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**How Artificial Intelligence is shaping content production in corporate communications –
an analysis of preparedness, challenges, and opportunities
on the agency and corporate side**

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Abstract

Since the release of OpenAI's chatbot ChatGPT, the debate surrounding Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a central topic for businesses and society. Generative AI applications can produce human-like content, thus gradually finding their place in corporate communications. With the ever-growing volume of content across digital channels and the demand for precise audience targeting, the application of AI offers unprecedented possibilities to address current communication challenges. A comprehensive literature review reveals gaps in the current state of research in this area, justifying further research due to the constant evolution of the topic. This research, therefore, aims to examine to what extent the current use of AI is shaping content production in corporate communications, drawing a comparison between communication practitioners from companies and agencies.

The theoretical framework establishes a technical foundation, elucidating AI functionalities and their interconnectedness. This knowledge is then applied to corporate communications, examining its implications within the context of digital transformation, and outlining the current state of potentials, limits, and impacts on communication practitioners. Considering ethical aspects and legal boundaries as current obstacles in AI implementation, this analysis forms the basis for the methodological section. Qualitative expert interviews are conducted to evaluate the preparedness, opportunities, and challenges assessed by 13 experts representing 12 organizations.

The key findings reveal that communicators expect benefits from the application of AI tools, such as outsourcing repetitive tasks or providing an additional source of creative inspiration. Knowledge gaps and the ongoing need for training emerge as the main challenges in successfully implementing AI tools. Both agencies and companies see clear advantages in AI, with companies saving costs by outsourcing tasks and agencies saving time, leading to market advantages. A future development towards customized AI versions can enhance output and align with specific corporate language requirements. Legal uncertainties, particularly regarding data protection and copyright, as well as ethical issues, underscore the remaining significance of human oversight in the content production processes. Agencies face a transformation towards offering more consultancy services, while creative agencies solely focusing on content creation might be replaced by AI.

This research provides an overview for practitioners and researchers, relating the current developments in AI. Additionally, it offers guidance for handling and approaching generative AI applications, paving the way for further exploration of AI's role in shaping communication processes and its implications for the profession in both corporate and agency environments.

Key words: Artificial Intelligence, corporate communications, content production, ChatGPT

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
API	Application Programming Interface
B2B	Business-to-Business
B2C	Business-to-Customer
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CNN	Convolutional Neural Network
CO ₂	carbon dioxide
CommTech	Communication Technology
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DL	Deep Learning
DNN	Deep Neural Network
dpa	Deutsche Presseagentur
EU	European Union
f.	following page number
GAN	Generative Adversarial Network
GPT-3	Generative Pre-Trained Transformer 3
GPT-4	Generative Pre-Trained Transformer 4
IT	information technology
LLM	Large Language Model
l.	line
ML	Machine Learning
NLP	Natural Language Processing
PR	Public Relations
RQ	Research question
RGQ	Research guiding question
SEO	Search Engine Optimisation
USP	unique selling proposition
VAE	Variational Autoencoder

List of Auxiliary tools

Product name	Usage	Retrieved from
DeepL	Translation German-English	Free version, https://www.deepl.com/translator
DeepL Write	Optimising grammar and spelling in individual text passages	Free version, https://www.deepl.com/write
trint	Support for interview transcriptions	Paid service, https://trint.com/de/home
MAXQDA	Coding of text passages for content analysis	Free version, https://www.maxqda.com/de/produkte/ maxqda-standard
ChatGPT	Translation German-English Finding synonyms Optimising grammar and spelling in individual text passages	Free version, https://chat.openai.com/
Canva	Creating figures and tables	Free version, https://www.canva.com/
Citavi	Literature management and bibliography	Free version, https://www.citavi.com/de/download

1 Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing the rapidly changing digital landscape and playing an increasingly significant role. This technology has already permeated everyday applications and has already become an integral part of automated speech recognition, image processing software, e-commerce, and personalized content, that makes it indispensable in various domains. In November 2022, the US-based company OpenAI launched the AI-powered chatbot ChatGPT, which is considered "the latest pinnacle of the steady development"(Teubner, Flath, Weinhardt, van der Aalst, & Hinz, 2023, p. 95) of AI applications. With the newly accessible form of generative AI, the societal debate about AI and its transformative power is reignited, offering organizations in all industries unprecedented possibilities. Just two months after its release, ChatGPT garnered 100 million users, setting new records for user engagement. Surpassing the achievements of popular social media platform TikTok, which took approximately nine months to reach the same user milestone (Hu, 2023), ChatGPT has captured the attention and enthusiasm of a vast user base. Since then, providers have been consistently releasing new tools, and the possibilities of AI applications seem boundless. Even Google has been working on its own AI offerings, although initially hesitant to release this disruptive technology due to potential reputation concerns (Elias, 2022). Following the release, the company announced plans to launch over 20 new AI products in 2023. Additionally, they revealed intentions to enhance their search functionality by incorporating a chatbot (Smith & Waddington, 2023, p. 18). The uniqueness of this development lies in the fact that most applications are made accessible to everyone through open-source platforms, eliminating the need for expensive IT infrastructure or extensive technological expertise (Lang, 2022, p. 177). This development has opened up new possibilities for individuals and organizations to leverage the benefits of AI without significant barriers. With an intuitive user interface, this digital technology has gained immense popularity and interest, paving the way to fundamentally transform creative and artistic work through automated content generation in text, image, or video formats (Raabe, 2023). Aspland links this development to the rise of "thoughtomation", in which not only manual tasks are automated, but also human thinking capabilities can be outsourced to machines (Aspland, 2017, p. 8), highlighting the potential for AI technologies to not only perform routine tasks but also to simulate human cognitive processes, such as decision-making, problem solving, and creative thinking.

AI applications play a crucial role in driving digital transformation and can be compared to "the creation of the microprocessor, the personal computer, the Internet, and the mobile phone," as described by Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates in a current AI-statement (Gates, 2023). It shows that AI applications have the potential to be the key in navigating this transformative era marking the

relevance for businesses, as "entire industries will reorient around it. Businesses will distinguish themselves by how well they use it." (Gates, 2023).

The communication industry is facing the challenge of serving demanding media landscapes while improving efficiency and scalability in content creation. Additionally, building a trust relationship with stakeholders is crucial, as it can be undermined by the misuse of digital technologies. This study aims to generate an overall understanding of the use of AI and to identify potential opportunities and challenges for communicators on both the corporate and agency sides.

1.1 Problem definition and relevance

AI models are capable of generating human-like output, which has sparked enthusiasm and curiosity in the field of corporate communications. AI application has the potential to streamline processes of content creation, writing, and strategic audience targeting. As these advancements directly impact fundamental elements of the profession, the influence of AI in this industry, as well as scepticism regarding its implementation, is particularly significant. Communicators are facing the question of how far tasks can be delegated to AI or whether machines can eventually replace human labour altogether.

While previous advancements in automation primarily outsourced manual labour, with the emergence of tools such as ChatGPT, the issue of outsourcing creative and intellectually demanding tasks is gaining prominence. While agencies and strategic consulting firms are often considered more agile and closely attuned to the latest trends due to the nature of their services, departments within companies face organizational and structural barriers that need to be overcome before new workflows can be established. It becomes evident that there is a lack of concrete implementation structure, leading to misunderstandings and complicating the work of communicators. Therefore, it is crucial to address these challenges and establish clear implementation frameworks to facilitate the successful integration of AI technologies in the field of corporate communications. The growing interest in AI sheds new light on digitalization and raises questions about the implementation and impact of role distribution within the workforce. This leads to the question of how communicators navigate the current wave of AI applications and to what extent it serves as a catalyst for rethinking content creation processes. The emergence of AI tools in content creation also poses ethical implications and privacy concerns. As media landscapes become increasingly complex, efficient and effective working practices become essential. However, communicators face numerous challenges in this fast-paced and deadline-driven environment, particularly in the midst of a transformation towards more digital tools. Furthermore, the opaqueness of the underlying structures of AI systems and the lack of in-depth knowledge about information technology create "AI Anxiety" (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018, p. 736),

leading to inherent scepticism and fearful handling of the capabilities of such AI tools and bringing ethical principles to the forefront of implementation. The challenge for communication practitioners is to define the level of human oversight and to enable a responsible and effective implementation of AI technology while carefully considering its impact.

A review of the current literature reveals that the application of AI in the context of corporate communication is only marginally addressed. Furthermore, due to the timeliness of the topic and the widespread use of ChatGPT, there is a need for further research in this area. The literature review on the topic of communication and artificial intelligence highlights the following research gaps, which form the basis for the following study:

Brockhaus, Buhman, and Zerfass examine the influence of digitalization on corporate communication and the consequences of communication technologies (CommTech) as digital infrastructure in their research. In their study, a quantitative survey was conducted with 2,664 communicators from 48 countries. The results indicate that a significant part of the surveyed communicators perceive the importance of digitalization, but the ways for implementation and digital maturity are still lacking and are still not reflecting the perceived importance (Brockhaus, Buhmann, & Zerfass, 2022, p. 15). It is identified that the exploration of the socio-technical perspective and the examination of CommTech as "practiced technology" within the field of corporate communication represent a research gap. The importance of investigating the interplay between technological and human factors is underscored, highlighting the need for further research to bridge this gap and gain a deeper understanding of the implications for effective communication in the digital age (Brockhaus et al., 2022, p. 22).

The research paper by **Galloway und Swiatek** explores the role of AI in the field of public relations (PR). The authors discuss the potential benefits of AI in PR and address the ethical considerations surrounding AI to deal with bias in algorithms. They emphasize the need for PR professionals to develop a deeper understanding of AI technologies and highlight the evolving role of AI in the PR industry as a valuable tool in their strategic communication efforts. According to the researchers, the development of AI should not be solely reduced to automation, but also emphasize the economic and societal impacts (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018, p. 734). Since the publication was conducted at a time when AI development was still in its early stages, the paper could only draw superficial conclusions about the potential depth of the impacts of AI technology on PR work (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018, p. 738). This opens further research opportunities to reevaluate the variety of its practical applications and to understand how communication professionals perceive the current development in other areas of communication work. While current research focuses primarily on the automation of

communication work, the present research aims now to turn the attention to AI in the disciplinary field of content production.

Zerfass and Hagelstein, in their cross-national quantitative study among 2689 European communication practitioners, focus on the impact of AI on communication management and the perception of potential challenges and risks. The study emphasized the need for communicators to immerse into the topic of AI and be aware of their responsibility in integrating such tools within their work field (Zerfass, Hagelstein, & Tench, 2020, p. 385). The study aims to provide initial insights into the introduction of AI in communication management (Zerfass et al., 2020, p. 387). This creates a research gap that requires further empirical investigation into the practical application of AI in communication, considering new factors and expanding the scope as the research is based on the year 2020. The launch of new AI tools, such as ChatGPT, has led to a heightened awareness of AI topics in both the business and social contexts, and serves as a starting point for more in-depth research.

In contrast, **Banholzer's** research analyses the use of AI applications as a solution for the challenges of contingency and complexity in communication. Through an analysis of pilot applications, it is highlighted that the use of AI goes beyond mere technological implementation and leads to new strategic orientations that can also impact the external stakeholders' environment (Banholzer, 2020, p. 23). The author points out that the term AI application is often used in a broad sense as an "empty signifier" (Banholzer, 2020, p. 43) calling for further research to narrow down its scope. As AI solutions for communicators, particularly in automated text generation, move beyond data-driven analysis and start to reshape the communication profession itself, research can focus on the impact of content production. Another area for research is not only to observe the changes within a company's communications department, but also the impact on agencies as stakeholders that can be influenced by the implementation.

The identified research gaps highlight the growing importance of AI in content production, which presents intriguing questions and significant opportunities for further research and exploration. The above-mentioned insights can complement the research question of this study on a theoretical basis.

1.2 Objectives and structure

The aim of the study is to reflect upon and clarify the extent to which AI shapes content production in corporate communications, taking into account the current preparedness for its implementation and an assessment of potentials and risks. The objective is to establish a comparison from the perspectives of both corporate communicators and agencies. Resulting from the problem, its research relevance and interest, the following research question (RQ) arises:

RQ: To what extent is the current development of generative AI shaping the process of content production in corporate communications on both the company and agency side?

To support the research questions, five subordinate guiding questions (RGQ) are developed, which dissect the research subject into thematic parts of an assessment of preparedness for AI, its associated potentials and risks, as well as an analysis of changes in the company-agency relationship.

RGQ1: In what ways are generative AI tools currently being utilized in content production workflows?

RGQ2: To what extent do communication practitioners and their team feel prepared for the usage of AI in a rapidly evolving environment?

RGQ3: In which areas do the interviewed experts identify potential opportunities for leveraging artificial intelligence in content production?

RGQ4: What are the specific concerns of experts regarding the implementation and use of artificial intelligence in content production?

RGQ5: How do companies and agencies perceive their future collaboration and division of responsibilities in content creation?

Following the introduction, the second chapter of this thesis establishes the theoretical framework. The literature review adopts a funnel approach to provide an overview of the existing research. Chapter 2.1 introduces technical definitions, explaining the interconnectedness among the terms Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Deep Learning, and Generative AI. Chapter 2.2 provides an in-depth analysis of AI applications within the corporate communications sector. It starts by exploring the digital transformation, followed by the concept of CommTech, which is narrowed down from the point of view of AI applications in the field of communication. In this context, the study delves into the development, possibilities, and limitations of AI implementation, along with its potential impact on human work processes. Moreover, ethical considerations are addressed in a chapter 2.3, along with an encompassing review of the prevailing legal boundaries in chapter 2.4, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Chapter 3 initiates the empirical section, detailing the methodology, research approach, design, sampling strategy, expert selection, and interview guidelines. The data analysis method is outlined before the chapter concludes with a reflection on research ethics and data quality. Chapter 4 presents the findings, categorized into overarching themes based on the interview guidelines. Followed by Chapter 5, the results are contextualized with the theoretical framework, addressing the research guiding questions and providing an answer to the overarching research question. The thesis concludes

with a reflective closing, a critical evaluation of research limits, and the identification of opportunities for further research.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Technical Definitions

In the following chapter, the related terminology of AI is outlined, thereby establishing a fundamental understanding of its functionalities, layers, and conceptual relationships. As a working definition, the definition of the European Commission can be applied. According to Article 3 and Annex I of the EU AI Act, AI is referred as software developed on the basis of machine learning approaches, logic and knowledge-based approaches or statistical approaches that "can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, generate output such as content, predictions, recommendations, or decisions, influencing the environments they interact with" (European Commission, 2021, p. 39). The following figure unveils the different layers of AI with the aim to clarify the connection between the subsequent definitions. In the following chapters, the term AI is used inclusively and is limited to the approach of machine learning. Therefore, no distinction is made between other complex AI dimensions. Since the present research pursues a perspective from communication and business science, the simplified use of the term should enhance the understanding outside the expertise of information technology.

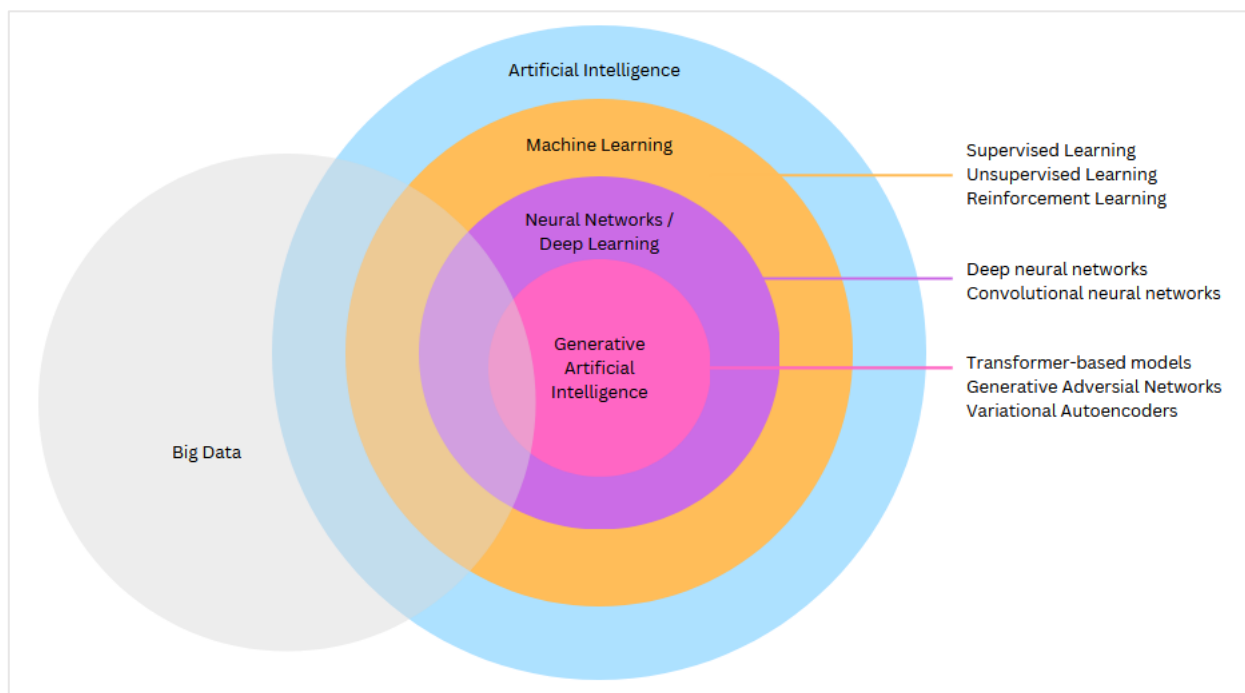


Figure 1: Artificial Intelligence landscape, own representation

2.1.1 Artificial Intelligence

Depending on the respective understanding, different attempts to define AI can be found in the literature. It can be classified as a sub-field of computer science, which according to Banholzer is about researching and further developing automated processes to enable a machine to solve problems

on its own (Banholzer, 2020, p. 7). Arweck characterises AI as a key technology and part of our everyday lives that, due to its highly complex and advanced software, works similar like cognitive functions and can thereby perform activities that normally require human labour (Arweck, 2023, p. 449). Jarrahi et al. argues in a similar way, putting human intelligence in relation to AI and highlighting the differences. According to this author, an AI system can take up experiences in order to learn and adapt to new situations, which is why it cannot be attributed solely deterministic and mechanistic features, since intelligence is the decisive factor (Jarrahi, Lutz, & Newlands, 2022, p. 2). Unlike the aforementioned characteristics of AI systems, humans have the ability to understand and analyse, as well as to conceive and create new ideas. Moreover, humans possess the capacity for analytical thinking, enabling them to derive connections from different environmental situations. Associated with this is a "hard-to-imitate emotional, social, and cooperative intelligence" (Jarrahi et al., 2022, p. 2) that remains intact even in unfamiliar circumstances, diverging from AI applications. This necessitates higher-level thinking and intuitive decision-making processes, which are considered unique human characteristics. However, through emerging algorithms, AI can surpass human capabilities in terms of speed and scale when it comes to technical and problem-solving requirements. In summary, AI intelligence is primarily based on task-centered execution, allowing it to evaluate and process correlations in data, but unlike human intelligence, it cannot recognize causal relationships (Jarrahi et al., 2022, p. 2). According to Beckett, a degree of autonomous action has to be defined, according to which there is either the possibility that the machine acts autonomously without human influence and thereby frees itself from human intelligence in order to generate its own learning algorithm (Jarrahi et al., 2022, p. 2), or supports the human being by offering a choice of alternative methods of action (Beckett, 2019, p. 16).

