

CIPR Engage Episode 16 - PR in the Age of AI

Intro

For the last 12 months, the AI landscape has shifted significantly and discussions on how it can be used and benefit each industry, including PR and comms, have been at the forefront.

In this latest episode of Engage, a podcast from the CIPR, panellists reflect on the evolution of AI over the last year and its impact on PR and comms.

Andrew Bruce Smith

Hello, and welcome to episode 16 of the CIPR Engage podcast. My name is Andrew Bruce Smith, and I'm Chair of the CIPR AI in PR panel. We're here today to talk about what else but artificial intelligence and its impact on the world of public relations and communications. 2023 has been quite a year for AI, and I'm happy to reveal that we're actually recording this podcast on November 30th. It's exactly one year today since the launch of ChatGPT.

Unquestionably, in the last 12 months, we've seen an incredible period of technological development, massive impact on the work of PR professionals everywhere. Hopefully, over the next 40 minutes or so, we're going to reflect on what's happened, as well, perhaps foolishly, to attempt to try and understand, possibly predict, what the next 12 months and beyond will hold for AI and PR practitioners.

To assist me in this gargantuan task, I have two titans of the world of AI and communications. First of all, I'd like to introduce my guests. First up, Antony Cousins, Executive Director of AI Strategy at Cision. Antony leads the integration of new AI tech with PR and Comms profession. He has over 20 years of experience in communications, PR and technology, and he has an enviable track record of developing and delivering cultural, behavioural, and digital transformation propositions and strategies for diverse stakeholders and clients. He's also Tech Hub Chair at AMEC and a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Artificial Intelligence. Welcome, Antony. Great to have you here.

Antony Cousins

Thanks for having me.

Andrew Bruce Smith

Not at all. Brilliant. Also, an equal titan, Dr. Swati Virmani, Senior Lecturer and Teaching Fellow at the De Mont University in Leicester. Swati is a very dear colleague of mine on the CIPR AI in PR panel, and she has been instrumental in co-authoring many of the AI in PR panel research reports, including our most recent one, which no doubt we'll be referring to in this particular podcast, entitled *Humans Needed More Than Ever*.

Let's get to it. Wow. What a year. The first question, I think fairly obviously: is it possible to sum up how AI has evolved over the last year and how it's impacted public relations and just your personal observations of some of those most significant advancements and milestones? Antony, would you like to take that one first?

Antony Cousins

Yeah, that's a big one, right?

Andrew Bruce Smith

Why not?

Antony Cousins

Yeah. I think the way I explain this is I think when this first happened in November of last year, it took obviously a couple of months for it to spread out from the tech people to the mainstream. I think the way I explain why everyone was so confused to start with, like, "Why are we talking about AI all of a sudden?" Especially in public relations when we've been using AI for more than a decade now. Everyone was a little bit confused, like, "We've had AI for a while." As tech providers, us and our competitors all trying to make that point. "Hey, we've been using AI for quite some time."

I think the way I explain it is that we did hit a jump in maturity such that the AI we've been using for the last decade or more, simple sentiment analysis or relevancy models,

et cetera, is what I refer to now as an AI assistant. It's an AI that requires you effectively to be supported by the AI, and the AI needs lots of human feedback to know if it's done a good job or not. You need lots of data to train the AI for those simple models, and it's only capable of a single output. "Classify this text." You need to tell exactly what text to classify. Very narrow in its capabilities.

I think what happened in November of last year and why everyone is talking about it so much, and this is the explanation point for PR people, is, effectively, we got an AI which is capable of co-pilot level capabilities, like colleague-level capabilities. No longer do you have to be really specific in your direction. You still need to give it direction, but you can say, "Hey, just generate me a press release." You can be a little bit more broad and a little bit more vague in your instructions, and it will try and please you every time. It will give you something. It may not be a great output, but that's where the expertise in prompting comes in.

