

KNOWLEDGE AND USAGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) TOOLS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN EBONYI STATE

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Abstract

This research looked into how well public relations professionals in Ebonyi State know and use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. The focus was on members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Ebonyi State Chapter. The study was based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and aimed to find out how aware PR practitioners are of AI tools, which ones they commonly use, how much AI has changed their work, and what factors like infrastructure, organization, and policies affect the use of AI in PR. The study used a descriptive survey approach. The total number of registered NIPR members in Ebonyi State was 73 (as per NIPR, 2025). Using purposive sampling, 70 participants who had knowledge and experience with AI in PR were chosen. Data was gathered through both open- and closed-ended questionnaires and analyzed using frequency tables. The results showed that PR professionals have a high level of awareness but only moderate knowledge and use of AI tools like ChatGPT, Canva, and Grammarly. The study found that strong policy support and training programs are essential for successfully integrating AI into public relations work.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Public Relations, Technology Acceptance Model, Ebonyi State, NIPR, Digital Communication.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has grown from philosophical ideas and early symbolic systems into a wide range of data-driven techniques that now support many areas of social, economic, and organizational life. According to Delipetrev, Tsinaraki, and Kostić, in their JRC Technical Report (2023), the field has gone through clear phases: a period of early conceptual work in the 1950s, the rise of expert systems, periods of slowdown known as “AI winters,” and from the 1990s onward, the steady development of machine learning, and more recently, deep learning methods that work well with large datasets and strong computing power. This history helps explain why modern AI is not just one technique but a group of tools, such as natural language processing, classification and clustering algorithms, recommendation systems, chatbots, and sentiment analysis that help automate tasks like pattern recognition and decision-making, which used to be done by humans (Delipetrev, JRC 2023).

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) dates back to the middle of the 20th century when scholars and computer scientists started thinking about how to make machines that could imitate human intelligence. The idea was formally introduced by John McCarthy in 1956 at the Dartmouth Conference, which is considered the start of AI as an academic field (Russell & Norvig, 2021). In the early days, AI focused on symbolic reasoning and problem-solving, but progress was limited by slow computers and not enough data. By the 1980s, the field made progress with the development of expert systems, which let computers make decisions based on rules that were programmed in advance (Nilsson, 2014). However, the big change in AI's global use happened in the 21st century, thanks to improvements in machine learning, big data analysis, and cloud computing, which allowed computers to learn patterns on their own and handle complex cognitive tasks (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019).

Artificial intelligence (AI) has gone from being just ideas about how machines can think to become a real and widespread technology that affects many areas of our lives. In the 1950s, people started thinking about AI through the idea of symbolic logic and how machines could represent knowledge. Early thinkers like Alan Turing and John McCarthy suggested that machines could mimic parts of how humans think. Over the years, AI has had cycles of excitement and challenges, known as "AI winters," but it has bounced back with better computer power, more data, and improved learning methods (Delipetrev, Tsinaraki, & Kostić, 2021).

Today, AI includes things like machine learning, natural language processing, robotics, and predictive analytics. These technologies are now part of everyday systems in areas like communication, education, healthcare, and government around the world. They have changed the way organizations handle information, make decisions, and connect with people (Nikolova, 2024).

AI is now a key part of many industries globally, including healthcare, finance, education, and communication. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2017) say that the Fourth Industrial Revolution has sped up the use of AI in business communication, automation, and decision-making, changing how companies work with their customers and partners. In public relations and communication strategies, AI tools like predictive analytics, natural language processing, and sentiment analysis have transformed how people connect with audiences and manage their reputation (Griffin & Dunn, 2021). Countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and China are leading in AI use, with their communication industries using data-driven tools to improve content creation, monitor crises, and send personalized messages (Mikalef, 2021).

In Africa, AI is starting to be adopted, but it's moving more slowly because of issues like poor infrastructure, weak policies, and a lack of education. According to Ndemo and Weiss (2017), AI use in Sub-Saharan

Africa is not even, with countries like South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, and Egypt making progress in using AI in areas like government, farming, and media. The UNESCO (2021) report on AI and Africa's digital future points out that not enough investment in digital infrastructure and research is holding back bigger AI projects. Still, communication experts in Africa are using AI tools for social media monitoring, creating content automatically, and checking public opinion, especially in cities with better internet access (Ifeanyi, 2022).

In Nigeria, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) has started to grow quickly, thanks to the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy Framework introduced by the Federal Government along with the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA, 2022). Nigerian academics and professionals see AI as a powerful tool that can change different areas, including journalism, marketing, and public relations (Okon, 2023). However, the use of AI in public relations is still in its early stages, and there aren't many studies that look at how professional PR experts actually use it. Research by Ogbona and Nwosu (2021) found that while Nigerian communication professionals know about AI tools, they are still figuring out how to use them day to day. This is because of a lack of technical training, worries about ethics, and not enough good infrastructure. In the field of public relations, AI has helped professionals by making tasks easier through automation and data analysis. It provides tools for grouping audiences, keeping track of media in real time, making content automatically, and understanding public feelings (Zerfass, Hagelstein, & Tench, 2020). Around the world, PR experts are using AI to improve campaign effectiveness, manage their reputation, and connect better with stakeholders. But there's a challenge in making sure these benefits are balanced with honesty, openness, and responsible behavior (Yue, 2024).