Jarrahi et al. distinguish between human-augmented *AI* and augmented human intelligence. They define *human-augmented* AI applications as systems that are continuously trained and thus improved by human input, with the aim of getting as close as possible to the level of a human performance. Humans act as mediators and prerequisites for the training of AI. In contrast, *augmented human* intelligence is an extension of human capabilities, with the AI acting as a support system and thus not aiming to replace humans, but to enhance them. These two concepts can be combined, resulting in *hybrid intelligence* (Jarrahi et al., 2022, p. 3). The status of ideal efficiency from both advantages lies between the two areas, where humans and machines benefit from each other. Here, AI systems function as 'sociotechnical systems' that are both based on human advancement and at the same time can complement human capabilities. In this case, the machine aims for the most accurate human-like execution possible, while the human learns to understand the concept of machine decision-making (Jarrahi et al., 2022, p. 4). Kerr et al. identify the human component as an essential link for today's AI applications, meeting the ever-increasing demands of new technologies, as such systems can be used

on the human side to extract sufficient value from data and use it in detail (Kerr, Barry, & Kelleher, 2020, p. 2).

Similar to the division according to Jarrahi et al., another way to distinguish between AI types is to sort them according to strong and weak intelligence. According to Banholzer, weak AI is considered an application that is feasible from a technical standpoint and has already been implemented in some software solutions. It aims to create problem-solving algorithms in a specific limited task area (Smith & Waddington, 2023, p. 6). In contrast, the approach of strong AI strives to be able to reproduce human thought processes and to imitate human behaviour (Banholzer, 2020, p. 8).

Another term applied in this context is AI solutions. According to Banholzer, no distinction is made between narrow or weak AI, but the term is understood as an umbrella term that describes the complexity of the system. AI solutions are hence applications that can process data with the help of higher computing power, recognise patterns and correlations and thus quickly provide data as a basis for further decision-making (Banholzer, 2020, p. 8). This opens up a wide range of possible uses for AI, depending on the area of application. Following the definitional approaches above, Galloway and Swiatek focus on the application practice in the context of public relations. Accordingly, in this field AI can be understood as technology that can carry out human ways of thinking and functions in the field of public relations and can thereby collaborate independently or together with communication practitioners (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018, p. 735). This is closely linked to the definition of “automated journalism”, whereby textual content such as news articles is created by machines based on previous data sets. Nevertheless, there is no clear consensus on the extent to which machines and humans act together, whether those systems require human action during or only on the setting up of the computer application (Sirén-Heikel, Leppänen, Lindén, & Bäck, 2019, p. 49).

2.1.2 Machine Learning

In the differentiation of terms, AI is considered as an overarching concept, while Machine Learning is defined as a subcategory (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018, p. 736). The term is often used synonymously with AI and is the most common application of its technology (Banholzer, 2020, p. 8). Machine learning describes an IT system that can recognise and process patterns in existing data sets. The performance increases automatically through previous experience, without having been explicitly programmed in this direction (Smith & Waddington, 2023, p. 14). The system learns by observing large amounts of input data. It concentrates on the learning rules that are provided in this material (Sirén-Heikel et al., 2019, p. 49). This results in an initial pre-experience in the form of a data set that has to be available for machine learning applications. According to Banholzer, however, it is typical among all learning algorithms that it is not clear on the human side what exactly is being learned from the data (Banholzer, 2020, p. 8). Smith and Waddington emphasise in their definition that

through the learning process the system is able to make decisions or predictions without requiring human command (Smith & Waddington, 2023, p. 14).

The objective is to achieve an optimal prediction, which can be obtained by constant feeding of data samples. A distinction is made between different learning algorithms: supervised learning, unsupervised learning and reinforcement learning (Anantrasirichai & Bull, 2022, p. 591). Russell and Norvig distinguish these terms as follows: In *supervised learning*, the relationship between input and output is analysed in such a way that the machine can generate an appropriate output even for previously unknown input, enabling it to make predictions or classifications for unknown data. In *unsupervised learning*, patterns are learned from the input without feedback, allowing input examples to be grouped into clusters. With *reinforcement learning*, the task for the computer program is to complete tasks for which it is either rewarded or punished, with the strategy being to optimize performance in order to maximize rewards (Russell & Norvig, 2021, p. 671).

2.1.3 Deep Learning

Deep Learning is a subcategory of Machine Learning. It is the newest field of research in the area of AI and offers interdisciplinary application possibilities (Lang, 2022, p. 202). In the programming process, *deep artificial neural networks* (DNNs) are employed, which consist of layers of neuron collections that are interconnected and can learn through patterns and relationships in the data. Additionally, *convolutional neural networks* (CNNs) can be distinguished, which are also inspired by the human brain function. The different layers pursue a filter function that can be overlaid on the output and thus perceive certain features until a nearly identical representation of the original input after multiple processes can be achieved (Anantrasirichai & Bull, 2022, p. 592). They are particularly useful when data needs to be analysed across multiple dimensions, such as in image and object recognition or natural language processing tasks (Lang, 2022, p. 206).

The concept of *artificial neural networks* derives from an artificial connection of neurons, which, although not using actual biological neurons, is inspired by the intelligent behaviour of the human brain in the form of machine learning models (Lang, 2022, p. 203). Thus, data is fed into the input nodes of the networks, which then propagate the data through the nodes of the underlying network layers until it reaches the output nodes. During this process, the system learns to adjust the parameters of the network through observation, aiming to achieve more effective results with each training iteration (Vesala, 2023, p. 353). In this way, the neurons can control how information is transmitted through the network from the input nodes to the output nodes by weighting each connection (Lang, 2022, p. 202). The process is particularly beneficial for image generation, as the parameters are adjusted in such a way that gradually the results of the target image can be achieved.

At the core of deep learning and machine learning processes are large and complex datasets, commonly referred to as *Big Data*. According to the definition by Smith and Waddington, Big Data is characterized by the "3 V's": **volume**, which refers to the large amount of data that is required; **velocity**, which relates to the speed of data transmission; and **variety**, which highlights the diverse range of data types. By processing Big Data, as described above, patterns and correlations can be uncovered, leading to valuable insights for data-driven decision-making processes. (Smith & Waddington, 2023, p. 10). Kerr et al. emphasize that without AI and Big Data, the maximum value of data cannot be extracted. They perceive the utilization of AI and Big Data as an ongoing progression within the realm of expanding data collection in society, economy, and online communication (Kerr et al., 2020, p. 2).

2.1.4 Generative Artificial Intelligence– Open AI's ChatGPT

Generative AI is a form of deep learning that can generate new content based on user inputs called prompts, which can be provided in the form of questions, textual commands, or image data. It aims to produce outputs that closely resemble human-generated content (Lim, Gunasekara, Pallant, Pallant, & Pechenkina, 2023, p. 2). It can create outputs across multiple media formats, like images, videos, animations and audio content. In contrast, *discriminative AI* is designed to classify and differentiate outputs based on predefined criteria but cannot create its own content (Russell & Norvig, 2021, p. 779).

In November 2022, the company OpenAI revolutionized the perception of AI and its accessibility beyond the area of extensive IT expertise with the launch of a generative AI tool called ChatGPT, based on its GPT-3 technology. According to Open AI's own mission statement, it aims „ensure that artificial general intelligence benefits all of humanity“ (OpenAI, 2023a). The organization was founded in 2015 (OpenAI, 2015) and has since been recognized as a competitor of DeepMind, which was acquired by Google LLC. One of the major investors in OpenAI is the tech company Microsoft. *GPT-3* is an abbreviation for Generative Pre-trained Transformer. The name encompasses the description of the AI application, which is a third-generation, autoregressive language model based on deep learning methods. Its primary goal is to generate text elements that are as human-like as possible. According to Floridi and Chiriatti, this system starts with the input of a prompt, which contains the command input, and based on that, it can generate word sequences, codes, and other data. Through this application, for instance, it is possible to predict word sequences statistically (Floridi & Chiriatti, 2020, p. 684), whose output can hardly be distinguished from human-generated text. In March 2023, OpenAI expanded its offering with the introduction of the GPT-4 Plus variant. This paid service provides an enhanced functionality of the ChatGPT language model with greater accuracy,

finer nuances, and compressed response results. Additionally, despite being trained primarily on text, the product has the capability to process and interpret visuals (Holtermann, Jahn, & Scheuer, 2023).

There are three distinct application models of generative AI: transformer-based models, generative adversarial networks (GAN), and variational autoencoder (VAE). **Transformer-based models** as ChatGPT are used in Natural Language Generation (NLG) applications, that require a massive amount of training data and can only generate new content based on that material (Sirén-Heikel et al., 2019, p. 49). This form of *conversational AI* relies on neural transformation models that utilize self-attentive processes and therefore allows the model to address different parts of the input separately, while enabling it to process longer data sequences such as texts (Russell & Norvig, 2021, p. 919). With applying the idea of self-attention, transformer-based models can also take into account the context of the processed input, allowing them to recognize related words and concepts (Bouschery, Blazevic, & Piller, 2023, p. 141). This significantly enhances their efficiency in text processing. A significant development in this field is the emergence of *Large Language Models (LLMs)* based on this transformer architecture. They combine a large-scale approach with vast amounts of textual training datasets. As a result, this system can understand, manipulate, and generate texts at a level comparable to human capability. (Teubner et al., 2023, p. 95). According to Teuber et al., OpenAI achieved a breakthrough with the introduction of ChatGPT, as it provided the general public with access to an intuitive and user-friendly interface of a Large Language Model (LLM) for the first time. This made the technology available not only to selected experts but also expanded its application to a wide audience, making ChatGPT a "killer application to showcase LLM capabilities" (Teubner et al., 2023, p. 96). Due to its simplicity of use, it quickly became a tool of "cultural sensation" (Thorp, 2023, p. 313). The uniqueness lies in the implementation of a reinforcement learning technique besides supervised and unsupervised algorithms, where human feedback has been incorporated into the language model in the form of feedback. This enables the creation of a conversational interface, similar to a chatbot (Thorp, 2023, p. 313), which made it a pioneering model that captivated the general public. According to Teuber et al., the current version features approximately 175 billion parameters and was trained on around 570 GB of training data, including books, newspaper articles, internet entries such as blogs and social media content, as well as Wikipedia (Teubner et al., 2023, p. 96).

While transformer-based models primarily excel in language processing, the generation of images and videos is embedded in a further application model. **Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs)** are characterized by two components: the generator and the discriminator, each with distinct structures. The input to the generator network starts randomly, while the input set of the discriminator network consists of training data and the final output image from the generator. The generator's task

is to create a fake image, while the discriminator assesses and estimates whether the received image is real or fake. The competing nature of the two networks leads to the generator being forced, through training iterations, to generate a completely new image that becomes increasingly realistic from iteration to iteration. After several modules, the discriminator perceives the initially generated image as real, marking the end of the training process. Thus, the aim of producing a completely new and realistically-looking, yet fake image based on a dataset of real images is achieved (Lang, 2022, p. 213). The technology of GAN is popular in the creative sector due to its ability to produce realistic outputs with minimal errors (Anantrasirichai & Bull, 2022, p. 593). In this context, Newman emphasizes that the uniqueness of generative AI applications lies not only in the more efficient execution of a process but also in the ability to create something entirely new from existing assets (Newman, 2023, p. 35).

Another form of application are **Variational Autoencoders (VAEs)**, which are based on statistical methods. Using the probability distribution of mean and variance, VAEs aim to capture the input data in such a way that new data can be generated. Encoders classify the input data, convert them into variables, and combine them in the trained neural network to form new results in a space called the latent space, which are then reconstructed in the decoder. By selecting points randomly from the statistical distribution of the latent space, a new sample can be created. The model is trained to minimize the reconstruction difference between input and output, enabling the generation of new data samples that can be applied in text and image domains (Rocca, 2019).

It can be observed that AI tools cannot be strictly assigned to a single application process and display blurred boundaries in the application of various machine learning algorithms. As a result, different approaches and technologies come into play, the relationships of which are explained above. This serves as a technological background knowledge for reference to AI tools in the subsequent research. With various machine learning and deep learning applications existing, this research focuses specifically on deep learning applications in the field of generative AI, with a focus on creative practices in language and image processing. The term AI is used synonymously in the following lines, but it is acknowledged that AI also has applications and functions beyond generative applications.

2.2 Artificial Intelligence in the Corporate Communications Environment

The following chapter establishes the connection between Artificial Intelligence and its practical application in corporate communication. It begins by outlining the role of corporate communication facing digital transformation in the business environment, which serves as a background knowledge for subsequent analysis. Following, it describes the ongoing transformation and digitalization processes. This is especially examined from the perspective of the success factor "CommTech", before concluding with the use of AI applications and their possibilities and limitations in corporate communication. This research follows an interdisciplinary understanding of the role of corporate communication, which is why literature about Information Technology and Artificial Intelligence in areas such as Public Relations, Editorial, Journalism, and Marketing Communication is utilized.

2.2.1 Corporate Communications in the digital transformation

Corporate communication combines various disciplines that result in a diverse distribution of roles. Rosenberger and Niederhäuser examine the roles and tasks of communication practitioners in the digital transformation and cluster them into four areas of action. In the (1) *operational* domain, the focus is on implementing communication strategies in general. In addition, communicators pursue an (2) *educational* mission, which involves enabling and informing employees outside the communication department to prepare them for consistent communication with stakeholders. The (3) *business* role revolves around the effective development and evaluation of communication strategies. Finally, (4) *reflective* activities are part of corporate communication, which involve monitoring the environment and verifying whether the company's vision, mission, and strategy continue to align with the needs of the market situation and stakeholders (Rosenberger & Niederhäuser, 2019, p. 74). Panda et al. breaks down these areas of action into specific tasks in daily operations and refers to strategy development, campaign setup, writing and distributing press materials, as well as dealing with crisis situations (Panda, Upadhyay, & Khandelwal, 2019, p. 197).

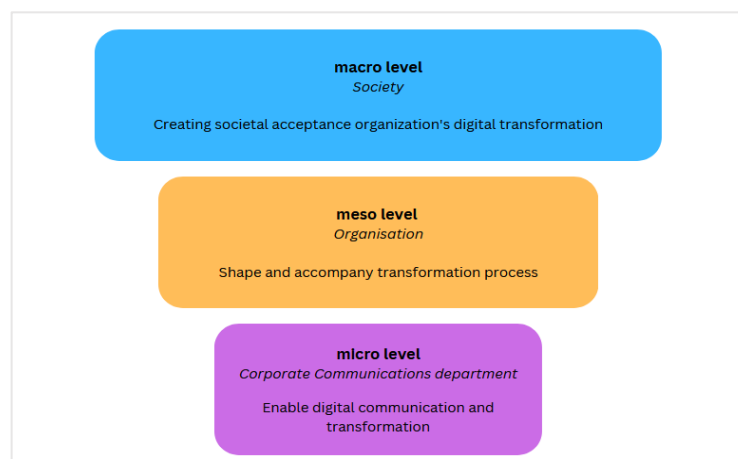


Figure 2: Roles of Corporate Communications in digital transformation, own representation based on Rosenberger & Niederhäuser, 2019, p.78

As illustrated in figure 2 above, Rosenberger and Niederhäuser consider the roles of corporate communication on three levels: micro, meso, and macro level. The *micro level* represents the level of the communication department and aims to enable digital communication, thus playing a pioneering role in the organization's transformation. It is crucial to align the elements of strategy, structure, culture, and technology in a way that supports and accelerates a holistic transformation. This process entails redefining interfaces across different departments (Rosenberger & Niederhäuser, 2019, p. 81). The *meso level* broadens the perspective to the entire organization. Here, corporate communication is responsible for shaping and accompanying the transformation process. This includes advising the management level, enabling effective communication among employees, and moderating internal communication formats (Rosenberger & Niederhäuser, 2019, p. 82). Lastly, the *macro level* encompasses the understanding of the role outside of the organization and highlights the task of creating societal acceptance for the digital transformation of the organization. This includes the spokesperson function as a voice to the public, explaining the transformation, as well as taking responsibility, demonstrating innovation capability, and promoting transparency (Rosenberger & Niederhäuser, 2019, p. 85).

