

**EVALUATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN CONTEMPORARY
PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence, shortly known as 'AI' has taken a vast shape technologically purposely to help humans in carrying out programmed functions in place of human efforts. Available studies suggest that AI has transformed the way public relations professionals communicate with their audiences, enabling them to offer more focused and customized information, analyze data more effectively, and respond to issues and crises more efficiently. Its services are notable in the areas of media evaluation, tracking, reporting, content development, social media management, and crisis and campaign response. The study was to properly evaluate the roles that AI plays in modern public relations (PR), look at the consequences of AI in PR now, and ascertain extent AI is being used in PR today in Nigeria. Survey research approach helped in gathering data. Findings suggest that AI was helpful to the PR practitioners to some extent. The results also acclaim that the Nigerian PR practitioners were using chatbots to provide timely customer care information needs, enhance relationships with customers, and efficiently handle large datasets. Based on this, the researchers conclude that PR experts in Nigeria should keep an eye on AI developments, stimulate the integration of people and businesses.

Keywords: Evaluation, Artificial Intelligence, Contemporary Public Relations, Practice, Nigeria

Introduction

In the past, prior to the emergence of the Internet which gave birth to Artificial Intelligence (AI), the means of publicity was done traditionally - Radio, Television or print media like newspapers or magazines. Relating with heterogeneous people was prolonged because of get-keeping of news and other information messages. This time, AI seems to be taking over most of the productions as fast as possible. It has been proven that AI, all over the world, is a growing field with increasing interest and investment from both the public and the private sector. Particularly in Nigeria, AI is progressively being incorporated into various industries and sectors, including public relations (PR). It is playing an increasingly significant role in contemporary PR. With the growth of digital communication channels and the need for more personalized and efficient engagement with stakeholders, AI technologies are being utilized by PR professionals to

streamline processes, enhance decision-making, and improve overall communication strategies.

According to Nnaji, Mozie and Mbonu (2013, P. 503), "following the emergence of the print media, radio, television and telegraph the modus of information dissemination changed. The changes have continued until this period of the use of ICT equipment based on computers." Anie (2011), quoted in Ekwueme (2013, p. 702) explains that Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which AI is part of, "is the backbone of business activities productivity, trade and social development."

Linking traditional and digital public relations systems, Rodsevich (2023) explains that both can help one create connections with important stakeholders, though their approaches differ. He opines that traditional public relations foster strong relationships with journalists and editors, who may highlight or mention a company in an article. These connections

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require personal communication and possibly face-to-face interaction. Digital is more anonymous, as it relies on internet platforms, social media, and blogs. It supports real-time interactions, provides rapid response, and it is less individualized because multiple audiences can also witness any message.

As AI is also being used in Nigeria PR to assist firms better their statement policy, expedite procedures, and involve stakeholders, Ardila (2020) study suggests that intelligent computers are not producing and pitching stories right now, but they are enhancing the efficiency and accuracy of traditional measuring procedures in public relations. For instance, public relations professionals who would previously evaluate the Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE) or the volume of perceptions of a news story to prove the impact of their gained publicity efforts now have a choice of AI-powered tracking tools that assess the public opinion of the service, the press outlet's scale of impact, and the amount of traffic the story drove to the brand's channels of communication.

According to Adi (2023, p. 4), "for communicators, where the cloud of big data was already looming threateningly, AI is a whole new level of good and bad news all in one." In *Anyoha* (2017) point that the society is now in the era of "big data," a period at which we have the potential to collect massive amounts of information too onerous for a human to process, Panda, Upadhyay and Khandelwal (2019) confirm that AI, by its intrinsic features of connected smartness and intelligence helps in giving context, specificity, relevance, and customization to the essential process and procedures in the public relations sector. According to Panda et al (2019), AI has surmounted tremendous hurdles, such as delivering tailored solutions at both the mass and individual levels. AI also permits the evaluation of the efficacy of the campaigns and assists in overcoming any potential barriers or problems.

