

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN NIGERIA: OPPORTUNITIES, ETHICAL CHALLENGES AND PROFESSIONAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

This study examined the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the future of public relations practice in Nigeria, focusing on the opportunities, ethical challenges and professional implications associated with its adoption. The study adopted a qualitative documentary research design based entirely on secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly publications, professional documents, policy reports and other credible sources published primarily between 2016 and 2026. The data were analyzed thematically in line with the objectives of the study. Findings indicate that AI presents significant opportunities for improving efficiency, content creation, media monitoring, audience analysis, sentiment analysis, crisis communication and strategic decision-making in public relations. However, its adoption also presents ethical challenges relating to misinformation, accuracy, transparency, accountability, privacy, intellectual

property, authorship, algorithmic bias and overdependence on automated systems. The study further found that AI is changing the competencies expected of PR practitioners, creating a growing need for AI literacy, data interpretation, content verification, digital ethics and human-AI collaboration. The study concludes that AI should not be viewed as a replacement for PR practitioners but as a tool for professional augmentation, with human judgement, ethical responsibility and strategic decision-making remaining central to effective public relations practice. It recommends continuous AI-focused professional development, the development of clear organizational and professional guidelines for ethical AI use, and the integration of AI into PR practice in ways that preserve human accountability and public trust.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Public Relations, AI Ethics, PR Practice, Professional Competencies, Nigeria

AI USER STATEMENT: AI-assisted tools were used for language editing, organization, and clarity. The author reviewed and verified the content and remains responsible for the work's originality, accuracy, and integrity.

Background to the study

Technological innovation has always influenced the development of public relations. The profession has moved through several communication environments, from newspapers and magazines to radio and television, and subsequently to websites, social media and mobile

communication. Each technological transition has altered how organizations communicate with their publics, how information is distributed and how practitioners understand and manage relationships. Artificial intelligence (AI) represents another major development in this continuing process.

Recent scholarship confirms that AI is already becoming an important subject within public relations. Yue et al(2024), in a study involving 20 public relations leaders with expertise in AI, examined practitioners' attitudes, applications, perceived benefits, risks, ethical dilemmas and expectations concerning the future of AI in the profession. Their findings demonstrate that AI is no longer merely a theoretical possibility for public relations but is becoming incorporated into practical professional activities.

AI may draft a press release, summarize a report or identify sentiment in thousands of social media posts. It cannot, by itself, assume professional accountability for the decision to publish that material. The human practitioner remains responsible for assessing accuracy, context, fairness, cultural appropriateness and potential consequences.

The African context makes the discussion even more significant. Nutsugah and Senanu (2024), in what they describe as a continent-wide empirical study of generative AI and public relations, investigated PR professionals across major economic regions of Africa. Their study found considerable engagement with generative AI but also identified practical, sociocultural

and ethical implications. Of particular relevance is their argument that the absence of adequate ethical policies for GenAI use poses a threat to transparency and accountability in African public relations practice.

For a profession built around credibility, this is a serious concern. A fabricated message attributed to an organization can damage reputation even when the organization did not create it. Similarly, an inaccurate AI-generated statement released by an organization can become a reputational crisis within minutes.

The present paper examines these issues by focusing on three interconnected dimensions: the opportunities created by AI for Nigerian public relations, the ethical challenges associated with its adoption, and the professional implications for practitioners and the future of the profession.

Statement of the Problem

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly transforming public relations (PR) by supporting content creation, media monitoring, audience analysis, sentiment analysis, stakeholder engagement and crisis communication. While these applications can improve efficiency, responsiveness and strategic decision-making, they also raise ethical concerns relating to accuracy, transparency, accountability, privacy, intellectual property, misinformation, authorship and professional judgement (Dong & van den Berg, 2025).

In Nigeria, AI adoption among PR practitioners is growing but remains uneven due to inadequate technical expertise, poor digital infrastructure, data-privacy concerns, ethical challenges, financial constraints and fears of job displacement. Recent studies also indicate that Nigerian practitioners tend to use AI mainly for content creation and social media monitoring, while more strategic applications remain underutilized (Sabastine, 2025; Salaudeen et al., 2026).

These developments create concerns about the changing roles and competencies of PR practitioners. As AI takes over or assists with routine tasks, practitioners increasingly need competencies in AI literacy, data interpretation, content verification, digital ethics, privacy protection and human-AI collaboration. At the same time, human judgement, empathy, accountability and strategic decision-making remain essential to maintaining organizational credibility and public trust.

Although international research on AI and PR is expanding, there is still limited context-specific evidence that brings together the opportunities, ethical challenges and professional implications of AI for Nigerian PR practice. The central problem, therefore, is the limited integrated understanding of how AI is reshaping public relations practice in Nigeria, particularly regarding its opportunities, ethical challenges, and implications for the roles, competencies and professional development of PR practitioners. This study consequently examines these dimensions to provide a clearer understanding of

responsible and effective AI integration in Nigerian public relations practice.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this paper is to examine the implications of artificial intelligence for the future of public relations practice in Nigeria.