The digitization of corporate communication has not only led to reputation-enhancing measures for achieving recognition but also assigns communication practitioners a significant role in terms of relationship quality, building networks beyond the organization, and interacting with stakeholders. This forces cross-functional interactions and results in an audience-based alignment of communication content (Banholzer, 2020, p. 14). Community management thus becomes an essential component of corporate communication. Therefore, in a digital environment, it is not only about successful collaborations with individual external stakeholders but rather about the technical evaluation of digital datasets, which in turn serves as a basis for automated and personalized communication to reach as broad a target audience as possible (Bachmann, 2019, p. 326). Challenges such as societal differentiation, constantly evolving network structures, an orientation towards project-based structures, and volatility are ongoing drivers of digitization. Additionally, social media platforms play a role in changing and consolidating the attention structures of recipients. They need to be effectively addressed and integrated alongside traditional media formats (Banholzer, 2020, p. 20). A study conducted in 2023 among 130 communication departments in Switzerland concludes that the majority of respondents, with 73.8% in self-assessment, rate their progress in transformation as mediocre, while only around 5% report a poor process (Rosenberger, Niederhäuser, & Krämer, 2023, p. 30). This highlights that the importance of transformation has already permeated communication departments, yet there is still room for improvement.

Brockhaus and Zerfass have developed a framework for identifying the tasks of communication departments that can be supported by digital technologies, highlighting three dimensions. Firstly, there are *primary activities* that are directly linked to value-creating communication activities from an organizational perspective. These include managing communication processes on internal and external stakeholder sides, as well as internal advisory functions. Furthermore, *functional support activities* ensure the smooth execution of primary activities, such as aligning communication with business goals, conducting monitoring activities, and digital asset management. Thirdly, *generic support activities* form the basis for daily workflow and extend beyond the scope of the communication department, ensuring workflows in other departments as well, such as human resource management (Zerfass & Brockhaus, 2021, p. 208). According to these authors, the latter dimension can be summarized as "OrgTech," while infrastructure elements for carrying out primary and functional support activities include computing and network resources, referred to as "CommTech" (Brockhaus et al., 2022, p. 8).

2.2.1 Use of CommTech as a success factor

While the literature on the digitization of communication departments and agencies has primarily focused on individual digital technologies such as social media, the term "CommTech" summarises the development in an overarching way. This term not only emphasizes the various use cases of digital technology but also highlights their management along the stakeholder journey (Brockhaus et al., 2022, p. 2). Page shapes this term, defining CommTech as „a new Communication discipline that uses digital tools, techniques and data to enable personalized engagement with stakeholders for content creation and delivery, management and analysis of events and feedback, data visualization and more.” (Page, 2020, p. 4). According to this perspective, communication is no longer solely focused on shaping the perception of an organization in its favour and strengthening its reputation to influence stakeholder behaviour. It goes beyond that by expanding the role of corporate communication to communicate what stakeholders themselves believe should be communicated. It aims to bridge the gap between perception and reality, significantly increasing the level of authenticity (Page, 2020, p. 8). The data obtained via CommTech can assist in successfully positioning an organization externally by capturing the current perception it has. By adopting the classification of tasks complemented by digital technologies as proposed by Brockhaus and Zerfaß (Zerfass & Brockhaus, 2021, p. 208), CommTech can be utilized to support with primary activities such as communicating with internal and external stakeholders. It can also simplify functional support tasks such as content planning and monitoring activities (Brockhaus et al., 2022, p. 6). By leveraging CommTech and utilizing data-driven approaches, organizations can enhance their ability “to turn communication campaigns from intuition into a science” (Page, 2020, p. 4).

According to the literature, the integration of CommTech as the interface between communication and technology becomes a critical success factor (Brockhaus et al., 2022, p. 2; Rosenberger et al., 2023, p. 9) and modernises the digital communication infrastructure by introducing new software (Rosenberger et al., 2023, p. 7). While the neighboring field of marketing has widely embraced the concept of "MarTech", the term "CommTech" is not yet common among communicators. (Zerfass, Moreno, Tench, Verčič, & Buhmann, 2022, p. 43). The European Communication Monitor 2022 addresses the topic of CommTech evolution as well and evaluates the current level of interest in the concept and the assessment of potential changes in the work environment among 1,771 communication practitioners in 48 countries. The study reveals that only about one-third of communication professionals in Europe are actively engaging with the CommTech evolution, and only a small majority expects it to significantly impact their daily work or the communication profession as a whole. This is due to many communicators feeling overwhelmed by digitalization and the ever-increasing number of tools available. They still have limited confidence in the ability of data-driven tools and AI applications to facilitate or enhance the efficiency of their work (Zerfass et al., 2022, p. 43). However, digital trends are still listed among the top 10 issues in the field of communication, with around 23% of respondents highlighting the issue of "using data/or algorithms for communication" and another 21% considering more digital communication with stakeholders important (Zerfass et al., 2022, p. 73). This indicates a fundamental shift towards increased use of AI while a further engagement can be expected.

2.2.3 Development of Artificial Intelligence

The constantly evolving technological innovations in media and communication technology are reshaping the landscape. It results in a need for openness to new discursive spaces and media landscapes, new digital public spheres, and target audiences with changing communication demands. AI holds the promise of another significant leap forward, supporting the work of communication practitioners and shifting the focus from data collection to value creation through meaningful integration and utilization of data (Rosenberger et al., 2023, p. 9).

Brockhaus et al. identify that the change process affects four key areas: technology, tasks, structure, and people. It is essential to balance both the technological and social challenges in this transformation process. This complex interplay of these four factors not only presents challenges but also offers potential for restructuring, alternative work routines, new workflows in group processes, changes in hierarchical levels, and adaptations of new work processes (Brockhaus et al., 2022, p. 11).

The interest and expectations surrounding AI can be traced back to the post-World War II era. According to Kerr et al., the current interest in AI and its emerging research possibilities can be

regarded as further growth period, characterized by a rather positive societal perception (Kerr et al., 2020, p. 2) and as an entrepreneurial solution to the current challenges.

Facing contrary perspectives, AI is not the cause of accelerating this transformation process. Instead, according to Banholzer, AI should be seen as a solution to address the challenges in a rapidly evolving landscape (Banholzer, 2020, p. 41). The use of AI in corporate communications is not only accompanied by the implementation of a new technology, but rather by a change in strategic direction and a shift in thinking and behaviour (Banholzer, 2020, p. 23). According to Banholzer, AI is the answer to hypercompetitive market structures that companies have to deal with in the perception and valuation of communication content. Coupled with the constant pressure for innovation and the fast-paced nature of audience attention, AI solutions provide the technical response to this challenge (Banholzer, 2020, p. 20). Galloway and Swiatek also consider changed user behaviour as a challenging factor, as digital assistants such as Siri or Google Assistants, as well as personalized content, are changing the decision-making process of recipients. Consequently, the public relations task of communication can no longer solely focus on convincing the target audience but has to find new ways to reach and engage with target audiences (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018, p. 736). With the launch of ChatGPT, users now have a new opportunity to quickly access information in a chat format, providing them with a new form of digital opinion formation.

2.2.4 Implementation of Artificial Intelligence

To effectively respond to ongoing innovations, a profound cultural transformation is required, which not only changes the way of working within a communications department but also shifts the understanding of roles among those responsible in this change process. According to Rosenberger et al., Chief Communication Officers are increasingly becoming "Chief Culture Officers," advocating for digital transformation (Rosenberger et al., 2023, p. 8). Similar assessments are provided by Smith and Waddington, who highlight the need for communication practitioners to expand their skills. This goes beyond personal technical proficiency in handling AI but rather emphasizes the role of advisors who navigate the application of AI and provide insights into reputational implications (Smith & Waddington, 2023, p. 17). Bachmann even refers to an opportunity for competition with data engineers in this regard, as the boundaries between technology and communication may become blurred depending on the extent to which they are utilized for persuasion and influencing the public (Bachmann, 2019, p. 325). With the implementation of AI different future roles emerge in corporate

communications, which can be according to Aspland summarized into five areas, referred to as STAKE. Figure 3 elucidates the future professions and their tasks.

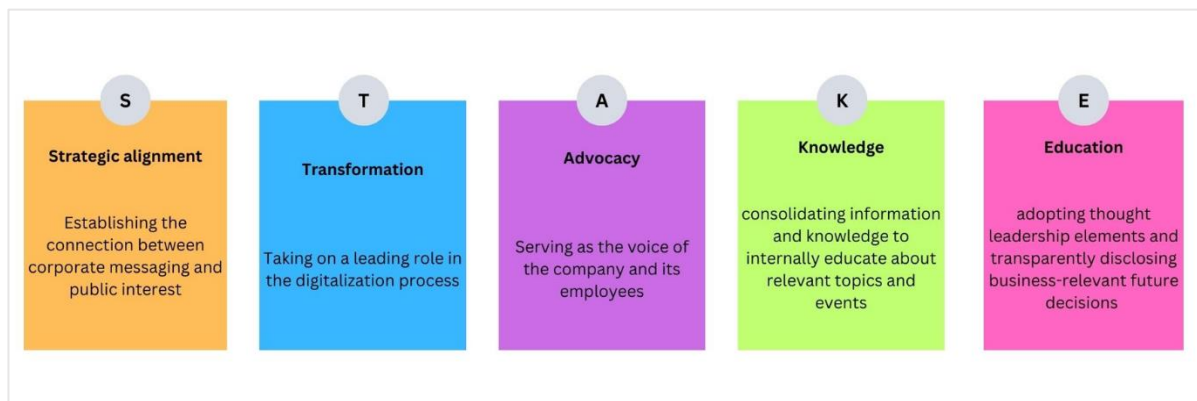


Figure 3: Adapted roles of corporate communication in transformation, own representations based on Aspland, 2017, p.21

It becomes apparent that several task areas have to be covered by communication practitioners. The potential applications of AI solutions in the field of corporate communication and agency work are categorized into five subcategories by Anantrasirichai and Bull: content creation, information analysis, content enhancement and post-production workflows, information extraction and enhancement, and data compression (Anantrasirichai & Bull, 2022, p. 591). This paper adopts this approach and specifically focuses on the use of AI in the generative domain, particularly in the area of **content creation**, also referred to as "artificial creativity" (Vesala, 2023, p. 352).

While AI applications are well-known and established in the marketing and eCommerce sectors, their use in the field of journalism ranges from content personalization to enhanced image and video search so far. However, there are already initial attempts at automated content production (Arweck, 2023, p. 449). According to Stray, there are already successful journalistic use cases in the field of document classification, speech analysis, data processing, lead generation and identification of important news (Stray, 2019, p. 1081). Journalists and editorial teams are considered external stakeholders of corporate communication, and as such, they indirectly influence the performance of corporate communication. This influence becomes more significant as AI applications are increasingly used for "research, aggregation, selection, and weighting of information" (Banholzer, 2020, p. 11), which is why the journalistic approach is also taken into consideration in this research.

Following, the findings of various research reports in the field of journalism and communication were analysed and compared to create a comprehensive understanding of the current status quo. In 2019, Beckett conducted a study on the current state of AI implementation in 73 news organizations across 32 countries. The analysis revealed that approximately 63% of the respondents did not have an AI strategy in place (Beckett, 2019, p. 39). Four years later, Newman's Trend Report 2023 concluded that among the 303 participants from media companies, 39% continue to experiment with AI while 28% have already integrated AI into their daily operations (Newman, 2023, p. 5). Focusing on the

corporate communications sector, also growing interest in AI applications becomes evident. According to the Global CommTech Report by the PR consultancy Purposeful Relations, which surveyed 329 communications professionals from December 2022 to March 2023, 34% of in-house corporate communication practitioners and 43% of agencies anticipate increased investments in generative AI in the coming year (Bruce & Bailey, p. 26). However, the findings by Virmani et al. in 2021 showed that among the 280 respondents, nearly 43% indicated having a limited understanding of AI and being less confident in this field (Virmani & Gregory, 2021, p. 3). In summary, these research studies from recent years highlight the high relevance of AI for communicators and media practitioners, with further exploration anticipated. However, it is evident that the implementation of AI in preparation and strategy is still incomplete, indicating a gap between recognition and execution. Moreover, the relatively low user adoption rates indicate that AI has not yet been widely integrated into communication workflows, indicating the need for more awareness and education regarding AI's potentials and risks.

2.2.5 Possibilities and limits in content production processes

While the overall tone regarding AI usage in current literature is predominantly positive, there are different approaches evident when it comes to evaluating the potentials and limits of AI implementation in the corporate communications field. Different priorities can be observed in the recognition of AI advantages. Due to similar content structures and close stakeholder connections, the research conducted on the journalist and editorial side can also be partially applied to content creation processes in the corporate and agency environments in this research. In general, Banholzer sees the use of artificial intelligence as a means to respond adequately to the challenges of information overload, competitive opportunities, volatility, and network structures (Banholzer, 2020, p. 13).

According to Beckett, tasks in the field of content production can be specified as content creation, editing, platform- and channel-specific format development, text, image, and video creation, as well as repurposing and preparation of information for different target audiences. In the author's global survey on journalism and AI, the majority of respondents identified potential use cases for AI in content creation, in addition to newsgathering and news distribution (Beckett, 2019, p. 20). Newman also mentions possibilities in the area of summaries, text-to-speech applications and automated creation of subtitles and mentions. News executives are also hoping to be able to follow up on content recommendations and thus optimise their reach (Newman, 2023, p. 37). Image generators like Midjourney and DALL-E can provide illustrations for articles and posts (Newman, 2023, p. 36) and expand the possibilities for visual representation by providing illustrations instead of common stock footage or elaborate media photos. This enables more efficient content production and empowers journalists to navigate news overload and connect information in a way that creates relevant,

audience-oriented, and engaging content. These benefits can also be translated to the work of communication practitioners. Specifically, in the PR field, the application of AI technologies can improve the measurement of communication efforts and align them with the company's mission, corporate language, and goals. AI also holds potential in crisis management, transcribing audio into text, early detection and tracking of media trends, and social media management, as it can automate various work processes (Panda et al., 2019, p. 197).

Indeed, the facilitation provided by AI tools creates room for generating enhanced content. AI can be leveraged to enhance authenticity and build trust with audiences (Beckett, 2019, p. 89), which supports the target group approach. Panda et al. also highlight the advantage that "with AI, PR professionals can use their precious time more creatively for relationship building, strategy development, trust building, and storytelling" (Panda et al., 2019, p. 197), as well as „focus on their time and effort on generating more valuable written content” (Smith & Waddington, 2023, p. 12), while AI does not replace human input but rather provides advantages in the content creation process by freeing up time. The benefit of tailored communication, as noted by Hermann, lies in the combination of persuasive, audience-centric messaging and data analysis of consumers' digital footprints. According to Hermann, this large-scale data can generate awareness and understanding of the external stakeholders' requirements, enabling communicators to deliver situation-specific and context-aware content. (Hermann, 2022, p. 1262). Furthermore, the use of AI tools for workflow optimization does not require significant additional resources as AI applications often can be accessed for free or at relatively low costs (Smith & Waddington, 2023, p. 13). This accessibility is particularly beneficial for smaller corporate communications, as it allows them to leverage AI technology without the need for significant financial investments.

However, there are also critical voices on the use of AI that highlight the potential risks and challenges associated with implementation. Various concerns can be identified in the literature. Illia et al. address three challenges of automated content creation: Communicators are confronted with the spread of disinformation through manipulating social bots, posing the risk of fake agenda setting through AI applications. The quality of content can significantly decline, leading to rapid dissemination of easily created content, which can hinder stakeholder communication in the long run (Illia, Colleoni, & Zyglidopoulos, 2023, p. 206). In the long run, organizations may risk compromising their authenticity and losing the trust of their stakeholders. Galloway and Siwatek also emphasise the importance of a human connection between companies and stakeholders, noting that transparency and authenticity will decrease depending on the quality of AI-generated content. As this directly affects a company's reputation, human-produced content remains crucial, as a foundation of trust can only be established between humans rather than algorithms (Galloway & Siwatek, 2018, p. 737). A reorientation of the

human-computer role in the content area needs to be realised, as due to current fast-moving developments and constantly improving tools, the boundary is becoming increasingly blurred and it is still open to what extent a major social influence is exerted through an active role in the design of communication material (Illia et al., 2023, p. 202). According to Stray, a human double-check remains necessary to accurately detect ethical and data protection challenges early on. Derived from the challenges of automated content in investigative journalism, ad-hoc messages in corporate communication should also be crafted in a situation-specific manner. Often, these messages contain complex information that requires meticulous precision in their formulation (Stray, 2019, p. 1094). Therefore, human involvement remains crucial to ensure accuracy and appropriate handling of sensitive topics in corporate communication.

Beckett lists seven main challenges retrieved of responses from participants of a journalism AI survey. These challenges include the willingness to invest in this technology and the necessary financial resources. Additionally, a lack of technical understanding and certain scepticism towards AI-based applications are mentioned. Within a company, structural issues such as access permissions or other technical gaps within departments can arise, along with a general lack of knowledge about potential opportunities and risks. This is often accompanied by a lack of an AI strategy from management, which can be attributed to a lack of time to prioritize this topic in the company's workflow (Beckett, 2019, p. 47). One can assume that these challenges also occur to some extent in corporate communications departments.

2.2.5 Impact on human communication professions

With the rise of AI applications that closely mimic or even surpass human capabilities, communicators are forced to consider future role and task distribution as well as to draw conclusions for potential AI implementation. In summary, most researchers assume a shift in tasks, while entire job profiles can only be partially replaced. Nevertheless, as the use of AI is still in early stages of development, the approaches found in the literature can be categorised as being speculative, as they are based on assumptions rather than concrete application studies substantiating the actual capabilities of AI and the associated impact on professions.

