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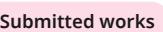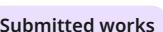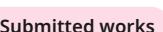
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ENHANCING PR AGENDA SETTING:
KOL AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the strategic integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) within Public Relation (PR) campaigns aimed at advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Utilizing Agenda Setting Theory, the study examines how AI enhance the precision of sustainability objectives. Data gathered through a mixed-methods approach, involving in-depth interviews with PR practitioners and quantitative surveys, to assess the adoption and efficacy of AI in managing KOL partnerships. Key findings indicate that 45.5% of respondents use AI to optimize KOL interactions, while 33.3% incorporate KOLs into campaigns focused on SDG-related initiatives. Furthermore, 44.4% of respondents emphasize the critical importance of credibility in determining the success of KOL-driven campaigns. However, challenges remain, as 22.2% of professionals report difficulties in AI adoption, citing a lack of technical training as a barrier. The study concludes that AI significantly enhances PR strategies by improving audience targeting and campaign management, though human expertise remains essential in ensuring ethical decision-making and contextual relevance, particularly in culturally diverse regions such as Indonesia. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the intersection of AI, PR, and sustainability, providing practical recommendations for future campaigns aimed at promoting global development goals. To enhance the relevance of the study within the field of public relations and sustainability, keywords such as Agenda Setting Theory have been incorporated to better align the paper's focus with strategic communication frameworks.

Keywords: *Public Relations, Artificial Intelligence, Key Opinion Leaders, Agenda Setting Theory, Sustainable Development Goals*

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements have revolutionized Public Relations (PR), with Artificial Intelligence (AI) playing a crucial role in various PR functions, from relationship building to campaign management (Suherman, 2020). The digital first shift of the 4.0 industrial revolution has made AI integral to modern PR strategies. Agenda Setting Theory addresses how the media shapes public perceptions of important issues." (Shaw & McCombs, 1972).

AI advancements facilitate quicker and more accurate identification of public agendas by analyzing data from digital platforms and social media, allowing PR to adjust narratives accordingly (Guzman & Lewis, 2020). However, the human element remains essential for

designing algorithms, organizing data, and making informed decisions based on AI-generated insights (Jones & Sun, 2021). This research aims to explore the adaptation of AI in PR practices to enhance responsiveness to public agendas, particularly within Indonesia's diverse cultural and social context (Suherman, 2020).

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Public Relations (PR) has become increasingly in shaping strategic communication efforts. With AI-driven tools now being widely adopted, PR practitioners are better equipped to enhance audience targeting, content creation, and campaign management. AI's ability to analyze large volumes of data in real time allows PR professionals to align their strategies with emerging trends, particularly in support of SDGs. The role of KOLs in influencing public opinion has also gained prominence, and AI can optimize the selection of KOLs to ensure that PR campaigns resonate with targeted audiences, thereby advancing global sustainability initiatives (Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

This research draws on Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which highlights the media's role in shaping public perceptions of issue salience. PR practitioners, leveraging AI, can now identify critical issues that align with the SDGs and use KOLs to influence public attention on these matters. AI driven analysis provides real time insights into audience behavior and sentiment, allowing for more precise agenda setting that is both data-driven and responsive to public concern (Jones & Sun, 2021). Source credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) informs the study by addressing the significance of KOL credibility in shaping public trust and engagement. AI encances this process by identifying KOLs with the highest credibility, ensuring the effectiveness of PR campaigns.

THEORY / LITERATURE

Agenda Setting Theory

In the context of public relations, Agenda Setting Theory is an important framework for understanding how practitioners can influence public perceptions of certain issues through strategic relationships with the media. Public relations plays an active role in shaping and directing the media's focus on issues that benefit the institution or organization it represents, functioning not only as a conveyor of information but also as an agenda builder (Botan & Hazleton, 2006).

The process involves various techniques, such as the drafting of press releases, the holding of press conferences, the provision of credible sources, and the creation of media-generic moments that attract the attention of journalists. Consequently, public relations functions as a gatekeeper, meticulously observing the dissemination of information and capitalizing on opportunities to strategically position messages within the media agenda.

The application of Agenda Setting Theory in public relations, as emphasized by Kryanto (2021), enables practitioners to pinpoint key themes pertinent to the target audience and

methodically organize communications. This approach ensures that issues brought to the audience's attention are of real importance. This is particularly relevant in crisis management, product launches, social campaigns, and organizational image building.

Agenda setting is also closely related to framing. Framing is how an issue is packaged narratively and visually. This creates a certain interpretation. In public relations, framing is used to shape public perceptions that align with an organization's values and goals. Consequently, public relations endeavors to garner attention for specific issues while also cultivating a comprehensive understanding of how these issues are perceived by the public. This reflects a shift from the first level of agenda setting, issue salience, to the second level, attribute salience, as described by McCombs and Shaw (1993). With the development of digital and social media, public relations professionals have greater opportunities to directly shape the public agenda through owned media channels, as well as by utilizing influencers, media partners, and digital platform algorithms. However, new challenges also arise. These challenges are especially in terms of source credibility and the speed of information flow. This speed of information cannot always be controlled. Therefore, a deep understanding of agenda-setting theory is very important for PR practitioners in designing responsive and sustainable communication strategies.

Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) and their Role in Agenda Setting

KOL (Key Opinion Leaders) plays a vital role in the Agenda Setting process, influencing how certain issues are identified and prioritized by the public through media and influential figures. Rooted in the Two-Step Flow theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), KOLs function as intermediaries who filter, interpret, and reframe messages for their specific audiences. Rather than passively transmitting media content, KOLs contextualize and personalize messages, allowing these to resonate more deeply with followers' values and lived experiences (Jurkowitz et al., 2020). This dynamic positions KOLs not only as secondary agenda setters, but also as powerful actors capable of shaping collective attention and influencing public discourse.

In digital media environments, the role of KOL has become increasingly prominent. As opinion leaders within their respective niches—be it sustainability, health, gender, or education—KOLs act as trusted figures who legitimize information and reinforce media messages by customizing them for audience needs. This interpretive function is crucial for transforming broad institutional campaigns into accessible narratives, which audiences are more likely to internalize and act upon. According to Strömbäck et al. (2020), the credibility of KOLs significantly affects how effectively messages are received, emphasizing that perceived trustworthiness is a key determinant in agenda transmission.

The relevance of KOLs is particularly apparent in campaigns addressing broader social goals, such as those outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Issues like climate

change, gender equality, or poverty eradication are often abstract and complex; KOLs make these themes relatable by embedding them within everyday narratives and social contexts. Winter and Eyal (1981) noted early on that the personalization of complex issues increases public attention and understanding, and this effect is magnified in the age of social media where parasocial relationships with KOLs create emotional bonds that encourage behavioral shifts.

Moreover, Liu and Huang (2020) demonstrate that the use of KOLs significantly enhances public engagement with SDG-related content. KOLs mobilize public interest by reframing sustainability issues in compelling, value-driven narratives that match audience concerns. The integration of AI and data analytics into PR practices further expands the strategic potential of KOLs. Guzman and Lewis (2020) note that AI can help practitioners identify the most relevant and influential KOLs for specific topics or communities, optimizing agenda-setting efforts by aligning message framing with audience preferences and tracking real-time engagement patterns.

Through this synergy between traditional media, digital influencers, and data-driven strategy, KOLs not only amplify the reach of key messages but also accelerate the agenda-setting process by bypassing institutional bottlenecks. They serve as dynamic "gatekeepers" in a decentralized media ecosystem, directing attention toward urgent social issues more rapidly and effectively than legacy media can achieve alone. This places KOLs at the center of modern public communication strategies, especially for campaigns rooted in values-based frameworks such as the SDGs.

Role & Function of Public Relation

Public Relations serves as a vital link between organizations and their internal and external stakeholders. Its primary function is to foster relationships that build trust and ensure loyalty through effective communication. PR operates across various models, including one-way persuasive communication, two-way asymmetrical, and symmetrical communication models, as well as interactive models. The key roles of PR include being a communicator, reputation manager, and strategic consultant. As a communicator, PR conveys the organization's message through multiple channels, ensuring that the message reaches the intended audience effectively. Reputation management is another crucial function, as PR works to build and maintain a positive image of the organization by ensuring transparency, consistency, and honesty in all communications, especially during crises (Fawkes, 2018).

Additionally, PR functions as a strategic consultant, contributing to decision-making processes within organizations, with a deep understanding of audience behavior and market dynamics. PR ensures a mutual understanding between organizations and their stakeholders, promoting sustainable relationships. PR has expanded beyond traditional

roles, especially with the introduction of AI and KOLs. These tools enhance PR's ability to communicate efficiently and manage campaigns that align with SDGs, making PR a pivotal player in shaping public perceptions and driving positive social change (Jones & Sun, 2021).

Research
Involves gathering informaition tp understand the organization's current situation, audience, and the boarder context. of media coverage.

Adjustments
Based on the evaluation results, PR practitioners may make adjustment to their strategies to improve future campaigns and better meet the organicational goals.

Planning
PR proffesionals develop a strategic plan based on the research findings. This include setting object, identifying target audiences, and determining key messages and tactic.

Evaluation
After implementing the strategies, PR profesionals assess the effectiveness of their efforts, include measuring media coverage, analyzing audience engangement, and evaluating wheter objectives were met.

Implementation
Involves executing the planned strategies and tactics. It may includes writing press releases, organizing events, launching social media campaigns, ad enganging with media and other stakeholder.

