

# Public Relations - Artificial Intelligence Relationship from the Perspective of Turkish Academy: A Meta-Thematic Analysis

Hıdır POLAT<sup>1</sup>

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## Article Info

## Abstract

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*The digitalized and globalized world has transformed societies, institutions, and individuals, resulting in significant changes in communication. These changes have created different roles and qualifications for public relations professionals. To succeed, these professionals must closely follow, integrate, and specialize in these changes. Additionally, the modern public relations industry has become reliant on artificial intelligence software across all sectors. However, studies indicate insufficiency in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in public relations. Therefore, this research aims to examine the role of AI by analyzing perspectives within the Turkish academic community regarding its use in public relations. Additionally, this study seeks to identify potential solutions for industry professionals. A qualitative research design, specifically a case study, was implemented to accomplish these objectives. Taking into account the document analysis technique employed to gather data, this research identifies AI's benefits and limitations in public relations. The data sets were analyzed using the meta-thematic analysis technique incorporated in the MAXQDA 2020 package program. The results indicate that artificial intelligence possesses vast potential in the context of public relations. Its contributions are noteworthy in the domains of media monitoring, tracking, reporting, content generation, social media management, as well as effective crisis and campaign management. Public relations experts are recommended to monitor advancements in AI, promote the integration of individuals and organizations, and regulate its impact.*

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## Introduction

Human beings witness different developments and transformations at every stage of life. The 21st century is shaped by digitalization itself. Güçdemir (2015: 7) argues that the first reflection of this change manifested itself in the field of communication. In parallel with digitalization, the globalizing world has completely transformed the communication process based on institutions. The necessity to communicate with large masses has increased the importance of the public relations profession. For public relations professionals, different requirements emerge in the new world order. Among these are adapting to digital environments, closely following their developments, and using them effectively in influencing public opinion (Brown, 2009: 4). For this reason, public relations professionals should know the requirements of the digital world and the changing expectations of target audiences (Peltekoğlu, 2014: 311-312). This necessity reveals the necessity for public relations professionals to update themselves in the face of the benefits of digitalization. Therefore, public relations professionals should respond to the increasing pace of change at the same speed. One of these changes is artificial intelligence itself. For this reason, public relations professionals should correctly analyze the tools emerging as a

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<sup>1</sup>Assist. Prof. Dr., Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University, Faculty of Niksar Applied Science, Department of Public Relations and Advertising, hidirpolattt@gmail.com, Orcid: 0000-0002-7839-4666

result of artificial intelligence studies and the strategy behind them and know how to position them in terms of their profession (Abdullah, 2020: 411). Because artificial intelligence is changing the organizational roles of public relations professionals (Galloway and Swiatek, 2018: 738).

Artificial intelligence, which is used to define technologies that enable people to perform cognitive tasks such as seeing, writing, reading, and analyzing more effectively than humans, has many advantages for public relations. It is inevitable to use artificial intelligence as a technology that can strengthen the hands of public relations professionals in many aspects, such as creating press releases, media monitoring, content production, target audience, and market analyses (Kaput, 2021). It should be noted that the hinterland of contribution to the public relations profession is quite vast. Despite all these contributions, its use in the public relations sector remains relatively slow compared to other sectors (Biswal, 2020: 173). One of the main factors affecting this situation is that the impact of artificial intelligence on the public relations sector cannot be thoroughly evaluated. Therefore, artificial intelligence and the public relations sector are subject to academic studies as problematic. In this academic research, questions are generally made about how artificial intelligence should be used in public relations.

Çağlayan (2021) questions the impact of artificial intelligence on the future of public relations with research on public relations agencies in Turkey. Soldan (2022) discusses using artificial intelligence in the public relations sector through public relations managers in Turkey. Çeber (2022) discusses using artificial intelligence in public relations through in-depth interviews with public relations managers in public relations agencies and organizations in Turkey. Çataldaş and Özgen (2021) tried to explain the usage areas of artificial intelligence by analyzing the software used by the public relations sector. Aydınalp (2020) analyzed artificial intelligence from the perspective of public relations. Ardila (2020) analyzed the effects of artificial intelligence on the public relations sector.