It is understood that AI in public relations aims to optimize communication tactics, stimulate innovation, and offer quantifiable results that improve the organization's reputation and stakeholder relationship; by properly utilizing AI technology, PR professionals may expand their talents, improve decision-making, and

remain ahead in a quickly developing digital world. Kothari (2023) affirms that one of the primary goals of AI is to create systems capable of analyzing vast records, identifying patterns, and making data-driven choices

Since digitization has brought numerous new technologies to bear, it is often assumed that Artificial intelligence, for example, has sparked a new era of revolution in public relations. Some digital public relations tasks are presently being carried out using artificial intelligence, although it is unclear what role this technology will play in the near future. And because it is still not clear, Panda et al (2019) believe that it is too early to say whether AI would act as a strategic disruption in the PR industry. However, this study evaluates artificial intelligence in the context of current communication methods in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In recent times, AI has been of help to several sectors – agricultural, educational, information sharing, data analysis, content development, social media management, researching and a lot of it. In public relations, it has been a means some PR practitioners or agencies use for media content evaluation, tracking, reporting and so on. Traditional PR stresses quick and focused messages in that some traditional public relations strategies such as television, radio, and newspaper place an emphasis on one-way communication as at then. During a crisis, official statements and press releases give critical information on a particular topic which used to be one consistent message. But available studies suggest that modern PR is significantly more comprehensive and diverse than previous PR, which was primarily concerned with media relations and earned media attention. This time, it includes a variety of methods with the help of AI, such as social media management, content development, influencer marketing, and community participation. However, it has been gathered that AI suffers difficulties with data privacy, the possibility for bias in AI algorithms, and the validity of AI-generated material. AI may speak in an impersonal or robotic manner, detracting from the authenticity and sincerity that are essential in PR engagements and also lack the capacity to identify and react to human feelings and maintain ethical provisions which is critical

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in PR where creating connections and trust with stakeholders is vital.

Though some scholars have written about AI in different fields, not much has been sight-seen in this area. This study, therefore, sought to address this knowledge gap by undertaking rigorous research to evaluate AI in contemporary PR practice in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

This work is based on the following objectives, to:

- evaluate what best describe functions of AI in public relations practice in Nigeria
- examine effects of AI in the present Public Relations Practice in Nigeria
- ascertain the level of AI application in present Public Relations Practice in Nigeria

Understanding AI in Public Relations

It is unarguably that communication has begun to take place as a result of digitalization, using new methods and platforms that were not before available to us. From this perspective, the use of new communication techniques in public relations has become vital. One of these technologies is artificial intelligence (AI), which has grown in popularity as a result of digitalization. AI is being applied in several fields, including education, health, law, art, production, and communication (Çataldaş & Özgen 2023).

According to Alawaad (2021), AI is the general concept of computers being able to think and accomplish tasks like humans using software and algorithms. AI automates many of the operations involved in obtaining, storing, maintaining, and retrieving information, which can aid in the development and administration of firm offers. Haidar (n.d.) adds that one classical definition for AI comes from Kaplan and Haenlein (2019, p. 15) as “a system’s ability to interpret external data correctly, to learn from such data, and to use those learnings to achieve specific goals and tasks through flexible adaptation.”

As a result, Basarir (2020) explains that computers and digital technologies provided architecture with immense capabilities that were implemented in phases ranging from

conceptual design to 3D visualization, design optimization to project management, and so on, resulting in unprecedented levels of architectural knowledge management efficiency.

Artificial intelligence has mostly used alphabetic symbols. It is intriguing to consider whether certain aspects of ideogrammatic script may find a home in artificial intelligence, complementing the alphabetic in some manner. Referring to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2018), the term "AI" may apply to both technology and the systems that use them.

Artificial intelligence, which refers to technology that allows individuals to execute cognitive activities like perceiving, writing, reading, and analyzing more efficiently than humans, offers several benefits in public relations. It is unavoidable to employ artificial intelligence as a tool to help public relations professionals with a variety of tasks, including press release creation, media monitoring, content generation, target audience, and market analysis (Kaput, 2021 in Polat, 2023).

Citing McLuhan (1994, p. 90) in Çataldaş and Özgen (2023), technology has become an extension of humanity, enhancing their power and speed. People today employ new modes of communication to access digital platforms for a variety of objectives. In addition to being present in people's everyday lives, digital platforms are becoming increasingly important for various institutions and organizations to reach their target audiences.

