International Journal of Marketing, Communication and New Media
ISSN: 2182-9306. Special Issue on Marketing & Business Perspectives: Transformative Insights for Marketing and Communication in the Digital Era, May 2025

IJMCNM

DOI: https://doi.org/10.54663/2182-9306.2025.SpecialIssueMBP.6-27

Research Paper

Torn between practicality and fear: how strategic communication professionals are adopting artificial intelligence

Patrícia Dias *
Priscila Krolow **
José Gabriel Andrade ***

ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is expanding across various contexts and organizations and becoming ingrained in daily practices professionals in strategic communication. This study examines the adoption of AI in strategic communication, mapping how and why professionals integrate AI into their workflows. Specifically, it identifies key AI tools, their applications, and the opportunities and risks their adoption entail. This exploratory study employs a qualitative approach, based on structured interviews to a purposive sample of 16 strategic communication professionals, defined as "professionals working in communication departments or agencies as primary agents of communication" (Heide et al., 2018, p. 1), including communication Directors and Managers. A thematic analysis was applied to the data using MAXQDA software. Our findings reveal widespread AI adoption, with ChatGPT emerging as the most used platform. AI tools are applied in various tasks, including social media content creation, data analysis, process optimization, and workflow facilitation. The main advantages identified are enhanced efficiency, resource optimization, and speed, while challenges revolve around potential displacement and data privacy concerns. Looking ahead, professionals anticipate that AI will increasingly streamline repetitive tasks, allowing them to focus on critical thinking and creative work. This study contributes to understanding AI's evolving role in strategic communication and highlights key implications for future professional practices.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, AI, Communication, Strategic Communication, Communication Professionals, Data privacy, Ethical considerations

Acknowledgments: The authors thank CECC - Universidade Católica Portuguesa and ICS - Universidade do Minho for the support provided to our work.

* CECC, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Lisbon, Portugal. E-Mail: pdias@ucp.pt
** CECC, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Lisbon, Portugal.
*** ICS, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal.

Received on: 2024.10.18
Approved on: 2025.03.13
Evaluated by a double-blind review system

1. MAIN INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Role of AI in strategic communication

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming widespread in several organizations and is increasingly being integrated in professional routines (Prasad Agrawal, 2023). Despite its growing presence, the implications of AI for strategic communication remain underexplored, particularly regarding how strategic communication professionals are adapting to and integrating AI into their daily practices. This article sets out to explore how AI is being adopted by strategic communication professionals, mapping out its main uses and purposes, as well as discussing the opportunities and risks it entails for organizations and their different stakeholders.

Strategic communication plays a pivotal role in organizations, driving them towards their strategic goals by establishing and nurturing mutually beneficial and long-lasting relationships with their different stakeholders (Nothhaft et al., 2020). The evolution of media has always shaped communication, and in the last few decades, rapid advancements in digital technologies have transformed the communication landscape, creating an intricate ecosystem that blends traditional and digital media (Stasberger, 2023).

One of the latest technological developments is AI, which can be defined as a set of computational systems designed to simulate tasks requiring human intelligence, such as problem-solving, language processing, and pattern recognition, or, in the words of Haenlein and Kaplan (2019), "a system's ability to correctly interpret external data, to learn from such data, and to use those learnings to achieve specific goals and tasks through flexible adaptation" (p. 3). These capabilities are developed using complex algorithms trained with vast amounts of data, thus supporting decision-making and enabling autonomous processes (Ng et al., 2021). As in other dimensions of organizations, AI is being adopted to support strategic communication (Osei-Mensah et al., 2023).

1.2 Uses of AI within the scope of strategic communication

The initial approach has been to incorporate AI into the existing technological toolkit, primarily as a tool for monitoring and assessing communication actions and efforts, as well as collecting data about the online behaviour of different stakeholder groups, mainly consumers and fans. As the technology evolves, professionals are shifting from an operational use of AI towards more

strategic applications, leveraging its capabilities to enhance decision-making and long-term planning (Osei-Mensah et al., 2023).

Examining emergent research on AI and strategic communication reveals a growing integration if AI into professional routines. Studies report an increased use of AI in sentiment analysis (Taherdoost, 2023). AI can process vast volumes of data from social media, websites, news outlets, and other online sources to determine public sentiment towards an organization, brand, product/service, statement or initiative. This real-time monitoring of digital conversations helps organizations anticipate potential crises and evaluate the effectiveness of their communication strategies (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018).

Another rapidly expanding application of AI is in chatbots and virtual assistants (Gupta et al., 2020). Advances in AI have significantly enhanced the conversational capabilities of chatbots, enabling them to provide more accurate and context-aware responses through continuous learning. Consequently, chatbots and virtual assistants now offer 24/7 support to users, reducing costs associated with human resources while improving customer experience. Initially deployed in customer service, these solutions are now being applied to broader aspects of consumer engagement, positively enhancing it (Agarwal et al., 2022).

Predictive analysis represents another key area where AI is transforming strategic communication. AI-driven algorithms can identify trends, analyse consumer behaviour, and develop forecasts that aid organizations in strategic decision-making and crises prevention (Verma et al., 2021). Additionally, AI is increasingly being used for content generation (Du et al., 2023). Content creation has always been central to strategic communication, with professionals priding themselves on crafting relevant, engaging, and timely messages. Initially, AI was employed for personalizing mass communication by tailoring messages based on sociodemographic data and online use behaviour. More recently, AI has been utilized to generate original content, including articles, reports, press releases or social media posts, catering to the demands of an ever-accelerating digital landscape. In media environment where frequency and consistency drive visibility, AI-generated content has emerged as a valuable tool for maintaining engagement.

1.3 Challenges of AI for strategic communication professionals

The integration of AI into strategic communication brings both opportunities and challenges. Understanding these challenges is essential for professionals to develop effective strategies that mitigate risks while maximizing the benefits of AI-driven communication.

