Appraisal of Dispositions and Gratifications of Artificial Intelligence Application Among Public Relations Practitioners in Rivers State

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Abstract

The study appraises the Dispositions and gratifications of artificial intelligence application among public relations practitioners in Rivers State. To achieve this, the study raised three objectives which are to; examine the dispositions of public relations practitioners in Rivers State toward the application of artificial intelligence in their profession; identify the gratifications derived by public relations practitioners in Rivers State from using artificial intelligence in their professional activities; assess the factors influencing the adoption or resistance to artificial intelligence among public relations practitioners in Rivers State. The study was anchored on one theory; Technological Determinism Theory. The survey research design was used for this study. The population of this study comprised all the public relations practitioners in Rivers State. The total population of this study is 250 (NIPR Secretariat, Port Harcourt). Therefore, since the population of the study is small and manageable, Census was used to adopt the entire population of 250 as the sample size. Purposive sampling technique was used to administer the instrument to the respondents. Questionnaire was used as Instrument for data collection. Weighted Mean Score (four point likert scale) was used to analyze the data generated from the questionnaire. Findings of the study showed the attitude of public relations practitioners in Rivers State towards the adoption of artificial intelligence in their work such as Concerns about AI replacing human elements, emphasis on foundational skills, recognition of AI's enhancing capabilities etc. Findings of the study showed the benefits public relations practitioners in Rivers State derive from the application of artificial intelligence in their work such as Enhanced media monitoring, Improved crisis management, and personalized communication. The study concluded that public relations practitioners in Rivers State exhibit a mixed disposition toward the adoption of artificial intelligence in their profession. While many recognize AI's ability to enhance their work such as improving media monitoring, crisis management, and personalized communication there are concerns about AI replacing the human elements, leading to a strong emphasis on foundational PR skills. The study recommended that public relations practitioners in Rivers State should undergo regular training and workshops to improve their understanding and practical application of artificial intelligence in their profession. The study also recommended that organizations and PR agencies should identify and promote the specific benefits of AI that enhance job satisfaction, such as improved content creation, audience analysis, and crisis communication management.

Keywords: Appraisal, Dispositions, Gratifications, Artificial Intelligence, Application

Introduction

Public relations (PR) is a strategic communication discipline that fosters mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. In recent years, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into PR practices has garnered significant attention, offering new tools and methodologies to enhance communication strategies. This introduction explores the dispositions and gratifications associated with AI application among PR practitioners in Rivers State, Nigeria, through the lens of the Uses and Gratifications Theory. AI refers to the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, particularly computer systems, encompassing learning, reasoning, and self-correction. In the PR industry, AI applications have become increasingly prevalent, offering tools that automate routine tasks, analyze vast datasets, and facilitate personalized communication strategies.

For instance, AI-driven platforms can monitor media coverage in real-time, assess public sentiment, and predict potential crises by identifying patterns in data. These capabilities enable PR professionals to respond proactively, tailoring their strategies to the evolving media landscape.

The integration of AI into PR practices has been observed globally, with Nigerian practitioners beginning to recognize its potential. AI can automate repetitive tasks, facilitate strategic decision-making, and foster personalized stakeholder communication. This technological evolution necessitates an examination of how PR professionals in Rivers State perceive and utilize AI in their daily operations. PR practitioners' dispositions toward AI are influenced by various factors, including perceived usefulness, ease of use, and the potential for career advancement. Some practitioners view AI as a threat to job security, fearing automation may replace human roles. However, others perceive AI as an opportunity to enhance their work, automating mundane tasks and allowing them to focus on strategic initiatives. In Nigeria, the adoption of AI in PR is still in its nascent stages, with practitioners acknowledging its potential while also expressing concerns about ethical implications and the need for proper guidelines. The application of AI in public relations represents a significant advancement, offering numerous benefits that align with the evolving needs of the industry. In Rivers State, understanding PR practitioners' dispositions toward AI and the gratifications they seek is essential for effective integration. Employing the Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a valuable framework for this exploration, highlighting the active role of practitioners in adopting and utilizing AI technologies. As AI continues to evolve, it is imperative for PR professionals to adapt, embracing technological innovations while upholding ethical standards to enhance their practice and better serve their organizations and audiences.

