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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN UNIVERSITY PUBLIC RELATIONS: ENHANCING COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN PALESTINIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in enhancing communication practices within university public relations in Palestinian universities operating in a complex political, security, and economic environment that intensifies institutional communication challenges. Adopting a descriptive-analytical approach combined with a multiple case study design, the research draws on data collected from four universities across the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Data collection included a structured questionnaire (N = 31), document and content analysis, digital tool auditing, and unstructured interviews, supported by a triangulation strategy to enhance analytical rigor. The findings indicate that AI adoption in university public relations remains predominantly operational, focusing on content production, translation, and digital platform management, while its strategic integration—particularly in media planning, crisis communication, and institutional image building—remains limited. The study identifies a significant gap between awareness of AI's importance and institutional readiness, driven by human, organizational, and technical constraints, including the lack of specialized competencies and the absence of formal governance frameworks. Conceptually, the study introduces the notion of "crisis-driven AI adoption," highlighting how institutions operating in high-risk environments adopt artificial intelligence as an adaptive response to contextual pressures rather than as a purely strategic innovation. The study proposes a phased AI activation approach that integrates technological efficiency with ethical governance, contributing to the advancement of institutional communication effectiveness and sustainability in higher education.

KEYWORDS: Artificial Intelligence; University Public Relations; Communication Practices; Palestinian Universities; Crisis Communication; Digital Transformation.

I. GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has fundamentally reshaped institutional communication practices, transforming the ways organizations generate, manage, and disseminate information. Contemporary organizational communication increasingly relies on data-driven analytics, predictive audience modeling, automated content production, and intelligent crisis management systems. Within this transformation, public relations—by virtue of its communication-intensive nature—has emerged as one of the most significantly affected domains, evolving from a primarily operational function into a strategic, data-informed practice.

In the context of higher education, AI has become a critical instrument for enhancing institutional communication, strengthening stakeholder engagement, and shaping corporate image. Universities are no longer confined to traditional communication models; rather, they are increasingly expected to adopt adaptive and technologically integrated strategies capable of responding to rapidly changing communication environments. This expectation becomes particularly pressing in politically and economically unstable contexts, where communication systems must operate under conditions of uncertainty, resource constraints, and recurrent crises.

Within the Palestinian context, universities face compounded structural challenges, including political instability, economic limitations, restricted resources, and continuous communication pressures driven by crisis conditions. These factors not only complicate institutional communication but also create a unique environment in which artificial intelligence may function as both a technological enabler and an adaptive response mechanism. Despite the growing global interest in AI-driven communication, empirical research examining its adoption within university public relations in high-risk environments remains limited.

Accordingly, this study seeks to analyze the role of artificial intelligence in developing communication practices within university public relations units in Palestinian universities. It examines patterns of AI adoption, explores practical dimensions of implementation, identifies institutional and contextual barriers, and provides an analytically grounded perspective on how AI can enhance communication effectiveness. In doing so, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of

AI adoption as a context-sensitive process shaped not only by technological capabilities but also by environmental pressures and institutional readiness.

2. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from both its scientific contribution and its practical relevance within the evolving field of artificial intelligence in institutional communication. First, the study contributes to addressing a notable gap in Arabic scholarship concerning the adoption of artificial intelligence in public relations, particularly within higher education institutions operating in complex environments.

Second, it provides an empirical examination of communication practices in Palestinian universities in the context of accelerated digital transformation, offering context-sensitive insights into how AI is utilized under conditions of political and economic instability.

Third, the study offers practical implications for university decision-makers by identifying key indicators that can support informed and strategic AI adoption within public relations departments.

Fourth, it advances understanding of the relationship between artificial intelligence and crisis communication, particularly within high-risk environments where communication effectiveness is critical to institutional resilience.

Finally, the study contributes to the development of more flexible, adaptive, and technologically integrated institutional communication strategies, thereby supporting the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of communication practices in higher education.

3. Research Objectives

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of artificial intelligence adoption within university public relations in Palestinian universities. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Examine the current level and patterns of AI adoption in university public relations units.
- Analyze the role of artificial intelligence in media planning and crisis communication.
- Explore the contribution of AI to audience analysis and institutional image construction.
- Assess the level of technological readiness within public relations departments.
- Identify the key technical, organizational, and human barriers that constrain effective AI implementation.

4. Research Questions

To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following central research question:

What role does artificial intelligence play in enhancing communication practices in university public relations within Palestinian universities?

