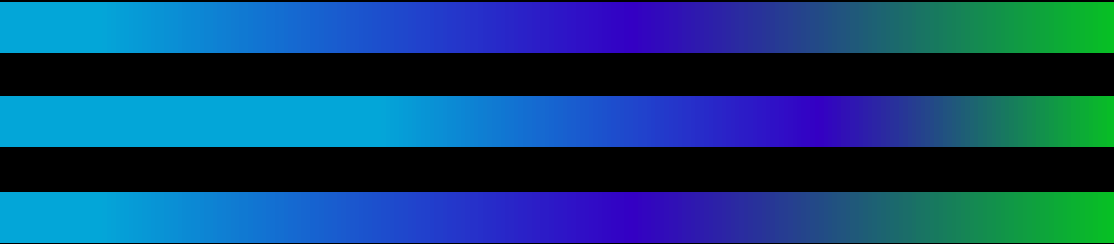


WHITE PAPER

CheatGPT?

Generative text AI use in the UK's
PR and communications profession.



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The rapid rise of generative text AI (Gen AI) tools has sparked significant interest, curiosity, and concern across the world.

At Magenta Associates, we recognised the profound implications these tools could have on the communications profession. Gen AI is becoming increasingly prevalent in content development, yet there has been limited research exploring how communication professionals are adapting to these new technologies.

This is why we embarked on a research project in collaboration with the University of Sussex — to gain a deeper understanding of the realities of Gen AI in our field.

Our aim was to undertake a detailed exploration of how Gen AI is being used within the communications industry, the challenges it poses, and the opportunities it offers.

With 80% of our survey respondents — content

writers in the UK PR and communications profession — now using Gen AI tools at least occasionally, it is no longer a distant future but a present reality.

However, while Gen AI can enhance efficiency — 68% of our respondents reported that it improves productivity — it still lacks the ability to create the nuanced, impactful content that humans excel at. Many professionals still rely on these tools for drafting and ideation, but they carefully edit and refine the output to ensure it aligns with their authentic voice and the unique demands of the communications industry.

One of the key takeaways from our research was the mixed feelings surrounding the ethical use of Gen AI. While 68% of content writers consider it ethical, concerns about transparency and the potential for Gen AI to replace human roles linger.

Furthermore, secrecy around Gen AI use in some workplaces reveals that there is still a level of discomfort about how this

FOREWORD



Jo Sutherland

Managing director,
Magenta Associates

technology is perceived. This speaks to a broader need for guidelines and open conversations around its use — a recommendation we strongly advocate.

We hope this white paper will provide valuable insights for communications professionals navigating this new landscape. Gen AI is here to stay, and it is essential that we adapt to its capabilities while maintaining the human-centred creativity

and expertise that defines our industry.

The findings presented here are just the beginning of a conversation that will undoubtedly continue to evolve. As we look ahead, we are committed to staying at the forefront of this dialogue, ensuring that we balance technological innovation with the human values of authenticity, ethics, and quality in communication.

RESEARCHER'S VIEW

Dr Tanya Kant

Senior lecturer in media and cultural studies (digital media) at the University of Sussex



Can 'algorithmic literacy' help us understand the promises and pitfalls of Gen AI?

The potential dangers of Gen AI have dominated popular and industry-based debates in recent months, with global players framing AI tools as existential threats to jobs, creativity and even humanity itself. Despite the allure of these 'grand narratives', researchers highlight that if we are to effectively understand the

most pressing social effects of AI, we need to move away from overarching speculations and towards understanding usage in specific contexts. Though there are numerous speculative studies of Gen AI capabilities, at present there is a striking lack of research that asks why people are increasingly turning to Gen AI. Our project looks to address this problem by revealing how and why professional writers in PR and communications are using Gen AI in their daily work tasks.

In the UK, swathes of the PR and communications profession are comprised of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As our research finds, writers and managers in SMEs are increasingly using ChatGPT and its competitors – and yet despite wide and fast uptakes, these stakeholders have little power in shaping the broader landscape of development, ethics and power in AI technologies. As the 2023 #AISummitOpenLetter highlights, this increasing disparity in power between

big tech companies and community/SME stakeholders is a major cause for concern because small businesses and artists are 'squeezed out... as a handful of big tech companies capture even more power and influence'.

The power imbalances between communications SMEs and Big Tech giants are concerning for a number of reasons. Firstly, there's a strong likelihood that commercial Gen AI technologies have been trained on significant amounts of text authored by writers in the communications and PR sectors. It's well publicised that large organisations such as The New York Times are suing OpenAI for unauthorised use of their articles in training ChatGPT. For most communications SMEs, suing tech giants is not an option. SMEs developing their own Gen AI tools is also not viable – but as our project finds, writers and managers understandably feel the need to use these tools to optimise efficiency in an already struggling profession.

This all begs the question – how can we empower

writers and managers to use Gen AI in ways that benefit SMEs, rather than playing into the hands of Big Tech? One way might be to improve the 'algorithmic literacy' of workers in the profession. Researchers define algorithmic literacy as 'being aware of the use of algorithms in online applications, platforms, and services, knowing how algorithms work, being able to critically evaluate algorithmic decision-making as well as having the skills to cope with or even influence algorithmic operations'.

At present, work on algorithmic literacy is a scattered field that tends to promote 'awareness' of algorithmic systems rather than 'how to improve' algorithmic literacy in specific contexts. There is emerging research that considers algorithmic literacy specifically in AI tool users – for example the term 'generative AI literacy' is used to describe user awareness of 'ethical and societal' implications of Gen AI. Once again, however, there is little empirical research in this field, with our project the first of its kind to study Gen AI use in the UK PR and

communications profession. There are different types of algorithmic literacy – 'cognitive', 'behavioural' and 'affective' for example – but it seems that in the case of understanding the power imbalances that come with Gen AI, Dr Kelly Cotter's notion of 'critical algorithmic literacy' is best placed to empower SME communications professionals.

This form of algorithmic literacy best acknowledges the unequal distribution of algorithmic power between different kinds of global and local stakeholders. Critical algorithmic literacy recognises that ethical and confident use of Gen AI tools is not just a question of upskilling or training, but a matter of challenging power relations.

