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Perceived usefulness of Artificial Intelligence on Public Relations Practices in Malaysia: A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

This pilot study investigates the perceived usefulness of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Public Relations (PR) practices from the perspective of Malaysian practitioners. With the increasing adoption of AI across industries, PR professionals are beginning to explore how such technologies can enhance strategic communication, media monitoring, campaign planning and stakeholder engagement. However, there is limited empirical research capturing these perceptions in the Malaysian context. Guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this study aims to assess the extent to which AI is perceived to enhance efficiency, transform roles and support the core functions of PR. This study evaluates how practitioners view AI's ability to streamline content creation, automate repetitive tasks and analyse media trends. Using a quantitative survey approach, data were collected from various Malaysian PR practitioners through an online questionnaire. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to identify key patterns in perception. The results reveal that AI is generally perceived as a valuable tool for automating routine tasks such as press release writing, social media monitoring and media analysis. However, its perceived usefulness diminishes in areas requiring emotional intelligence, strategic judgment, or interpersonal engagement, such as crisis communication and relationship-building with stakeholders. The findings underscore a dual perception of AI as both an enhancer of efficiency and a potential disruptor of core human-centred PR functions. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on AI in communication by providing initial empirical insights from Malaysia, a region underrepresented in current discourse. It also lays the groundwork for future studies exploring behavioural intention and actual AI usage in PR, which could be investigated further. The study concludes by recommending skill development initiatives, ethical AI integration and policy support to ensure AI adoption aligns with professional standards and societal values.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Public Relations, Perceived Usefulness, Technology Acceptance Model, Malaysia*

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly emerged as a transformative force across a wide array of industries, including public relations (PR). From automating routine tasks to enhancing data-driven strategic planning, AI technologies are increasingly integrated into communication workflows. In the global PR context, tools such as ChatGPT, Bard

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and other generative and analytical AI platforms are already streamlining media monitoring, content creation, sentiment analysis and crisis communication. According to the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (2023), AI is not merely reshaping operational aspects of PR but is redefining the core competencies expected of practitioners.

In Malaysia, AI adoption in public sector governance and corporate communication has gained momentum, driven in part by national digital initiatives. The launch of the National Artificial Intelligence Office (NAIO) in 2024 and state-level strategies such as the Selangor AI Blueprint have positioned Malaysia as an emerging AI hub in Southeast Asia. These efforts, along with platforms like MyMahir, aim to build AI fluency among 50,000 Malaysians by 2025, marking a significant step in workforce readiness.

Despite these advancements, empirical studies on how PR professionals in Malaysia perceive and apply AI remain scarce. This gap is particularly significant given the sector's reliance on human connection, creativity, and contextual judgment—attributes traditionally thought to resist automation. While marketing and journalism have seen increasing AI integration, the Malaysian PR industry lacks both adoption and academic analysis. Preliminary data from this study's pilot survey supports this gap, indicating moderate awareness but relatively low practical integration of AI into PR tasks.

Figure 1. Perceived AI Adoption by PR Practitioners in Malaysia (Pilot Data, N=61)

PR Task	% of Respondents Agreeing AI is Useful
Writing Press Releases	85%
Content Management	82%
Media Monitoring	79%
Media Analysis	76%
Campaign Planning	76%
Media Monitoring Understanding	73%
Videography Support	72%
Leadership Prep (Media Conferences)	70%
Photography Support	70%
Face-to-Face Presentation	69%
Social Media Listening	68%
Media Relationship Building	68%
Press Release Distribution	66%

These figures suggest that Malaysian PR practitioners recognise the utility of AI in structured and repetitive tasks, such as writing, content scheduling, and data tracking.

However, tasks requiring strategic judgment, creativity, and emotional intelligence—such as crisis response or relationship-building—received comparatively lower agreement scores. This nuanced perception highlights a cautious yet growing openness to AI within the PR field.

Although AI offers opportunities for enhancing operational efficiency, its full integration into PR practices depends on multiple factors, including ease of use, trust, ethical concerns, and technical literacy. To understand these dynamics, this study employs the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as a guiding framework, focusing on two key constructs: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU).

RQ1 – What is the level of the perceived usefulness of AI technologies among PR practitioners in Malaysia regarding the efficiency of public relations practices?

RQ2 – What is the level of AI technologies impacting the roles and responsibilities of PR professionals in Malaysia?

RQ3 – What is the level of relationship between AI adoption and the perceived efficiency of PR practices among its practitioners?

LITERATURE REVIEW OR RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The definition of AI remains elusive, with no universally agreed-upon interpretation and criticism directed towards both the concept and its terminology for being ambiguous. Nonetheless, there is broad consensus that AI, in its current form, is neither conscious nor a general intelligence. Popular perceptions of AI, many argue, are largely fictional. Today, AI is primarily recognised in its 'narrow' form, designed for specific tasks, often replicating a particular human skill. These narrow AI structures employ various techniques, exhibiting different levels of independence and complexity. While they excel in their defined roles, they are incapable of performing functions beyond those for which they have been programmed. Examples of narrow AI include machine learning techniques such as deep learning and natural language processing (NLP), where machines learn over time by processing vast data sets. These training methods encompass supervised and unsupervised learning, as well as reinforcement learning and human feedback (RLHF).