Specifically, the paper seeks to:

1. Examine the opportunities presented by artificial intelligence for enhancing public relations practice in Nigeria;
2. Examine the ethical challenges associated with the adoption and use of artificial intelligence in Nigerian public relations practice; and
3. Assess the implications of artificial intelligence for the roles, competencies and professional development of public relations practitioners in Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Artificial Intelligence:

For the purpose of this study, Artificial Intelligence refers to computer-based systems that can process information and perform tasks associated with aspects of human intelligence; including learning, pattern recognition, language processing and decision support (OECD, 2024). Within public relations, the concept encompasses the use of AI technologies to support activities such as content creation, media monitoring, audience analysis, research, social media management and other communication functions (Yue et al., 2024).

The significance of AI to PR therefore extends beyond the automation of routine tasks; it also has the potential to reshape how practitioners conduct their work, make communication decisions and interact with organizational publics.

Strategic Nature of Public Relation Practice:

This understanding changes the position of the PR practitioner within an organization. The practitioner is no longer limited to writing press releases or organizing events but is increasingly involved in understanding public opinion, advising management and maintaining relationships with different publics. The role requires an understanding of organizational goals as well as the concerns and expectations of those affected by the organization's activities. It also involves identifying communication issues, responding to emerging problems and contributing to the protection of organizational reputation (Grunig & Grunig, 2000; Public Relations Society of America [PRSA], 2012).

Developments in communication technology have further changed the way these responsibilities are performed. The growth of websites, social media and other digital platforms has made organizational communication more immediate and interactive. Organizations can communicate directly with their publics, while audiences can respond to organizational messages, raise concerns and share their own views. Studies of PR practice in Nigeria have similarly found that social media has become an important part of

professional communication and audience engagement (Lucas, 2024; Saadudeen et al., 2026).

This digital environment has also increased the importance of monitoring and responding to public conversations. Rather than simply sending messages to audiences, contemporary PR practitioners need to pay attention to how people react to organizational communication and how issues develop across different platforms. Social media provides opportunities for real-time interaction and feedback, but it can also make reputation management more demanding because information and public reactions can spread rapidly (Mu'azu & Gapsiso, 2024).

The relationship between AI and public relations therefore presents both opportunities and challenges. AI may help practitioners in processing information, monitor communication environments and perform some routine tasks more efficiently. At the same time, the relational and ethical character of public relations means that technology cannot replace human judgement, professional responsibility or an understanding of the people with whom organizations seek to build relationships. Recent research on AI and PR similarly points to the need for communication professionals to balance technological use with ethical oversight and human responsibility (Bowen, 2024; Yue et al., 2024).

Artificial Intelligence and the transformation of Public Relations Practice

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly becoming part of contemporary public relations practice, changing not only the tools practitioners use but also the way communication is researched, planned, produced and evaluated. The transformation is particularly visible in the growing use of generative AI, machine learning and automated analytical tools in activities such as content development, media monitoring, sentiment analysis, audience research and stakeholder engagement. Rather than viewing AI simply as another digital communication tool, recent scholarship suggests that it is beginning to influence the nature of professional PR work and the competencies expected of practitioners (Yue et al., 2024).

Another important development is the changing role of the PR practitioner. The increasing use of AI does not necessarily suggest that practitioners will simply be replaced by machines. Rather, it points towards a redistribution of professional responsibilities. Routine activities may become increasingly automated, while practitioners may be required to devote greater attention to strategic planning, interpretation, relationship management and ethical decision-making. Yue et al (2024) demonstrate this tension in their examination of PR leaders, whose perspectives reflect both enthusiasm about AI's capabilities and concern about the risks associated with its use

The changing role of the public relations practitioner also creates a need for new professional competencies. While established PR skills such as writing, interpersonal communication, strategic thinking and relationship management remain important, practitioners increasingly need to understand AI technologies, data and digital analytics. Recent scholarship suggests that the growing application of AI in public relations is creating a demand for practitioners who can combine communication expertise with technological knowledge (Yang, 2025; Yue et al., 2024).

Opportunities presented by AI for Public Relations Practice in Nigeria

The increasing application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents public relations practitioners with opportunities to improve the speed, efficiency and analytical capacity of their work. Recent research involving PR professionals indicates that AI is already being explored for a range of communication activities, while practitioners also recognise its potential to support innovation and strengthen communication strategies (Yue et al., 2024). In Africa, Nutsugah and Senanu (2024) similarly found substantial engagement with generative AI among PR professionals across the continent, suggesting that the technology is becoming increasingly relevant to professional communication practice.

AI and Efficiency of Public Relations

Evidence from internal communication provides further support for this possibility. Yue et al(2024) found, from interviews with 20 senior communication professionals, that AI could improve communication efficiency, information flow and organisational listening. Although the study focused specifically on internal communication, its findings are relevant to PR because internal communication constitutes an important area of organisational communication practice.

The Nigerian evidence points in the same direction. Salaudeen et al(2026) found that AI adoption among PR practitioners in Lagos was already concentrated in activities such as content creation and social media monitoring. This suggests that Nigerian practitioners are using AI primarily where it can assist with relatively repetitive and information-intensive communication tasks.

AI-Assisted Content Creation

Another significant opportunity is the use of generative AI in content development. Generative AI systems can produce drafts of text and other forms of communication content from human instructions. For PR practitioners, this can support the preparation of initial drafts for social media communication, organisational statements, campaign materials and other routine content. Yue et al(2024) identified practical applications of AI within PR and reported that practitioners were assessing the technology in relation to communication work and future professional practice.