One of the primary advantages of AI is its ability to enhance efficiency by automating repetitive tasks, reducing operational costs, and optimizing resources. AI-drive data analysis enables organizations to process vast amounts of information in real time, providing valuable insights for strategic decision-making (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018). In addition, data analysis offers predictive power, helping organizations take advantage of upcoming trends and/or cope with or avert potential crises, supporting decision-making that is grounded on solid information (Verma et al., 2021). Furthermore, AI enhances the personalization of communication, ensuring that stakeholders receive targeted and relevant messages, which in turn foster stronger engagement and long-lasting relationships. Thus, AI makes strategic communication more successful (Du et al., 2023).

However, challenges are also emerging. A recurring concern is the potential loss of human agency in strategic communication, with AI-driven automation replacing certain roles traditionally performed by strategic communication professionals (Su et al., 2021). Chatbots and virtual assistants, for instance, have begun to replace customer care professionals in some areas, although human oversight remains necessary for complex interactions Similarly, AI-generated content has raised concerns about the future role of copywriters, designers, photographers, and other content producers. While AI-generated content can increase efficiency, it often requires human refinement and oversight to ensure quality and alignment with brand identity. Rather than fully replacing strategic communication professionals, AI is reshaping their roles, shifting their focus from routine tasks to strategic planning, creative direction, and decision-making. professionals, AI is reshaping their roles, shifting their focus from routine tasks to strategic planning, creative direction, and decision-making. In addition, strategic communication professionals are increasingly working closely with AI experts, which may require mutual understanding, as well as the development of skills and vocabulary that support an effective collaboration (Holmberg & Mehrabov, 2023).

Another critical challenge is data privacy and security. AI systems rely on extensive data collection to function effectively, which may raise ethical and legal concerns, particularly with regulations such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Kuner et al., 2018). As stakeholders become increasingly aware of their digital rights, organizations must ensure transparent and responsible data practices to maintain trust and avoid reputational risks, as well as legal repercussions (Du & Xie, 2021).

The rapid pace of AI development also present challenges to organizations attempting to keep their technological resources and communication strategies up to date. While early adopters gain competitive advantages, the widespread implementation of AI can erode this edge over time (Krakowski et al., 2023). Companies must remain agile, continuously evaluating and upgrading their AI-driven communication approaches to stay relevant and competitive.

Finally, ethical concerns remain a pressing issue (Du & Xie, 2021). AI systems are only as unbiased as the data and algorithms that shape them. If biases are embedded in AI models – intentionally or unintentionally – they can lead to exclusion, discrimination, and reputational damage (Borenstein & Howard, 2021). Addressing these ethical issues requires ongoing scrutiny, the establishment of ethical guidelines, and responsible AI development to ensure fairness and inclusivity in communication strategies.

In conclusion, while AI offers unprecedented opportunities to improve strategic communication, it also introduces complex challenges that must be carefully managed. By critically evaluating AI's role, implementing ethical data practices, and ensuring human oversight, organizations can harness the full potential of AI while maintaining transparency, accountability, and meaningful relationships with their stakeholders (Radanliev, 2025).

1.4 Future AI trends in strategic communication

Emerging trends suggest that AI will continue to shape in the landscape of strategic communication. One key area of development is the enhancement of AI's conversational capabilities. Research indicates that future iterations with AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants will engage in increasingly natural and context-aware interactions, closely mimicking human-to-human communication (Woo, 2020). Another anticipated advancement is AI's improved ability to generate complex content autonomously. AI is expected to expand beyond simple text generation to produce sophisticated reports, market analyses, and even strategic recommendations, significantly enhancing productivity in communication teams (Mijwil & Abttan, 2021).

Additionally, the integration of AI with emerging technologies such as augmented reality and virtual reality is set to create immersive and interactive communication experiences. These advancements could revolutionize stakeholder engagement, providing organizations with new ways to foster relationships and build brand loyalty (Li et al., 2023).

Lastly, ethical considerations will become increasingly central, as AI adoption grows. Organizations will need to prioritize transparency, accountability, and ethical data managemenr, to align with evolving regulatory frameworks and stakeholder expectations (Du & Xie, 2021).

In summary, the integration of AI in professional routines of strategic communication is redefining the way organizations relate to their stakeholders, and the role of professionals working in this field. These changes offer significant opportunities to improve effectiveness, efficiency, and engagement in strategic communication, but they also present challenges in terms of ethics, privacy, and constant adaptation (Osei-Mensah et al., 2023). It is imperative that organizations understand the potential of AI to appropriate it critically, safely, responsibly, and beneficially. Organizations that embrace AI are expected to be better positioned to achieve their goals and maintain synergic relationships with their stakeholders. This entails being flexible, adapting to an ever-changing technological environment, but above all acting ethically and discovering new best practices and professional routines that are truly beneficial for both organizations and their stakeholders. Our research sets out to explore how this adoption of AI by organizations, and specifically by strategic communication professionals, is unfolding in Portugal and Brazil, by mapping their new AI-based routines and discussing the opportunities and risks that they acknowledge in AI.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research design

We conducted an exploratory study, aiming to collect information and insights about an emergent phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). While AI has existed for quite some time, its adoption across organizations is relatively new. With a specific focus on strategic communication, our study set out to map how strategic communication professionals are adopting and using this new resource.

For this purpose, the qualitative method is advantageous, as it allows in-depth exploration and understanding of novel experiences, collecting rich and nuanced data, capable of providing insights on the perceptions, meaning and intricacies of such experiences for those involved. Furthermore, qualitative methods are flexible, ideal for studying new phenomena and adjusting to unexpected findings, thus providing a holistic and rich starting point to further research (Stebbins, 2001).