This central question is further explored through the following sub-questions:

1. What is the current level and nature of AI adoption in university public relations departments?
2. How does artificial intelligence contribute to media planning and crisis communication?
3. In what ways does AI support audience analysis and institutional image building?
4. To what extent are public relations departments technologically and organizationally prepared to adopt AI technologies?
5. What are the key barriers that hinder the effective implementation of artificial intelligence?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. International Scholarship on Artificial Intelligence in Public Relations

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into public relations and strategic communication has become a central focus of contemporary international scholarship. Increasingly, AI is conceptualized not merely as a technical support tool, but as a transformative force reshaping communication governance, crisis responsiveness, stakeholder engagement, and institutional reputation management. This shift reflects a broader transition from traditional communication models toward data-driven and adaptive communication systems.

A foundational contribution to this field is provided by Zeffass et al. (2018), who position artificial intelligence as a core component of strategic communication development. Their work emphasizes that AI enhances organizational decision-making through big data analytics, real-time monitoring of public opinion, and predictive detection of communication crises. Importantly, they argue that the effectiveness of AI integration depends less on technological sophistication alone and more on organizational readiness, leadership commitment, and cultural alignment.

Similarly, Pavlik (2019) highlights the operational advantages of AI applications in public relations, including automated sentiment analysis, content personalization, and enhanced communication efficiency. However, Pavlik also raises critical ethical concerns, particularly regarding transparency, accountability, and the potential erosion of professional standards in communication practices. This dual perspective underscores a central tension

within the literature between technological efficiency and ethical governance.

In the context of crisis communication, Wirtz et al. (2019) demonstrate that AI-enabled systems significantly improve institutional responsiveness by facilitating real-time environmental monitoring and rapid adaptation to changing audience dynamics. Their findings suggest that organizations adopting AI-driven communication strategies are better equipped to anticipate and contain crises, thereby enhancing organizational resilience.

In parallel, Buhmann and Fieseler (2021) extend this discussion to the domain of reputation management, arguing that AI contributes to message consistency, audience trust, and long-term corporate reputation. However, they stress that these benefits are contingent upon maintaining meaningful human oversight to prevent algorithmic bias, ethical deviations, and potential manipulation of public opinion.

Collectively, international scholarship converges on the view that artificial intelligence holds substantial potential to transform public relations into a more strategic, data-driven, and proactive function. At the same time, it highlights that this transformation is conditioned by organizational readiness, ethical governance, and the capacity to integrate AI within broader institutional communication strategies rather than limiting its use to operational tasks.

2. Arab Scholarship on Artificial Intelligence in Public Relations

In contrast to the extensive and analytically advanced international literature, Arab scholarship on artificial intelligence in public relations remains relatively limited and predominantly descriptive in nature. Existing studies tend to focus on identifying challenges associated with digital transformation rather than developing comprehensive empirical or theoretical models of AI integration within institutional communication.

Al-Shammari (2020), for instance, identifies several structural barriers to AI adoption in Arab public relations practices, including weak digital infrastructure, limited financial resources, and a shortage of specialized competencies. The study also highlights a persistent gap between theoretical awareness of AI's importance and its actual implementation within institutional settings.

Similarly, Abdel Hamid (2021) observes that AI adoption in educational institutions across the Arab region remains at an early stage, with applications largely confined to routine functions such as digital

platform management and automated communication processes. More advanced and strategic uses—such as predictive analytics, media intelligence systems, and crisis modeling—remain underdeveloped, reflecting a limited transition toward data-driven communication strategies.

Furthermore, Al-Harbi (2022) emphasizes the role of human and organizational factors in constraining digital transformation, particularly resistance to change and insufficient professional training. These findings suggest that even when technological tools are available, their effective utilization is hindered by institutional culture and the absence of structured capacity-building initiatives.

Overall, Arab scholarship consistently points to a structural gap between technological availability and institutional readiness, indicating that AI adoption remains fragmented, experimental, and largely driven by individual initiatives rather than coordinated organizational strategies. This pattern reinforces the need for more context-specific research that moves beyond descriptive analysis toward a deeper examination of how institutional and environmental factors shape AI integration in public relations practice.

3. Research Gap

In contrast to the extensive and analytically advanced international literature, Arab scholarship on artificial intelligence in public relations remains comparatively limited and largely descriptive. Existing studies tend to focus on identifying challenges associated with digital transformation rather than advancing empirically grounded or theoretically integrated models of AI adoption within institutional communication.

Al-Shammari (2020), for example, identifies a set of structural barriers constraining AI adoption in Arab public relations practices, including weak digital infrastructure, limited financial resources, and a shortage of specialized competencies. Beyond these structural limitations, the study highlights a persistent disconnect between theoretical awareness of AI's importance and its practical implementation, suggesting that institutional adoption processes remain incomplete and fragmented.

Similarly, Abdel Hamid (2021) observes that AI adoption in educational institutions across the Arab region is still at an early stage, with applications largely confined to routine operational functions such as digital platform management and automated communication processes. More advanced and strategic applications—such as predictive analytics, media intelligence systems, and crisis modeling—

remain underdeveloped, reflecting a limited transition toward data-driven and anticipatory communication practices.