Rahikainen (2020: 10) states that it is challenging to develop an approach to the role of artificial intelligence in the public relations sector. In this direction, practitioners need to understand what artificial intelligence can do in the public relations sector (Roetzer, 2018). The suggestions put forward, approaches developed, and results obtained in academic studies can contribute to the journey of the public relations sector in the artificial intelligence process. Therefore, this research aims to evaluate the contributions of artificial intelligence to public relations in scientific studies focusing on the process of artificial intelligence and public relations in Turkey.

## **Research Methodology**

The study employed a case research qualitative design, conducting meta-thematic analysis on scientific articles that examine the correlation between artificial intelligence and public relations. Meta-thematic analysis, utilized for qualitative data analysis, entails reviewing studies from a researcher's viewpoint, drawing all-encompassing and general conclusions. Therefore, this involves re-expressing and interpreting the themes and codes derived from various studies within the framework of themes and codes determined in the context of diverse research (Batdı, 2019: 10-11). In this context, research conducted in Turkey was reviewed. Google Scholar and the National Thesis Centre were used to search the studies. While searching on Google Scholar, the keywords "artificial intelligence" AND "public relations" were used. In the results, only the research dealing with the relationship between artificial intelligence and public relations was focussed. As a result of this search, 4 articles were obtained. In the National Thesis Centre, a search was made with the keyword "artificial intelligence" and limited to "public relations" in the thesis name section. 3 theses were obtained as a result of this research. As a result of the searches, 1 book chapter was not included in the data set because it could not be accessed. As a result, the data set consisted of 7 publications. MAXQDA 2020 package program was used to analyze the data.

## Findings

Based on the data set within the scope of the research, it is seen that a total of 225 codings were made under 4 top codes and 32 sub-codes (Table 1). It is seen that these studies on the relationship and interaction between artificial intelligence and public relations started in 2020. However, it does not have a numerically intense study hinterland. It is seen that 4 of these studies are review (n=1) and research (n=3) articles published in refereed journals, and the rest are doctoral theses (n=2) and master's theses (n=1) carried out within higher education.

**Table 1.** *Main information*

<b>Code System</b>	<i>f</i>
<b>AI's Contribution to Public Relations</b>	
Engaging in different and creative work	8
Identifying and analyzing target audience	14
Creating individualized, effective messages to target audiences	8
Increasing effectiveness in the campaign management process	14
Empowering the decision-making process	5
Increasing effectiveness in the crisis management process	8
Contributing to institution-product promotion	2
Media monitoring, tracking and reporting	23
Automation	4
Conducting market research (competitors, trends, etc.)	12
Gaining competitive advantage	2
Effective management of social media	21
Increasing the speed of data collection and processing	10
Increasing efficiency	7
Saving time	14
Measurement and evaluation	13
Content creation (press releases, articles, social media conten	18
Workload alleviation	8
<b>What should PR professionals do?</b>	
Ethical principles should be observed in the use of AI	1
Increasing investments in AI	1
Collaborate with different disciplines	1
Specialize in AI	5
AI must be kept in check	3
Should keep abreast of AI developments	3
Should ensure individual/organizational integration of AI	6
<b>Publication Year</b>	
2020	1
2021	3
2022	3
<b>Publication Type</b>	
Master Thesis	1
PhD Thesis	2
Review Article	1
Research Article	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b>

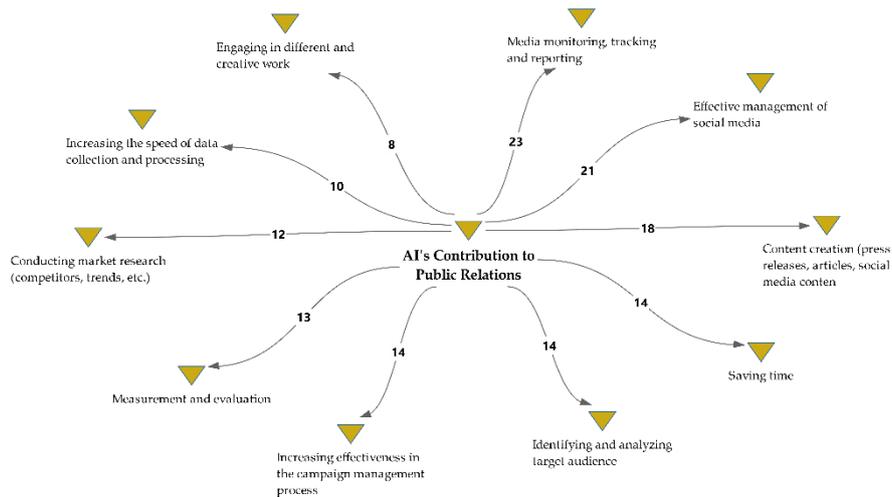
The parallels among the articles and theses forming the research dataset were examined. The similarity measures indicate the degree of correlation between two different attributes and range from 0 to 1. A higher value denotes a stronger relationship (Yıldırım & Sakalhoğlu, 2014). Analysis using the Kuckartz & Radiker zeta similarity measure (Table 1) reveal that the similarity measures between articles and theses are mostly 0.70 and above. The similarity measure between T3 and other research data is only moderate. This suggests that the processes relating artificial intelligence and public relations are similar in approach.