Antony Cousins

I think the biggest thing for me was that jump in maturity, that we hit a level where you can now effectively use AI as a colleague. That was the biggest jump that we had in November last year, and that's why we're talking about it so much because that's huge. Basically, an infinite number of colleagues sat waiting to help you.

Andrew Bruce Smith

Yeah, absolutely. Swati, what are your thoughts and observations of the last 12 months?

Dr. Swati Virmani

First of all, I would just look generally in terms of AI and advancement and the large language models; of course, as you mentioned in the beginning, it's just been 12 months, but what a roller coaster ride it has been. We now have advanced to GPT-4 turbo version with the 128K tokens and LLMs now advancing in the direction, which would allow a wide range of users with an ease of use. Perhaps something that's my favourite is the ease of using because of accessibility issues, introducing the microphone, the vision version, et cetera.

AI has made strides in education. Being an educator - we're now using it for personalised learning tailored support. Of course, there are also concerns around academic integrity and other things. AI has evolved in the health sector, specifically in public relations, which is why we are here to talk about it. I would like to, of course, quote the most recent research that we did as a panel, which is, in 2019, 2020, we thought that PR is one of the professions that's sleepwalking into the use of AI.

But now, if you look at what has happened in 2023 with our most recent research, that it's around 40% of the tasks are now automated. You look at content creation, and you look at data analysis, and social media management. I mean, those are the areas where you would see 60% to 70% of people now using AI or automating tasks. But there are still areas such as crisis management and building partnerships where there's still a lack of assistance, or I would say not massive use of AI.

But again, we are advancing into something like the use of chat boards, hyper-personalisation and communication, or automating routine tasks or helping us to do not those mundane tasks, which could be data analysis. Perhaps the advancement here is that the role of PR is now moving more into focusing on strategic direction and governance. But probably I'd like to also quote here the latest report from the Department of Education on the impact of jobs and training. They have just mentioned that public relations is one of the professions which is most exposed to AI. That just says it all.

Andrew Bruce Smith

Yeah. Actually, that's a very good thing to point to. That research has literally appeared, I think, in the last 48 hours. My interpretation of it was this concept of being exposed. I get in the sense that it say, "Well, if you do nothing, then quite clearly, your role, et cetera, may be at risk." I guess it's to come back to our own research. That's really good to highlight that in a really short space of time, that AI clearly is being used by PR practitioners.

But I think, as was said in that report, it's still largely focused on certain specific areas. I mean, content creation, generation, it's a fairly obvious use case. But patently, there's a

whole raft of other areas of the PR profession where AI potentially or even can provide support. It's an observation from myself over the last 12 months because, let's be honest, I don't seem to have done anything else apart from work related to AI in that time.

Having talked to a lot of PR professionals, both in-house and agency side, there's obviously a number of very, very common questions that come up. The obvious one is, "Is my job at risk? Do I still have a career? Is AI going to somehow do everything?" I think it's safe to say that clearly, it currently can't do everything. It's probably, and I know predictions are dangerous, but it's unlikely in the short to medium term, it's going to do everything for us. But I think, to both of you, really, what are your thoughts on where AI clearly is a boon and help, and those things that actually AI isn't as good as we might think it is at that? Where's that balance and mix?

Antony Cousins

I think if you break the communications down, this is what you effectively have to do to figure out where you're going to apply AI. This is not just PR; this is every department of every business—breaking your department down into your functions, breaking those functions down into individual tasks, and then thinking, "For this individual task, can I use an AI to automate that?"

If you do that for communication, break it down into some basic building blocks effectively of setting your objectives, which of course, we all do. Before we do any communications, we figure out what it is we're trying to achieve because that's best practice. Right now, there's no help at all from any systems or software AI to do that. That's still in your heads.

I think the benefit of AI is potentially automating and providing guidance, some of those areas that we tend not to focus that much on. Content creation is a good example of where we know how to do content creation. It might help us get there faster, and it might help us train how to prompt better because we know what good output looks like. It helps us to know what the output should look like and that helps us learn how to prompt.

