

The ethical dilemma: PR practitioners' exploration of AI usage

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly transformed communication methods worldwide, including public relations (PR). AI offers efficiency in tasks such as drafting press releases, brainstorming, and research synthesis, but its adoption has also had a noticeable impact, notably concerning the ethical dilemmas faced by practitioners. In Indonesia, the use of AI surged after the launch of ChatGPT in late 2022. At the same time, the adoption of technology has not been matched by the adoption and development of ethical standards. This study aims to explore ethical dilemmas arising from the embedding of AI into their daily work, using the theoretical framework of Bowen's (2024) Human-in-the-loop (HITL) and Human-on-the-loop (HOTL). Using an exploratory qualitative design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 PR practitioners from across sectors, including communication agencies, government, education, technology, and real estate in Greater Jakarta. Prior to the research, this study obtained ethical clearance, and the personal data of the informants was kept confidential. Data were analyzed using grounded theory coding to identify recurring themes. The findings point to four main ethical dilemmas: Confidentiality risks and data privacy violations when client information is uploaded to AI platforms; structural and workplace pressures that prioritize speed and efficiency over ethical oversight; Transparency challenges in disclosing AI use to clients and the public; and Questions about authenticity and copyright in AI-generated content. In addressing ethical dilemmas, practitioners often adopt mitigation strategies such as data masking, verification, and selective disclosure. This study emphasizes that ethical responsibility ultimately lies with human practitioners, who act as ethical gatekeepers, upholding trust and credibility. This study concludes that an individual's moral conscience and human contextual intelligence remain the ultimate pillars of professional integrity within the PR landscape through the implementation of mentoring-based peer evaluation.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; Ethical Dilemma; Indonesia; Public Relations*

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has been a subject of much debate, drawing broad interest from the public and industry globally. The term "artificial intelligence" was coined in 1956 at the Dartmouth Conference, which initiated efforts to develop machines capable of mimicking human intellectual abilities (Nilsson, 2009). Nevertheless, after the initial hype, interest in AI waned during the period referred to as the "AI winter" of the 1970s (AICI, 2024). The stagnation period that lasted into the 1990s was marked by few advances in artificial intelligence research and development, and, consequently, dwindling funding and a decreased emphasis on AI in academic and industrial environments. Although there have been downturns, AI has experienced a significant revival, entering what Chace (2018) calls a "boom phase." The revival picked up speed in 2012 with the emergence of deep learning, a type of machine learning that enabled AI systems to surpass human performance in tasks such as image recognition and to advance quickly in speech and natural language processing.

In Indonesia, interest in AI gained considerable momentum at the close of 2022, especially after OpenAI launched ChatGPT on 30 November 2022 (CNN Indonesia, 2023). Between September 2022 and August 2023, Indonesian internet users generated 1.4 billion visits to AI applications, accounting for 5.60% of global traffic and making Indonesia the third-largest contributor worldwide (Muhamad, 2024). Reflecting this escalation in public attention, Badan Bahasa designated “Kecerdasan Artifisial” (Artificial Intelligence) as the Word of the Year in 2023, highlighting AI’s increasing prominence in national discourse (Hutapea, 2023).

The development of AI certainly has the potential to impact every industry and aspect of life. Phillips (2024) argues that PR is the industry that most quickly adapts to technological developments (ranging from traditional media such as newspapers, electronic media such as telephone, radio, and TV, to the explosion of online presence such as social media). So, logically, PR is also one of the industries with the potential to quickly adapt to the rapid emergence of AI. Although PR practitioners are expected to quickly adapt to new technologies, namely AI for now, it does not mean that PR has the obligation to become an expert in these technologies. The ability to quickly absorb technology is needed to offer informed, reliable and sound advice to clients (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018).

Munandar and Irwansyah’s (2020) research showed that Indonesian PRs have utilized AI in their daily practices. Their findings show that AI is primarily perceived as a tool for low-level technical tasks, such as social media monitoring, representing the most basic PR functions. Building on this, Suciati et al. (2021) highlighted that AI can greatly assist PR practitioners, particularly in producing press releases. In practice, the use of AI in Indonesia has mainly taken the form of chatbots and virtual assistants. In several state-owned banks, for example, there is Sabrina (Smart BRI New Assistant) owned by Bank Rakyat Indonesia - BRI; Cinta (Chat With Your Intelligence Advisor) owned by Bank Negara Indonesia - BNI; Mita (Mandiri intelligence Assistant) owned by Bank Mandiri (Abdullah, 2020). There is also the largest cellular telecommunications company in Indonesia, Telkomsel, which has adopted a chatbot leveraging ChatGPT (Putri, 2023). Meanwhile, in the healthcare sector, Siloam Hospital also has an integrated chatbot-based communication service center (Hariyanto, 2024).