Statement of the Problem

Public relations (PR) are an essential communication practice that helps organizations build and maintain relationships with their publics. With the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), PR professionals now have access to tools that can automate tasks, analyze public sentiment, and enhance communication strategies. However, despite the global adoption of AI in PR, its application among PR practitioners in Rivers State remains largely unexplored. AI offers numerous benefits, including efficiency, personalized communication, and predictive analytics. Yet, many PR practitioners in Rivers State may lack the necessary skills, awareness, or infrastructure to fully integrate AI into their work. There are also concerns about AI replacing human roles, ethical implications, and the overall effectiveness of AI in maintaining authentic and strategic communication. These issues raise questions about how PR practitioners in Rivers State perceive AI, their willingness to adopt it, and the extent to which they derive satisfaction from its application. Furthermore, while AI is expected to revolutionize PR practices, its adoption in Nigeria, particularly in Rivers State, is still at a developmental stage. Many PR professionals may be unaware of AI-driven tools or may be skeptical about their impact. Without empirical research on the dispositions and gratifications of AI application among PR practitioners in Rivers State, there is limited understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with AI integration. This study seeks to examine the attitudes of PR practitioners in Rivers State toward AI, the factors influencing their adoption of AI technologies, and the specific gratifications they derive from AI applications. Addressing this problem will provide insights into how AI can be effectively integrated into PR practices in the region while identifying potential barriers that need to be overcome.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to appraisal of dispositions and gratifications of artificial intelligence application among public relations practitioners in Rivers State. The specific objectives are to;

1. examine the dispositions of public relations practitioners in Rivers State toward the application of artificial intelligence in their profession.
2. identify the gratifications derived by public relations practitioners in Rivers State from using artificial intelligence in their professional activities.
3. assess the factors influencing the adoption or resistance to artificial intelligence among public relations practitioners in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of public relations practitioners in Rivers State toward the adoption of artificial intelligence in their work?
2. What benefits do public relations practitioners in Rivers State derive from the application of artificial intelligence in their work?
3. What factors influence the willingness or reluctance of public relations practitioners in Rivers State to adopt AI in their professional practice?

Conceptual Review
Public Relations (PR) in Nigeria

This section examines the literature that pertains to the Saudi context in order to clarify the history and development of public relations practice in the Kingdom. The broader context of the Middle East and the specific instance of Nigeria will be analyzed to elucidate changes in the attributes of the PR business that are associated with a transformation in the use of media instruments, both prior to and following the Millennium. According to Grunig (2008: 338), the two-way symmetric model necessitates contextual factors, including the media landscape, political and economic systems, and culture and language, to be considered in global research on public relations communication. Saudi culture and religion (Islam), Nigeria's education system, Saudi politics and public media, and the Saudi government's regulation of media outlets, as well as other factors that may impact the public relations sector in the Kingdom, are all examined in this section. It is probable that research on 20th century public relations in Nigeria would initiate in 1923, the year the current state of Nigeria was established (Alanazi, 1996: 247). The Saudi government's prioritization of communication, which was prompted by King Abdulaziz Al-Saud's desire to engage with tribal leaders throughout the Kingdom, was the source of the significance of public relations at this juncture (Alanazi, 1996: 243). Alanazi (1996) specifically specifies public relations initiatives such as lobbying, the establishment of consulates in other nations, and the practice of diplomacy as effective strategies for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. The establishment of connections and the facilitation of two-way communication with the public and numerous stakeholders were all part of the 20th-century conception of public relations. Leaders in the Gulf region had previously communicated with the populace through public assemblies.

Nevertheless, research on 20th-century public relations in the Arab world, specifically in Nigeria, indicates that public relations was not initially acknowledged as a legitimate professional discipline, nor was it given significant prominence by Arab governments or local groups. For example, Al-Enad (1990) notes that the term "general relations" is frequently employed in the Arab world in place of any term that could be translated as "public relations." The Arabic language does not have a definitive equivalent for the terms "public relations" or "public" (Al-Enad, 1990). The Arabic literature on "general relations" does not contain the phrase. As a result, the Arab world initially misinterpreted and obscured the role of public relations practice. The persistent ambiguity surrounding PR's objectives, characteristics, prospects, and strategies may have been exacerbated by its classification as "general relations" (Al-Enad, 1990). This misconception regarding public relations persisted in Nigeria until the early 21st century, during which time corporations rarely acknowledged the budgets and resources allocated to public relations departments (Alanazi, 1996). The interview data obtained from academics in this research clearly demonstrated the results documented by Al-Enad (1990) and Alanazi (1996).