Furthermore, Al-Harbi (2022) underscores the critical role of human and organizational factors in constraining digital transformation, particularly resistance to change and insufficient professional training. These findings suggest that the availability of technological tools alone is insufficient to ensure effective AI integration, as institutional culture and capacity-building deficits significantly shape adoption outcomes.

Collectively, Arab scholarship points to a persistent structural gap between technological availability and institutional readiness, indicating that AI adoption in public relations remains fragmented, experimental, and predominantly driven by individual initiatives rather than coordinated organizational strategies. This pattern reveals a deeper analytical limitation within the literature, where the focus remains on identifying barriers rather than explaining the underlying mechanisms of AI adoption. Consequently, there is a clear need for context-sensitive research that moves beyond descriptive accounts toward a more comprehensive understanding of how institutional, organizational, and environmental factors interact to shape AI integration in public relations practice.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in an integrative theoretical framework that combines Diffusion of Innovation Theory, Institutional Communication Theory, and Systems Theory to explain patterns of artificial intelligence adoption within university public relations units in Palestinian universities. The integration of these complementary perspectives enables a multidimensional understanding of AI adoption as a complex organizational process shaped by technological capabilities, institutional conditions, and environmental pressures. Rather than examining AI adoption as a purely technical phenomenon, this framework conceptualizes it as a context-sensitive transformation embedded within broader communication and organizational dynamics.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 2003) provides a foundational lens for analyzing how AI technologies are introduced, adopted, and institutionalized within organizations. Rogers conceptualizes innovation adoption as a staged process encompassing knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. Within this framework, AI adoption in public relations can be examined through factors such as perceived

relative advantage, compatibility with existing structures, complexity, trialability, and observability. Importantly, the theory highlights the role of organizational characteristics—including leadership support, communication channels, and social systems—in accelerating or constraining adoption. In the context of Palestinian universities, this perspective helps explain why AI usage often remains operational and experimental, reflecting an incomplete transition from early adoption stages to full institutionalization.

Institutional Communication Theory (Cornelissen, 2020) extends this analysis by positioning communication as a strategic managerial function rather than a purely technical activity. From this perspective, public relations departments are not merely responsible for information dissemination but play a central role in shaping organizational identity, legitimacy, and stakeholder relationships. Accordingly, AI technologies are evaluated not only in terms of operational efficiency but also in relation to their strategic contribution to media planning, reputation management, and crisis communication. This perspective underscores that without alignment with institutional objectives and governance frameworks, AI adoption risks remaining confined to routine content production rather than functioning as a strategic decision-support system.

Systems Theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) further enriches the framework by conceptualizing universities as open systems operating within dynamic and often unstable environments. Public relations departments act as boundary-spanning units that manage information flows between the institution and its stakeholders. In politically volatile contexts such as Palestine, environmental turbulence intensifies the need for adaptive and responsive communication mechanisms. AI-driven tools—such as real-time monitoring, predictive analytics, and audience segmentation—enhance the organization's capacity to sense environmental changes and respond effectively. From this perspective, AI adoption is understood as an adaptive response to environmental pressures rather than merely a technological upgrade.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide a coherent and integrated framework for understanding artificial intelligence adoption as a multidimensional transformation process. Diffusion of Innovation Theory explains the mechanisms and stages of technological uptake; Institutional Communication Theory situates AI within strategic communication processes; and Systems Theory contextualizes adoption within environmental

interaction and crisis responsiveness. Together, they highlight the interplay between technological readiness, organizational capacity, and contextual pressures in shaping AI integration.

Building on this integrated framework, the study adopts a conceptual perspective in which artificial intelligence adoption in university public relations is interpreted as the outcome of institutional readiness and crisis-driven contextual dynamics. Within this perspective, technological capabilities, organizational conditions, and environmental pressures interact to shape both the level and nature of AI utilization. This approach enables the study to move beyond descriptive analysis toward a more interpretive and context-sensitive understanding of AI adoption patterns, particularly within crisis-prone environments such as the Palestinian context.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical research design situated within a mixed-methods framework to provide a comprehensive examination of artificial intelligence adoption in public relations departments across Palestinian universities. The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches enables a multidimensional understanding of both the measurable extent of AI utilization and the contextual, organizational, and perceptual factors shaping its implementation. By combining survey data with qualitative inquiry and institutional document analysis, the study enhances explanatory depth and strengthens analytical validity through methodological triangulation.

Sample

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure representation from major universities across both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, thereby capturing institutional diversity within the Palestinian higher education system. The selected institutions include Al-Azhar University, the Islamic University of Gaza, Birzeit University, and An-Najah National University. These universities were selected based on their institutional scale, organizational structure, and the presence of active public relations units.

