JOURNAL LA SOCIALE

VOL. 07, ISSUE 03 (1018-1031), 2026
DOI:10.37899/journal-la-sociale.v7i3.3248

Challenges in Automation by Public Relations Practitioners

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Article Info

Article history:
Received 13 April 2026
Received in revised form 13 May 2026
Accepted 28 June 2026

Keywords:
Automation
Automation Automation
Artificial Intelligence
Digital Skills

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the challenges faced by public relations practitioners in implementing automation in Makassar City. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach involving public relations practitioners from Kalla Group, PT Pelabuhan Indonesia IV (Persero), and PT Vale Indonesia Tbk. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, and were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation of interview, observation, and documentation data. The findings reveal four main challenges in public relations automation. First, internet speed and real-time communication demands require practitioners to respond rapidly while maintaining originality, accuracy, and credibility in organizational communication. Second, limited digital understanding and skills hinder the effective use of automation, artificial intelligence, and big data in public relations practices. Third, resistance to technological change occurs because automation is often perceived as a threat rather than a supporting tool. Fourth, ethical issues, data privacy concerns, and limited regulatory guidelines create uncertainty in the adoption of automation. These findings indicate that the successful implementation of public relations automation depends not only on technological availability but also on practitioner competence, organizational readiness, ethical awareness, and regulatory support. The study also confirms the relevance of Innovation Diffusion Theory in explaining the gradual adoption of automation in public relations practice.

Introduction

Digital technology has changed the landscape of practice Public Relations (PR) significantly, according to (Ceunturion, 2020) said that the Public Relations conventional is starting to experience a shift towards digital. Since 1906, the concept of PR was introduced, now PR has metamorphosed into one of the main fields of Communication Science which has transformed into one of the important and strategic professions. This phenomenon occurs because one of the pillars of the industrial revolution 4.0 is Big Data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Arsyad, 2020) The impact of this phenomenon has not been very felt, but in reality robots are able to write articles in the media and help write by looking for materials, as well as PR activities such as automation which is one of the crucial aspects in PR practice show an increasing trend (Saktisyahputra, 2022).

Automation is called the application of technology, such as programs, robotics or processes to achieve results with minimal human input (IBM, 2023). This concept emerged in response to the need for higher efficiency and productivity in various areas of the organization, especially in the business industry. The process of using technology and executing tasks or processes, in a broad context automation includes software, such as Artificial Intelligence, algorithms, to robotic systems, this is certainly to increase efficiency. (Noviyanto, 2025) Adding using

ISSN 2721-0960 (Print), ISSN 2721-0847 (online)

technology, automation systems can automate repetitive and repetitive processes, freeing up human resources to focus on more complex and value-added tasks.

Public relations Practitioner (PR) is usually referred to as the process of strategic communication that forms a mutually beneficial relationship between the organization and its public. (PRSA, 2015). Public relations It is defined as a strategic, planned process that focuses on helping the organization achieve its goals. Public Relations has two important tasks, namely carrying out communication management in the organization, both from planning, implementation and evaluation of communication activities in the organization. In addition, publicity, media relations agenda, organizational program campaigns are the activities of a PR person. Meanwhile, in the task of carrying out organizational communication, PR must carry out communication in each unit, such as a harmonious relationship between external and internal parties of the Company, as well as regulating communication control in organizational activities. (Arsyad, 2020).

Since its inception, and increasingly practiced Public Relations has had a unique and symbiotic relationship with emerging technology. At the turn of the century, practitioners began to seek to further control this relationship, examining what emerging technology meant for the way practitioners were Public Relations in adding to and limiting mutually beneficial relationships (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). However, in order for practitioners Public Relations to be able to utilize new technologies effectively, they must understand the various technological conveniences embedded in technology, norms and expectations of technology by Public strategy, and use critical thinking in deciding on communication outreach protocols (Macnaghten et al., 2019).