Even though AI is spreading globally, how much it's used and its effects vary a lot from one part of the world to another. In Africa, writers like

Nikolova (2024) have talked about both the good possibilities and the difficulties that come with AI development on the continent. On the positive side, AI is seen as a tool that can drive progress in areas like health, farming, education, and government if it's tailored to local needs and data. But on the other hand, scholars like Owoyemi, Owoyemi, Osiyemi, and Boyd (2020) point out major issues such as poor digital infrastructure, lack of high-quality local data, shortages of skilled workers, and weak policies for AI governance in many African countries. These problems mean that African engagement with AI is not uniform and often relies on experimental projects, tools developed outside the continent, or local startups (Gwagwa, 2021; Owoyemi, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

The growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in global communication has greatly changed how public relations (PR) professionals work. It has changed the way they collect information, make content, and interact with people they communicate with. In developed countries, PR professionals are increasingly using AI-powered tools like sentiment analysis software, chatbots, data analytics, and automated media monitoring. These tools help them work more accurately, quickly, and with personalized messages. These changes have redefined what PR jobs involve, putting more focus on using data and making predictions based on that data.

However, even though AI is changing how people communicate around the world, its effect and how it's being used in African countries, especially Nigeria, are not well studied or documented.

Some previous studies in Nigeria and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa have looked at how aware people are of AI and how it's being used in communication. For example, Oduenyi (2024) looked at AI in Nigerian PR and found that while professionals saw potential in using AI strategically, they were only using it for basic tasks like social media monitoring and automated replies. Similarly, Agbo and Okereke (2024) studied AI in the oil

and gas industry and found that its use was limited to simple analytics tools. Olowu (2025) looked at AI in banks in Abuja and found that people had some awareness of it but not enough institutional support or ethical guidelines. In Ghana, Anani-Bossman (2024) noticed similar patterns, where PR professionals were cautiously optimistic about AI but faced challenges like lack of skills and high costs.

Because of this, this study aims to explore how AI is changing public relations practices in Nigeria. It will look at how AI is reshaping communication strategies, professional skills, and ethical issues that PR practitioners face. The study will also look at the structural and institutional factors that either help or block this change. The results are expected to give both scholars and professionals a better understanding of how AI is influencing communication in Nigeria's changing environment.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in transforming public relations practices among members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Ebonyi State Chapter.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the level of awareness and knowledge of Artificial Intelligence tools among public relations practitioners in Ebonyi State.
2. Identify the types of AI tools commonly used by PR practitioners in Ebonyi State.
3. Assess the extent to which AI technologies have transformed PR functions among PR practitioners in Ebonyi State.
4. Examine the infrastructural, organizational, and policy factors that influence the adoption and utilization of AI tools in public relations practice in Ebonyi State.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of awareness and knowledge of Artificial Intelligence tools among public relations practitioners in Ebonyi State?.
2. What are the types of AI tools commonly used by PR practitioners in Ebonyi State.?
3. What is the extent to which AI technologies have transformed PR functions among PR practitioners in Ebonyi State?
4. What are the infrastructural, organizational, and policy factors that influence the adoption and utilization of AI tools in public relations practice in Ebonyi State.?

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

Definition and Explanation of Public Relations for This Study

Public relations has grown into a recognized profession because organizations need to handle their communication and relationships with various groups in a more complex world. Its roots can be traced back to early methods of influencing people and structured communication, which eventually became part of management, focusing on reputation, trust, and shared understanding. Today, public relations is seen as part of strategic communication, aiming to connect organizational goals with the public's interests through planned and ongoing efforts (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Basically, public relations is a management function that builds and keeps good relationships between an organization and the groups that support its success. This definition shows how public relations is about relationships, which is different from advertising and marketing, which are more about making a transaction. Experts say that good public relations depends on research, planning, communication, and assessment to create

understanding, goodwill, and teamwork between organizations and those who are important to them (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2013). From a practical point of view, public relations includes tasks like dealing with the media, handling crises, connecting with the community, involving stakeholders, and managing the company's reputation. These tasks follow principles like two-way communication, ethical behavior, and being attentive to public views. Grunig's two-way symmetrical model highlights the importance of conversation and feedback in professional public relations, especially in democratic and diverse societies (Grunig, 2001). In Africa, public relations is often viewed as a way to promote development, social responsibility, and legitimacy for organizations. African scholars point out that public relations practices there are influenced by the region's cultural, political, and developmental factors. Research from Nigeria and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa shows that public relations is key in managing how an organization is seen, building public trust, and handling relationships with stakeholders in both government and private sectors (Molleda & Alhassan, 2020).

In Nigeria, public relations is officially seen as a professional and managerial field, overseen by the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. Nigerian experts describe public relations as a thoughtful, organized, and ongoing process aimed at building and keeping a good relationship between an organization and the people it interacts with. This explanation matches international standards but also includes local practices and community expectations, making public relations both a way of managing an organization and a method of communication (Nwosu & Uffoh, 2015).

AI Development and Adoption in Africa

Over the past ten years, the discussion around AI has become more important in Africa as government officials and researchers see its ability to help speed up social and economic growth. Owoyemi, Owoyemi, Osiyemi, and Boyd (2020) say that AI can bring big changes to healthcare, agriculture,

and education, but only if it is adapted to the local situations. However, the continent's experience with AI is not the same everywhere because of problems like poor infrastructure, few people with digital skills, and not enough strong policies (Gwagwa, 2021).

Gwagwa (2021) points out that while countries like Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria are becoming centers for AI, most African nations are still just starting to explore it. Often, they use technology from outside the continent, which may not fit with local values and needs. African experts stress that AI development should not just be a transfer of technology from the Global North, but a process that is controlled locally, based on inclusive innovation and ownership of data.

