Strengthening Public Relations Practitioners' Capacity to Address Artificial Intelligence Challenges

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Article Information

Abstract

The emergence of digital tools like artificial intelligence (AI) presents unique challenges to public relations practices, making it crucial for practitioners to understand these dynamics and strengthen their competencies for the digital transformation era. A Community Service Team conducted a "Workshop on Enhancing the Capacity of Public Relations Practitioners in Facing the Challenges and Threats of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Digital Public Relations Practices" in Room 7.2, Building C, FISIP, Universitas Brawijaya, on Tuesday, August 20, 2024. This community service activity falls under problem-based, experiential, and real-world project-based learning methods, specifically Problem-Based Learning, in the form of training/workshops. Its primary objective is enhancing theoretical knowledge and strengthening foundational skills in utilizing AI to formulate effective digital PR strategies. The workshop underscores the critical need for PR professionals to enhance their digital literacy, particularly in AI, to remain competitive in an increasingly digital and data-driven environment.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of information and communication technology (ICT) has profoundly transformed public relations (PR) practices, ushering in an era of unprecedented innovation and complexity. Among these advancements, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Data stand out as transformative forces, enabling PR professionals to adapt to dynamic global changes and foster more effective relationship management. The integration of these technologies has become indispensable for understanding public opinion, monitoring trends, and crafting strategic communication efforts (Whatmough, 2018). Public relations practitioners must view the Internet as their primary medium for direct communication with the public (Moore & Hübscher, 2021). Today, public relations practice is more competitive (Permatasari et al., 2021). In this era, public relations professionals are competing not only with other professionals but also with machines capable of generating press releases, managing schedules, and predicting future events and strategic actions for an organization (Abdullah, 2020). The accessibility of the Internet has enabled public

relations professionals to engage in two-way communication between organizations and the public, aligning with the concept of interactivity (Kelleher, 2018).

Despite these advancements, the lack of digital competencies among PR practitioners remains a pressing issue, particularly in Indonesia. Research highlights that while many practitioners have adapted to using digital communication tools, they often lack practical skills in analyzing large volumes of data from online and social media platforms. This gap hampers their ability to maximize the potential of digital PR strategies, pointing to an urgent need for training and competency development in digital data analytics (Wulandari & Wachid, 2022). Moreover, integrating Big Data and AI has yielded significant advantages, including expanded knowledge, staying updated with trends, and increased creativity. However, these benefits are heavily reliant on sufficient digital literacy, which remains inconsistent across PR professionals in Indonesia (Wulandari, 2023). This inconsistency in digital literacy is reflected in the low mastery of tools such as Google Analytics and Big Data Analytics,

critical technologies that can provide insights to enhance PR practices (Wulandari, 2023). We can observe digital public relations practices through websites, blogs, and social media platforms to communicate or deliver organizational messages to the public or stakeholders. As such, digital communication platforms have become integral to how society interacts and operates (Hutabarat, 2022; Kim, 2019; Mizanie & Irwansyah, 2019).

The era of PR 4.0 has further emphasized the importance of integrating Big Data and AI with existing media platforms. This era facilitates two-way communication between organizations and their public, fostering interactivity and transparency (Wulandari, 2023). However, the digital transformation in Indonesia presents uneven adoption across industries. Many organizations continue to struggle with leveraging AI and Big Data effectively, leaving significant room for improvement in the strategic application of these tools. Addressing these challenges ensures Indonesian PR professionals can compete in a rapidly evolving global digital landscape (Wulandari, 2023). The study by Ananda, Sultan, and Karnay (2022) on corporate public relations in Indonesia highlights that the integration of big data and AI has provided three significant benefits for practitioners in this field: expanded knowledge, enhanced ability to stay current with the latest trends, and the development of creativity. Public relations practitioners must possess adequate digital literacy skills to improve their knowledge acquisition.

