

## Data science and communications management

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### ABSTRACT

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In this editorial for issue two of volume five of the Journal of Professional Communication, the author discusses how data science is changing the communications landscape. He suggests that advances in technology are making it easier to learn about and communicate with publics. The author challenges communications professionals to make better use of this new technology in their own work.

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The information era is now truly upon us. With the rise of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data science as commonplace terms in business news, an understanding of information science is becoming a must for communications practitioners. Whether it is the rise of the chatbot, or AI assistants, or the possibility of creating artificial societies to predict group behaviour, the ineffable area that have been traditionally reserved for communications professionals, *the relationship*, is finally becoming something that can be quantified, analysed, and modeled.

In the past, the relationship in its many manifestations in politics, society, and economics was the realm of the public relations professional. However, it was considered an ephemeral thing, difficult to measure and hard to define. The impact of the relationship on the organizational bottom line was hazy in the minds of top executives in the public, private, or not-for-profit sectors. This reality is changing quickly.

Scientific models are now allowing us to model an organization's relation-

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ships. In the past, doing this was a challenge, because an organization had to have very sophisticated programming talent to succeed in the attempt. Also, data were often stored on cumbersome or awkward media, such as vast assortments of proprietary hard drives or worse. Today, organizations such as Google are making sophisticated neural network models available for free for anyone to tinker with and use. Also, because of the vastly lower costs of storage, most organizations have massive datasets available: email repositories, social media interactions on corporate sites, point of sale, sensor data, or myriad other ways organizations collect data.

It is incumbent upon communications professionals to become acquainted with data science, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and other digital technologies, such as sensors, and systems, such as smart homes. Don't lose heart if you have limited mathematical ability and possibly no computer programming experience. The world has not passed you by. In fact, a world run on data that quantifies our relationships needs professional communicators more than ever. Who better understands the rhythm and cadence of language that will be spoken by an artificial intelligence, a chat bot? Who will make certain that the neural network model of the organization-client relationships is accurate and representative of the brand, its narratives, and its place in the cultural context? Indeed, I think it should be the professional communicator for whom relationships, culture, society, and politics are like oxygen.

For communicators to take our place alongside data scientists in the emerging digital world, it is important that we develop literacies in data science and artificial intelligence. One of the best ways to do this is to familiarize yourself with the culture of technology and data. That way, we will understand that seemingly arcane world created by engineers, mathematicians, and scientists through the special lens of the communicator — a lens that the technical-minded professional very often lacks.

## Articles in this issue

In her commentary piece, "*Public relations excellence: A behavioural perspective*," Antonina Rizzo offers a reflection on why theoretical public relations scholarship is necessary to focus on the impact of behaviour in three areas: socio-cultural studies on internal business culture; organization-public relationship (OPR) focused on publics' perceptions; and functional integrative stratification in the context of an organization to its society and in the evolution of public relations practice.

In his research article, "*Public relations in strategic management: Strategiz-*

ing in the communicative organization," Mark Dottori explores the connections between public relations and strategic management theory. He demonstrates how, in an era of growing importance for human communication, largely driven by smart phones and social media, it is important for public relations to learn how to integrate the theory of strategic management. Robin Spring and Alex Nesterenko, in their research article, "*Liberal vs. professional advertising education: A national survey of practitioners*," conduct an empirical examination of the development of advertising curricula through a national survey that was conducted with 366 practitioners in the United States. Finally, Amy Thurlow, Ala Kushniryk, Karen Blotnick, and Anthony R. Yue explore perceptions of public relations roles and influence among senior communication managers in Canada in their research article, "*Roles, decision-making, and access to the dominant coalition: The practice of public relations in Canada*."

This issue includes two case studies. Paul McIvor explores how Halton Healthcare, a hospital corporation in the Greater Toronto Area, began to create and implement a disciplined visual identity. Dan Tisch studies how the Argyle Public Relationships team worked with the then Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities to develop a campaign for a government program providing tuition rebates to post-secondary students.

All articles except the commentary piece in this issue of JPC have undergone strict double-blind peer review by at least two anonymous reviewers.

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