But then I would say after you've experimented with using it for content creation, experiment with it in the areas that you don't have time for right now, in the areas that you underserve. Then the objectives, and setting some of those upfront is a good example of that. If you break your tasks down into those blocks, objectives is potentially a place where we can get a lot of help for this.

Here's what I do on a daily basis. "What business impact can I have with that? How can I make a business? How can I explain that to people who don't understand what I do?" Which is something that is a fundamental challenge for communicators all over. Great opportunities there.

Audience analysis is another one where, effectively, you can handle way more segmentation to support the personalisation of content than, as a human, you might have time for right now. If you're creating a campaign, you might segment it into groups that you can manage. But forgetting, of course, that if you have AI, you don't need to worry about managing the personalisation of content by those groups anymore; it can handle that at nth degree.

Breaking those tasks down and applying AI to each individual one, I think, is really the approach we should be taking at that strategic level. But to agree with your point, Andrew, what you'll end up with, I think, is the human spending more time in setting direction, strategy, human relationships, empathy and emotional understanding, and adding that contextual awareness.

The model, even after GPT-4 Turbo was released with an updated cut-off of April '23 for knowledge, and you can now upload your own information to it, even that is going to be limited in terms of the model's understanding of what your business is going to be doing next year. You may have that in your head, and that may influence the decisions you make as to how you communicate now. The model will never know that. Adding that contextual awareness and strategy, figuring out the why, that's where the humans will end up. If you go through this process, I think that's where we'll end up gravitating towards is the upfront, "Why are we doing this?"

Andrew Bruce Smith

Sure. Swati, what are your views on where AI is going to do it and where there's still work left to do?

Dr. Swati Virmani

Well, I think that's a million-dollar question. Everyone wants to know whether it's coming for my job or not. A couple of things that come to my mind. First of all, when we say "exposure," it does not necessarily mean substitutability. It does not necessarily mean that it will substitute you completely. In fact, again, I would refer back to the research that we did. We said that it's not replacing jobs. It's going to displace tasks, which means certain sets of tasks would be now automated or would be co-piloted or would be... Routine tasks, especially, could be just done with the help of AI.

The first thing that is very important and reiterated is that resistance is futile. It is here, and we must live with it. We must work with it. You can't just get away with it. There's a significant shift in the profession. If you just keep resisting it, then you should realise that management consultancies are now moving into the territory. There's huge importance to show how can we complement our skills with the help of these AI tools.

Probably, the strategic use would be that think of the tasks that would make you most productive with the help of AI if you use different tools. What are the routine tasks that you can automate? Develop a game plan for yourself. If you are a newcomer and if you're concerned about the use of AI tools, then probably start with the simple, low-risk use.

Of course, as Antony was saying, shift focus onto more strategic roles. But then also, I would be cautious here, because there are tools that could help to carry out those strategic roles. Even if we were thinking that, "I'm a public relations professional who is more at a senior level doing strategic roles or governance or ethical issues, then my job is safeguarded," no, it's not. Because if AI is not coming for the PR tasks, it's definitely coming for you if you're not using AI tools at all. There is a need to understand that there is a significant shift. Completely as I said, resistance here is futile.

Andrew Bruce Smith

That's right. It's here; it's not going away. Unless the asteroid hits, then we've got bigger things to worry about. You mentioned management consultants, and that reminds me of Professor Ethan Mollick, who for me personally, has been definitely one of the go-to people around AI and AI usage over the last 12 months.

Perhaps some of us might not be aware, but Professor Mollick did conduct a research study in conjunction with the Boston Consulting Group, a management consultancy firm, I think it was back in the summer, where they took, I think, 750 consultants, divided them into two groups. One group they said, "Do your normal work for the next two months, and hey, you get to use ChatGPT." The other group had said the same thing, but they were told, "You can't have ChatGPT." Then to compare the quality of the output at the end of that period.