AI will continue to evolve in the field of PR, providing more efficient, accurate, and measurable solutions for managing communication and organizational reputation (Wulandari, 2023). The use of AI in PR, ranging from media monitoring and message personalization to crisis management, opens up significant opportunities to enhance audience engagement and optimize communication strategies. It has been demonstrated through several case studies that have occurred in Indonesia, such as the public sentiment monitoring implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of chatbots for various company applications (for example, Veronika from PT. Telkomsel), algorithms for content personalization applied by Bukalapak, and content automation features previously implemented by Katalis Digital Indonesia. Recent case studies show that organizations in Indonesia have started to leverage AI to improve communication effectiveness and address the challenges in the increasingly complex world of PR.

The issues mentioned above have empirically occurred among the members of one of Indonesia's PR organizations, PERHUMAS Malang Raya. The Indonesian Public Relations Association (PERHUMAS) is a professional organization for public relations and communication practitioners in Indonesia, founded on December 15, 1972. The Ministry of Home Affairs (DEPDAGRI), Indonesia's national public relations organization, and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), based in London, officially registered PERHUMAS. PERHUMAS aims to enhance professional skills, broaden and deepen knowledge, improve contact and experience exchange among members, and establish relationships with similar organizations both domestically and internationally. Based on observations conducted by the team, several issues have been identified among PERHUMAS Malang Raya members in addressing the challenges of AI in their daily work, as presented in Fig. 1.
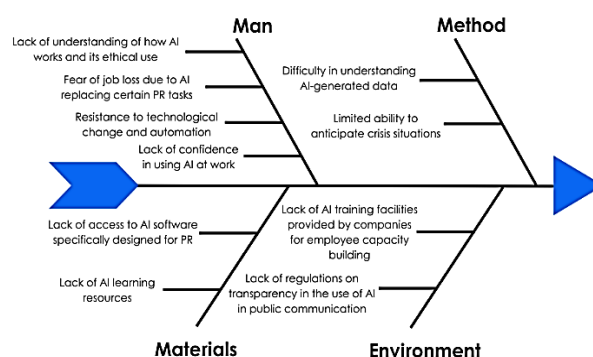

Fig. 1. AI challenges for PR practitioners

Given these challenges, this study focuses on equipping PR practitioners with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate the evolving digital landscape. By examining the dimensions of human resources, accessibility, political systems, legal and regulatory frameworks, and ethical codes, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of digital PR practices in Indonesia while offering actionable strategies to enhance digital competencies among practitioners. Furthermore, the study highlights the critical role of AI and Big Data in shaping PR practices, ensuring professionals remain adaptable and relevant in this dynamic era.

Artificial intelligence (AI) presents significant challenges and threats in the field of public relations. One of the primary challenges is the paradigm shift in information management and stakeholder interaction. Although AI can enhance efficiency in data analysis and decision-making, the success of public relations relies on a deep understanding of social dynamics and complex contexts. AI's ability to generate content and interact with the public can threaten authenticity and trust, as it often lacks the human touch in communication. Another threat is the potential loss of traditional public relations jobs due to the automation of routine tasks, which could undermine the human element in the profession.

Additionally, using AI to analyze and store sensitive data heightens data security risks, raising concerns about privacy and ethics. Awareness of these impacts is crucial in developing balanced public relations policies and practices, combining AI's strengths with human expertise to ensure effective, authentic, and responsible communication in this digital era.