In general, research on PR practitioners’ use of AI focuses more on communication efficiency or the results it produces. However, the ethical issue seems to have been overlooked in the discussion. In response to this, Bivins (2023) reminds us that PR practitioners often fall into the ‘ends justify the means’ mindset because they overlook ethical aspects. Ethical practice carries significant weight in PR because it can taint the achievements obtained by PR (Bivins, 2023). Ethical PR can be defined as the obligations, responsibilities, and professional standards of conduct that govern how practitioners carry out their duties (Bivins, 2023; Bowen, 2017, 2024; Bowen & Bhalla, 2021). This is generally manifested in the role of corporate conscience, where practitioners provide strategic advice to align organizational policies with stakeholders’ ethical expectations. To address this ethical gap, this study utilizes not only Bowen’s (2024) Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) and Human-on-the-Loop (HOTL) theoretical framework but also proposes the concept of a mentorship-based peer evaluation scheme alongside four key dimensions of AI-PR ethical dilemmas.

There are at least three major ethical dilemmas in PR practitioners’ use of AI. The first is the ethical dilemma surrounding AI hallucinations (Park & Nan, 2025), which arises because PR ideally aims to convey fact-based information (Bivins, 2023). However, the integration of AI into work practices opens the possibility of creating a

mirage of facts and potentially damaging communication integrity. Second, there is the ethical dilemma of data privacy and security risks (Bowen, 2024; Mat Noor, 2025). There is a risk that confidential client data could be uploaded to public AI platforms, leading to permanent information leaks because data absorbed by machines is difficult to track or retrieve. Third is the ethical dilemma of algorithmic bias, in which AI systems unintentionally reinforce existing social prejudices or stereotypes (Bowen, 2024).

There have been efforts to investigate the integration of AI into PR, but a significant research gap remains in both global and local contexts. At the international level, Zeffass et al. (2020) have surveyed 2,689 practitioners in Europe and focus primarily on technical competencies, adoption rates and operational risks. Meanwhile, that research overlooked the crucial ethical dimension. Meanwhile, several scholars in Indonesia have raised questions about ethics in the country's PR academic discourse (Haikal et al., 2025; I. M. Putri & Qurniawati, 2024). Both touch on PR ethics but remain limited to the use of chatbots in large companies or to general literature reviews. On top of that, both research articles show that there are no concrete, structured ethical standards for PR practitioners to deal with the complexities of AI, as existing approaches remain heavily affected by cultural differences and legal systems. Moreover, there is another study conducted by Wachid et al. (2024), which is more comprehensive, presenting recommendations for three fundamental ethical values in digital PR practices in Indonesia, namely transparency, privacy management, and social responsibility, in order to build organisational credibility amid the threat of disinformation. However, this study has limitations regarding the number of informants, as it involved only two practitioners. Thus, the findings cannot be generalised, especially since the conclusions obtained are still limited to individual experiences and do not yet reflect the diversity of digital PR practices in Indonesia. Further, this study aims to help bridge the research gap by presenting data that goes beyond the limited information currently available, drawing on 20 informants from various PR sectors (communication agencies, government, education, technology, and real estate).

Regarding ethical issues in the practical field, Perhumas (Indonesian Public Relations Association) has not issued official guidelines on the use of AI, although discussions have been raised publicly about incorporating AI principles into the national code of ethics (Rochman, 2024). Almost a year later, discussions about releasing a code of ethics for the use of AI continue to be raised (Setiawan, 2025), but at the time of writing, no code of ethics for the use of AI from Perhumas has been found. On the government side, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo) has issued Circular Letter No. 9 of 2023 on AI ethics, but comprehensive regulations governing the application of AI in professional communication are not yet available. Discussions on AI-related legislation are scheduled to begin in August 2025, led by the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs (Komdigi), the new name for Kominfo, together with the House of Representatives (DPR) (Untari, 2025).

Therefore, an in-depth exploration of the ethical dilemmas faced by practitioners throughout various industrial sectors is needed to produce concrete, detailed ethical guidelines and ensure that the use of AI remains grounded in professional responsibility and human values. This study specifically aims to explore how Indonesian PR practitioners perceive their dilemmas when using AI, therefore contributing to both the academic discourse on AI ethics in communication and the ethical standards for the PR profession in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach and an exploratory research design because the phenomenon of ethical dilemmas in PR practitioners' use of AI in Indonesia is still nascent, with ethical standards that are not yet concrete. The justification for using this method is based on Stebbins' (2001) view that exploration is necessary when a social group or process has not yet been systematically empirically examined or when scientific knowledge about it is still very limited. Through an exploratory approach, researchers can maintain an open-mindedness to gain a deep understanding of how PR practitioners actually navigate moral risks in the field. Thus, this study attempts to fill the gap in the literature by constructing a grounded theory based directly on the daily practice data of PR practitioners.

To support the legitimacy of the research and protect participants, including their anonymity, this research has obtained ethical clearance from the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) under letter number 312/KE.01/SK/04/2025. After obtaining ethical clearance, researchers began collecting data. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with PR practitioners. Following the research design of Yue et al. (2024), 20 participants were interviewed. This number was considered sufficient to achieve data saturation. All participants are practitioners residing in the Greater Jakarta area.

Below is a table containing a list of participants who were interviewed. The identities and institutions of the participants have been kept confidential to protect them and enable them to provide information more freely (Pascale et al., 2022).

