Școala Națională de Studii Politice și Administrative

DOCTORAL THESIS ABSTRACT

Doctoral Thesis Title: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in the Implementation of Public Relations Campaigns.

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Abstract

Strategic communication, in particular, is a field where the processes of drafting, adapting, and personalizing messages are fundamental. The integration of a tool like ChatGPT requires a reassessment of the added value provided by human intervention. This research began from the central issue concerning how AI influences the quality and efficiency in the drafting of communication materials, as well as the tension between automation and creative thinking in a sector where content is not only operational but also strategic.

Within this framework, the general objectives of the research focused on understanding the concrete impact of using the ChatGPT application on the quality and duration of the drafting process for communication materials (newsletters, invitations, social media posts), as well as exploring individual and contextual factors that influence the efficiency of AI integration in professional activity. In addition to these quantitative objectives, the research aimed to capture the perceptions, attitudes, and social representations associated with AI use, to establish a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of technological adoption in the field of public relations.

The methodology of this research is based on a mixed approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, with the goal of comprehensively investigating how AI-based applications are perceived and used in the professional practice of communication and public relations. This methodological choice reflects the complexity of the formulated objectives, which involve not only the analysis of generalizable trends at the population level but also a contextualized exploration of individual experiences, perceptions, and the impact of technology on work processes within organizations.

The methodological components were selected to allow for data triangulation and verification of the formulated hypotheses from different perspectives. The quantitative survey, conducted through a standardized questionnaire, aimed to obtain systematic data regarding perceptions, media literacy levels, locus of media control, and the frequency of AI application usage among communication professionals. This instrument was applied online via the Google Forms platform over approximately two months and collected 227 valid responses from individuals professionally active in the field. The questionnaire structure was designed to measure distinct dimensions of the relationship between users and AI technologies, using Likert scale items as well as demographic variables useful for sample segmentation. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods implemented through SPSS and Excel, enabling the interpretation of correlations between variables and the testing of formulated hypotheses.

The experimental component of the research was organized to evaluate the impact of using the ChatGPT application on the time required for drafting and the quality of content produced by professionals. The experiment took place in two controlled sessions within a professional environment, involving 20 individuals active in the communication field, divided into two groups: an experimental group using ChatGPT and a control group drafting texts without technological assistance. Participants were selected based on clear eligibility criteria and were asked to draft three types of materials: a newsletter, an official invitation, and a professional social media post. The time required for each task was individually timed, and the texts were subsequently evaluated by a jury of three independent specialists, using a standardized grid that included criteria such as clarity, coherence, stylistic appropriateness, and logical structuring. The results were statistically analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test for group differences and Spearman's correlation coefficient for the relationship between time and quality, highlighting efficiency patterns and potential difficulties in technology use.

In addition to the quantitative and experimental components, the research also included a qualitative dimension, consisting of 21 in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted either online or face-to-face, depending on participants' availability, between November 1, 2024, and February 15, 2025. Respondents were selected using the "snowball sampling" method, starting from an initial base of professionals active in communication agencies and subsequently expanded through referrals. The interviewees' profiles were diverse, including both individuals in management positions and specialists directly involved in drafting, strategy, and campaign implementation. The interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions formulated to explore perceptions regarding AI efficiency, its impact on professional skills, team adaptation, and organizational transformations generated by the integration of emerging technologies.

The responses were transcribed and anonymously coded, being used in thematic analysis to identify recurring discursive patterns and emerging themes relevant to the research objectives. This approach allowed the quantitative data to be complemented with detailed information on organizational change processes, internal team dynamics, and ways of relating to new competencies required by AI use in communication.

Through this complex methodological approach, the research not only tests specific hypotheses but also contributes to shaping an integrated interpretative framework on the current role AI occupies in professional communication practice. Furthermore, clarifying performance differences according to familiarity with technology, participant age, or writing style adds depth to understanding the real impact of artificial intelligence on cognitive work. The major contribution of the study lies precisely in this dual anchoring: in the analysis of empirical data and in problematizing the process of AI integration as part of a broader reconfiguration of communication professions.

The originality of this approach lies not only in the application of a triangulated methodology but also in firmly anchoring the research in the local professional context, which provides conclusions relevant to the Romanian communication market. In a field dominated by polarization, the research proposes a balanced and reflective approach, where AI is analyzed not as a substitute for human thinking but as a technological partner whose benefits and limitations must be understood within the specific context of its use.

