FROM AI ADOPTION TO RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE

AUTHORS: RUTH AVIDAR, YEZREEL VALLEY COLLEGE; ITZHAK MASHIAH, UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA

FROM AI ADOPTION TO RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE

AUTHORS: RUTH AVIDAR, YEZREEL VALLEY COLLEGE; ITZHAK MASHIAH, UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA



© AdobeStock | fadi

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming embedded in strategic communication faster than many organizations can establish rules for governing its use. Drawing on two studies involving public relations professionals, content creators, and consumers, this article highlights two linked challenges: AI adoption often develops from the bottom up, while greater self-reported AI knowledge does not necessarily translate into stronger support for responsible AI practices. We argue that communication leaders should move beyond adoption toward governance that connects AI use in practice with organizational accountability and stakeholder expectations for transparency and trust.

AI IN COMMUNICATION PRACTICE

Over the past two decades, communication and marketing professionals have had to continuously adapt to new technologies, platforms, and communication channels. Generative AI represents a particularly significant shift. Unlike technologies that require organization-wide implementation, many AI tools can be adopted directly by individual employees. Communication professionals can experiment with them immediately and integrate them into everyday tasks without waiting for formal organizational decisions.

AI is not simply another tool added to the communication professional's toolbox. It is increasingly changing how messages are produced, evaluated, and distributed. Today, AI can support tasks ranging from content creation, research and monitoring, and ideation to data analysis, strategic planning, and professional decision-making. Its accessibility further distinguishes it from many earlier technologies: professionals can engage with increasingly sophisticated capabilities through relatively simple and intuitive interactions, often without extensive technical training.

This accessibility creates opportunities for efficiency and innovation, but it also creates a managerial challenge. AI use may become established in professional routines before organizations have developed clear policies, training, or shared expectations for its responsible use. Questions of transparency, verification, human oversight, accountability, and stakeholder trust can therefore emerge after AI has already become part of everyday communication work.

Two recent studies examine this challenge from complementary perspectives. The first explored how AI is being adopted and integrated into public relations organizations, including the role of managers, employees, training, and ethical concerns (Mashiah & Avidar, 2025). The second study compared professional content creators with consumers, examining AI knowledge, trust, and support for responsible AI practices (Avidar & Mashiah, 2026). Together, these studies shift the question from whether communication professionals will adopt AI to how organizations can govern its use responsibly while remaining attentive to stakeholder expectations.

AI ADOPTION OFTEN STARTS FROM THE BOTTOM UP

The first study examined how AI was being integrated into public relations organizations and how senior professionals understood its opportunities, risks, and ethical implications (Mashiah & Avidar, 2025). Interviews with senior public relations executives showed that AI was already part of their daily communication work, supporting tasks such as content creation, research, consultation, strategic planning, and media-related activities.

Generally speaking, organizational technology adoption can develop through both management-led and employee-led pathways, with emerging technologies sometimes spreading through employee experimentation before formal managerial processes are established (Li, 2023; Tursunbayeva & Chaluz-Ben Gal, 2024). In relation to AI adoption, one finding stood out in the first study: adoption often emerged organically from the bottom up. Rather than management first selecting tools, defining procedures, and training employees, younger and more technology-oriented staff frequently began experimenting with AI tools on their own. Their use then spread through the organization and gradually became normalized.

The first study therefore showed that AI adoption did not always follow a planned managerial process. This pattern matters because most interviewees also reported that their organizations had not yet established formal, structured AI policies. Some relied instead on informal “dos and don’ts,” while systematic training was limited. In several organizations, AI had therefore become part of professional routines before management had developed clear expectations for how it should be used.

Yet, it is important to note that “bottom-up” adoption is not necessarily a weakness. It can sometimes support experimentation, rapid learning, and innovation. But it also creates a governance challenge. Employees may use AI for external communication before organizations have clarified who is responsible for checking the output, what information can safely be entered into AI systems, when AI-generated material should be disclosed, or how its accuracy should be verified.

The interviews illustrated the practical consequences of this gap. One public relations executive described a case in which an AI-generated opinion piece was sent to a newspaper without adequate verification and was challenged by the editor. Other participants expressed concerns about inaccurate outputs, copyright, the loss of human judgment, professional credibility, and the possibility that clients or journalists might react negatively to undisclosed AI use. As one CEO and public relations agency director put it, “AI usage is embarrassing because it feels like a lack of effort”.

Nevertheless, AI adoption is already widespread in practice, meaning that AI may become embedded in communication practices before it is incorporated into formal organizational governance. This shifts the managerial challenge from deciding whether to adopt AI to developing appropriate governance mechanisms for technologies that employees may already be using.

AI KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT GUARANTEE RESPONSIBLE PRACTICE

The second study examined a different dimension of the same governance challenge: whether greater familiarity with AI is associated with stronger support for responsible AI use. It compared 203 professional content creators, including journalists, public relations and advertising practitioners, and independent creators, with 503 content consumers (Avidar & Mashiah, 2026).