Banholzer refers to the application of AI as an opportunity to relieve communication practitioners, allowing them to utilize their freed-up capacity for creative and strategic tasks (Banholzer, 2020, p. 28). Similarly, Aspland argues along a similar approach and categorizes future processes of the technology into "create, help, inform, publish, and streamline," while envisioning a role for humans in "building, researching, advocating, influencing, networking, and strategy" (Aspland, 2017, pp. 18–19). This suggests that AI can assist in various operational tasks, allowing communicators to focus on activities that require human expertise and strategic thinking. The shift is therefore reflecting in

analysing and adapting existing work processes rather than creating new technology-oriented roles (Beckett, 2019, p. 45). Beckett's highlights that most organizations are still in the early stages of adopting AI, primarily gaining an understanding of the current situation and defining future steps to achieve their goals. Beckett criticizes the concept of "creative disruption" associated with the use of AI in the content field and emphasizes that in the field of journalism, there are limited time and financial resources available to apply and experiment with AI without a clear strategy (Beckett, 2019, p. 37). This can also be applied to the communication industry, as it requires a clear AI strategy and a certain mindset of efficiency for companies and agencies to benefit from it, which is why the term "disruption" is not suitable in this context.

For example, the dpa (German Press Agency) has published specific AI guidelines to address the question of AI strategy and publicly position themselves. The agency defines its engagement with AI based on five key guidelines: openness, human autonomy, legality, technical security and transparency and promotion of usage (Raabe, 2023). One can refer to the dpa-approach as an exemplified reference for a specific strategy.

By establishing concrete strategies like the above-mentioned criteria, AI can be applied as a supplement in communication work. However, the introduction of such technological innovations does not happen "in a vacuum," but is based on an interplay of corporate culture, habits, management structures, infrastructure conditions, and socio-economic factors that significantly influence the extent of AI deployment (Sirén-Heikel et al., 2019, p. 49). By delving deeper into the underlying reasons and motivations, AI has the potential to expand its capabilities beyond its current definition as a human task for research, if also context-related materials can be created (Sirén-Heikel et al., 2019, pp. 61–62). As a result, it becomes the responsibility of humans to verify the facts generated by AI in order to meet journalistic and editorial standards. Additionally, it is important for humans to intervene in the process of providing accurate training data for AI systems (Raabe, 2023). The human oversight and intervention play a crucial role in maintaining the reliability and credibility of AI-generated content.

Fact-checking is essential to prevent the spread of false information and misunderstandings originating from training datasets. This is crucial to mitigate the risks of reputational damage and loss of trust. Connock emphasizes that reputation management becomes even more significant with the emergence of AI tools. AI enables the quick and easy discovery and visibility of company content through targeted searches, which can be a critical factor in shaping reputation. However, it also raises the concern of cancel culture, where companies may face significant backlash. Therefore, effective reputation management becomes paramount to navigate these challenges posed by AI (Connock, 2023, p. 327). In this context, Newman raises questions about the future value of human creation as

rapidly and cheaply produced media content becomes dominant, AI-generated content commercialises news, while trust in news value and information content declines. (Newman, 2023, p. 38). The concerns raised by Newman highlight the potential consequences of the widespread use of AI in content creation and dissemination. At the stakeholder level, it is therefore crucial to continue building a foundation of trust even in the presence of AI-generated media. According to Smith and Waddington, one of the major challenges in automating content creation is the potential loss of genuine connection with stakeholders, when the use of tools takes precedence over human contact. They emphasize that this could lead to a diminished sense of interpersonal relationships, where communication relies solely on data analysis (Smith & Waddington, 2023, p. 19). The question arises as to how the quality of content can be ensured. According to Floridi and Chiriatti, there is a risk that the pressure to publish will increase due to the sheer volume of content available. This may lead to the publication of low-quality articles since the barrier to writing is lowered, and “if you can simply push a key and get some 'written stuff,' 'written stuff will be published” (Floridi & Chiriatti, 2020, p. 692). It underscores the importance of maintaining a human touch in communication and avoiding over-reliance on automated tools.

Building and maintaining trust is considered one of the main tasks of corporate communication. According to the European Communication Monitor, this aspect remains a top priority for communication practitioners in Europe, with 39.2% of respondents considering it crucial over the next five years. The importance of trust-building is particularly high in governmental organizations, ranked at 44.7% of respondents, as well as in strategy consulting firms and agencies, ranked at 40.7% (Zerfass et al., 2022, p. 73). Foldes argues that in the field of marketing and communication, human relationships are indispensable, and considers no potential for technology to replace them. He assesses emotional intelligence as a strength of human interaction and as essential to maintain genuine stakeholder interest (Foldes, 2018).

While time-consuming and standardized tasks might indeed be taken over by AI solutions in the future, the literature analysis reveals a shift towards creative and strategic tasks that continue to require human expertise. According to Teubner et al., even though widespread access to language model applications may “revolutionize the handling of written language”, the ability of communicators to read and interpret texts is expected to become increasingly important (Teubner et al., 2023, p. 98). According to Smith and Waddington, this raises the question of to which extent writing skills in the communication industry stay relevant when AI systems can generate output in seconds based on specific prompts (Smith & Waddington, 2023, p. 11). According to Floridi and Chiriatti, human skills and thinking are still required in this process, which means they are not replaced but applied in different ways to develop prompts that yield the desired results in these

applications. Communication practitioners need a strong ability to effectively "prompt and collate" (Floridi & Chiriatti, 2020, p. 691). If users are not adequately trained or familiar with the use of AI-tools, it can hinder efficiency and potentially reverse the intended productivity gains. As highlighted by Teubner et al., the benefits of using LLM tools are initially marked for users who are IT-savvy or have a strong understanding of how to effectively utilize such tools (Teubner et al., 2023, p. 98).

2.3 Ethical considerations

As the line between human and artificial intelligence becomes increasingly blurred, it is crucial to consider ethical implications and societal impact of leveraging AI in content creation. According to Arweck, these challenges do not originate from the AI technology itself but are rather linked to human behaviour in connection with AI. This is because AI precisely and accurately carries out what a human has programmed and instructed it to do. As a result, there are potential risks concerning data misuse, deepfakes, manipulation, and privacy violations (Arweck, 2023, p. 453). According to the Big Data and AI Readiness Report of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, which surveyed 280 participants globally, approximately 18% of the respondents identified ethical considerations as a top challenge for PR professionals when it comes to implementing AI tools within an organization (Virmani & Gregory, 2021, p. 17). This shows that ethical issues have not yet been sufficiently clarified.

As a result, there are several negative examples emerging in practice. The photo editing app *Lensa*, developed by Silicon Valley-based company Prisma Lab, uses face transformation technology to convert portrait photos into avatar characters resembling various art styles, aiming to look as close as possible to the person in the original photo. The app has been criticised for depicting images of female users exclusively according to traditional beauty ideals, often with disproportionate representation of body parts and discriminatory features (Becchi, 2023). An experiment by the tech magazine *TechCrunch* reveals that also content with nudity elements may be generated on the basis of previously uploaded photos (Kamps, 2022). Another example is the integration of the chatbot "Tay" by technology company Microsoft on the social media platform Twitter in 2016 that further exemplifies how AI applications can give rise to ethical issues. The chatbot was trained and developed based on user inputs, which led to the bot making racist and sexist statements. As a result, Microsoft took the chatbot offline less than 24 hours after its launch (Steiner, 2016).

These negative examples demonstrate that improper AI implementation due to ignorance and the lack of ethical frameworks has the potential to cause harm. Consequently, societal debates arise, critically questioning the usefulness of AI. According to Beckett, these debated topics can be categorized into six interconnected areas: the question of whether AI signifies financial savings for organizations or initially requires an investment, algorithmic biases, misinformation and the promotion of filter

bubbles, transparent labelling of AI and editorial decisions, the balance between artificial and human intelligence, and the significance of evolving technology companies (Beckett, 2019, p. 52). So far, ethical frameworks in the context of AI are only vaguely covered in the literature. In the following, an overview of the current viewpoints will be given.

Three approaches of a comprehensive picture of ethical principles have been identified. The multi-stakeholder forum AI4People, an initiative of the Atomium European Institute for Science, Media, and Democracy, developed an ethical framework for the use of AI with the aim of building a foundation for a “Good AI Society” (Floridi et al., 2018, p. 7). Five ethical principles developed by the European expert group aim to assist in the evaluation of ethical issues in the field of AI. They build upon the four traditional bioethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, and justice, while also incorporating an AI-specific criterion of explainability (Floridi et al., 2018, p. 21). In Hermann's approach, the principles of dignity and privacy are also included as fundamental rules of information technology (Hermann, 2022, p. 1262). In a study conducted by Jobin et al., 84 documents relating to guidelines for ethical principles in AI were examined, and an overview of the most frequently mentioned principles was compiled. According to them, the above-mentioned framework can be complemented by the principles of responsibility, trust, sustainability, and solidarity. (Jobin, Ienca, & Vayena, 2019, p. 395).

The three approaches result in a total of 11 criteria, which can be described as follows:

Beneficence. It is considered an overarching principle of ethical action. This principle emphasizes the importance of ensuring that AI technologies are designed and programmed to enhance human well-being and promote societal and individual advantages. The goal is to maximize the benefits of AI for a wide range of people, while always prioritizing human welfare, dignity, and responsible environmental practices (Floridi et al., 2018, p. 17).

Non-maleficence. This principle aims to ensure that AI applications are not abused, leading to negative consequences. Closely linked to the privacy principle, it emphasizes the protection of personal rights. Floridi et al. summarizes it in avoiding general harm, both in the undesired behavior of machines and the criminal intentions of humans (Floridi et al., 2018, p. 18). To prevent such misuse of technology, new educational standards are needed, including comprehensive training on the proper use of AI tools (Illia et al., 2023, p. 207).

Autonomy. Humans should retain decision-making authority over how they use AI tools and the actual outcomes they apply. As the use of AI involves the delegation of some human decision-making to machines, it is essential to strike a balance between human capabilities, which are exclusively reserved for humans, and the decision-making authority delegated to AI applications. The pre-

filtering of information or personalized selection through algorithmic filters can influence this balance (Hermann, 2022, p. 1268). Under the concept of "meta-autonomy" or a "decide-to-delegate" model, Floridi et al. define a continuous ability to trace and understand the delegation of tasks, ensuring to stay in control (Floridi et al., 2018, 18f.).

Justice. This principle aims to prevent discrimination and promote fairness in AI applications. It seeks to address the risk of biased outputs resulting from distorted training datasets. This bias can also arise from mass personalization algorithms that limit individuals' exposure to diverse viewpoints, leading to distorted perceptions of the overall societal picture. AI-driven content selection can reinforce discrimination, which, in turn, can further distort training datasets for content creation (Hermann, 2022, p. 1269). By adhering to this principle, AI systems strive to ensure that their outputs are fair, unbiased, and inclusive.

Explicability. It encompasses transparency and aims to address the issue that only a limited number of selected IT experts are involved in the design and development of AI applications, thereby having the ability to influence and reshape society in an opaque manner. According to Floridi et al., transparency refers to clarifying the "intelligibility" of AI systems and understanding how they function. It also involves establishing "accountability" by determining who can be held responsible for the functioning of these systems (Floridi et al., 2018, p. 21). If users refer to AI applications as a "black box", the outcome cannot be interpreted in a neutral way due to a lack of understanding (Hermann, 2022, p. 1269). According to Hermann, this criterion can be considered an enabling principle for all other ethical frameworks, as the level of understanding of each individual contributes to the assessment of other factors (Hermann, 2022, p. 1270).

Dignity. Jobin et al. emphasize that human dignity should not be overridden by AI technology, but rather a human-machine collaboration should be fostered that upholds and enhances human dignity. This requires avoiding harm and coerced acceptance, as well as clearly labelling unknown uses of AI (Jobin et al., 2019, p. 396). Clear guidelines and safeguards are necessary to prevent negative impacts on individuals and society.

Privacy. Privacy risks can occur when data is collected without the prior consent of individuals, when data is not stored or processed carefully, or when an AI system can track data back to the individual (Hermann, 2022, p. 1267). The lack of transparency regarding the data used by AI systems poses challenges in terms of data protection when not sufficiently disclosed by AI developers. According to West, there is an imbalance between data access and the value derived from it, with organizations that possess the technical and financial resources having the power to filter and control it. On one hand, the basic functioning of AI applications is a right of the programmers and a crucial element for

successful machine learning implementation. On the other hand, there is a societal desire for enhanced data privacy (West, 2019, p. 37).

Responsibility. Responsibility is based on both the ethical conduct of the user and the responsible programming of the underlying processes that can potentially cause harm. According to Illia et al., the problem lies in the fact that moral responsibility in the process of developing AI applications is distributed among various actors who cannot be immediately identified. There are hybrid forms of human and machine contributions that may have played a role in the development of an AI tool. Consequently, it is difficult to establish a universal societal expectation regarding the underlying ethical principles (Illia et al., 2023, p. 203).

Trust. This principle pertains to both trustworthy AI technology and a sense of trust from the recipients. In addition to avoiding harm, the issue of data privacy plays an important role here. Furthermore, in automated content generation, there is a risk that the level of trust between sender and recipient diminishes as communication is outsourced to AI applications, blurring the lines between different communication parties. It is therefore ethically necessary to differentiate to what extent an opinion is of human origin or whether the AI is autonomously presenting arguments, which should be transparently indicated (Illia et al., 2023, p. 206).

Sustainability. It counts as a broad interpretation of the beneficence principle (Floridi et al., 2018, p. 17) and includes the idea of environmental protection. The technology should be treated with care both during the development process and during its use in order to ensure ongoing efficiency gains and minimize the environmental footprint. Additionally, this concept includes the pursuit of a socially just society, which is why companies are encouraged to consider ethical responsibility in relation to potential role distributions and job losses due to AI replacement possibilities (Jobin et al., 2019, p. 399).

Solidarity. Similar to a social perspective of the sustainability principle, solidarity aims at an ethical approach to potential changes in the labour market. AI should be used in a way that takes into account vulnerable groups and prevents individual enrichment of sensitive data (Jobin et al., 2019, p. 396). According to Lauer, an ethical application of AI tools at the corporate level can only take place if this is also deeply anchored at the organisational level (Lauer, 2021, p. 25). Therefore, it requires a culture of solidarity within companies that understands solidarity as an overarching principle and looks inward to align ethical guidelines with their own corporate actions, rather than adopting an isolated universal solution.

Lauer criticizes the principles proposed by Jobin et al., arguing that these ethical principles entail much greater complexity and do not adequately address the structures of today's world. Given that

society is shaped by competitive markets and resource constraints, these principles cannot be adopted in isolation, but have to be adapted in a systemic manner to effect ethical change (Lauer, 2021, p. 24). This can also be applied to the analyses of Floridi et al. and Hermann. In the content production context, it means developing a deep understanding of the profession and AI challenges, and embedding the "moral compass of AI" as a fundamental concept in the communications industry (Tilson, 2017, p. 206). AI applications are taking the necessary skills of communication practitioners to a new level, enabling them to establish an ethical understanding in society through moral actions (Tilson, 2017, p. 217). In this context, Hermann introduces the concept of "AI literacy," which aims to encompass five aspects of an individual's foundational understanding: Firstly, it involves understanding how data is collected, including the methods and sources involved. Secondly, it encompasses the awareness of how data is processed, combined, or compared to generate meaningful content or draw insights. Thirdly, it emphasizes recognizing one's own human decision-making power and agency in relation to AI systems, including the ability to act upon or define goals. Fourthly, it involves being conscious of the potential for selectivity and biases in AI algorithms and outcomes, which can impact the information received. Lastly, it entails comprehending the broader perspective and influence of AI applications in society. Raising awareness among users, but also on the developer side, all the way to increasing social competence would be a basis for general interest (Hermann, 2022, p. 1270) and a framework for common ethical AI guidelines.

2.4 Legal boundaries

The question of legal framework in the field of content creation with AI applications arises when considering intellectual property and copyright, as well as in cases of defamation and privacy concerns.

In April 2021, the European Commission laid the foundation for a potential regulation of AI systems with its Artificial Intelligence Act. In their proposal paper on harmonized rules on Artificial Intelligence, they categorize these applications into three different categories, following a risk-based approach. An illustration of the allocation can be found in figure 4. They distinguish between AI systems that pose (1) an unacceptable risk, (2) a high risk, and (3) low or minimal risk. (European Commission, 2021, p. 12). According to Title II Article 5, applications that violate applicable EU law, such as fundamental rights, and can harm and manipulate individuals through subliminal techniques, are considered unacceptable. This includes vulnerable groups of people who, due to their age, physical or mental condition, are unable to assess exploitation. Examples of such applications include remote biometric identification systems and other governmental social scoring systems in public spaces (European Commission, 2021, p. 43). In Title III, high-risk AI systems are listed, which are subject to specific legal requirements. Again, a distinction is made among those high-risk applications

that are permitted but require prior conformity assessment, such as ranking tools for applicant screenings or medical devices, and those applications that are allowed but must fulfil transparency and information obligations, such as social bots (European Commission, 2021, p. 45). The classification in general is based on the purpose of the application and therefore does not solely follow a functionality-oriented approach. The requirements relate to data and data governance, documentation and record keeping under Article 12, transparency and provision of information to users under Article 13, human oversight under Article 14, and robustness, accuracy and security under Article 15 (European Commission, 2021, p. 13). All other AI applications that do not fall under these categories remain largely exempt from legal regulations and can set up a code of conduct on a voluntary basis (European Commission, 2021, p.9).