World developments Public Relations with Artificial Intelligence and Big Data It is very important because today's technology has penetrated everywhere. Over the years, the term "AI" has often been used loosely to refer to any form of automation. However, AI encompasses more than just automation and goes beyond the realm of algorithms and computer code (Malthouse & Copulsky, 2023). AI technology can provide input on sentiment from media coverage, and then send alerts when negative news appears, so PR practitioners can respond faster. A team of researchers from the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, (Valin, 2018) reveals that even though humans have the ability to think critically.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is predicted to change lives much faster than imagined. According to Online Publication, Quartz AI is software or computer programs with a mechanism to learn, then with that knowledge is used to make decisions in new situations, such as those done by humans. AI is also a system that thinks like a human, a system that acts like a human, a system that thinks rationally, and a system that acts rationally (Abdullah, 2020).

According to McKinsey Consultants predicts the impact of technology Big Data and Artificial Intelligence that by 2030, one-third of workers in the United States will be unemployed due to automation. The United States, a country with fairly high incomes, is worried that automation will reduce the income of its employees. Workers need to be equipped with special skills in order to survive and be able to have additional income, especially practitioners Public Relations (Arief, 2019). According to a report from the USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations (2021), more than 85% of global PR practitioners have adopted at least one form of automation technology in their daily practices.

Companies that have used Artificial Intelligence and Big data in the activity Public Relations, let's call it a case study of how the aviation giant Southwest Airlines that has used to take advantage of Artificial Intelligence and Big Data in supporting the Company's operations, Southwest airlines takes advantage of Social Listening by integrating various functions,

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ranging from the Company's communication, Marketing, and operational. However, there are still companies that do not integrate this technology, with the various challenges and obstacles faced by practitioners, based on previous research (Indriani Dewi Resky Ananda, Muh. Iqbal Sultan, 2022) emphasized that there are still companies that have not used technology, one of which is because of the human resources that are still filled in the company.

This research focuses on how the challenges in Automation by Public Relations Practitioners in the city of Makassar. This research explores practitioners' attitudes and awareness about technology, identifies key factors and provides deeper insights into the challenges faced with the presence of new technologies such as automation of PR practitioners in the digital age.

Literature Review

Public Relations

A Practitioner Public Relations which can help manage reputation by communicating and building good relationships with all stakeholders, especially the public (Arief & Saputra, 2019). Public have a view of the organization, from how to interact, good or bad relationships, as well as the impressions felt from communication between the two parties. This perception ultimately drives the decision-making process, whether the audience will support, continue the Cooperation, or be interested in buying the Company's products and services. The public can also directly provide input, views, comments, and complaints. This interaction will simultaneously create public opinion on the communication activities that have been carried out by the company.

According to (Sujanto, 2020) Public Relations (PR) is an effort in today's modern world that is used to streamline the process of communication and understanding. However, PR does not have a simple definition. PR is so very developed with technology that is undeniable, the scope is very wide, it cannot be summarized into a number of words. With PR, all forms of communication in the organization are planned, implemented and evaluated, both from outside and inside, between the organization and the audience, both external and internal in achieving specific goals.

Industrial Revolution

Surprising technological changes dramatically impact social life and work around the world. Revolution 1.0, which was first triggered in 1784, where technology at that time was still limited to steam technology, then Revolution 2.0 described the activities carried out in 1870, namely mass production or activities, where the involvement of electrical energy supported by mass technology. In this era, activities focused on mass-production, standardization, work specialization, and manufacturing. The industrial revolution 3 which began in 1970, in that year there was automation and computers that could support various activities, there was a leap in information technology (IT) to make mass production and automation.

This occurred the first, second and third industrial revolutions that took place about 100 years ago, respectively, and there was a leap from the third industrial revolution to the fourth industrial revolution to about 50 years. In Indonesia, it will focus on five main sectors for the initial application of this technology, namely: food and beverages, textiles and clothing, automotive, chemicals and electronics (Arief & Saputra, 2019).

Artificial Intelligence and Big Data

Artificial Intelligence Concept

Artificial Intelligence is a broader concept of machine learning that discusses the use of computer systems to mimic the functions of human knowledge. Artificial Intelligence is a

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process in which machines perform tasks by adhering to algorithms based on an "intelligent" approach (Schneider & Weiller, 2018). Machine learning is part of Artificial Intelligence, whose focal point is to ensure the machine's ability to get a set of data and learn, changing the algorithm while learning more about the information being processed. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be defined as a computer program or robotic tool with a learning mechanism that is then applied to generate actions in new situations similar to those created by humans. Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the ability of machines to use algorithms to learn from data and apply previously learned concepts to produce results similar to humans (Arief & Saputra, 2019).