A McKinsey & Company (2023) survey delved into the potential contributions of generative AI across various industries, revealing significant financial opportunities in key sectors. It was found that approximately 75% of the value generated by AI will be concentrated in four areas: customer operations, marketing and sales, software engineering, and research and development (R&D). The banking, high-tech, retail,

consumer goods, and life sciences industries are poised for the greatest growth in earnings. For instance, in the banking sector, AI is projected to generate an additional $200 billion to $340 billion in annual revenue, while the retail and consumer goods sectors could see an additional $400 billion to $660 billion (McKinsey & Company, 2023).

The increased visibility of AI tools became especially apparent in November 2022, with the launch of platforms like ChatGPT, Bard, Claude, and Midjourney. These tools, capable of generating both visual and written content, have gained considerable attention, particularly in marketing, where their potential for content creation has quickly been realised.

Numerous universities, professional organisations, and global PR bodies have addressed the growing intersection of PR, big data, and AI. The 2018 World Public Relations Forum, held in Oslo, explored key issues surrounding AI, while in Indonesia, the Asian Network for Public Opinion Research (ANPOR), in collaboration with Padjadjaran University, focused on critical topics such as social media, big data, and AI. These discussions underscore the increasing importance of AI, which has garnered significant attention from both scholars and industry practitioners alike.

Big data and AI are emerging as central concerns for professionals across various fields, including communications. Previous research has suggested that AI's influence will extend to all areas of expertise. While the extent of AI's impact on the PR profession remains uncertain, it is clear that PR professionals must develop a deep understanding of these technologies and prepare for the shifts they bring. The use of AI in automating PR tasks has already led to significant changes, demanding greater consideration of its effects on technological, economic, and societal sectors, particularly in media analysis related to company services and products.

AI provides big data operators with increasingly sophisticated tools for both predictive and descriptive analysis, streamlining work processes and maximising efficiency in terms of labour and time. However, existing studies present divergent viewpoints, with some advocating for AI integration, while others caution against its unregulated use. Most scholars agree that PR practice revolves around building relationships with stakeholders through face-to-face interaction. Public relations, which is rooted in fostering trust and reputation—qualities that humans have cultivated with each other, not with machines or robots—could suffer if AI-generated messages lack perceived authenticity.

The rapid advancement of technology has brought forth a variety of applications, platforms, and tools to enhance PR and communications efforts. These innovations not only simplify and automate tasks but also enable the analysis of complex data. Despite these advantages, concerns about their role in crisis management remain. For instance,

consistent engagement with influencers, reporting on company-related news, and analysing media coverage concerning services and products are crucial in evaluating the success of PR campaigns.

AI Scene in Malaysia

The establishment of the National Artificial Intelligence Office (NAIO) marks a pivotal step towards Malaysia's digital transformation, solidifying the country's commitment to advancing its AI agenda both regionally and globally. Approved by the Cabinet on 28 August 2024, NAIO is set to drive Malaysia's transition into a producer of AI technology and position it as a competitive player within the evolving digital economy.

To realise this vision, NAIO is addressing five interconnected areas: investments, innovation, collaboration, policy and governance, and security. These efforts aim to close the systemic gaps in AI within Malaysia and align educational programmes with industry needs. Emerging technologies, such as AI, robotics, and biotechnology, are becoming integral to national development, necessitating a highly skilled and adaptable workforce. Estimates suggest that by 2030, Malaysia will need an additional 500,000 workers in fields such as AI, cybersecurity, and data analytics, underscoring the urgency of workforce re-skilling programmes.

A key initiative under NAIO is the MyMahir platform, designed to educate 50,000 students in AI, computer programming, and data analysis by 2025. This programme seeks to address the country's growing demand for skilled talent in AI and related industries, while also preparing workers for the competitive landscape of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

While the focus is on workforce competency, the initiative also emphasises the importance of embedding Malaysian values and ethics into AI development. This reflects the significance of cultural contextualisation, ensuring that AI technology is harmonised with societal values, reducing bias and safeguarding data sovereignty. Such frameworks ensure that AI development in Malaysia is aligned with national interests.

In tandem, NAIO is promoting AI adoption through cross-sector collaboration and innovation. For example, AI applications in public service can enhance governance efficiency, expand access to services, and foster a robust digital economy. These efforts align with Malaysia's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with AI solutions aimed at addressing challenges in sectors such as environment, health, and education.

The establishment of NAIO represents a comprehensive policy shift towards digital transformation. By fostering investments, improving governance, and prioritising innovation, Malaysia aims to position itself as a regional leader in AI technology and

applications. The vision for the future economy is one that balances inclusivity, economic growth, and social development.