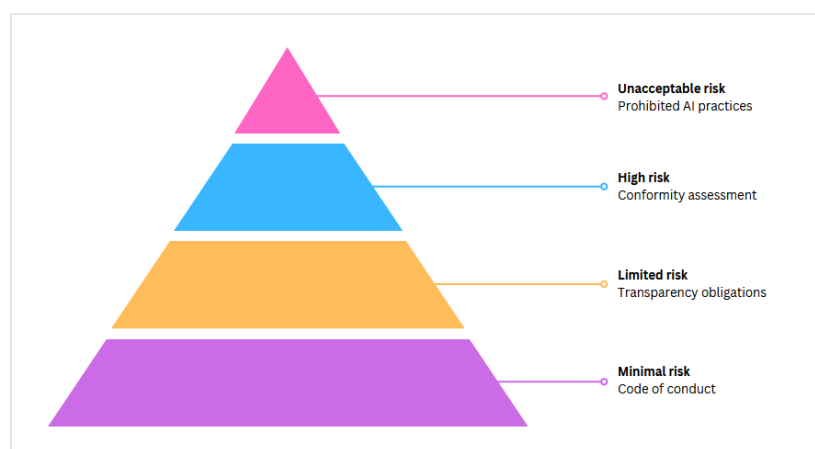


Figure 4: Classification of AI systems according to EU AI Act, own representation based on European Commission, 2023.

After the release of ChatGPT, the AI Act was further expanded in May 2023 to include generative AI systems. The expansion includes an adjustment of the general definition of Artificial Intelligence Systems, now also considering "foundation models" and "general-purpose AI systems." According to the definition by the European Parliament, a foundation model like GPT-3 is defined as "an AI model that is trained on broad data at scale, is designed for generality of output, and can be adapted to a wide range of distinctive tasks" (European Parliament, 2023b, p. 137). In the previous version, the purpose of the AI application was required to be disclosed regardless of its functionality. The definition of general-purpose AI systems now encompasses the potential misuse and exploitation of the capabilities of such systems, defining them as "AI systems that can be used in and adapted to a wide range of applications for which it was not intentionally and specifically designed," thus providing legal coverage for such cases (European Parliament, 2023b, p. 137). As stated in Article 28(b), developers are required to disclose detailed summaries of the data and materials used in the development of the AI application. This provision aims to enhance transparency and promote accountability in the development process, ensuring that users and regulatory authorities have access to information about the underlying data and materials utilized in AI systems (European Parliament,

2023b, p. 24). The aim of disclosing detailed summaries of the data and materials used in the development of AI applications is to ease the detection of **copyright infringements** and allow artists and creators to track and provide a negotiating basis when their works are used as training material. Additionally, transparency requirements will be imposed to disclose and label the use of AI for content creation. According to the accompanying press release from the European Parliament, the list of unacceptable AI applications, which are strictly prohibited, has been expanded. Furthermore, AI systems used to influence voters in political campaigns have been added as high-risk AI systems. These measures are intended to address emerging concerns and regulate the responsible use of AI in these sensitive areas (European Parliament, 2023a). In June 2023, the European Parliament voted on the elaborated version as a legislative proposal, while EU lawmakers will continue to review the new legislation.

In summary, the European model, with its categorization based on risk management, employs a range of methods, from prohibiting systems in serious cases to subjecting high-risk systems to a detailed procedure and monitoring and disclosure of transparency and information requirements. Low-risk applications, on the other hand, do not require regulation except for transparency obligations. This approach allows for a universal application in various sectors, creating an overarching legal framework for artificial intelligence systems based on the current state. However, Finocchiaro argues that this legal interpretation is not designed to keep pace with the rapidly changing and innovative environment, making it less responsive to future developments. It can be assumed that new system methods will emerge and continually increase the risk level, which is not adequately addressed from today's perspective (Finocchiaro, 2023, p. 5). This is evident in the subsequent amendment by the European Parliament to the original proposal by the EU Commission, which was already deficient due to the emergence of systems like ChatGPT. Furthermore, the high bureaucratic burden of this approach is criticized, as the classification and conformity assessment creates significant financial barriers for companies, regardless of their size and the type of high-risk AI applications they develop (Finocchiaro, 2023, p. 6), thus granting continued market monopolies a competitive advantage.

According to Ruschemeier, the legal definition of artificial intelligence systems in the AI Act proposal paper is too broad and encompasses too many possibilities. This leads to legal uncertainty, which affects users, but also system administrators. However, it can provide a foundation for further in-depth research and legal regulation in the future (Ruscheimer, 2023, p. 368). According to Ruschemeier, the classification based on risk categories takes into account the intended purpose and societal context of AI systems but does not classify them according to their impact on fundamental rights. Consequently, considering the definitions of the AI Act, the scope encompasses the fundamental functioning of many software programs, thereby lacking a necessary legal filter for

proportional violations of fundamental rights (Ruscheimer, 2023, p. 369). The approach of intended use is also questionable, as this category is subjective and dependent on the provider and user of the system. Therefore, a high-risk classification based solely on intended use may not be able to prevent potential harm resulting from misuse or incorrect usage of the system (Ruscheimer, 2023, p. 368).

One can summarize that the AI Act does not fully resolve the copyright issue related to AI-generated content. However, it aims to enhance accountability, transparency, and control over AI models. By now, generative AI applications pose challenges for legal decision-makers. For example, the stock photo company Getty Images has filed a lawsuit against Stability AI, the company behind the AI system Stable Diffusion, which generates images based on textual commands. As reported by the news agency Reuters, it is presumed that unauthorized copying of Getty Images' pictures occurred during the training of the tool, resulting in a violation of copyright law (Brittain, 2023). Furthermore, a significant increase in the number of legal challenges can be expected as a result of the rapid advancement and adoption of AI technology (Smith & Waddington, 2023, p. 18).

Hugenholtz and Quintais approach copyright in AI-assisted creative processes from an application-oriented perspective and develop a four-step model to assess whether and to what extent copyright regulations apply to AI-generated content in accordance with EU law. This concept encompasses all output created through or with AI systems (Hugenholtz & Quintais, 2021, p. 1192). The following stages need be undergone to qualify as a work under EU law: (1) Production in the literary, scientific, or artistic domain, (2) human intellectual effort, (3) creative choice, and (4) expression (Hugenholtz & Quintais, 2021, p. 1200). A creative choice as in the third stage consists of three phases: conception of the general idea for a work, execution in the form of a draft, and redaction for the final selection, editing, and finalization of the work. The following figure 5 provides a graphical overview of this approach.

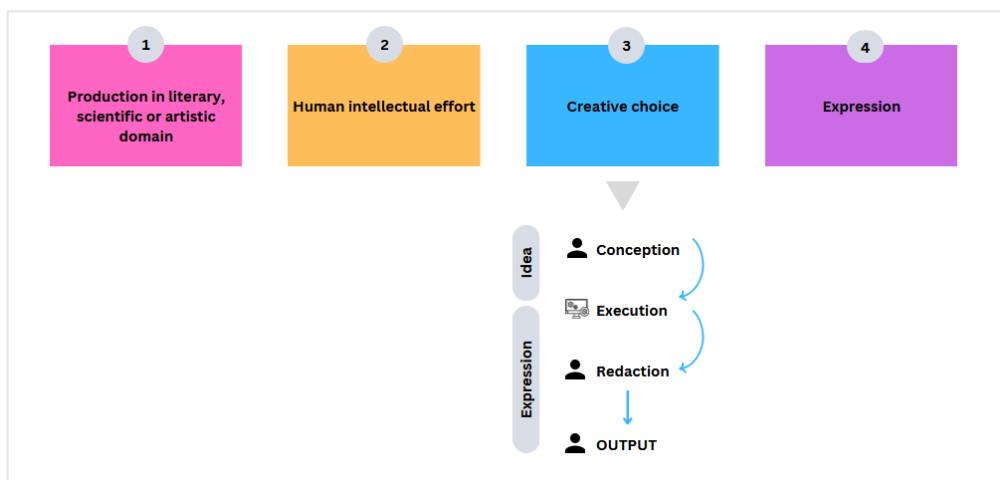


Figure 5: Copyright ownership in AI-assisted creative processes, own representation based on Hugenholtz & Quintais, p. 1200-1202

In the case of AI systems, the execution phase can be performed by a machine, while human skills are required in the conception process. According to Hugenholtz and Quintais, humans are essential in the redaction process to oversee and adapt the AI-generated output. The researchers assume that most AI users do not publish AI-generated content that has not been edited by humans beforehand (Hugenholtz & Quintais, 2021, p. 1203) and that the decision to publish is also made by a human (Hugenholtz & Quintais, 2021, p. 1204). According to their approach, if AI-generated work content is automatically executed without prior conceptualization or subsequent editorial revision by humans, it would not meet the criterion of overall human creative choice. Consequently, it would not be classified as a "work" and would therefore not fall under copyright regulations (Hugenholtz & Quintais, 2021, p. 1212). According to this perspective, in most cases, the user of an AI system would be considered the author, as long as they have contributed to the output in a creative manner. However, the system developer would not be considered the author (Hugenholtz & Quintais, 2021, p. 1213). This aligns with the American approach to addressing copyright issues in the context of generative AI. In March 2023, the US Copyright Office published a statement of policy assuming that, "[...] a human may select or arrange AI-generated material in a sufficiently creative way that 'the resulting work as a whole constitutes an original work of authorship'" (U.S. Copyright Office, Library of Congress, 2023, p. 16192, cited after 17 U.S. Code §101).

According to Connock, there are four possible contenders that could potentially claim ownership or authorship rights over AI-generated work: the source of the AI training data, the algorithm creator, the developer, or the human artist who provides the real-world content piece that the AI-generated work is based on (Connock, 2023, p. 321). Due to the various parties claiming ownership over the input data, licensing based on the training mechanism with large datasets often becomes unfeasible. As a result, there is a risk of copyright infringements, which, according to Vesala, requires a copyright exception (Vesala, 2023, p. 352). According to this perspective, reconciling customer needs such as digital privacy with the continuous advancement of AI systems by media companies is challenging (Connock, 2023, p. 326). Legal regulations therefore have to balance the benefits and risks of automated content generation (Vesala, 2023, p. 352), that can be a complex task and requires careful attention to privacy safeguards, transparency, and responsible data governance practices.

While the European Artificial Intelligence Act takes a "horizontal normative approach", Finocchiaro considers the possibility of tailored regulations for specific sectors and individual areas to specifically address their impacts (Finocchiaro, 2023, p. 2). Instead of applying a broad regulatory framework across all sectors, this approach allows for a more nuanced and context-specific regulation of AI, taking into account the specific needs and characteristics of different sectors and fields.

When it comes to addressing potential **privacy concerns**, there are other European legal frameworks to consider besides the AI Act. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Data Act, and Data Governance Act ensure data protection and privacy. The Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act focus on market monopolies and promote competitiveness (Finocchiaro, 2023, p. 3).

In the context of **defamation** resulting from unauthorized use of data or false information, there is a further challenge that needs to be addressed legally. AI tools can quickly generate and disseminate deepfakes and other forms of disinformation. Commonly referred to as “AI hallucination” (Ji et al., 2023, p. 1), the spreading of misinformation about individuals or companies can pose a legal risk. The Artificial Intelligence Act categorizes applications that violate human rights and jeopardize safety as "unacceptable" (European Commission, 2021, p. 12) and they are therefore prohibited. Further personal and data protection rights could also apply here depending on the individual case.

3 Methodology

The empirical part of the study is based on semi-structured expert interviews, which are analysed using a qualitative content analysis. In this chapter, the methodological approach is outlined as well as the research approach and design justified. The sampling strategy and the guideline are initially described before an analysis of the data quality is carried out.

3.1 Research Approach

Research approaches can be divided into qualitative and quantitative methods, with the possibility of using mixed methods, which combine both approaches. The choice of approach has implications for data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and is closely linked to the research question. Quantitative approaches are suitable when the research question is narrowly defined, and the aim is to investigate a broad dataset on a measurable basis for validity. Qualitative approaches are typically used in studies that aim to generate new ideas, approaches, and concepts, have an exploratory nature, and seek in-depth insights (Scholl, 2016, p. 21).

The aim of this research is to explore a comprehensive research question that highlights AI as a significant technological innovation. Due to the novelty of the topic and the associated processes of change, the motivations and opinions of the interview partners are to be precisely analysed, making the qualitative research method suitable. The objective of this study is to examine the implementation of AI in the field of communication, focusing on the perspectives of both businesses and agencies. The application areas of this technology are a highly discussed topic that has gained significant importance in recent months, leading to increased scrutiny across various industries. To address the research questions effectively, the qualitative approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of dimensions and motivations while considering the viewpoints of different stakeholders. By utilizing this qualitative methodology, it becomes possible to gain valuable insights beyond mere quantitative data, enabling a better understanding of the current state of human-technology interaction and the acceptance of generative AI systems. Furthermore, as the research questions are contextualized within a specific setting, it becomes feasible to consider potential nuances and relate them to the social and societal factors at play, thereby identifying context-specific challenges and opportunities. These findings and firsthand experiences cannot be solely derived from theoretical frameworks due to the dynamic nature of the subject matter and the potential variations observed in practical implementations. Likewise, these insights may not be obtained through quantitative research.

3.2 Research Design and Data Collection

In this study, the theoretical examination is complemented by qualitative expert interviews, which form the methodological approach for the empirical part. This data collection instrument is criticized

in theory for its lack of standardization and scientific rigor (Scholl, 2016, p. 27). However, it can provide valuable insights through its focus on capturing additional knowledge (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, p. 466). In the field of communication, the use of AI is still scarcely researched and subject to constant change due to the emergence of new AI tools. This approach allows for openness and adaptability. Expert interviews have therefore been chosen as a suitable method for addressing the research question.

Bogner et al. classify expert interviews into three different areas: explorative, systematizing, and theory-generating. In *theory-generating* interviews, the expert acts as a representative of a particular group and can supplement and influence their insights through their private, subjective assessment like through implicit knowledge and personal experience. A *systematizing* expert interview involves the use of an expert as a "guide" whose factual knowledge providing direct information on the research topic. This allows for a comprehensive and systematic evaluation of the subject matter.(Bogner, Littig, & Menz, 2014, 25f.). In *exploratory* interviews, the aim is to gain access to inaccessible expertise. They involve gathering comprehensive information about the context surrounding the research area, with a particular focus on technical operations and processes (Bogner et al., 2014, 23f.). It can be assumed that communicators, similar to the reflection of society, approach the field of AI gradually and experimentally. Therefore, the exploratory interview approach offers an opportunity to explore and understand possible approaches in this field and to contextualize them for a more holistic and in-depth exploration of the topic.

To establish triangulation, the approach of data triangulation is pursued by including different groups of individuals from the corporate and agency sides in the interviews. Triangulation aims to create a comprehensive picture by illuminating different perspectives to gain deeper insights into the research topic. According to Flick, triangulation is a strategy for quality assurance in qualitative research, as it helps to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings by considering multiple viewpoints and sources of information (Flick, 2005, p. 205). In combination with the findings from the theory, this should create a thorough understanding and improve the quality and significance of the results.

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the practices taken by different companies and agencies, experts will be interviewed using semi-structured interviews. This approach allows for an appropriate structure to be maintained through the use of an interview guide, ensuring comparable results. However, it also allows for necessary flexibility to respond to the direction of the interviewee's answers. Moreover, the interviewer can adapt to the conversation by addressing the individual experiences and opinions of the expert, creating an open and comfortable atmosphere that fosters authentic dialogue, leading to enriched data. Given that the terminology surrounding AI applications can be ambiguous, it is important to understand the interviewee's context and be able to ask targeted

questions that address specific circumstances. The ability to react to misunderstandings or to explore specific topics allows for a detailed analysis of the subject matter. Additionally, as a comparison of perspectives between companies and agencies is sought, semi-structured interviews enable better comparison of data points and identification of relationships. In summary, semi-structured interviews provide a balanced combination of structure and flexibility, making them suitable for the topic of AI implementation in communication.

The approach of expert interviews in qualitative research is differently assessed in literature. No clear definition on experts can be observed, but researchers define certain requirements that characterise an expert as a suitable interviewee. According to Bogner et al., the definition of an expert is not associated with a personal attribute or ability, but rather the person is addressed as an expert through the attribution of the interview request. Thus, the expert is defined based on the research interest (Bogner et al., 2014, p. 11). Additionally, an expert has the ability to apply this knowledge in an impactful way in practice, thereby significantly influencing other practitioners in their respective fields through their actions. Through a combination of knowledge and power, they become relevant to research through their "social relevance" (Bogner et al., 2014, p. 13). Meuser and Nagel emphasise at this point that the expert is responsible for the design, elaboration, implementation or control of a problem and thus has privileged access to information on decision-making processes and viewpoints (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, p. 470). In the current research, the use of AI in communication is to be investigated, which is why the term "expert" is attributed to possible participants if they have dealt with the topic of AI on a professional level or have derived recommendations for action in this field.

The researchers distinguish between operational knowledge, which refers to the expert being questioned about their own area of responsibility within an organization, and contextual knowledge, which allows them to provide information about the conditions of action of other practitioners as well (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, p. 470). According to Bogner et al., an expert can also decisively determine which perspectives and buzzwords are present in society on the topic (Bogner et al., 2014, p. 15). Meuser and Nagel recommend creating an interview under both aspects of operational knowledge and contextual knowledge (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, p. 471), which is why the selected experts from the corporate and agency field are to provide insights into the current processes and can supplement them with personal perspectives and background experience.

3.3 Sampling strategy and selection of experts

The strategy of purposive sampling was used for the selection of experts. Since a qualitative approach is being followed, participants are chosen based on specific research objectives and their experiential relevance to the topic. The focus is on obtaining in-depth information, rather than selecting participants solely based on predetermined criteria such as age or duration of experience. This

approach aims to cover a diverse and representative range of perspectives while also prioritizing unique insights that align with the research questions. In contrast, the commonly used snowball sampling method in expert interviews was not applied. This method involves asking participants for recommendations at the end of an interview, potentially leading to the inclusion of specific networks or groups of people (Bogner et al., 2014, p. 35), which might potentially bias the sample. Instead, the aim of this study is to capture a broad understanding of the communication field on both agency and corporate sides, without favouring particular networks or groups.