Our study follows a simple research design, with only one data collection stage, followed by data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Our study was approved by the Ethics Committee of CECC - Research Centre on Communication and Culture of Universidade Católica Portuguesa, and strictly followed the center's ethical guidelines and GRDP. Informed consent was obtained from all participants individually.

2.2 Sampling technique

Our study uses a purposive sample, a sampling technique in which participants are selected deliberately based on specific criteria, determined according to research goals. This type of sample is advantageous because it can provide rich and specialized data, depending on the expertise of the participants selected. Also, it is time and cost effective, as it affords direct access to participants with specific characteristics and experiences, who are able to provide deeper and richer insight into the phenomenon in study (Ray, 2012).

In our case, as our goal was investigating how AI is being used within the scope of strategic communication, we followed Heide et al.'s definition as "professionals working in communication departments or agencies as primary agents of communication" (2018, p. 1), thus including professionals with the job titles of "Communication Director" and "Communication Manager" working in communication departments or agencies. Within this homogeneity criterion, we searched for diversity, selecting professionals of different ages, genders, sectors, positions and work experience. We identified potential participants via the researchers' LinkedIn networks and invited them by direct message on this platform. Using personal contacts entails biases, such as lack of diversity of the contacts, and a propensity to please the researcher on the part of personal contacts (Galdas, 2017). This team of researchers possesses a wide and diverse network of contacts, built over more than 20 years of experience as teachers, researchers and professionals working in Communication. To minimize such biases, we only contacted professionals that were third or further connections, thus not including closest contacts.

We sent out 30 invitations and got several positive answers. We decided to stop data collection at 16 participants, both from Portugal and Brazil, when we reached data saturation. On Table 1, we present a general description of our sample.

Table 1. Sample description.

NAME	COUNTRY	GENDER	COMPANY	INDUSTRY/SECTOR	JOB ROLE	JOB LEVEL
Alessa Flores	Brazil	Female	Sense Comunicação	Communication Agency	Director of Communication	Senior-level
André Casado	Portugal	Male	IAMIN	Communication Agency	Director of Communication	Senior-level
Débora Martins	Brazil	Female	NSC Comunicação	Communication Agency	Communication Manager	Mid-level
Filipe Morna	Portugal	Male	Fullsix Portugal	Communication Agency	Communication Manager	Mid-level
Graziella Rigotti	Brazil	Female	Agibank	Bank	Communication Manager	Mid-level
Joana Teixeira	Portugal	Female	Jerónimo Martins	Retail	Communication Manager	Mid-level
Mariana Lima	Portugal	Female	Tricycle	Communication Agency	Communication Manager	Junior-level
Mauren Faria	Portugal	Female	Multivision	IT	Communication Director	Senior-level
Pâmela Seiffert	Brazil	Female	SoftDesign	IT	Communication Manager	Mid-level
Paola Müller	Brazil	Female	Brivia Group	Communication Agency	Communication Director	Senior-level
Patrícia Fernandes	Portugal	Female	Mercedes-Benz.io	Automobile	Communication Manager	Mid-level
Raquel Silvério	Portugal	Female	Nova SBE	Higher Education	Communication Manager	Mid-level
Rui Patarrana	Portugal	Male	Marco Gouveia Unipessoal LDA	Communication agency	Communication Manager	Mid-level
Sílvia Carapeto	Portugal	Female	Nova SBE	Higher Education	Communication Director	Senior-level

NAME	COUNTRY	GENDER	COMPANY	INDUSTRY/SECTOR	JOB ROLE	JOB LEVEL
Thiago Miroh	Portugal	Male	OralMed	Health	Communication Manager	Mid-level
Vanessa Raminhos	Portugal	Female	Handy Creative Studio	Communication agency	Communication Manager	Junior-level

2.3 Data collection technique

As a data collection technique, we selected the structured interview. Interviews are considered one of the most advantageous data collection techniques in qualitative research. Their dialogical nature, and particularly the non-structured and semi-structured formats, allows in-depth exploration of topics, contextualized by personal perspectives and experiences, thus affording deeper understanding of complexity and meanings. The face to face and interactive nature of interviews affords flexibility, adaptability, the possibility to clarify and explore responses, the tailoring of the interview to each participant, and spontaneous contributions from participants. In addition, interviews favor the establishment of personal connections, which make it possible to explore personal and sensitive topics, taking a deeper look into personal perspectives (King et al., 2019).

We opted for structured interviews because our participants are busy professionals, their availability is limited, and they were only agreed to short interviews, up to 30 minutes. Our interview script is composed of 11 questions, divided into 2 groups: 3 questions on sociodemographic data and 8 questions about their professional practices with AI (focusing topics such as specific tasks and functions accomplished with AI in their daily routine, overall use of AI in their organization, overall view of use of AI in strategic communication, benefits and risks of AI for all stakeholders, regulation, and vision of the future). All participants signed an informed consent form and authorized the use of their personal data, namely name and job description.

2.4 Data analysis technique

As a data analysis technique, we used thematic analysis. This technique is particularly useful for small-scale exploratory studies with limited resources. It allows a theory-driven approach, establishing themes based on the literature review, combined with a data-driven approach, considering emerging themes. This is adequate for exploratory studies, affording extended knowledge on new phenomena, and allowing participants to express their perspectives.

Furthermore, it is a flexible and versatile technique, which polishes the data through subsequent rounds of coding.

We followed the 4-stages approach of Vanover et al. (2021): 1) familiarization with the data (transcribing, summarizing, and taking notes) – Notta.ai was used to transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews, while summaries and notes were manually added during the revision of the AI-produced transcripts; 2) generating initial codes (combining theory-driven and data-driven categories) – using MAXQDA; 3) second round of reading and coding, organizing themes and subthemes and incorporating emergent themes – using MAXQDA, specifically thematic clustering; and 4) validating coding through intercoder consistency checking. Three coders were involved in data analysis. Coder 1 was responsible for stage 1), coder 2 was responsible for stage 2, and all coders participated in stages 3) and 4). The intercoder consistency checks were performed during stage 3), conducted in the following manner: 10 excerpts from each coder were randomly picked and assigned to the other two coders for coding, then results were compared. The coding was consistent among the three coders in 97% of the cases. On Figure 1, we present the set of themes and subthemes used for coding.