Selangor, Malaysia's state, has become the first to implement a state-run AI programme, setting a precedent for regional adoption. With an RM5 million allocation under Budget 2025, Selangor's AI blueprint focuses on improving public service efficiency, driving innovation, and providing AI capabilities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups. The launch of the Selangor AI Incubator Centre, in partnership with Google, marks a significant milestone in developing AI literacy and supporting technological innovation. As Malaysia progresses towards its AI transformation, Selangor's proactive stance serves as a key model for the nation's digital future.

*The Potential of AI in PR*The application of AI in public relations has proven to hold immense potential, offering new approaches to content creation, social relations, and crisis communications. Through machine learning algorithms, AI enables PR practitioners to process vast amounts of information quickly and accurately, allowing brands to respond meaningfully to constituencies, track issues in real-time, and react swiftly to potential crises.

Despite its many advantages, AI raises concerns about the future role of human skillsets in PR. The Chartered Institute of Public Relations acknowledges that while AI can automate certain tasks, such as media monitoring and sentiment analysis, it cannot replace human capabilities such as critical thinking and creativity. These uniquely human traits are essential in building genuine relationships with stakeholders—a core function of PR that AI cannot replicate.

The increasing integration of AI technologies in PR is reshaping the industry, transforming practitioners from passive observers to active collaborators with the public. Tools like chatbots and voice-activated assistants are now essential components of marketing strategies, particularly in service industries (De Andrade & Tumelero, 2022). These technologies automate repetitive tasks, accelerate information processing, and improve the accuracy of data-driven insights, freeing up time for PR professionals to focus on strategic and creative tasks.

Nevertheless, a cautionary perspective on over-reliance on AI is warranted. The ability of AI to analyse complex data does not negate the importance of human judgment in decision-making. As Foldes (2018) points out, while AI enhances professional activities, it cannot replace the expertise required for critical decision-making. Additionally, concerns about privacy, misinformation, and the ethical

implications of data usage temper AI's potential to revolutionise PR practices (Prahl & Goh, 2021).

AI adoption in PR has been uneven across regions, with notable disparities between the Global North and Africa. Literature from Western countries suggests increasing engagement with AI in PR (Pavilik, 2007; Tilson, 2017), while African studies indicate that AI adoption in PR remains limited. This gap highlights the need for more empirical research on AI's use in non-Western contexts, especially in Africa. The Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence (2019) notes that African PR professionals face significant barriers to adopting AI, including infrastructure, training, and resource limitations.

In contrast, the Global North has witnessed an increased awareness of AI's transformative potential. Davenport et al. (2020) argue that AI can reshape marketing strategies and decision-making through real-time insights. However, such transformation requires the development of new skills, such as big data analysis and predictive modelling, to ensure that professionals remain competitive (Maldonado, 2020).

Despite AI's growing presence, there remains a notable gap in AI competencies within the PR industry. Studies by Galloway & Swiateck (2018) and Zerfass et al. (2020) highlight the lack of AI training among professionals, which limits broader AI adoption. This gap is particularly evident in developing countries, where AI infrastructure and educational frameworks are often lacking. However, Panda et al. (2019) report that the potential of AI to improve PR practice is becoming increasingly evident as professionals recognise its ability to simplify work, predict trends, and gauge consumer behaviour with unmatched precision.

AI's role in public relations is best viewed as complementary to human expertise. According to Stone et al. (2020), while AI can process large amounts of data and provide valuable insights, it cannot replicate the imagination, emotional intelligence, and reflective thinking that drive successful PR practice. For example, while AI can help PR professionals identify and respond to crises in real-time, human discretion is still needed to craft meaningful, personalised messages that resonate with audiences.

Moreover, AI can assist in decision-making by revealing hidden consumer trends, as evidenced by Shrestha et al. (2019). However, as Whitaker (2017) suggests, the value of AI lies not in replacing professionals but in providing them with information-driven tools to work smarter and creatively.

Application of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): A Theoretical Framework

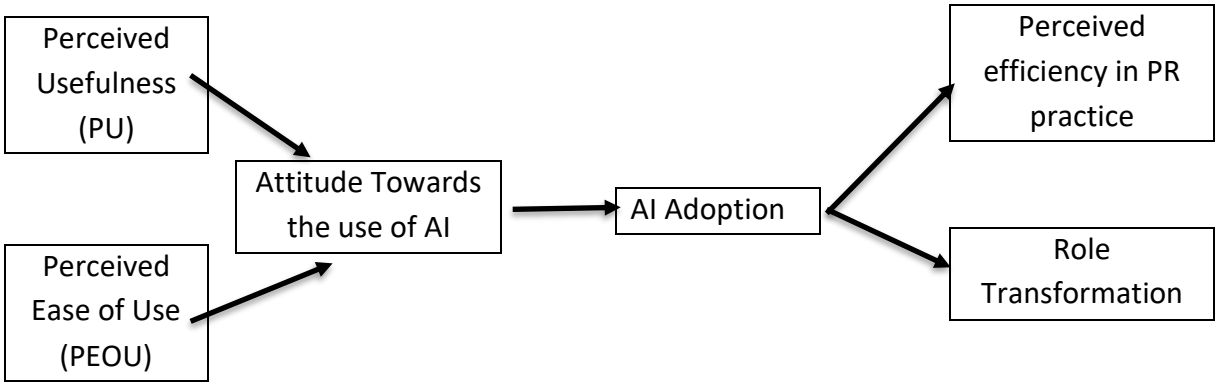
The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis, serves as the theoretical foundation for this research. TAM provides a structured framework for understanding the factors that influence the adoption and perceived usefulness of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology in public relations (PR) practice. This model has been widely used in studies on technology adoption, particularly in workplace settings, where it explains how new devices and technologies are integrated into professional environments. According to TAM, the acceptance of new technology is determined by two key factors: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU).