Thus, this outreach or training program comprehensively addresses how public relations practitioners can enhance their capacity to face the threats and challenges arising from the role of AI in digital public relations practices. First, participants will gain a deep understanding of AI's basic concepts and how this technology is transforming the digital communication landscape. Next, the training will explain how to identify AI's potential positive and negative impacts on the public relations profession. Additionally, the program will provide in-depth insights into the ethics of using AI in digital public relations, focusing on data privacy, transparency, and information security. We will encourage participants to understand and incorporate ethical practices relevant to using AI in their public relations endeavors. By the end of the training, we expect public relations practitioners to integrate their new knowledge and skills to respond wisely to the changes AI brings about in digital public relations practices.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This community service activity falls under problem-based, experiential, and real-world project-based learning methods, specifically Problem-Based Learning, in the form of training/workshops. The title of this activity is "Enhancing the Capacity of Public Relations Practitioners to Address Threats and Challenges from Artificial Intelligence." It is scheduled to take place from April to August 2024. The location of the activity will be in Building C, Room 7.2, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Brawijaya (FISIP UB), with the program targeting members of PERHUMAS (Indonesian Public Relations Association) in the Malang Raya area.

Fig. 2 illustrates the flowchart outlines a structured three-stage process for a training program. The first stage, preparation, focuses on laying the groundwork by conducting a preliminary observation and coordinating with PERHUMAS to understand the target audience's problems and needs. This step ensures that the training content and materials are effectively tailored and the necessary technical preparations are made. The insights gained during this phase are crucial for the second stage, implementation, where the actual training and hands-on practice take place. Scheduled for August 20, 2024, the training will be conducted in person at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP) at

Universitas Brawijaya, enabling participants to engage with the content directly. The success of this stage is heavily reliant on the solid foundation set during the preparation Phase, as the materials and technical setup must be aligned with the needs identified earlier. The third stage, evaluation, is divided into two parts: The first evaluation happens immediately after the workshop. The training effectiveness is measured using pre-and post-test questionnaires. Six months later, a second evaluation occurs to assess the long-term impact and retention of the skills learned. These evaluations are directly connected to the preparation and implementation stages, as the pre-test and post-tests are designed based on the needs identified in the first stage. In contrast, the second evaluation helps determine the lasting impact of the training. This three-stage process ensures the training is relevant and practical, with evaluations informing future improvements.
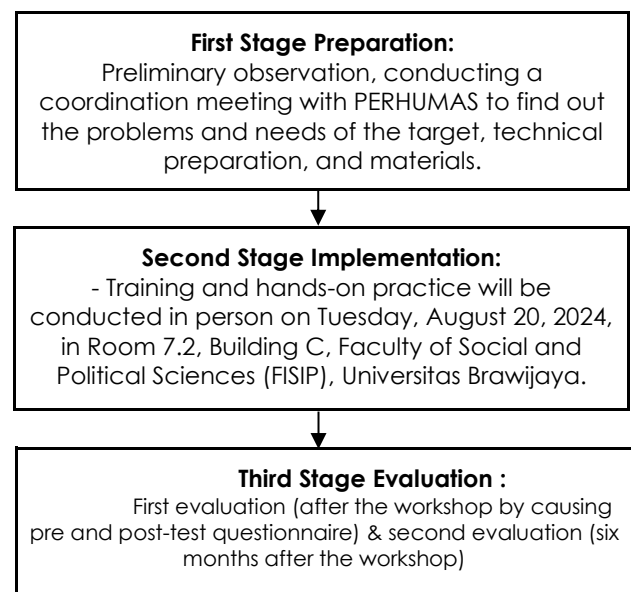
First Stage Preparation:
Preliminary observation, conducting a coordination meeting with PERHUMAS to find out the problems and needs of the target, technical preparation, and materials.

Second Stage Implementation:
- Training and hands-on practice will be conducted in person on Tuesday, August 20, 2024, in Room 7.2, Building C, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP), Universitas Brawijaya.

Third Stage Evaluation :
First evaluation (after the workshop by causing pre and post-test questionnaire) & second evaluation (six months after the workshop)

Fig. 2. Community service activity

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The workshop held in Room 7.2 of Building C at FISIP Universitas Brawijaya was a key component of the community service program. Its primary objective was enhancing theoretical knowledge and strengthening foundational skills in utilizing AI to formulate effective digital PR strategies. The workshop successfully involved 35 participants, all of whom were PERHUMAS Malang Raya members. The involvement of participants who are all actively engaged in the field of public relations facilitates the exchange of knowledge and experience relevant to their daily work contexts. The workshop facilitators consisted of professionals in the field of public relations with extensive experience, mainly focusing on digital public relations.