AI and Robotisation as PR Tools

AI and robotisation have become increasingly popular as Public Relations (PR) tools for businesses and organizations. They are being used in the following ways:

i. **Chatbots:** AI-powered chatbots have become a widely used PR tool for providing customer service and support. They can be programmed to answer frequently asked questions, provide product or service information, and even handle customer complaints or issues. Chatbots are available 24/7, allowing businesses to provide customer support around the clock (Matsen, 2020; Molnar, 2020).

ii. **Social Media:** AI can be used to analyze data from social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn to gain insights into customer sentiments, interests, and preferences. Businesses can use this data to tailor their PR campaigns and messaging to better resonate with their target audiences (Lian et al, 2020).

iii. **Content Creation:** AI-powered tools such as natural language generation can be used to create compelling content such as press releases, blog posts, and social media updates (Raza et al., 2021). Content can be optimized for search engines and tailored to specific target audiences, allowing businesses to increase their visibility and reach (Osman &Rajzifard, 2020; Molnar, 2020).

iv. **Influencer Marketing:** AI-powered tools can be used to identify and engage with social media influencers who align with a brand's values and target audience. This helps businesses to amplify their messaging and reach more people through the influential voices of others (Hassannezhad & Tatnall, 2018; Marek, 2020).

v. **Robotics:** In events and exhibitions, interactive robots are increasingly being used as eyecatching PR tools. They can be used to engage with visitors, provide information about products or services, and

even entertain. Robotics comes in to enliven exhibitions and events (Hafeez et al, 2019; Nica & Roman, 2020; Lunn, 2021).

Interactive robots have been designed to inform, engage and entertain visitors at events. These robots help to create a memorable and immersive experience for the targeted audience. While AI and robotisation offer PR professionals new and creative ways to interact with their target audience, it is crucial to ensure their use is effective, ethical, and aligned with the company's broader goals (Gummesson, 2018). AI and robotisation cannot replace human creativity and empathy in PR. Instead, PR professionals should incorporate these tools as part of comprehensive strategies.

Use of AI and Robotisation as PR Tools by Select Financial Institutions: The Nigerian Experience

Nigerian financial institutions are beginning to explore the use of AI and robotisation as a PR tool. The implementation of AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants is helping to enhance customer experience and satisfaction. Additionally, these technologies are enabling financial institutions to grow their customer base and offer new and innovative financial products tailored to individual customer needs. In the future, there is no doubt that more Nigerian financial institutions will embrace AI and robotisation as public relations tools, as the country's fintech industry grows. Meanwhile, the following financial institutions have started embracing AI and robotisation as a public relations tool:

i. **Access Bank Plc:** Access Bank recently launched "Ada," a virtual assistant that uses AI technology. Ada is designed to help customers carry out transactions, answer inquiries, and give users customized advice based on their financial needs.

ii. **Sterling Bank Plc:** Sterling Bank has implemented AI and robot technology to help their customers access banking services with ease. The bank has deployed a chatbot named "Spectra," which can help customers open accounts and process transactions with speed and accuracy.

iii. **Guaranty Trust Bank (GT Bank):** GT Bank has leveraged AI technology in their public relations strategy. The bank's chatbot, "GTWorld," has been used to interact with customers, answer inquiries, and process transactions easily and conveniently.

iv. **First Bank of Nigeria:** First Bank has also implemented AI technology in their public relations strategy. The bank's chatbot, "FirstMonie," enhances financial accessibility for the unbanked population, and it helps customers carry out banking transactions conveniently.

v. **Zenith Bank:** Zenith Bank has introduced a mobile app called "ZIVA," which uses AI technology to enhance users' experience. The app supports customers with personalised financial advice, investment options, and access to a wide range of financial products and services.

Tools and Strategies of AI Integration in the Practice of PR in Nigeria

Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerful tool in the field of public relations (PR), particularly in Nigeria, where technology adoption is increasingly becoming mainstream as (Abayomi, 2020). AI has the potential to revolutionize the way PR professionals work, by enabling them to automate repetitive tasks, analyze data at a faster rate, and make more informed decisions (Chaffey & Patron, 2019). One of the key tools of AI in PR is natural language processing (NLP), which allows machines to understand and generate human language. This tool is particularly useful in the field of media monitoring and sentiment analysis (Ardila, 2020). In Nigeria, where social media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, NLP can help PR professionals track conversations about their clients or brands in real-time, and analyze the sentiment behind these conversations (Chloé, 2021). By understanding how people perceive a brand or issue, PR professionals can tailor their messaging and strategy accordingly (Deal et al., 2010).