Big Data Concept

The most widely applied definition of Big Data has been inferred from Meta Group's analysis which includes large-scale, high-speed, and diverse information resources that require new and innovative methods in processing and optimizing Information, increasing insight into data content, and decision-making based on processed data (Laney, 2021). Basically benefits Big Data namely providing analysis of data, for example the use of Big Data This can be implemented in agricultural information systems, taxation, health, traffic regulation, and so on. Big data be Huge amounts of data are collected, stored, processed, and analyzed to produce useful information to be used as a basis for decision-making or policy. In its development Big Data has a basic character of 3V, which is Volume, Velocity, and Variety (Laney, 2021).

Public Relations Automation

Automation Public Relations, has become a growing trend in the world of corporate communication. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning, and advanced algorithms have allowed PR practitioners to automate routine tasks and analyze data more efficiently. Automation systems can help in social media monitoring, analytics sentiment public, and Distribution of press releases that enable teams Public Relations to focus on strategy and creativity (Çataldaş & Özgen, 2023).

Public Relations Transformation

(Arief & Saputra, 2019) said there was a change in practice Public Relations 20 years ago until the current PR. Situation and changes The industrial revolution also has an influence on the PR profession, so that it can no longer carry out PR activities and programs as usual. In line with the industrial revolution, there has been an evolution in the roles, functions and duties of PR, as follows:

PR in the Era of the Industrial Revolution 1.0

In this era, public relations practitioners carry out their activities or duties traditionally. In this era, practitioners have to carry out their duties and responsibilities every day, such as manual monitoring, such as print media, newspapers, magazines, and television, which are very reliable sources of information. The industry 1.0 era describes the existence of one-way or vertical communication from only one source to the audience, usually people call it one to many so that current activities describe a practitioner as a broadcaster.

PR in the Era of Industrial Revolution 2.0

The era of the industrial revolution 2.0 was marked by the birth of online media, this revolution illustrates the existence of horizontal communication, communication from various sources, interconnected, or many to many so that the role of PR practitioners at that time was referred to as connectors. One of the most memorable characteristics is that this era emerged as an online media, as well as the transformation of print media that switched to digital platforms.

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PR in the Era of Industrial Revolution 3.0

The era of the Industrial Revolution 3.0 is marked by the existence of social media which is the most widely used, widely liked and mostly trusted by the public. This era emerged with activities such as citizen journalism, corporate journalism or employee journalism, so that very significant changes occurred. This era sees that in the past only a journalist could make news, now anyone can upload news, be it through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, to blogs which are one of the digital platforms. In addition, Public Relations Practitioners not only monitor offline and online media but also social media both with bad and good news that can come at any time or reel time.

PR in the Era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0

The era of the industrial revolution 4.0 with very significant changes with the presence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Big Data Era. This phenomenon is not felt at this time. However, managing releases, articles looking for materials, and other PR activities have become real activities for practitioners. Various tools used by practitioners function to simplify PR tasks, activities such as distributing releases to various media, as well as managing the Company's campaigns. This era is also called the presence of buzzers, influencers, and data management from interested parties, the management of platforms for digital, audio, and video content and the management of data analytics can be done with Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology and Big data.

Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the challenges faced by public relations practitioners in implementing automation in Makassar City. This approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore practitioners' experiences, perceptions, and institutional challenges related to the use of automation, artificial intelligence, and big data in public relations practice.

The research was conducted in Makassar City, focusing on public relations practitioners working in organizations that actively conduct corporate communication and public relations activities. The informants were selected using purposive sampling based on two main criteria: first, they had professional experience in the field of public relations and understood the functions and responsibilities of PR practitioners; second, they had knowledge of digital technology development in the era of Industry 4.0. Based on these criteria, the study involved three key informants: a Senior Public Relations practitioner from Kalla Group, a Public Relations practitioner from PT Pelabuhan Indonesia IV (Persero), and a Senior Communication Coordinator from PT Vale Indonesia Tbk.