Fig. 3. Community service workshop

It can be seen from Fig. 3 that the first speaker, Maulina Pia Wulandari, S.Sos., M.Kom., Ph.D., discussed the current state of digital public relations practice in Indonesia during the era of big data and AI, along with the key elements for addressing these challenges. Mrs. Pia emphasized that a transformation in the public relations landscape, referred to as PR 4.0, has taken place, with social media significantly influencing this shift. Thanks to digital systems, tasks such as issue monitoring, public sentiment analysis, and others have become easier to manage. Therefore, we should not view AI as a replacement for humans but rather as a tool that can enhance human capabilities (Daugherty & Wilson, 2018).

In addition to discussing the state of digital public relations in Indonesia, Mrs. Pia also highlighted several key elements that public relations practitioners can use to face the challenges posed by PR 4.0. According to her, public relations practitioners must be capable of monitoring public issues and utilizing this information to plan effective communication strategies. Thus, big data becomes essential in public relations practice in the digital era, serving as a crucial source of information for understanding audience characteristics. Big data in public affairs offers new opportunities for real-time insights into behavioral patterns (Mergel et al., 2016).

Fig. 4. Maulina Pia Wulandari in the community service workshop

As seen in Fig. 4, the speaker said that AI helps public relations professionals by making technical tasks easier (but not at the managerial level), making it easier to understand and analyze other people's communication, helping with social listening to see how problems are developing, automating tasks, organizing and deconstructing data, and looking at current trends to find phenomena so that data-driven strategies can be made instead of relying on gut feelings. Francesco Marconi's research aligns with this, emphasizing using artificial intelligence (AI) to optimize research procedures and communication tactics by forecasting audience behavior through predictive analytics (Marconi, 2020).

Nevertheless, a practitioner's failure to comprehend AI data could result in inaccuracies in data interpretation, excessive dependence on AI, lack of personalization, user privacy violations, and ethical dilemmas. Presently, the proficiency level of sentiment analysis based on big data among public relations practitioners in Indonesia stands at a mere 44%. Most of these practitioners depend on third-party entities to perform big data analysis. In addition, Mrs. Pia highlighted that fundamental components for executing digital PR in Indonesia encompass human resources, the political structure, legislation and regulations, accessibility, and the code of ethics. Undoubtedly, we cannot dismiss the existence of digital technology, so we must confront it by augmenting our ability to excel in digital technology. One approach is to investigate material thoroughly and consistently acquire new skills pertinent to AI technology to maintain competitiveness in the digital age (Schwab et al., 2020).

The second presenter, Dr. I Made Ariya Sanjaya, S.T., M.T., delivered a presentation on "Challenges and Threats of AI in Digital PR" during an online Zoom meeting. In his presentation, Mr. Ariya clarified the differences between the terms "digital" and "online," often perceived as interchangeable. Within the realm of public relations, the term "digital" refers to the utilization of artificial intelligence (AI). However, it is crucial to understand that you can apply AI in both online and offline contexts. For instance, TV is a digital product, not exclusively online, whereas YouTube is both a digital and online product.

As seen in Fig. 5, drawing upon this differentiation, Mr. Ariya defined digitalization within public relations as utilizing digital technology to revolutionize business paradigms and offer novel prospects for generating value-added output. Digitalization is intricately connected to technology, so it is imperative to fully utilize technology in accordance with the three primary indicators of effective technology use in the framework of Society 5.0: comfort, vitality, and overall quality of life. Digitization has significantly transformed several aspects of the public relations industry, including interactions with the media,

stakeholders, and influencers. According to experts, 55 out of 59 viewpoints (Cataldas & Ozgen, 2023) indicate that digital public relations efforts in the future will undoubtedly rely on collaboration between humans and artificial intelligence.