According to Helfferich, a three-step process is followed to determine the sample and assess the generalizability of the results. Firstly, the specific interest in certain groups of individuals is clarified. Subsequently, representatives from diverse backgrounds are also included in the sample to avoid premature conclusions and ensure comprehensive coverage of the core topic. Finally, an assessment is made to identify any missing configurations that could potentially limit the validity of the findings (Helfferich, 2011, 173f.).

On the agency side, in this research the term encompasses the areas of creative agencies and strategy consulting firms. It should be noted that there can be overlaps between the activities of creative agencies and strategy consulting firms. Since the primary focus of the research question is to examine the content creation process, and agencies might offer both strategic and creative services or are indirectly involved in the process through strategic recommendations, no distinction is made. Both categories are considered relevant for the subsequent research and are intended to provide a broad representation of readiness, potential assessment, and risk perception on the service provider side.

On the corporate side, the aim is to capture a representation of operational areas within the corporate communications field, which includes public relations, internal communication, external communication, social media, and corporate communication strategy. As the boundaries between marketing and communication within a company might be blurred depending on the company's operational field and size, some experts may have dual responsibilities. Therefore, influences from the marketing communications field and employer branding are also taken into account by the experts.

For the selection of experts, it is ensured that not only a strong communication background is present but also that the expert knowledge is helpful in addressing the research questions. To address the research question, it is important to have a fundamental understanding of AI, change management abilities to implement new tools, and a broad sector knowledge to contribute to the evaluation. The sample was systematically completed to adhere to a clean qualitative approach (Helfferich, 2011, p. 174). The following questions constitute the selection criteria for the experts, taking into account the above-mentioned requirements.

- 1) Does the interviewee demonstrate a profound understanding of communication practices, tactics, and various communication channels?
- 2) Has the interviewee ever explored the relevance of AI tools in the content creation process?
- 3) Does the interviewee have practical experience and skills in implementing new processes, systems, or technologies within an organization?
- 4) Does the interviewee possess ample knowledge about the communication landscape within the company or agency's operating environment?

A total of 60 suitable experts were contacted through the professional networking platform LinkedIn and personal connections. This resulted in 13 expert interviews from 12 organizations. Within the sample, 7 experts represent the agency side, with two experts representing their organization as a team, and 6 experts represent the cross-industry corporate sector. This sample size aligns with the recommended range of 6 to 30 for a moderate sample size (Helfferich, 2011, p. 173).

The recruitment mailing informed interview partners of the objectives of the survey and assured them of the anonymity of their responses with regard to their name, company, and any mention of potential collaborations. Upon request, the experts were provided with a condensed version of the interview guide that also included a definition of the term "generative AI" to ensure a common understanding (see Appendix B.3, B.4). By narrowing down the focus to the area of generative AI, it was ensured that other AI tools such as voice assistants or data monitoring systems were not the primary focus of the interview. To address any potential apprehensions or concerns of the experts, it was clearly communicated that the conversations would revolve around the experiential knowledge of communication practitioners rather than specific information technology knowledge of artificial intelligence. This way, the expectation was defined in advance, creating a comfortable interview situation for the expert rather than conducting the interview in an ad hoc manner. By allowing experts to prepare beforehand, they could provide more precise and detailed responses, leading to higher-quality information.

The following table 1 provides an overview of the selected experts and their industry backgrounds. In order to preserve the anonymity of the experts, the selected interview partners are numbered and listed without names. The job titles are slightly adapted and listed for the general classification of an industry sector of the company. The areas of responsibility of the agency experts are assigned to a main subject area.

Corporate	Interview number	Code	Job title	Industry
	I01	C01	Senior Consultant Brand Communications	Apparel & Footwear
	I02	C02	Manager PR Product & Lifestyle Communication	Automotive
	I03	C03	Head of Corporate Communications	Energy
	I04	C04	Manager Internal Communication, External Communication and Employer Branding	Human Resources
	I05	C05	Senior Vice President Corporate Communications, Branding and Marketing	Technology
	I06	C06	Senior PR Manager & Social Media	e-Commerce
Agency	Interview number	Code	Job title	Job focus by main subject areas
	I07	AG01	PR Director and Member of Management Board	Real Estate & Finance
	I08	AG02	Managing Director	Investment & Corporate Strategy
	I09	AG03	Director Business Development and Member of Management Board	Start-ups & Journalist relations
	I10	AG04-1	Senior Associate	Transactions & Corporate Strategy
		AG04-2	Senior Associate & Data Scientist	Technology & Transformation
	I11	AG05	Senior Communications Consultant	Executive Communication & Social Media
I12	AG06	Leading Communications Consultant	Journalist relations & Technology	

Table 1: Overview of selected experts, own representation

All the experts share the common characteristic of possessing extensive experience in their respective roles. Following Bähring et al., it is crucial to ensure that the selected experts in the sample are capable of contributing to the research-relevant questions (Bähring, Hauff, Sossdorf, & Thommes, 2008, p. 97). Since the application of AI tools in content creation is an emerging topic, basic experience is crucial. As it can be assumed that the use of AI tools in the field of communication was selective and without widespread awareness before the introduction of ChatGPT, including the aspect of AI experience in the sample for the purposes of the interviews would have biased the focus of the study. Additionally, to ensure data privacy and maintain anonymity, no additional personal information such as names, ages, genders, or workplace locations were gathered. If experts voluntarily provided such information, it was anonymized in the transcriptions.

3.4 Interview guideline and implementation

In qualitative expert interviews, a interview guide facilitates a structured and systematic execution of the interview, ensuring traceability and comparability of the collected data. The process of creating the interview guide also allows the interviewer to acquire a certain level of thematic expertise during the preparation phase, which is essential for a successful interview (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, p. 473). The aim is to create a conversational atmosphere that facilitates a beneficial interview relationship and establishes a basis of trust (Bähring et al., 2008, p. 98), so that an open discussion can be ensured. However, it is important to minimize the "researcher effect". Since the interview only takes place within a short time frame, it is difficult to fully capture the background and motivations behind the

respondents' answers (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson, & Jaspersen, 2018, p. 402). As a result, respondents might be inclined to withhold their true opinions and instead provide answers they believe the interviewer seeks. To maintain professional distance, measures were taken to ensure that the interviewee did not belong to the interviewer's close circle. According to Meuser and Nagel, the interview guide should not be treated as a strict script, but rather as a thematic framework that allows for flexible conversation (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, p. 474). This approach ensures that each interviewee and their conversational style are addressed individually, allowing for effective communication with both reserved and talkative participants. It creates a foundation that also allows room for topics raised by the interviewee, as openness is fundamental to purposive qualitative work.

Open-ended questions were chosen to encourage a natural flow of conversation and avoid restricting the experts' input. In order to strive for comparability of results, the interviewer's guide included possible follow-up questions that could be relevant for addressing the research questions. Given that the topic of AI implementation in the communications industry is still marked by uncertainties and some questions targeted emotional assessments and personal speculations, the experts occasionally deviated from the specific question. However, additional spontaneous follow-up questions were formulated based on the interview situation, as a natural conversation cannot be fully predetermined by methodological rules (Bogner et al., 2014, p. 29). To achieve a conversational and dialogic interview style, the flexible follow-up questions included filter questions, knowledge questions, and control questions. These served to explore in more detail, clarify any misunderstandings, or probe further into specific aspects. In general, it was ensured that the questions did not overwhelm the interviewees, were asked in a clear and structured way and did not anticipate answer options (Bähring et al., 2008, p. 95).

The interviews were conducted in the interviewees' native language German to ensure that subtleties of communication are accurately captured (Bogner et al., 2014, p. 44). This creates a familiar conversational environment that encourages honest and spontaneous responses from the experts.

Two similar interview guidelines were created to accommodate the different groups of experts from the corporate and agency sides (see Appendix B.1, B.2). Each guide was tailored to address the specific areas of expertise for each group, ensuring that the interviews contain relevant questions that specifically target the experiences and perspectives of each expert group.

The interview guidelines begin with a greeting, followed by introductory statements that explain the background and objectives of the study. Privacy and anonymity of the participants are reiterated, and consent for recording is obtained. As an "icebreaker question" and introductory question (Bähring et al., 2008, p. 95), the expert will be asked to outline their name, background and responsibilities to

give context to the interviewer and the research. The icebreaker question creates a relaxed atmosphere by encouraging the expert to talk about their role and responsibilities. In total, the interview guidelines contain six major thematic blocks with respective sub-questions, which are explained in detail below:

In the first section of the questionnaire, the aim is to cover the current status quo of AI applications in the communication field. Participants are asked to describe the daily workflows in which they use AI tools and the extent to which they use them. They should name and specify the AI solutions used to ensure a focus on generative AI and comparability of results. In the case of agencies, they are also asked to classify the current situation on the client and mandate side, including the level of interest in the topic of AI.

The next section focuses on the organizations' readiness to implement AI in their content processes. The objective is to gain insights into their strategies for integration and identify any concerns that may hinder the process. Initially, experts are asked to assess their personal preparation, determining if any feelings of being overwhelmed may be a barrier. They are then asked to evaluate challenges within their work environment, providing an analysis of internal company structures that may impact the implementation process of AI tools. Furthermore, the aim is to evaluate the organizations' internal and external positioning on this topic. Experts are asked to assess, based on their personal experiences, the potential disadvantages of being closed off to AI applications and to identify specific areas where they see these drawbacks. This allows for reflection on potential risks and challenges associated with reluctance towards AI in communication and encourages the identification of areas where adjustments may be necessary.

In the third section, an examination of the relationship between agencies and organizations takes place. Experts from both groups are asked to assess whether there may be shifts in roles or responsibilities and how they perceive further collaboration. This question aims to determine where agencies can still provide value to clients despite automated content creation, while assessing the corporate view regarding an in-house shift of content creation.

In the fourth section, experts are questioned about their perceptions of potential. They should reflect on opportunities and benefits for their own areas of work and their teams, based on their previous use of AI tools. The question also aims to gather insights on future thinking, including how innovative approaches or emerging trends are perceived and deemed relevant. Additionally, experts are asked to evaluate their past experiences with the quality of AI-generated content and explain possible benefits.

The complement is covered in the fifth section, which is related to the experts' perception of risks. It seeks to identify awareness of risks related to data protection and ethical issues, as well as whether

concerns from organizations extend to specific areas where AI assistance is excluded. The evaluation also includes assessing preventive measures and strategies for risk management.

In the final section, and experts are asked to assess the long-term changes in roles and task distribution in communication and how they might manifest. Additionally, future perspectives such as job changes and evolving requirements for the communication function are explored. On the agency side, an overarching assessment should be provided regarding the development. Finally, both groups of experts are asked to evaluate on a personal basis the future relevance of human creativity in the content creation process.

In a final question, experts are given the opportunity to share any thoughts or perspectives that were not addressed during the interview. This ensures that all relevant aspects and ideas from the experts are fully considered.

The interviews are scheduled for a duration of 20 to 40 minutes, as this is considered an appropriate timeframe to facilitate in-depth discussions and potential follow-up questions. At the same time, breaks can be taken, and the interviewee is not fatigued. The interviews are conducted using Microsoft Teams or Zoom, as these platforms are considered suitable for interviewing participants located in different places, while also maintaining a level of anonymity and creating a consistent conversational atmosphere for all interviewees. Moreover, this approach allows for experts with a limited availability to be included in the interview process.

According to Bähring et al., the interview guide developed in theory should undergo a pretest before conducting the first interview. This pretest aims to identify any structural and content-related weaknesses or potential sources of errors (Bähring et al., 2008, p. 97). In a pretest conducted with a junior communications manager on the corporate side, the interview guide was evaluated for its clarity of content, structure, and question formulation, and the duration of the interview was determined. The participant was not included in the final sample of experts. Based on the pretest, adjustments were made to the icebreaker question. Moreover, the experts were not explicitly asked to differentiate between text and image generators due to the fluid boundaries in the experimentation phase of AI applications and the potential bias that could arise from such a distinction. Furthermore, more time was allocated to the personal introduction of the expert at the beginning of the interview. As a result of the pretest, the planned time frame was ultimately shortened by avoiding redundant follow-up questions.

The field phase for interviewing the 13 experts took place from April 27, 2023, to June 6, 2023 (see Appendix A.13). The interviews were recorded via audio and supplemented with additional handwritten notes, ensuring a comprehensive data analysis.

3.5 Data analysis method

Qualitative approaches allow for a deep understanding of complex phenomena and comprehensively capture individual perspectives on a specific topic. To address the potential criticism regarding generalizability in qualitative approaches, the following section explains the data analysis procedure in detail to elucidate how the findings are evaluated. Meuser and Nagel propose a six-step method for analyzing expert interviews: transcription, paraphrasing, coding, thematic comparison beyond individual text units, sociological conceptualization to identify differences and similarities, and theoretical generalization that connects meaningful relationships with subsequent theory (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, 476f.). This procedure forms the basis for the following evaluation.

The strategy of transcription prioritizes the interest in answering research questions. non-verbal elements such as throat clearing or stuttering were not taken into consideration, as the primary focus was on the verbal content of the communication (Bähring et al., 2008, p. 101). Thematic digressions that are not part of a usable answer, as well as interruptions by third parties during the course of the conversation, have been indicated using square brackets "[...]". In order to preserve anonymity, the transcripts also include redactions with square brackets of names, locations, or other identifying information that could lead to inferences about the identity of the expert or their surroundings. The interview has been timestamped in the running text starting from the moment of audio recording, after the greeting and notification of the recording. The format used is #00:00:00#, representing #hour:minute:second#.

For the content-analytical evaluation in this study, the Grounded Theory of Glaser and Strauss or the qualitative content analysis of Mayring could be applied. Kühlmeyer et al. compare these two methods with regard to their “instructionality” identifying how precise and binding the rules for coding and structuring the data are depending on the degree of severity (Kühlmeyer, Muckel, & Breuer, 2020, p. 4). In qualitative content analysis, the analysis is guided by a pre-existing research question, resulting in the data material already being delimited at the beginning of the analysis with a clear direction. With the Grounded Theory method, on the other hand, the analysis is based on an open-minded approach and a general interest in understanding, which requires a high degree of flexibility in the analysis process (Kühlmeyer et al., 2020, p. 7). A direct comparison of the two methods reveals that the approach of qualitative content analysis is highly prescriptive, with detailed descriptions of the procedure. In contrast, the coding process in the Grounded Theory method is described only in terms of suggestions, making it less concise (Kühlmeyer et al., 2020, p. 9). Mayring's approach is characterised by high precision and regularity (Kühlmeyer et al., 2020, p. 15), which leads to improved traceability and reproducibility of the results. Furthermore, in the process,

only data materials that are deemed relevant for answering the research question are selected (Kühlmeier et al., 2020, p. 10).

Due to above-mentioned characteristics, the qualitative content analysis is applied as it allows for a precisely documented analysis of the interview transcripts. According to Mayring, three basic forms of interpretation can be distinguished: *Summarizing* focuses on reducing the material and creating a manageable data complex. *Explicating* incorporates additional material for analysis, expanding understanding and interpreting text passages. The form of *structuring* filters out specific aspects from the material, thus providing a cross-section of statements based on predefined criteria. (Mayring, 2022, p. 66). As this study aims to examine primarily the themes outlined in the interview guide, the structuring form of interpretation will be applied. One can differentiate between inductive and deductive category formation in the coding process. Inductive coding involves developing categories without pre-existing theoretical concepts and aims to generalize the material, where categories are established based on the data itself. In contrast, the deductive approach involves establishing the category system in advance, guided by theory and research questions (Mayring, 2022, p. 67). In the current study, a deductive approach is applicable as the research question is previously defined and thus the view of experts in a particular context of generative AI can be evaluated. The codebook in Appendix C provides a specific definition of each category, anchor examples, and corresponding coding rules, following Mayring's approach (Mayring, 2022, p. 96). This ensures that the qualitative approach is designed to be fully transparent. The coding in this research is done with the programme MAXQDA.

In addition to the overarching qualitative content analysis methods, Mayring proposes a mixed form that combines both inductive and deductive category formation (Mayring, 2022, p. 67) allowing for flexibility in the selection of variants (Kühlmeier et al., 2020, p. 12). In this research, for content-analytical evaluation of the expert interview transcripts **Mayring's topic analysis** is applied in order to take explorative questions into account and to facilitate filtering according to topics addressed in the interview. Following a deductive top-down strategy, the data are summarised per thematic block and supplemented by inductive category formation (Mayring, 2022, p. 104). A visual representation of the step-by-step process is shown in figure 6 below.