The data used in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. The interviews were conducted to explore informants' views on the challenges of PR automation, including digital skills, organizational readiness, technological resistance, ethical issues, data privacy, and regulatory limitations. Observation was used to understand the context of PR practices and the use of digital technology in organizational communication activities. Documentation was collected from relevant institutional documents, journals, previous studies, media reports, and other supporting sources related to public relations automation, artificial intelligence, and big data.

Data collection was carried out through three techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected informants to obtain detailed information regarding their experiences and perceptions. Second, observation was used to identify the practical context of public

ISSN 2721-0960 (Print), ISSN 2721-0847 (online)

relations activities in relation to digital transformation. Third, documentation was used to support and verify the data obtained from interviews and observations. These techniques were applied to ensure that the data were comprehensive and relevant to the research focus.

The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction was conducted by selecting, simplifying, and categorizing information related to the challenges of PR automation. The reduced data were then presented in a descriptive narrative form based on emerging themes, such as internet speed, lack of digital skills, resistance to technological change, ethical issues, data privacy, and regulatory limitations. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the relationship between the findings and the theoretical framework of Innovation Diffusion Theory.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings on the challenges faced by public relations practitioners in implementing automation in Makassar City. The findings were obtained from interviews with public relations practitioners from Kalla Group, PT Pelabuhan Indonesia IV (Persero), and PT Vale Indonesia Tbk. Based on the data analysis, four main themes emerged: internet speed and real-time communication demands, limited digital understanding and skills, resistance to technological change, and ethical, privacy, and regulatory challenges. The interview excerpts presented in this section have been translated from Indonesian into English while maintaining their original meaning.

Internet Speed and Real-Time Communication Demands

The first challenge faced by public relations practitioners is the rapid speed of internet-based communication. In the digital era, information moves quickly and continuously, requiring public relations practitioners to monitor, respond to, and manage public communication in real time. This condition is different from conventional public relations practices, which previously relied more on newspapers, radio, and television as communication channels.

Wiwiek Dwi Endah from PT Pelabuhan Indonesia IV explained that the fast pace of social media has changed the working rhythm of public relations practitioners:

> *"The initial challenge is that we are overwhelmed by the fast pace of social media. The work must keep up with speed because social media has become very fast. There is no longer a distinction between Saturday, Sunday, or working hours because now we have to work 24 hours as public relations practitioners in the era of internet speed."*

This statement shows that public relations work is no longer limited to formal office hours. Practitioners are expected to remain alert to public issues, online conversations, and potential crises at any time. The real-time nature of digital communication requires PR practitioners to work faster, provide immediate responses, and maintain the organization's visibility in the public sphere.

A similar view was expressed by Muhammad Kharji Muhajir from Kalla Group. He emphasized that internet speed requires practitioners not only to follow public attention but also to maintain originality in content production:

> *"With internet speed, we have to follow what attracts people's attention. We must also create something original and natural, especially in producing content that is fresh, natural, and truly ours, because internet trends change very quickly."*

This finding indicates that internet speed creates two major pressures for PR practitioners. First, they must be able to follow rapidly changing trends and public conversations. Second, they

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must ensure that the content they produce remains original, credible, and aligned with the identity of the organization. Therefore, the challenge of automation is not only related to technological speed, but also to the ability of practitioners to maintain authenticity and accuracy in communication.

Limited Digital Understanding and Skills

The second challenge is the limited understanding and digital skills of public relations practitioners. Although automation, artificial intelligence, and big data offer various benefits for public relations activities, their effective use depends on the competence of the practitioners. The findings show that not all practitioners have sufficient digital literacy to understand and apply automation tools in their work.

The use of automation in public relations requires practitioners to understand digital platforms, data analytics, artificial intelligence, social media monitoring, and online issue management. However, the rapid development of technology has created a skills gap among practitioners. Some practitioners are familiar with digital communication tools, but they still need further training to use more advanced technologies such as AI-based sentiment analysis, automated media monitoring, and big data-driven communication strategies.