Fig. 5. I Made Ariya Sanjaya via zoom meeting

Artificial intelligence (AI) is undoubtedly an important subject when examining digitalization. Mr. Ariya also addressed the potential of AI to revolutionize our lives by modifying current information processing and future service delivery paradigms. Thus, in the age of artificial intelligence, public relations professionals must cultivate the following competencies: AI prompting, proficient communication, strategic analysis, ingenuity, relationship establishment, media relations, and crisis management. In order to provide well-informed advice, public relations professionals need to have a comprehensive knowledge of the current and future applications of artificial intelligence (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018).

The third speaker was Karolus Danar Kurniawan, S.I.Kom., M.I.Kom., who presented a seminar titled "Artificial Intelligence in Public Relations: Tools or Threats." The workshop focused on addressing the apprehension of public relations professionals towards AI, which motivated the topic selection. Rapid technological advancements have transform-ed various industries, including public relations, into digital platforms. However, many public relations professionals remain uninformed about the presence of AI, its potential as either a tool or a threat, and the possibility of computers replacing human tasks. To address these concerns, the session provided Perhumas with extensive insights into artificial intelligence's potential benefits and risks in digital public relations. Additionally, participants were given hands-on training and practical exercises on creating prompts for AI tools such as ChatGPT and Co-Pilot, which can be utilized for tasks like audience analysis, press release creation, communication strategy planning, and more.

Fig. 6. Karolus Danar Kurniawan in the community service workshop

In Fig. 6, the speaker discussed the era of digital disruption; effectively overcoming the advancement of artificial intelligence requires individuals to have adequate adaptability, critical thinking skills, and interpersonal skills (Masrichah, 2023). It supports Mr. Danar's statement that artificial intelligence (AI) will not replace the human factor in public relations (PR), as PR has the advantage of establishing emotional bonds. Although humans primarily concentrate on activities that demand creativity, intuition, and emotional comprehension, artificial intelligence (AI) can manage technical and repetitive (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015). Although artificial intelligence (AI) can generate the first version of a press release or data analysis within the public relations (PR) realm, the people are responsible for the ultimate customizing process and strategic options. As a result, artificial intelligence (AI) does not pose a threat because it can function as a facilitator to optimize activities, particularly in the realm of public relations.

Furthermore, Mr. Danar displayed a graph from Muck Rack's State of AI in PR_2024, illustrating that the percentage of public relations professionals utilizing generative AI has increased by over two-fold, rising from 28% in March to 64% in November. Therefore, public relations professionals are very cognizant of and benefit from the involvement of generative artificial intelligence in executing their public relations strategies. Hence, Mr. Danar emphasized that an Indonesian public relations practitioner should perceive AI as a tool rather than a nuisance since it can potentially augment the efficiency of public relations activities. Using AI enables public relations professionals to execute activities such as content creation and data analysis with incredible speed and effectiveness (Bourne, 2019).

Nevertheless, there are several factors that public relations professionals must take into account while using AI. Firstly, delivering the appropriate instruction or prompt to achieve a flawless task necessitates a methodical approach. Secondly, give careful consideration to ethics. Implementing ethical

Table 1. Changes resulting from service activities

Initial Condition	Intervention	Condition Change
PR practitioners are still unaware of how AI works and its ethical considerations.	Providing materials about the basic concepts of AI and its ethical use.	There were changes in knowledge among 32 participants regarding basic concepts of AI and its ethical use.
There is a lack of confidence in using AI due to the limited ability of PR practitioners to leverage AI to support their daily work.	Providing basic training to PR practitioners to enhance their skills in operating AI tools such as ChatGPT and CoPilot.	There is an increase in self-confidence due to the improvement in abilities among 28 participants in using basic skills with ChatGPT and CoPilot to support their work as PR practitioners (developing PR strategies, producing PR campaign content, etc.)
PR practitioners still have a low awareness of the importance of understanding that AI is a tool, not a threat.	Providing materials to enhance PR practitioners' understanding that AI can be optimally utilized to support PR performance.	There were changes in the knowledge aspect among 28 participants regarding the benefits of AI and its potential to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and innovation in various aspects of PR work.