Table 1. Participants Information

ID	Level of Position	Gender	Years of Experience in Public Relations	Industry & Services
01	Middle Level Management	Male	8+	Public Relations & Communication Services
02	Executive or Senior Level Management	Male	15+	Public Relations & Communication Services
03	Middle Level Management	Female	10+	Public Relations & Communication Services
04	Executive or Senior Level Management	Male	16+	Public Relations & Communication Services
05	Executive or Senior Level Management	Female	10+	Public Relations & Communication Services
06	Lower Level Management	Male	5+	Public Relations & Communication Services
07	Executive or Senior Level Management	Female	10+	Education
08	Executive or Senior Level Management	Female	15+	Politics & Technology

09	Middle Level Management	Female	15+	Government
10	Middle Level Management	Male	15+	Government
11	Executive or Senior Level Management	Male	10+	Public Relations & Communication Services
12	Middle Level Management	Male	15+	Hospitality Industry
13	Middle Level Management	Female	15+	Government
14	Middle Level Management	Female	10+	Technology Industry
15	Middle Level Management	Female	15+	Real Estate Developer
16	Executive or Senior Level Management	Female	15+	Public Relations & Communication Services
17	Middle Level Management	Male	15+	Commercial Airline
18	Middle Level Management	Male	8+	Government
19	Middle Level Management	Male	8+	Real Estate Developer
20	Lower Level Management	Female	5+	Public Relations & Communication Services

The researcher set the minimum criteria for participants: at least 5 years of work experience as a PR practitioner. This refers to when ChatGPT first became popular in Indonesia in 2022. Thus, practitioners with at least 5 years of work experience have had experience both before and after the advent of AI. Furthermore, the participants varied in terms of management level (lower, middle, and senior), gender, years of experience (ranging from 5 to over 15 years), and industry affiliation, including communication services, government, education, hospitality, technology, real estate, and politics. Additionally, the researcher employed the snowballing method (Handcock & Gile, 2011), beginning with a small number of initial informants and then asking them to recommend or connect the researcher with other relevant individuals.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face or online, depending on the participants' preferences. Each interview lasted an average of 45 minutes to one hour. After all participants had been interviewed, the researcher transcribed the interviews. The transcription process utilized AI, namely Turboscribe, with its most accurate features. This practice is considered common in the research process, provided the researcher verifies the resulting transcripts (Da Silva, 2021; Eftekhari, 2024). After the transcripts were double-checked, the researcher proceeded to the systematic coding themes stage following the Corbin & Strauss process (2014). The analysis involved three phases in sequence. First, open coding was used, in which interview transcripts were analyzed line by line to extract concepts and initial codes related to AI use and ethical issues. Second, axial coding, in which related codes were grouped and categorized into broader themes representing different ethical dilemmas and mitigation practices. Third,

selective coding, in which these core categories are integrated into a thorough framework centred on ethical oversight involving human involvement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

AI Integration in PR Daily Practices

Before presenting findings on the ethical dilemma of AI use by PR practitioners, it is also important to provide an overview of everyday AI use. Overall, PR practitioners specifically use generative AI (GenAI) more. Cazzaniga et al. (2024) define GenAI as an AI system that uses a large language model (LLM) and can produce new content, including text, images, audio, and audiovisual content. In this regard, three GenAI systems are commonly used by PR practitioners: ChatGPT, Gemini, and Copilot. The preference for a particular type of GenAI is based on personal choice or institutional instructions. For example, Interviewee 11, an executive-level (ChatGPT), and Interviewee 14 (Copilot) are required by their institutional leaders to use a specific type of AI.

In general, the PR practitioners who participated in this study use AI in three broad categories. Firstly, AI is used as a partner for brainstorming and initiating ideas. The practitioners share a common experience of writer's block. Interviewee 1 revealed that he and his co-workers use ChatGPT. For them, using AI can speed up the idea creation process because 'AI can be an instant brainstorming partner, without having to align perceptions with other humans, which requires aligning perceptions first and taking time'. Further, Interviewee 7, who is also at the executive level, echoed Interviewee 4's sentiments, emphasizing that "we are not against AI, we use it, and we feel very welcome because it really helps when we are under pressure from our clients". This is in line with the findings of Noy & Zhang (2023), who stated that the use of AI increases work efficiency and effectiveness by up to 40%.

Meanwhile, interviewee 4, who is at the executive level, did recommend that his colleagues seek ideas from AI. Specifically, interviewee 4 said:

"Actually, I am grateful for the existence of AI... We often face deadlines and PR work, and it is difficult to come up with initial ideas, so I also recommend that the team ask ChatGPT first... the results can be used as a reference to trigger even fresher ideas".

Heyman et al. (2024) noted that AI results are not always in line with the initial prompt, but they can still serve as a stimulus for generating more contextual and original ideas.

In addition, interviewee 15, who comes from middle management, explained that he uses AI to find fresh perspectives on an idea. Meanwhile, interviewee 14 said that in addition to promoting the main theme of a campaign, he also uses AI to organize schedules to realize that theme. Meanwhile, interviewee 20 said that AI helps to find routine ideas. The finding echoes Panda et al. (2019), emphasizing that AI can assist PR professionals with repetitive or mundane activities.