REPORT

CheatGPT? Generative text AI use in the UK's PR and communications profession

Survey details:

N = 1,629 (screen out 366)
Total valid responses: N = 1,110
Content writers = N: 637
Managers = N: 437

Interview details:

N = 18
Content writers = 8
Managers/content writers = 10

How widespread is generative text AI tool use in the profession?

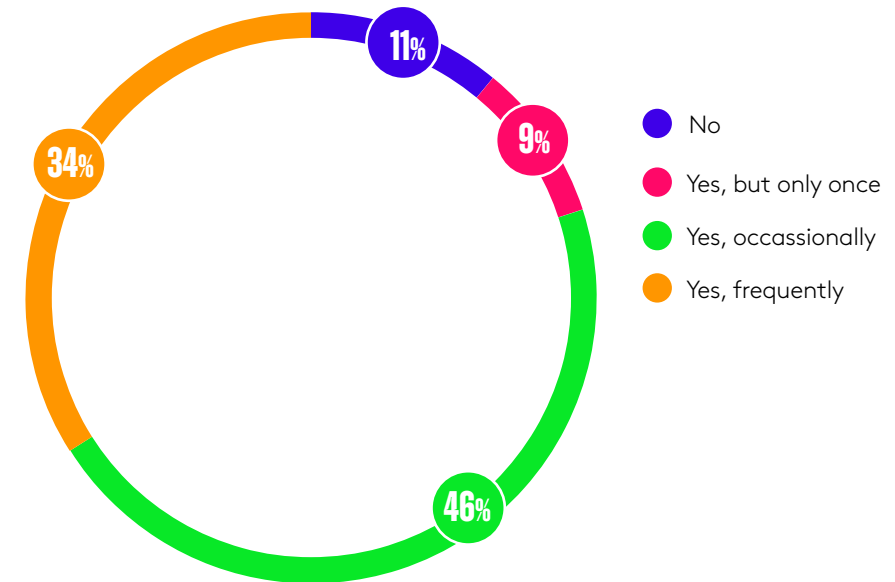
'I can't live without it now'

— Heather, content creator

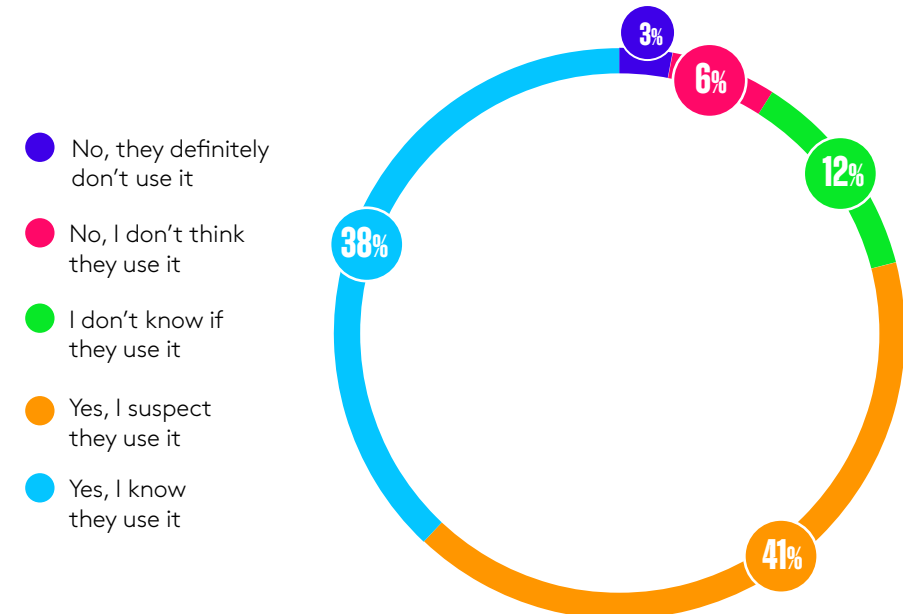
Gen AI text use is widespread in the profession, with 80% of content writers using generative AI text tools frequently (34%) or occasionally (46%). Only 11% of content writers have never used it. Those that do use it are using it more and more - interview participants told us they are using it 'almost as much as Google search' (Dev, digital marketing manager) and felt they 'can't live without it' (Heather, content creator).

Relatedly, 38% managers know their writers use it and 41% suspect they do. Only 3% of managers are confident that their writers do not use these tools.

Content writers: have you ever used ChatGPT or other Gen AI text tools at work?



Managers: Do your writers use ChatGPT or similar Gen AI tools at work?



How are people using Gen AI?

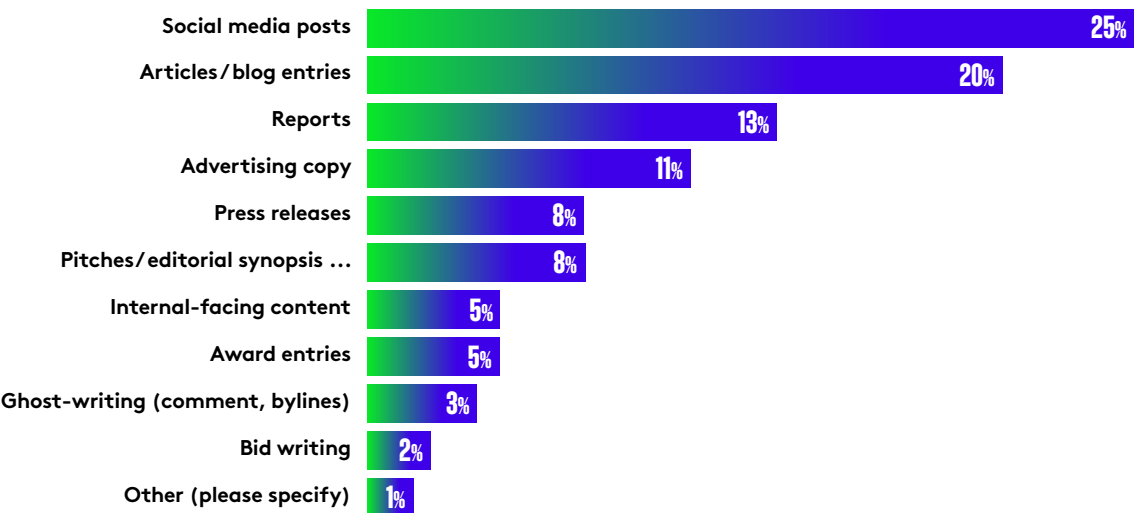
‘It makes my notes more structured, which then helps me write’ — George, senior consultant