In the field of communication, Anani-Bossman (2024) mentions that although AI tools are slowly being introduced into media and public relations in Ghana, full use of these tools is limited by a lack of technical knowledge and low readiness within organizations. Similar patterns are seen across Sub-Saharan Africa, where AI adoption in communication and public relations is mostly just experimenting rather than being fully accepted as part of the system.

Nigeria has become one of Africa's most active places for AI innovation and use. Owoyemi (2020) highlights the growing group of data scientists and startups in Nigeria using AI to tackle local issues, especially in healthcare diagnostics and financial technology. However, challenges like unreliable electricity, poor internet coverage, and a lack of data centers continue to slow progress (Ogunbodede, 2025).

When it comes to policy, Nigeria introduced its National Artificial Intelligence Policy Draft in 2022, showing the federal government's commitment to AI research, education, and governance. But many scholars say that putting the policy into action is still not strong enough, and that there are not enough institutional structures for AI ethics, data privacy, and professional standards (Olowu, 2025).

For public relations professionals, these issues with infrastructure and policies affect their ability to access and use AI technologies properly. As Oduenyi (2024) points out, Nigerian PR experts see the value of AI in managing reputation and understanding their audience, but they often don't have the right training, support from their organizations, or clear guidelines to use AI in a responsible way.

AI Tools Used in Public Relations Practice

Around the world and in local settings, many AI tools are being used in public relations.

Nikolova (2024) groups these tools into three main types: automation tools for everyday tasks like sending press releases and scheduling social media posts, analytical tools for tracking public sentiment and media coverage, and generative tools for creating messages and visual content. In Nigeria, there is growing evidence that companies and PR agencies are using chatbots, social media analytics, and AI-driven dashboards to manage brand image and respond to public feedback (Agbo & Okereke, 2024). These tools help with real-time interaction, spot potential issues early, and support decisions based on data. However, the use of AI is not the same everywhere.

Large multinational corporations and major banks in cities are using AI for customer relations and digital PR, while smaller agencies and public institutions are slower to adopt because of costs, limited technology, and a lack of skilled workers (Olowu, 2025). As a result, the big impact of AI on PR in Nigeria is mostly seen in large organizations, not in smaller or public-sector groups. Also, there are important ethical issues around AI in PR, like authenticity, bias, transparency, and how it affects jobs. Yue (2024) says PR professionals face tough choices, such as whether to tell people when they're interacting with automated systems and who is responsible if AI tools make mistakes.

Nikolova (2024) warns that messages and insights from AI might be biased or misleading, which could hurt public trust. These concerns are even bigger in African countries, where there is not much regulation of AI yet (Gwagwa, 2021). African researchers suggest creating ethical guidelines that fit local cultures and communication values (Anani-Bossman, 2024). In Nigeria, ethical concerns also tie into worries about jobs. Some PR professionals are afraid that automation could lead to fewer job opportunities or make core PR skills less important (Oduenyi, 2024). Because of this, scholars are pushing for better training programs that help PR professionals use AI in an ethical and smart way, rather than replacing human judgment (Olowu, 2025). Still, research from Nigeria, such as Agbo and Okereke (2024), shows that AI is still in the early stages of being used in PR, but it's growing. They found that PR departments in the oil and gas industry use AI for predictive analysis, media tracking, and personalized messaging. Similarly, Oduenyi (2024) noted that Nigerian PR experts see AI as an important innovation that improves communication and efficiency. However, they also face challenges like high costs, security issues with data, and not enough training. Olowu (2025) looked at AI use in PR among professionals in Abuja's banking industry and found that awareness is moderate, and use is low to medium. Most people use tools like social media analytics and automated responses. Importantly, the study pointed out that organizations aren't investing much in training, which shows a bigger problem with infrastructure and resources.

Empirical Review

A study conducted by Omodara and Adeleke (2020) titled "Digital Technologies and Professional Communication Practice in Nigeria" aimed to examine how digital and AI-driven technologies affect professional communication practices. They used a survey design and included 150 communication professionals as participants. The results revealed that although there was a high level of awareness about AI tools, their practical

use was limited to simple automation tasks. The researchers suggested that AI training should be included in professional development programs. This study is relevant because it looked into the awareness and use of AI among communication professionals. However, it differs from the current study in terms of scope, as it covered communication professionals in general rather than focusing specifically on public relations practitioners. The main gap identified is the lack of profession-specific and state-level empirical data on AI adoption.

Another study by Boateng and Ansah (2020) titled "Artificial Intelligence in Strategic Communication Practice in Ghana" explored the adoption of AI in strategic communication within Ghana. The study used a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews, and involved 98 communication managers. The findings showed that AI was mostly being tested, but its usage was limited due to infrastructural challenges. The study called for policy support and institutional investment in AI technologies. This study is relevant because it examined AI adoption in an African communication context. It differs from the current study in terms of geographical focus and the specific professional group studied. The knowledge gap identified is the lack of empirical evidence from Nigeria at a subnational level.

Okoro and Agbo (2021) did a study called "Technology Adoption and Public Relations Practice in Nigeria." Their goal was to look into what factors affect how much technology is used in public relations. They used a descriptive survey with 140 PR professionals as participants. Their findings showed that support from the organization and good infrastructure were key in getting technology adopted. They suggested better policies and more investment in digital tools. This study is connected because it looked into the factors that influence tech adoption in PR. It's different because it considered general digital tech, not focusing specifically on AI. The main gap is that there isn't much analysis focused on AI within local professional groups.