The African experience provides additional evidence. Nutsugah and Senanu (2024) investigated generative AI use among PR professionals across major African economic regions and found substantial adoption and engagement with the technology. Their study indicates that generative AI is becoming part of the practical environment within which African PR practitioners operate.

Improved Media Monitoring and Social Media Listening

AI also offers opportunities for strengthening media monitoring and social listening. Public relations practitioners need to know what is being said about their organisations, brands, products, leaders and activities. The increasing volume of digital communication can make manual monitoring difficult, particularly when conversations occur across multiple platforms.

The Lagos study provides direct evidence of this opportunity in Nigeria. Salaudeen et al(2026) report that AI adoption among the practitioners they studied was concentrated partly in social media monitoring. Their findings indicate that AI-supported monitoring is already being incorporated into PR practice in Lagos, although the study also found that more advanced applications remain underutilised.

The broader PR literature similarly identifies AI's potential for analysing large amounts of communication information and supporting practitioners' understanding of public reactions. Yue et al(2024) found that AI is being considered and used by PR leaders for professional

purposes, while their related study on internal communication identified improvements in organisational listening as one of the potential benefits of AI.

For Nigerian PR practice, improved monitoring could help practitioners identify emerging conversations and respond more quickly to issues affecting organisational reputation. However, this should be understood as an opportunity rather than an automatic outcome, since the effectiveness of AI monitoring depends on the quality of the data, the tools available and the practitioner's ability to interpret their outputs. The Lagos evidence is particularly useful here because it shows that adoption exists but that more sophisticated applications remain limited (Salaudeen et al., 2026).

Crisis Communication and Early Issue Detection

Crisis communication represents another area in which AI may provide opportunities for Nigerian PR practitioners. Crisis situations often require organisations to identify emerging issues, understand public reactions and respond within a limited period. AI-supported monitoring and analytical tools may assist practitioners in processing large amounts of information during such situations.

The Nigerian evidence is particularly relevant here. Salaudeen et al(2026) specifically examined AI-powered crisis communication and used the Lagos State Government's response to the 2023 fuel subsidy removal protests as a case through which to examine the possibilities and limitations of AI-assisted PR in an

African urban governance context. Their study found that AI-supported crisis applications have potential, although strategic applications such as AI-driven crisis modelling remain underutilised in Lagos.

Strengthening Internal Communication and Employee Engagement

AI may also support PR practitioners responsible for internal communication. Effective internal communication requires organisations to provide employees with relevant information while also paying attention to employee concerns and feedback. Yue et al(2024) found that AI can improve internal communication efficiency, information flow, organisational listening and employee experience, based on interviews with senior communication professionals.

For Nigerian organisations, these capabilities may be useful in situations where communication practitioners have to manage large employee populations or process substantial volumes of internal feedback. AI could assist with organising information and identifying recurring concerns, while practitioners retain responsibility for interpreting those concerns and determining appropriate organisational responses. The evidence therefore supports AI as a potential co-piloting tool for communication professionals rather than as a substitute for human interaction (Yue et al., 2024).

Supporting Strategic Decision-Making

Beyond routine tasks, AI may create opportunities for PR practitioners to participate more effectively in

strategic organisational decision-making. The ability to process and analyse information can potentially give communication professionals additional evidence for understanding communication environments and anticipating possible developments.

Yue et al(2024) found that PR leaders perceive AI as having potential to drive innovation and enhance communication strategies. However, the evidence from Nigeria suggests that this strategic potential has not yet been fully realised. Salaudeen et al(2026) found that predictive analytics and AI-driven crisis modelling were underutilised among the practitioners studied in Lagos.

This distinction is important for the present study. AI presents Nigerian PR practitioners with the opportunity to move beyond using the technology mainly for content creation and monitoring towards more strategic applications. At present, however, the available evidence suggests that this transition remains incomplete.

Opportunity for professional Development and New PR Competencies

The adoption of AI also creates opportunities for professional development. As AI becomes increasingly incorporated into communication work, practitioners have greater reason to develop competencies in AI-assisted communication, data interpretation and digital analytics. Yue et al(2024) found that effective AI adoption requires PR professionals to understand how the technology can be applied while maintaining human oversight.

The African evidence reinforces the importance of this development. Nutsugah and Senanu (2024) found high levels of engagement with generative AI among African PR professionals but also identified gaps surrounding ethical guidance. The implication is that AI adoption creates an opportunity for PR education and professional development, but that opportunity needs to be accompanied by appropriate ethical and professional preparation.

For Nigeria, this could encourage PR practitioners to develop a combination of traditional communication expertise and technological competence. Such development would be particularly valuable because the Lagos study identified limited institutional AI literacy as one of the barriers affecting AI adoption (Salaudeen et al., 2026). Thus, professional training is not simply an optional benefit; it is connected to the ability of practitioners to make meaningful use of AI.