From the first point above, the use of AI by PR practitioners cannot be seen linearly, that AI is only used for technical convenience, but rather, there is a shift in viewing the creative results of practitioners' ideas. There is potential for AI to influence the ideas generated by PR practitioners before they are presented to their clients. Referring to

the research by Heyman et al. (2024), which reminds us that AI output should be treated as a stimulus rather than a final product. Therefore, the use of AI in the daily practice of PR practitioners stresses the importance of ethical considerations.

Secondly, AI speeds up the technical processes of creating the first draft, translating, and converting media into sound or text. One of the main routine tasks of PR is creating press releases (Alvin, 2025, 2026). Most interviewees explained that AI is often used to speed up the process of creating press releases. However, the process of checking the results of press releases remains the main task for human practitioners. Regarding this, Interviewee 3 elaborated further:

“AI is very helpful for us in creating the foundation of the release. So, they create it first, and then we make many corrections and changes according to our needs. We have to check it because there are many mistakes, and some are made up. On a scale of 0-100%, only about 25% of the information produced by AI is used, and the rest is revised.”

At a glance, AI is considered a tool to accelerate work processes in the PR industry, and Frank et al. (2017) refer to it as a type of Narrow AI that aims to be practical and influential for business outcomes. Despite the benefits offered by AI, Moore & Hübscher (2021) give caution that AI results can sometimes be too robotic. This is evident from the findings of this study, which indicate that PR practitioners still review AI products, provide context, and, as emphasized by interviewees 7, 11, 16, and 17, ensure that the company's point of view is reflected in AI-generated products. This means that PR practitioners still pay attention to contextual sensitivity and add more of a human touch to PR materials.

Thirdly, AI has become an asset in gathering and providing background research. In an effort to meet clients' needs for reputation management, PR practitioners face the challenge of processing and presenting data based on facts. Interviewee 2 recounted that conducting research before AI sometimes required considerable time, energy, and money. Even in the internet era, with search engines like Google, he and his colleagues still had to visit various websites. Meanwhile, with the presence of AI, interviewee 2 said the following.

“What I do is focus more on how to use AI to conduct research. So, conducting research related to issues faced by clients, like getting an initial overview to support strategy development, and communication strategies that become easier. In the past, using Google search was usually just a collection of links, and it might not summarize. Well, the effectiveness of AI is because it can synthesize findings.”

The integration of AI into daily PR practices not merely demonstrates operational convenience but also signals a change in work patterns, mindsets, and the responsibilities of professional PR practitioners. Although PR practitioners adopt AI as a brainstorming partner, writing tool, and research assistant, findings indicate that they experience a dilemma. Practitioners may not explicitly mention this, and maybe they do not even think about that dilemma. This phenomenon can be described as moral myopia (Bivins, 2023), a condition in which a person is unaware of a moral or ethical dilemma when it occurs. As a result, ethical issues do not receive their attention because their views are distorted by short-term interests, efficiency, or client orders. This moral myopia is often supported by various reasons or rationalizations that deny individual

responsibility and accountability for their actions. Several statements made by informants reveal that practitioners justify their reliance on AI outputs without fully questioning the ethical implications. Below are some quotes from informants that indirectly highlight moral myopia.

"In the business sector, the motto is 'make it happen.' As long as it is practicable, it's fine because we work in the result-oriented industry. They don't really think about methodology or ethical aspects like academia does" (Interviewee 1).

"The only important thing is we deliver our outcome well to the client" (Interview 3).

"I have deep personal concerns, but as an institution, the leadership team doesn't care. They only care about keeping the Minister's image good" (Interview 9).

"Clients don't really care (whether we use AI or not). They just want a good PR campaign that fits their budget. AI is just our 'kitchen work' (dapur). It's a common and necessary tool for us" (Interviewee 11).

Therefore, the integration of AI in PR is not a neutral adoption of technology but rather requires a more critical perspective, in which increased efficiency must be balanced with ethical awareness. The ethical dilemmas experienced by PR practitioners when using AI will be explored in more depth in the subheading below.

AI Adoption and Ethical Dilemmas in PR

There are several categories of ethical dilemmas faced by PR practitioners. Firstly, there is the risk of breach of non-disclosure. PR practitioners are well aware that uploading data to public AI platforms such as ChatGPT constitutes significant risks because data once ingested by machine learning can no longer be tracked, controlled, or retrieved (Huang et al., 2023). Even if a practitioner requests that their data be deleted from the system, the underlying algorithm has most likely already learned from that input (Williams, 2024). This creates a dilemma between the need to obtain research results quickly and the obligation to maintain the confidentiality of client data to prevent it from leaking into the public domain.

Interviewee 7, who works for a PR agency, said she is accustomed to using AI but admitted there are limits she cannot cross. This limit includes mentioning the name of the company or client he represents in the AI. He understands that when prompting AI, it must be as specific as possible to achieve optimal results. However, she admitted that with each use, she still tried to ensure that her clients' names did not enter the AI. Interviewee 7 stated the following:

"Sometimes I feel nervous when uploading documents. Like, oh no, will this appear to other people? The data inside, that is. So, generally, we scratch off brand names or things related to our clients' privacy."

