

Shifting roles of public relations professionals in artificial intelligence technology era: Case study of XY PR and digital agency

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Abstract

The Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology has changed the way public relations professionals conduct research, build relationships with the public and personalize messages, one of which is at the PR and Digital XY agency. Artificial intelligence is not only a tool but also a technology that drives a shift in the role of Public Relations professionals in the communications industry. This study aims to analyze how the shift in the role of public relations professionals in dealing with the development of artificial intelligence technology in the public relations profession. The theory used is McLuhan's technological determinism and the role of Dozier and Broom's public relations. The method used in this study is a case study with data collection techniques in the form of interviews and literature studies. The results of the study show that in the era of artificial intelligence, there has been a shift in the role of public relations professionals from the four conventional PR roles to the role of gatekeepers and validators. PR is required to have digital communication competencies and ethical behavioral principles in using artificial intelligence technology.

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Introduction

Currently, artificial intelligence (AI) assumes an increasingly significant role. Role in research and professional communication in public relations (PR), along with its evolution (Suciati et al., 2021). Public Relations has evolved to adapt its practices to meet the needs of users (Permatasari et al., 2021). AI helps PR professionals in collecting and analyzing data more efficiently, enabling faster and data-driven decision-making (Okhotnikova & Korpachova, 2021). In research, AI can be used to analyze public sentiment, map trends, and identify relevant audiences, while in communication, AI supports message personalization and automated interactions through chatbots and social media platforms (Blankson & Anani-Bossman, 2023). The use of this technology enables more effective and responsive communication, as well as enhances the organization's ability to respond to market dynamics and public feedback in real-time. With the integration of AI, PR not only becomes more efficient but also more adaptive in facing the ever-evolving challenges of

communication. In practice, public relations as a management function is to maintain good relations between management and internal employees as well as external consumers, society or government. Good relations built by PR practitioners themselves are very beneficial for the company in achieving its goals, one of which is as a company branding to obtain greater profits. It is undeniable that the role of PR practitioners is crucial for the company; this is evident in the presence of PR practitioners, which enables the company to operate smoothly without obstacles from internal or external parties.

Theoretically, artificial intelligence in the evolution of public relations can be analyzed through the lens of technological determinism, which suggests that technological advancements drive changes in communication practices (McLuhan, 1994). As AI becomes more sophisticated, its ability to automate, predict, and personalize communication aligns with the media richness theory, which posits that richer media forms enable more effective message delivery (Daft & Lengel, 1986). This theoretical framework helps in understanding the transformative role of AI on PR and highlights the necessity for adaptation in communication strategies. Although artificial intelligence (AI) offers a lot of potential in research and professional communication in public relations, there are several challenges that organizations must face. One of the primary challenges is the reliance on high-quality data, AI requires accurate and relevant data to generate useful insights. However, not all organizations have access to complete or well-structured data. In addition, there are issues related to data privacy and security that need to be addressed. Extensive data collection for AI analysis can raise concerns about privacy violations, which can damage the organization's reputation if not managed properly.

Additionally, another challenge related to the adaptation of AI technology in PR organizations is the lack of skills and understanding among PR professionals (Men et al., 2022). Although AI can automate many processes, effectively leveraging this technology requires deep technical knowledge, as well as the ability to integrate AI tools into broader communication strategies. PR professionals who are not trained in the use of advanced technology may find it difficult to adapt to these changes. Therefore, organizations need to invest in training and skill development for their PR teams so they can optimally utilize AI while maintaining the essential human element in effective communication with the public. PR professional habitus is defined by a relentless focus on optimism and futurity (Bourne, 2019).