The quantitative component yielded 31 valid responses from public relations professionals occupying managerial, supervisory, and operational roles. The inclusion of participants with diverse levels of professional experience enhances the credibility of the data and ensures that the findings reflect both strategic orientations and day-to-day communication practices.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using four complementary instruments designed to capture both structural patterns and contextual insights:

(1) **Structured Questionnaire (N = 31):** Developed based on established literature and validated measurement constructs, the questionnaire assessed AI usage patterns, perceived effectiveness, organizational readiness, and barriers to implementation.

(2) **Document and Content Analysis:** Institutional communication materials, digital outputs, and strategic documents were systematically reviewed to identify observable patterns of AI integration in practice.

(3) **Digital Tool Audit:** An evaluative mapping of AI-based tools used within public relations departments was conducted to assess the scope, functionality, and degree of institutionalization of technological applications.

(4) **Unstructured Interviews:** In-depth interviews were conducted with public relations directors and digital media officers to contextualize survey findings and explore institutional dynamics, governance structures, and crisis communication practices.

This multi-instrument approach ensures triangulation across perceptual data, documented practices, and technological infrastructure, thereby enhancing the robustness of the findings.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to identify patterns of AI adoption and perceived impact. Qualitative data derived from interviews and document analysis were examined using thematic analysis, enabling the identification of recurring themes related to governance, organizational readiness, crisis responsiveness, and strategic integration.

In addition, a comparative interpretive analysis was conducted across the four universities to identify institutional similarities, contextual variations, and structural constraints influencing AI implementation. By integrating statistical description with qualitative interpretation, the study achieves analytical rigor while capturing the complexity of AI adoption within politically and economically constrained higher education environments.

Although the study primarily employs descriptive statistical analysis, it is guided by an interpretive analytical perspective that seeks to

explain patterns of AI adoption in relation to institutional and contextual factors.

V. METHODOLOGICAL RIGOR AND VALIDATION

This study adopts a rigorously structured mixed-methods design to enhance both internal and external validity, ensuring that the findings are analytically robust and methodologically defensible. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence was systematically planned to strengthen inferential credibility and mitigate the limitations associated with single-method research designs.

The development of the quantitative measurement instrument followed established scale-construction procedures. Item generation was grounded in a comprehensive review of contemporary scholarship on artificial intelligence adoption, digital transformation, and strategic communication. Content validity was established through expert evaluation by specialists in public relations, digital communication, and research methodology. A pilot test was conducted to refine item clarity and assess preliminary reliability, after which internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability indicators.

Construct validity was assessed through both convergent and discriminant validation procedures. Convergent validity was examined using factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE), ensuring that items measuring the same construct demonstrated strong internal coherence. Discriminant validity was confirmed by verifying that distinct constructs remained empirically distinguishable. These procedures ensured that key variables—such as technological readiness, AI usage intensity, crisis communication capability, and perceived barriers—were measured with conceptual precision.

Where explanatory relationships were explored, appropriate statistical techniques were applied in accordance with sample size considerations and distributional assumptions. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) or regression-based models were considered suitable approaches for evaluating predictive relationships within an exploratory research context, without overextending inferential claims.

To address potential common method bias, both procedural and statistical safeguards were implemented. Procedural remedies included ensuring respondent anonymity, carefully sequencing questionnaire items to minimize priming

effects, and separating predictor and outcome constructs within the instrument design. Statistical diagnostics were also employed to detect potential response-pattern inflation, thereby strengthening confidence in the independence of the reported findings.

Qualitative data were analyzed using structured thematic coding procedures. Interview transcripts and documentary materials were systematically coded and categorized to ensure analytical transparency. Coding decisions were documented to enhance replicability and reduce interpretive ambiguity. The triangulation of qualitative insights with quantitative findings further strengthens methodological rigor and enriches contextual interpretation.

Finally, the study situates artificial intelligence adoption within a responsible communication framework that emphasizes transparency, accountability, human oversight, and ethical governance. By embedding ethical considerations within both the conceptual design and analytical interpretation, the study aligns with contemporary global standards in strategic communication and public relations research. This integrated approach ensures that technological innovation is evaluated not only in terms of operational efficiency but also in relation to institutional legitimacy and professional responsibility.

Field Study Findings

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to provide a comprehensive overview of patterns of artificial intelligence adoption and practitioner perceptions. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software. All Likert-scale items were measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), allowing for the assessment of both the direction and intensity of responses. Mean values were interpreted relative to the scale midpoint to determine the overall level of agreement across different dimensions.

For multiple-response questions, analysis was based on frequency distributions rather than cumulative percentages, ensuring accurate representation of usage patterns and tool prevalence. The statistical findings were systematically presented in tabular form to enhance clarity and transparency. Each table was accompanied by analytical interpretation linking numerical results to the study's research questions and theoretical framework, thereby integrating descriptive statistical evidence with substantive contextual analysis.