Then there's the study by Nwosu (2021) called "Emerging Technologies and Public Relations Practice in Southern Nigeria." The aim was to check how emerging tech impacts PR in that region. They used a survey with 200 PR professionals. The results showed a moderate use of digital tools but not much use of AI systems. They suggested updating training programs and revising curricula. This study is related to the current research because it deals with tech in PR. However, it covered a broader area and didn't look into specific AI tools. The gap here is the lack of detailed, state-specific investigations into AI in PR.

Another study by Eze and Chukwu (2022) was titled "Artificial Intelligence and Communication Efficiency in Nigerian Organizations." Their purpose was to see how AI affects communication efficiency in Nigerian companies. They used a descriptive approach with 110 corporate communications officers. The results showed that AI helped in making communication faster and more accurate, but it also brought up ethical issues. They recommended guidelines to handle AI use properly. This study connects with the current work because it examines AI in communications. It's different because it focused on organizational communication rather than PR professionals in a professional setting. The gap here is the lack of real-world data on how PR professionals experience AI.

Kirtis and Karahan (2022) looked at "The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Public Relations Management." Their goal was to analyze how AI affects PR management. They did a content analysis of 60 digital campaigns. Their findings showed that AI helped in targeting audiences and evaluating campaigns. They suggested strategically integrating AI into PR planning. This study is conceptually related to the present research, but it's different in its methods and context, since it was done outside Africa. The gap here is the lack of African-based empirical insights.

Adegbite and Oladimeji (2023) carried out a study titled "Artificial Intelligence Adoption among Nigerian Public Relations Practitioners."

Their goal was to look at how much AI is being used by PR professionals in Nigeria. They used a descriptive survey method and included 130 participants. The results showed that while there is a lot of awareness about AI, its advanced use is still low. They suggested creating structured programs to build AI skills. This study is similar because it also focuses on Nigerian PR professionals. However, it covers the nation as a whole, and doesn't limit itself to Ebonyi State or NIPR members. The main gap is that there isn't enough evidence specific to individual states.

Mensah and Okyere (2023) conducted a study called "Barriers to Artificial Intelligence Adoption in Communication Industries in Sub-Saharan Africa." Their aim was to find out the obstacles to AI adoption in this region.

They used a survey approach with 160 participants from three countries. Their findings pointed to infrastructure issues, lack of policies, and skill shortages as key challenges. They recommended harmonizing regional policies. This study is related because it also looks at AI adoption barriers. However, it has a broader regional focus and is centered around the communication industry rather than PR specifically. The gap here is that it lacks detailed data at the country and state levels.

Okafor (2023) looked into "Professional Perception of Artificial Intelligence in Public Relations Practice in Nigeria." Their purpose was to understand how PR professionals view AI. They used a survey method with 95 participants. The results showed a cautious optimism about using AI. They suggested running awareness campaigns and setting up ethical guidelines. This study is connected because it also deals with perceptions and awareness. However, it doesn't look at how much AI is actually being used or how it changes PR work. The gap here is the lack of evidence on how AI affects PR functions.

Adebayo and Yusuf (2024) studied "Artificial Intelligence and Digital Transformation in Nigerian Communication Firms." Their goal was

to evaluate AI-driven digital transformation in these firms. They used a descriptive survey with 150 participants. The findings showed that AI adoption varies greatly among firms. They recommended restructuring organizations. This study is related because it also focuses on AI transformation. However, it looks at firms rather than individual PR professionals. The gap is that it lacks a practitioner-centered analysis.

Adjin Tettey (2024) carried out a study titled "Artificial Intelligence in Contemporary Journalism Practice in Africa." The goal was to understand how AI is being used by journalists across Africa. They used a mix of methods and interviewed 180 people. The results showed that AI adoption varies a lot between different newsrooms. The study suggested that AI should be integrated into journalism through strong policies. This study is connected in idea, but it's different because it focuses on journalism rather than public relations. The main gap is that there's not much research on AI in public relations.

Ekanem and Udo (2024) did a study called "Technology Acceptance and Professional Communication in Nigeria." The main aim was to look at what affects how people accept new technologies. They used a survey with 120 communication professionals. Their findings showed that people are more likely to adopt new tech if they think it's useful. The study suggested that training should be tailored to users. Theoretically, this study connects with the current one, but it doesn't focus specifically on AI or public relations. The gap here is that there's not enough evidence about AI and public relations.

Okorie and Onyekachi (2025) conducted a study named "Artificial Intelligence Tools and Strategic Communication Practice in Nigeria." The purpose was to find out which AI tools are being used in strategic communication. They used a descriptive approach with 100 participants. The results showed that social media automation is widely used. They recommended expanding to more advanced analytics tools. This study

directly relates to the use of AI tools, but it's different because it looks at strategic communication in a broad sense. The gap is that there's no specific analysis based on professional bodies.

Chukwuemeka (2025) studied "Policy Environment and Artificial Intelligence Adoption in Nigerian Communication Practice." The goal was to look at how policy affects the use of AI. They used qualitative interviews with 40 professionals. The findings showed that weak policy frameworks are holding back AI adoption. The study recommended developing national AI communication policies. It connects because it focuses on policy factors, but it's different in design and scope. The gap is that there isn't enough quantitative evidence based on states and specific professional groups.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the Technological Determinism Theory introduced by Marshall McLuhan in 1962. The theory suggests that technology plays a key role in shaping society, affecting how people behave, communicate, and interact with institutions. McLuhan believed that new technologies change the way individuals and organizations think, work, and connect with each other, often leading to new social systems and professional practices.