A similar practice is also carried out by most interviewees, who do not disclose their clients' personal information. Slightly different, interviewee 13, who works as a PR officer at a government agency, said that she always uses freemium AI or free services

by logging in with her email. The institution where she works does not allocate a budget for premium AI subscriptions. However, the use of AI is not prohibited. In her daily practices, she uses AI through her personal email. Interviewee 13 said, "I use a separate email account, which usually stores promotional emails in my inbox and trash. I don't dare to use my.gov domain email because I'm afraid of data leaks".

From this finding, a common thread emerges: the absence of PR ethical guidelines on the use of AI has led practitioners to develop their own mitigation strategies, namely, data masking. In short, they anonymize data when utilizing AI because they are aware of the risk of information leaks. This practice of data masking also demonstrates the proactive ethical awareness of practitioners, who prioritize information security (Williams, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, any leak or error in data management can damage an organization's reputation and its relationship with clients. Data masking is only a mitigating measure, not a final solution. Therefore, in addition to technical strategies, formal ethical guidelines from professional associations (such as Perhumas) and government regulations are needed to ensure that the use of AI in PR remains aligned with the principles of confidentiality, accountability, and public trust.

Secondly, an ethical dilemma arises from structural and workplace pressures. In the public or government sector, there is tremendous pressure to produce communication products that are visually and narratively sophisticated, but this often clashes with minimal ethical oversight from their respective leaders. The use of AI is often driven solely by cost efficiency and speed, sometimes even disregarding the ethical issues that should be upheld. Interviewee 9, a practitioner who also works in government PR, said that she is directly responsible for the text and audiovisual content of the minister she works for. Her minister's instructions are very clear: "AI must be used to ensure quick results". In more detail, she said the following:

"As civil servants, we work according to the instructions of our superiors. If our superiors say to use AI, then we have to work using AI. In fact, the minister encourages us to use AI. Now, it can be said that we definitely use AI every day... And this greatly helps our work, which involves documenting and disseminating the minister's activities, which can amount to five or ten releases a day" (Interviewee 9)

Interviewee 9 also added that the minister had emphasized the importance of copying and pasting AI results. Despite receiving that specific instruction, interviewee 9 admitted that she continues to carry out verification and checking processes. This statement shows a phenomenon in which leaders place greater importance on the individual's or organization's image without considering the long-term consequences for the integrity of the institution's data.

Similarly, interviewee 18, who is also a civil servant, revealed that there was work pressure from his superior, who was the former CEO of a large company. This superior brought with them a very fast-paced work culture and demanded instant results. From the statements of interviewees 9 and 18, an ethical dilemma regarding the use of AI could arise due to pressure from superiors. This means that when there is friction between leadership image and responsibility, ethical issues can arise.

On top of that, PR practitioners working in private consulting firms must actively seek opportunities to acquire clients. One of the most efficient ways to do this is to use AI during the pitching process. In her own words, Interviewee 3 stated as follows.

"For example, when we pitch to potential clients... We use AI to create the communication strategy requested by potential clients for pitching, simply so that we can save time. Because when we pitch, sometimes the ideas can be used, sometimes not. Well, before AI existed, we really had to brainstorm a lot. Like, really coming up with original ideas. But in practice, sometimes the client has budget constraints or other reasons. So, we'd put in all that effort thinking, but they wouldn't hire us. Or they might just take the idea."

Meanwhile, interviewee 6 acknowledged the high level of uncertainty surrounding Indonesia's economic conditions. This has resulted in instructions from superiors not to hire additional employees to keep up with work demands. Meanwhile, the alternative measure taken is to maximize the use of AI. He said, "AI is very helpful, especially when the team is short of personnel". This finding is in line with what was stated by Rožman et al. (2023) that in situations of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), AI can contribute as an alternative solution. To put more nuanced context, AI integration into the workplace in Indonesia has become unavoidable amid economic slowdown (BPS, 2025). With growth dropping to 4.87% in May 2025, layoffs and hiring freezes (Ajeng & Kamal, 2025; Ghifari, 2025) have forced PR firms to rely on AI as a cost efficient tool to manage heavier workloads.

The PR practitioners mentioned above, whether from the government or the private sector, are caught in a situation known as a physical or lack-of-alternatives constraint (Bivins, 2023). Bivins explains that someone forced to do something they would not normally do, such as using AI for sensitive data under orders from their superiors, may feel their moral responsibility is diminished by this pressure. This situation shows that the use of AI in PR is not only driven by technical needs or efficiency, but also by organizational or even structural pressures that can shift the moral responsibility of practitioners. When ethical choices are constrained by instructions from superiors or organizational conditions, the dilemma is not merely a matter of technology but of how PR professionals maintain their integrity and credibility in the face of coercion.