Table 1. Sample Distribution by University.

University	Frequency	%
Birzeit	9	29.0
An-Najah	7	22.6
Islamic University of Gaza	9	29.0
Al-Azhar Gaza	6	19.4
Total	31	100

The sample reflects both geographic and institutional diversity across universities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, enhancing the contextual representativeness of the study. This distribution supports the inclusion of varied institutional perspectives, thereby strengthening the interpretive relevance of the findings within the Palestinian higher education context.

Table 2. Job Position.

Position	Frequency	%
PR Manager	4	12.9
Assistant Manager	3	9.7
Head of Department	6	19.4
PR Officer	18	58.0
Total	31	100

The predominance of respondents in operational public relations roles provides insight into day-to-day AI usage practices, ensuring that the findings capture practical implementation dynamics rather than being limited to managerial perspectives.

Table 3. Years of Experience.

Experience	Frequency	%
>10 years	15	48.4
5–10 years	11	35.5
<5 years	5	16.1
Total	31	100

A substantial proportion of participants possess more than ten years of professional experience, providing an informed perspective on AI adoption and enhancing the interpretive depth of the reported perceptions.

Table 4. Level of AI Usage.

Level	Frequency	%
Very High	5	16.1
High	4	12.9
Moderate	15	48.4
Low	7	22.6
Not Used	0	0
Total	31	100

The findings indicate that AI adoption is predominantly moderate, suggesting a transitional stage characterized by partial or experimental integration rather than full institutional deployment.

Table 5. AI Tools Used.

Tool	Frequency	%
ChatGPT / Text Generation	26	83.9
AI Visual Design	21	67.7
Audience Analytics	17	54.8
Social Media Management	11	35.5
Chatbots	11	35.5
Public Opinion Analysis	12	38.7
Crisis Analysis	8	25.8
AI Translation	17	54.8
Media Monitoring	6	19.4

Note: As this was a multiple-response question, the total frequencies exceed the total sample size (N = 31).

AI usage is primarily concentrated in content production functions, while more advanced and strategic applications-such as media monitoring and crisis analysis-remain relatively limited.

Table 6. Fields of AI Application.

Field	Frequency	%
News Writing	11	35.5
Platform Management	9	29.0
Visual Design	11	35.5
Translation	7	22.6
Audience Analysis	5	16.1
Chatbots	6	19.4

Note: As this was a multiple-response question, the total frequencies exceed the total sample size (N = 31).

Public relations departments primarily utilize artificial intelligence for routine operational tasks, while its application in audience-centered analytical functions and interactive communication practices remains limited, indicating a need to strengthen technological capabilities to support more advanced forms of communication.

Table 7. ChatGPT Subscription Type.

Type	Frequency	%
Free Version	21	67.7
Personal Paid	11	35.5
Institutional	16	51.6
Personal Accounts	13	41.9
Not Used	0	0

Note: As this was a multiple-response question, the total frequencies exceed the total sample size (N = 31).

The findings indicate a notable reliance on free and personal AI tools, suggesting limitations in formal institutional governance frameworks. This pattern highlights the need to develop clear organizational policies to regulate AI use and facilitate a transition from informal or individual practices toward more structured institutional implementation, thereby enhancing efficiency, security, and long-term sustainability.

Table (8) Role of Artificial Intelligence in Media Planning and Crisis Management (N = 31).

Item	Mean	SD	Rank
AI improves media planning	4.06	0.57	1
AI predicts potential crises	3.77	0.76	3
AI unifies media discourse during crises	3.74	0.68	4
AI speeds crisis response	3.87	0.50	2

The results indicate a relatively high level of agreement regarding the role of AI in enhancing media planning and crisis response, with the highest mean score observed for media planning (M = 4.06), suggesting a strong perceived operational value of AI in this domain.

Table (9) Use of Artificial Intelligence in Audience Analysis and Image Building.

Item	Mean	SD	Rank
AI analyzes audience interests	4.00	0.63	1
AI tailors messages to audience segments	4.00	0.52	1
AI measures audience reactions	3.84	0.82	3
AI improves university image	3.61	0.50	4

The findings indicate a relatively strong level of agreement regarding the role of AI in audience analysis and message customization, while its perceived impact on long-term institutional image building remains moderate. This suggests that, although AI is effectively utilized for tactical communication functions, its strategic potential in shaping institutional image has not yet been fully realized. Accordingly, the results point to the need for strengthening the strategic integration of AI technologies within institutional communication policies.

Table (10) Barriers to AI Adoption in Public Relations Departments.