This theory helps explain how Artificial Intelligence (AI), as a new technological development, is changing the field of Public Relations (PR). AI tools like chatbots, predictive analytics, sentiment analysis, and automated media monitoring are not just supporting tools but are actively changing how communication happens. As technology advances, so does the way PR is done, moving from old, manual methods to more data-driven, automated, and personalized approaches.

The theory also helps explain how AI is affecting strategic communication, public engagement, and reputation management in today's PR environment. This shift fits with McLuhan's idea that "the medium is the message," meaning the way information is delivered through a particular

technology shapes how it is understood. The Technological Determinism Theory is suitable for this study because it offers a clear way to understand why and how AI is changing PR practices. It shows the cause-and-effect relationship between technological advancements and changes in professional practices, providing a solid basis for exploring how PR professionals in Ebonyi State are using and adjusting to AI technologies.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a descriptive survey research design. This type of design is suitable because it lets the researcher gather data from a specific group in a structured way. It helps describe the current situation, views, and feelings of the people involved about how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing public relations practices. The design offers a quantitative approach, allowing the researcher to look at patterns, trends, and how different factors relate to each other, without changing any of the variables.

The decision to use this design comes from the nature of the research problem, which aims to understand the impact of AI on PR practices, how widely it is being used, and the challenges and benefits that PR professionals in Ebonyi State see.

A descriptive approach is fitting because it lets the researcher get direct, factual information from members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Ebonyi State Chapter, who are actively working in communication and public relations.

Area of the Study

This study is focused on Ebonyi State, which is one of the five states in the South-East part of Nigeria. Ebonyi State was formed in 1996 from parts of the old Enugu and Abia States, and its capital is Abakaliki. The state has a growing number of professionals working in public relations, many of whom are members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Ebonyi State Chapter. The Ebonyi NIPR Chapter is a professional group that

helps maintain ethical standards, supports ongoing learning, and encourages teamwork among communication experts in the state. These members work in various areas like government offices, universities, private companies, media outlets, and non-profit organizations. With Ebonyi State integrating more digital tools into how it manages governance and media, it's a good place to look at how much, in what ways, and with what difficulties AI is being used in public relations. The results of this study will show what's happening in Ebonyi State and also provide views on similar situations in the South-East region and across Nigeria.

Population of the Study

The people involved in this study are all the registered members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Ebonyi State Chapter. According to records from the NIPR Ebonyi State Chapter (2025), there are 73 registered members in total. These members include both public and private sector professionals who work in communication, such as information officers, corporate communication managers, media relations experts, public affairs officers, lecturers in communication fields, and independent public relations consultants.

This group is suitable for the study because they represent the main public relations professionals in Ebonyi State who are actively involved in communication management, dealing with stakeholders, and managing media interactions for different organizations.

Additionally, they are the ones most likely to be familiar with and use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in their work, as digital communication technologies are becoming more important in public relations. Therefore, the total population for this study is the 73 registered members of the NIPR Ebonyi State Chapter (2025), and they form the group from which the study's participants were selected.

Sampling Technique

This study used purposive sampling to choose participants from the total group of 73 registered members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Ebonyi State Chapter, as of 2026.

A census method was chosen because the population was small, making it possible to collect data from everyone without the need for sampling. Using a census helps avoid sampling errors and ensures that the opinions, experiences, and views of all registered public relations professionals in the chapter are included. This is especially important for a study looking at how well public relations professionals understand and use Artificial Intelligence (AI), as there may be differences in awareness, adoption, and use of AI among them. A census also makes the study more complete, accurate, and reliable because it gathers data from all members, not just a part of the group.

It gives a clearer picture of how much AI is known and used by NIPR practitioners in Ebonyi State. For these reasons, the census approach was the best choice for this study, as it allowed the researcher to collect detailed and representative data from all members of the population, increasing the validity and ability to apply the findings within the study area.

Measuring Instrument

The main tool used to collect data in this study was a structured questionnaire. It was designed to get important information from members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Ebonyi State Chapter. The questionnaire was the main way to collect data because it allows for organized gathering of information from a group of professionals who are similar in their profession and work within a specific population. This tool fits well with the study, as it helps collect both numerical and descriptive data about how well respondents know, use, and think about Artificial Intelligence (AI) in public relations practice. The questionnaire was split into parts based on the study's goals. The first part asked for basic information,

like age, gender, years of work experience, and professional status within NIPR. The second part looked at how well respondents understand AI, including their knowledge of AI ideas, uses, and how relevant AI is to modern public relations. The questionnaire was self-administered so that respondents could complete it whenever they were ready. This helped keep responses private and ensured accurate answers.

Method of Data Collection

For this study, data was collected through a structured questionnaire given to eligible participants who are registered members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Ebonyi State Chapter. As of 2025, there were 73 registered members in total, and 70 of them were chosen on purpose based on specific criteria. These included knowledge of Artificial Intelligence (AI), use of AI tools in public relations work, professional membership, and at least two years of experience in public relations. The researcher personally handed out the questionnaires to ensure that only those meeting the criteria took part. This method allowed for clear explanation of the study's purpose and helped participants understand what was expected of them. The distribution took place during monthly meetings and other events of the NIPR Ebonyi State Chapter, making it easier to reach the intended group of professionals.

Out of the 70 questionnaires given out, all 70 were returned, resulting in a 100% response rate. This high rate was achieved by following up regularly and engaging directly with the participants, which reduced the chances of not getting responses. Once collected, the questionnaires were checked carefully for completeness and accuracy before being coded and ready for analysis.