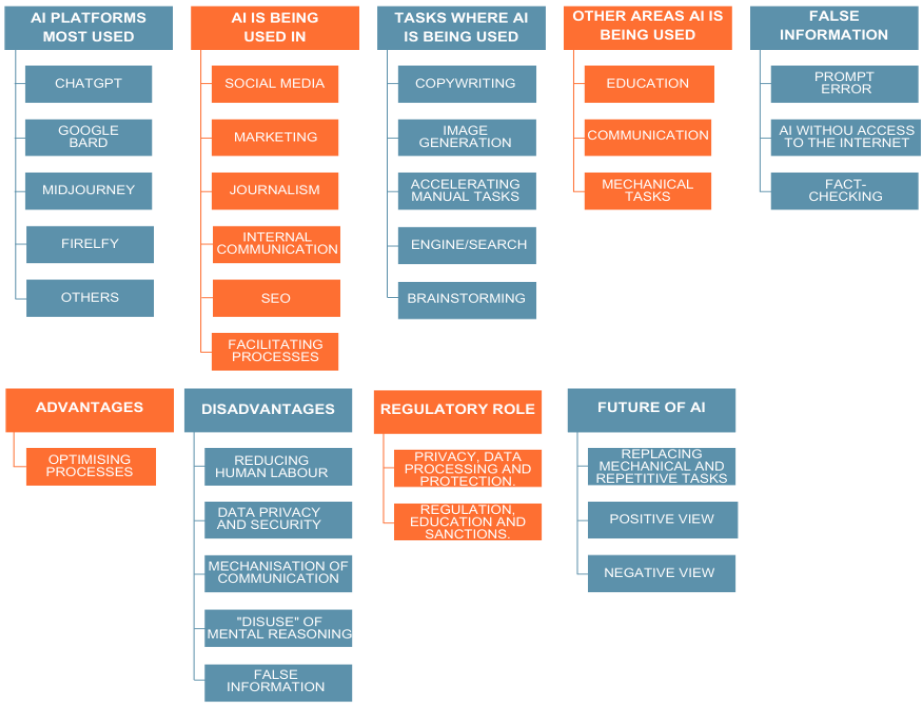

Figure 1. Themes and subthemes for coding

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

We interviewed 16 strategic communication professionals working in Brazil and Portugal. All of them reported incorporating AI into their daily work, highlighting a variety of applications and perspectives. These professionals have witnessed the rapid changes brought about by social media and are now taking their first steps with AI in their work. Our findings align with theoretical knowledge suggesting that AI plays a multifaceted role in strategic communication, spanning sentiment analysis, content creation, and data-driven decision-making (Osei-Mensah et al., 2023). In the next sections, we present and discuss our findings, following the main themes included in our codebook, displayed in Figure 1 above, as well as referring to our theoretical introduction.

In our exploration of the data, we could not find significant differences or patterns regarding the comparison between strategic communication professionals working in Portugal or in Brazil, or whether they operate at senior, mid or junior level in their career. Possible explanations for this are the fact that the Portuguese and Brazilian markets share the same language and are deeply intertwined, with many organizations operating in both markets, and that all professionals are coping with AI-driven innovations, regardless of their career level or expertise.

3.1 AI platforms that strategic communication professionals are using

Our analysis revealed that the platform most frequently mentioned by interviewees is ChatGPT. Google Bard, MidJourney, and Firefly are also widely recognized. A wide array of other AI-based platforms were also mentioned by a few respondents, such as NeuronWriter, Leonardo.Ai, ElevenLabs, Sudo, HeyGen, and Mónica. The diversity of platforms mentioned suggests that these professionals are in an exploratory phase, testing various tools and functionalities to determine which best suit their needs. This aligns with the notion that AI is becoming an infrastructural component of communication workflows rather than just a supplementary tool (Osei-Mensah et al., 2023).

Recent studies have shown that as AI tools become more integrated into communication workflows, they not only support creative and operational tasks but also redefine professional competencies (Weller & Lock, 2024). This aligns with our findings that professionals are leveraging AI for multiple functions, signaling a transformation in strategic communication practices.

3.2 Areas of use and specific tasks performed with AI platforms

Based on interviewees responses, AI is being applied in several key areas within strategic communication, including: i) community management on social media; ii) marketing; iii) journalism; iv) SEO; and v) facilitating processes. These categories are closely related to the nature of the organization to which each interviewee belonged to – communication agency or organization from a specific sector – and to their roles and responsibilities.

Thematic cluster analysis on MAXQDA allowed us to organize our data in a different perspective, not focusing on specific strategic communication areas, but focusing instead on the general strategic communication tasks that are transversal to all areas: i) research; ii) strategy; and iii) implementation. This points to AI becoming an infrastructural layer in the professional practices of strategic communication, instead of a set of specialized tools. Additionally, our analysis distinguished between using AI tools merely to facilitate and accelerate tasks, from using it to perform tasks, autonomously or under human oversight. Figure 2 displays a graphic representation of how our themes and subthemes were organized by the thematic cluster analysis conducted, and how there are connected.