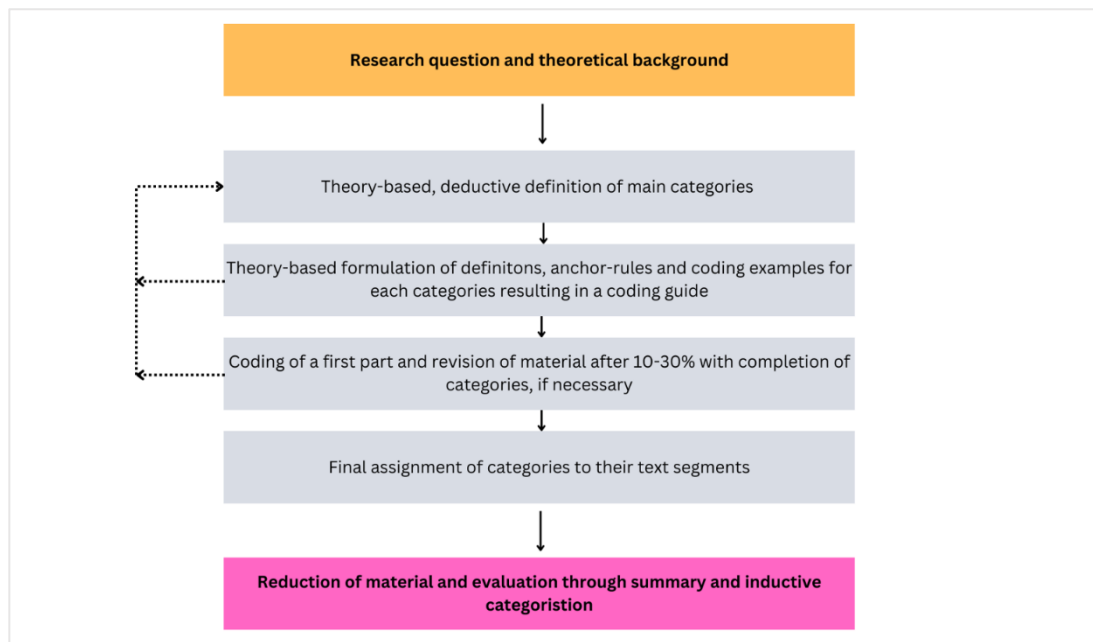


Figure 6: Process of topic analysis according to Mayring, own representation based on Mayring, 2022, p. 95, 105.

3.6 Data quality and research ethics

Orientation towards quality criteria represents quality assurance in qualitative research and provides a framework for the evaluation and assessment of the qualitative approach. Based on the concept of trustworthiness according to Guba, common quality criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to enhance the quality of results (Guba, 1981, p. 80). Quality criteria of quantitative research, such as objectivity, reliability, and validity, need to be adjusted in qualitative research. The concept of objectivity, for example, cannot be applied to the conduct of interviews, due to different role expectations. Instead, criteria from social research cannot be uniformly transferred (Bogner et al., 2014, p. 91).

Kaiser specifies the quality criteria for the method of expert interviews and classifies three quality features: intersubjective comprehensibility of the data collection and data analysis procedures, a theory-guided approach, and the researcher's neutrality and openness to new findings and patterns of interpretation (Kaiser, 2014, p. 9). Tracy's approach can be considered as an extension, reflected in her development of the "Eight 'Big-Tent' Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research", which serve as guidelines for producing accurate qualitative research results. It emphasizes the importance of scientific rigor, ethical conduct, and considering the impact and context of the research (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). Table 2 provides an overview of these criteria as an extension of the common quality criteria.

Quality criteria	Explanation
Contribution to the field	The research should make a significant contribution to the understanding of the research area.
Rigorous methods	The research should rely on careful and well-grounded methods to ensure the validity and reliability of the results.
Reflexivity	The researchers should reflect on and make their own positions, influences, and assumptions transparent.
Coherence	The research should provide a clear and coherent presentation of the theoretical foundations, methods, and findings.
Transparency	The researchers should document their decisions and steps transparently to enable the replicability of the research.
Impact and importance	The research should have an impact and significance for both the academic community and practice.
Ethical practice	The research should adhere to ethical principles and standards, especially regarding the protection of participants and the confidentiality of data.
Appropriate and effective representation	The researchers should ensure that the perspectives and experiences of the participants are adequately and effectively represented.

Table 2: "Eight 'Big Tent' Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research", own representation based on Tracy, 2010, p. 804.

Following, the criteria will be placed in relation to the current research. In chapter 1, the research questions and the current state of the literature are extensively explained, establishing the relevance of the research topic. As discussed in chapter 3.1, a qualitative approach is chosen, which is systematically elaborated upon in the subsequent subsections. According to Bogner et al., statements in interviews can be biased by attributing expertise to the interviewer, making assumptions about the respondent's role, or concerns about potential reputational consequences, which can affect the quality of the data (Bogner et al., 2014, p. 50). To ensure reflexivity, the participants are informed about the purpose of a research project within the framework of a master's degree to eliminate potential competence barriers. Additionally, ensuring the anonymity of the participants aims to create an atmosphere of relaxed conversation within a relationship of trust. The research procedure is thematically structured in chapter 3.2, with detailed descriptions of the individual considerations and to maintain coherence. The qualitative content analysis according to Mayring is chosen as a transparent evaluation method for data analysis, documenting the analysis steps and allowing for the traceability of research findings. Given that the current study fills a scholarly gap in the research field, provides opportunities for further research, and addresses a current topic that is relevant to the practical domain, the impact and importance of the research are evident. Moreover, the experts had the opportunity to freely report their experiences through the semi-structured interview format. Throughout the process of research design, common ethical practices were applied like voluntary participation, anonymization of the participants, and non-harm to the participants (Helfferich, 2011, 190f.), with the aim of creating a comfortable and engaging conversation atmosphere without external influences. In summary, by taking Tracy and Kaiser's approaches into account, a solid methodological basis for qualitative research can be pursued.

4 Findings

The objective of this chapter is to present the findings in alignment with the overarching research question. The results are organized according to the categories outlined in the interview guideline.

4.1 Status quo

Current AI usage in content production

The current use of AI is widespread across various applications. Different levels of use can be identified among the respondents. Three experts from the agency side (AG02, 1.23f.; AG03, 1.11-16; AG06, 1.34-38) and four company representatives (C01, 1.28-32; C03, 1.28-30; C05 1.25-28, C06, 1.59-61) explicitly emphasize an internal phase of experimentation. It becomes also evident that ChatGPT has acted as a catalyst for departments to engage more with the topic of AI usage:

“I think that we are currently in the phase - probably many are now - where we are first becoming aware of what it means, what it entails, how AI will change our work. So, we are still at the beginning.” (C03, 1.19-22, translated to English)

“I would say that in the last six to nine months, it has skyrocketed. Just with the release of ChatGPT, suddenly everyone wanted to use this tool and see what was possible. I remember myself, I played around with it a lot in the early days, and it became very, very prominent for us.” (AG06, 1.33-38, translated to English)

Furthermore, the application scope can be divided into specific areas of creative inspiration, image generation, translation services, research support, text creation, and proofreading, that is fairly balanced represented on both agency and company side.

In the field of text creation, all experts, both from agencies and companies, recognize the opportunity of using AI to generate texts and obtain initial drafts, while they are already using it in their daily work to a certain extent (C01, 1.31; C02, 1.28; C03, 1. 39; C04, 1. 32-34; C05, 1.178f.; C06, 1.32; AG01, 1.17; AG02, 77f.; AG03, 1.34; AG04-2, 1.32-25; AG05, 1.27f.; AG06, 1.54-56). One expert also highlights the use for automated transcriptions (AG03, 1.23f.). On the company side, two experts mentioned using AI for writing social media captions (C01, 1.26; C06, 1.76.-78). Further application possibilities can be found in scriptwriting (C04, 1.30-35), for SEO optimization (C04, 1.43), and generating headlines (C06, 1.78; AG06). It is emphasized by one expert that AI tools like ChatGPT are particularly beneficial for standard text creation.

“We write press releases that often contain repetitive and standard sections. [...] Due to the high degree of templated content - this is just one example - it is likely that AI can take over at least 90-95% of the workload.” (AG01, 1.94-100, translated to English)

In the field of image generation, experts responded more cautiously, with only two experts from the company side (C03, 1. 44; C05, 1.27) and two experts from the agency side currently engaging with automated image creation (AG02, 1.74f.; AG06, 1.40). Two experts referred to the experimentation

phase with the tool DALL-E (AG02, 1.74; C03, 1.45). While one agency expert sees the potential benefits of generative AI, especially in the visual domain (AG06, 1.41-46), one company expert remains critical especially of the use of automated images:

“[...] We are on the job with videographers and photographers, producing the content ourselves, because there is still a grey area in terms of copyright and because it is not yet possible to use such images commercially unless you buy the rights for them. That's why we're not currently using AI in pictures and videos.” (C06, 1.41-45, translated to English)

Translation programs like DeepL were mentioned by three experts from both interview groups (AG01, 1.14; AG02, 1.14; AG05, 1.26; C02, 1.37; C03, 1.39; C06, 1.46), while applications for proofreading were mentioned by only two experts (C04, 1.36; AG01, 1.30). Additionally, one expert mentioned the possibility of using the paid version of OpenAI's GPT-4 model to generate Excel queries (AG04-1, 1.28) in this context. In addition to text generation, the benefits in terms of creative inspiration, emphasizing the use of AI as a fresh perspective, are evident.

“[...] maybe even have my draft text pre-texted - not to use it afterwards, but just to see how practically someone else would approach the matter in quotations marks. Simply to get a fresh look at something. [...]” (AG04-2, 1.33-36, translated to English)

"It's just for that "Oh, I just want to get the draft done quickly" - that's going to get a high level of self-evidence." (C05, 1.164 f., translated to English)

In the context of simplifying work processes, one expert assigns AI a special role as an additional employee:

“A lot of staff have been here for eight or ten years. You really notice that from time to time when a new colleague comes in and brings in a breath of fresh air. That's how we actually see AI.” (C06, 1.157-160, translated to English)

High interest on client side

In the examination of the status quo, it emerged that five out of six agency experts recognize also high interest in the topic of AI on the client side (AG02, 1.47-50; AG03, 1.60-62; AG04-1, 1.45; AG05, 1.21-23; AG06, 1.69). The interest cannot necessarily be reduced to a basic understanding, as there already exists "a high level of basic knowledge" (AG02, 1.66), even though a deep understanding of the various functionalities of AI is not the main focus. One expert gives an example of generating a "worst-case scenario" for the client to illustrate the possibilities and dangers of AI tools in a negative sense (AG06, 1.70-77). The demands on the customer side can be specifically categorized for the agencies, with two experts also narrowing down that the current demands revolve almost exclusively around the ChatGPT tool (AG02, 1.68; AG03, 1.65). It also becomes apparent in the experts' perceptions that one can also observe that customers are already dealing with the topic themselves. In this context, the requests of clients can be classified both in terms of content, which the agencies are supposed to provide information services, and the overall operational area, where higher

expectations are passed on to the agency. Possible questions that clients ask with regard to AI are listed by one expert as follows:

“So, the tool level, the superordinate level "How is AI developing overall?" and then there is the level "What does AI actually imply for communication? And this question is also coming up more and more from our clients. And I think many of us are dealing with it individually. So, what does that mean for the training of communicators? What does it mean for communication, if you now look at it a bit systematically and theoretically, if you suddenly use AI more? And what are the implications for how we communicate or what communication recommendations we can give to clients?” (AG02, l.30-36, translated to English)

One expert also addresses client’s fears and concerns (AG06, l.70). Two experts mention the increasing interest in educational presentations, as there are many unanswered questions, which can create a new field of consulting services:

“It's a huge topic of discussion - how to deal with it, fields of application, compliance, policies, staff training - and everything.” (AG04-1, translated to English)

“But now, of course, there is a lot of interest in it and it is also a good model for counselling, because everyone is clueless about the same things at the end and everyone is looking for people who have dealt with it or have a clue about it.” (AG02, l.47-49, translated to English)

On the operational side, experts are urged to look into the possibilities of using AI from an advisory perspective at an early stage in order to continuously deliver added value for the client.

“So, on the one hand, there is attention paid to how we use it. But on the other hand, it is also expected that we use it., Simply to have a finger on the pulse. I think it would be strange if you didn't do some form of data-driven work these days, especially in many consulting services, because you would probably be perceived as lagging behind.” (AG04-2, l.56-61, translated to English)

However, according to the experts, this also requires an understanding of the client’s knowledge level in order to work collaboratively and effectively on the implementation of AI. (AG04-1, l.72-76, AG03, l. 63 f., AG05, l.54 f.).

“At the same time, the classic consultant response of "It depends" is also a significant factor here because if you have someone on the client side who is already relatively data-savvy or affine and has a basic understanding, then there is generally much more interest and attention towards the topic.” (AG04-1, l.72-76, translated to English)

4.2 Interest in using AI

Initiative in engaging with AI tools

The analysis of the interviews reveals that a high degree of self-initiative is demonstrated in dealing with the broad topic of generative AI in a fast-paced and innovation-driven environment, while maintaining a positive attitude towards it. However, discrepancies can be observed in terms of workplace support and organizational engagement. Four respondents from agencies (AG03, l.73-75;

AG04-1, 1.86, AG04-2, 1.92-94, AG05, 1.79-81; AG06, 1.86) and three respondents from corporate settings (C02, 1.28; C04, 1.63; C05, 1.43f.) consider themselves personally prepared. Two corporate experts emphasize that they have not received any support for the use of AI tools in the workplace, which has prevented them from engaging with the topic at a deeper professional level. Instead, their previous use of AI tools has relied solely on individual responsibility (C01, 1.28-32; C02, 1.80-84). This situation can also be linked to the structure of the company and the openness of the management:

“Regarding my employer, I actually feel very, very badly prepared. There are no trainings provided, and there is no department that strategically addresses such matters. I find it quite disappointing. I'm grateful that we collaborate extensively with agencies, where I have the impression that they engage more with such tools.” (C02, 1.70-75, translated to English)

“I would say that it is definitely very important to respond very flexibly and quickly to the changes. But because we still have barely any points of connection in our company, it is also very difficult for us to really use it properly.” (C01, 1.41-44, translated to English)

Two experts report that they were able to deal with AI in depth internally and could therefore build up deeper knowledge:

“[...] Our boss is very supportive when it comes to this topic within our team, and she wants us to be innovative pioneers within the company. She provides us with a lot of opportunities to enhance our knowledge and build our foundation through webinars, events, and more.” (C04, 1.63-67, translated to English)

“[...] We had already reserved a day for ourselves in June or July where we planned to deal with this, where we said, let's sit down together, let's think about how we want to use it, where do we see limits, where do we see deficits, how will our professional image change to some extent, how will cooperation in the team change - these are questions that we ask ourselves. [...]” (C03, 1.59-63, translated to English)

On the agency side, there is unanimous agreement regarding engagement with this topic in the workplace, which is supplemented by personal commitment. This is also linked to the organizations' overall attitude towards technological advancements, as emphasized by experts:

“[...] we simply have a clear line. We say we are not afraid of innovations, and we do not communicate with fear, but rather communicate the strengths and of course have a critical respect.” (AG05, 1.70-72, translated to English)

“I don't think anyone was really prepared. That is somehow also the beauty of it. But you can see that there was also a lot of self-initiative, especially at the beginning, to which extent people worked with it.” (AG04-1, 1.109-111, translated to English)

Challenges in the business environment

The majority of experts identify the need for training and lack of knowledge as the biggest challenge in introducing AI tools into content production workflows (C01, 1.51; C02, 1.71f.; C04, 1.79f., AG01, 1.48; AG03, 1.99; AG04-2, 1.97f.; AG05, 1.98-100). According to one expert, there is a lack of a fundamental introduction "to understand what further possibilities exist and how they can be

integrated into our work" (C01 l. 53f.). Another expert highlights that this is also associated with new responsibilities for providing information, which is time-consuming due to constantly evolving applications and conditions. Due to the significant time commitment and capacity constraints, this is considered challenging to implement:

"The challenge is clearly "How can we provide them with information on the topic and how can we keep it up to date?", because currently there are new AI tools popping up every day, there are new legal regulations. It's all still a huge ball that hovers in front of you, that hasn't really been discovered yet, so that there is somehow information where I can say "here, I can upload a document for you and it will be up to date for the next three months", but we would have to assign someone to deal with the topic on a regular basis, which is simply a challenge in terms of capacity." (C04, l.80-87, translated to English)

Capacity challenges also exist when companies do not impart the necessary knowledge for application, but employees deal with it exclusively privately, as there is no time for it within everyday business (C02, 97-100). Following on from this, the communications sector is also affected by a particularly large knowledge and experience gap in the area of automation and AI solutions, as this was often only established in other departments on the company side:

" I think that there is just so much ignorance on the corporate side in the field of communication, that for a long time it was somehow in the whole IT area, that it is now slowly coming up in the marketing area and that this whole automation topic, that all those who deal more with such topics, are far more ahead than we are in communication [...] no one has a firm grasp of the whole thing." (C02, l.403-407, translated to English)

On the agency side as well, an expert specifically mentioned that there has been no comprehensive training on ChatGPT (AG01, l.46f.). Therefore, there is also a need for internal explanation and systematic measures within agency structures to accommodate employees who, due to their personal level of technology affinity or job-specific interactions, have not had the opportunity for in-depth engagement and require a basic understanding:

"This means that there is also internal explanatory work, in that you just practically - that the data team or people who have already accompanied projects more strongly - sit down together with other customer teams who perhaps have not yet had so much experience with it [...] in order to reduce inhibition barriers in the company, because everything is just at the beginning in its infancy." (AG04-2, l. 102-107, translated to English)

Three experts observed barriers among employees in their working environment with regard to the use of AI (AG04-2, l.97-102, C04, l.71-73; C05, l.81-83). Not only a lack of knowledge in dealing with AI tools was mentioned as a problem, but also a fearful attitude towards job changes or the replacement of one's own job by AI:

"We had concerns about that. Our team's editors expressed concerns, as did the graphic designers. Our first task is to provide them with information so that they see it as a

complementary tool rather than immediate competition. It is inevitable for people to perceive it as competition.” (C05, l.81-85, translated to English)

Closely associated with this are privacy concerns, which pose significant challenges for companies depending on the application area. An expert from a technology company mentioned that ChatGPT had already been blocked due to data protection reasons (C05, l.25f.). As a result, organizations have also to deal with the challenge of safeguarding sensitive data and determining the appropriate scope of deployment or establishing guidelines to limit its use:

“That is first of all the protection, how do you protect the terms and the things you feed into the system, how do you not make any mistakes negligently. In our case, it is all about protecting intellectual property.” (C05, 61-63, translated to English)

“Data protection is the number one problem for the corporate application. [...] The problem is, if I run a super sensitive announcement tomorrow and I put my press release into GPT-4, then it is somewhere else. So Open-AI has not had a process to give information about this data processing. [...] And that's why we still can't recommend to any customer to process sensitive information with GPT.” (AG04_1, 122-137, translated to English)

The position and engagement of management can also be listed as a challenge in establishing AI tools at a professional level. Two experts report contrasting experiences in this regard (C02, l.79f.; AG05, l.25-27). In practice, the need for new and innovative solutions might only reach the management level through a note from individual employees, as one expert reports:

“Then there is also the fact that in our company, innovation is always a bit interesting in terms of the cultural context, and since such things are not always necessarily aware at the top of the management that you have to watch out or pay attention to what is overtaking you from the left and the right.” (C02, l.87-91, translated to English)

However, on the contrary, excessive enthusiasm and indiscriminate testing of AI tools without a structured approach can also pose an obstacle:

“I think the biggest challenge is to find the right application. There are a lot of tools out there right now, our CEO is also really behind the times and has sent a huge list of everything you can use. I don't think you should get lost in the tool jungle, because now every week a new company is being built, a new tool is being created and not everything makes sense for us.” (AG05, l.86-90, translated to English)

Internal Positioning

Out of the 12 organizations represented by the surveyed experts, 10 are already internally exploring the use of AI in communication (C03, l.58; C04, l.63-67; C05, l.26-28; C06, l. 1.66; AG01, l.46-48; AG02, l.98f; AG03, l.96f.; AG04-1, l.151; AG05, l.125; AG06, l.38f.) However, two experts from the corporate side (C01, l.63-65; C02, l.71f.) confirm that the topic has not been discussed internally so far. The approach of organisations varies across different levels. Some experts have only discussed it

internally in meetings (AG03, 1.97; AG05, 1.116-120; C03, 1.96.98), while others have appointed internal responsibilities for further addressing the topic (AG02, 1.19-21; AG05, 1.106-108; C05, 1.26f.; C06, 1.57-59). An expert from the agency side mentioned individual awareness raising in the team in this regard:

“And it is definitely peer-to-peer help, someone has found a trick and says “Hey, here, look, check this out.” (AG05, 1.115f., translated to English)

According to the interviewed experts, the appointment of internal responsible persons or the founding of task forces results in test groups, which are to evaluate individual tools (AG02, 1.19-21), in teams of so-called "Innovation Council", which are to publish a list of tools that make sense for the company's purpose (AG05, 1.106), in prepared lectures and workshops for other employees (C06, 1.57-59) or an intensive exploration of the use of AI in specific target areas beyond (C05, 1.92).