Wiwiek Dwi Endah emphasized the importance of strengthening training and education in the PR industry:

> *"Data show that there is a need for increased training and education to bridge this gap in the PR industry, especially because the information and communication sector is one of the sectors affected by AI."*

This finding suggests that the challenge of automation is not only technical but also related to human resource readiness. Public relations practitioners need continuous professional development to improve their ability to use automation tools strategically. Without adequate digital skills, automation may not be fully utilized and may even create uncertainty among practitioners.

Organizations have an important role in supporting digital capacity building. Training, mentoring, and institutional support are needed so that practitioners can understand how automation works, how to interpret digital data, and how to use technology ethically and effectively in communication practices.

Resistance to Technological Change

The third challenge is resistance to technological change. The findings show that automation, artificial intelligence, and big data are sometimes perceived as threats to human work. This perception may emerge because some practitioners are unfamiliar with the technology or are concerned that automation will reduce the role of humans in public relations.

Muhammad Kharji Muhajir from Kalla Group stated that technological development should not be viewed only as a threat:

> *"Humans will be able to survive technological advances such as artificial intelligence, and humans can use it to survive. There is no need to worry that AI and big data will replace human work."*

This statement shows that automation should be understood as a supporting tool rather than a replacement for human practitioners. In public relations, human roles remain essential because communication requires judgment, creativity, ethical awareness, empathy, and the ability to

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build relationships with stakeholders. Automation can assist practitioners in conducting repetitive and technical tasks, but strategic decision-making still requires human involvement.

Resistance to technological change is also related to organizational readiness. If organizations do not provide clear direction, adequate facilities, or sufficient training, practitioners may hesitate to adopt automation. Therefore, successful implementation of PR automation requires not only technological infrastructure but also a supportive organizational culture that encourages learning, adaptation, and innovation.

The finding indicates that resistance can be reduced when practitioners understand the benefits of technology and receive proper support from their organizations. Public relations practitioners need to see automation as a tool that can improve efficiency, strengthen monitoring, and support faster communication responses, rather than as a threat to their profession.

Ethical Issues, Data Privacy, and Regulatory Challenges

The fourth challenge concerns ethical issues, data privacy, and regulatory limitations. The use of artificial intelligence and big data in public relations raises concerns about bias, data misuse, privacy violations, and the potential decline of public trust. These issues are important because public relations practitioners are responsible for maintaining credible and responsible communication between organizations and their publics.

Suwarny Dammar from PT Vale Indonesia Tbk explained that AI may affect public trust if it is not managed properly:

> *"The presence of AI also presents its own challenges, such as its impact on public trust. A biased AI system can lead to distorted sentiment analysis and misrepresentation of various groups, which can damage public trust."*

This statement indicates that automation tools can produce problematic results if the data used are biased or incomplete. In public relations, inaccurate sentiment analysis or misrepresentation of public opinion can lead to inappropriate communication strategies and may harm the organization's relationship with stakeholders.

Suwarny Dammar further emphasized the importance of human supervision in AI-based communication processes:

> *"On the other hand, AI can cause unfair or inaccurate communication bias. To overcome this, it is important to use diverse training data, conduct regular bias updates, and include human supervision in AI-based processes."*

This finding shows that public relations automation must be supported by ethical awareness and human control. Practitioners cannot fully rely on automated systems without critical evaluation. Human supervision is needed to ensure that AI-based outputs are accurate, fair, and aligned with organizational values and public interest.

In addition to ethical concerns, regulatory limitations also become an obstacle in implementing automation. Practitioners need clear guidelines to ensure that the use of artificial intelligence and big data complies with ethical and legal standards. Suwarny Dammar stated:

> *"Indonesia wants the use of artificial intelligence to be ethical, fair, and responsible."*

This statement reflects the need for clearer policies and regulations regarding the use of AI in public communication. Without strong ethical and regulatory frameworks, organizations may hesitate to adopt automation because of concerns about data privacy, legal risks, and public accountability.

ISSN 2721-0960 (Print), ISSN 2721-0847 (online)

The findings of this study indicate that automation in public relations is not merely a technological issue, but a professional, organizational, and ethical transformation. The challenges faced by public relations practitioners in Makassar City reflect a broader transition in the communication industry, where practitioners are expected to work faster, interpret digital data, maintain public trust, and adapt to new forms of human–machine collaboration.