Process of Public Relation (Canel & Kent, 2019)

Canel and Kent in their book *Public Relations: A Strategic Approach* (2019) which draws on the perspective of Grunig and Hunt in *Managing Public Relation* (1984), categorize public relations into distinct stages. Each phase is interdependent and plays a critical role in shaping effective public communication strategies. In the first stage, the process begins with research, which is essential to grounding PR activities in empirical understanding. This phase involves collecting information to assess the organization's current situation, audience characteristics, and the broader context of media coverage. Research enables practitioners to diagnose communication challenges, segment audiences, and identify strategic opportunities (Broom & Sha, 2012). It forms the foundation for evidence-based decision-making and sets the direction for subsequent planning.

Second, following research, the planning stage involves the development of a strategic communication framework. PR professionals formulate objectives, determine key messages, identify target audiences, and select suitable tactics. As Gregory (2015) emphasizes, effective planning ensures alignment between organizational goals and stakeholder expectations. Strategic planning transforms data into actionable insights, enabling coherent and targeted communication.

In the third phase, implementation refers to the execution of the planned strategies and tactics. This can include a variety of activities such as drafting press releases, organizing events, managing digital campaigns, and engaging with stakeholders through both traditional and social media. Successful implementation requires coordination, creativity, and responsiveness to real-time developments (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006).

Once the strategy has been executed, evaluation becomes vital to measure its effectiveness. This stage includes monitoring media coverage, analyzing audience engagement, and assessing whether the campaign objectives were met. According to

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Macnamara (2014), evaluation not only demonstrates accountability but also contributes to organizational learning by revealing what worked and what did not. The final stage, adjustments, involves refining strategies based on evaluation results. PR practitioners may recalibrate messages, modify tactics, or shift target audiences to improve future campaigns. This iterative process reflects the dynamic nature of PR and the importance of adaptability in managing stakeholder relationships and communication outcomes (Canel & Kent, 2019).

In essence, the PR process as outlined by Canel and Kent (2019) underscores the importance of strategic planning, evidence-based practice, and continuous improvement. By treating communication as a cyclical process, organizations can enhance their credibility, improve audience engagement, and foster long-term relational outcomes. Understanding and implementing these stages is crucial for daily PR practices, as they facilitate the development and maintenance of relationships with the public.

Artificial Intelligence in Public Relation Practices

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly evolved and significantly impacted various fields, including public relations (PR). In the realm of PR, AI adapts and learns from analyzed data, enabling practitioners to derive valuable insights from vast datasets. This capability has made AI increasingly central in PR practices, especially in areas such as sentiment analysis, audience segmentation, and predictive analytics. These tools empower PR professionals to design data-driven campaign strategies that are not only responsive but also proactive in addressing audience needs, aligning with broader global objectives like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Broom & Sha, 2019).

Recent developments demonstrate AI's potential to enhance efficiency, personalization, and strategic communication. According to Guzman and Lewis (2020), AI enables organizations to process big data in real time, offering immediate insight into trends and public sentiment. This real-time processing supports more agile communication strategies and allows for timely interventions when public opinion shifts. From operational automation to advanced data interpretation, AI significantly alters how PR is practiced. Jones and Sun (2021) identify key areas where AI adds value, including automating repetitive tasks like media monitoring, social media scheduling, and press release distribution. These functions free up PR professionals to focus on strategic and creative tasks.

Moreover, AI facilitates deeper personalization by analyzing demographic, psychographic, and behavioral data. Through machine learning models, organizations can craft tailored messages that resonate with individual audience segments, enhancing engagement and relational depth (Suherman, 2020). As noted in the "Reimagining Tomorrow" report, AI's utility extends into virtual assistants, chatbots, and dynamic content creation—all of which support consistent and customized audience interactions.

In terms of crisis communication, AI-powered tools such as sentiment analysis and natural language processing (NLP) help detect emerging issues by monitoring online conversations and media coverage. Canel and Kent (2019) emphasize that this predictive capability enables organizations to act before crises escalate, thereby protecting reputations and maintaining stakeholder trust. In the context of crisis communication, Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies such as sentiment analysis and natural language processing (NLP) play a pivotal role in identifying potential reputational threats. These tools monitor and analyze large volumes of online conversations, social media activity, and news coverage in real time, enabling communication professionals to detect shifts in public sentiment and emerging issues before they escalate. According to Canel and Kent (2019), this predictive capability is instrumental in allowing organizations to take preemptive action, thereby mitigating reputational risks and preserving stakeholder trust. For example, during a product recall, an AI-powered sentiment monitoring system can flag a surge in negative online sentiment or recurring concerns across digital platforms. This early warning allows the public relations team to respond swiftly with transparent communication, corrective measures, and tailored messaging to different stakeholder groups. By intervening at an early stage, the organization not only controls the narrative but also demonstrates accountability, which is essential for maintaining credibility during crises.