Enhancing Strategic Value of Public Relations

Taken together, these opportunities suggest that AI could contribute to the strategic repositioning of public relations in Nigeria. When used appropriately, AI can support content development, social media monitoring, information processing, audience analysis, internal communication and potentially crisis preparedness. International evidence indicates that PR professionals are already exploring these possibilities, while African research demonstrates that generative AI adoption is occurring within the continent's PR profession (Yue et al., 2024; Nutsugah & Senanu, 2024).

The Nigerian evidence, however, presents a more nuanced picture. Salaudeen and Daranijo (2026) found that AI use among Lagos PR practitioners is growing but remains largely tactical, with content creation and social media monitoring receiving greater attention than predictive analytics and AI-driven crisis modelling. This suggests that the greatest opportunity for Nigerian PR may not simply be greater AI adoption, but more strategic and professionally informed adoption.

AI therefore offers Nigerian public relations practitioners an opportunity to improve efficiency while potentially expanding their analytical and strategic roles. The technology can support practitioners in handling information and routine communication tasks, but its greatest professional value may emerge when practitioners use it to complement, rather than replace, human judgement. This position is consistent with the international PR literature, which identifies AI's potential for innovation and strategic communication while maintaining attention to human oversight and professional responsibility (Yue et al., 2024).

Ethical Challenges of AI in PR in Nigeria

The increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in public relations presents important ethical questions because PR practice is fundamentally concerned with information, relationships, reputation and public trust. While AI can assist practitioners with content production, monitoring and analysis, its use also introduces questions about the accuracy of information, accountability, transparency, privacy, bias, authorship

and professional responsibility. Recent research involving PR professionals identifies misinformation and disinformation, authorship and professional identity, accountability and disclosure as particularly important ethical dilemmas associated with generative AI (Dong & van den Berg, 2025).

These concerns are particularly relevant to Nigeria because public relations practitioners are already bound by professional requirements concerning truth, accuracy and responsibility to the public. The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) Code of Professional Conduct requires practitioners to respect the truth, avoid knowingly or recklessly disseminating false or misleading information, verify information before dissemination and have regard for the public interest (Nigerian Institute of Public Relations [NIPR], 1992). The introduction of AI therefore does not create a separate ethical responsibility for the machine; rather, it creates new circumstances in which existing professional responsibilities must be exercised.

Accuracy, Misinformation and AI Hallucination:

The issue has direct relevance to Nigerian PR practice because the NIPR Code requires practitioners to take proper care to check information before dissemination and prohibits the knowing or reckless dissemination of false or misleading information (NIPR, 1992). Consequently, the use of AI does not remove the practitioner's obligation to verify information. If an AI-generated press statement, social media post or public response contains false information, the professional and

organization may still bear the consequences of its publication.

The challenge is therefore one of human verification. AI can assist in producing communication materials, but the PR practitioner must determine whether the information is factually correct before it is communicated to the public. Bowen (2024) argues that communication professionals have an important responsibility to understand, advise on and ethically oversee AI systems used by their organisations.

Accountability and Responsibility:

A second major ethical challenge concerns who is responsible when AI-assisted communication causes harm. Traditional PR practice provides a relatively clear chain of responsibility: a practitioner develops or approves communication on behalf of an organisation, and the organisation remains accountable for what it communicates. AI complicates this relationship because a practitioner may rely on a system to generate or analyse information.

Recent research suggests that responsibility can become unclear when organisations adopt AI without establishing clear institutional guidance. A study published in *Public Relations Review* found that PR practitioners were moving forward with AI use even where organisational guidance was inconsistent, creating challenges associated with the diffusion of responsibility within organisations (Dong et al., 2025).

This issue is particularly important in Nigeria because the NIPR Code places professional responsibility directly on practitioners. The Code states that members must uphold high standards of professional practice and can be held responsible where they knowingly allow staff to act inconsistently with professional requirements (NIPR, 1992). Thus, practitioners cannot simply attribute an inappropriate communication to an AI system and assume that responsibility has shifted to the technology.

The ethical implication is that organisations using AI for PR should establish clear procedures concerning who approves AI-generated material, who verifies factual claims and who assumes responsibility for the final communication. This position is consistent with Nigeria's National AI Strategy, which identifies accountability, transparency, fairness and human-centered AI as important principles for responsible AI development and deployment.

Transparency and Disclosure:

Transparency presents another important challenge. PR practitioners traditionally have an obligation to communicate honestly with their publics, but generative AI makes it possible for organisations to produce communication without necessarily disclosing the extent to which AI was involved.

Dong and van den Berg (2025) identified transparency and disclosure as important areas of ethical uncertainty among PR practitioners using generative AI. Their findings indicate that professionals are still negotiating questions concerning when AI involvement should be

disclosed and how such disclosure should be handled in practice.

The issue becomes more significant when AI-generated content is presented as though it were entirely produced by a human professional. In such circumstances, questions may arise concerning authenticity and the credibility of the organization. For a profession built around trust and relationship management, the failure to provide appropriate transparency could weaken public confidence.

The African evidence is also significant. Nutsugah and Senanu (2024), in a continent-wide qualitative study of PR professionals, found that although generative AI adoption was relatively high among the professionals studied, ethical policies guiding its use were lacking. They argue that this absence of clear ethical guidance threatens transparency and accountability in African PR practice.