One of the main gaps in the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in public relations (PR) research and communication is the limitations in access and the quality of data used for analysis (Gloria, 2018). Many organizations, especially smaller or newly developed ones, face difficulties in collecting sufficient data to effectively train AI systems (Jeong & Park, 2023). Without accurate and relevant data, AI cannot deliver optimal results in analyzing audience trends, public sentiment, or message effectiveness. Moreover, data obtained from various sources is often unstructured or scattered, which can complicate effective integration and analysis. This creates a gap between the potential of AI and the reality of its application in PR, where organizations that cannot access or utilize data effectively will struggle to maximize the use of this technology. PR practitioners lacked the skills to leverage AI for media monitoring or sentiment analysis (Arief & Gustomo, 2020)

Moreover, there is a gap in terms of understanding and skills among PR professionals in using AI technology. Although AI offers convenience and efficiency, not all PR practitioners possess the technical skills to integrate AI tools into their communication strategies (Alawaad, 2021). These skills include the ability to interpret AI data analysis results, as well as optimizing the use of technology to enhance interactions with the public (Gouda et al., 2020). Education and training in this technology are still uneven, causing many

PR professionals to struggle to adapt to these technological advancements. Therefore, the gap between technical skills and the need for AI understanding in PR must be addressed through training and skill development so that AI can be effectively applied in research and communication in the field of public relations.

As AI becomes more integrated into the PR profession, it is important to understand the changing role of PR from traditional to digital. The primary objective of this study is to examine the changing role of public relations due to the development of AI technology. The importance of this study lies in its capacity to influence policy, direct organizational strategy, and shape future curricula for public relations education, thereby ensuring that professionals have the skills necessary to responsibly and effectively utilize artificial intelligence in an ever-evolving communications environment.

Method

This research employs a qualitative research method with a case study approach to explore the altering responsibilities of Public Relations professionals in facing the development of artificial intelligence technology in the communication industry, particularly at the XY PR and Digital agency. This approach was chosen because it can deeply explore the dynamics and meanings of the PR role amidst the complex and contextual ongoing digital transformation.

The case study design was chosen because it provides flexibility in exploring real phenomena currently occurring in the field, and how PR practitioners adapt to the implementation of AI in their daily work. This case study is exploratory, focusing on understanding the context, processes, and implications of using AI technology in public relations practice. The research was conducted at the XY PR and Digital Agency, which is known as one of the agencies that have implemented artificial intelligence technology in public communication and public relations services. The main informants in this study consist of senior PR practitioners and strategic managers who are directly involved in the planning and implementation of AI-based programs.

Data was collected through two main techniques, in-depth interviews: conducted with 3 key informants holding positions as founder, senior, and public relations staff from the XY PR and Digital Agency, and 2 scholars from Public Relations field. The interviews were semi-structured, with a question guide developed based on the theory of technological determinism (McLuhan, 1994) and the PR role theory (Dozier & Broom, 2006; Dozier, 2013). Literature review conducted by examining internal documents, AI-based project reports, as well as journals and scientific articles related to the role of PR and artificial intelligence technology. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The stages of analysis included interview transcription, data coding, theme categorization, and result interpretation according to the theoretical framework.

The following criteria for inclusion and exclusion were implemented to facilitate the study of literature: 1) Inclusion criteria: Peer-reviewed journal papers, conference proceedings, and books published between 2019 to 2024, focused on the integration of AI in public relations, communication strategy, and organisational change within digital transformation contexts. 2) Exclusion criteria: sources not available in English, articles without abstracts or complete texts, and publications that focused exclusively on AI in advertising or marketing without evident relevance to public relations approaches. To collect relevant literature, this study utilized AI-supported tools, including Research Rabbit and Semantic Scholar.

The specific keywords used included: “Artificial Intelligence in Public Relations,” “AI and Communication Strategy,” “Technological Determinism in PR,” and “AI and Organizational Change”. For Research Rabbit, AI-generated visual maps were used to identify the most cited and interconnected sources, allowing researchers to follow citation trails and detect knowledge clusters. Semantic Scholar’s advanced filter settings (e.g., publication type, publication year, and relevance score) helped further refine the selection and ensure scholarly relevance. The focus of the analysis is directed towards how the conventional roles of PR (as communication technicians, communication facilitators, problem-solving facilitators and expert prescribers) are reinterpreted in the context of AI usage, as well as how ethics, validation, and control over technology are practiced by PR professionals. To maintain data validity, source triangulation and theory triangulation techniques were employed.