Perceived usefulness (PU) refers to the extent to which an individual believes that using a specific technology will enhance their job performance. In this study, PU is employed to examine how AI technology is perceived in terms of improving efficiency and effectiveness in PR work within Malaysia. On the other hand, perceived ease of use (PEOU) denotes the degree to which a technology is considered free from effort. By incorporating these constructs, TAM helps illuminate how practitioners' perceptions of AI influence their adoption behaviour and the subsequent implications for PR practices.

This research applies TAM to explore the integration and interaction between practitioners' attitudes, the adoption of AI technologies, and their impact on the Malaysian PR sector. By focusing on PU and PEOU, this study not only investigates the factors driving the adoption of AI but also sheds light on how these technologies are reshaping PR practices. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the evolving dynamics between technology and professional communication in the age of AI.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework on the Perceived of Usefulness Perceived usefulness of AI on PR Practices in Malaysia



The conceptual framework as presented in the Figure 1 illustrates the interaction between the major constructs of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the acceptance of AI technology by PR practitioners in Malaysia.

PU is the degree to which PR professionals believe that AI technologies enhance their work efficiency. This construct influences their use attitudes and thus their willingness to use the mentioned technologies. In this study, Research Question 1 examine the perceived effectiveness of AI technologies in automating the practice of public relations. The relationship between perceived usefulness and AI adoption reflects how perceptions of efficiency straightaway affect the adoption of technology.

PEOU is the degree to which AI technologies are seen as user-friendly and easy to use. Like PU, PEOU influences practitioners' attitude toward use, which in turn influences their adoption behaviors. This is consistent with Research Question 3, which are concerned with establishing the ease of adoption and how it influences perceived efficiency in PR practices.

Attitude Toward Use and AI Adoption

The way PR practitioners perceive AI, particularly in terms of its practical benefits and ease of integration, plays a pivotal role in shaping adoption rates. When AI technologies are viewed positively, they tend to be integrated more frequently into professional practice, resulting in two key outcomes. Firstly, the adoption of AI enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of PR functions, contributing directly to the study's objective of assessing the value AI brings to the field. Secondly, this adoption triggers a broader transformation in the roles and responsibilities of practitioners, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of PR work—a theme central to the exploration in Research Question 2.

Perceived Effectiveness in Public Relations and Professional Role Transformation

The integration of AI technologies into PR is not merely about improving operational efficiency. It fundamentally alters how practitioners approach their work, redefining roles and responsibilities in response to these technological shifts. For example, tasks traditionally seen as time-intensive, such as media monitoring or campaign performance analysis, are increasingly automated, allowing practitioners to focus on strategic decision-making. This dual effect – enhanced productivity and role evolution – not only underscores the strategic implications of AI adoption but also aligns closely with the study's broader aim to explore the intersection of technology and professional transformation within the industry.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive survey approach to explore the perceived usefulness of artificial intelligence (AI) in public relations (PR) practices in Malaysia. The research is guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), focusing on perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) as primary determinants of AI adoption among communication professionals.

A total of 61 public relations practitioners participated in this pilot study. The sample was obtained through non-probability convenience sampling, targeting practitioners with direct experience in PR and some exposure to or awareness of AI tools. While this method limits generalisability, it is appropriate for pilot studies aimed at refining research instruments and exploring initial trends (Hertzog, 2008; Johanson & Brooks, 2010).

Importantly, the sample represents a diverse cross-section of the Malaysian PR landscape. Respondents were drawn from the following sectors:

- Government agencies - 36 respondents (59%)
- Government-linked companies (GLCs) - 11 respondents (18%)
- Private companies - 12 respondents (20%)
- Self-employed and retiree - 2 respondents (3%)

This distribution reflects the current structure of Malaysia's communication ecosystem, where the public sector and GLCs play a significant role in employing PR professionals. In addition, the sample includes individuals across a range of professional levels—from junior executives to heads of department ensuring a balanced representation of practitioner perspectives.

Respondents held varied positions, ranging from junior executives to department heads, with over 54% reporting more than 16 years of industry experience. This diversity ensures that the findings reflect a range of professional perspectives within the Malaysian PR ecosystem.

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed to operationalise the constructs of perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) from TAM. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:

1. **Section A:** Demographic information to profile respondents.

2. **Section B:** Items measuring attitudes and perceptions towards artificial intelligence technologies and their usefulness in public relations practices.

3. **Section C:** Items evaluating the relationship between artificial intelligence adoption and its perceived impact on efficiency, roles, and responsibilities in public relations.