Chatbots are AI-powered virtual assistants that can interact with users in real-time. In Nigeria, where customer service is a critical aspect of PR, chatbots can help PR professionals provide instant support to clients and customers (Ealham &Surridges, 2020). These chatbots can answer frequently asked questions, provide updates on products or services, and even collect feedback from users. By using chatbots, PR professionals can streamline their communication process and provide better service to their clients (Ekeanyanwu, 2021).

Predictive analytics, which uses AI algorithms to analyze data and forecast future trends. In PR, predictive analytics can help professionals identify potential crises before they escalate, anticipate media coverage, and assess the effectiveness of their campaigns (Haenlein &Kaplan, 2019). By using predictive analytics, PR professionals can make data-driven decisions that can lead to better outcomes for their clients Challenges and drawbacks to AI integration into PR practices in Nigeria Artificial intelligence (AI) technology has been rapidly evolving in recent years and has the potential to revolutionize many industries, including the field of public relations (Johnson & So, 2018). In Nigeria, the integration of AI into PR practices has become increasingly

common as organizations seek to streamline their communication efforts and enhance their outreach to stakeholders (Ogunleye &Akinbolowa, 2018). However, while AI offers many advantages, there are also several challenges and drawbacks to its integration into PR practices in Nigeria. Some of which are;

Lack of awareness and understanding of the technology among PR professionals. Many PR practitioners in Nigeria may not be familiar with how AI works and how it can be leveraged to improve their work (Ogunleye &Akinbolowa, 2018). This lack of knowledge can hinder the effective implementation of AI tools and strategies in PR practices, limiting the potential benefits that AI can offer (Omojuyigbe, 2018).

Another challenge of AI integration is the cost associated with implementing and maintaining AI systems. AI technology can be expensive to develop and purchase, and it may require ongoing maintenance and updates to keep it running smoothly (Panda et al., 2019). For many organizations in Nigeria, especially smaller companies with limited resources, the cost of implementing AI technology may be prohibitive, leading to a reluctance to adopt AI in their PR practices (Singh &Sood, 2020).

Artificial Intelligence in Public Relations
Artificial intelligence is transforming public relations by offering powerful tools that improve PR practices and instigate change within the field. The impact of AI on public relations extends beyond mere work automation, carrying substantial ramifications for technology, economics, and society, necessitating proactive engagement from PR professionals (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018). Wang (2008) articulates that artificial intelligence aims to develop computer systems that can emulate and augment the cognitive capacities of the human mind, including several viewpoints of the essence of this resemblance, including aspects of structure, behavior, capacity, function, and principle. The implementation of AI signifies the beginning of a more substantial communicative link between humans and technology, cultivating interactions with AI systems as comparable and human-like counterparts (Moore & Hübscher, 2021). Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a computer proficient in executing activities akin to human capabilities (Marr, 2016) and a technology that employs machine learning, analytical skills, and problem-solving abilities comparable to those of humans (Valin, 2018). Kok et al. (2009) categorized AI systems into four groups due to the challenges in representing AI: "systems that think like humans," "systems that act like humans," "systems that think rationally," and "systems that act rationally" (p. 2). Galloway and Swiatek (2018) specifically observe that in public relations, AI functions as a tool exhibiting human-like characteristics and doing human-like tasks, either in collaboration with PR specialists or independently.

Numerous researchers have examined the impact of AI-driven technologies on public relations methods, resulting in improved efficiency, functionality, and optimization of methodologies. Former CIPR President Waddington, together with 20 volunteers from the #AIinPR initiative, has compiled an extensive list of more than 150 products that include AI functionalities, highlighting the significant extent of AI incorporation within the PR business (Slee, 2018). By using AI tools and technologies, organizations may assess the impact of their public relations efforts and assure alignment with their corporate vision and objectives (Panda et al., 2019). Artificial Intelligence has the potential to automate and execute various tasks in the field of public relations, including the formulation of data-driven narratives, the management and updating of media databases, support in crisis management, transcription and conversion of audio to text, monitoring and predicting media trends, and the oversight and management of social media platforms (Marx, 2017; Panda et al., 2019). Bourne (2019) elucidated that AI, in the context of public relations, encompasses diverse modalities of public communication, including corporate communications by multinational technology firms, business-to-business interactions by global management consultancies, and business-to-consumer engagements by technology start-ups. The shift in public relations, propelled by sophisticated AI integration, might beneficially influence the evolution of PR theory and foster the development of novel PR models pertaining to economic, social, and cultural dimensions (Arief & Gustomo, 2020).