Thirdly, the dilemma of transparency in AI usage. Bivins (2023) writes that transparency is an important element in PR practice because it is the foundation of honest interaction that allows humans, as rational beings, to assess each other's behavior. In practice, Bivins explains that PR practices often operate in a grey area. He compares it to advertising, where messages are openly acknowledged as sales efforts, while PR messages are often not transparent. The public often does not know whether a news story in the media was produced independently or influenced by PR practitioners through news releases.

Although data masking has been implemented, as noted in the first finding, there are also deeper, related ethical issues, particularly regarding the transparency of AI use in PR work involving client data, even if that data has been anonymized. It bears remembering that PR work emphasizes trust and credibility (Alvin, 2020; Blanco, 2025).

Several PR practitioners noted that clients are indifferent to AI usage as long as deliverables are met. Interviewee 1 explained that clients view practitioners as experts and simply accept the results if their requests are fulfilled. Similarly, Interviewee 2 noted no specific client demands regarding AI adoption in the workflow, while Interviewee 3 emphasized that AI remains part of the consultant's internal "kitchen" that clients need not question.

Interviewee 10, who works in government, has a different view. He elaborated further as follows:

"I work at a government research institute. If research institutes use AI when disseminating information, it could be viewed negatively later. Sometimes we must maintain the integrity of the institutions we work for. We also need to avoid negative sentiments".

From the above statement, it appears that practitioners believe that openness about the use of AI could undermine public confidence in human expertise, the PR profession's main selling point. Regardless of interviewee 10's perspective, scholars emphasize that the use of AI is inevitable (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018; Panda et al., 2019; Swiatek et al., 2024; Yue et al., 2024).

According to Bowen (2024), despite the use of AI to automate routine PR tasks, the industry currently lacks standard rules regarding agencies' obligation to inform clients of such use. Furthermore, in terms of transparency issues regarding AI usage, Bowen also criticized the ethical dilemma surrounding how agencies or PR consultancies charge fees (for hours worked) if the work is done by an AI system rather than a human being.

Nevertheless, it is not appropriate for PR practitioners to conceal their use of AI in practice (Bivins, 2023). Therefore, it is also recommended that PR practitioners be transparent not only to clients about the use of AI, but also to the public (Alvin, 2026; Yue et al., 2024). If a practitioner allows a client to believe their PR work is human-generated when it is AI-generated, this could be seen as a breach of trust and eventually damage professional relationships.

The absence of industry regulations or standard procedures exacerbates the dilemma of transparency regarding AI in PR practice. Professional associations such as Perhumas in Indonesia (Rochman, 2024) have not yet established clear guidelines regarding the obligation to disclose the use of AI to clients. Consequently, transparency practices remain highly dependent on each organization's internal policies, leading to inconsistencies and potential ethical loopholes.

Fourthly, there is a dilemma between the originality of the work and the copyright of the results produced by AI. Interviewee 20 highlighted this sharply by saying, "How can we claim it as our own work? Because it was created by AI". For interviewee 20, there is an inner conflict in acknowledging their PR work as their own when there is AI involvement. Meanwhile, interviewee 1 shared his colleagues' concerns and said, "Some (team members) feel like they are cheating... they feel that they will stop thinking and become weak in producing creative ideas".

Interviewee 12, who works as a public relations officer at a well-known hotel in the Greater Jakarta area, expressed apprehension when using AI-generated content. He said, "Here, we are very careful in using AI results because the content may be someone else's copyright. It's better to be safe than sorry". This statement is reinforced by the findings of Yue et al. (2024), who write that the situation regarding copyright is like the Wild West, a state of regulatory anarchy in which AI innovation is far ahead of legal and ethical guidelines, forcing the PR industry to adapt and navigate independently amid legal and reputational risks that have not been fully mapped out.

One interesting statement was made by interviewee 5, who said the following:

“What PR provides to clients and the media must be factual. We cannot simply make claims; for example, we represent an automotive company and then overpromise our cars, saying that this car can fly when in fact it cannot. So, there are facts that, when we take them from AI, turn out to be overpromising. It doesn't align with what the company has promised. Because, ultimately, the job of PR is to protect the company's reputation. When we make exaggerated claims or overpromise, but the company can't deliver, that's something we as communication consultants in PR can't protect”.

This finding confirms that originality in the AI era is no longer simply a matter of ‘who typed or prompted it’, but rather who is responsible for the validity of the information. Interviewee 5 reminded us that practitioners cannot hide behind AI if there is misinformation or overpromising. In deontological analysis (Bivins, 2023), ethical and moral responsibility remains with humans to avoid algorithmic bias and false information (Mat Noor, 2025; Williams, 2024) that can permanently damage an organization's reputation.

Originality in digital PR practice in Indonesia is currently being redefined as the human curation of machine outputs. Although competitive pressures are driving the widespread adoption of AI, professional integrity can only be maintained through transparent use and a commitment not to eliminate human critical thinking from every narrative produced (Mat Noor, 2025).

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the ethical dilemma in the adoption of AI by PR practitioners is not only technical in nature but also touches on structural, regulatory, and moral aspects. To clarify the theoretical contribution of these findings, this study proposes a synthesized conceptual model (Figure 1 below) that illustrates the interrelationships among the four ethical dilemmas.