First, the demand for real-time communication shows that automation has become increasingly relevant for public relations work. The speed of digital communication requires practitioners to monitor issues, identify public sentiment, and respond to organizational risks more quickly. This is consistent with Suciati et al. (2021), who found that AI-based press release applications were perceived as useful because they could assist routine PR tasks without fully replacing practitioners. However, the findings of the present study extend this argument by showing that speed alone is not enough. Practitioners also need originality, contextual judgment, and sensitivity to local public discourse. Therefore, automation should be positioned as a support system for faster communication, not as a substitute for human creativity.

This finding is also in line with Malthouse and Copulsky (2023), who explain that AI in marketing communication works best when it is integrated into a broader communication ecosystem rather than used as a stand-alone tool. In the context of public relations, this means that automation should support media monitoring, content planning, and audience analysis, while the final communication strategy must remain under human control. Similarly, Çataldaş and Özgen (2023) found that AI has the potential to transform digital public relations through content production, data analysis, and stakeholder engagement. However, their Delphi study also suggests that the future role of AI depends on how well practitioners understand and manage the technology. This supports the finding that PR practitioners in Makassar need not only access to automation tools, but also the ability to use them strategically.

Second, the limited digital understanding and skills found in this study confirm that human resource readiness is a central issue in PR automation. Wuersch et al. (2024) emphasize that digital capability development requires more than individual technical skills; it must be supported by organizational communication strategies, training systems, and internal trust. This is relevant to the present findings because PR practitioners cannot be expected to adopt automation effectively if organizations do not provide structured training and clear digital transformation policies. In other words, digital skill development should be treated as an organizational responsibility, not only as an individual obligation.

The importance of AI literacy is further supported by Obadă et al. (2026), who argue that AI literacy includes the ability to identify, use, evaluate, and apply AI tools within ethical standards. This perspective deepens the interpretation of the present findings: the problem is not only that some practitioners lack technical skills, but also that they may lack critical understanding of how AI produces outputs, how data should be interpreted, and how bias may occur. Affandi Mat Noor et al. (2025) similarly show that perceived usefulness influences the acceptance of AI in public relations practices. Therefore, practitioners are more likely to adopt automation when they can clearly see its benefits for daily work, such as reducing repetitive tasks, improving monitoring accuracy, and supporting decision-making.

Third, the finding on resistance to technological change shows that automation adoption is shaped by professional identity and perceived threat. Febriani et al. (2024) found that AI changes the role of public relations professionals from conventional communication executors into gatekeepers and validators. This is important because it suggests that automation does not eliminate the role of PR practitioners; instead, it shifts their role toward verification, ethical judgment, and strategic interpretation. In Makassar, resistance can therefore be reduced if

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practitioners understand that AI is not replacing their profession but changing the competencies required to perform it.

This interpretation is supported by Zhao (2024), who found that AI is increasingly accepted in public relations research and practice, but it is unlikely to completely replace PR professionals in the short term. Zhao's review is useful for understanding why practitioners' concern about job replacement should be reframed. The real challenge is not the disappearance of PR work, but the transformation of PR work into a more data-driven, analytical, and ethically sensitive profession. Dias et al. (2025) also found that strategic communication professionals are "torn between practicality and fear" when adopting AI. This closely reflects the situation in the present study: practitioners recognize the practical benefits of AI but remain cautious because automation may weaken originality, reduce critical thinking, or create dependence on machine-generated outputs.

Fourth, organizational readiness is a decisive factor in whether automation can be successfully adopted. Gregory and Smith (2025) argue that AI adoption in strategic communication is strongly influenced by organizational dynamics, leadership, and the ability to build dynamic capabilities. This means that PR automation should not be reduced to the purchase or use of digital tools. Organizations need leadership commitment, clear work procedures, and internal policies that explain how AI should be used. Harris and St. John (2025) strengthen this point by showing that unclear responsibility within dominant organizational coalitions creates challenges for PR practitioners in AI implementation. This is relevant to the present study because practitioners may hesitate to adopt automation when there is no clear division of responsibility regarding data use, message approval, risk management, and ethical accountability.