For Nigerian PR practice, this suggests a need for clearer professional guidance on when and how AI-assisted communication should be disclosed. However, it would be premature to claim that all Nigerian practitioners conceal their use of AI; the available evidence does not establish this. The defensible argument is that the absence of clear guidance can create uncertainty about transparency and disclosure.

Privacy and Protection of Personal Data:

Privacy is another major ethical concern because AI systems often depend on large quantities of data. Public

relations practitioners may have access to information about customers, employees, journalists, stakeholders and members of the public. Using such information in AI systems without appropriate safeguards can create privacy risks.

Nigeria's legal framework makes this issue particularly important. The Nigeria Data Protection Act, 2023 provides data subjects with specific protections concerning the processing of personal data. Among other provisions, the Act establishes a right not to be subjected to a decision based solely on automated processing, including profiling, where the decision produces legal or similarly significant effects. It also provides for safeguards including human intervention, the opportunity to express one's view and the ability to contest such decisions (Nigeria Data Protection Act, 2023).

The implications for PR are considerable. AI-supported audience analysis, profiling and personalized communication may involve the processing of personal information. Practitioners and organisations therefore need to consider whether the information being collected and processed is lawful, necessary and appropriately protected.

Nigeria's National AI Strategy similarly recognizes data protection and privacy as important components of responsible AI governance. The strategy identifies responsible data collection, data minimization, purpose limitation, privacy, consent and fairness among the principles relevant to AI applications in Nigeria.

This means that the use of AI for audience intelligence cannot be separated from questions of data ethics. The ability to collect and analyze more information does not automatically justify collecting or using all available information.

Authorship, Intellectual Property and Professional Identity:

The NIPR Code is relevant here because it requires practitioners to give credit for ideas and words borrowed from others (NIPR, 1992). The increasing ability of generative AI to reproduce or transform existing information therefore raises questions about attribution and originality.

The issue is particularly sensitive in academic, corporate and media communication, where originality and ownership can have professional consequences. PR practitioners therefore need to understand the provenance of AI-generated material and avoid presenting material as original without considering applicable intellectual-property and attribution requirements.

Professional Standards and the Absence of Specific AI Guidance:

Perhaps one of the broader ethical challenges is that technological development may move faster than professional regulation. Nutsugah and Senanu (2024) found that African PR professionals were adopting generative AI in the absence of sufficiently developed ethical policies governing its use. Dong and van den

Berg (2025) similarly found that existing professional codes may not adequately address all of the ethical problems emerging from generative AI.

This creates a particularly important question for Nigerian PR practice. The NIPR Code provides broad principles concerning truth, accuracy, public interest, confidentiality and professional conduct, but these principles were developed before contemporary generative AI became part of everyday communication practice.

The challenge, therefore, is not necessarily that Nigeria lacks ethical principles. Rather, existing principles may need to be interpreted and supplemented in ways that address AI-specific situations such as automated content generation, AI disclosure, algorithmic bias, data profiling, deepfakes and responsibility for AI-assisted communication.

The Nigerian Context: An Emerging Ethical Governance Challenge:

The Nigerian situation is therefore characterised by a developing relationship between AI adoption, professional ethics and national regulation. Nigeria's National AI Strategy places responsible and ethical AI development among its strategic priorities and identifies fairness, transparency, accountability, privacy and human well-being as important considerations. The National Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics also identifies algorithmic fairness, accountability and transparency as priorities in its policy and ethics programme.

At the same time, the NIPR Code already establishes professional obligations concerning truth, accuracy, public interest and confidentiality. The Nigeria Data Protection Act provides additional legal safeguards concerning personal data and automated decision-making. These frameworks provide a foundation for responsible AI use, although they do not eliminate the need for profession-specific guidance on AI-assisted PR.

The available African evidence also cautions against assuming that technological adoption automatically means ethical preparedness. Nutsugah and Senanu (2024) found a gap between the adoption of generative AI by African PR professionals and the availability of ethical policies governing that use. This makes the development of clear organizational policies, professional guidance and practitioner training an important issue for the Nigerian PR profession.

Professional Implications of Artificial Intelligence for Public Relations Practice in Nigeria

The growing application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in public relations is likely to have consequences that extend beyond the adoption of new communication tools. AI is influencing the tasks practitioners perform, the skills they require, the way professional value is understood and the ethical responsibilities attached to communication work. Recent research on PR professionals, shows that AI is already being applied to activities such as content development, sentiment analysis, speech-to-text translation, report preparation, social media monitoring and strategic communication,

indicating that its implications are both practical and professional (Dong & van den Berg, 2025).

This development may require PR practitioners to move further away from an exclusively production-oriented role towards one that places greater emphasis on strategy, interpretation and professional judgement. Yang (2025) argues that the increasing application of AI in PR is creating a demand for practitioners with new competencies and that PR education needs to respond by preparing students for an AI-enabled professional environment.

Yang (2025) proposes that PR AI education should be grounded in authentic dialogue, client value and legal and ethical considerations. She further identifies AI fundamentals, information security and AI deployment among the areas that future PR practitioners need to understand.