Empirical Review
Salih's (2021) investigated how Saudi Arabian Public Relations Firms and Individuals Use Social Media. The use of social media in Saudi Arabian public relations and the ways in which PR companies use it are the subjects of this research. Following this, three research methods were used: first, a survey was used to gather information from 117 PR professionals; second, an online questionnaire was sent to 20 PR professionals; and third, in-depth interviews were conducted with four firms' senior PR managers, five Saudi academics, and individual PR practitioners. This study compares and contrasts social media with more traditional forms of public relations communication, and it finds that businesses and PR firms generally use social media since it is cheap and can transmit a lot of information quickly. Twitter, followed by YouTube and Facebook, is the most popular and widely utilized platform among the whole research group, according to the statistics. Public

relations firms and individuals in Saudi Arabia rarely use social media to build new connections or interact with stakeholders and clients, according to the results, and the principal goal of using such platforms is to collect data on consumers and products. The use of social media was also shown to be constant across different types of businesses and sizes. Public relations (PR) professionals and organizations in Saudi Arabia rely heavily on traditional media like television, radio, and newspapers for PR communication, according to the findings. Social media, on the other hand, is just a part of the media landscape, sharing resources and using similar tactics as traditional media. In addition, handling public-facing internet interactions and exchanges was the biggest challenge for public relations professionals and businesses. For the most part, the practitioners stayed out of online communities because they weren't good enough at providing relevant content or using the right Arabic conversational style for public involvement and relationship building.

The study by Eke and Adeyemi (2024) was titled: Using AI to Strengthen PR Strategies During Nigeria's Economic Recovery in the Modern Era. Raising the profile of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission by rehabilitating its image and implementing initiatives to increase participation. The idea of agenda-setting and image restoration provided the theoretical groundwork for the investigation. The in-depth interview approach was employed in this study as a qualitative research tool. Seventeen members of the public relations branch of INEC in Rivers State and professionals in the field from the University of Port Harcourt's Department of Public Relations and Advertising made up the research population. To get the sample for the investigation, researchers used snowball and purposeful sampling techniques. The study analyzed the data collected from the in-depth interviews using a thematic method. The research showed that the INEC's PR efforts have helped improve its image and reduce negative public perceptions, particularly in the areas of transparency and stakeholder engagement, but that there are still problems, such as claims of election fraud and contradictory messages, that need to be addressed. According to the research, current public relations efforts by INEC have helped improve the organization's image and reduce negative public perceptions, but ongoing problems like perceived election malpractices and inconsistent messaging show that these efforts have not been completely successful. In order to make its public relations efforts more comprehensive and inclusive, the research said that INEC should prioritize a consistent message, increase transparency, and reach out to more people from all walks of life.

Haitham's (2021) examine How AI Affects PR in Nigeria. Using a cross-sectional survey approach, this research delves into the ways in which AI has altered public relations strategies in Nigeria. This study is based on the Diffusion of Innovations concept, which describes how new technologies and ideas spread across a community. In order to collect data, public relations professionals in Lagos, Nigeria were asked to fill out a standard questionnaire. The purpose of the survey was to learn more about the current state of AI adoption, the benefits and drawbacks of incorporating AI into PR campaigns, and other relevant topics. A diverse and representative sample was ensured through data collection conducted through face-to-face contacts. After applying descriptive statistics to the collected data, a comprehensive picture of current trends and viewpoints about AI in the public relations field was produced. While AI is being more and more recognized as a valuable tool to enhance public relations campaigns, the key findings show that its application is still in its early stages. This includes content development, media surveillance, and audience evaluation. Limited resources, lack of knowledge, and inadequate publicity all pose serious problems. Despite these challenges, most respondents expressed optimism about AI's potential to transform Nigeria's public relations strategies. The paper said that public relations professionals need more training in artificial intelligence (AI), that more money should be invested in AI, and that PR firms and AI developers should work together to integrate AI tools seamlessly. Deeper exploration of AI applications within certain sectors and the long-term impacts of AI on public relations tactics are two areas that need further research.