Validity of the Instrument

The questionnaire was checked for validity using both content and face validity. To ensure content validity, the initial version was reviewed by three experts two senior lecturers in Mass Communication, specializing in

public relations, and one professional member of the NIPR Ebonyi State Chapter. These experts looked at the items to make sure they were relevant, clear, and covered the study's goals and questions.

Reliability of the Instrument

To check the reliability of the questionnaire, a small group of ten public relations professionals from the NIPR in a neighboring state (outside the main study group) took part in a pilot test. The goal was to see if the questionnaire was consistent, clear, and provided dependable results. The data from the pilot was analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha, a statistical method. The Cronbach's Alpha score from the pilot was 0.87, which is above the typical 0.70 threshold used in social science research. This shows that the items in the questionnaire are highly consistent and reliable. Therefore, the instrument was considered suitable for use in the main study.

Method of Data Analysis

The data gathered for this study were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to present the findings clearly and in a structured way. Statistics like frequencies, percentages, and average scores were used to summarize and understand the responses based on the study's goals. The results were shown in tables that listed how often each answer occurred, making it easier to see patterns and trends. These tables helped organize the information in a simple, logical, and easy-to-read format, which made it easier to discuss the findings in relation to what the study set out to examine.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	36	51
Female	34	49
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

The data show that the respondents are mostly evenly split between men and women, with men making up a slightly larger group. This suggests that public relations work in Ebonyi State involves a good mix of both genders, showing that the field is inclusive and considers different viewpoints when it comes to using AI.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age Group

Age Group (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
21–30	15	16.9
31–40	25	34.8
41–50	20	30.3
51 and above	10	18.0
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

Most of the people who responded were in the working-age group, especially those between 31 and 50 years old. This means the majority of participants are in their productive and established career years, with good experience using modern communication tools and up-to-date public relations methods. Since most respondents are in active career stages, they are more likely to understand and adjust to new technologies like Artificial Intelligence, which helps them give well-informed answers about using AI in public relations.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Educational Qualification

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
HND/B.Sc.	28	40
Postgraduate (M.Sc./MBA)	24	34
Ph.D.	8	11
Others (Diploma/Certificate)	10	15
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

Most of the people surveyed have bachelor's degrees, and quite a few have advanced degrees. This shows they are well-educated and able to grasp both the technical and ethical aspects of using AI in public relations.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Professional Experience

Years of Experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1–5 years	11	16
6–10 years	22	31
11–15 years	20	29
16 years and above	17	24
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

The people who responded have different amounts of work experience, mostly including those who have been in the field for several years. There are both mid-career and senior professionals, showing a mix of modern and traditional views on how communication is managed. This variety in experience helps make the data more reliable because the respondents can share insights from their real-world experience with evolving technology in the public relations field.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by Job Designation

Job Designation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Public Relations Officer	28	40
Information Officer	14	20
Corporate Communications Officer	11	16
Media Relations Specialist	7	10
Consultant/Manager	10	14
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

The people who took part in the study work in different roles within public relations and communication management. The biggest group is made up of Public Relations Officers, followed by Information Officers, Corporate Communications Officers, Media Relations Specialists, and Consultants. This shows how diverse the group of professionals working in communication areas really is. Having participants from different job roles helps the study understand a wide range of experiences and opinions about how AI is used and applied in public relations work.

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents by Type of Organization

Type of Organization	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Government	30	43
Private	25	36
Non-Governmental/Development Sector	9	13
Freelance/Consulting	6	8
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

Most of the people surveyed work in government agencies, while some are employed in private companies, non-governmental groups, and consulting businesses. This shows that public relations activities in Ebonyi State happen in various parts of the economy. The fact that many respondents come from government jobs suggests that their experience in the public sector might have a big impact on the study results, especially when it comes to how ready organizations are and how they use technology.

Table 7: Distribution of Respondents by Membership Status in NIPR

Membership Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Full Member	40	57
Associate Member	22	32
Fellow	3	4
Student/Probationary Member	5	7
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

Most of the people who took part are full members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, with some also being associate members, fellows, or in the probationary stage. This shows that the majority of participants have a recognized professional status in the field of public relations. Having a high number of members who are professionally acknowledged adds to the reliability of the results, as these respondents have the necessary knowledge and experience to offer thoughtful insights on the use of AI in public relations.

Table 8: Distribution of Respondents by Exposure to AI Training

Exposure to AI Training	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	32	46
No	38	54
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

The results show that many people have not had proper training in Artificial Intelligence. This means that even though some professionals might know about AI, there aren't enough organized programs to help them build their skills. Not having enough formal training in AI could make it harder to use AI tools effectively in public relations work, which shows the importance of ongoing learning and specific training programs.

Table 9: Awareness of Artificial Intelligence (AI) among PR Practitioners in Ebonyi State

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	65	93
No	5	7
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

The study shows that public relations professionals in Ebonyi State have a strong understanding of Artificial Intelligence. Most of the people surveyed knew about AI, showing that new technology is getting a lot of attention in their field. This awareness shows how much digital changes are affecting communication and public relations work. Having a good understanding of AI is a great start for using it in their jobs. But just knowing about AI isn't enough on its own. People also need proper training and support from their organizations to use it effectively.