Item	Mean	SD	Rank
Lack of qualified staff	4.19	0.65	1
Lack of institutional policies	4.13	0.62	2
Limited financial resources	4.10	0.70	3
Weak technical infrastructure	3.97	0.66	4

The findings indicate that human and organizational barriers constitute the primary challenges to the adoption of artificial intelligence technologies, particularly the lack of specialized expertise and the absence of formal institutional policies and governance frameworks. This suggests that effective AI integration extends beyond the mere availability of technological tools, requiring a more comprehensive institutional approach that incorporates financial planning, capacity building, and structured governance mechanisms. Such an approach is essential to support the sustainable, ethical, and effective utilization of AI within university public relations practices.

Table (11) Impact of Political and Security Conditions on AI Adoption.

Item	Mean	SD
Political conditions accelerated AI adoption	3.87	0.88

The results indicate that political and security conditions function as key contextual drivers accelerating the adoption of artificial intelligence in communication practices. This finding is further supported by qualitative evidence, including expert insights from a public relations director in a Palestinian university, who emphasized that crisis conditions have directly contributed to the increased use of AI tools by enhancing operational flexibility, strengthening crisis responsiveness, and supporting organizational continuity during emergencies (personal communication, 2025).

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that artificial intelligence is increasingly embedded in university public relations practices across Palestinian universities; however, its adoption remains predominantly operational rather than strategic. The moderate level of reported AI usage reflects a transitional stage in which awareness and experimentation are widespread, while institutional integration remains fragmented and largely informal. This pattern suggests that AI is currently utilized to enhance routine communication efficiency rather than being systematically incorporated into comprehensive communication strategies.

Beyond these descriptive patterns, the results can be interpreted through a “crisis-driven AI adoption” perspective, whereby technological adoption emerges not solely from planned institutional strategies but as a reactive response to environmental instability. In this context, political and security pressures function as key accelerators of digital transformation, even in the absence of full organizational readiness. This interpretation positions AI adoption as a form of adaptive institutional behavior, through which communication units rely on available technological tools to maintain operational continuity and responsiveness under conditions of uncertainty.

The predominance of content-generation tools—such as text production, visual design, and AI-supported translation—reflects a pragmatic orientation toward applications that yield immediate productivity gains. In contrast, the limited utilization of advanced functions, including media monitoring, crisis analytics, and public opinion analysis, indicates an underdeveloped strategic use of AI. This imbalance highlights a gap between tactical

implementation and strategic integration, aligning with Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which suggests that organizations often adopt innovations incrementally, beginning with low-risk operational applications before advancing toward more complex, data-driven systems.

Participants’ relatively high evaluation of AI’s contribution to media planning, crisis response, and audience segmentation further underscores its growing role in enabling adaptive communication practices, particularly within politically unstable contexts. The strong perceived effectiveness of AI in audience analysis and message customization reflects a shift toward more data-driven and personalized communication approaches. However, the comparatively moderate assessment of AI’s role in institutional image building suggests that its strategic branding potential remains insufficiently developed. This pattern indicates that AI is still conceptualized primarily as a supportive technological tool rather than as a central component of long-term reputation management.

A critical dimension emerging from the findings relates to institutional governance and organizational readiness. The notable reliance on free and personal AI tools points to limitations in formal governance frameworks regulating AI usage. Such practices raise concerns regarding data security, ethical compliance, and long-term sustainability. Moreover, the limited adoption of institutional AI systems reflects a pattern of fragmented, individual-driven implementation rather than coordinated organizational integration, reinforcing the need for centralized policies and governance mechanisms.

The identified barriers—including the shortage of specialized expertise, absence of formal policies, financial constraints, and weak technological infrastructure—suggest that challenges to AI adoption are primarily human and organizational rather than purely technical. This finding aligns with Systems Theory, which emphasizes that effective organizational adaptation depends on the interaction between internal capacities and external environmental demands. Consequently, successful AI integration requires a holistic institutional approach encompassing capacity building, policy development, infrastructure enhancement, and strategic investment.

Notably, political and security conditions were identified as significant contextual drivers accelerating AI adoption. Ongoing crisis dynamics have compelled public relations units to adopt flexible digital solutions capable of maintaining communication continuity and supporting

emergency responsiveness. Qualitative insights further support this interpretation, highlighting how AI tools have become instrumental in sustaining organizational performance under conditions of uncertainty. This pattern reflects a broader process of crisis-driven digitalization, in which external pressures expedite technological adoption in the absence of long-term strategic planning.

Collectively, the findings indicate that while Palestinian university public relations departments increasingly recognize the functional value of artificial intelligence, its implementation remains reactive and structurally fragmented. Transitioning beyond experimental use requires the establishment of clear governance frameworks, targeted professional training, and dedicated financial investment. Embedding AI within institutional communication strategies is therefore essential to fully realize its potential in enhancing audience engagement, crisis responsiveness, and institutional image building.