However, the integration of AI into PR is not without its challenges. Ethical considerations, data privacy, algorithmic transparency, and the risk of dehumanization in communication remain pressing concerns. The "Reimagining Tomorrow" report also underscores the importance of maintaining human oversight. AI can guide and inform decisions, but it cannot replace the contextual, emotional, and ethical reasoning that human practitioners bring to the table. Ultimately, the synergy between human creativity and machine intelligence defines the future of PR. Rather than replacing human communicators, AI enhances their capacity to engage audiences meaningfully, make informed decisions, and uphold ethical standards in communication practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively explore the role of AI in Public Relations. Combining qualitative and quantitative methods allows for a nuanced understanding of both the practical applications of AI and the broader trends in its usage (Sugiyono, 2017). The research was conducted over a four-month period from July 2024 to October 2024, with a specific audience of Public Relations practitioners in any fields in Indonesia encompassing multiple phases of data collection and analysis.

The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews with PR practitioners to gain insights into their experiences with AI in campaign planning, execution, and evaluation. A total of 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with PR professionals from various organizations, including corporate communications departments, PR agencies, and

independent consultants. The interviews, lasting approximately 60-90 minutes each, were recorded and transcribed for analysis. This approach provided valuable context regarding the decision-making processes that shape AI integration into PR activities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The selection of participants followed a purposive sampling method to ensure representation across different levels of AI adoption and organizational contexts (Patton, 2015).

Observations of real-time AI-driven campaigns and desktop analysis of industry reports enriched the qualitative findings. The research team conducted systematic observations of 15 AI-powered PR campaigns over the study period, documenting key performance indicators, implementation challenges, and success factors. This observational data was supplemented by analyzing 30 industry reports and white papers published between 2022-2024, providing historical context and future projections (Yin, 2018).

For the quantitative aspect, structured questionnaires were distributed to a broader sample of PR professionals to assess the frequency and types of AI tools being utilized. The survey instrument was developed based on preliminary qualitative findings and validated through a pilot study with 20 respondents (Kumar, 2019). The final questionnaire was distributed to 500 PR professionals across different regions, yielding a response rate of 78% (n=390). This method provided measurable data on common AI applications such as predictive analytics and sentiment analysis (Bryman, 2016).

Data analysis followed a sequential explanatory design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2021). Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis using NVivo software, identifying key patterns and emergent themes. The quantitative data were processed using SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The integration of both datasets followed Creswell's (2018) convergent parallel design, where qualitative and quantitative results were compared and synthesized to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. To ensure research quality and rigor, several validation strategies were employed. These included members checking for qualitative data, pilot testing for the survey instrument, and triangulation of multiple data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 2015). Ethical considerations were carefully addressed through informed consent, data anonymization, and secure data storage protocols (Israel & Hay, 2020).

The mixed-methods approach provided complementary strengths, with qualitative methods offering rich, contextual insights and quantitative methods enabling broader generalization. Together, these methods offer a comprehensive understanding of how AI supports PR activities, providing both detailed insights from practitioners and broad statistical trends. This methodological framework aligns with recent scholarly recommendations for studying technological innovations in communication fields (van Ruler & Verčič, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Researchers present the findings from the field regarding public relations activities that are closely related to the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Tables in this presentation of the data findings quantitatively illustrate these findings while also depicting the profile of AI required by PR practitioners. Researchers also presented an analysis linked to the agenda setting theory and the concepts that were used in this research.

1st table
Respondent Career Term

NO.	CAREER TERM	PERSON INVOLVED	PERCENT
1.	1 -3 year	4	50.0%
2.	4 – 6 year	1	12.5%
3.	7 – 9 year	1	12.5%
4.	10 year / more	2	25.0%
	TOTAL	9	100.0%

Source: Research Questionnaire, 2024

The above table shows the career length distribution of respondents involved in this study. Most respondents (50%) have 1-3 years of experience. This reflects the dominance of the new generation of Public Relations (PR) practitioners in the adoption of technology. This includes artificial intelligence (AI). Meanwhile, perspectives from senior practitioners who have witnessed the transformation of technology in the PR industry were provided by 25% of respondents.

This diversity of experience is important in mixed-methods research because it allows researchers to capture the dynamics of AI adoption from various perspectives, including those of young practitioners, who tend to be more adaptive to new technologies, and senior practitioners, who have a deep understanding of strategic change in PR (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This approach enriches the data, allowing it to accurately reflect the actual conditions on the ground (Sugiyono, 2017).

The external validity of the research is also strengthened by this distribution, as the perception, acceptance, and use of AI in PR activities can be influenced by variations in work experience (Bryman, 2016). By having respondents from different levels of experience be involved, more comprehensive AI adoption patterns can be identified by this study, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by PR practitioners at different career stages.