The headline was that, of course, the AI group were able to do more work, that they did it quicker, and the output quality was perceived to be 40% greater than the non-AI group. It's interesting to me that amongst the various tasks that were being asked to be performed by these consultants, it included writing press releases. There were clearly in-house PR people in the groups there.

But it was the finding that in the AI group, the people that over-relied on AI actually saw a decline in the quality of their output and work, and indeed, their skill appeared to degrade. I guess this relates to the big question of skills and skill shift. Are there going to be new skills that PR practitioners are going to need to learn and develop as a result of using AI? What remains? What is the role for the kind of skill that we've always had to have and will continue to need to do so? I'm very interested in both of your thoughts on that subject.

Antony Cousins

I think for me, there was a lot of talk about a year ago, that *prompt engineer* was going to be a job title. I think, more or less, we've accepted that as AI gets better, you need to rely on better and better, or rather, you need to worry about your prompts less and less as its capability grows. I think the idea of having a job title skill or a role based around it is probably gone.

However, that doesn't mean that setting good, clear, concise direction isn't important. You can call it prompt engineering, but effectively, that's what you're doing. You're setting direction to a colleague or the AI, it doesn't matter. I think setting good, clear, concise direction is going to remain a really important skill, but probably increasingly so, because if you're good at it, you're going to get better outputs from the AI.

The interesting thing I thought for that report was looking at the difference in performance results from the high performers and the low performers, where the low performers actually increase their output significantly to the point where, in some cases, they outperform the high performers on the same tasks.

Antony Cousins

I think this is a huge leveller for people's skills. I think it may well be if you look down, and I'm not sure the report goes into this detail, but if you look at the reasons why those low performers managed to get such a performance boost and perform as well as the high performers, it could well be that those particular performers were just good at setting direction. Nothing to do with their broader capabilities, but if you can set good, clear, concise direction, you're going to get better outcomes from this.

Dr. Swati Virmani

Yeah, could I just add to that? Especially I mean, whenever the question comes around the output generation, and new skills, perhaps the one thing that we must be clear about is that there's a difference between time-saving and productivity. I mean, 70% of your time could be saved because of the AI tool, but if the output that you're generating is of no use, or is not authentic, or is not productive or is just a very routine output that is not adding any value.

That's the first thing, that whenever you're trying for a new skill or whenever you're using an AI tool, are you just trying to show the distributional use of that tool or how fast it's making you do something? Or are you also concerned about the output that it's generating? Those are the two key things, first of all, to keep in mind whenever you're using an AI tool, which is 70% of the time you could be saving, but it might just be only 15% to 20% productive. How much it's adding value or making your use effective.

Something that Antony was saying about prompt engineering: I think we've always found that there is going to be a huge curriculum shift here from just writing content to writing good prompts. Prompt engineering, of course, is one of the areas which does appear to be gaining strength and where the most probably the budget is going to end up landing in.

The other thing that comes to my mind, of course, when we talk about skills is to understand how to build on partnerships more because at the end of the day, public relations is about human connections. Where you would want to put your eggs, which basket do you want to put in, and then also understanding about how much are you understanding the responsible use of AI. The skills around responsible use, ethical use, understanding around how to build partnerships, more strategic roles, and good writing of prompts. I think that's where the direction is going to land up in.

Antony Cousins

There is a strategic shift, though, in the last ten years, maybe more. As an industry, we've been saying, got to hire more data literate people, got to train for data literacy, hire more data scientists, get good at data visualisation. I think that's one thing actually we might shift back in the other direction, which is we can now focus on more of the softer human relationship-building skills, which, as communicators, we tend to gravitate towards, I think, rather than the hard numbers-based aspect of those roles, because effectively we all just became data scientists with the use of ChatGPT. I think that's an interesting shift that we were trying to crowbar, like data science and hard mathematical skills, into a human relationship-focused industry. I wonder if that's going to shift back in another direction now.