Since the inception of AI, things have shifted from conventional methods to a technologically driven world. According to Russell and Norvig (2003), the gestation of artificial intelligence began in 1943, when Warren McCulloch and Walter Pitts conducted the initial experiments. The Turing Test, established by Alan Turing in 1950, was intended to offer a suitable practical definition of intelligence. In the summer of 1956, John McCarthy and nine other colleagues conducted a two-month workshop at Dartmouth during which AI was born, and it has since continued to evolve till now only that between then and now, AI has developed more tools.

Digital breakthroughs in marketing communications have emerged during the

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previous decade. AI allows computers and robots to accomplish activities that previously needed human intelligence. PR is one function in the realm of marketing communications that sees an increase in applicability and is on the verge of an AI revolution. Public relations, as a function, ensures that companies transmit the correct message to the right audience at the right time and place. To achieve organizational goals, organizations place a high value on providing smart solutions to their stakeholders. Organizations may use AI tools and technologies to analyze the value of public relations activities and assure alignment with their company's broader purpose and goals (Panda, Upadhyay, & Khandelwal, 2019).

Soldan and Kelimeler (2022), who agree with Panda, et al (2019), posit that advances in information and communication technology have profoundly altered public relations research during the previous fifteen years. Artificial intelligence, big data, machine learning, and natural language processing are all terms and concepts that have grown common in business communication. The fact that the masses have simultaneously become content creators has shifted crises away from conventional media and onto alternative channels, and consumer communication has taken on new dimensions owing to tools like voice assistants and chatbots.

In the twenty-first century, as all elements of society—companies, nonprofits, governments, religious institutions, sports teams and leagues, arts organizations, and all others—face constant shifts in economic conditions and competition, security concerns, and shifting public opinion, the public relations profession is expected to thrive as an increasing number of organizations are interested in communicating their stories. Polat (2023) expresses that humans experience many growths and modifications during their lives; remarking that digitalization shapes the twenty-first century.

Coppin (2004) claims that artificial intelligence is especially effective in instances when traditional techniques would be too sluggish, implying that it is likely that artificial intelligence will become increasingly common in our culture. According to Ertel (2017), the World Economic Forum produced research in January 2016, which was widely referenced in the German press, forecasting that some

industries will eliminate over five million jobs over the next five years. Russell (2019) opines that superhuman artificial intelligence is an impending tidal wave that will challenge not only jobs and human relationships, but even society itself. Conflict between people and robots is viewed as unavoidable, and the conclusion is all too predictable. This prognosis is not unexpected given that automation in industries, offices, administration, transportation, the household, and many other areas have resulted in an increasing amount of labour being done by computers, machines, and robots. AI has been one of the most major drivers of this development since around 2010.

According to Ardila (2020), there are undoubtedly more operations in the field of public relations that are now touched by some sort of AI. AI algorithms have made content production more customized. In this, Kissinger, Schmidt, and Huttenlocher (2021), opine that AI is reshaping human civilization in basic and deep ways.

But Adi (2023) suggests that the question of AI in PR or PR in AI is one of mindset and paradigm of operational logic: applying linear management principles to core PR tasks and AI support, from the use of chatbots to AI-enabled communication planning, execution, measurement, and evaluation, is an expression of a mechanistic worldview.

Barrat (2023), though, appreciates AI evolution but warns that the society may be on the verge of catastrophe, as breakthroughs in artificial intelligence by the military, universities, and corporations might result in an uncontrolled new lifeform far smarter and more powerful than we can fathom. Advanced artificial intelligence may appear to be a far-fetched science fiction scenario, yet it is far closer than most people believe. According to Zaeid (2020), Macluhan believes that the fundamental change in technological communication triggers profound alterations, not only in social structure but also in human sensitivity.

Anne (2018) stresses that, despite the demanding nature of AI in PR, its attraction to companies and other organizations has expanded in recent years. The public relations sector promises to be able to 'create relationships' with the general population while avoiding the dreaded 'hard sell' of advertising or marketing.