Writers and managers are using it for all sorts of reasons and not necessarily in the ways people might assume. Respondents reported being very careful to review any text these tools produce – writers who are using it are editing or heavily editing any text their tool generates and only 4% never edit AI generated text. When people do use it to

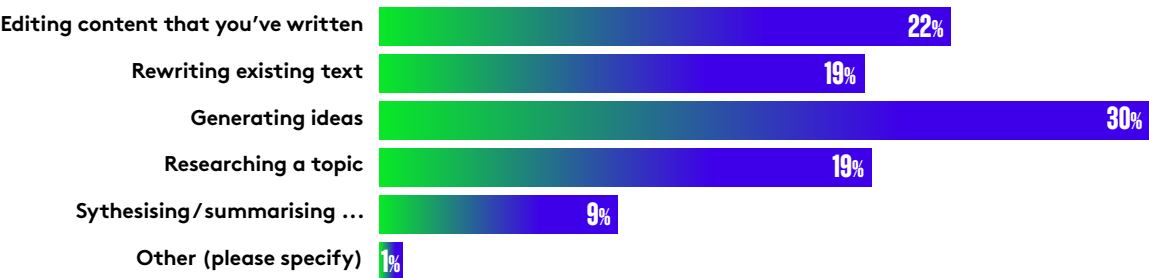
produce content, it is most likely to be for social media posts (25%), articles/blog entries (20%) or writing reports (13%). As well as drafting some types of content, people use it to edit content that they have written, rewrite existing texts, suggest structure or headings, synthesise notes and summarise

transcriptions. Many people are using it for idea generation and topic research as well as providing feedback, to organise their day or as a ‘sounding board’ (Vinita, director). As George puts it, his preferred AI tool was most useful for making ‘notes more structured’ rather than creating content itself.

What draft or original content have you created using these tools?



What other tasks have you used ChatGPT/similar tools for?



Why don't people use it to create content?

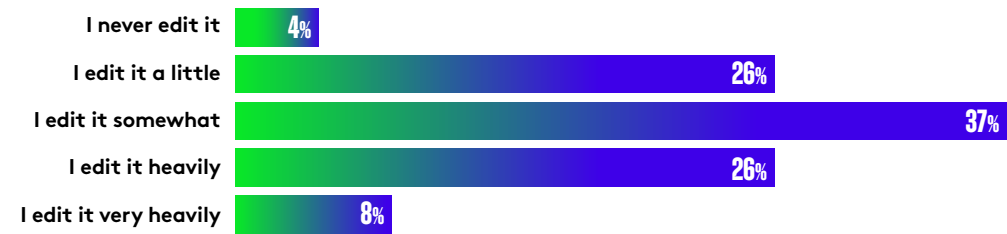
‘The actual content it spews out is not good’ — Rosie, managing director

Writers consistently reported being underwhelmed with the style and authorial tone of voice that these tools provide. Even when writers are prompting their preferred software to write in specific styles, AI text tools are described as producing writing that is ‘slightly shallow and repetitive’ (Peter, head of communications), ‘very bland’ (George, senior consultant), ‘very salesy’ (Fay, managing director) or as a survey participant put it ‘just plain dross’ (survey

respondent, content writer). Others commented that generated text was ‘far too verbose’ (survey respondent, content writer) or ‘very floaty, flowery language that I would never write in’ (Suzanna, senior consultant) and others stated that its style was ‘robotic’ (Seth, senior consultant). Some writers simply trust and enjoy using their own authorial voice, telling us ‘I prefer to use my own style and language’ (Vinita, director) and ‘I like the

active writing, that’s why I wanted to go into this role in this industry’ (Leena, account executive). Others don’t use it for content generation as a matter of principle - one respondent told us that they ‘wouldn’t feel comfortable’ (survey respondent, executive), whilst Suzanna framed it as ‘cheating’ to use it to create client-facing content (see page 12 for more on ethics).

Normally, how heavily do you edit the text it creates/suggests?



Why do people use these tools?

‘Boom, it’s all there, so that’s really good for organising my day’ — Michael, communications officer

Survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated that Gen AI tools can improve efficiency, with 68% agreeing they ‘definitely’ (21%) or ‘probably’ (47%) make their work more efficient. Interview and open-ended survey responses reflected this, telling us their preferred tool is ‘convenient and time saving’ (survey respondent, writer) and helps them ‘produce better work more quickly’ (Heather, content creator). Speed and ease were key descriptors, with writers telling us their preferred software helps ‘speed things up and help with deadlines’ (Seth, senior consultant) and ‘it’s never been easier to write blogs’ (survey respondent, writer). page 12 for more on ethics).

Does Gen AI make content writers more efficient?



‘An extremely junior but very effective colleague who... is not at all precious when I tell it that it’s wrong’ — Peter, head of communications

Respondents were a little less enthusiastic about Gen AI’s ability to enhance creativity: 23% of survey respondents were unsure and 25% indicated it does not make writers more creative. That said, just over half of respondents (52%) agreed that it could play some kind of role in enhancing creativity.

Some used their tools for experimentation or ‘simply because its fun’ (writer). For others it is their chatbot-like functionalities that make them more useful than other research tools – their ability to ‘have a conversation’ (Dev, digital marketing manager) or act like ‘an assistant for brainstorming’ (Vinita, director). Peter suggested his Gen AI functions as a co-worker that is ‘free from judgement’ that can be used in ways to save other colleagues’ time. Others commented that use their preferred tool to help with writes block by helping overcome that ‘blank page feel’ (Peter, head of communications).