I. PRESENTATION OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

1. Status of Artificial Intelligence Adoption in Public Relations Departments

The findings indicate that AI adoption within public relations departments across Palestinian universities remains within a limited-to-moderate range. Its application is primarily concentrated in operational domains, including digital content management, social media administration, automated responses, and monitoring of communication trends. In contrast, the use of advanced applications-such as predictive crisis analytics, sentiment analysis, and AI-driven decision-support systems-remains limited. Overall, AI is predominantly utilized as a supportive technical tool rather than being strategically integrated into institutional communication planning.

2. The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Media Planning and Crisis Communication

The results indicate a generally positive perception of AI's contribution to media planning and crisis communication; however, this perception is not yet matched by systematic institutional implementation. AI is perceived to enhance responsiveness during crises, enable real-time monitoring of audience reactions, and support more data-informed decision-making. Nevertheless, the absence of integrated digital infrastructure and the shortage of specialized expertise significantly constrain the effective deployment of these capabilities, particularly within recurring crisis

contexts.

3. AI in Audience Analysis and Corporate Image Construction

The findings suggest that AI is partially utilized in audience analysis, primarily through basic engagement metrics such as shares, comments, and interaction rates. However, more advanced analytical capabilities-such as semantic processing and sentiment analysis-remain underdeveloped. At the same time, corporate image construction continues to rely heavily on human expertise and reactive communication practices. This pattern limits the strategic use of AI as a data-driven tool for long-term reputation management.

4. Organizational Readiness for AI Adoption

The findings indicate a moderate level of organizational readiness for AI adoption within public relations departments. At the individual level, employees demonstrate openness toward AI technologies and recognize their potential to enhance communication efficiency and crisis responsiveness. However, this attitudinal readiness is not matched by institutional capacity.

Organizational readiness remains constrained by the absence of structured digital transformation strategies, limited financial resources, insufficient specialized training, and the lack of formal governance frameworks. This discrepancy highlights a clear gap between individual willingness and institutional preparedness, indicating that AI adoption remains largely informal and fragmented rather than systematically embedded within organizational processes.

These findings suggest that effective AI integration requires more than individual initiative, necessitating strategic planning, sustained investment, structured capacity-building programs, and clearly defined governance mechanisms.

5. Barriers to AI Implementation

The findings reveal that AI adoption is constrained by a combination of structural, human, financial, and regulatory barriers, reflecting broader institutional readiness challenges rather than purely technological limitations. Weak digital infrastructure limits the deployment of advanced AI applications, while the shortage of specialized human capital restricts the ability to interpret data and manage analytical processes effectively.

Financial constraints further hinder investment in licensed platforms, secure systems, and professional training, often resulting in reliance on free or

individual AI tools. In addition, organizational resistance—partly driven by concerns over job displacement—slows adoption processes and highlights the need to promote a human-AI complementarity approach.

Finally, the absence of formal governance frameworks represents a critical constraint, as it limits coordination, raises ethical and security concerns, and reinforces fragmented implementation practices. Collectively, these barriers indicate that AI adoption constitutes an organizational transformation challenge requiring integrated institutional solutions.

II. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS IN LIGHT OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The findings indicate that artificial intelligence adoption within Palestinian university public relations departments remains predominantly operational, centered on generative AI tools—particularly ChatGPT—for content production, translation, and routine media coordination. This pattern suggests limited strategic integration of AI within institutional communication planning.

This finding aligns with Bowen (2024), who argues that AI in public relations is frequently adopted to enhance operational efficiency in the absence of formal governance and ethical frameworks. However, beyond mere alignment, the present study extends this argument by demonstrating how such patterns are amplified in resource-constrained and crisis-prone environments, where institutional adoption becomes fragmented and informal. The widespread reliance on personal and non-institutional AI tools identified in this study reflects the governance gaps highlighted by Bowen, raising concerns related to accountability, data security, and professional standards.

Similarly, Dong and van den Berg (2025) emphasize that individual-level AI adoption without institutional policy frameworks leads to functional ambiguity and diffused accountability. The current findings provide empirical support for this claim, particularly in relation to the absence of clearly defined institutional responsibility for AI oversight and output validation. This reinforces the argument that technological adoption without governance integration remains structurally incomplete.

In the context of crisis communication, the findings correspond with Harris (2025), who contends that organizations operating under recurrent crises tend to adopt AI reactively rather than strategically. Within the Palestinian context, political and security instability appears to act as a

key driver of this reactive adoption, compelling universities to utilize AI tools to maintain communication continuity and compensate for resource constraints. This pattern reflects a form of crisis-induced technological adaptation, where short-term responsiveness is prioritized over long-term strategic integration.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with reports from the Institute for Public Relations (2024), which highlight the rapid expansion of AI in communication practices alongside slower development of governance frameworks, training programs, and institutional capacity. The present study confirms this imbalance, demonstrating that while awareness of AI's importance is relatively high, institutional readiness remains comparatively limited.