Professional creators reported greater AI knowledge than consumers. At the same time, however, they were less supportive of several responsible AI practices. Consumers expressed stronger support for ethical codes, transparency about AI use, fact-checking, and public education. The two groups did not differ significantly in their support for data security. Differences within the professional group were also notable. Public relations and advertising practitioners reported higher AI knowledge than journalists, but lower support for responsible AI practices than journalists and independent content creators. This suggests that greater familiarity with AI should not be assumed to produce stronger endorsement of the practices commonly associated with responsible use.

One possible explanation is that professionals experience the practical tensions surrounding AI more directly. Transparency, for example, may be valued in principle but can also create concerns about credibility, client reactions, or reputational risk. This is consistent with research describing a "transparency dilemma," in which disclosure of AI use can sometimes reduce trust even when transparency is normatively desirable (Schilke & Reimann, 2025; Toff & Simon, 2025). More broadly, research on AI in public relations has emphasized the need for ethical guidance and professional oversight as AI becomes integrated into communication practice (Bowen, 2024; Germinder & Capizzo, 2025).

The findings therefore point to an important distinction between technical familiarity and responsible practice. Communication professionals may report greater AI knowledge and use it extensively, yet still differ from audiences in how they evaluate transparency, verification, and other forms of responsible AI use. For communication leaders, this matters because AI expertise alone cannot substitute for explicit organizational standards and ethical discussion. If organizations rely only on individual competence, they may overlook differences between professional norms and stakeholder expectations. Technical fluency and responsible judgment should therefore be treated as related but distinct dimensions of professional AI practice.

TWO STUDIES, ONE GOVERNANCE CHALLENGE

Taken together, the two studies reveal a broader organizational challenge. The first shows that AI can enter communication practice from the bottom up, before formal policies, training, and managerial oversight are fully developed (Mashiah & Avidar, 2025). The second shows that greater professional AI knowledge does not necessarily lead to stronger support for responsible AI practices, and that practitioners and consumers may differ in their expectations of how AI should be used (Avidar & Mashiah, 2026). Together, the findings point to two related gaps:

1. The first is a **governance gap:** actual AI use may move faster than organizational oversight.
2. The second is an **expectation gap:** professional approaches to responsible AI may differ from stakeholder expectations.

Employees may already be using AI extensively while managers are still determining appropriate rules and responsibilities. At the same time, communication professionals may view some responsible AI practices differently from the audiences they serve. This is why the challenge cannot be reduced to writing an AI policy. Formal guidelines are important, particularly where AI use has developed informally. Previous research has also emphasized the ethical oversight role of public relations in organizational AI use (Bowen, 2024). But policy alone does not ensure that everyday practice, professional judgment, and stakeholder expectations are aligned.

For communication leaders, responsible governance therefore requires attention to all three dimensions: Organizations need to understand how AI is being used in practice, clarify who is accountable for AI-assisted communication,

and consider how their practices align with stakeholder expectations concerning transparency, verification, and trust. Responsible AI governance begins by aligning actual practice, organizational accountability, and stakeholder expectations.

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THIS ARTICLE

Study 1: 15 interviews with senior public relations professionals in Israel examined AI adoption, opportunities, risks, and ethical challenges (Mashiah & Avidar, 2025).

Study 2: A survey of 203 professional content creators and 503 consumers examined AI knowledge, trust, and support for responsible AI practices (Avidar & Mashiah, 2026).

The studies examine how AI enters communication practice and how professional approaches can differ from stakeholder expectations.

BUILDING RESPONSIBLE AI PRACTICES

The findings suggest that communication leaders should move beyond informal AI adoption toward clearer and more deliberate governance. This does not mean trying to control every use of AI. It means creating structures that connect experimentation with professional responsibility. To put this into practice, organizations should consider the following:

1. **Map how AI is already being used.** Because adoption may develop from the bottom up, managers should not assume that formal policy marks the beginning of AI use. Understanding existing practices can reveal where AI supports work effectively and where risks or inconsistencies have emerged (Mashiah & Avidar, 2025).
2. **Combine bottom-up knowledge with top-down accountability.** Employees who use AI regularly can contribute valuable practical knowledge, but responsibility for standards, verification, and acceptable use remains organizational. This balance is consistent with research emphasizing the need to connect employee-led experimentation with deliberate managerial implementation (Li, 2023; Tursunbayeva & Chaluz-Ben Gal, 2024).
3. **Define human responsibility for AI-assisted communication.** Employees need clear expectations about who verifies outputs, who approves externally facing content, and who is accountable when AI-generated information is inaccurate or inappropriate (Mashiah & Avidar, 2025).
4. **Establish explicit principles for transparency and verification.** As the recent study shows (Avidar & Mashiah, 2026), professionals and consumers do not always share the same expectations regarding responsible AI practices. Disclosure and fact-checking should therefore not be left entirely to individual judgment. Organizations should instead define when disclosure, verification, and human oversight are expected, taking account of the communication context and potential stakeholder impact.
5. **Train for professional judgment, not only technical proficiency.** Greater AI knowledge does not necessarily lead to stronger support for responsible practices (Avidar & Mashiah, 2026). Training should therefore address transparency, accountability, verification, stakeholder trust, and the boundaries of responsible AI use alongside technical skills.