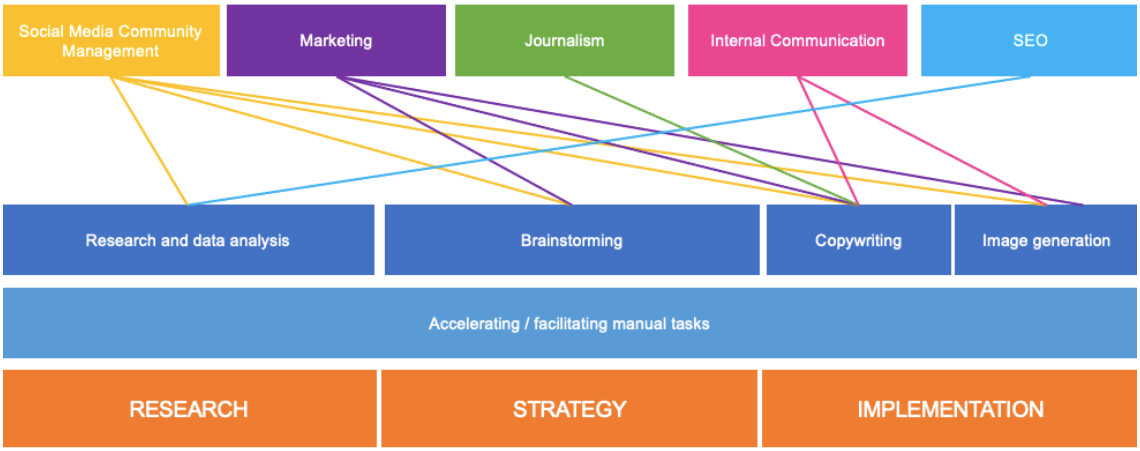

Figure 2. Organization of the themes and subthemes found in our thematic analysis

In this section, we present and discuss how and for which purposes AI tools are being used in specific strategic communication areas that our interviewees mentioned.

Within social media community management, AI is supporting creative processes by generating ideas, providing insights based on data analysis, and assisting in brainstorming. A noteworthy pattern in our findings is the reliance of these professionals on AI for strategic thinking – they use it not only to process data but also to contextualize insights, explore trends, and draft strategic

plans and proposals. For example, Graziella Rigotti from Agibank claims that “Within the tech team, we use it for various processes that optimize data analyses”, Paola Müller from Brivia Group adds that “There are machine learning mechanisms for data processing and analysis, supporting the creation of presentations and content production”, and Sílvia Carapeto from Nova SBE states that AI is very effective "To collect data quickly; to automate tasks that were otherwise carried out by humans and took three times as long (reports)." This reinforces previous literature findings that AI’s role in strategic communication extends beyond automation to supporting real-time monitoring, trend analysis, and crisis response (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018; Taherdoost, 2023).

Additionally, AI is being widely employed for content creation, particularly for copywriting and image generation, as is exemplified by Thiago Miroh from OralMed, who uses AI “in design and video creation”, and by Débora Martin from NSC Comunicação, who adds that "Content creation is greatly facilitated by AI, bringing copywriters closer to sources and data, reducing research time”. This use is mostly applied to creating social media content, which must be produced continuously, and AI helps optimize costs and resources (e.g. it provides an alternative to purchasing images, hiring professional photographers, models, etc.).

In marketing, respondents highlighted AI’s role in creative tasks such as brainstorming and suggesting names for new products and services. It also plays a role in content creation, including drafting advertising materials and adjusting images for different formats.

For journalism, AI is used to conduct research and facilitate access to sources. Professionals also leverage it for content production, such as copywriting, summarizing, translating and rewriting text.

Similarly, IA supports internal communication by assisting in content creation for internal channels and optimizing processes related to employee training.

SEO emerged as a recurring theme across different professional areas. Interviewees reported using AI to optimize digital content for search engines and social media platforms.

Additionally, AI serves as a tool for facilitating processes across various domains. Many respondents described using AI for facilitating processes and saving time, exemplifying with the following activities: searching for information (as an aid to the preferred search engine or as the prime research tool); summarizing, translating or rewriting text; developing presentations; accelerating operational tasks; and operations management. Rui Patarrana from Marco Gouveia Unipessoal LDA. is an example, as he uses AI “For transcribing meetings or videos”.

When asked about additional areas where AI is being used within their organizations, several interviewees noted its adoption beyond strategic communication. Some pointed to its integration in data analysis and research, while others highlighted its role in process optimization and design. These varied applications indicate a growing perception of AI as a versatile tool that enhances multiple facets of organizational workflows. This also aligns with research suggesting that AI's increasing integration across disciplines will continue to transform the communication landscape (Du et al., 2023).

These findings suggest that AI is enabling a shift toward data-driven decision-making in communication strategies. This transformation aligns with emerging research highlighting AI's role in predictive analytics for trend forecasting and audience engagement (Al Khaldy et al., 2023). The ability of AI to rapidly analyze and interpret large datasets enhances strategic adaptability in communication efforts. Furthermore, the application of AI goes beyond the research and the strategic dimensions of strategic communication, as professionals are finding very useful for the implementation of their communication plans, providing almost instantaneous content creation and reducing costs (Weller & Lock, 2024).

3.3 Verification practices and false information

Concerns about the inaccuracy or ineffectiveness of AI, mainly due to incorrect, incomplete, or even false information, is an underexplored topic in the literature explored, but that strongly emerged from the data. When discussing the reliability of AI-generated content, interviewees expressed a range of experiences. While some had not encountered significant inaccuracies, others noted instances of false or misleading information. Among those who had identified inaccuracies, three key patterns emerged: i) they considered them a consequence of poor prompt specificity on their part; ii) they consider them errors of AI tools that only offer limited free versions, and do not consider all the information available on the internet; and iii) they consider that fact-checking AI-generated content is becoming a default requirement when using these tools.

Interviewees who experienced inaccuracies often attributed them to vague or poorly formulated prompts. Several respondents emphasized the importance of refining their queries to obtain more precise answers. Filipe Morna from FullSix Portugal shared his experience: "I already reduce these errors as much as possible by optimizing prompts". This testimony shows that not only AI learns from interaction with users, these are also learning how to interact with AI and how to be more effective in getting the intended outcomes.