2nd table
PR Activities Carried Out by Respondents in Recent Times

NO.	PR ACTIVITY	PERSON INVOLVED	PERCENT
1.	Teaching	1	6.7%
2.	Research and Media Outsearch	2	13.3%
3.	Publication	1	6.7%
4.	Press Release	3	20.0%
5.	Campaign & Promotion	3	20.0%
6.	KOL / Relation	5	33.3%
	TOTAL	15	100.0%

Source: Research Questionnaire, 2024

The data illustrates a shift in PR practice, with Key Opinion Leader (KOL) engagement and external stakeholder relations emerging as the most prevalent recent activity, involving 33.3% of respondents. This reflects a growing emphasis on relational strategies and the personalization of messages—domains where AI tools such as audience profiling and influencer analytics are particularly impactful. Campaign and promotional activities, as well as press release distribution, both follow at 20%. These are areas where AI is commonly used for automated scheduling, message testing, and sentiment analysis, supporting faster and more targeted content delivery.

Interestingly, the distribution of activities across various roles (e.g., teaching, research, publication) suggests that AI is not confined to veteran practitioners, but is being utilized across experience levels, affirming its accessibility and adaptability. As discussed in the Global Alliance's Reimagining Tomorrow report (2025), this aligns with findings that AI use is widespread (91%), but formal training and governance frameworks remain insufficient.
Considering this, the integration of AI in stakeholder engagement and KOL relations becomes particularly strategic. By automating data collection, mapping influencer networks, and personalizing communication, AI empowers PR professionals to manage external relationships with greater precision—a capability crucial to effective SDG-related communication and brand resilience in crisis contexts.

3rd table
Frequency of PRs Activities in which Respondents used AI

NO.	PR ACTIVITY	PERSON INVOLVED	PERCENT
1.	Always use AI	3	33.3%
2.	If Necessary	4	44.4%
3.	Not use AI	2	22.2%
	TOTAL	9	100.0%

Source: Research Questionnaire, 2024

The data reveals varied levels of AI integration in public relations practices. A significant proportion of respondents (44.4%) indicated that they utilize AI tools on an as-needed basis, while 33.3% consistently integrate AI into their PR workflows. Meanwhile, 22.2% reported not using AI at all, underscoring persistent gaps in adoption despite the increasing availability and accessibility of AI technology. This variation reflects broader trends highlighted in the "Reimagining Tomorrow" report by the Global Alliance (2025), which found

that 91% of PR professionals are permitted to use AI, yet only 39.4% of organizations have established responsible AI frameworks. This suggests that while AI adoption is growing, its strategic and ethical integration remains uneven.

The findings also resonate with earlier discussions in our analysis: while AI shows tremendous potential in areas such as audience segmentation, campaign personalization, stakeholder mapping, and crisis monitoring, its full-scale application is still hindered by several factors. These include, (1) Lack of training or digital literacy among PR practitioners; (2) Unclear governance or ethical guidelines; and (3) Concerns over creativity loss and human disconnection in communication.

The 22.2% of respondents who do not engage with AI may represent those who are either technologically cautious, ethically uncertain, or positioned in traditional PR environments where automation is limited. This aligns with the report's call for capacity building, emphasizing the need for structured training, ethical education, and strategic repositioning of AI as a tool not only for efficiency, but also for accountability and innovation in communication practices.

4th table
AI Features and Applications used by Respondents

NO.	PR ACTIVITY	PERSON INVOLVED	PERCENT
1.	Not use any AI Tools	1	9.1%
2.	Google / Google Assistant / Google Translate	2	18.2%
3.	Quill Bot	1	9.1%
4.	Chat GPT	5	45.5%
5.	Gemini	2	18.2%
	TOTAL	11	100.0%

Source: Research Questionnaire, 2024

The findings presented in the fourth table emphasize ChatGPT as the most frequently used AI tool among respondents, with 45.5% reporting active use. This is consistent with broader trends in communication practices, where generative AI tools are increasingly leveraged for efficient content generation, rapid data summarization, and media message drafting. In contrast, applications such as Google Assistant, Google Translate, and Gemini reflect moderate usage levels (18.2%), while QuillBot is used by only 9.1% of respondents. Notably, 9.1% of participants indicated that they do not use any AI tools, which echoes findings in earlier tables about varied adoption and limited AI literacy among some practitioners.

These results align closely with insights from the Reimagining Tomorrow: AI in PR and Communication Management (2025) report, which observed that content creation remains the dominant application of AI in PR (71.4%), yet broader strategic use—such as for ethical risk assessment, stakeholder engagement, or predictive analytics—is still emerging. ChatGPT's preference among users can be attributed to its user-friendly interface, multilingual capabilities, and flexibility in generating high-quality text, which makes it highly

suitable for tasks such as: (1) Drafting press releases; (2) Managing social media posts; (3) Brainstorming campaign slogans; and (4) Creating summaries from media coverage.

However, the disparity in tool usage also reflects gaps in organizational support, governance, and training. As indicated in previous analysis, many PR professionals are engaging with AI at a tactical level, while missing opportunities to use it strategically—such as in issue monitoring, KOL mapping, or audience behavior prediction.