The instrument was reviewed by two academic and industry experts for face validity and subsequently tested in the pilot for reliability and clarity. Each item was measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). The questionnaire was designed to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives.

Data Collection

Data were collected via an online self-administered questionnaire using Google Forms. Respondents were provided with study information and consent statements, ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The data collection period spanned three weeks in November 2024.

Pilot Study Analysis

The pilot study focused on descriptive statistical analysis to examine central tendencies, variability, and initial trends in perception. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess internal consistency of the instrument. The overall alpha coefficient was 0.962, indicating a high level of reliability across the items measuring AI's perceived usefulness.

The pilot findings served to refine the questionnaire and confirm the conceptual alignment between the TAM framework and the responses gathered. While this initial study does not test causal relationships, it sets the stage for future research involving inferential statistical techniques (e.g., regression or SEM) to examine behavioural intention and actual adoption behaviour.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Statistics

		Age	Gender	Years of Working Experience	Professional Role	Primary Industry of Employment
N	Valid	61	61	61	61	61
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0

Table 1. Respondents Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	23-29 years old	6	9.8	9.8	9.8
	30-35 years old	11	18.0	18.0	27.9
	36-40 years old	8	13.1	13.1	41.0
	41-45 years old	20	32.8	32.8	73.8
	>46years old	16	26.2	26.2	100.0
	Total	61	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	30	49.2	49.2	49.2
	Female	31	50.8	50.8	100.0
	Total	61	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Years of Working Experience

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-4 years of working experience	7	11.5	11.5	11.5
	5-10 years of working experience	7	11.5	11.5	23.0
	11-15 years of working experience	14	23.0	23.0	45.9
	>16 years of working experience	33	54.0	54.0	100.0
	Total	61	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. Professional Role

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Junior Executive	13	21.3	21.3	21.3
	Senior Executive	11	18.0	18.0	39.3
	Assitant Manager	9	14.8	14.8	54.1
	Manager	13	21.3	21.3	75.4
	Head of Department	15	24.6	24.6	100.0
	Total	61	100.0	100.0	

Demographic Data

The sample consisted of various PR practitioners in Malaysia, reflecting a diverse range of industry backgrounds. Respondents' ages ranged from 23 years to over 46 years, with the majority aged between 41–45 years. Gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 50.8% identifying as female and 49.2% as male. Regarding professional experience, 54% of respondents had more than 16 years in the field, while 23% had 11–

15 years, and smaller proportions reported less than 10 years. Respondents were employed across various sectors as shown in Table 5.

This diverse composition provides a meaningful snapshot of AI perceptions across Malaysia's multifaceted PR ecosystem.

Table 5. Primary Industry of Employment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Government Agency	36	59.0	59.0	59.0
	Government Link Companies	11	18.0	18.0	77.0
	Private Company	12	19.7	19.7	96.7
	Self-employed	1	1.6	1.6	98.4
	Retiree	1	1.6	1.6	100.0
	Total	61	100.0	100.0	

PU of AI in Public Relations Practices

Table 6. AI eases PR tasks

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
AI eases the process of writing press releases.	61	1.00	5.00	4.2295	.92003
AI eases content management tasks in PR	61	1.00	5.00	4.1639	.82017
AI eases tracking mentions of specific keywords across digital media.	61	1.00	5.00	4.0656	.98097
AI eases the process of compiling news clippings in PR	61	1.00	5.00	4.0656	.83404
AI eases the understanding of media analysis.	61	1.00	5.00	3.9508	1.00708
AI eases campaign planning in PR.	61	1.00	5.00	3.9508	.97342
AI eases the understanding of media monitoring in PR.	61	1.00	5.00	3.7377	.96439
AI eases PR work with videography	61	1.00	5.00	3.7049	1.00572
AI eases preparation for senior leadership teams in media conferences.	61	1.00	5.00	3.6393	1.01707
AI eases PR work with photography	61	1.00	5.00	3.6393	1.09594

AI eases PR work with face-to-face presentation	61	1.00	5.00	3.5902	1.13103
AI eases the process of social media listening.	61	1.00	5.00	3.5738	1.02403
AI eases media relationship-building in PR.	61	1.00	5.00	3.5738	1.02403
AI eases the distribution of press releases.	61	1.00	5.00	3.4426	1.08819
Valid N (listwise)	61				

The analysis of responses the respondents reveals that AI is generally perceived as useful in enhancing efficiency across various public relations functions. Tasks such as writing press releases (M = 4.23, SD = 0.92), managing content (M = 4.16, SD = 0.82), and tracking media mentions (M = 4.07, SD = 0.98) received the highest usefulness scores. These are all highly structured, repetitive tasks that align well with the capabilities of narrow AI applications. This finding supports the argument by Galloway and Swiatek (2018) that AI, in its current form, is particularly effective for automating rule-based tasks in PR, such as media monitoring, content scheduling, and distribution. Similarly, Davies (2024) notes that AI tools have become standard in communication workflows for press release drafting and trend analysis, allowing professionals to redirect their focus toward strategic functions.