Fifth, the ethical and privacy challenges found in this study are strongly supported by recent literature. Bowen (2024) emphasizes that communication professionals must not only use AI but also understand, advise on, oversee, and defend its ethical use in organizations. This argument is particularly important for PR practitioners because they are responsible for maintaining public trust. If AI-based communication produces biased sentiment analysis, inaccurate public mapping, or misleading messages, the reputational damage will not be seen as a technical failure only, but as an organizational communication failure.

Hermann (2022) also warns that AI-driven personalization raises ethical and literacy concerns because automated communication can influence audiences in ways that are not always transparent. In public relations, this means that the use of AI for personalization, audience targeting, or sentiment analysis must be accompanied by transparency and ethical reflection. Prahl and Goh (2021) further show that when AI systems fail, organizations must still communicate publicly and take responsibility for the consequences. This supports the finding that human supervision remains essential in PR automation. AI may assist communication processes, but accountability must remain with the organization and its communication professionals.

Sixth, the discussion on public trust is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context. Soegiarto et al. (2024) found that AI in corporate PR practices in Indonesia is used to accelerate media analysis, sentiment analysis, social media content management, and marketing communication automation, but implementation is limited by resources and regulation. This aligns with the present study, where practitioners recognize the usefulness of automation but still face barriers related to skills, organizational readiness, and regulatory clarity. Nasikhah et al. (2022), through a study of chatbots for public relations and customer service in Indonesia, also show that the adoption of AI-based communication tools can be understood through diffusion of

ISSN 2721-0960 (Print), ISSN 2721-0847 (online)

innovation. Their study suggests that adoption depends on perceived benefits, compatibility with existing work patterns, and the readiness of users to accept new systems.

Yue et al. (2024) provide further support by showing that PR leaders use AI for practical communication functions but remain concerned about risks, ethical dilemmas, and the future direction of the profession. This is directly connected to the present findings because automation creates both efficiency and uncertainty. Practitioners may benefit from faster analysis and content support, but they must also manage risks related to accuracy, bias, privacy, and public accountability. Hidayat et al. (2026) add that research on AI in cyber public relations is still dominated by chatbot and interaction-efficiency studies, while long-term relational outcomes and AI governance remain underdeveloped. This indicates that future PR automation should not only focus on efficiency but also on relationship quality, trust, and governance.

Overall, this study confirms that the adoption of automation in public relations requires a balanced approach. Automation can support speed, efficiency, monitoring, and content management, but it cannot replace human judgment, ethical responsibility, and contextual understanding. The findings contribute to the literature by showing that PR automation challenges in Makassar City are shaped by four interconnected factors: real-time digital pressure, limited digital competence, resistance to technological change, and ethical-regulatory uncertainty. Practically, PR organizations need to develop continuous digital training, establish ethical AI guidelines, clarify responsibility in AI-supported communication, and strengthen human supervision. Theoretically, the findings support the view that the diffusion of PR automation is not automatic; it depends on perceived usefulness, compatibility with professional values, organizational support, and public trust.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of automation among public relations practitioners in Makassar City faces multidimensional challenges involving technological, professional, organizational, and ethical aspects. The findings show that internet speed and real-time communication demands require PR practitioners to work more responsively while maintaining originality, accuracy, and credibility in organizational communication. Limited digital understanding and skills remain a major barrier, indicating the need for continuous training and capacity building in automation, artificial intelligence, big data, and digital communication management. Resistance to technological change also affects the adoption of automation, particularly when practitioners perceive AI and big data as threats rather than supporting tools. In addition, ethical issues, data privacy concerns, and limited regulatory guidelines create uncertainty in the use of automation in public relations practices. Therefore, the successful adoption of PR automation depends not only on technological availability, but also on practitioner competence, organizational readiness, ethical awareness, and clear regulatory support. These findings reinforce the relevance of Innovation Diffusion Theory, which explains that the acceptance of new technology requires understanding, perceived usefulness, compatibility with professional values, and supportive social and institutional systems.

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