Therefore, beyond simply identifying popular tools, this data underscores the urgent need for structured AI integration, both in terms of capability development and responsible usage frameworks, especially as AI continues to reshape the landscape of strategic communication.

5th table
Purpose using AI in PR Activities

NO.	PR ACTIVITY	PERSON INVOLVED	PERCENT
1.	Communication	1	11.1%
2.	Data Analysis	1	11.1%
3.	Social Media Management	2	22.2%
4.	Content Personalization	1	11.1%
5.	Chat Bot	0	0.0%
6.	Diversity and Language	2	22.2%
7.	Communication, Data Research and Analysis, More Insighgt, and Ideas	1	11.1%
8.	All the points	1	11.1%
	TOTAL	9	100.0%

Source: Research Questionnaire, 2024

This table highlights the diverse purposes for which AI is applied in public relations activities, with social media management and diversity & language applications emerging as the most cited, each by 22.2% of respondents. These functions reflect AI's growing relevance in handling audience segmentation, cross-cultural communication, and real-time digital engagement—a core theme in the evolving PR landscape.

The use of AI for content personalization (11.1%), communication (11.1%), and data analysis (11.1%) further underscores the multidimensional role AI plays in enhancing the relevance, speed, and impact of PR strategies. As emphasized in the Reimagining Tomorrow report (Global Alliance, 2025), AI tools are particularly beneficial for processing large datasets, identifying communication trends, and crafting adaptive messaging tailored to diverse audiences.

Interestingly, the use of chatbots, a technology often highlighted in AI discourse, was not reported by any respondent in this sample, suggesting either a lack of adoption or perhaps that their use is managed by departments outside of PR teams (e.g., customer service or IT support). This reflects findings from previous tables that show disparity between AI's potential and its practical implementation, often due to organizational silos or limited governance structures.

Moreover, one respondent selected "All of the above", indicating a more holistic integration of AI across multiple PR functions. This supports the strategic vision promoted by the Responsible Communication Movement, which encourages PR practitioners to shift from tactical AI use toward strategic leadership roles, encompassing ethics, governance, inclusivity, and innovation.

In practice, these results affirm that AI enhances PR efficiency in managing digital communication workflows, particularly by enabling real-time content adaptation and multilingual outreach—an essential capability in today's globalized and digitally fragmented audience environments.

6th table

Respondent References Know the AI Features and Tools Used

NO.	PR ACTIVITY	PERSON INVOLVED	PERCENT
1.	Google / Internet	2	22.2%
2.	Collagues	4	44.4%
3.	Social Media	3	33.3%
	TOTAL	9	100.0%

Source: Research Questionnaire, 2024

The data from the sixth table highlights those interpersonal sources, particularly colleagues (44.4%), are the most relied-upon reference for learning about AI tools and applications among PR practitioners. This is followed by social media (33.3%), and search engines or internet sources (22.2%).

This finding reinforces the argument that peer-based learning and informal knowledge exchange play a crucial role in the diffusion of AI practices within professional environments. As emphasized in the Reimagining Tomorrow report (Global Alliance, 2025), while AI access has become democratized across organizations (65.2% of professionals report having access), structured training remains limited, prompting professionals to turn to more accessible, peer-based resources.

The dominant role of colleagues as an informational source suggests that organizational culture and social interaction are key enablers of AI adoption. In line with Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) Two-Step Flow Theory, opinion leaders or informed peers act as mediators who interpret and distribute technical knowledge. We are seeing, in this case, related to AI tools, within the PR ecosystem.

Social media's strong position (33.3%) also illustrates the influence of digital communities and professional networks (e.g., LinkedIn groups, Twitter threads, webinars) in sharing best practices, case studies, and tutorials related to AI-enhanced communication strategies. These platforms function as decentralized knowledge hubs that accelerate AI literacy among communication professionals.

Thus, the data underscores that the successful integration of AI in PR practice is not only a technological process but also a social one—dependent on collaboration, knowledge sharing, and the organic transfer of expertise. This insight is vital for institutions aiming to strengthen their AI implementation: efforts must go beyond tool access and include strategies that cultivate peer learning environments and mentorship in digital skill development.

KOL and AI Integration in PR Strategies for Sustainable Development
Image Source: Visual model, created with assistance from OpenAI's GPT (2024)
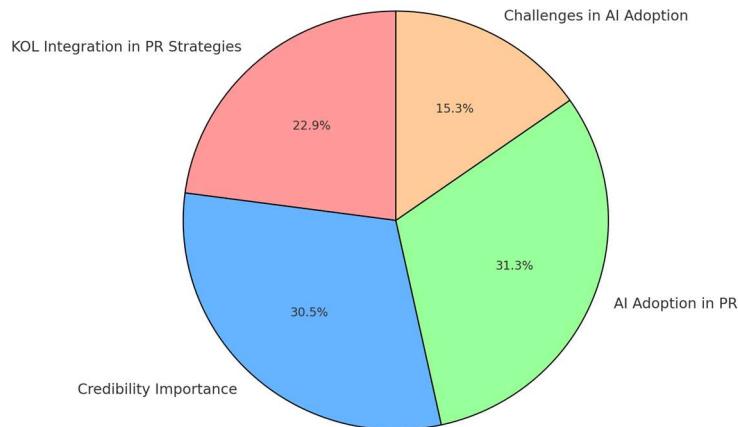
This visual model presents a summary of key insights regarding the integration of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Public Relations (PR) strategies, particularly within the framework of sustainable development communication. First, 31.3% of respondents reported active AI adoption in PR, highlighting a shift toward data-driven communication practices. This aligns with trends we have previously discussed, where AI supports campaign targeting, sentiment analysis, and audience personalization to enhance message relevance and timing (Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