**Table 2.** *Kuckartz & Radiker zeta Similarity matrix*

Paper Name	A1	A2	A3	A4	T1	T2	T3
A1	1,00	0,75	0,73	0,64	0,77	0,68	0,56
A2	0,75	1,00	0,76	0,77	0,76	0,70	0,63
A3	0,73	0,76	1,00	0,76	0,74	0,79	0,50
A4	0,64	0,77	0,76	1,00	0,65	0,85	0,63
T1	0,77	0,76	0,74	0,65	1,00	0,73	0,62
T2	0,68	0,70	0,79	0,85	0,73	1,00	0,55
T3	0,56	0,63	0,50	0,63	0,62	0,55	1,00

**A:** Article                      **T:** Thesis

The main focus of the study is the contributions of artificial intelligence for the public relations profession. In this direction, when the hierarchical code-sub-code model (Image 1) is analyzed, it is seen that among the contributions of the use of artificial intelligence to public relations (the ten most vital elements), media monitoring, tracking, and reporting (n=23), effective management of social media (n=21), content production (press release, article, social media content, etc.) (n=18), time-saving (n=14) constitute the majority in the general distribution. In addition, it is also seen that artificial intelligence contributes to target audience identification and analysis, the effectiveness of the campaign management process, measurement and evaluation process, market research, data collection and analysis process, and orientation towards different and creative works.



**Image 1.** Hierarchical code-subcode model showing the contributions of artificial intelligence to public relations

In addition, artificial intelligence has different contributions to the public relations profession. As a result of the analysis, it is stated that it positively impacts 18 different processes. A closer look at these (Table 3);

**Table 3.** Contributions of artificial intelligence to public relations

Contributions	f	%
Media monitoring, tracking and reporting	23	12,04
Effective management of social media	21	10,99
Content creation (press releases, articles, social media conten)	18	9,42
Increasing effectiveness in the campaign management process	14	7,33
Saving time	14	7,33
Identifying and analyzing target audience	14	7,33
Measurement and evaluation	13	6,81
Conducting market research (competitors, trends, etc.)	12	6,28
Increasing the speed of data collection and processing	10	5,24
Engaging in different and creative work	8	4,19
Increasing effectiveness in the crisis management process	8	4,19
Creating individualized, effective messages to target audiences	8	4,19
Workload alleviation	8	4,19
Increasing efficiency	7	3,66
Empowering the decision-making process	5	2,62
Automation	4	2,09
Gaining competitive advantage	2	1,05
Contributing to institution-product promotion	2	1,05
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>100,00</b>