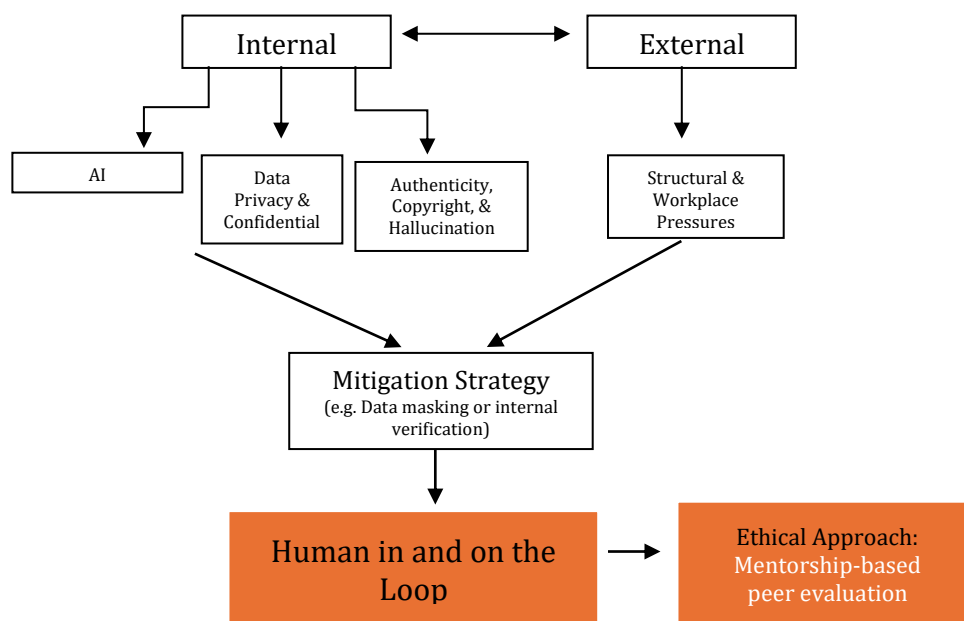


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of AI Ethical Dilemmas and Human-Centric Mitigation in PR Practice

Note: Developed by the author based on research findings

Practitioners face risks of data leaks, structural and workplace pressures, unclear transparency, and issues of originality and copyright. Although mitigation strategies such as data masking or internal verification have been implemented, these measures are only temporary solutions that cannot replace the need for formal ethical guidelines and clear regulations. This situation emphasizes that moral responsibility remains with humans as the primary curators of AI output. The integrity of the PR profession can only be maintained through consistent human involvement, transparency in the use of technology, and a commitment to maintaining public trust and organizational credibility amid pressures for efficiency and competition. This brings us to the next crucial discussion: the importance of human involvement mechanisms in ensuring accountability and integrity in the era of AI.

The Importance of Human in and on the Loop

Several international PR professional organizations have released specific ethical guidelines for the use of AI with the main objective of maintaining professional integrity and stakeholder trust. The Public Relations Society of America, or PRSA (Cherenson et al., 2023), has released a framework that promotes core values such as honesty, fairness, and advocacy in generative AI practices to prevent the spread of misinformation. Meanwhile, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) in the UK released guidelines in 2020 that use a principle-based approach supplemented by a Decision Tree to help practitioners evaluate ethical dilemmas step by step (Valin & Gregory, 2020). In a decision tree, PR practitioners need to answer a number of questions, such as: what objectives are to be achieved, whether it causes harm, whether it violates legal or moral rights, whether it is fair and in accordance with promises, and whether all parties are treated impartially. If the answers indicate injustice, then the action must be stopped. Unless it is proven to bring greater benefits to the community.

Concurrently, the International Public Relations Association or IPRA (Verčič et al., 2023) followed with the release of a code of ethics in October 2023, with a primary focus on transparency and data confidentiality. Meanwhile, Indonesia's neighboring countries, such as Malaysia, have introduced the National AI Governance and Ethics Code or AIGE (2024) in September 2024. Among the existing codes of ethics regarding AI, there is one main commonality: human involvement and judgment must remain in control.

Human involvement and judgement in the use of AI are paramount. According to Bowen (2024), machine learning features often enable AI to operate as a black box whose decisions are difficult to understand, even by its own developers. In this context, Bowen encourages a 'human-in-the-loop' or HOTL mechanism as the main solution to prevent fatal ethical consequences. Human presence within the system is necessary to provide corrective intervention if AI produces biased or hallucinatory information.

Although AI can generate large volumes of content quickly, it is essentially a statistical correlation machine (Bowen, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024) that lacks moral intuition or emotional awareness. The literature emphasizes that ethics, alongside human involvement and judgment, must remain in the front seat (Mat Noor, 2025). PR practitioners are responsible for ensuring that all AI outputs align with the organization's agreed-upon corporate character and core values. Strategic decisions regarding what is appropriate to communicate to the public must remain based on

human wisdom and intuition in accordance with moral virtue (Bivins, 2023), which cannot yet be replicated by machines.