Some participants highlighted how AI tools have improved over time, noting that errors were more frequent before platforms gained internet access. This was the case of Filipe SJ from Nagarro, for example, who reported that “It has happened that the information was not entirely accurate, and we had to explain what we wanted with more information, but this happened before ChatGPT had access to the internet”.

We could also observe that professionals using AI are developing fact-checking skills and routines. Many professionals also stressed the importance of verification, pointing out that AI-generated information – like any other source – should not be taken at face value. . In the words of Pâmela Seyffert from SoftDesign, “Yes! As always, we need to check the information and compare data”. This underscores theoretical discussions on the ethical responsibility of AI users in maintaining information integrity and ensuring data transparency (Kuner et al., 2018; Du & Xie, 2021).

Practical implications of these findings indicate the necessity of AI literacy training for strategic communication professionals. Scholars argue that integrating AI ethics and verification practices into media and communication curricula can help professionals navigate misinformation risks effectively (Chu-Ke & Dong, 2024).

3.4 Main advantages and challenges of AI

All respondents agreed that AI has optimized processes and resources. Interviewees consistently described AI as enhancing speed, agility, efficiency, time saving and efficiency in their daily professional tasks. For example, Filipe SJ from Nagarro states that "Speed and scale, in 30 minutes I can upload more than 1000 articles to a blog and monetize much faster than if I had copywriters writing content from scratch", while Rui Patarrana, from Marco Gouveia Unipessoal LDA, adds that AI provides "Optimization of processes and more technical tasks, and thus better use of working time".

However, interviewees also expressed concern about risks, challenges, and disadvantages associated with the use of AI in strategic communication. A central theme that has emerged was the potential impact on human labor. Many professionals acknowledged AI’s ability to assist with creative tasks, but worried that the excessive reliance on AI-generated content might lead to a mechanization of communication, leading to a loss of originality and personalization. They also raised concerns about AI’s influence on professional skills development, noting that reduced engagement in critical thinking could impact long-term competencies. Additionally, many of our participants consider that using AI without fact-checking is a poor professional practice.

Transversal to all interviewees is another major concern about data privacy and security. Respondents emphasized the importance of regulatory oversight to ensure responsible AI use. For example, Alessa Flores from Sense Communication argues that "it's important for companies and individuals to be held accountable in order to guarantee transparency in the professional use of AI", and Sílvia Carapeto from Nova SBE agrees that "there should be an organization that sets legal and ethical limits, but that's it, because it's a technology that knows no limits, it just gives answers, whatever they may be". While some advocated for stricter regulations and sanctions – such as Joana Teixeira from Jerónimo Martins, who claims that "Outlining rights and duties, boundaries of use, and sanctions for those who don't comply" -, others emphasized the need for education and awareness-building to promote ethical AI practices – as is the case of Paola Müller from Brívia Group, who states that "User education in relation to the tools". This aligns with broader ethical considerations in AI governance and the balance between efficiency and accountability (Osei-Mensah et al., 2023).

This is consistent with studies predicting that AI will not replace communication professionals but will require them to develop new skills, such as AI supervision, strategic oversight, and critical evaluation of automated outputs (Weller & Lock, 2024). Organizations investing in AI literacy and training will likely maintain a competitive edge.

3.5 The future of AI in strategic communication

When asked about the future of strategic communication in a AI-embedded world, interviewees expressed diverse perspectives and mixed feelings. A dominant perspective was that AI would increasingly take over mechanical tasks and repetitive tasks, allowing professionals to focus on strategic and creative work. This is the view of Débora Martins from NSC Comunicação, who says that "AI will increasingly be used for repetitive tasks, enabling professionals to explore their creativity and critical/strategic thinking". Many envisioned a shift in professional roles, with AI acting as a co-worker that enhances human capabilities rather than replacing them entirely. In this sense, Filipe SJ from Nagarro states that "These tools and the fluid spread of AI will completely change the way we work, the people and positions we hire and the way we train from now on. The more technical positions will disappear, and the human being will become a kind of director with a giant variety of tools that will work with a technical team ready to work at any time".

Some respondents speculated that the communication industry would undergo profound transformations, requiring professionals to adapt and develop new skill sets. Others voiced

uncertainty about the implications of advanced AI, such as Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), and its potential to disrupt traditional agency models. While many saw AI as an opportunity for efficiency and innovation, others viewed it as a force that could reshape – not necessarily for the better – the relationship between humans and technology. While considering that AI will be important in day-to-day work, that companies that know how to use it will gain competitive advantages, and that many strategic communication professionals will make the most of it, they are concerned about the relationship between humans and machines. They wonder whether AI will leave room for humans in the field of strategic communication, especially with the arrival of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), which, according to this group of participants, could completely eradicate the role of advertising agencies. This perspective supports ongoing discussions in AI research, emphasizing the need for responsible AI adoption to ensure transparency, accountability, and ethical use (Du & Xie, 2021; Mijwil & Abttan, 2021).

From a practical standpoint, these findings suggest that organizations should develop AI adaptation strategies that incorporate ethical considerations, human oversight, and continuous skills training. Future research should explore how AI governance policies shape communication workflows in corporate and agency settings (Weller & Lock, 2024).

In summary, this study provides a nuanced perspective on AI's role in strategic communication. It highlights both the opportunities and challenges that professionals face as AI becomes more deeply embedded in their workflows. Ethical considerations, evolving professional roles, and the balance between automation and human expertise will shape the future of AI-driven communication.

4. CONCLUSION

Our study sheds light onto the integration of AI into the professional routines of strategic communication professionals.

Theoretical knowledge, so far, highlights the multifaceted potential of AI in strategic communication, emphasizing its role in tasks ranging from sentiment analysis to content creation (Osei-Mensah et al., 2023). Our results align with these theoretical expectations, revealing a diverse range of applications adopted by strategic communication professionals, ranging from research to strategy, implementation, and the facilitation of mechanical and repetitive tasks.