Andrew Bruce Smith

Yeah, and that's a fantastic point. I was guilty as anybody, quite frankly, over the last 10 years at exhorting PR professionals everywhere to increase their levels of data literacy. I would still argue you still need to have some, but no question, certainly with the arrival of ChatGPT, and specifically, ChatGPT Plus' capability of acting as a 24/7 data analyst for you. You can literally just give it a spreadsheet of data. Historically, a PR professional may say, "Well, I've got the data, but what do I do with it? I don't have a PhD in statistics, and quite frankly, I haven't got the time to figure this out."

Whereas now, it's like having a conversation with the data. Give it the data, and you don't even need to tell it what it is. It tries to figure it out for you, and it says, what do you want to know? This, I think, shifts it more to being able to articulate and think about asking the right questions. The historical barriers to the PR professional exploiting data insights, I think that's actually quite exciting. To your point, Antony, if it frees up more time and we can redeploy that time to the things that actually do add more value to increase our time spent on the human elements.

I was reminded of, actually, it was Alan Turing actually said this back in the 1940s. He had this distinction between, as he termed it, ingenuity and intuition. He was even speculating then - will there be a world in the future where the technology is so advanced that it literally can do everything and there literally is nothing left for the human being to do? Even he said, no, there is always going to be a role for the human beings, always going to be something that we have that the AI doesn't. I guess it's trying to get that balance right.

If we just move it on to talking about the technology, because I'm a bit of a tech head, but this is a question I often get asked. There are so many tools out there. Andrew, have you got any advice about which ones we should be looking at? PR professionals always want to know, are there any that I don't have to pay any money for? What are the brilliant ones that are free? If I have to pay, which ones should I investigate? Any views that either of you have on specific tools and technologies?

Dr. Swati Virmani

Andrew, I think you would have been best placed to answer this question yourself. Also, having done that report, which I believe came in February-.

Andrew Bruce Smith

February. Yes, that's right.

Dr. Swati Virmani

Yeah. February, 2023. The panel did a report mentioning that there are more than 6,000 tools. I wouldn't say there's one best practice here. That can't be because if you find one best solution, then there's nothing left exciting about the problem. I would say that don't put all your eggs in one basket. There could be a different tool for a different task. First of all, find the tasks for which you need help with. Where do you think it's going to make you most productive? Let's say for content creation, of course, the most favourite ones. As you were mentioning, Professor Ethan Mollick, I think he put a post on LinkedIn saying that there's nothing that has come as close to ChatGPT around content creation.

But then there are other things like meeting assistance or summarisation. You could have Fireflies or Otter for that. You've got image creation, Midjourney, but DALL-E is now integrated with the GPT-4 Turbo. You've got Claude for summarisation and Perplexity for the AI-assisted search. I wouldn't say there's one specific one for anything. It's always best to try different tools. Sometimes, you would be surprised with the output it generates.

Andrew Bruce Smith

Excellent. Antony, what's your thoughts?

Antony Cousins

Well, to make the appropriate declaration. Of course, I was CEO at Factmata. It was an AI startup in this space. We got acquired by Cision. Our technology for Factmata is now being integrated into Cision. But to make this useful for listeners, though, I would say that the approach I'd recommend is, first off, to do that analysis of what are the tasks we're actually doing. Break that down first and start from there. I would question the scale, question the speed, question the reliability, and question the sustainability of that business. We'll see acquisitions, we'll see integrations.

I would say first things first, make sure you understand your processes. Then, probably my next best piece of advice is to go on Fiverr, go on Upwork, find yourself a back-end engineer, and just experiment with GPTs and your own data. Use that as a testbed for hacking something together. Is this what we want to do? Is this how we want to work? Then go and see, is there a provider out there that does that, or is it on the roadmap of one of our bigger players? It's a great way to experiment. I love this experimentation. As

an entrepreneur and as a tech person myself, seeing what people are creating on those GPTs is super exciting. We've all just become product people as well as data scientists.