To further elaborate on the important role of humans in AI, Salzano and Ashby-King (2025) propose a normative framework, Participatory (AI) Public Relations, to guide the ethical use of AI in the PR profession. The main recommendation aligns with the international code of ethics and Bowen's ideas: place human-to-human relationships at the core of public relations practice to preserve the profession's identity. Practitioners must treat AI as a supplemental partner, not a replacement, for tasks such as brainstorming ideas for headlines, proofreading, or assisting with brainstorming.

Any AI-generated content must undergo human editing to ensure the message remains consistent and accurate, aligned with the practitioner's objectives. Practitioners are reminded not to use AI simply because the technology is available, but to ask whether the tool really helps achieve public relations objectives. In addition, ethical concerns must be evaluated before and during the use of AI tools to avoid the risk of a textpocalypse (Kirschenbaum, 2023), a flood of machine-generated text that undermines trust.

Human involvement is embodied in daily practice through verification and validation processes. Just as editors check the facts in news stories written by journalists, PR practitioners must also verify AI output. More specifically, and as a practical contribution from this research, PR practitioners can implement a mentorship-based peer evaluation scheme. This scheme is carried out through mentoring by senior PR practitioners to junior practitioners, along with peer-review practices to thoroughly examine whether AI results violate norms or are out of context, which could pose drawbacks for stakeholders.

Research by Zerfass et al. (2020) among 2,689 PR practitioners in Europe shows that the majority have a limited understanding of AI, with highly variable levels of competence. Given that the average age of respondents is 42.7 years, this group can be categorized as senior practitioners with extensive experience who face challenges adapting to AI technology. By implementing a mentorship-based peer evaluation scheme, senior practitioners can help their juniors become tech-savvy and understand which AI applications are most efficient for supporting their daily work, ultimately minimizing competency gaps. On the other hand, seniority provides them with contextual and cultural sensitivity that machines do not possess, thus they can act as a filter to ensure a human touch. With this mentoring model, the use of AI is no longer seen as cheating, but rather as a process of human curation of machine results that can be ethically accounted for.

This means that fellow PR practitioners become ethical gatekeepers. On top of that, human involvement is not merely an additional step but the foundation for ensuring that PR remains a profession built on human relationships and trust. This scheme is basically inspired by interviewee 5, who highlighted the practice of institutionalized peer-learning through a dedicated weekly "sharing session on Wednesday", as well as interviewee 4, who emphasized the necessity of senior-level mentorship because "they understand PR practice from the pre-AI era".

However, it cannot be denied that the mentorship-based peer evaluation scheme has a weakness and limitation: its actual implementation is highly dependent on the organization's discretion. Yue et al. (2024) report that nearly 75% of organizations lack a legal clearance process for distributing AI-generated content, and 86% have not updated their client contracts to cover the use of AI. This creates a grey area in which practitioners must decide for themselves whether to disclose, as there is no contractual

obligation to do so.

Meanwhile, many practitioners are caught in a state of moral myopia, failing to recognize ethical dilemmas because they focus on functional interests that please clients. For Bivins (2023), organizational discretion often manifests as ethics-washing, creating the illusion of positive change through superficial formal guidelines without a real commitment to implementing these standards in daily practice.

Consequently, the integrity of communication in the current AI era is highly dependent on individuals' integrity and the microculture of each organization in implementing mentorship-based peer evaluation.

Based on the above elaboration, human involvement in AI is not an optional extra but the foundational pillar of the PR profession's sustainability, which rests on trust and human relations. This study demonstrates that mentorship and peer evaluation can bridge competency gaps, structural hurdles remain. Limitations tied to organizational policies and moral myopia reveal that communication integrity depends heavily on individual commitment and organizational micro-culture. Therefore, strengthening formal regulations, cultivating ethical practices, and ensuring consistent human involvement are absolute requirements for AI adoption in PR to balance efficiency with accountability, fairness, and professional sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the profound ethical dilemmas, such as data privacy risks and transparency gaps, faced by Indonesian PR practitioners when adopting GenAI. These challenges unintentionally foster "moral myopia" in which AI is utilized without adequate ethical scrutiny. While practitioners currently rely on informal mitigation strategies, this research emphasizes that such temporary fixes cannot replace formal guidelines. To safeguard the profession's integrity, this study proposes a mentorship-based peer evaluation scheme and advocates for human in and on the loop mechanisms. Furthermore, it underscores the urgent need for policymakers and PR associations in Indonesia to establish culturally sensitive ethical standards that move beyond mere ethical washing.

Despite its contributions to the global discourse on AI communication ethics, this exploratory study is limited by its geographical focus on 20 practitioners in Greater Jakarta, potential social desirability bias in self-reported data, and an exclusive focus on GenAI platforms. To build upon these findings, future research should expand geographically, particularly to Central and Eastern Indonesia and incorporate quantitative or longitudinal approaches to measure evolving ethical perceptions. Additionally, cross-national comparative studies within Southeast Asia would provide valuable insights into how varying cultural and regulatory contexts shape the ethical adoption of AI in PR.

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