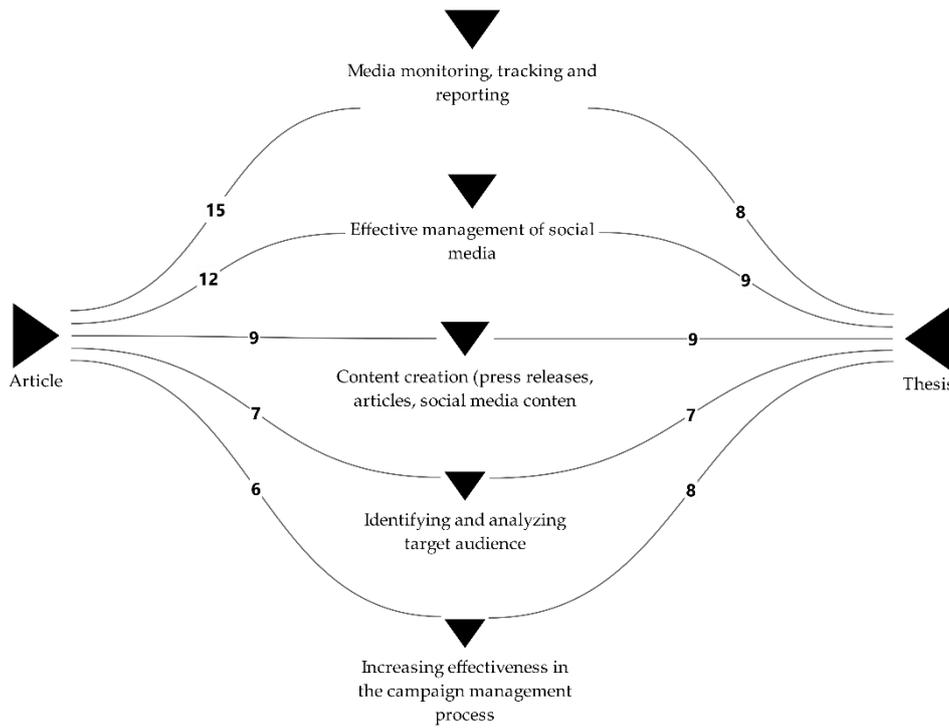
In addition to the ten contribution processes highlighted in the hierarchical code-subcode model (Image 1), artificial intelligence contributes to the public relations profession by increasing the effectiveness of the crisis management process, creating effective messages tailored to target audiences, lightening the

workload, increasing efficiency, strengthening the decision-making process, automation, gaining competitive advantage and contributing to the promotion of the institution-product.

**Table 4.** Contributions of artificial intelligence to public relations profession according to year variable

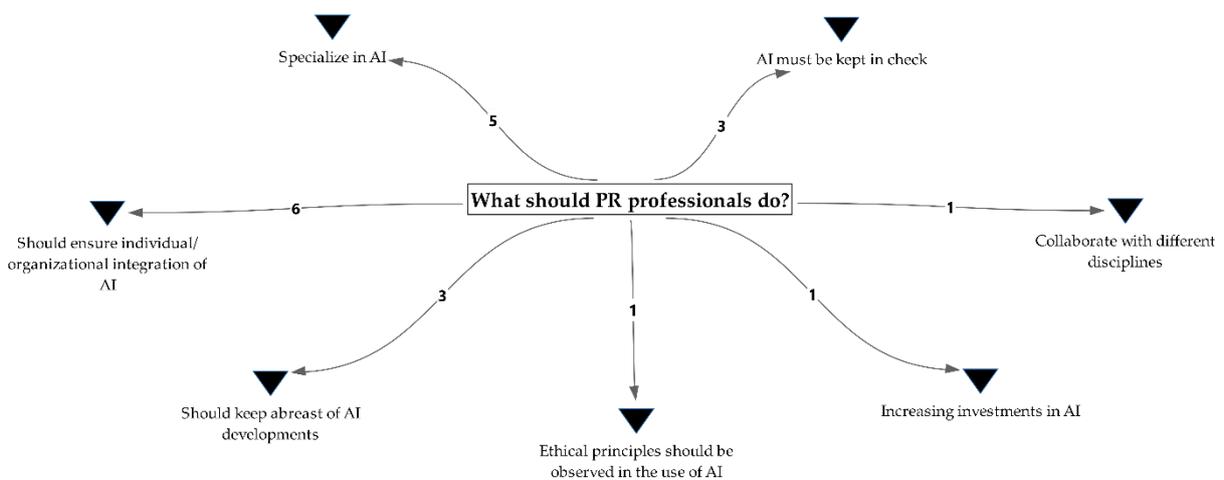
<b>Contributions</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>Total</b>
Engaging in different and creative work	2	4	2	8
Identifying and analyzing target audience	1	5	8	14
Creating individualized, effective messages to target audiences	2	0	6	8
Increasing effectiveness in the campaign management process	1	5	8	14
Empowering the decision-making process	0	1	4	5
Increasing effectiveness in the crisis management process	1	2	5	8
Contributing to institution-product promotion	2	0	0	2
Media monitoring, tracking and reporting	4	6	13	23
Automation	0	2	2	4
Conducting market research (competitors, trends, etc.)	2	1	9	12
Gaining competitive advantage	0	2	0	2
Effective management of social media	5	6	10	21
Increasing the speed of data collection and processing	2	2	6	10
Increasing efficiency	0	0	7	7
Saving time	2	7	5	14
Measurement and evaluation	1	2	10	13
Content creation (press releases, articles, social media conten	5	7	6	18
Workload alleviation	1	3	4	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	31	55	105	191