Does Gen AI make writers more creative?



How do writers feel about using it?

‘I feel half guilty for it and half it’s ridiculous that I feel guilty’ — Rosie, managing director

There was a diversity of often ambivalent opinions expressed by participants about using these tools, with some such as Rosie feeling at times guilty for using it, whilst also acknowledging among others that they are ‘just tools’.

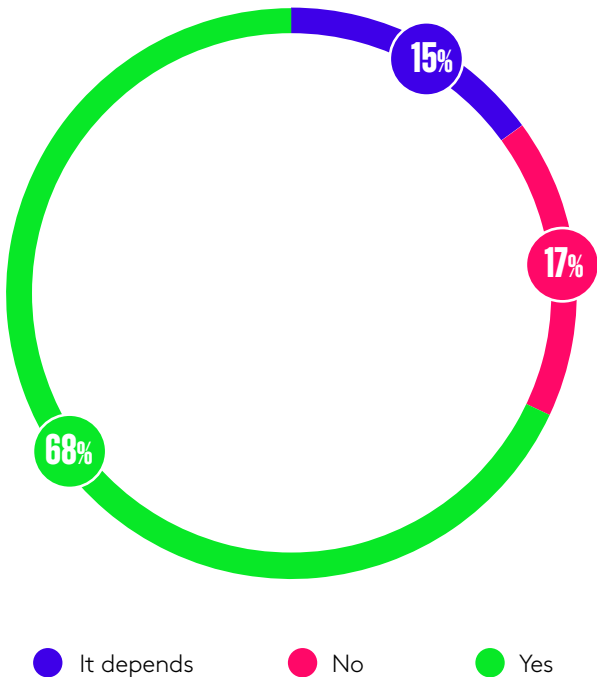
but only if you adapt it significantly to be your own’ (survey respondent, content writer). Ethically acceptable uses included structural help, finding diverse viewpoints and for research — as long as the results

were fact-checked. One participant surmised ethical uses with the sentiment: ‘for fluff pieces not so bad, for a memoir I would feel duped’ (survey participant, content writer).

Perhaps unsurprisingly given that most writers are using Gen AI, most writers (68%) think it is ethical to use it. Only 17% thought it was unethical and the remaining 15% believe ethical uses to be context-specific: some respondents noted they should be using it as an ‘ideas machine only’ (survey participant, writer) some said it was dependent on transparency of use (Adam, corporate communications executive) others said ‘for small matters, I see it as a simple effective tool to replace Google... however it shouldn’t abused to replace the job/role of an employed human being’ (survey respondent, manager).

Another commented that ‘using AI for ideas can be a useful tool for at work,

Writers: you think using ChatGPT/Gen AI tools at work is ethical?



How do managers feel about their workers using it?

‘It gives [my team] a little bit more confidence’

— Adam, executive director

Despite widely reported fears of misuse, most managers expressed that they were happy for writers to use if done so mindfully, stating things like ‘it’s fine to use it as long as they edit the copy or use it as inspiration rather than the final piece’ (survey participant, manager).

Others suggested use was fine as long as they fact-checked any information. There were a minority of managers who said they felt ‘slightly annoyed’ (survey participant, manager) by writers using it and a few that said they saw it to be cheating, but they were in the minority. In fact, some

managers actively promoted Gen AI use, with some team leaders saying ‘it really helps [our writers] to edit stuff in a way everyone will like’ (survey respondent, manager) and others saying ‘I think it’s really useful and everyone should use it’ (survey respondent, manager).

MAD risks

Model Autophagy Disorder (MAD) refers to the degradation of AI models when they are trained or retrained on their own synthetic outputs, rather than on new, high-quality human-generated data.

Over time, this creates a self-reinforcing loop where the quality of the model’s outputs diminishes, leading to increasingly incoherent or flawed results.

As more AI-generated content circulates online, models risk absorbing and replicating this lower-quality data, amplifying the problem. MAD highlights the importance of curating training datasets carefully to avoid this self-consuming decline in model performance.

PRESENT CHALLENGES, IMPLICATIONS AND IMPACTS FOR THE PROFESSION

Differing cultures of transparency

‘Sometimes I feel ashamed that I need additional support’ — *survey respondent, writer*

One challenge is the differing level of transparency currently related to talking about AI use in workplaces. The majority of writers tell their co-workers (31%), and quite a few tell their managers (20%) that they use it to an extent. Only 8% of respondents use Gen AI in total secrecy. However, only 11% of respondents talk openly to clients or external partners about using it.

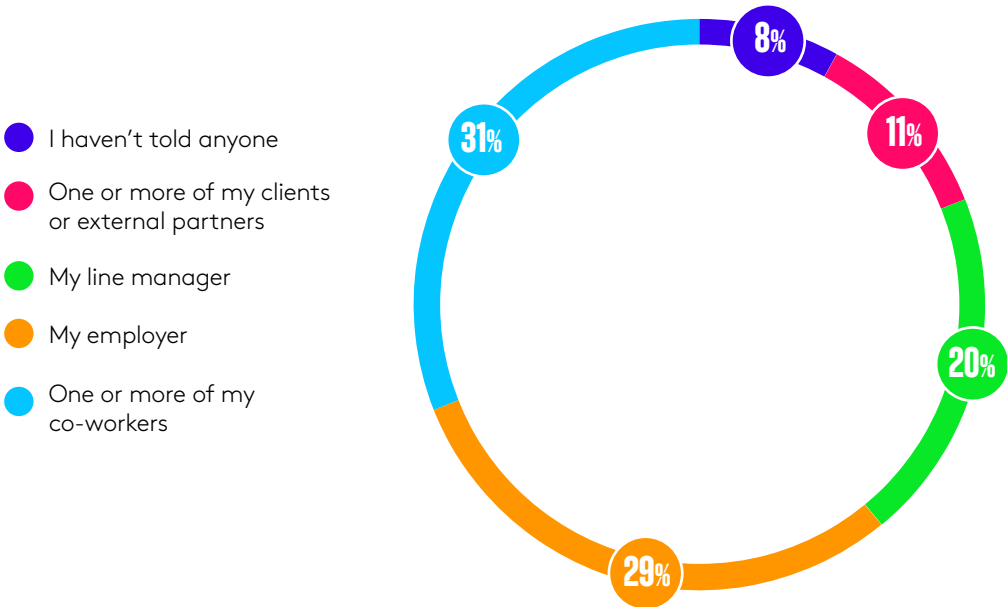
Many interviewees and survey participants elaborated that they have

never been asked about using Gen AI and so had not felt the need to disclose use.