Andrew Bruce Smith

Yeah, well, I guess my observation on that is that I shamefully can't remember who said it, but natural language is now the programming language de jure. What is computer code? It's language designed to get the machine to do something for you. But if you could just tell it to do what you want it to do, and it does it for you, well, that's tremendous. That really does democratise the capability of people to get the machine to do before them.

I agree. It's fairly obvious, isn't it? You just look back over the last few weeks. You've mentioned the OpenAI Dev Day, just announcement after announcement, new feature capabilities. Claude, to that point, had the so-called largest context window, the ability to ingest and feedback huge amounts of information. Then, of course, GPT-4 takes over that crown, saying, hey, we've got 128K windowed now. Then, last week, Claude said, oh, we're the kings again because we've got a 200,000 context window. It would seem unwise to try and predict a winner at the moment. Of course, we haven't mentioned Google once yet, which is astonishing when you consider that, actually, Google is pretty much responsible for all of this.

The now infamous research paper, *Attention Is All You Need*, was the starting point for the explosion in the transformer technology approach. Google Gemini, which, as I understand it, has now been pushed back for release until early next year, and yet the word on the AI street suggests that it is going to be very, very impressive, certainly more impressive than Bard. We have all that to await us.

I guess I'd just like to move on the conversation to other questions that have patently arisen over the last 12 months in the PR community, and I have no doubt they're going to continue to be asked. That's around issues such as ethics and legal implications of the technology. Not using it, but the output from AI tools. I'd be extremely interested in both of your perspectives on the ethical and the legal question, of course, with the caveat that none of us here are legal professionals.

Dr. Swati Virmani

First of all, I'm reminded of if you've watched the *Lincoln Lawyer* series on Netflix. I was re-watching it. I remember there was a case where he brings a witness who takes the fifth. Then one of his dad's friend says, "You get an A-plus for strategy, but you get a D minus for ethics there." There you go. You might have the best output, but it may not be ethical. It comes from the fact that AI's need for data conflicts with the whole principle of personal data, privacy, and confidentiality.

Often, there comes times when people say that you use placeholders such as company A or pseudonyms or something or the other. But then there's always a risk that AI tools could be misused to spread misinformation disinformation. The use of AI tools is not just about the tools themselves or showing what the tool can do but it involves a professional responsibility here to leverage AI in the most effective way. What comes to me is the ethics guide that the panel generated, where we suggest a principle-based approach to ethics rather than a rule-based approach.

What it means is that you pick the ethical principle in play, and then you make a decision-making tree to arrive at the most ethical decision. Where we say the key principles could be around what's the best in public interest, whether we are respecting diversity, about integrity, honesty, transparency, or privacy. I often get asked the question, so what if you put personal data?

You don't realise, but you're breaching confidentiality here, or there's some legal consideration that's happening in the background. Those type of things are often ignored when we just are so awe struck or overly enthusiastic with the output that it generates for us. Especially within public relations, I think PR professionals should be aware of the potential bias, and they have the responsibility to ensure that this bias is not amplified through the output or through the content that it generates here.

This is the whole argument between or the conflict between time-saving versus generating something that's productive, ethical, and more responsible. I believe this is a massive issue. Perhaps going forward, the developers are taking this into consideration. I hope so. I would like to think so.

Andrew Bruce Smith

Sure. Antony, what are your thoughts on that?

Antony Cousins

Over the course of the last year of talking about this problem, I think I've come to the conclusion that it is a massive issue, and it isn't. Because, effectively, nothing has changed. You are still responsible for everything you put out into the world. If you use AI to automate a part of your process, you're still responsible for the output. If you use AI to give you advice on certain actions, you're still responsible for the output. Nothing has actually changed. Nothing has removed your responsibility as a public relations professional or as a human in making good choices when it comes to ethical and moral responsibilities.