Source triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results with documents and literature. Meanwhile, theory triangulation was carried out by linking empirical findings with two main theories: technological determinism and the PR role theory.

Results and Discussion

According to Dozier & Broom (2006) the roles of Public Relations in an organization is categorized into four, including:

Roles	Description
Expert Prescriber	An experienced and highly skilled public relations expert can help find solutions in resolving public relations issues. The organization acts passively to accept or trust what has been suggested or proposed by the PR expert (expert prescriber) in solving and addressing the public relations issues faced by the respective organization.
Communication Facilitator	PR practitioners act as communicators or mediators to help management listen to what the public wants and expects. On the other hand, he is also required to be able to explain the organization’s desires, policies, and expectations back to the public. Thus, with such two ways of communication, mutual understanding, trust, respect, support, and good tolerance can be created from both parties.
Problem Solving Facilitator	PR practitioners in the process of solving public relations issues is part of the management of organization. This intends to assist the organization’s leadership as both an advisor and in executing decisions to address the difficulties or crises encountered rationally and professionally. Usually, in facing a crisis, a task force is formed, coordinated by expert PR practitioners, involving various departments and expertise in a special team to assist organizations, companies, and products that are facing a specific crisis issue.

Roles	Description
Communication Technician	Unlike the three previous roles of professional PR practitioners that were closely related to organizational management functions. The role of a communication technician makes a PR professional act as a technician who only provides communication technique services.

This research reveals that the presence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the communication industry has triggered significant changes in the roles of public relations (PR) professionals, particularly in agency environments like XY. These changes not only encompass operational technical aspects but also touch upon the strategic and ethical dimensions of the public relations profession. In this context, the two main theories used as analytical foundations are Marshall McLuhan's technological determinism and Dozier and Broom's PR role theory. According to McLuhan (1994), media or technology is not a neutral entity, but rather has a profound influence on shaping consciousness and the way humans communicate. His famous statement, 'the medium is the message,' illustrates that technology not only conveys a message but also shapes the meaning of the message itself. In public relations practice at XY, AI has become a new medium that not only facilitates the delivery of messages but also changes how messages are crafted, to whom they are directed, and how their impact is measured. Scholars and professionals alike are still largely focused on the impacts that AI is having on public relations practice, in helping communicators, for example, undertake more effective media monitoring and schedule more targeted social media posts (Swiatek et al., 2022).

The Roles of Conventional Public Relations in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

The major changes brought about by artificial intelligence (AI) have pushed the PR profession to evolve. Previously, conventional PR practices—based on intuition, experience, and interpersonal skills—must now adapt to technology that enables automation of data analysis, algorithmic message personalization, and real-time media monitoring. However, this change does not necessarily eliminate the conventional role of PR, but rather demands a reinterpretation and shifting that is in line with technological advances. In the context of a communication agency like XY, AI technology is a catalyst for changing the role of PR professionals. Referring to McLuhan's Technological Determinism theory (1994), communication media such as AI not only expand human reach but also shape the way people think, interact, and interpret social roles. AI is not just a tool, but also a force that influences the structure of the PR profession systemically. AI begins to be used more robustly for media analytics, predictive modeling, and targeted messaging (Kaleel & Alomari, 2024).

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) has had a significant impact on public relations practices, including in agencies like XY. AI no longer functions merely as an auxiliary tool but also as a force that systematically influences the work structure and roles of public relations professionals. Within the framework of McLuhan's (1994) technological determinism theory, AI as a new medium shapes the way we think, act, and interact, which in turn, transforms the landscape of the PR profession. Meanwhile, the Public Relations role theory developed by Dozier & Broom (2006) identifies four main roles of PR practitioners that are conventional yet relevant to be reanalyzed in the context of current technology: communication technician, communication facilitator, problem-solving process facilitator, and expert prescriber. Below is an explanation of how each of these roles has evolved in the context of AI utilization at XY:

As a communication technician, from Production to AI Content Validation. The PR professional is primarily responsible for creating communication materials such as brochures, videotapes, newsletters, and press releases. He administers communication programs but is not involved in the decision-making that leads to the program's creation (Mohamed & Bayraktar, 2022). In conventional practice, communication technicians are responsible for writing press releases, creating media content, and carrying out other tactical communication activities. However, in the AI era, many of these functions have been automated. Tools such as automated content generation, AI copywriting tools, and chatbot scripting can now generate messages efficiently and quickly. However, PR professionals at XY continue to play an important role as validators. They no longer just create messages, but also edit, filter, and ensure the accuracy, ethics, and relevance of AI-generated content. Thus, the role of technicians has not disappeared, but shifted from manual production to editorial functions and quality control based on communication ethics.

As a communication facilitator, PR is bridging organizations and the public. In the conventional communication facilitator is tasked with building two-way communication channels between the organization and the public. In the context of AI, this task has evolved into managing automated communication systems (such as chatbots, automated email systems, or AI-based social media) while ensuring that the technology remains human, empathetic, and responsive to the audience's needs. At XY, PR functions as a gatekeeper, ensuring that the information conveyed through technology aligns with the organization's values and communication strategy. They are also tasked with bridging the gap between AI analytics results and public feedback, creating a dialogue that remains authentic even though it originates from a digital process.

As a problem-solving process facilitator, data integration for strategic decisions. As problem-solving facilitators, PR practitioners are tasked with identifying issues, analyzing risks, and developing effective communication strategies. This role is highly relevant in the era of AI, where AI's ability to detect trends and crises early through predictive analytics accelerates the problem identification process. This is where conventional PR has an advantage as a bridge between analytics and action. PR professionals at XY use AI data as the basis for strategy, but still lead in strategic decision-making, considering social, political, cultural, and psychological aspects that machines cannot analyze. AI provides the map, but humans determine the direction.

As an expert prescriber, strategic consultant in the digital ecosystem. As an expert advisor, PR holds a strategic position in providing communication recommendations to organizational leaders or clients. In the context of AI, this role becomes increasingly important because organizational leaders need guidance not only on messaging but also on which technologies are ethical, effective, and relevant to use. At XY, PR professionals are required to possess digital communication competencies, data literacy, and an understanding of the legal and ethical implications of AI usage. They become advisors who not only understand communication but also technology, helping clients or management make data-driven decisions that still humanize the public.

The Roles of Gatekeeper and Validator in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

In addition to conventional roles, other roles are needed for PR practitioners in the AI era. Several new activities in the PR profession today have shifted conventional roles due to the use of AI-based devices for media monitoring, public sentiment analysis, message personalization based on data segmentation, and even automated content creation. These tasks previously required a lot of time and human effort, but can now be done more efficiently. However, this efficiency also brings new challenges, namely ensuring that AI

results remain ethical, accurate, and aligned with responsible communication values. PR practitioners do not yet have the skills to utilize AI for media monitoring or sentiment analysis (Arief & Gustomo, 2020), while organizational priorities are still focused on operational tasks rather than technological innovation (Turksoy, 2022).

In the case study of the XY PR and Digital agency, two new dominant roles have emerged in the PR profession in the AI era, a gatekeeper and a validator. As a gatekeeper, PR plays a role in filtering and controlling information and content generated by AI before it is delivered to the public. This is important to prevent the spread of biased, inaccurate, or unethical information. Many PR departments still struggle with fragmented data systems and the ethical implications of personal data use (Arief & Saputra, 2019). Meanwhile, the role of a validator emphasizes that PR professionals must be able to critically assess the validity of AI data and interpretations. PR practitioners must validate the data generated by AI to ensure it is in accordance with what it should be. Thus, PR practitioners act as a bridge between technology and social values that are the foundation of public relations. This role is very strategic because AI does not have moral capabilities and value judgments, this remains the responsibility of humans as PR professionals. In addition to functional roles, this study also reveals that PR professional competencies are now becoming increasingly complex. Not only writing skills or public speaking skills, PR practitioners are now required to have digital literacy, the ability to understand data analysis, and ethical awareness in the use of technology. This shows that technological determinism is actively working to reshape the structure of work, task distribution, and expectations of the PR profession.