Writers gave several reasons for using it in secrecy — some don’t tell because they believe it will lead to judgement: for example one survey respondent wrote ‘I think it gives the impression that I’m lazy and the work isn’t mine, when in fact 99.9% of the work is my own, I just use it to break my writers block’ (survey respondent, content writer). Another writer using their

preferred tool secretly stated ‘I don’t want my employer to think I am copying work directly from AI, when I often use it to generate ideas or help with sections of more difficult work’ (survey respondent). Others conceal their use out of a sense of ‘embarrassment... about the fact I needed help’ (survey participant, writer) and others think that age matters: ‘My manager is quite a bit older, I think that she would not approve of any use of AI’ (Michael, communications officer).

Writer responses: who knows you use ChatGPT or similar software?



Lack of guidance

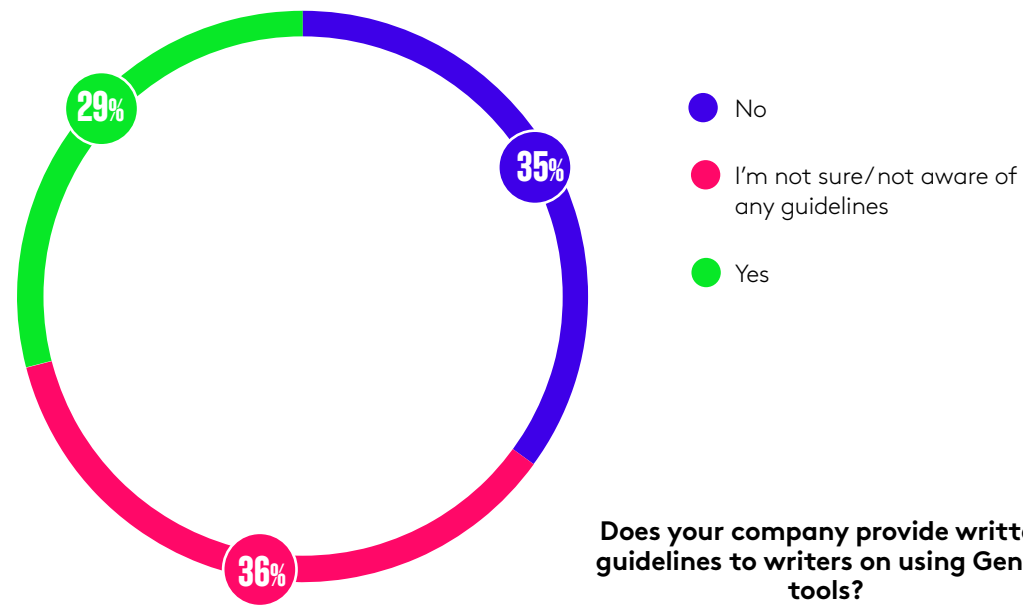
We need guidelines we can collectively all agree on’ — *Suzanna, managing director*

One challenge affecting both writers and managers is lack of guidelines on acceptable uses of Gen AI. 71% of writers said their organisation had no guidelines regarding its use or they were not aware of any, and the 29% of people whose organisations did have guidelines told us that employers issued advice like ‘use it selectively’ (survey

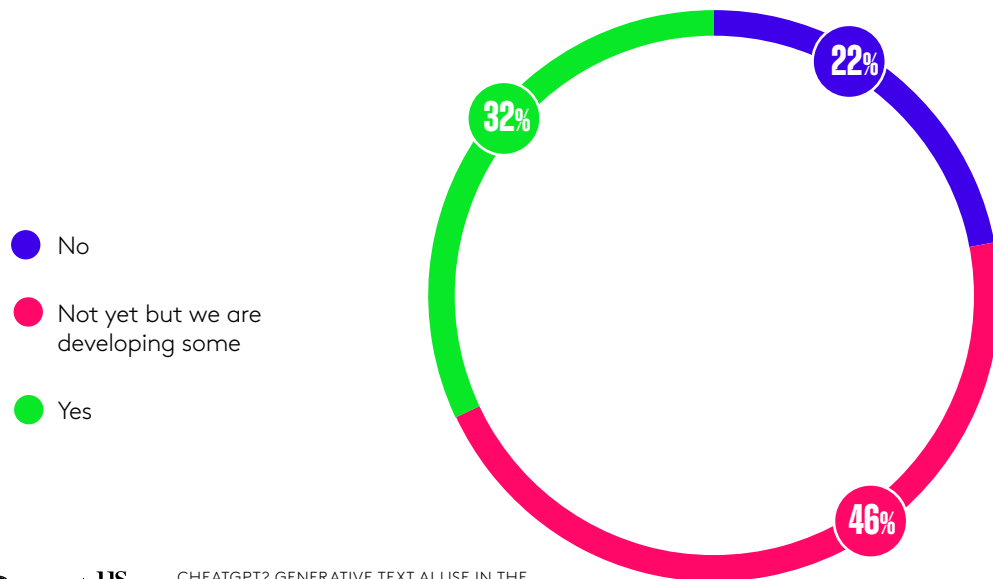
respondent, writer) ‘don’t make it obviously AI’ (survey respondent, writer) and to ‘edit it if it looks like it’s been written by a chatbot’ (survey respondent, writer). One respondent said they’re told ‘always look over’ what is written – ‘don’t let the AI do the job, just let it be a helper’. It’s worth noting that few organisations seem to

be explicitly banning its use altogether. Instead many recognised the value of guidance, with some such as Suzanna noting that company policies should be written collectively with managers and writers able to input thoughts for best practice.

Does your employer/client have written guidelines regarding use of Gen AI tools?



