakeholders, ultimately improving the effectiveness of their PR campaigns (Jones, 2019).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The integration of artificial intelligence in the practice of public relations in Nigeria has become a significant topic of interest in recent years (Jones, 2019). As technology continues to advance, professionals in the field are exploring how AI can streamline processes, improve efficiency, and enhance communication with target audiences (Tetteh & Adegbite, 2020). The study anchors its assertions on the uses and gratification theory. The uses and gratification theory by Rosengren (1974) focuses on the ways in which individuals actively seek out media content to fulfill their own needs and desires. When applied to the integration of AI in public relations, this theory highlights the importance of understanding the preferences and behaviors of target audiences. By leveraging AI-driven data analytics and audience segmentation tools, PR professionals can tailor their messaging and content to resonate with specific demographic groups. This personalized approach

not only enhances engagement but also creates opportunities for organizations to build stronger relationships with their stakeholders.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research method applying an in-depth interview research strategy to gather relevant data for the study which was conducted using semi-structured interviews (Ayres, 2008). The population was PR practitioners in Owerri Nigeria summing up to 99 registered public relations practitioners according to the NIPR Secretariat Owerri, Imo state Nigeria 2024 February. Applying the purposive sampling technique, the sample of the study consisted of 10 well known public relations practitioners of Imo State based on notable contributions to public relations growth in Owerri Imo state Nigeria and the theme analysis for analysing qualitative data was employed. The in-depth interview session was conducted via mobile phone calls as it was more flexible and network friendly (Creswell, 1998).

4. DATA ANALYSIS

This theme analyses the participants' knowledge on the known and future benefits of integrating artificial intelligence in PR in Nigeria alongside challenges faced by them in its integration and application;

AI technology has the potential to streamline various public relations activities, such as media monitoring, sentiment analysis, and content creation. By automating these tasks, organizations can save time and resources, allowing them to focus on more strategic aspects of their communication efforts. AI can help in analyzing large volumes of data quickly and accurately, providing valuable insights into audience preferences and behaviors. AI-powered chatbots can engage with customers on social media platforms, answer frequently asked questions, and provide instant support, enhancing the overall customer experience. This real-time monitoring enables organizations to stay ahead of the curve, respond promptly to stakeholder concerns, and shape the narrative around their brand. One major concern is the potential loss of human touch in communication efforts. While AI technology can enhance efficiency, it may lack the emotional intelligence and creativity that human PR professionals bring to the table. Moreover, there are concerns about data privacy and security, as AI algorithms rely on large amounts of data to function effectively. From respondents' responses, it is clear that the application of AIs in Nigeria PR practices is quite a breath of fresh air as the innovation enables these professionals to be a breast with the recent trend in public relations practices across the globe enabling a more competitive and productive discharge of duties. But like the popular saying "everything that has advantage has disadvantage, despite the numerous benefits of AI integration and application, it poses a huge threat as ethical issues and other issues poses threat to realizing its full potentials.

PR professionals' attitude across Nigeria me inclusive towards AIs in Nigeria can be characterized as a mix of curiosity, skepticism, and optimism as change comes with an overload of fear. PR professionals are increasingly interested in exploring how these technologies can enhance their work efficiency and effectiveness so it's a welcome development. Concerns with regards to the ethical implications of using AI in PR practice, such as data privacy issues, bias in algorithms, and the potential for AI to replace human jobs poses as a huge turn off to many PR practitioners. In a country like Nigeria, where there is a strong emphasis on personal relationships and face-to-face communication, some PR professionals may be reluctant to fully embrace AI technologies that may erode the human touch in PR practice. The place of AI in Nigeria public relations practices is without doubt expanding and growing based on the fact that the world today every sector is toeing the line of AI integration and application. Although its impact is without doubt beneficial, many are still skeptical about its total dominance and infusion of AI based on many valid reasons as seen in the responses of the interviewees.