The results show that in this AI era, PR practitioners not only have a technical role but also act as gatekeepers and validators of information. AI technology is indeed capable of analyzing sentiment and making predictions based on data, but to interpret these results still requires contextual understanding, organizational values, and ethical sensitivity that only PR practitioners can provide. As gatekeepers, PR practitioners filter technological results so that they remain ethical, meaningful, and do not harm the organization's reputation. As validators, PR ensures that AI-based decisions still consider the social and cultural aspects of the audience. Thus, the conventional role of PR is shifting and expanding its functions. Practitioners now not only convey messages but also assess the feasibility of messages composed by AI-based systems. This shows that although AI offers efficiency, control, and effectiveness in communication remains in human hands. Currently, the utilization of artificial intelligence in public relations tasks is limited to monitoring and analysis of social media and activities on the internet that provide a picture of the pattern of human activity on social media and the internet, so that it can be a basis for decision making for public relations practitioners (Munandar & Irwansyah, 2020).

Furthermore, there is a need for new competencies in digital communication. PR professionals must master data literacy, understand how algorithms work, and uphold communication ethics amidst technology that can massively manipulate public perception. Without mastering these competencies, PR will fall behind and lose its strategic relevance within the organization. However, it should be emphasized that technology has not yet been able to fully replace humanistic values in communication. Emotional relationships, empathy, and cultural sensitivity are still realms of human strength that are irreplaceable. Therefore, the role of conventional PR remains important as a guardian of values in an increasingly digital era. Overall, the AI era demands that the role of conventional PR evolve.

Practitioners who can combine traditional experience with technological mastery will be able to continue to survive in this profession. They are not only required to be tactical executors but also strategic direction setters in managing organizational communication amidst the complexities of the digital age. AI in PR operates semi-autonomously, such as

automated scheduling and AI-based press release writing. Communication strategies are now highly dependent on algorithms. This reflects the element of ‘technological autonomy’ in determinism. The message lies not only in the content of the communication, but also in the technology that delivers it. AI as a medium of communication in PR has structural and cognitive impacts, determining how meaning is formed and received by the public. This means that the use of AI changes the dynamics of communication itself.

This study underlines that the gatekeeper function is now expanding into a hybrid human-AI system, where algorithms influence content selection based on engagement and personalization metrics, so the role of human PR is crucial to prevent bias and misinformation. Technological determinism, although it shapes the structure of tasks and competencies, is also tied to the process of adapting social values and policies. This finding supports the argument that the role of PR validators—to assess the validity of AI data and output—is a strategic response to technological developments, as well as evidence that PR professionals are not passive, but rather actively shaping the direction of AI use in communication.

Determinism of Artificial Intelligence Technology in the Public Relations Profession

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has brought profound disruption across sectors, including the field of PR. In this context, Marshall McLuhan’s theory of technological determinism (1994) offers a relevant conceptual framework for understanding structural and functional shifts in the PR profession. McLuhan emphasized that “the medium is the message,” meaning that communication technologies are not neutral—they actively shape how people think, interact, and behave within society. In public relations practice, AI has become a dominant medium that influences all aspects of professional work, from audience research and message development to campaign evaluation. Technologies such as predictive analytics, chatbots, automated media monitoring, and machine-generated content have transformed traditional PR methods, which were once highly reliant on intuition, interpersonal skills, and manual processes.

From the technological determinism perspective, when AI becomes the primary medium in communication processes, the structure of PR work and the roles within it are also reshaped. PR practitioners are no longer mere conveyors of messages but are now required to manage data-driven systems and algorithms that determine what message is delivered, when, to whom, and through which format. The integration of AI into PR has deterministically triggered a shift in professional roles. The role of communication technician—once responsible for writing press releases and managing media relations—has evolved into that of a data analyst, digital consultant, and real-time crisis manager. AI is no longer just a tool but a structural force that creates a new professional ecosystem.