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Theoretical Framework

The backup theory to this study is Technological Determinism Theory. It postulates that media technology influences how individuals in society think, feel, act, and operate as society advances from one technological period to the other. Additionally, Technological Determinism is the view that technology is the primary driver of society's

Determine Sample Size	
Confidence Level:	95%
Population Size:	7,559
Proportion:	0.5
Confidence Interval:	0.05
Upper	0.55000
Lower	0.45000
Standard Error	0.02551
Relative Standard Error	5.10
Sample Size:	366

evolution. The birth of this idea is commonly credited to the American sociologist, Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), who developed the causal relationship between technology and society.

Giving to adherents of technological determinism, as Prof Thomas Hauer edifies, technology, technical advancement, communications technology, and media influence all social developments. He states that the modern information society is the consequence of the evolution of inventions, new technologies, and their social and political ramifications. He goes on to say that the advancement of computers, networks, and the Internet have fundamentally altered many elements of not only human communication, but also society as a whole (Hauer, 2017).

So, by the ideas projected by these scholars, Technological Determinism Theory supports this study because Public Relations in this present Nigeria, according to available

literatures, cannot be fully achieved without the use of AI and social media.

Methodology

The study design was survey. According to George (2012), a survey is the study of randomly selecting segments of a population for a survey, as well as the techniques used to create questionnaire and enhance the amount and quality of survey responses. The instruments or methods employed in the survey approach may include one or more open-ended questions.

Population of the Study

The population comprised members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR). According to Prnigeria (2024) the current NIPR membership distribution, as obtained from the register, are 215 Fellows, 25 Honorary Fellows, 649 Full Members, 6,513 Associate Members, 218 Graduate Members, and 33 Corporate Members. Therefore, adding up to the figures amount to 7,653. But as projected by the NIPR website, the number of the members was 7,464 at the time this study was done. The difference in figures has been necessitated by new members joining from time-to-time making the figure to change. By average figure obtained, the population approximately becomes 7,559.

Sample size

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024)

Sampling Techniques

This study adopted Multi-stage Sampling Technique which was segmented into different stages:

Stage 1: Purposive Sampling Technique was chosen to select five states in South-East: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo.

Stage 2: Simple Random sampling method was applied to select three states, namely: Anambra, Enugu and Imo states.

Stage 3: Cluster Sampling Technique was chosen to select different organizations such as the States Ministry of Information Officers, Federal Ministry of Information Officers in the states of South-East, members

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from Radio and TV stations and private organizations.

Stage 4: Proportionate Sampling Technique was used to determine 122 number of questionnaire distributed to each state of the three selected in South-East.

Stage 5: Accidental Sampling Technique was adopted to administer questionnaire to NIPR members in each of the clustered organizations who used AI tools.

Instrument for Data Collection

Primarily, the data was obtained through questionnaire. The researchers believed that there could not have been any other instrument suitable to this kind of research if not questionnaire. This method was helpful since surveys might be used to determine how representative individual perspectives and experiences were. For instance, when correctly done, surveys provide accurate data about people's opinions and activities that may be used to make important choices. Again, polls' anonymity allows respondents to deliver more sincere and accurate replies.

Validity of Data Instrument

The instrument was subjected to face validity. However, to determine the validity of the data instruments, the questionnaire was presented to three communication and public relations research experts in University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) who made useful suggestions and corrections. The questions therein were clearly and easily structured to avoid any uncertainty and those remarked errors were effected before circulation.

Reliability of Measuring Instruments

The **test-retest** method was chosen to test the reliability of measurement of instrument. The researchers did this by distributing a small number, 20 copies of questionnaire to some respondents in two different occasions (in two weeks interval) for the purpose of knowing the consistency of their answers. The reliability level of the instrument was calculated using the Guttman scale of coefficient to give 92.5%, which is considered high.

Method of Data Collection

The data for this research came from the fieldwork. The data were collected through self-administration and four research assistants. They were chosen from the various NIPR Chapters under study, as two persons were selected from each Chapter. The research assistants helped the researchers in two states while the researchers carried out the remaining processes in one state. Those assistants were members of NIPR. The method was chosen because it encouraged and enabled the researcher to make clarifications where necessary.