Second, 30.5% emphasized the importance of KOL credibility in influencing campaign outcomes. This reflects the role of KOLs not only as amplifiers of media messages but as agenda setters who can shape public opinion—especially in sensitive or high-impact domains like sustainability, environmental awareness, and gender equality (Freberg et al., 2011; Chung & Cho, 2017). Third, 22.9% of responses show that KOLs are being actively integrated into PR strategies, confirming that organizations are recognizing the value of trust-based, community-embedded communication. This supports our earlier analysis where KOLs serve as intermediaries who reframe institutional narratives for niche audiences in relatable terms, particularly on social platforms.

Last, 15.3% of respondents still face challenges in AI adoption, particularly related to limited training and technical understanding. This barrier is consistent with previous data across the tables, where a portion of PR practitioners either rely heavily on peer knowledge or avoid AI tools entirely. This finding reinforces the call for more formalized AI literacy

programs, ethical frameworks, and governance structures (Canel & Kent, 2019; Reimagining Tomorrow Report, 2025).

In these terms, observations This chart encapsulates the dual role of technological capability (AI) and human trust capital (KOLs) as complementary forces in modern PR. AI provides efficiency, real-time analytics, and strategic insight, while KOLs provide relational legitimacy, narrative authenticity, and audience loyalty—both of which are essential in advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through communication. Together, these findings reinforce the notion that effective PR in the digital era requires a hybrid model—one that combines algorithmic precision with human connection. For sustainable and inclusive communication strategies, the integration of both KOL and AI is not only beneficial, but increasingly necessary.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the integration of Key Opinion Leaders and Artificial Intelligence in public relations strategies aimed at promoting SDGs. Examining the relationships between KOL influence, credibility, and AI-driven precision, this discussion explores how these components can be strategically leveraged to optimize PR campaigns. Additionally, the challenges associated with AI adoption are analyzed to highlight areas where PR professionals can further enhance their capabilities. This section delves into the implications of the findings and offers a comprehensive view of how KOLs and AI can drive impactful, sustainable communication efforts.

KOLs as Strategic Partners in Agenda Setting for PR Campaigns

Researchers highlight the crucial role of Key Opinion Leader in modern Public Relation (PR) strategies, particularly in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Building on McCombs and Shaw's (1972) Agenda Setting Theory, the study shows that KOLs have envolved from traditional media influencers to active participants in shaping public discourse on social platforms. 33.3% of respondents use KOLs in PR strategies, translating global sustainability issues like climate action and gender equality into relatable concepts. Aligning KOL's expertise and values with campaign goals enhances the credibility and reach of PR initiatives. KOLs play a vital role in framing public understanding of social and environmental challenges, ultimately making these issues more actionable and relevant to everyday life.

Credibility as a Pillar of Effective KOL Partnerships

Finding from our research indicates that 44.4% of respondents view credibility as essential for the success of PR campaigns involving Key Opinion Leader, supporting Hovland and Weiss's (1951) assertion that credible sources are more persuasive particularly in addressing complex topics like the SDGs. . In today's digital landscape, credibility is closely linked to both expertise and authenticity, as audiences increasingly seek trustworthiness and

transparency in their interactions with KOLs (Strömbäck et al., 2020). Our study reveals that KOLs who consistently advocate for relevant causes, such as sustainable consumption or renewable energy, are more effective in driving public engagement in SDG-related campaigns. Therefore, PR practitioners must carefully select KOLs whose credibility aligns with campaign goals, ensuring that the KOL's message authentically reflects the campaign's focus to foster deeper audience connections and achieve meaningful impact.

AI for Enhanced Precision in KOL Selection and Campaign Management

Our study also explored the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in PR practices, particularly in the KOL selection process. 45.5% of respondents in our research indicated that AI-driven tools are central to their strategy for identifying and managing KOL partnerships. AI enables PR professionals to sift through vast amounts of social media data, allowing them to identify KOLs who align with campaign values and audience demographics.

As Guzman and Lewis (2020) demonstrate, AI tools offer a significant advantage in terms of data-backed decision-making. For instance, AI can analyze engagement metrics, audience sentiment, and demographic data to ensure the selected KOL aligns perfectly with the campaign's goals. This precision is especially important in SDG-related campaigns, where the KOL's alignment with sustainability principles can significantly influence the campaign's effectiveness.

