

AI an opportunity says global communications professionals

Globally 86% of communications professionals see artificial intelligence (AI) as an opportunity rather than a risk.



Source © limbi007 [123rf](#) AI as an opportunity says global communications professionals

This is according to *AI in Communications-Industry Opportunities and Risks* a study, launched in April by strategic communications and public affairs firm Sandpiper and based on the survey of 406 communications professionals, conducted in March 2023 in five continents globally.

It found that despite forecasts around job takeovers and loss of control, less than one-third (29%) of communication professionals are concerned that the rise of generative AI will see a reduction or replacement of their roles in the future – with those over 45 years old half as likely as those under 35 to be concerned – at 21% and 40% respectively.

PR industry predicted to face major changes

With rapid advances in AI technology, including the launch of generative AI tools such as GPT-4 and Midjourney, nearly two-thirds (65%) of those surveyed predict the \$107bn global public relations industry to face major change within the next three years.

Despite this, the study finds that 86% are also positive about advances in generative AI specifically.

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Pressure is mounting on industry leaders to catch up

However, in the face of change there are concerns that industry leaders are not acting quickly enough either to capitalise

on the opportunities (58%) or to manage the risks (59%) posed by AI.

On the flipside, a considerable contingent also feel change may be taking place without sufficient consideration – with 53% globally believing industry leaders aren't taking the risks seriously enough and 43% saying leaders are acting without thinking through the potential implications and consequences.

This inaction may be due to knowledge and capability gaps, with only four out of 10 saying that communications industry leaders have a good understanding of AI (41%) or generative AI (39%) specifically.

When looking at capabilities across the industry, only 55% of survey respondents indicated they had received any sort of training on AI technologies, with just 18% trained on responsible use of generative AI tools, 17% on managing deep fakes, and 10% on identifying deep fake content.

The horse has bolted

Despite the knowledge gaps and lack of training, the study finds that 61% of communicators globally say they are already using generative AI tools in their daily work, with one in five using them frequently. Use is expected to increase, and in just six months nine out of 10 communications professionals believe they will be using AI tools at least weekly.

As use of these tools grows, most feel that soft skills such as leadership abilities, strategic advisory, creative thinking, and relationship building will become more important than they are today.



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With opportunity comes responsibility

While positivity runs high around the opportunities, 85% are also concerned about the potential legal and ethical issues that generative AI technologies may give rise to in the communications industry in the future.

This concern is highest in Asia Pacific (65%) and North America (64%) and somewhat lower in Europe (60%) and the Middle East & North Africa (59%).

However, companies largely unprepared, with only 11% of currently having policies or guidelines in place for using generative AI tools.

Another area that the study points to as a growing future issue is data ownership. Two-thirds (66%) believe advances in AI

pose data ownership risks for the industry. Opinions are divided around who should own the data. While 36% believe users should retain ownership, 23% believe this should be jointly shared.

Others believe the tool itself should own the content (14%) or the owner of the original source of content (14%) should own the output.

With these risks, six out of 10 believe more companies in the future are likely to need support around managing AI-generated reputations.

“AI technology and generative AI in particular holds transformative potential for our industry but it must be approached with care,” says Emma Smith, CEO, Sandpiper.

“Sitting at the helm of many of the most important communications channels in the world, communicators have an urgent responsibility to upskill in this area to both take advantage of the opportunities it presents and mitigate the risks.

“With the democratisation of generative AI tools, governance and trust issues around the management, validity and dissemination of content will surely grow and we all must all be prepared to face this,” says Smith.

Methodology

The study is based on a survey conducted online by Sandpiper in March 2023 of 406 communications professionals working in both in-house and agency roles in Asia Pacific, Europe, North America, and the Middle East & Africa.

Download the full report [here](#).

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