According to the years (Table 4), while the contributions of artificial intelligence to the public relations profession in 2020 focused on social media management, content management, media monitoring, and reporting, in 2021, campaign management, time-saving, identification, and analysis of the target audience, and orientation towards different and creative work areas were added to these. In the 2022 studies, it is seen that the contributions of artificial intelligence have expanded even more. While the contributions in previous years remain dominant, emphasis is also placed on contributions such as market research, measurement and evaluation, increasing efficiency, and creating individualized messages to target audiences. In general terms, it can be said that the main contributions of artificial intelligence to public relations are media monitoring, tracking and reporting, effective management of social media, campaign management, and target audience analyses.



**Image 2.** Two case models showing the overlap in articles and theses on the contributions of artificial intelligence

The research data consists of theses and articles. After dividing the data set into two clusters as theses and articles, two case models (Image 2) show in which processes the contributions of artificial intelligence to the public relations profession overlap based on these two clusters. Accordingly, the contributions of artificial intelligence to public relations are media monitoring, tracking and reporting, social media management, content production, target audience analysis, and campaign management. The researchers in the studies also state suggestions on what public relations professionals should do about artificial intelligence, which has such a wide range of contributions to public relations. According to the analyses, the recommendations put forward in the studies are presented in Image 3.



**Image 3.** Hierarchical code-subcode model showing what public relations professionals should do in the process of artificial intelligence

In the studies focusing on artificial intelligence and the public relations process, there are suggestions for integrating public relations professionals at the individual/organizational level in the artificial intelligence process. Subsequently, it is recommended that they specialize in artificial intelligence, keep artificial intelligence under control, and follow artificial intelligence developments.

## **Discussion/Conclusion**

The public relations sector is giving a test against the use of artificial intelligence software by other actors in the sector. According to research, although it is the sector most affected by the digitalization process, it lags behind other sectors in using artificial intelligence. The main reason underlying this situation is uncertainty. Public relations professionals have difficulty developing an approach to the sectoral contributions of artificial intelligence (Rahikainen, 2020). They should accelerate the sector's development and understand how they should use artificial intelligence. This research presents findings that will contribute to developing this understanding of the public relations profession and professionals.

As a result of the research, it is seen that artificial intelligence research has started to increase in recent years. However, it is seen that the most significant contribution of artificial intelligence to public relations is media monitoring, tracking and reporting, social media management, content production, and target audience analyses. Çeber (2022) argues in his research that artificial intelligence contributes most to the public relations sector in measurement-evaluation, social media management, crisis prediction and follow-up, and the realization of routine work. The research result partially confirms other results obtained in the literature. However, the research findings overlap with those obtained in Soldan's (2022) research. Therefore, the contributions of artificial intelligence to the public relations process are considerable. However, public relations professionals have duties in this process.

According to the research findings, these tasks ensure individual-organizational integration, understand artificial intelligence, keep it under control, and follow developments closely. It is seen that the suggestions for using it within the ethical framework are pretty weak. However, the suggestions for making investments were also feeble. However, the concept of data in the artificial intelligence process causes ethical discussions to remain alive (Çataldaş and Özgen, 2021). However, the importance of investing in artificial intelligence is emphasized in the literature (Soldan, 2022). In this context, it is seen that the recommendations ignore the issues emphasized in the literature.

As a result, artificial intelligence has excellent advantages for the public relations sector and the professional development of professionals. In addition, it should not be ignored that it carries certain disadvantages. It is necessary to follow the developments in artificial intelligence closely, specialize in the use process, and not leave control in hand.

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