Education and training programs should be conducted to familiarize practitioners with the benefits of AI technology and how it can be applied in the field of public relations. Grants, subsidies, and tax breaks could help offset the cost of acquiring and implementing AI systems, making them more accessible to a wider range of organizations. Data protection laws and codes of conduct can help safeguard individuals' privacy rights and prevent the misuse of personal information by AI systems. Transparency and accountability are essential in building trust with clients and maintaining ethical standards in the industry. Regulations and guidelines should be developed to ensure the ethical use of AI in public relations practices. Workshops, seminars, and online courses can help professionals acquire the necessary skills to leverage AI effectively. Government and industry bodies should provide financial support and incentives to encourage public relations agencies in Nigeria to invest in AI technologies. The interviewees believed that the provision of adequate and updated trainings, workshops and seminars for Nigeria PR practitioners is a step towards the right direction as these tools need to be understood before it is efficiently applied. Also, funding opportunities should be made available for PR practitioners who wishes to utilize the tools of AI as these tools can be quite expensive. One of the core challenge faced by PR practitioners in the full acceptance of AIs in the fear of

unethical approach of AI as these tools are devoid of human emotions and prone to be hacked or manipulated to suit personal aspirations and whims of its operators.

5. DISCUSSION

Integrating artificial intelligence in PR in Nigeria over the years have proven to be quite beneficial aiding a more professional and globalized form of PR existing in this demission of information technology diversification. It is clear from other studies that AIs in world of communication is a veritable tool that have transcended time and age adding positive to the day-to-day operations of communication practitioners public relations. That been said, AIs comes with own challenges as seen by respondents' views such as potential loss of human touch in communication efforts, lack the emotional intelligence and creativity that human PR professionals bring to the table, concerns about data privacy and security and so on. Supporting these assertions are studies by Haitham (2021) who believes that AI helps in the growth of the industry is found to be high compared with non-using AI industry while offering business implications, deployment of AI, developing products and ideas. Change is one element that creates an emotion of fear, apprehension and indifference in humans and the integration of AIs in public relations is not different. PR professionals' attitudes and perceptions towards artificial intelligence in Nigeria is no different from how the average human will evaluate situations and these insecurities with regards to the full acceptance of AIs is not farfetched. Many are open to new changes and trends while some are quite comfortable with tools they are familiar with. This is in line with a study by Ardila, (2020) who mentioned that many of PR tools currently feature AI algorithms which extract qualitative and quantitative data about behaviours, feelings and opinions of individual persons, so AI is now part of the day to day operations of PR. The effective integration of artificial intelligence in the practice of public relations in Nigeria can only be obtainable if an enabling environment is created by interested parties such as government, organization, public relations organizations and even the PR practitioners themselves. These strategies ranging from funding, adequate and updated trainings, workshops and seminars for Nigeria PR practitioners and so on should be made available and accessible to PR practitioners. This is in view with a study by Panda et al., (2019) who highlights that the needed skills by PR practitioners which can be acquired through learning and development or a broader understanding of AI-based cognitive machines in order to realize full potential for up-skilling current tasks in the AI age.

6. CONCLUSION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming various industries, including the field of public relations. In Nigeria, the integration of AI in public relations practices is gaining traction, with organizations leveraging advanced technologies to enhance communication, media monitoring, and stakeholder engagement. The integration of artificial intelligence in the practice of public relations in Nigeria has the potential to revolutionize the field and enhance the effectiveness of PR campaigns. By leveraging AI technologies, PR professionals can automate routine tasks, analyze data more effectively, and engage with audiences in real-time. However, it is important for PR practitioners to consider the ethical and social implications of AI integration, and to ensure that they use these technologies responsibly and ethically. While there are challenges and drawbacks to integrating AI into the practice of public relations in Nigeria, the potential benefits of AI technology cannot be ignored.

6.1 Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the followings are the recommendations:

- By addressing the challenges of cost, job displacement, and lack of knowledge, PR professionals in Nigeria can harness the power of AI to enhance their communication efforts, reach their target audiences more effectively, and achieve their PR objectives.
- With the right approach and strategies in place, AI integration in PR in Nigeria has the potential to transform the industry and drive success for organizations in the digital age.
- As AI technologies continue to transform the field of PR, it is essential for PR professionals to embrace these technologies while also being mindful of the ethical and cultural implications.

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