FOUR QUESTIONS FOR RESPONSIBLE AI USE IN COMMUNICATION

- Have I verified factual claims using reliable sources?
- Who remains responsible for the final content or decision?
- Does AI involvement need to be disclosed in this context?
- Could AI use affect trust with clients, journalists, or other stakeholders?

AN ONGOING CHALLENGE

AI is already reshaping communication work, but the central challenge is no longer adoption alone. The two studies suggest that AI can become embedded in professional practice before organizations have developed formal governance, and that greater professional familiarity with AI does not necessarily lead to stronger support for responsible AI practices.

Taken together, these findings suggest that responsible AI use requires more than policies or technical competence. Communication organizations need to connect actual practice with clear accountability, informed professional decision-making, and stakeholder expectations. This is especially important because AI-assisted communication does more than change how communication work is performed; it can also shape how organizations assume responsibility and maintain legitimacy in the eyes of their stakeholders.

The role of communication leaders is therefore likely to become increasingly important as AI tools continue to evolve. Governance will need to remain flexible enough to accommodate innovation while providing clear principles for verification, disclosure, oversight, and professional responsibility. As AI becomes more deeply integrated into communication workflows, the challenge may increasingly shift from deciding whether particular tools should be used to determining when, how, and under whose responsibility they should be deployed.

This challenge is particularly consequential in strategic and corporate communication, where professionals do not simply produce content but help shape how organizations and brands are represented, understood, and trusted. Responsible AI use therefore becomes not only a matter of organizational governance, but also an important dimension of organizational reputation, stakeholder trust, and strategic communication practice.

This also means that AI governance should be treated as an ongoing organizational process rather than a one-time policy exercise. Communication leaders will need to revisit standards as technologies, professional practices, and stakeholder expectations change. Future governance will therefore depend not only on keeping pace with technological developments, but also on preserving the human judgment and relational responsibilities that remain central to strategic communication. Ultimately, the key question is no longer whether communication professionals will use AI, but how organizations can govern its use in ways that remain responsible, credible, and aligned with stakeholder expectations.

REFERENCES

Avidar, R., & Mashiah, I. (2026). Creating and consuming AI-generated content: Ethical challenges of trust and transparency. Journal of Communication Management, 1–18.

Bowen, S. A. (2024). "If it can be done, it will be done": AI ethical standards and a dual role for public relations. Public Relations Review, 50(5), Article 102513.

Germinder, L. A., & Capizzo, L. (2025). Responsible AI for public relations practice: Applying public relations practitioner perspectives to ethical codes for the use of generative artificial intelligence. In A. V. Laskin & K. Freberg (Eds.), Public relations and strategic communication in 2050 (pp. 36–48). Routledge.

Li, Y. (2023). The influence of top-down mode and bottom-up mode to national innovation and entrepreneurship. Journal of Innovation and Development, 2(3), 158–161.

Mashiah, I., & Avidar, R. (2025). The paradox of technology acceptance: Ethics and strategic implications of artificial intelligence in public relations. Journal of Communication Management, 603–623.

Schilke, O., & Reimann, M. (2025). The transparency dilemma: How AI disclosure erodes trust. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 188, Article 104405.

Toff, B., & Simon, F. M. (2025). "Or they could just not use it?": The dilemma of AI disclosure for audience trust in news. The International Journal of Press/Politics, 30(4), 881–903.

Tursunbayeva, A., & Chaluz-Ben Gal, H. (2024). Adoption of artificial intelligence: A TOP framework-based checklist for digital leaders. Business Horizons, 67(4), 357–368.

AUTHORS



DR. RUTH AVIDAR is Head of the Marketing Communication Track at Yezreel Valley College, Israel. Her research focuses on digital public relations, AI in public relations, interactivity, and dialogic communication.
Email: ruthav@yvc.ac.il



DR. ITZHAK MASHIAH is Lecturer in Marketing Communication at the University of Haifa, Israel. His research focuses on technology and communication, media practices, strategic rhetoric, and innovation-driven integrated marketing communication. Email: imashiah@staff.haifa.ac.il

MORE INFORMATION

This article is based on a two-phase study (Avidar & Mashiah, 2026; Mashiah & Avidar, 2025), supported by the Berger Research Award from the Global Strategic Communication Consortium at the University of Carolina, USA.

Cite this article: Avidar, R. & Mashiah, I. (2026). From AI adoption to responsible governance. Corporate Communication Review, 2(2), 16-21. https://doi.org/10.63904/ccr.v2i2.38