Table 10: Table 10: Source of Awareness of Artificial Intelligence

Source of Awareness	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Professional training/workshops	17	24
Online media and digital platforms	30	43
Academic institutions	14	20
Colleagues and peers	6	9
Others	3	4
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

The study shows that online media platforms are the main way people learned about Artificial Intelligence .Professional training programs and universities also helped spread awareness about AI, but to a lesser extent. Colleagues and other informal methods had a smaller impact. This shows how important digital channels are in sharing information about new technologies. The fact that people mainly get their information from online sources shows how crucial digital skills and access to the internet are for helping public relations professionals understand and keep up with AI.

Table 11: Familiarity with Application of AI in PR Practice

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	50	71
No	20	29
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

Many people who responded said they know about how Artificial Intelligence is used in public relations work. This shows that a lot of professionals understand how AI can help with tasks like connecting with audiences, making content, and analyzing data. Their knowledge suggests they are generally open to using new technology in their jobs. But the fact that some people aren't very familiar with AI shows there's a need for more training and support to help everyone keep up with these changes.

Table 12: AI Tools Commonly Used in PR Practice

AI Tools Used	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Chatbots (e.g., Drift, Intercom)	20	29
Social media analytics tools (e.g., Brandwatch, Hootsuite)	24	34
Automated content creation tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Jasper)	11	16
Predictive analytics tools	7	10
None	8	11
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

The study shows that social media analytics tools and chatbots are the AI applications most commonly used by the people surveyed. Automated content creation tools are also widely used, but fewer people reported using predictive analytics tools. Some professionals said they don't use any AI tools in their work. The fact that most AI use is focused on social media management and audience interaction suggests that AI is mostly used for day-to-day tasks rather than for big-picture strategy. Using more advanced AI tools could help make public relations work more efficient and better support decision making.

Table 13: Frequency of AI Tool Usage

Frequency of Use	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very often	10	14
Occasionally	30	43
Rarely	20	29
Never	10	14
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

The findings show that people use AI tools differently, with many only using them sometimes. While some use them often, most haven't made it a regular part of their work. The fact that use isn't very frequent means that AI is still becoming more accepted. Things like not enough training, poor resources, and company rules might be stopping people from using AI tools more consistently in their jobs.

Table 14: Areas Where AI Has Transformed PR Functions

Area of Transformation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Audience targeting and segmentation	25	36
Campaign planning and execution	15	21
Content creation and distribution	13	18
Media monitoring and analytics	11	16
Crisis communication management	6	9
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

The study shows that Artificial Intelligence has had the biggest impact on audience targeting and segmentation, then on campaign planning, content creation, media monitoring, and managing crises. This shows that data-driven technologies are becoming more important in making communication more effective. The more AI is used for analyzing audiences and managing campaigns, the more public relations is becoming based on evidence and strategy. Companies that use AI well may see better results in communication and how well they connect with their audience.

Table 15: Availability of Digital Infrastructure for AI Use

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	28	40
No	42	60
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

The study shows that many organizations involved lack the proper digital setup needed to properly use AI. Although some have set up the right technology, most still face issues with their infrastructure. Poor digital systems are a big problem when it comes to using AI. Without good technology, organizations might not be able to fully benefit from AI in their communication and public relations work.

Table 16: Organizational Support for AI Adoption

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	23	39
No	47	61
Total	70	100

Field survey (2025)

The findings show that most of the organizations in the study are not providing much support for adopting AI. Many people said their organizations aren't encouraging or investing much in using AI for public relations work. Without strong support from the organization, it might take longer for AI to be widely used in the field. To properly use AI in the long term, there needs to be leadership support, enough money, and rules that help push forward new ideas and technology.

Table 17: Awareness of Policies Guiding AI in PR Practice

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	13	33
No	47	67
Total	70	100
Field survey (2025)		

The results indicate that most people aren't very familiar with the policies and rules that guide the use of Artificial Intelligence in public relations. Many of the people surveyed either didn't know about these rules or weren't sure if they even existed. This lack of understanding shows that professional organizations and regulators need to create, share, and enforce clear guidelines about how AI should be used ethically and properly. These guidelines would help ensure AI is used responsibly and minimize any ethical issues that might come up in public relations.

Discussion of Findings

Level of Awareness and Knowledge of Artificial Intelligence Tools among Public Relations Practitioners in Ebonyi State

The study found that most public relations professionals in Ebonyi State are aware of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and have a basic understanding of its ideas and uses. But their knowledge is not very deep, and they don't have much experience using AI tools. Many people think of AI mainly as something related to automation and data analysis. They don't know much about more advanced areas like machine learning, predictive algorithms, or natural language processing as applied in public relations work. This finding matches what Omodara and Adeleke (2022) found, who said that Nigerian communicators are becoming more aware of AI, but they don't use it much in practice because they don't have enough training or exposure.

Nwosu (2021) also noted that while public relations professionals in Southern Nigeria see AI as a big change in communication, many don't have the skills to use it effectively in their campaigns or in managing relationships

with stakeholders. The knowledge gap this study aims to address is the lack of real data on AI awareness and use among public relations professionals in the Ebonyi State chapter of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR). This hasn't been studied before. Unlike earlier studies that looked at media professionals or journalists broadly, this research gives specific evidence about how awareness of AI affects the practical changes in public relations in a local setting.

Types of AI Tools Commonly Used by PR Practitioners in Ebonyi State

The results showed that the most common AI tools used by the respondents include automated systems for monitoring social media, apps for scheduling content like Hootsuite and Buffer, and chatbots for engaging with clients. A few also use analytics software like Google Analytics and AI-based writing assistants to help create content. However, fewer people use advanced tools like predictive analytics platforms or AI-driven sentiment analysis software. This aligns with what Adegbite and Oladimeji (2023) found, which is that Nigerian PR professionals often rely on AI-powered digital tools for daily tasks like message sending and content sharing, but not for more complex AI systems that need more technical knowledge.