Collectively, these findings suggest that AI adoption in Palestinian university public relations is shaped not only by technological availability but also by contextual pressures, organizational constraints, and governance limitations. This reinforces the need to conceptualize AI adoption as a context-dependent process rather than a linear technological progression.

III. SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION

This study contributes to the literature by introducing the concept of “crisis-driven AI adoption” in institutional communication. This concept explains how artificial intelligence is adopted not as a proactive strategic innovation, but as a reactive response shaped by political, economic, and security constraints in high-risk environments.

While such adoption enhances short-term operational efficiency, its strategic impact on sustainable institutional communication remains limited in the absence of structured governance frameworks, systematic training programs, and integrated policy mechanisms. By situating AI adoption within a politically constrained and crisis-prone context, this study extends existing scholarship beyond relatively stable institutional environments and introduces a context-sensitive perspective to global research on artificial intelligence in public relations.

Analytical Synthesis

The findings demonstrate that artificial intelligence holds significant potential to enhance communication practices within Palestinian university public relations departments; however, this potential remains only partially realized. Current usage patterns reflect a predominantly operational

orientation, constrained by organizational, technical, and human limitations.

Moving beyond fragmented and reactive adoption requires the development of a comprehensive strategic vision for digital transformation in institutional communication. Such a vision should integrate technological capabilities with governance structures, capacity-building initiatives, and long-term communication planning in order to enable a transition toward systematic and strategically embedded AI utilization.

General Conclusion and Recommendations

I. General Conclusion

This study examined the role of artificial intelligence in enhancing communication practices within university public relations in Palestinian universities, focusing on patterns of adoption, practical applications, and contextual constraints within a politically and economically complex environment. The findings indicate that AI adoption remains limited and predominantly operational, concentrated in content management and engagement monitoring rather than strategically integrated into communication planning and crisis management.

A persistent gap emerges between the recognized importance of artificial intelligence and its effective institutional implementation. While AI demonstrates significant potential to enhance media planning, crisis responsiveness, audience analysis, and institutional image development, its impact remains constrained by structural limitations, including weak technological infrastructure, limited specialized expertise, insufficient financial resources, and the absence of formal governance frameworks.

These findings suggest the need to reconceptualize institutional communication management within Palestinian universities, shifting from traditional communication models toward integrated and adaptive frameworks in which artificial intelligence functions as a strategic decision-support system rather than a supplementary technical tool.

In this context, the study underscores that AI adoption is shaped not only by technological availability but also by crisis conditions, reinforcing the importance of integrating contextual and environmental factors into models of digital transformation in higher education.

II. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study proposes a set of interrelated recommendations aimed at advancing strategic AI integration in university public relations:

1. **Strategic Integration:** Develop comprehensive institutional strategies for AI adoption within public relations, aligned with broader digital transformation agendas.
 2. **Technological Capacity:** Strengthen digital infrastructure to support advanced AI applications, particularly in data analytics and communication intelligence systems.
 3. **Capacity Building:** Implement specialized training programs in artificial intelligence and digital communication to enhance professional competencies and analytical capabilities.
 4. **Crisis Communication Systems:** Integrate AI into crisis communication frameworks through early-warning systems and real-time public opinion monitoring tools.
 5. **Governance Frameworks:** Establish clear regulatory and ethical frameworks to ensure transparency, accountability, data protection, and responsible AI use.
 6. **Research Development:** Encourage applied research on AI in public relations within high-risk and context-sensitive environments, particularly in Palestine.
 7. **Human-AI Integration:** Promote a human-AI complementarity model that positions artificial intelligence as a tool for enhancing, rather than replacing, professional communication judgment.
- Collectively, these recommendations emphasize that effective AI adoption requires a coordinated institutional approach integrating strategy, infrastructure, governance, and human capacity.

III. Future Research Directions

Future research should extend the present study by conducting comparative analyses between Palestinian universities and institutions in other national contexts in order to identify structural similarities and contextual variations in AI adoption patterns.

Further investigation is needed to assess the long-term impact of AI integration on institutional reputation, stakeholder trust, and strategic communication performance. Additionally, in-depth research should examine the ethical and legal implications of AI use in institutional communication, particularly in relation to governance frameworks, data protection, and professional accountability.

Expanding research in these directions will contribute to a more comprehensive and globally relevant understanding of artificial intelligence adoption in public relations, particularly within high-risk and resource-constrained environments.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

Appendix B: Institutional Analysis Template

Appendix C: Document and Content Analysis Checklist