This is important for Nigeria because the professional value of PR should not be reduced to the ability to produce communication materials. If AI can generate a press release within seconds, for instance, the distinctive value of the practitioner may increasingly lie in deciding what should be communicated, why it should be communicated, to whom, in what context and with what ethical consequences. This interpretation is consistent with Yang's (2025) emphasis on authentic dialogue, client value and ethical considerations in preparing PR practitioners for AI-enabled practice.

Theoretical Framework

The present study, “Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Public Relations Practice in Nigeria: Opportunities, Ethical Challenges and Professional Implications,” is anchored primarily on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989). However, TAM serves as the principal theoretical framework because the study is concerned not only with the existence of AI but with how public relations practitioners perceive, accept and integrate AI into their professional activities.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model was developed by Davis (1989) to explain why individuals accept or reject new information technologies. The model proposes that two major perceptions influence technology acceptance: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which an individual believes that using a particular technology will improve his or her performance, while perceived ease of use concerns the extent to which the individual believes that using the technology will require little effort (Davis, 1989). Davis developed and validated measurement scales for these two constructs and demonstrated their relevance to users' acceptance of information technology.

The central argument of TAM is that people are more likely to accept a technology when they believe that it will be useful to them and relatively easy to use. Perceived usefulness has been shown to be particularly

important in shaping behavioural intentions to use technology (Davis et al., 1989).

Empirical Review

Yue et al(2024) conducted an empirical study examining how public relations leaders understand and use AI in professional practice. The researchers adopted a qualitative approach and interviewed 20 PR leaders with substantial knowledge and experience of AI. The study examined participants' attitudes towards AI, its practical applications, perceived outcomes, risks, ethical concerns and possible future implications for public relations.

The study is relevant to the present research because it demonstrates that AI adoption in PR has moved beyond theoretical discussion. PR leaders are actively considering how AI can be incorporated into professional activities while also negotiating its limitations and ethical consequences. However, the study was based on 20 PR leaders with expertise in AI and was conducted outside Nigeria. Consequently, its findings cannot be automatically generalised to Nigerian PR practitioners. Its major contribution to the present study lies in establishing the broader professional context within which AI adoption is occurring.

For the Nigerian context, the study raises an important empirical question: do Nigerian PR practitioners perceive AI in similar ways, and what opportunities and professional challenges do they associate with its use? This question provides part of the justification for the present study.

The study reported substantial engagement with generative AI among the PR professionals studied. The findings identified both benefits and threats associated with the technology and showed that AI was beginning to influence professional PR practice in Africa. However, the researchers also identified ethical concerns surrounding the use of generative AI, particularly the absence of adequate ethical policies to guide its use. They argued that this situation could create difficulties for transparency and accountability in relationships between practitioners, clients and publics (Nutsugah & Senanu, 2024).

Nevertheless, the study does not provide sufficient evidence about Nigeria specifically. Its continental scope means that differences among African countries in technological infrastructure, professional regulation, organisational culture and levels of AI adoption may not be fully captured. This limitation makes Nigeria-specific empirical investigation necessary.

The findings identified several major ethical concerns. These included misinformation and disinformation, authorship and professional identity, accountability and disclosure. The study also found that practitioners faced complex decisions concerning transparency and disclosure when using generative AI. In addition, the researchers reported concerns about the adequacy of existing professional codes in addressing the ethical problems created by rapidly developing generative AI technologies (Dong & van den Berg, 2025).

The study nevertheless strengthens the argument for investigating AI in Nigeria because it demonstrates that the adoption of AI can create professional dilemmas that cannot be resolved simply by technological competence. Nigerian practitioners may similarly encounter questions concerning accuracy, authorship, disclosure, accountability and professional identity, but these issues require empirical investigation within the Nigerian professional environment rather than assumption.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative documentary research design based entirely on secondary data. The approach was considered appropriate because the study seeks to examine the opportunities, ethical challenges and professional implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for public relations practice in Nigeria through existing scholarly and professional evidence. Documentary research enables the systematic examination and interpretation of relevant published materials to develop an understanding of a research problem (Bowen, 2009).

Data were obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, empirical studies, professional publications, policy documents, institutional reports and credible online academic databases. Priority was given to recent and verifiable publications, particularly those published between 2016 and 2026, while earlier foundational works were retained where necessary for theoretical perspectives. Relevant Nigerian and African studies were given particular attention, while

international studies were used for comparison and broader contextual understanding.

Documents were purposively selected based on their relevance to the study's objectives, particularly evidence concerning AI adoption in public relations, opportunities created by AI, ethical concerns, changing professional roles and competencies, and the future of PR practice. Unverified blogs, anonymous materials, promotional content and sources without identifiable authorship were excluded.

The collected materials were analyzed using thematic document analysis. Following Bowen (2009), the documents were systematically reviewed, relevant information was extracted and findings were grouped into themes corresponding to the study objectives: (1) opportunities presented by AI for public relations practice, (2) ethical challenges associated with AI in PR, and (3) professional implications of AI for the PR profession in Nigeria. Findings from different sources were compared to identify areas of agreement, differences and gaps in the existing literature.

Discussion of Findings

AI and the Opportunities for Public Relations Practice

One major finding from the literature is that AI provides public relations practitioners with opportunities to improve efficiency, information processing and content development. Yue et al(2024) found that PR leaders were already exploring AI for different professional activities

and regarded the technology as relevant to innovation, strategy and the future direction of the profession. Their findings suggest that the value of AI lies partly in its ability to support practitioners in handling communication tasks more efficiently.