Does your company provide written guidelines to writers on using Gen AI tools?



Understanding legalities

‘Is it appropriate to dump all of [our data] into a model we actually don’t really know anything about and certainly don’t own? I don’t think so’

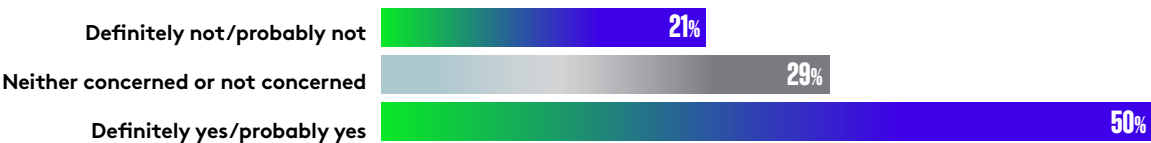
— Peter, head of communications

Another challenge facing workers is confidently understanding the legalities of Gen AI use. 50% of managers were concerned about the legalities of using ChatGPT and/or its competitors, with only 5% being completely unconcerned.

Most respondents were aware and indeed very careful of the kinds of content they input into their chosen tool, telling us they would not put anything sensitive or identifiable into the software in case the information was used as part of the data set and one day

made public or leaked. Respondents such as Micheal and Adam made sure to only input generic details or imagined scenarios to protect any sensitive or identifiable information when using Gen AI software.

Are you concerned about the legalities of Gen AI use?



IP concerns

‘We’ve got like 80,000 stories on the website.... It’s obviously looked for things’ — Neil, publisher

Many managers expressed concerns around Intellectual Property infringement, with 45% expressing probable or definite concern regarding IP implications and generative text. However, interview responses suggested that this was largely thought of from the perspective of using content produced by AI, rather than AI infringing on their company’s own intellectual property.

For instance Sarah (account executive) stated that using AI-generated text is ‘obviously very unfair to the person who had originally written that content’ unless they had explicitly given permission. Other interviewees, especially those that managed teams or own companies, did express concerns regarding if their own content had been used to train Gen AI tools. For example publisher Neil told us he has used software

that ‘would let you know whether your website had been scraped’ and found that web crawlers had indeed accessed their news articles and blog posts. However, he expressed a sense of helplessness in protecting site IP, adding ‘we can’t do anything about [text scraping]. You know the Washington Post or whatever, or Sony Music obviously can do something about it, but ... the most we can do is complain about it.’

Are you concerned about the IP implications of Gen AI use?



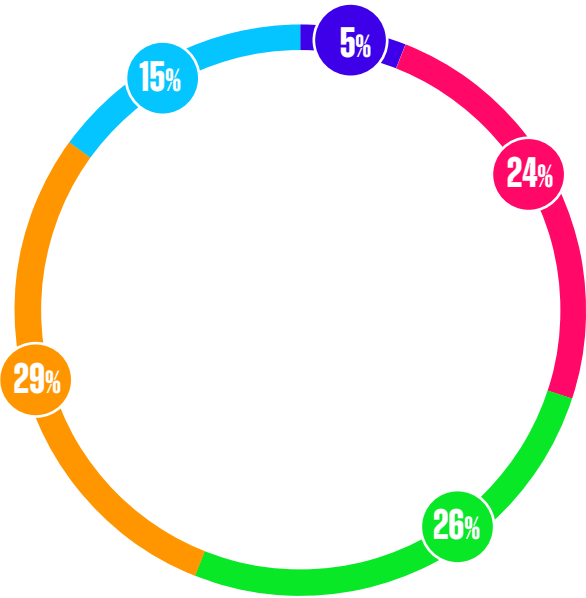
PROMISES AND PITFALLS: AI ARTISTS AND REPORTERS

A real-world impact that is already affecting the profession is the slow but steady appearance of ‘AI writers’ and ‘AI artists’. For example Fay (managing director) told us her company is currently working with an AI film-maker who saves money for companies by AI-generating voice-overs, rather than paying a voice-over artist for corporate filming, and Neil uses an AI reporter to ‘take on work we would otherwise have to turn away’. Others talked of fears of AI taking freelancer jobs, though concrete examples of this was were less tangible.

Future impacts and implications

Though most people do not feel their job is threatened by Gen AI tools, a large portion of our respondents were ambivalent or at least a little concerned about AI’s implications for their employment, with 65% stating that AI might present a threat or definitely did. Interview respondents elaborated on this by stating that though some elements of their job might be at risk, largely their roles were safe due to the value of their ‘expertise’ and their ‘humaness’ — that is the value they brought to their role, in networking, authorial tone of voice, knowledge, thought leadership and experience.

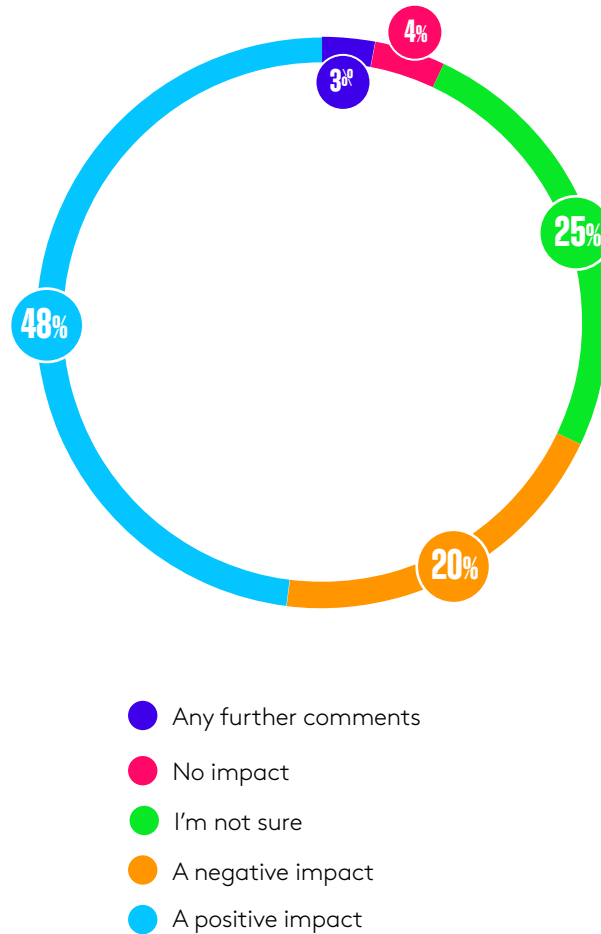
Do you think Gen AI tools are a threat to your job?



