

THE CHALLENGES OF INDONESIAN PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS IN THE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENT ERA*

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The emergence of digital communications and information technology has led to a significant change in several global sectors, including the field of public relations. The Internet and digital technologies have a substantial impact on the strategies used by public relations to develop relationships and engage with stakeholders. Moreover, they facilitate a change in the way organizational stakeholders get information and interact with companies (Christ, 2007). Pavlik's (2007) research on the impact of internet technology on public relations has shown that the emergence of the Internet has led to an increased demand from the public for firms to actively participate in interactive communication. Consequently, organizations are recommended to improve their involvement and communication tactics with the public.

Since the internet and digital communication arouse interest, public relations practitioners should prioritize the internet and online communication as crucial tools for engaging with the public (Moore & Hübscher, 2021). The advent of the internet has provided public relations practitioners with unique opportunities to collect data, track concerns and public opinion, and actively participate in various discussions with their intended recipients (McAllister & Taylor, 2007). McAllister and Taylor (2007) contend that the widespread use of the internet has made it necessary for public relations experts to prioritize the quality of the content they create. They must ensure that the information they share is accurate and reliable in order to build trust among the public. However, it is crucial to recognize that digital communication technologies may sometimes result in negative outcomes for public relations. In today's age of ubiquitous internet connections and the dominance of social media platforms, people have easy access to information, allowing them to quickly share it with others before companies officially reveal it (Whatmough, 2018). Moreover, the organization now lacks the authority to control the public's expression of ideas directed at it, whether via direct communication or through its social media platforms (Moore & Hübscher, 2021). Hence, it is clear that digital communication technology functions as a tool and plays pivotal roles in augmenting communication between a business and its audience.

The rise of digital communication and information technology has converted traditional public relations into digital public relations. The field of public relations has transitioned into the age of PR 4.0, characterized by the integration of big data, artificial intelligence, and several

other digital platforms into the practice of public relations (Arief & Gustomo, 2020). Kelleher (2018) states that the increase in internet connection has enabled public relations professionals to engage in interactive communication, enabling reciprocal interchange between corporations and the public. Therefore, public relations practitioners encounter competition not just from their colleagues but also from automated technologies.

Big data and AI have had a significant impact on the practice of public relations, causing a fundamental shift in its operations and influencing the field's future. The advent of big data and AI has yielded several advantages and favourable impacts on the field of PR, including:

First of all, the utilization of big data and AI has emerged as a means to substitute certain tasks in the field of public relations. These tasks include generating press releases, monitoring news media, curating news content, managing social media platforms, analyzing public sentiment, disseminating information and news to the public, particularly through mass media channels, and providing support for PR presentations during face-to-face interactions with stakeholders (Arief & Saputra, 2019). Secondly, AI-powered systems have the potential to rapidly produce responses on social media platforms on behalf of customers while also efficiently managing emergency circumstances (Quesenberry, 2020). AI has the capacity to enable public relations professionals to enhance their time management by automating mundane chores such as creating media lists, organizing meetings, and sending follow-up emails (Panda, Upadhyay, & Khandelwal, 2019). The use of artificial intelligence in mass personalization and customization is improving the effectiveness of public relations efforts.

Thirdly, the use of AI has shown its advantages in the domain of public relations, namely in cultivating and enhancing customer relationships (Alawaad, 2021). AI use in public relations enhances understanding of consumer behavior and allows for the detection of underlying variables that contribute to trouble in customer interactions. AI may facilitate the acquisition of knowledge on customer preferences, buying patterns, and habits (Türksoy, 2022). Big data analysis and machine learning algorithms are just two examples of the sophisticated analytics methodologies used to achieve this.

Fourthly, the use of big data analysis allows for the delivery of efficient solutions and the development of marketing and public relations strategies with improved accuracy and effectiveness. AI may provide a competitive edge, allowing public relations businesses to provide enhanced and cost-efficient services (Buhmann & White, 2022). Fifthly, some corporate communications in the finance industry have extensively integrated artificial intelligence systems into their customer support systems in an effort to enhance business reputation (Jeljeli, Farhi, & Zahra, 2022). Last but not least, AI and big data can make public relations campaigns more effective by letting professionals make decisions based on facts and trends instead of just gut feelings (Charles, Rana, & Carter, 2022; Luttrell, Emerick, & Wallace, 2022).

Conversely, using big data and AI in public relations strategies leads to the following drawbacks: First and foremost, the issue at hand is a data misunderstanding. The effectiveness

of AI depends on the quality of the data it is trained on, and it is possible for data sets to show bias or incompleteness. This has the potential to lead to the misunderstanding of data and the formulation of erroneous or deceptive conclusions. This is a significant concern, especially when it comes to sentiment analysis, since AI may not consistently and accurately capture the tone or context of a message.

Another drawback is the overreliance on artificial intelligence. While AI may aid in automating tedious tasks and streamlining processes, there is a potential risk that PR professionals may overly depend on AI and neglect other essential aspects of their work. The involvement of human judgment and decision-making is essential in crisis communications to choose an appropriate response.