In contrast, tasks requiring emotional intelligence or interpersonal interaction, such as face-to-face presentations (M = 3.59, SD = 1.13), media relationship-building (M = 3.57, SD = 1.02), and stakeholder engagement, received notably lower usefulness scores. These findings suggest scepticism regarding AI's ability to replicate human judgment, empathy, and trust-based communication. This distinction echoes Foldes (2018), who emphasised that while AI can support efficiency, it lacks the nuanced, context-sensitive communication that PR practitioners rely on to manage relationships. Furthermore, Prahl and Goh (2021) highlight the ethical risks associated with AI-generated messages that lack authenticity or transparency, potentially undermining stakeholder trust.

General Perception of AI in PR Tasks

Overall, the data suggests that AI is regarded most favourably in tasks that are routine, data-driven, or structured. For instance, the statement "AI eases the process of writing press releases" received the highest mean score (M = 4.2295, SD = 0.92003), indicating broad agreement that AI is highly effective in this area. Similarly, tasks such as content management (M = 4.1639, SD = 0.82017) and tracking digital media mentions (M =

4.0656, SD = 0.98097) also received relatively high mean scores, reinforcing the perception that AI is particularly useful for organisational, monitoring, and content distribution activities. These findings align with the assumption that AI excels in automating and streamlining processes involving large volumes of data or content creation.

However, the mean scores for other PR tasks present a more nuanced view of AI's utility. Tasks requiring higher levels of human interaction, creativity, or strategic thinking—such as "AI eases PR work with face-to-face presentations" (M = 3.5902, SD = 1.13103) and "AI eases media relationship-building in PR" (M = 3.5738, SD = 1.02403)—received lower mean scores compared to more data-driven tasks. This suggests that respondents perceive AI as less effective in activities that require personal engagement, empathy, or complex decision-making. Additionally, the relatively higher standard deviations for these tasks indicate greater variability in responses, reflecting divided opinions on AI's usefulness in such contexts.

The variability in respondents' responses, as indicated by standard deviations, is particularly noteworthy. For instance, the high standard deviation for "AI eases PR work with face-to-face presentations" (SD = 1.13103) suggests considerable disagreement regarding AI's ability to support interpersonal communication. While some respondents may perceive AI as a useful tool for presentations, others remain sceptical, likely due to the belief that human interactions rely on nuance and adaptability—qualities that AI may not fully replicate.

In contrast, tasks such as press release writing (SD = 0.92003) and content management (SD = 0.82017) exhibit lower variability in responses, suggesting a stronger consensus that AI is beneficial in these areas. This implies that for structured, process-driven tasks, AI's role is widely accepted and seen as effective across the sample.

Table.7 AI efficiently handle PR functions

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
AI efficiently saves time by automating repetitive tasks.	61	1.00	5.00	3.9672	.96553
AI efficiently creates engaging PR content.	61	1.00	5.00	3.8689	1.02430
AI efficiently suggests appropriate responses based on data-driven insights.	61	1.00	5.00	3.8361	.95185
AI efficiently drafts statements during times of crisis.	61	1.00	5.00	3.7705	1.05504

AI efficiently gains a better understanding of the target audience	61	1.00	5.00	3.7541	1.02723
AI efficiently improves customer relationship management using targeted communications.	61	1.00	5.00	3.7541	.94262
AI efficiently analyses complex data.	61	1.00	5.00	3.7377	1.01492
AI efficiently supports management in adopting proactive reputation management.	61	1.00	5.00	3.7213	.95098
AI efficiently provides insights into the sentiment of media coverage.	61	1.00	5.00	3.7213	1.03491
AI efficiently creates impactful strategies for the brand.	61	1.00	5.00	3.6885	.97538
AI efficiently assists in identifying risks.	61	1.00	5.00	3.6557	1.01465
AI efficiently measures PR value.	61	1.00	5.00	3.6066	1.02109
AI efficiently monitors public sentiment in real-time during crisis communications.	61	1.00	5.00	3.5902	1.08593
AI efficiently manages risks.	61	1.00	5.00	3.3279	1.07581
Valid N (listwise)	61				

The results reveal that AI is perceived as a valuable tool in improving operational efficiency across several core PR functions. Respondents agreed strongly that AI contributes to automating repetitive tasks (M = 3.97, SD = 0.97), creating engaging PR content (M = 3.87, SD = 1.02), and generating response suggestions based on data insights (M = 3.84, SD = 0.95). These findings support the central premise of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), particularly the construct of perceived usefulness (PU), which posits that users are more likely to adopt technologies they believe enhance job performance (Davis, 1989). This trend is consistent with recent industry reports by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR, 2023), which highlight that AI tools are increasingly embedded in campaign planning, content automation, and sentiment analysis, enabling communication professionals to manage higher information loads with greater efficiency.