principles in AI use is critical to upholding the honesty and reliability of public relations activities. Hence, Mr. Danar emphasized that PERHUMAS, in its capacity as a member, has a pivotal function in overseeing and formulating ethics and rules for the use of AI, thereby guaranteeing that this technology improves rather than weakens the interaction between organizations and the public. The ethical principles cover data collection, storage, and usage, together with the transparency and accountability of communications generated by artificial intelligence (Bostrom & Yudkowsky, 2014).

Before the workshop began, we distributed a pre-test questionnaire to the 35 participants. The results indicated that all respondents were aware of AI, but only 43% understood its workings and ethical considerations. Additionally, 46% of respondents reported that their companies had implemented AI in daily operations, but only 20% of these companies provided training on AI usage. Furthermore, 71% of respondents expressed a lack of confidence in using AI for their tasks, and 80% felt that AI would threaten their jobs as PR practitioners.

This workshop helped PR practitioners better understand AI's role as an emerging technology in their daily work and enhanced their foundational skills in utilizing AI (Tabel 1). Upon completing the workshop, we distributed a post-test questionnaire (Fig. 7, Fig. 8, and Fig. 9), to the 35 participants, which revealed a significant increase in understanding of AI usage and ethics—from 43% initially to 92%. After receiving the materials, practicing basic prompt creation for PR strategies, and developing PR campaign content using ChatGPT and Co-Pilot, 80% of respondents reported feeling more confident in using AI for their tasks. Furthermore, 80% of

respondents stated that AI would not threaten their jobs but rather serve as a supportive tool in completing their assignments.
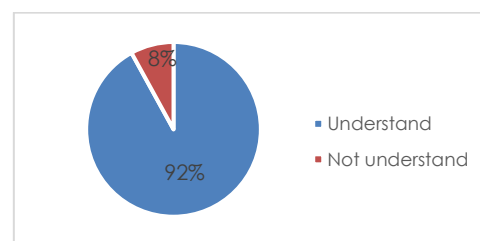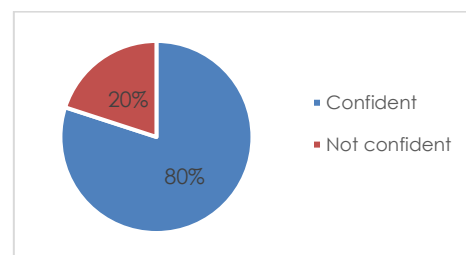

Fig. 7. Understanding of AI usage and ethics

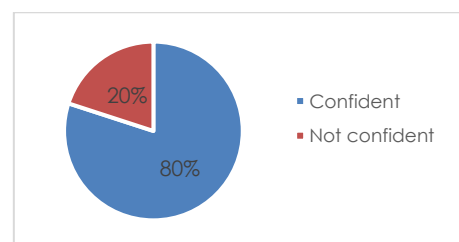**Fig. 8.** Feeling more confident in using AI for their tasks

Fig. 9. Believing in AI would not threaten jobs but rather support assignments

CONCLUSION

The workshop underscores the critical need for PR professionals to enhance their digital literacy, particularly in AI, to remain competitive in an increasingly digital and data-driven environment. Key findings suggest that effective AI integration in PR requires continuous skill development and a proactive approach to embracing technological advancements. By equipping PR practitioners with the right tools and knowledge, they can not only navigate the challenges of AI but also harness its full potential to drive strategic communications.

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