

## EDITORIAL

This issue brings together articles that cover various subjects. The first four articles dwell on various aspects of AI and its implications for the field of strategic communication in Africa. AI and related technologies are increasingly permeating and changing every aspect of life, including organizational communication processes. One of the most noticeable advancements in AI are in the field of communication, a field that is intricately linked to major technological innovations in history. AI-powered tools leverage natural language processing to produce communication text, mimic human behaviors, imitate or replace human users and perform various other communication functions in the digital sphere. AI software constitutes a larger part of technologies that are increasingly automating the process and labour of communication (Reeves, 2016), making inroads into organizational communication practice, influencing how organizations communicate and interact with their stakeholders, and how people communicate in general. As Jakesch, French, Ma, Hancock, and Naaman (2019) aptly observe, "we are now entering an era of AI-mediated communication where interpersonal communication is not only mediated by technology, but it is optimized, augmented, or generated by artificial intelligence." Artificial Intelligence applications are increasingly becoming more and more complex and interconnected. This growing complexity makes it more imperative than ever for scholars to probe how new technological advances are impacting society in both positive and negative ways. Not surprisingly, artificial intelligence (AI) has become an emergent field of research across disciplines. The applications in AI have ignited several questions in virtually every discipline, ranging from mundane questions on how it works, how it impacts work, to worries that AI might pose an existential risk to humanity. In the field of strategic communication, AI is gaining traction as well and there is growing literature investigating a variety of issues: how AI is used in public relations and how it is changing the PR practice (Buhmann & White, 2022; Panda, Upadhyay, & Khandelwal, 2019), role and implications on communication professionals (Swiatek, Galloway, Vujnovic, & Kruckeberg, 2022) and the social, cultural and ethical implications of AI (Logan & Waymer, 2023). The first four articles in this issue join this growing list of literature on AI, but with a specific attention to the African context.

**Anani-Bossman, Nutsugah and Abudulai** investigate the knowledge, adoption, and impact of AI in the public relations and communication management industry in Ghana. Their findings show that professionals in Ghana are fully aware of AI and some of its implications, but they do not fully comprehend its impact, challenges and risks. The adoption of AI in Ghana is still in its nascent stages, given the persistent challenges of low internet speed, penetration and data costs. **Abude, Odei-Mensah and Schaling** use AI-powered text mining techniques (natural language processing (NLP)) to create monetary policy communication-based indicators through an analysis of press releases from the Bank of Ghana. Press releases from the central bank constitute a valuable source of information for various stakeholders within an economy. However, as the authors note, press releases are usually qualitative in nature and hence difficult to quantify. Using AI techniques, Abude *et al.* construct communication-based indicators measuring readability, sentiment and uncertainty indexes. **Shabangu's** conceptual article examines AI's impact on the strategic communication in the South African context. It notes that there has been so far little research on the field of AI in South Africa and, hence, little understanding of how AI development is apprehended in the Global South, particularly in Africa. Shabangu further notes that South Africa is well ahead of other countries in Africa in the implementation of AI tools. Several AI research-based institutions have been established in South Africa. The article identifies several issues and challenges arising from the adoption of AI in the field of strategic communication. **Morapeli and Khemisi** explore the role of artificial intelligence in the strategic communication industry in South Africa. Their findings highlight some of the benefits of AI, such as its convenience in executing complex and tedious tasks such as collecting and analyzing data and providing templates for press releases via ChatGPT. The findings show that the AI is far from supplanting human labour as there are certain human skills that cannot be replicated by AI. They identify a need for South African industry to equip communication professionals with new technological expertise in order to fully understand the AI technology and to prepare them for organizational changes.

The rest of the articles in this issue cover a variety of topics. **Nyaga and Adu Gyamfi** present a comparative study of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine acceptability in Kenya and the USA.

They highlight that health communication plays a vital role in communicating about HPV vaccination, encouraging and persuading target audiences. The study offers some insights that can contribute to policy and practice around the issue of vaccination and health communication. **Fadipe and Molale** examine how authorities communicated COVID-19 messages to rural communities in the North-West province of South Africa. They show that several lessons can be drawn from how the pandemic was communicated. Their findings highlight the need for active citizen participation through participation, dialogue and empowerment. **Boima and Oyedemi** investigate issues of the social media economy in the African context. They examine South African youth's awareness of business models and data commodification on Facebook. They draw on the lenses of digital capitalism and critical media literacy in their study. Their finding highlights the need to increase media literacy in South Africa. **Chmela-Jones, Cronje and Snaddon** investigate the evolving landscape of visual communication design in South Africa. They note that design practices are increasingly influenced by developments in technology, sustainability and environmental issues.

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