Nevertheless, perceptions of AI's value decline when tasks become more strategic or sensitive. For instance, AI's role in managing organisational risks was rated

lower (M = 3.33, SD = 1.08), as was its ability to monitor public sentiment during crisis scenarios (M = 3.59, SD = 1.09). This suggests that while AI is seen as a supportive tool for data-driven and routine tasks, its application in crisis communication and strategic reputation management remains contested. This echoes findings by Stone et al. (2020), who caution against over-reliance on AI in contexts where emotional intelligence, judgment, and stakeholder trust are paramount. As such, AI's impact on PR appears asymmetrical: practitioners embrace it for tactical execution, but hesitate to delegate complex decision-making or relational tasks to machines.

These findings reinforce the view that AI's current utility in PR lies more in augmenting human capacity than replacing it—a theme echoed across both global academic research and professional practice debates. Future adoption strategies must therefore balance automation with human oversight, particularly in contexts involving ethical sensitivity, crisis response, or brand integrity.

Reliability Result

The internal consistency of the scale used to measure PU of AI in PR tasks was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. The coefficient yielded a value of 0.962, indicating excellent reliability and suggesting that the scale items consistently measure the underlying construct. This high level of reliability supports the theoretical foundation of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), specifically Davis's (1989) proposition that PU is a coherent and measurable construct that can reliably predict user attitudes toward technology adoption.

Among the scale items, the strongest corrected item-total correlations were observed for "AI creates engaging PR content" (r = .838), "AI improves customer relationship management" (r = .836), and "AI supports reputation management" (r = .809). These results indicate that respondents consistently associated AI with value-enhancing capabilities in communication tasks that involve content quality, relationship-building, and brand stewardship. The instrument's psychometric robustness provides a reliable basis for further exploration of PU and its relationship to broader behavioural outcomes, such as intention to adopt or actual use of AI in PR contexts.

Table 8. Reliability Analysis

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted

AI eases the process of compiling news clippings in PR	101.2623	373.830	.674	.	.962
AI eases the process of social media listening.	101.7541	371.155	.610	.	.963
AI eases the understanding of media monitoring in PR.	101.5902	370.813	.660	.	.962
AI eases the understanding of media analysis.	101.3770	366.205	.753	.	.961
AI eases tracking mentions of specific keywords across digital media.	101.2623	367.763	.732	.	.962
AI eases preparation for senior leadership teams in media conferences.	101.6885	364.485	.792	.	.961
AI eases campaign planning in PR.	101.3770	365.272	.807	.	.961
AI eases PR work with photography	101.6885	366.118	.690	.	.962
AI eases PR work with videography	101.6230	365.705	.768	.	.961
AI eases PR work with face-to-face presentation	101.7377	359.397	.830	.	.961
AI efficiently monitors public sentiment in real-time during crisis communications.	101.7377	363.297	.768	.	.961
AI efficiently drafts statements during times of crisis.	101.5574	362.584	.810	.	.961
AI efficiently improves customer relationship management using targeted communications.	101.5738	365.249	.836	.	.961
AI efficiently creates engaging PR content.	101.4590	362.519	.838	.	.961

AI efficiently gains a better understanding of the target audience	101.5738	364.249	.789	.	.961
AI efficiently supports management in adopting proactive reputation management.	101.6066	365.909	.809	.	.961
AI efficiently measures PR value.	101.7213	363.871	.805	.	.961
AI efficiently analyses complex data.	101.5902	365.579	.764	.	.961
AI efficiently saves time by automating repetitive tasks.	101.3607	365.468	.809	.	.961
AI efficiently suggests appropriate responses based on data-driven insights.	101.4918	367.754	.756	.	.961
AI efficiently provides insights into the sentiment of media coverage.	101.6066	365.776	.743	.	.961
AI efficiently manages risks.	102.0000	362.667	.792	.	.961

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this pilot study provide preliminary insights into how PR practitioners perceive the usefulness of AI in their daily work. Overall, participants expressed favourable views toward AI in automating operational tasks, particularly those involving structured, repetitive activities such as press release drafting, media monitoring and content management. These results align with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), specifically the construct of perceived usefulness (PU), which posits that technologies believed to enhance job performance are more likely to be accepted and adopted (Davis, 1989).

This study's results are also consistent with previous research highlighting AI's utility in streamlining tactical communication functions. Galloway and Swiatek (2018) argue that AI tools are most effective when applied to low-ambiguity, information-intensive PR tasks, while Davies (2024) observes that content automation has become an essential tool in modern communication planning. The consistently high PU scores in

this study further affirm these views and suggest that Malaysian PR professionals are open to AI in areas where efficiency, speed and consistency are priorities.

However, a notable decline in PU was observed for tasks requiring interpersonal sensitivity, creativity and emotional intelligence, such as stakeholder relationship-building, crisis management and public sentiment interpretation. These findings underscore a cautious stance toward AI in strategic or ethical domains. Foldes (2018) cautions that AI lacks the contextual intelligence required for emotionally charged communication scenarios and Prahl and Goh (2021) emphasise the risk of eroding public trust through AI-generated, impersonal interactions. Thus, while practitioners appreciate AI's functional benefits, they remain sceptical about its capacity to perform roles central to the humanistic essence of PR.