Theoretical Review
The study was anchored on one theory; Technological Determinism Theory
Technological Determinism Theory

Technological determinism is a theory that posits technology as the primary driver of social change and development. This perspective suggests that technological advancements shape societal structures, cultural values, and human behavior, often in ways that are independent of social influences. The concept is rooted in the belief that technology evolves according to its own logic, which in turn dictates the course of human history and societal organization. The term "technological determinism" is most commonly associated with the American sociologist and economist Thorstein Veblen, who lived from 1857 to 1929. Veblen's ideas laid the groundwork for this theory, which has since been expanded and debated by various scholars. Veblen's work emerged during

a period of rapid industrialization and technological advancement in the United States. He observed that the development of machinery and technology was not merely a reflection of human needs but rather a force that shaped human thought and social organization. Veblen argued that technology had an autonomous influence on society, suggesting that "the machine throws out anthropomorphic habits of thought" (Veblen, 1914). This assertion indicates that technological progress could lead to changes in social norms and values, often without direct human intervention. The origins of technological determinism can be traced back to Veblen's critiques of capitalism and his analysis of the relationship between technology and social change. He believed that technological advancements were not just tools for human use but were integral to the evolution of society itself. Veblen's perspective was radical for its time, as it challenged the prevailing notion that human agency was the primary driver of social change. Instead, he posited that technology could dictate the terms of human interaction and societal organization.

In the decades following Veblen's work, other scholars expanded on the concept of technological determinism. Notably, Clarence Ayres, a follower of Veblen, further developed the theory by introducing the idea of "technological drag." Ayres argued that while technology progresses as a self-generating force, traditional institutions often lag behind, resisting the transformative potential of technological change (Ayres, 1962). This notion highlights the tension between technological advancement and social structures, suggesting that society must adapt to the changes brought about by technology.

William Fielding Ogburn, another key figure in the development of technological determinism, introduced the concept of "cultural lag." Ogburn (1922) argued that technological changes often outpace social and cultural adaptations, leading to a disjunction between the two. This lag can result in social problems and conflicts as society struggles to integrate new technologies into existing frameworks. Ogburn's work emphasized the need to understand the implications of technological advancements on social structures and cultural values.

The theory of technological determinism has been both influential and controversial. Proponents argue that it provides a useful framework for understanding the profound impact of technology on society. They contend that technological advancements have historically driven significant changes in social organization, economic structures, and cultural practices. For instance, the invention of the printing press revolutionized communication and information dissemination, leading to the rise of literacy and the spread of ideas that fueled social movements such as the Reformation (McLuhan, 1962). Marshall McLuhan, a prominent media theorist, is often associated with technological determinism due to his assertion that "the medium is the message." McLuhan (1964) argued that the form of a medium embeds itself in the message, influencing how the message is perceived and understood. He believed that the introduction of new media technologies fundamentally alters human experiences and societal interactions. For example, the advent of television transformed the way people consumed information and engaged with the world, shaping cultural norms and social behaviors.

Critics of technological determinism argue that the theory oversimplifies the complex relationship between technology and society. They contend that it reduces human agency and overlooks the social, political, and economic contexts in which technologies are developed and used. This reductionist approach can lead to a deterministic view of technology, suggesting that societal outcomes are inevitable and predetermined by technological advancements. Scholars such as Langdon Winner (1980) have criticized this perspective, arguing that it fails to account for the ways in which social structures and cultural values can shape technological development. The debate between hard and soft determinism further complicates the discourse surrounding technological determinism. Hard determinists assert that technology develops independently of social influences, leading to inevitable changes in society. In contrast, soft determinists acknowledge the role of social context in shaping technological adoption and use. They argue that while technology is a significant factor in social change, human agency and social interactions also play crucial roles in determining how technologies are integrated into society (Smith & Marx, 1998). In contemporary discussions, the rise of digital technologies and the internet has reignited interest in technological determinism. The internet, in particular, has been described as a transformative force that reshapes communication, social interactions, and cultural practices. Scholars argue that the internet's pervasive influence has led to significant changes in how individuals engage with information, form communities, and participate in political processes (Castells, 2000). This perspective aligns with the core tenets of technological determinism, suggesting that the internet has fundamentally altered the fabric of society.