The literature further indicates that AI is being applied to specific PR activities rather than existing only as a theoretical possibility. Dong and van den Berg (2025), in a study involving 21 PR professionals, found that sentiment analysis, speech-to-text translation, press releases and reports were among the reported applications of AI. Participants also identified content development, story ideation, strategic counseling, social media monitoring and time management as additional areas of use.

For Nigeria, this development presents opportunities for improving content production, media monitoring, audience analysis and strategic communication. However, these opportunities should be understood within the realities of the Nigerian communication environment. The mere availability of AI tools does not automatically translate into effective professional use. Practitioners still need the knowledge to select appropriate tools, evaluate their outputs and integrate them into existing communication strategies.

Another important finding is that AI can potentially strengthen the analytical dimension of public relations. The use of technologies such as sentiment analysis allows communication professionals to process and interpret large amounts of information relating to public

opinion. Dong and van den Berg (2025) identified sentiment analysis as one of the most common applications reported by their participants, accounting for 17% of the preliminary survey responses in their study.

This has particular relevance for contemporary PR because organisations increasingly communicate in environments where stakeholders can respond publicly and rapidly. AI-assisted analysis may help practitioners identify patterns in conversations and gain additional information for communication planning. Nevertheless, the findings also suggest that analytical technologies should complement rather than replace professional interpretation. An automated analysis may identify a pattern, but understanding what that pattern means in a particular social, cultural or organizational context remains a professional responsibility.

Overall, the evidence suggests that AI presents opportunities at operational, analytical and strategic levels. It can assist with routine communication tasks, support the analysis of information and contribute to strategic decision-making (Yue et al., 2024; Dong & van den Berg, 2025). For Nigerian PR practitioners, therefore, the central issue should not be whether AI should be accepted or rejected, but how its capabilities can be integrated responsibly into professional practice.

Ethical Challenges of AI in Public Relations

Despite these opportunities, the findings reveal that AI adoption creates serious ethical concerns. The most consistently reported concerns in the reviewed literature

include misinformation and disinformation, authorship, professional identity, accountability, transparency and disclosure. Dong and van den Berg (2025) specifically identified these issues through interviews with PR professionals and concluded that generative AI creates complex ethical decision-making challenges for practitioners.

The concern about misinformation is particularly important to public relations because PR practitioners communicate information on behalf of organisations and are therefore directly involved in shaping public understanding. If AI-generated content contains inaccurate information, the consequences may extend beyond an individual communication error to affect organisational credibility and stakeholder trust. Dong and van den Berg (2025) identified misinformation and disinformation as one of the principal ethical dilemmas raised by practitioners using generative AI.

Authorship presents another challenge. Generative AI can produce written communication, ideas and other forms of content, thereby making it less straightforward to determine where the contribution of the technology ends and that of the practitioner begins. Dong and van den Berg (2025) found that authorship and professional identity were among the major ethical concerns identified by PR practitioners.

The African context makes this concern even more significant. Nutsugah and Senanu (2024) found that although generative AI was being adopted by PR professionals across Africa, ethical policies specifically

guiding its use were lacking. They argued that the absence of such policies poses challenges for transparency and accountability in relationships between practitioners, clients and publics.

This finding has important implications for Nigeria. It suggests that technological adoption can develop faster than professional guidelines and organisational policies. Consequently, Nigerian PR practitioners may increasingly encounter AI-related ethical decisions without sufficiently detailed institutional guidance on issues such as disclosure, verification, authorship and accountability.

The ethical challenge, therefore, is not simply that AI can make mistakes. The deeper issue is that AI changes the conditions under which professional responsibility is exercised. A practitioner who uses AI must make decisions about what information can be entered into an AI system, whether its output is reliable, whether the content should be disclosed as AI-assisted and who should ultimately accept responsibility for the communication.

The findings consequently suggest that ethical AI use in public relations requires more than technical competence. It requires professional judgement, transparency and clearly defined organizational responsibilities. This supports Dong and van den Berg's (2025) argument that the development of AI-related ethical guidance should pay attention to the actual experiences and concerns of practicing PR professionals.

Professional Implications of AI for PR Practitioners

The third major finding concerns the changing professional expectations created by AI. The reviewed literature indicates that practitioners increasingly need to combine traditional PR competencies with technological understanding. Yue et al(2024) found that PR leaders were considering AI not only as a tool for performing tasks but also in relation to innovation, strategic communication and the future direction of the profession.

This means that professional competence in PR is likely to become broader. Traditional abilities such as writing, media relations, interpersonal communication, strategic thinking and stakeholder management remain important, but practitioners also need sufficient understanding of AI to use it appropriately and critically.

The African study by Nutsugah and Senanu (2024) reinforces this point. Their findings show that the emergence of generative AI is producing practical, socio-cultural and ethical implications for PR professionals across Africa. The study therefore treats AI adoption as a development affecting the practice and professional environment of PR rather than simply introducing another communication tool.