From a theoretical perspective, this reinforces the partial applicability of TAM in communication contexts. While PU was clearly supported in this pilot, constructs such as behavioural intention and actual usage were not measured, an acknowledged limitation. Davis (1989) and subsequent scholars (e.g., Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Zerfass et al., 2020) argue that PU must be analysed alongside PEOU, behavioural intention and facilitating conditions to fully predict adoption. Therefore, while the current findings validate PU as a reliable and relevant construct in PR contexts, they also indicate the need for an expanded TAM application in future studies.

Finally, the Malaysian context adds unique insight to global discussions. The high proportion of respondents from government and government-linked agencies suggests that institutional and policy environments may significantly shape AI adoption attitudes. Bourne (2019) highlights that public sector communication is often constrained by bureaucratic and reputational risk considerations, which can delay the uptake of emerging technologies. Thus, while AI's perceived usefulness is acknowledged, its strategic integration into PR practice may depend on institutional readiness, ethical guardrails and supportive leadership.

Implications for PR Practice

The findings suggest that AI is not merely an auxiliary tool but a fundamental asset in PR practice. Its ability to streamline media monitoring, facilitate crisis communication, enhance creative production, and support strategic decision-making makes it indispensable in today's PR landscape. However, while AI improves efficiency, PR professionals must ensure ethical considerations, such as data privacy and AI bias, are addressed when integrating AI into their workflows.

Overall, the results confirm AI's transformative impact on PR, reinforcing its role in enhancing media tracking, crisis response, content creation, and risk management.

The high Cronbach's Alpha values validate the reliability of these findings, providing strong evidence that AI is a valuable tool for modern PR professionals. Future research could explore how PR practitioners adapt to AI-driven workflows and the potential challenges associated with AI adoption in the industry.

For PR practitioners, the findings suggest that AI adoption can significantly enhance operational efficiency, particularly in data-driven tasks. Organisations should invest in AI tools that automate routine tasks, thereby allowing practitioners to focus on strategic decision-making and creative solutions. This could lead to a shift in PR education and training, where future practitioners are equipped with both traditional PR skills and technical knowledge of AI technologies.

For PR agencies and organisations, this study highlights the need for a balanced approach to AI integration. While AI can handle data analytics and routine tasks, human expertise remains indispensable in managing relationships and crafting creative campaigns. Training programmes should emphasise the complementarity of AI and human skills to fully leverage the benefits of both.

Limitations

The pilot study had several limitations, including the use of non-random sampling and a limited sample size, which restricts the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, the study was cross-sectional, meaning it captured perceptions at a single point in time and did not account for the evolving nature of AI technologies or PR practices. Future research could explore the long-term impact of AI on PR roles or focus on a larger, more representative sample.

Further research could examine the specific AI tools most commonly used in PR practices in Malaysia, comparing their adoption rates and effectiveness. Additionally, exploring how AI is reshaping public relations strategies across different sectors could provide deeper insights into the evolving role of AI in PR. A longitudinal study could also track how AI adoption influences PR practices over time, particularly as AI technologies continue to evolve.

CONCLUSION

This pilot study set out to examine the PU of AI in PR practice among Malaysian practitioners, using TAM as its guiding theoretical framework. The findings indicate that PR professionals largely perceive AI as a valuable tool for enhancing task efficiency, particularly in areas such as content creation, media monitoring and administrative automation. These results affirm the construct of PU within TAM (Davis, 1989) and suggest a growing openness toward AI technologies in the Malaysian communication sector.

However, the study also reveals limitations in AI's perceived relevance for tasks involving relational engagement, creativity and ethical decision-making. This divide reinforces the argument that AI currently serves best as an augmentative tool rather than a replacement for human communicators (Stone et al., 2020; Galloway & Swiatek, 2018). The hesitancy observed in applying AI to strategic and emotional communication contexts highlights the importance of preserving human judgment and empathy in professional PR roles.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study supports PU as a valid and reliable construct for evaluating emerging technologies in PR, but also reveals the limits of a perception-only approach. The absence of behavioural intention and actual usage metrics constrains the full application of TAM. Future research should therefore integrate these additional constructs and apply causal analytical methods such as regression or structural equation modelling (SEM) to more robustly assess AI adoption behaviour in the communication field.

In practical terms, PR professionals should be encouraged to approach AI as a collaborative partner, not a threat. Training programmes should prioritise AI literacy, with particular focus on ethics, data interpretation and human-machine synergy. Organisations must also develop clear guidelines for the responsible and transparent use of AI in public messaging, especially in sensitive or high-stakes scenarios.

At the policy level, Malaysia's ongoing digital transformation efforts, including the National Artificial Intelligence Office (NAIO) and MyMahir digital skilling initiative, should explicitly incorporate communication professionals into their outreach. Equipping this sector with future-ready capabilities is essential to ensuring ethical, effective, and culturally grounded AI adoption.

This pilot study contributes to a growing body of regional literature on AI in communication by offering empirical, context-specific insights into practitioner attitudes in Malaysia. It lays the groundwork for more comprehensive national studies and sets a direction for interdisciplinary inquiry that connects public relations, technology acceptance, and ethical innovation.

BIODATA

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