Yes, if you ask AI to give you an approach, it may recommend one that is common sense, one that is business sense. It may be commercially feasible, but is it ethical? Is it moral? That's something that humans will still have to do. I think there are some implications once we get to the full automation of some of these workflows, and this is what I've been talking about for the last year is engaging conversations to figure this out. Making sure that there is the right amount of human agency in each of those tasks. What is the appropriate amount of human agency?

Let's take an example. You've got a press release, which maybe you've used AI for, or you've written it as a human, it doesn't matter. You then get that typical task, which is I need some social media posts to advertise this news. Using AI to automate the creation of social media posts, bearing in mind it's entirely based on the content within the press release, do you need... I'm not saying this is a good idea, but do you need to have a human review each of those posts, or could you just automate that process? It's an interesting question.

I think I would like to assume you have enough time to look at the social media posts and check that they're accurate and check that you're not imprinting from your press release any additional bias or discrimination in that content, and that you're not leaving out some stakeholders or some groups. But do you need a human to look at that? That's just one example. Where else are across the whole communications workflow do

we need to have humans in there making sure that the output is correct? I think that's the interesting set of discussions.

But ultimately, at the moment, and at least for the short term, you're still responsible for what you put out into the world. The fact that OpenAI in the Dev Day announced that they were going to provide indemnification for any of their customers who get caught in copyright because of the output of their models following Google and Microsoft's footsteps is little benefit to the reputational damage that you would have if you're Pepsi and you end up plagiarising a Coca Cola ad campaign. The reputational damage is still yours to take on your shoulders. I say it is a big issue. We do need to talk about what the appropriate level of human agency is in these processes, but ultimately, nothing has changed.

Andrew Bruce Smith

Yeah. I was thinking about CIPR. There's a professional code of conduct which has always said you must behave in an honest, open, and transparent manner. In that sense, you're quite right. That is still the case and will always remain the case. On the ethical issue, in fact, we said this in the report that the AI and PR panel published back in February. Yes, there's the obvious implications for AI for the work that PR professionals do, but there is a potentially emerging role of communicators advising their organisations or their clients about the reputational implications of the use or thereof of AI.

We've already seen throughout this year where organisations have deployed AI, and it seems fairly obvious that communicators were not involved in that decision-making process. If we consider, shall we call it, the corporate psychodrama, OpenAI itself, a few weeks ago, it seems absolutely evident that there was absolutely no involvement from the communications team there advising about the implications. If you're going to take this decision, what are the communication reputation implications of that decision? Have you thought that through? As I say, I wasn't there, so I don't know the full details. But it seems a fairly safe bet they weren't.

That principle of PR professionals providing that sage counsel to their clients and organisations I think it's a hugely important one. As we said back in February, and I still

say it, it requires a level of AI literacy and understanding to be able to provide that sage counsel. On the issue of bias, I think we all know this now, large language models are inherently biased just by the very nature of the original data that they are fed on. Yes, all the AI companies are doing their best to mitigate against those biases, but I suspect that's pretty much an ongoing battle.

At the same time, and this goes back to the point, I think, Antony, you made, ultimately, it's human beings that are responsible for what you do with the output from the AI. In fact, you can mitigate against the bias by what I've been describing all year as mindful prompting. If the output comes back, in your view, as biased, well, you mitigate against the bias by providing it with a more specific prompt or a brief. I've preferred that term all year, that basically you're giving a good brief to the AI and the more specific and clear you are about what you want it to do for you, the role that you want it to take on, the audience for whom the output is intended and the outcomes that you're hoping for through the use of that AI.

Actually, that should be second nature to comms professionals. You're simply applying standard techniques for developing a successful comms campaign to the principle of the prompt. I'm extremely mindful now that it doesn't feel like it, but time, inevitably, when we talk about AI and comms and PR races by. I think we've reached that point where I have to ask the inevitable question around your thoughts and views of the next 12 months and possibly beyond. I'd absolutely welcome your extremely insightful perspectives on what does the next 12 months hold for PR professionals, and I guess, specifically, any tips and advice that you can give to people to try and attempt to navigate what I strongly suspect will be even more turbulent and interesting times ahead.