In terms of research, the study found a significant emphasis on its use for sentiment analysis. This resonates with the theoretical underpinning that AI can efficiently monitor and analyze vast

amounts of data from diverse online sources to monitor public sentiment (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018; Taherdoost, 2023). This real-time understanding is crucial for strategic communicators to respond promptly to emerging issues and crises. The application of AI in chatbots and virtual assistants also aligns with theoretical expectations (Gupta et al., 2020). The study shows that AI has not only improved conversational abilities but has also expanded its use beyond customer care to enhance overall consumer experience. This resonates with the idea that AI-driven automation can contribute to efficiency and effectiveness in communication processes (Agarwal et al., 2022). An intriguing finding is the use of AI in generating content. The theoretical framework acknowledged AI's potential in personalizing and optimizing content creation (Du et al., 2023). Although creating content has always been the expertise of communication professionals, our results confirm that AI-generated content encompasses articles, reports, and social media posts. This aligns with the evolving landscape of online communication, in which the frequency of content publication is a key factor. Professionals are leveraging AI to meet these demands efficiently.

Although strategic communication professionals are attracted to the practicality afforded by AI, they are simultaneously fearful of how the use of AI may impact their jobs. These fears encompass concerns about job displacement, ethical considerations, and the need for collaboration between communication professionals and AI experts. The study's findings validate these concerns, highlighting the fear of technology replacing human roles, particularly in customer care and content creation (Su et al., 2021). While the study suggests that AI will not replace strategic communication professionals entirely, it points to a redefinition of roles. Communication professionals are dedicating more time to strategic planning and creative work, as AI takes over routine tasks. This aligns with the theoretical argument that AI can enhance efficiency by automating repetitive tasks, allowing professionals to focus on more creative and critical activities (Du et al., 2023). Ethical concerns identified in the findings, such as privacy issues and potential biases in AI algorithms, resonate with the theoretical framework's emphasis on the importance of ethical considerations in AI adoption (Kuner et al., 2018; Du & Xie, 2021; Osei-Mensah et al., 2023). The study underscores the need for organizations to navigate the delicate balance between utilizing AI for efficiency and ensuring responsible and ethical practices. To support these, ethical guidelines and regulations are necessary. The study's participants anticipate the emergence of

transversal ethical principles, reflecting a maturation in the understanding of responsible AI adoption.

Looking at the future, academic literature anticipates the ongoing development of AI's efficacy in various functions and its integration with other technologies (Mijwil & Abttan, 2021). This study supports these expectations, emphasizing the continued improvement of AI's conversational skills and its ability to generate more complex content. The integration of AI with other technologies, such as augmented reality and virtual reality, aligns with the theoretical suggestion that AI will become more seamlessly integrated into existing technologies, offering immersive experiences. This suggests a future where AI enhances not only content but also the overall user experience through more interactive and immersive interfaces (Weller & Lock, 2024).

In conclusion, the results of our study provide valuable insights into the current state of AI adoption in strategic communication, offering both confirmation and expansion of the literature available. The practical application of AI in sentiment analysis, content generation, and enhanced consumer experiences align with theoretical expectations and previews of the broad potential of AI. Challenges such as job displacement, ethical concerns, and the evolving roles of communication professionals underscore the complex interplay between AI and humanity. Our findings highlight the dynamic nature of AI's role in strategic communication. The continued development of AI's capabilities and its integration with other technologies point to a future in which AI becomes an indispensable tool for communication professionals. Ethical considerations play a central role in shaping the trajectory of AI adoption, emphasizing the need for a balanced and responsible approach. As organizations navigate this transformative landscape, our study prompts further reflection and research on the ethical implications of AI, the evolving roles of communication professionals, and the collaborative synergy between human expertise and AI in the ever-evolving field of strategic communication. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the practical dimensions, challenges, and potential future trajectories of AI in this critical domain.

Despite these contributions, this study also has limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the research is context-specific, focusing on strategic communication professionals in Portugal and Brazil. As a result, the findings are not generalizable to professionals in other regions with different cultural, technological, and regulatory landscapes. Additionally, the study’s exploratory nature and relatively small sample size limit the extent to which broad conclusions can be drawn. While the qualitative approach provides rich insights, future research would benefit from larger, more diverse

samples and comparative studies across multiple countries and industries. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of AI tools means that some findings may quickly become outdated, necessitating ongoing research to track how AI adoption and perceptions shift over time. Recognizing these limitations allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the findings and underscores the need for continued investigation into AI's role in strategic communication.

Future research should explore several emerging areas in this field. First, the long-term impact of AI on professional roles remains uncertain, warranting longitudinal studies on how strategic communication professionals adapt to AI-driven workflows. Second, while AI aids content creation, research is needed to understand its effect on creativity in communication strategies. Additionally, studies should examine best practices for AI governance and regulatory compliance in strategic communication. Another relevant area involves audience perception – how do stakeholders engage with AI-generated content, and does it influence trust in organizations? Finally, cross-cultural research could provide insights into how AI adoption varies across different regulatory and organizational landscapes. Addressing these research gaps will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of AI's evolving role in strategic communication.

REFERENCES

Agarwal, S., Agarwal, B., & Gupta, R. (2022). Chatbots and virtual assistants: a bibliometric analysis. *Library Hi Tech*, 40(4), 1013-1030. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.08.024

Borenstein, J., & Howard, A. (2021). Emerging challenges in AI and the need for AI ethics education. *AI and Ethics*, 1, 61-65. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-020-00002-7

Chu-Ke, C. & Dong, Y. (2024). Misinformation and Literacies in the Era of Generative Artificial Intelligence: A Brief Overview and a Call for Future Research. *Emerging Media* 2(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2752354324124028

Creswell, J. & Poth, C. (2017). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among five approaches. Sage Publications.