However, critics caution against viewing the internet as a deterministic force. They emphasize the importance of understanding the social dynamics that shape internet use and the diverse ways in which individuals and

communities interact with digital technologies. The concept of "digital detox," for example, highlights the conscious choices individuals make to disengage from technology, challenging the notion that technology inevitably dictates human behavior (Turkle, 2011). Technological determinism is a theory that posits technology as a primary driver of social change, with its roots in the work of Thorstein Veblen. While the theory has provided valuable insights into the relationship between technology and society, it has also faced criticism for its reductionist approach. The ongoing debate between hard and soft determinism underscores the complexity of this relationship, highlighting the interplay between technological advancements and social contexts. As society continues to grapple with the implications of emerging technologies, the discourse surrounding technological determinism remains relevant and essential for understanding the dynamics of social change. Technological determinism theory is highly relevant to understanding the dispositions and gratifications of artificial intelligence (AI) applications among public relations practitioners in Rivers State. This theory posits that technology shapes social dynamics and influences human behavior. As AI tools become integral in public relations, practitioners are increasingly drawn to these technologies for their efficiency, enhanced data analysis, and ability to engage audiences more effectively. Public relations professionals leverage AI for tasks such as media monitoring, sentiment analysis, and personalized communication, fulfilling specific needs for efficiency and insight. This aligns with the core tenets of Uses and Gratification Theory, emphasizing that practitioners actively seek out AI tools to fulfill their professional needs. Moreover, the adoption of AI reflects a shift in the industry, driven by technological advancements that redefine communication strategies. By understanding the motivations behind AI usage, practitioners can better harness these tools to improve client relations and audience engagement, thereby enhancing their overall effectiveness in a rapidly evolving media landscape.

Methodology
The survey research design was used for this study. The population of this study comprised all the public relations practitioners in Rivers State. The total population of this study is 250 (NIPR Secretariat, Port Harcourt). Therefore, since the population of the study is small and manageable, Census was used to adopt the entire population of 250. Purposive sampling techniques were used to administer the instrument to the respondents and the response rate was 200. Questionnaire was used as Instrument for data collection. Weighted Mean Score (four point rating scale) was used to analyze the data generated from the questionnaire. The score of 2.5 was used as the criterion for discussion. A response which is equal to or more than 2.5 is positive, i..e the respondents agree with the item while any mean response less than 2.5 was negative.

Results

Research Question One: What are the attitudes of public relations practitioners in Rivers State toward the adoption of artificial intelligence in their work?

Table 1: Attitudes of Public Relations Practitioners in Rivers State towards the Adoption of AI in their work

S/N	Respondent's view Items	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL	MEAN	DECISION
1	Concerns about AI replacing human element	480	150	40	10	680		
		120	50	20	10	200	3.4	Agree
2.	Emphasis on foundational skills	400	150	60	20	630		
		100	50	30	20	200	3.15	Agree
3	Recognition of AI's enhancing capabilities	600	90	20	10	720		
		150	30	10	10	200	3.6	Agree
4	Resistance due to skills gap and infrastructure challenges	40	30	60	150	280		
		10	10	30	150	200	1.4	Disagree
5	Advocacy for ethical integration of AI	640	60	20	10	730		
		160	20	10	10	200	3.65	Agree

Criterion Mean = 2.5

Data in table above shows the attitude of public relations practitioners in Rivers State towards the adoption of artificial intelligence in their work.

Research Question Two: What benefits do public relations practitioners in Rivers State derive from the application of artificial intelligence in their work?

Table 2: The benefits Public Relations Practitioners in Rivers State derive from the Application of AI

| S/N | Respondent's view Items | Nature of Response | | | | | | |
		SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL	MEAN	DECISION
1	Enhanced media monitoring	600	90	20	10	720		
		150	30	10	10	200	3.6	Agree
2.	Improved crisis management	400	150	60	20	630		
		100	50	30	20	200	3.15	Agree
3	Personalized communication	480	150	40	10	680		
		120	50	20	10	200	3.4	Agree
4	Automation of repetitive tasks	640	60	20	10	730		
		160	20	10	10	200	3.65	Agree
5	Better data-driven decision making	400	180	40	20	640		
		100	60	20	20	200	3.2	Agree
6.	Loss of human touch in communication	40	30	40	160	170		
		10	10	20	160	200	1.35	Disagree
7	High implementation costs and technical challenges	40	30	60	150	280		
		10	10	30	150	200	1.4	Disagree

Criterion Mean = 2.5

Data in table 2 above shows the benefits public relations practitioners in Rivers State derive from the application of artificial intelligence in their work.