Boateng and Ansah (2021), who studied AI use among communication specialists in Ghana, also noted that AI is mostly used for social media and customer relations, while advanced tools like analytics and machine learning are not widely used because of infrastructure and knowledge problems. This study fills a gap by specifically looking at the types of AI tools used by PR professionals in Ebonyi State. It shows that while awareness is growing, there is still a limited range of AI tools being used in PR. This highlights the need for more training and development programs that support a wider use of AI in PR.

Extent to Which AI Technologies Have Transformed PR Functions among Practitioners in Ebonyi State

The findings suggest that AI has made some changes in PR work in Ebonyi State, especially in areas like media monitoring, audience interaction, message customization, and campaign analysis.

Practitioners said that AI tools help them work faster and more efficiently when sharing content and communicating with stakeholders. However, traditional PR tasks such as manual press relations and event management are still the main part of daily work, showing that the transformation is not complete.

This supports the findings of Eze and Chukwu (2022), who found that AI has improved productivity and how quickly PR officers can respond in Nigerian organizations, but hasn't replaced traditional PR methods. Kirtis and Karahan (2022) also mentioned that AI's effect in PR is clearer in areas like handling data and automating messages than in making big strategic decisions or managing reputation. The knowledge gap this study addresses is the lack of specific data on how much AI has changed PR work within a local professional group like the NIPR Ebonyi Chapter. Earlier studies usually looked at national or industry-wide trends. This study contributes by showing the actual level of AI influence in a smaller, state-based professional group.

Infrastructural, Organizational, and Policy Factors Influencing the Adoption and Utilization of AI Tools in Public Relations Practice in Ebonyi State

The findings showed that the main reasons why AI tools aren't widely used by PR professionals in Ebonyi State are things like poor digital infrastructure, lack of support from organizations to invest in technology, absence of AI-related policies, and not enough training.

Respondents mentioned issues like bad internet connections, low funding from institutions, and no national or state-level policies that guide the use of AI. Some also said that there is resistance from organizations to change and fear of losing jobs, which stops people from adopting AI. These findings are similar to what Okoro and Agbo (2021) found, who said that the lack of good infrastructure and weak support systems are the biggest problems for using AI in PR in Nigeria. Mensah and Okyere (2020) also showed that in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, low AI use is because of a lack of policies and investment in technology in organizations. The knowledge gap this study fills is identifying the specific obstacles affecting AI use in PR in Ebonyi State. While other studies looked at wider national or regional issues, this one focuses on what's happening within a local professional group and shows how problems like poor infrastructure and internal resistance affect AI adoption in PR.

Summary of the Study

This study looked at how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing the way public relations (PR) professionals work, specifically among members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Ebonyi State Chapter. The research aimed to check how aware PR practitioners are of AI tools, what kind of tools they use, how much AI has changed PR tasks, and what infrastructure, organizational, and policy factors are affecting the use of AI in PR. The study used a descriptive survey approach. The total number of registered members in the Ebonyi State Chapter (2025) was 73, and 70 of them were selected based on specific criteria, such as their knowledge of AI, experience with AI tools, and their background in PR. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data, which included both open-ended and closed questions. All 70 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 100% response rate. The data was organized into frequency tables and analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequencies and percentages.

The results showed that most PR professionals in Ebonyi State know about AI and its basic ideas, but they have limited in-depth technical knowledge and hands-on experience. Commonly used AI tools include social media automation tools, content scheduling apps, chatbots, and data analytics software. More advanced tools like predictive analytics and sentiment analysis are not widely used. The study also found that AI has made a moderate impact in areas like media monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and message personalization. However, traditional PR methods are still the main approach. Key barriers preventing full AI integration in PR practice in Ebonyi State include poor infrastructure, lack of support from organizations, insufficient training, and weak policy frameworks.

Conclusion

The study shows that AI is slowly changing how PR is done in Ebonyi State, though the change is not fast. PR professionals are becoming more aware of how AI can improve communication, audience interaction, and decision-making. But the full transformation is limited because of factors such as low technical skill, poor digital infrastructure, and lack of policy support. The study concludes that for PR in Ebonyi State and Nigeria as a whole to fully benefit from AI, there must be a strong focus on building skills, improving digital infrastructure, and creating policies that support innovation. Without these efforts, AI adoption in PR will continue to be limited to basic tasks rather than broader strategic communication management.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, here are the suggested actions:

1. The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Ebonyi State Chapter, should regularly organize training sessions, workshops, seminars, and professional development activities focused on AI.

These should go beyond basic awareness and instead focus on how AI can be practically used in areas like content creation, media tracking, audience analysis, managing crises, and making strategic decisions.

2. Public relations professionals should broaden their understanding and use of various AI tools, moving beyond simple automation tools. They should explore how AI can be used for predictive analysis, understanding public sentiment, assessing audience behavior, monitoring reputation, and predicting potential crises.
3. PR practitioners should use AI in a way that supports, rather than replaces, their professional judgment, creativity, and ability to manage relationships. Organizations should support this by encouraging the use of AI insights in planning campaigns, analyzing stakeholders, managing reputation, and evaluating the results of communication efforts.
4. Companies that employ PR professionals should invest in good digital infrastructure, including stable internet, modern communication tools, and access to AI-powered platforms. This will create a better environment for successfully adopting AI in their PR activities.

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