Dr. Swati Virmani

Probably the first tip would be that overcome denial if you're still in that mode. Adapt. Sometimes, the fear comes from the fact that people are concerned about job loss, and that's why they're resistant to change. But it's going to come after you if you're not going to try it. My first, of course, tip would be to give it a try. As I said before as well, there's no one best practice. Use of tools depends on your own voice, your own style. Follow

that. Keep following that, but use the AI tool, as Antony said in the beginning of the recording as well, that use it as a copilot for yourself. Don't just work independently.

In terms of future predictions, I hope whatever happens, AI becomes more aware of the ethics, and we become more aware of the ethics and responsible use and use it in the best way forward for everyone. But what I am probably looking forward to is, or pardon my ignorance, if it's already there, the autonomous agents, which would be capable of operating independently and performing tasks. Something that I see here is also, there's a huge sector going, which is the influencer economy.

Put these two together. What could happen in the future is that autonomous agents could analyse the content that they create, the interests that these influencers generate, and look at their engagement metrics and probably suggest to us which are the best candidates for collaboration. I'm not sure whether this is an idea that is already in the pipeline.

Yeah. Yann LeCun, who is very well-known in the AI world, he heads up AI research at Meta Facebook. He refers to it as objective AI purely on the basis that he thinks the term autonomous AI is going to scare the pants of people. But at the same time, he thinks it's still quite a good idea. I think you're absolutely right. I think next year, the whole autonomous objective AI space and development is definitely one to keep an eye on. That's great. Antony, what are your thoughts for the next 12 months?

Antony Cousins

Yeah, I was going to go to autonomous agents. What we've seen this year is the core capabilities. We're not looking at a huge jump in technical capability to get to autonomous agents. What we're looking at is greater integration. I think, as I said, it takes time. If you think this year is big, it's nothing because we're going to start to see those integrations in a big way in big products with huge potential time savings and output benefits next year.

I'd say that the integration of Microsoft Copilot into our daily working. Word, Outlook, the things we use all day, that's going to be huge. People, I think, outside of our space because I think sometimes it's also easy to think that this is mainstream, everyone

knows about it. But if you actually take a step back, it's largely knowledge workers who have been dealing with this. I think Microsoft will make it even bigger when everybody who uses Microsoft in any profession will start to see some of those benefits and some of the capabilities. The other big one that I think will make it even bigger than that is when we start to integrate the large language models into the assistants.

Alexa, Siri, Google Assistant. When you can start to have the conversation you have in written text with ChatGPT, but with your assistant all day long, I think that's going to make it really make sense to people even outside of knowledge work or office work or those environments. This will bring it into construction. This will bring it into other areas of the industry, as well as into our homes and to people who aren't working. Imagine your child having a conversation with Siri or Alexa. Imagine your elderly relative who maybe has issues with loneliness or things like that. It's going to bring it to a whole bunch more people in loads of really interesting ways. I think those are things which will make it feel even bigger than it has been this year. Not a leap in technological capability, a leap in integration.

That's obviously where we are, Cision, thinking about how we do that. The products we release next year, to quote Sam Altman, are going to seem quaint to the products we've got this year and last year.

Andrew Bruce Smith

Absolutely excellent. What can I say? We could clearly go on for another five hours, quite frankly. You can't possibly cover the entire landscape in one go, but we've given it our best shot. But just to end the podcast, my huge thanks to both of you, Antony and Swati. Can't think of two people I wouldn't have brought on here to try and attempt to provide that excellent perspective of the last 12 months and get our respective digital crystal balls out to predict the future. Thank you so much for being here today. I hope, dear listeners, that's been a productive use of your time as well, listening to this. Look forward to getting your feedback through all the usual digital channels on this session. Thanks again.

Antony Cousins

Thanks.

Dr. Swati Virmani

Thanks, Andrew. Thanks, Antony.