Research Question Three: What factors influence the willingness or reluctance of public relations practitioners in Rivers State to adopt AI in their professional practice?

Table 3: factors influencing the willingness of reluctance of Public Relations Practitioners to adopt AI in their professional practice

S/N	Respondent's view Items	Nature of Response						
		SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL	MEAN	DECISION
1	Awareness and knowledge of AI	400	180	40	20	640	3.2	Agree
		100	60	20	20	200		
2.	Perceived benefits and efficiency	600	90	20	10	720	3.6	Agree
		150	30	10	10	200		
3	Cost and accessibility of AI tools	400	150	60	20	630	3.15	Agree
		100	50	30	20	200		
4	Organizational support and culture	480	150	40	10	680	3.4	Agree
		120	50	20	10	200		
5	Ethical and job security concerns	640	60	20	10	730	3.65	Agree
		160	20	10	10	200		

Criterion Mean = 2.5

Data in table 3 above shows the factors influencing the willingness or reluctance of public relations practitioners to adopt artificial intelligence in their professional practice

Discussion

The study's results revealed the sentiments held by public relations professionals in Rivers State on the integration of AI into their jobs. These sentiments included worries that AI will supplant humans, a focus on basic abilities, and an acknowledgment of AI's potential to improve work. Consistent with Salih's (2021) results, this study confirms that traditional media play an essential role for Saudi Arabian public relations professionals and organizations. While newspapers, radio, and television are cornerstones of public relations communication, social media is an element of the media landscape that shares resources and uses tactics comparable to those of more conventional forms of media. The results of the study are in line with the technology determinism theory, which states that technological advancements are essential to society's progress and serve as instruments for human use.

Public relations professionals in Rivers State may reap the benefits of AI in their work, according to the report. AI can help with media monitoring, crisis management, and tailored communication, among other things. The results of this study are in line with those of a previous study by Eke and Adeyemi (2024) that found that the INEC's present PR campaigns have helped to repair its image and reduce unfavorable public attitudes to some extent. Stakeholder interactions and focused communication efforts have increased openness and involvement, which has led to this success. However, there are still problems that need fixing, such as claims of election malfeasance and contradictory messages. Technology Determinism Theory, which the study's results support,

holds that technological advancements have, throughout history, accelerated major shifts in social structure, economic systems, and cultural practices.

The study's findings identified elements that affect public relations practitioners' desire or reluctance to incorporate artificial intelligence in their professional practice, including awareness and understanding of AI, perceived advantages and efficiency, and the cost and accessibility of AI technologies. The study's findings align with those of Haitham (2021), which indicated that although AI is increasingly acknowledged as a valuable asset in augmenting public relations efforts—such as content creation, media monitoring, and audience analysis—its adoption remains in the nascent stages. Major obstacles encompass insufficient awareness, technical proficiency, and budgetary limitations. The study's findings align with the ideas of Technological Determinism Theory, which posits that the advent of new media technologies profoundly transforms human experiences and society relationships.

Conclusion

The study concludes that public relations practitioners in Rivers State exhibit a mixed disposition toward the adoption of artificial intelligence in their profession. While many recognize AI's ability to enhance their work such as improving media monitoring, crisis management, and personalized communication there are concerns about AI replacing the human element, leading to a strong emphasis on foundational PR skills. Additionally, the study highlights that factors such as awareness and knowledge of AI, perceived benefits, efficiency, and the cost and accessibility of AI tools play a crucial role in determining whether practitioners embrace or resist AI adoption. Therefore, while AI presents significant opportunities for the PR industry, its widespread integration depends on addressing these influencing factors to ensure a balanced and effective collaboration between technology and human expertise.

Recommendations

1. Public relations practitioners in Rivers State should undergo regular training and workshops to improve their understanding and practical application of artificial intelligence in their profession.
2. Organizations and PR agencies should identify and promote the specific benefits of AI that enhance job satisfaction, such as improved content creation, audience analysis, and crisis communication management.
3. To increase AI adoption, stakeholders should address key challenges such as lack of access to AI tools, high costs, and resistance to change.

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