The research results provide a broad and detailed perspective on how AI-based applications, especially ChatGPT, are integrated into communication and public relations activities in Romania. Through a mixed-methods approach, which included qualitative interviews, a controlled experiment, and a quantitative questionnaire survey, the research aimed to investigate both perceptions and actual practitioner performance in using these technologies.

The qualitative interviews revealed a predominantly positive perception of AI, seen more as an operational partner rather than a substitute for creativity. Interviewed practitioners described frequent uses of ChatGPT in tasks such as initial content drafting, idea structuring, and brainstorming. However, reservations were also expressed regarding style homogenization, dependency risks, and the dilution of authorial responsibility. Organizational culture and the level of professional experience were two major factors influencing the degree of AI integration in work processes.

The questionnaire results confirmed that the frequency of AI use is closely linked to the level of digital literacy and the perception of control over the information environment. Respondents confident in their ability to filter information and operate in digital environments were also the most open to the strategic use of AI-based applications. Familiarity with technology and direct experience using ChatGPT proved to be relevant predictors of perceived satisfaction and efficiency.

The results of the controlled experiment, focused on comparing two groups of practitioners—Group 1 (frequent ChatGPT users) and Group 2 (occasional users or those not currently using the application)—provided important clarifications. Contrary to initial hypotheses, Group 1 recorded significantly longer drafting times than Group 2 for all three types of texts (newsletter, invitation, and social media post). This outcome disproved the hypothesis that AI usage automatically leads to greater time efficiency. A possible explanation lies in the fact that frequent users dedicated more time to editing, critically evaluating, and adjusting the generated content, which extended the overall working time.

Regarding the quality of the texts, the hypothesis that ChatGPT use would result in superior quality was not supported. Group 2 achieved significantly higher scores across all content types evaluated. This suggests that mere AI integration does not guarantee superior outcomes and that the manner of use, professional judgment, and ability to adapt the generated content play essential roles. Without consistent human intervention, the produced texts may become standardized and less contextually relevant.

Moreover, analysis of the correlations between drafting time and text quality revealed an interesting phenomenon: in both groups, but especially in the control group, significant negative correlations were found. This means that spending more time on drafting is not associated with higher quality; rather, the opposite is true. These results confirm the hypothesis that work style, task familiarity, and drafting strategy can influence efficiency and performance. The tendency to spend more time on a text does not necessarily translate into better quality, but may reflect indecision, perfectionism, or lack of clear structuring guidelines.

Participant age proved to be a significant factor in differentiating performance. Younger practitioners, more exposed to digital environments and more flexible in interacting with AI, demonstrated a smoother integration of the application into the drafting process. They achieved, on average, higher scores in quality assessments, suggesting a more efficient adaptation to new technological tools. These results support conclusions from the specialized literature indicating that age and digital experience influence the manner of use and performance associated with emerging technologies.

Therefore, the experiment results support a complex interpretation: ChatGPT can assist the drafting process, but its benefits largely depend on the usage context, user competencies, and activity goals. AI does not automatically guarantee efficiency or quality; it becomes a valuable tool only when used discerningly, within a well-defined working framework and with an adequate level of professional training. From this perspective, ChatGPT and similar technologies can be effectively integrated into the communication field, provided a reflective and adaptable digital culture is developed.

The integration of AI in communication processes reflects a broader transition in defining professional identity: from roles based exclusively on individual creativity to a collaborative model in which algorithms become cognitive partners. This transformation demands new skills, ranging from prompt writing and critical evaluation to stylistic adaptation and discursive responsibility. The main conclusion of the research is that AI does not replace strategic thinking but can extend, complement, and support it—provided users are aware of both the limits and the real potential of these tools.

By correlating qualitative and quantitative data, the research shows that AI is not just a functional instrument but a systemic change agent in communication. The transformation is not uniform but constantly negotiated, involving adaptations at the level of roles, values, competencies, and processes. Efficiency and productivity are no longer defined solely by speed but by the ability to filter, interpret, and contextualize generated content. AI thus becomes a catalyst for a new professional paradigm, where the human and the automated coexist in a critically strategic complementary relationship.