Furthermore, AI enables real-time campaign monitoring, allowing PR teams to adjust strategies based on audience engagement. In campaigns promoting SDGs, this capacity for real-time management is invaluable, as it allows PR teams to continuously optimize the impact of their KOL collaborations.

Addressing Challenges in AI Adoption and KOL Integration

Our research highlights several challenges in the widespread adoption of AI in PR practices, with 22.2% of respondents citing difficulties in fully integrating AI into their campaigns due to insufficient training and understanding of AI tools. The integration of AI in public relations, while promising for enhanced data-driven decision-making, brings significant ethical considerations, especially concerning privacy, transparency, and bias. These aspects are crucial in ensuring that AI applications align with responsible communication practices, particularly when influencing public perceptions on sustainability topics. The potential of AI in PR can only be realized if professionals possess the necessary knowledge and skills to interpret AI-driven insights effectively (Liu, 2021).

The steps learning curve associated with AI requires organizations to invest in ongoing training to enable PR teams to leverage AI for tasks such as KOL identification and campaign management. It is crucial for PR teams to make real-time, data-driven decisions that enhance

campaign effectiveness, particularly in future SDG-driven initiatives where precise messaging and audience targeting are vital for achieving meaningful impact.

KOL and AI Integrations in PR Strategies for Sustainable Development
Image Source: Visual model, created with assistance from OpenAI's GPT (2024)
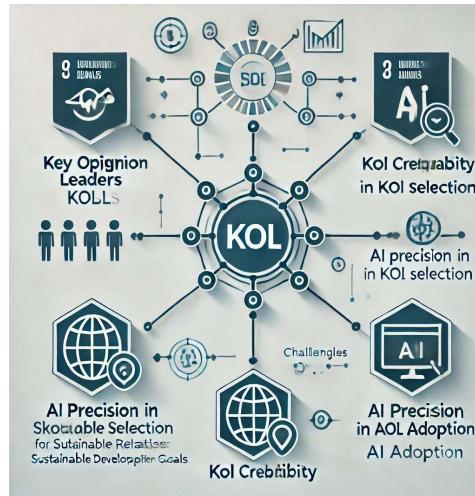
The research findings highlight a model that illustrates the interdependent relationship among four key components: KOL Integration, KOL Credibility, AI Precision in KOL Selection, and Challenges in AI Adoption. Central to effective PR strategies, KOL integration allows KOL's to function as secondary agenda setters, influencing public perceptions on sustainability issues. However, their impact relies heavily on KOL Credibility, which is grounded in authenticity and expertise, ensuring that their messaging resonates with audiences and enhances campaign effectiveness. AI Precision is crucial for accurately selecting KOLs whose influence aligns with campaign objectives, thereby maximizing reach and engagement. Despite AI's advantages, its adoption in PR reveals limitations that highlight the need for improved training. These findings emphasize the strategic integration of KOLs and AI to enhance PR campaigns targeting Sustainable Development Goals.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study has established a clear connection between the initial objectives and the findings regarding the integration of Key Opinion Leaders and Artificial Intelligence in Public Relations strategies aimed at promoting Sustainable Development Goals. The study shows that credible KOLs are effective agenda setters, driving audience engagement. While AI improves KOL selection and campaign management, challenges remain, particularly due to insufficient training among PR practitioners.

Optimizing KOL credibility and AI can strengthen PR strategies for global sustainability challenges. Future recommendations focus on enhancing their integration. PR professionals should prioritize AI-driven insights to refine audience targeting and campaign personalization, thereby ensuring accurate KOL selection. Collaborating with diverse stakeholders, such as NGOs and academic institutions, can enhance KOL credibility and trust. Additionally, tailored

training programs are essential to improve AI literacy among PR practitioners, helping to overcome barriers to AI adoption. Exploring new media ecosystems, including podcasts and virtual platforms, can broaden KOL influence, reaching more diverse audiences. Future research could explore AI and KOL applications in varied industries, like technology and healthcare, to further optimize PR strategies. Finally, promoting ethical and sustainable AI practices aligned with SDG principles will reinforce campaign integrity and foster long-term stakeholder trust. Future research could delve into the application of AI in public relations across various industries and regions, examining its impact on campaign outcomes. Moreover, the development of ethical AI standards and guidelines tailored to PR practices could support responsible innovation, enhancing public trust and aligning with global sustainability efforts.

BIOGRAPHY

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Samantha Luhukay is a dynamic Communcations Science lecturer and experienced PR practitioner with over six years of industry expertise. At Soegijapranata Catholic University, she transforms classrooms into vibrant hubs of innovation, seamlessly blending academic rigor with real-world practice. Passionate about empowering the next generation, Samantha excels in fostering global perspectives through impactful research, seminars, and workshops.

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