● Definitely yes ● Probably yes ● Might or might not ● Probably not ● Definitely not

Despite some fears of threats to their jobs, most respondents believe that Gen AI tools will ultimately have a positive impact on the profession. It seems then that future impacts and implications are perceived less negatively by those working in the profession as those working outside of it: the press have tended to concentrate on fear of AI taking away whole jobs when they actually seem to be automating parts of people's jobs.

What impact do you think ChatGPT and similar tools will have on PR and communications work in the next few years?



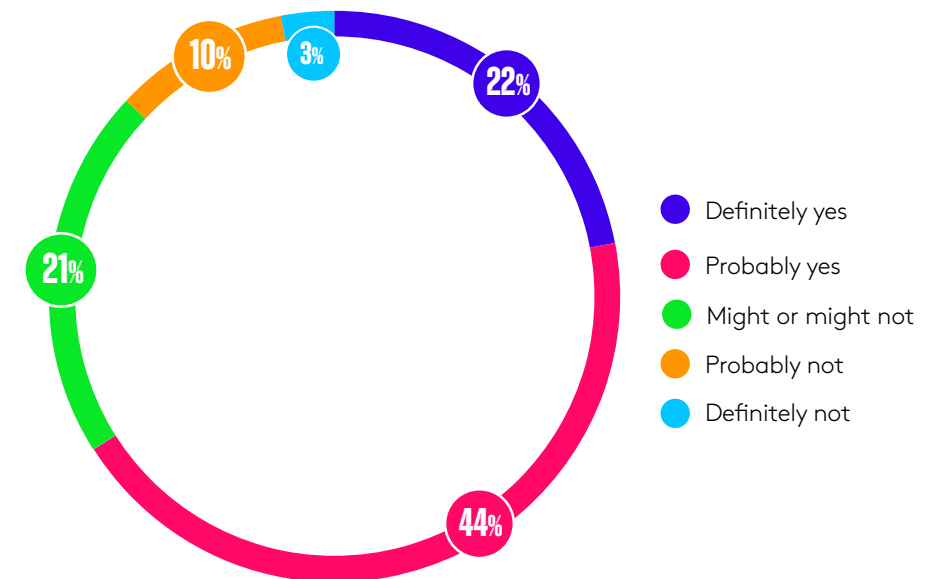
Solutions for the profession

Training would be useful - but take care it's the right type

85% of those surveyed had never received any kind of training in using Gen AI tools, with the remaining 15% being trained 'a little' (and even then most reported being trained in a self-initiated way).

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, 66% of respondents told us they thought training would be useful.

Do you think workplace training regarding the use of Gen AI could be useful?



Train your employees.

Take care it's the right kind of training – training could centre on legal issues of client sensitivity, prompt training and /or intellectual property retention for example. Do your research before picking a trainer – see the UK Government's List of Accredited Bodies for AI training, as well as its Guide to Assessing the trainer. You could also apply for funding for AI training.

Consider training outside of Gen AI tools too – training in idea generation, confident writing or fact checking may be just as useful.

Champion your authorial expertise.

In an age of AI, human expertise, connection, original insight and compelling authorship will be more important than ever. Champion these qualities to clients and external partners – remind them that Gen AI may be a cheap source of content, but that content is recycled and trained on data that is at least a year (normally more like three years) outdated.

Readers and journalists alike will be increasingly looking for compelling, exciting and human content that stands out

from the AI deluge. Equally, remind clients and external partners that providing AI content to writers is also going to generate poor quality outputs: information provided to writers should be generated from up-to-date sources, experts and thought leaders in the field.

Check your privacy settings.

If you do use a free-to-use, publicly available generative text tool, check your privacy settings. For example on ChatGPT you can turn off 'chat history', which prevents owners OpenAI from using the conversation in its training data. Or consider paid-versions that come with enhanced privacy and security measures.

Start protecting your own intellectual property.

It's likely that the biggest free Gen AI tools have used vast swathes of content produced by the PR and communications profession to train their models. There is collective strength in awareness of web scraping, even if you are part of or own an SME – so take steps to ensure your content is protected.

Promote open conversation.

It looks like Gen AI is here to stay, and so cultures that encourage secret use are unlikely to benefit many people. Promote transparency of use through open conversation and start a collective discussion with team members to agree on usage that works for everyone.

Produce company guidelines.

As of November 5, there is still little in the way of formal, profession-wide UK guidelines for best practice use of Gen AI for content writing in the PR sectors. Though it's likely that profession-wide guidelines will emerge, it's worth creating company guidelines ahead of the curve, based on collective workplace usage. Software is changing every day so review guidelines periodically and don't assume everyone is using the same text generator. This research project will be producing guidelines in the near future, so watch this space for more on this.

The Philosopher's Rosetta Stone

In October 2024, the University of Oxford's Institute for Ethics in AI event – *How to Think About Large Language Models* – explored the philosophical and ethical implications of large language models (LLMs), focusing on their ability to simulate human-like dialogue without genuine understanding. The speakers bridged the realms of computer science and philosophy, discussing concepts like justice, fairness, and freedom in relation to these AI systems.

Professor Murray Shanahan, principal research scientist at Google DeepMind and Professor of Cognitive Robotics at Imperial College London, highlighted the dangers of anthropomorphising LLMs, explaining that while these models can simulate beliefs, desires, and intentions, they lack any true engagement with the external world.

In expressing concerns about public misconceptions, particularly regarding the belief that these systems "know" or "understand" their outputs, Shanahan warned against attributing psychological traits to LLMs, noting that although they can appear to adopt personas, this is merely statistical token prediction rather than genuine thought. His key message is that we must avoid thinking about LLMs in this way because doing so can increase misguided trust in what these models generate. He suggested that LLMs are more akin to simulacra – performing a multiverse of possible characters that shift with conversation.