For instance, media monitoring, which used to be done manually, is now replaced by AI systems that can scan thousands of news stories and social media posts in seconds. PR professionals are thus required not only to observe but also to strategically and ethically interpret these technological outputs. As noted in this study, PR professionals now act as gatekeepers and validators.

Technological determinism also brings ethical challenges. The key is how responsibly we use a powerful technology in the greater services of mankind and beyond (Gouda et.al, 2020). While AI can automate communication functions, it can also introduce algorithmic bias, misinformation, and privacy violations if not critically monitored. Therefore, PR practitioners must uphold humanistic values in AI-assisted communication processes. Although AI can replicate certain functions, it cannot replace human intuition, empathy, and cultural sensitivity. This underscores the necessity for PR professionals to integrate

ethical judgment with technological competence. The profession must not only adopt new tools but also redefine its philosophy and values in the digital era. AI has also shifted the paradigm of the PR profession itself. It is no longer just relationship-based but increasingly data-driven. Consequently, there is a growing demand for new competencies such as digital literacy, algorithmic understanding, and data interpretation within the context of strategic communication. In today's context, PR practitioners are no longer just message communicators; they are also information architects who manage intelligent communication systems responsibly and effectively.

Through the lens of technological determinism, AI is a transformational force in public relations. It alters not only tools and methods but also professional structures, required competencies, and ethical frameworks. As a result, PR professionals must view AI not merely as an instrument but as a shaping force that redefines the relationship between organizations and their publics. AI is not just automating tasks, but is structurally shifting the PR profession's landscape, shifting the role of PR to the function of validating and evaluating algorithmic outputs. Furthermore, the technological determinism framework shows how AI is reshaping the PR work system, both through hard bureaucratic (hard determinism) and through cultural and normative adaptation (soft determinism). These findings reinforce that PR at XY PR and Digital agency has not lost its role, but has shifted to the role of gatekeeper and validator, and demands higher digital literacy, analytical competence, and ethical awareness. The ethical and legal implications of using big data and AI for public relations campaigns can be even more complex due to varying levels of technological development and regulatory infrastructure (James, 2024).

AI as a communication medium systematically changes the structure and expectations of PR work, according to McLuhan's technological determinism theory, but the application of values and ethics is still returned to human control (soft determinism). Algorithms now play an important role in the content selection process, but the final decision remains in the hands of humans. This is in line with the role of PR at the XY agency as a gatekeeper for AI output, filtering out bias and ensuring the quality of information. AI has shifted PR from the role of technician to the role of validator, testing the integrity and morality of AI content before it is delivered to the public. This finding is in line with the observation that PR in the AI era must now have high digital literacy, analytical competence, and ethical awareness.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the roles of public relations practitioners have shifted significantly due to the increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the PR profession. PR professionals are no longer just performing conventional tasks such as writing content and dealing with the media. PR practitioners are now also acting as gatekeepers and validators, ensuring that AI is used ethically and strategically in the PR work process. In line with Marshall McLuhan's notion of technological determinism, research shows that AI is not just a tool, but a medium that is changing the way PR professionals think, interact, and work. In the same way, using Dozier and Broom's role theory shows how the PR function is changing from a technical and conventional role to a strategic facilitation based on facts and ethics.

The example of XY PR and Digital Agency shows that incorporating AI technology into PR work requires new skills, particularly in digital communication and ethical decision-making. As AI systems increasingly impact personalized messaging, media monitoring, and predictive analytics, PR practitioners must be tech-savvy and have strong moral standards to ensure that communication initiatives are effective, responsible, and human-

centered. Public Relations in the AI era is experiencing a comprehensive paradigm shift—one that reinterprets the profession through a technological perspective, while focusing on the importance of human oversight and principles of ethical behavior.

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