Du, S., & Xie, C. (2021). Paradoxes of artificial intelligence in consumer markets: Ethical challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Business Research*, 129, 961-974.

Du, D., Zhang, Y., & Ge, J. (2023). Effect of AI Generated Content Advertising on Consumer Engagement. In International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction (pp. 121-129). Springer.

Galdas, P. (2017). Revisiting Bias in Qualitative Research: Reflections on Its Relationship with Funding and Impact. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917748

Galloway, C., & Swiatek, L. (2018). Public relations and artificial intelligence: It's not (just) about robots. *Public relations review*, 44(5), 734-740. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.10.008

Gupta, A., Hathwar, D., & Vijayakumar, A. (2020). Introduction to AI chatbots. *International Journal of Engineering Research and Technology*, 9(7), 255-258.

Haenlein, M., & Kaplan, A. (2019). A brief history of artificial intelligence: On the past, present, and future of artificial intelligence. California Management *Review*, 61(4), 5–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/0008125619864925

Heide, M., von Platen, S., Simonsson, C. & Falkheimer, J. (2018). Expanding the Scope of Strategic Communication: Towards a Holistic Understanding of Organizational Complexity. *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 12(4), 452-468. https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2018.1456434

Holmberg, N., & Mehrabov, I. (2023). Can Generative AI Replace Human Communication Professionals? Lund University [Master Thesis].

Al Khaldy, M. A., Al-Obaydi, B. A. A., & Al Shari, A. J. (2023). The impact of predictive analytics and AI on digital marketing strategy and ROI. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 15(1), 45-60. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijms.v15n1p45

King, N., Horrocks, C. & Brooks, J. (2019). Interviews in Qualitative Research. Sage Publications.

Krakowski, S., Luger, J., & Raisch, S. (2023). Artificial intelligence and the changing sources of competitive advantage. *Strategic Management Journal*, 44(6), 1425-1452. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3387

Kuner, C., Cate, F. H., Lynskey, O., Millard, C., Ni Loideain, N., & Svantesson, D. J. B. (2018). Expanding the artificial intelligence-data protection debate. *International Data Privacy Law*, 8(4), 289-292. https://doi.org/10.1093/idpl/ipy024

Li, K., Lau, B. P. L., Yuan, X., Ni, W., Guizani, M., & Yuen, C. (2023). Toward ubiquitous semantic Metaverse: Challenges, approaches, and opportunities. IEEE *Internet of Things Journal*, 10(24), 21855–21872. https://doi.org/10.1109/JIOT.2023.3302159

Mijwil, M. M., & Abttan, R. A. (2021). Artificial intelligence: a survey on evolution and future trends. *Asian Journal of Applied Sciences*, 9(2), 87-93.

Nothhaft, H., Werder, K. P., Verčič, D., & Zerfass, A. (2020). Strategic communication: Reflections on an elusive concept. In Future directions of strategic communication (pp. 24-38). Routledge.

Osei-Mensah, B., Asiamah, E. O., & Sackey, R. (2023). Strategic Communication and Artificial Intelligence: Reviewing Emerging Innovations and Future Directions. *Archives of Business Research*, 11(1). https://doi.org/10.14738/abr.111.13616

Prasad Agrawal, K. (2023). Towards adoption of Generative AI in organizational settings. *Journal of Computer Information Systems*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/08874417.2023.2240744

Ng, D. T. K., Leung, J. K. L., Chu, K. W. S., & Qiao, M. S. (2021). AI literacy: Definition, teaching, evaluation and ethical issues. *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 58(1), 504-509. https://doi.org/10.1002/pra2.487

Radanliev, P. (2025). AI Ethics: Integrating Transparency, Fairness, and Privacy in AI Development. *Applied Artificial Intelligence*, 39(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/08839514.2025.2463722

Ray, A. (2012). The Methodology of Sampling and Purposive Sampling. Grin Verlag.

Stasberger, G. D. (2023). Digital Media: Shaping Communication, Culture, and Society in the Digital Age. *Global Media Journal*, 21(64), 1-3. https://doi.org/10.36648/1550-7521.21.64.388

Stebbins, R.L. (2001). Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences: Qualitative Research Methods. Sage Publications.

Su, Z., Togay, G., & Côté, A. M. (2021). Artificial intelligence: a destructive and yet creative force in the skilled labour market. *Human Resource Development International*, 24(3), 341-352. https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2020.1818513

Taherdoost, H., & Madanchian, M. (2023). Artificial intelligence and sentiment analysis: A review in competitive research. *Computers*, 12(2), 37. https://doi.org/10.3390/computers12020037

Vanover, C., Mihas, P. & Saldaña, J. (2021). Analysing and Interpreting Qualitative Research: After the Interview. Sage Publications.

Verma, S., Sharma, R., Deb, S., & Maitra, D. (2021). Artificial intelligence in marketing: Systematic review and future research direction. *International Journal of Information Management Data Insights*, 1(1), 100002. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jjimei.2020.100002

Weller, T., & Lock, I. (2024). Automated Communication's Impact on Strategic Communication: Implications from a Systematic Review. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 19(1), 13–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2024.237

Woo, W. L. (2020). Future trends in I&M: Human-machine co-creation in the rise of AI. *IEEE Instrumentation & Measurement Magazine*, 23(2), 71-73. https://doi.org/10.1109/MIM.2020.9062691

How to cite this article:

Dias, P.; Krolow, P.; & Andrade, J. G. (2025). Torn between practicality and fear: how strategic communication professionals are adopting artificial intelligence. *International Journal of Marketing, Communication and New Media*, *Special Issue on Marketing & Business Perspectives: Transformative Insights for Marketing and Communication in the Digital Era*, May 2025, pp. 6-27.