Shanahan also addressed the risks of LLMs, such as deception, misinformation, and coercion, drawing from examples like Microsoft Bing Chat's erratic behaviour in February 2023 when the dialogue agent tried to persuade a user to leave his wife. Fellow panellists

further emphasised the need to remain sceptical about LLMs, warning against the temptation to anthropomorphise them simply because they interact through language – be mindful of the enchantment of language, urged Professor Rahul Santhanam.

Q&A

Andrew Bruce Smith

Andrew Bruce Smith is the founder and managing director of Escherman, a specialist consultancy delivering social media, SEO, PPC, and analytics training. Andrew has strategically integrated AI into digital communications programmes for some of the world's largest brands and is the co-author of 'Share This' and 'Share This Too' (publisher: Wiley), best-selling handbooks that reflect the evolution of media.

You've been at the forefront of integrating AI into digital PR and social media for decades. How has your perspective on AI's role in the PR industry evolved, particularly with the rise of Gen AI?

The biggest change has been the drastic difference between "pre-ChatGPT" and "post-ChatGPT" times. Until November 2022, AI's impact on PR was minimal. We did a CIPR survey in 2021, and only about one in five respondents thought AI would significantly impact their roles. Most weren't actively using it, and if they were, it was in indirect ways, like with Google's search algorithms. Direct applications within communications, like using AI for writing or research, only started to gain



momentum recently. It's like a light switch was flicked with the launch of ChatGPT.

Let's talk about the ethical implications. How do you view AI's role in digital communications, especially as these tools become increasingly capable of generating persuasive and influential content?

Ethics is crucial in communications, and AI brings up new ethical considerations, particularly around transparency. In the CIPR, for instance, our code stresses honesty and transparency. When using AI to assist with content creation, the question arises of if you should declare the use of AI. Many argue that transparency here is essential, even if it's a simple

statement like "AI was used in this content." There's also the issue of AI "hallucinations," where it generates credible-sounding information that isn't correct. Ultimately, the responsibility for accuracy falls on the human using the tool. It's a powerful resource, but it doesn't replace accountability.

Why is transparency with AI any different from using other tools like Google for research? We don't disclose our Google searches, so why do we need to be so open about AI?

I think it's partly about how quickly AI tools like ChatGPT have come onto the scene and the lack of consensus around their use. Google is seen as a research tool, but with Gen AI people often feel like they're "cheating" by relying on it. There's an interesting parallel with Ethan Mollick's recent blog, where he listed reasons why people don't admit to using AI. Some worry it undermines the perception of their skills or gives management a reason to cut resources.

Some content writers we surveyed described Gen AI outputs as lacking depth or a personal touch. What advice would you give professionals to balance AI-generated content with an authentic human voice?

It's a balancing act. AI often needs detailed prompts to

deliver something specific, so having clarity in your goals is essential. Gen AI can be a decent first draft generator, but you need that human touch to refine the output. Tools like custom GPTs can help by allowing you to input brand guidelines or style guides. But remember — AI is a tool, not a replacement for your voice. The more specific and well-informed your prompts, the more you can shape AI's output to reflect your intended style.

Beyond generative text, what do you see as the most transformative uses of AI for marketing and comms? Are there underutilised applications?

Definitely. While content generation gets most of the attention, AI's real strengths in PR and comms lie in summarisation, extraction, and rewriting. For instance, summarising lengthy documents or extracting key themes is invaluable for PR research and planning. Measurement and evaluation are also huge but underutilised. AI can analyse media coverage from the target audience's perspective, providing a more nuanced view than traditional sentiment analysis.

As Chair of the CIPR's AI in PR panel, you have a bird's-eye view of the industry. What trends do you see in how PR and comms professionals are

approaching AI today compared to five years ago?

Since November 2022, there's been a shift from curiosity and even scepticism to acceptance. Previously, many in PR saw AI as a fad or had concerns about its impact. Now, there's a growing sense that opting out of AI is not an option, but there's still uncertainty about where to start. It's been interesting to see agency leaders coming around to it, realising that AI isn't going away and that they need to integrate it thoughtfully into workflows. There's a sense of urgency now that wasn't there before.

Given the constant changes in tools and capabilities, where do you recommend professionals start, and how should they upskill to keep pace?

The foundation for good writing is good thinking. AI is an assistive tool, not a replacement, so it's essential to have domain expertise and a good grasp of language. I'd recommend basic training in prompting AI. Knowing how to brief an AI tool well is like briefing a human colleague effectively. Start with the basics, like content generation, then expand to more specialised tasks. Tools like Feedly, with built-in AI, can also help professionals stay up to date by filtering relevant content from a vast pool of information.

CONCLUSION

Gen AI is being used frequently in the UK's PR and communications industry, bringing both vast potential and pressing challenges.


Gen AI tools are reshaping content creation workflows and bringing efficiency, but not without ethical and quality concerns. While Gen AI can accelerate tasks like drafting and ideation, our findings confirm that professionals still heavily rely on their own expertise to produce high-quality content that delivers human authenticity.

Arguably just as important as how Gen AI is being used is the impact of power dynamics, particularly for SMEs. With most AI tools developed and controlled by large tech corporations, smaller industry players find themselves with limited influence over the development and ethical standards of these technologies, even though their content often fuels the very algorithms at play. The concept of critical algorithmic literacy, as Dr. Kant highlights, could empower these professionals, offering them a framework to critically engage with AI while challenging the dominance of Big Tech.

Moving forward, the industry must advocate for practical guidelines and ethical standards that support transparent and responsible Gen AI use. Open dialogue and upskilling teams are essential in order for communications professionals to harness Gen AI's capabilities without compromising the industry's commitment to integrity and creativity.

The next step for us following this research is the creation of AI fair use guidelines. We will develop a template based on these findings and with input from Dr. Kant and other communications and AI experts.

We are committed to leading the conversation on Gen AI and supporting the industry to engage with the tools in a progressive, fair and helpful way.



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