The lack of customization is the third disadvantage. While AI has the ability to enhance the creation of customized messages, there is a risk of lacking authenticity and originality. When AI algorithms generate all messages, developing a distinctive brand identity and a personal connection with customers might be difficult.

The fourth drawback is the violation of privacy. The use of AI in public relations and communications has the potential to infringe upon individuals' privacy as a consequence of the dependence on data by AI systems. The use of this technology gives rise to privacy apprehensions as well as possible issues with intellectual property and copyright violations, which might lead to substantial legal entanglements for organizations. Chatbots have the capacity to collect personal information from customers, giving rise to concerns around the use and protection of this data.

The last disadvantage is the ethical issue. Data derived from AI may not be accurate, trustworthy, or representative of a city and its citizens, which may cause bias, prejudice, and damage to a population by resulting in unjust service delivery (Mark, 2019).

Big data and AI use in public relations provide significant challenges for professionals in the Indonesian setting. Despite a study by finding that Indonesian public relations professionals have a good understanding of the significance of big data and AI in their work, the study I conducted in 2022 with Ivan Bima Wachid, a master's student in communications at Universitas Brawijaya, found that Indonesian public relations professionals are not very skilled at using digital analytics tools or AI to manage, process, and analyze digital data. A majority of participants, specifically less than sixty percent, demonstrated proficiency in the utilization, manipulation, and interpretation of digital data by means of Google Analytics. Forty-three percent of participants showed proficiency in using, manipulating, and understanding digital data that the Sentiment Analytic tool had processed. Comparatively, only 25 percent of participants demonstrated the ability to operate, process, and analyze data generated by the Big Data Analytics tool, an artificial intelligence program.

Our study also demonstrates the notable reliance of Indonesian public relations practitioners on third parties for digital analysis, amounting to fifty-three percent. Although

relying on external sources might offer access to specialized knowledge, it also emphasizes the need to cultivate analytical talents within the organization. The Indonesian public relations industry needs to find a good balance between working with outside groups and using its own digital analysis skills if it wants to do well in the constantly changing digital world. Furthermore, while big data and AI have originated in technological domains, their potential extends beyond those boundaries. When these technologies are used in strategic management tasks, they become very useful for making smart decisions, learning about how customers act, making the best use of resources, and eventually getting a competitive edge. It is crucial for firms to acknowledge this wider perspective in order to properly harness the revolutionary capabilities of big data and AI in their strategic public relations efforts.

Those data emphasize the need for additional training and upskilling programs to tackle this lack of expertise. Public relations practitioners would greatly benefit from acquiring proficiency in using diverse technologies, such as Google Analytics, social media analytics platforms, data visualization software, and other relevant tools. These technologies facilitate the gathering, examination, and understanding of digital data, thereby empowering professionals to gain useful insights. These abilities enable public relations professionals to effectively evaluate the impact of their campaigns, analyze audience preferences, track levels of engagement, and improve their strategies utilizing insights obtained from data. It is evident that public relations professionals must prioritize enhancing their data analysis abilities due to the disparity in competency levels between digital data analytics and other digital skills. The ability to understand, absorb, analyze, and convey digital information must be closely linked to the ability to extract information.

Through this presentation, I would like to give some recommendations in order to overcome the gaps of Indonesian public relations professionals in the face of the age of big data and AI today and in the future, which will become increasingly complex. The first is that college institutions should urgently update and develop comprehensive curricula related to digital public relations so that graduates of communications or public relations will not see big data and AI as a tool to do their job but also see it as an inevitable phenomenon. The curriculum should include courses such as social media platform management, digital marketing communications analysis, digital public analytics, digital big data analysis, problem translation, and crisis communication management that will help graduates adapt to digital technology developments.

Second, build a variety of technical skills through training. Higher education institutions should provide public relations professionals with practical training in using tools and digital platforms that are essential for modern and digital society relations. The aim is to enhance technical expertise in using big data and AI, which supports the work of public relations practitioners. Third, the establishment of a research center on AI. The current university institution needs to build a research center on AI that uses a multidisciplinary approach to conduct research that will also cover the impact of AI on the world of public relations and emerging trends and best practices in digital public relations.

Finally, it organizes internships and partnerships with government sectors, corporations, and NGOs, especially actors who have implemented big data and AI in their organizational management systems. Collaboration between higher education institutions and key actors will give students opportunities for internships, collaborative programs, and real-world projects. It will help graduates gain practical experience and enable them to apply their knowledge in a professional setting.

In summary, the development of digital technology in communication and information is no longer unavoidable in the field of public relations. Public relations no longer sees big data and artificial intelligence as unfamiliar and intimidating entities. Public relations professionals must possess a comprehensive understanding of digital technologies, including big data and artificial intelligence, in order to effectively manage and navigate the technical and management aspects of their field. However, it is crucial for public relations to acknowledge the potential adverse consequences that may arise from the use of big data and AI. Indonesian PR practitioners currently lack the necessary skills and expertise in dealing with big data and AI. To address this gap, it is crucial to expedite the development of knowledge in the field of digital public relations and foster collaborations with various stakeholders. These efforts are essential for preparing future professionals in the field of public relations in Indonesia.

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