For Nigerian practitioners, this implies a growing need for AI literacy and continuous professional development. AI literacy should not be reduced to knowing how to enter prompts into a generative AI platform. It should include understanding what AI systems can and cannot do, recognising possible errors and biases, protecting

sensitive information and exercising professional judgement over generated outputs.

The changing skill requirement does not necessarily mean that PR practitioners need to become programmers or AI engineers. Rather, they need sufficient technological awareness to work effectively with AI while retaining responsibility for communication decisions. Yue et al(2024) describe AI as part of an evolving professional environment in which practitioners must consider its applications, outcomes, risks and future implications.

The future PR practitioner may therefore derive greater professional value from activities that require distinctly human capabilities: contextual interpretation, strategic counselling, relationship management, ethical judgement and understanding of stakeholder expectations. This does not eliminate the importance of writing or content creation, but it changes the way those skills are applied.

The findings also suggest that organisations have responsibilities alongside individual practitioners. AI adoption cannot be treated solely as an employee's personal decision because organisational policies determine how technology is introduced, monitored and governed. Nutsugah and Senanu (2024) found that the absence of ethical policies for GenAI use across the African PR environment creates challenges for transparency and accountability.

Consequently, Nigerian organisations employing PR professionals should consider developing clear policies concerning AI-assisted communication, including

verification of AI-generated material, protection of confidential information, disclosure and accountability. Such measures would help ensure that technological efficiency does not come at the expense of professional standards.

Synthesis of the Findings

The evidence therefore does not justify presenting AI as either entirely beneficial or entirely destructive to public relations. Its impact is more complex. AI can increase efficiency and create new analytical and creative possibilities, but those benefits are accompanied by new forms of professional responsibility. The central challenge for Nigerian PR practice is consequently to achieve an appropriate balance between technological efficiency and human accountability.

Conclusion

This study examined the implications of Artificial Intelligence for the future of public relations practice in Nigeria, with particular attention to the opportunities, ethical challenges and professional implications associated with its growing use. The review shows that AI is no longer merely a future possibility for the PR profession. It is already being explored and applied in areas such as content development, media monitoring, sentiment analysis and strategic communication (Yue et al., 2024; Nutsugah & Senanu, 2024).

The study concludes that AI presents considerable opportunities for Nigerian public relations practice. Its ability to process information, support content

production and assist with communication analysis can improve efficiency and provide practitioners with additional resources for strategic decision-making. Evidence from South-East Nigeria also indicates that digital PR and AI adoption have significant potential to contribute to social and economic development, although this potential depends on adequate professional preparation and responsible use (Nwanmuoh et al., 2025).

At the same time, the findings demonstrate that AI introduces ethical concerns that cannot be ignored. Issues surrounding misinformation, transparency, accountability, authorship, privacy and the responsible use of AI-generated content have emerged as important concerns in PR scholarship. Research among African PR professionals has particularly highlighted the absence of adequate ethical policies governing generative AI use, raising questions about professional accountability and transparency (Nutsugah & Senanu, 2024).

The study further concludes that the growing use of AI will not eliminate the need for public relations practitioners but will change the nature of professional competence. Practitioners will increasingly require AI literacy alongside established skills in communication, strategic thinking, relationship management and ethical decision-making. Recent Nigerian evidence similarly points to the need for professional training, AI literacy and institutional support as the profession adapts to emerging technologies.

Therefore, the future of public relations practice in Nigeria should not be framed as a choice between human practitioners and artificial intelligence. Rather, it should be understood as a process of human–AI collaboration, in which technology supports professional work while practitioners retain responsibility for interpretation, strategic judgement, ethical decisions and relationships with publics. This is consistent with emerging scholarship which argues that PR professionals must not only use AI but also understand advice on and ethically oversee its application within organisations.

Recommendations

1. PR practitioners and professional bodies should prioritise AI literacy and continuous professional development to ensure effective and responsible adoption of AI in public relations practice:

The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) and relevant training institutions should provide regular practical training on AI-assisted content creation, media monitoring, data analysis, prompt use, verification of AI-generated information and strategic application of AI. This is necessary because recent Nigerian studies indicate that awareness of AI is growing, but effective professional application remains limited by skills and knowledge gaps (Adikuru & Abutu, 2025; Igbokwe et al., 2025).

2. PR organizations should establish clear ethical guidelines for the use of AI:

Organisations should develop policies covering accuracy, transparency, disclosure, data privacy, intellectual property, bias and accountability, while ensuring that AI-generated communication is reviewed by a qualified human practitioner before publication. This recommendation is strongly supported by research identifying misinformation, authorship, professional identity, accountability and disclosure as major ethical concerns surrounding AI in PR (Dong & van den Berg, 2025). Professional guidance from the International Public Relations Association also emphasises ethical, transparent and accountable use of AI in PR.

3. AI should be integrated into Nigerian PR practice as a tool for professional augmentation rather than human replacement.

PR practitioners and organizations should deliberately use AI to improve content production, research, monitoring, audience analysis and strategic communication while retaining human responsibility for judgement, creativity, cultural understanding and relationship management. Evidence from South-East Nigeria, shows that AI and digital PR can produce significant benefits, when professionals are adequately equipped, while recent Nigerian research also recommends deliberate investment in AI literacy and appropriate tool selection (Nwanmuoh et al., 2025).

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