Demographic Information of Respondents

A total number of 366 copies of questionnaire were distributed to respondents. Out of that, 362 copies were retrieved from the field while 4 missed giving a response rate of 98.90%. The table, figure and percentage below give detailed information of the returned rate from the three states.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of gender of respondents

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	155	42.81
Female	207	57.18
Total	362	100

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of age of respondents

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-30	49	13.53
31-40	155	42.81
41-50	101	27.9
51 and above	57	15.74
Total	362	100

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Table 3: Frequency distribution of educational qualification of respondents

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
HND/BSC/BA	279	77.07
PGD	14	3.86
Masters	58	16.02

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PhD	11	3.03
Total	362	100

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Psychographic Data Analysis from Field Survey

Under this, the data gathered from the questionnaire were used based on items to answer each research question.

Research Question 1: what best describe functions of AI in public relations practice in Nigeria?

Table 4: Frequencies on what best describe functions of AI in public relations in Nigeria

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Improving data analysis	50	13.81
Increasing speed and agility	13	3.59
Enhancing personalization	9	2.48
Redefining roles	10	2.76
Increasing efficiency	10	2.76
Taking over human job	70	19.33
All of the above	200	55.24
Total	362	100

Source: Field survey, 2024.

The implication in table 4 is not only that the listed are functions of AI in improving public relations practice in Nigeria but according to 19.33% of respondents, AI poses threat to PR pros as most of the jobs seem to be done by its tools.

Research question 2: what are the effects of AI in the present public relations practice in Nigeria?

Table 5: Respondents' perception on the effects (positive or negative) of AI in the present public relations practice in Nigeria

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
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		(%)
Positive effects	253	69.88
Negative effects	109	30.11
Total	362	100

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Research question 3: which level is AI application in present Public Relations Practice in Nigeria?

Table 6: Respondents' perspectives on how individual has been able to make use of AI in present public relations practice in Nigeria, using it,

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
to follow and analyze social media trends, sentiments, and discussions accordingly	30	8.28
as Chatbots	28	7.73
for audience targeting	13	3.59
No, it still gradually finding its way into PR practice in Nigeria	81	22.37
All of the above	210	58.01
Total	362	100

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study suggest that the Nigerian PR practitioners are utilizing AI tools like chatbots to efficiently manage large datasets, provide timely responses, and analyze big datasets for insights, trend monitoring, and assessing communication strategies' impact. They also utilize AI-powered social media monitoring tools to analyze conversations, and manage their online image, providing real-time insights and tailored content. This is as the findings also suggest that PR teams in Nigeria utilize AI-driven technologies for content creation, enabling efficient evaluation of media coverage and ensuring accurate portrayal of companies.

Apart from the fact that some respondents decline the postulation that the use of AI raises ethical concerns, including potential bias in algorithms, misuse of AI technology, and

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privacy concerns related to data collection and usage issues, AI automates repetitive tasks, increasing efficiency and production. Results indicate that AI has the power to give new employment opportunities, but it also has the capacity to automate specific professions and tasks, resulting in job displacement in certain areas. Relying on the findings, AI cannot replicate human touch in public relations.

Also, results show that some organizations have virtual assistants on their websites and social media platforms to provide prompt customer service and support, hence improving connection with Nigerian consumers and stakeholders. Results also show that AI solutions in Nigeria may help PR professionals harness the creation of materials such as press releases, blog pieces, and social media updates, saving time and resources. Findings display that AI technologies may likewise help PR practitioners acquire and analyze data from a variety of sources, providing substantial insights on audience behaviour, preferences, and trends.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the researchers conclude that since the use of AI in public relations practice in Nigeria was very low, although there was an increasing interest and acceptance of AI tools and technology in the PR practice, there is need for relative improvement in the use of AI. The PR practitioners should keep their eyes on the development of AI tools in the country so as to follow suit.

Recommendations

1. The biggest concerns of AI are data security and privacy, as AI systems require enormous volumes of data to operate and develop. To prevent leaks, violations, and abuse, one must maintain data security, accessibility, and reliability.
2. As AI suffers difficulties with data privacy, the possibility for bias in AI algorithms, and the validity of AI-generated material, the PR specialists must address these concerns responsibly, guaranteeing openness and integrity in their use of AI.
3. Though AI evolves and becomes more accessible, Nigerians should expect

more PR professionals in the country using it to improve their campaigns and tactics.

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