All agencies also announce their own educational formats that enable employees to learn about the operation of individual tools in detail and to acquire knowledge about which prompts and use cases are best suited to their area of responsibility (AG01, 1.48f.; AG02, 1.102f.; AG03, AG04-1, 1.154-156; AG05, 1.110-112, AG06, 1.52).

The strategic approach to positioning involves a technology-open and positive attitude, mentioned by three agency experts (AG02, 1.88-90; AG03, 1.73-75; AG05, 1.149f.) and one corporate expert (C05, 1.120-122). However, one expert emphasizes that the openness of the company should be considered in relation to the industry in which it operates. The example from the technology industry clarifies the link between internal engagement and the industry, as in this case, it is evident, that the topic of AI is difficult to circumvent (C05, 1.118-120).

“I think our approach would be to say internally that it is impossible to prevent it from coming. So do not fight it at all, but think about what you can do with it to make your own job easier.” (C05, 1.232-234, translated to English)

On the contrary, another expert from the company mentions a current observational attitude to keep an eye on the overall development of AI and that of competitors, deriving their own actions from it:

“We are more or less taking the path of not wanting to be the “first mover”, but we are rather now observing the whole process for a while and also looking at how the whole AI development is developing and how other brands are doing it, for example.” (C06, 1.119-121, translated to English)

External Positioning

Current action in terms of external positioning towards external stakeholders and the use of AI in content creation for external promotion was only confirmed by two experts (AG05, 1.132-134; AG06,

1.148). By now, it is also raised in discussions with clients in order to inform them in a contract about the possible use of AI, as mentioned by one expert:

“[...] This is already stated in the contracts, so we have it as a guidance that we don't exclude such possibilities. We would never keep information from a client that something was never seen by an AI or that we don't use it. Instead, we are communicating openly about incorporating these tools as assistance.” (AG05, l.133-137, translated to English)

In this regard, one expert emphasizes their CEO's positioning towards AI technology, which primarily takes place on social media platforms (AG05, 1.125). The interview evaluation otherwise reveals sceptical voices regarding external positioning. On the company side, external positioning was unanimously rejected (C01, 1.77; C02, 1.78-80; C03, 1. 106; C04, 1.94, C05, 1. 103; C06, 1.93) Five out of six surveyed agencies perceive it as a disadvantage for their business and client relationships (AG01, 1.60-63; AG02, 1.115f.; AG03, 1.106f; AG05, 1.177-180; AG06, 1.149-152).

“The agency as a whole doesn't stand up and says, "we are the agency that works a lot with AI". [...] You don't know if your counterpart has a positive attitude towards it.” (AG01, 1.60-62, translated to English)

“We know we're already in a start-up environment anyway and all of them are playing around with it themselves. [...] And when we say in this context "We're now also using ChatGPT" - putting it out there like that, it almost comes across like a 60-year-old saying he's young at heart. [...] That's why it has no added value.” (AG03, 1.111-115, translated to English)

Agencies fear, on the one hand, being perceived as backward in terms of their agility and progressiveness, as AI gains increasing relevance across society and may be seen as a given in this industry. However, it also raises the question of which services clients are still willing to pay for, associated with a potential loss of added value for agencies. One expert summarizes this concern:

“As a premium consultant, you kind of expect us to be efficient, let's say, and then of course use AI for that. But you would be quite disappointed if we said that the concept was created with AI or by AI. [...] of course one expects to have heard of AI and, if in doubt, not to do it by hand but to use a tool. But you are not buying us in because of the AI.” (AG02, 1.113-120, translated to English)

Additionally, one expert mentions that future positioning also depends on the extent to which the company is already advanced in terms of willingness and implementation of AI solutions for it to be purposeful, and emphasizes that it is still too early for such positioning:

“At the same time, however, it is the case that in these more specific cases or cases that are very relevant to everyday life, it is simply not yet so far advanced that you could incorporate this as a practically established process step or process as a whole into your advisory service. We are simply not there yet.” (AG04-2, 1.177-180, translated to English)

Evaluation of possible disadvantages in case of reluctance

Most experts see a refusal to adopt AI and a reluctance to adapt resulting in a competitive disadvantage (AG03, 1.122f. AG04-1, 1.190, AG05, 1.144.147; C01, 1.87 C04, C05). However, this advantage should be assessed depending on the given scenario and is relativised by the fact that it is limited to the extent of generative AI application. According to the experts, it becomes clear that the use of AI can help address the challenging environment and gain an advantage over competitors. Two agency experts specifically see the advantage of early engagement and knowledge acquisition in order to benefit from it (AG04-1, 1.189-191; AG05, 1.206-211).

“But all those who are already using it can really get a "first mover advantage", I think. If you already use it as much as possible, you will be on expert level in one or two years. And all those who are just starting out, because they are just looking and waiting, will of course be left behind and you will have already taken all the advantages.” (AG05, 1.206-211, translated to English)

According to one expert, the competitive advantage lies in being able to operate across multiple channels and keep up with the increasing volume of content.

“It's just becoming more and more, and AI is making it more and more possible. [...] And I simply worry that people who don't jump on the bandwagon will eventually be unable to keep up with this flood of content and won't be able to produce as much.” (C04, 1.108-112, translated to English)

The factor of time savings and more efficient execution of tasks is mentioned by three out of six agencies (AG02, 1.138-140; AG03, 1.121; AG04-1, 1.196), although it does not apply to all areas of work. It is limited to tasks such as translations (AG02, 1.140-145) and initial drafts of textual elements (AG04-1, 1.195f., AG03, 1.126f.). A corporate expert points out that the saved time can be allocated to "other things" (C03, 1.118). Two experts also highlight the factor of relieving employees, as certain time-consuming tasks can be delegated to AI (C01, 1.88-90; AG05, 1.144f.). An agency expert refers to the fast-paced nature of the service industry in this context.

“So, I think on the one hand, from a purely work perspective: we have more and more work, but fewer and fewer people. We need AI because it could take a lot of work off our hands and because - I think - especially in the agency sector, we sometimes engage in things that aren't so great.” (AG05, 1.143-146, translated to English)

Monetary disadvantages and cost pressures were mentioned by four experts (AG01, 1.72; C02, 1.123; C05, 1.136; C06, 1.111f.), three of whom are from the company side. In addition, two experts list potential staff reductions (AG01, 1.75f.; C05, 1.135f.). In conjunction, two experts point out potential savings in collaboration with external service providers in this context:

“If you close your mind to the issue, you have the disadvantage of cost savings, of course. I think that's the first place to go. Of course, we now pay our creative agency, we pay our copywriters. I think we could definitely gain advantages by offering a little more space or room to the topic of AI.” (C06, l.111-115, translated to English)

“So, primarily we will lose money. I think that's a big point, which is perhaps something that could be used to convince the management at some point to invest in it now, because at the end of the day we save money by having digital tools do something that we are currently paying providers for; - and not just a little bit.” (C02, l.123-127, translated to English)

An expert from the agency side, however, relativized the question of potential disadvantages for communicators in the case AI reluctance and stresses out that AI can only be a helpful tool to a certain extent and can only partially replace human expertise (AG04-2, l.210-214). Two experts also emphasize that, in their view, ignoring AI innovation will be a barrier to success and that, similar to other new technological tools, AI will eventually become firmly established in everyday business operations:

“Well, I do believe that some people will use ChatGPT or similar tools in the future in the same way that people use Google or the internet as a matter of course today. In this respect, it won't be wise in the long run to avoid them.” (AG02, l.126-128, translated to English)

“[...] If people are somehow afraid of anything new and only see the challenges and the negative, then no innovation will come about. And we want to continue to be innovative here and we can't just move on the same basis as ten years ago. That's why you simply need the new tools.” (AG05, l.147-151, translated to English)

4.3 Shifts in the interaction between agencies and companies

All interviewed experts on the company side who work with external agencies see the possibility of a change in long-term cooperation (C01, l.112; C02, l.159-161; C03, l.119f.; C05, l.156; C06, l.130-133). Four experts summarize it into concrete terms and could imagine limiting or suspending the supporting service in the long term by using generative AI tools instead (C02, l.160f., C03, l.120-122; C05, l.156; C06, l.130).

“I was talking about things like research tasks. When I see that my agency outsources research tasks to these digital tools, but then charges me, as they used to do, then I say well, then I can also ask the tool directly. Then we would save this middleman of the agency at the end of the day.” (C02, l.156-160, translated to English)

“We have many service providers on board who are also very active in text production for us. And then of course you ask yourself, okay, what will it look like in one year, what will it look like in three years? I don't know yet, but I can imagine that there will be some shifts. (C03, l.120-123, translated to English)

One expert, however, emphasizes that the reduction of agency involvement would mainly apply to content creation rather than strategic consulting, as analytical AI tools in strategic processes can still be used to provide insights and serve as a basis for further decision-making (C05, 148-152). Another

expert describes a potential shift in responsibilities that could still ensure collaboration with service providers, but in different areas.

“But you could also steer the whole thing in such a way that the orders stay with the agencies, because of course we are following a sustainable path and are also very happy about the cooperation with our agencies, some of which have also made the brand big and built it up, such that they use AI, and we still pay the agencies to do it. Of course, not to the extent that we currently do when they use AI. For example, that would also be a possibility that we see there.” (C06, l.133-139, translated to English)

The agency experts also anticipate the potential loss of certain tasks as AI continues to establish itself in corporate communication. Three experts mention the aspect that, with changing capabilities and positioning, value creation for companies has even more to be demonstrated, and convincing arguments are required to justify why a company should continue to pay for these services (AG03, l.153-155; AG04-1, l.229-232; AG05, l.171-173), as summarized by two experts:

“[...] We convince journalists to write about you. Sometimes there are also guest articles. We then offer to write them for an extra 1,500 euros. I can imagine that people then ask, “Well, now you want 1500 euros, you write with ChatGPT anyway and then I can do it myself”. I can imagine that it will be harder to sell such products that contain content, especially for such things.” (AG03, l.86-90, translated to English)

“I think the biggest point is to still show the client added value provided by the agency: So why shouldn't a client simply hire someone himself instead of hiring an expensive agency that looks at the texts? I think you have to enter into a dialogue - also with journalists - to see what else is needed and where we can create added value as an agency.” (AG05, l.174-177, translated to English)

One expert concludes that businesses themselves are already reaping the benefits of AI and incorporating AI into their daily operations may not necessarily rely on agency services. Instead, they may consider creating a dedicated position focused on AI applications, such as a "Head of AI" or "Head of Communication" who uses its expertise for the benefit of the company (AG06, l.184-188).

Closely linked to the order situation is the alignment of the client relationship and the set-up of the advisory service, which was addressed by five agency experts (AG01, l.107-109; AG02, l.167-169; AG04-2, l.234-236; AG05, l.173f.; AG06, l.189-191). It is therefore important to clearly define the future role of an agency, as emphasized by one expert:

“There is a bit of a danger - for example, you can get a very good answer with ChatGPT [...] Only if you as a advisor take it to the client, then you make yourself redundant, because in case of doubt, the client can do it himself or will quickly learn to do it himself. That means you have to make sure that what ChatGPT spits out is clearly further qualified in order to be able to deliver an advisory service. Otherwise you lose credibility and you will basically lose your role..” (AG02, l.163-172, translated to English)

According to the experts, there is an increasing demand for expert knowledge in the form of consulting services or training workshops, rather than just supporting content production processes (AG04-1, 1.224-226). One expert believes that the need for human consulting services will also grow, which will be further amplified by the rise of AI (AG06, 1.189-191).

The experts also anticipate higher expectations from clients and stakeholders in the agency-client relationship. This could manifest in increased demands for speed and quality (AG04-1, 1.226f.) and may also impact price negotiations when AI tools are utilized as support for paid service (AG03, 1.88-90). One expert draws a comparison to video conferences, where initially there was an expectation of saving time. This example illustrates a similar evolution of expectations:

“I just think it makes the demand bigger. Like we all use Teams or Zoom now to have meetings. As a result, you have a lot more meetings. That hasn't led to necessarily saving meeting time now compared to before, even though you don't have to travel anymore. It will be the same with AI.” (AG02, 1.277-280, translated to English)

4.4 Future potentials for the use of AI

While the exploration of the current status quo largely involves experimenting in the textual field, five experts see additional potential in the future for the use of image and video generators (AG05, 1.185; AG06, 1.42-46; C03, 1.137; C04, 1.128f.; C05, 1.71-74). Text generation is mentioned by seven experts (AG01, 1.118; AG03, 1.162; AG05, 1.184; C01, 1.126-128; C03, 1.137f.; C05, 1.178-181; C06, 1.151f.), with references to standard text generation (AG01, 1.118), emotional storylines (C01, 1.127f.), and first drafts (C05, 171f.). One expert sees the potential to continuously reduce the work of editors as long as the AI is trained specifically for the company and aligned with its language:

“That's where the corporate language project comes together with the use of AI. [...] But if AI is fed well, then it will certainly replace the first services of editors. And editors will no longer start from scratch, they will certainly feed it at some point in the future, get the first mark-up, do the fact check, formulate it even shorter, longer, down, and then they are done.” (C05, 1.173-181, translated to English)

Three experts mention the potential in research generation, particularly referring to additional analysis solutions that can contribute to an overview. Examples include screening the media landscape (AG01, 1.116f.), recognizing journalistic patterns (AG03, 1.163-165), or improving audience targeting through content analysis (C01, 1.119-121). An expert explicitly refers to the potentials of the GPT-4 version and describes the future development in this area using the example of classifications as follows:

“This is where I think it can make a huge difference, because it can really replace and automate manual work on a scaled level other than “I'm going to draft a PM” - that's cool, but it doesn't scale automatically. It saves 10, 15 minutes here and there, but the other thing is that it allows for completely different products and analyses that then run 24/7 completely

automatically somewhere on the server, which would be a huge gamechanger for us.” (AG04-1, l.279-284, translated to English)

Two experts think of technological support in the creation of presentation slides (AG02, l.160f.; C05, l.200f.), which can also provide an initial draft that only requires minimal customization to align with the company's needs.

4.5 Risk assessment of AI deployment

Concerns and limits in the use of AI

All the interviewed experts perceive legal issues as a significant burden. The topic of data protection and data security plays a major role, and most experts aim to address it by avoiding clear names and personal data (AG01, l.146-152; AG03, l.226-232; AG05, l. 1.252f.; C01, l.148; C02, l.267f.; C04, l.182-184; C06, l.199f.). In the case of expert C05, the use of ChatGPT has already been prohibited internally for security reasons (C05, l.25f.). The translation software DeepL is also mentioned by experts in the context of risk assessment (AG02, l.195-198; AG05, l.257-259). It becomes clear from the interviews that there is currently confusion and uncertainty about what exactly happens to the data entered and to what extent this content is processed further:

“If you feed highly sensitive things into the system and the other person on the other side of the world happens to ask about your company and then gets those things spat out - that would be not good. Of course, you have to be cautious about data sensitivity and security.” (AG02, l. 199-202, translated to English)

It is emphasized that the omission of real names need to be implemented consistently and accurately to ensure that it cannot be traced when using online-based AI tools, as otherwise, “it would be all for nothing” (AG01, l.144-152).

The lack of clarity regarding the obligation to label AI-generated content is also addressed by one expert:

“And of course, data protection is a huge topic for us as well. Do we need to label the texts, or do we not need to label them? Currently, it's unclear without any legal framework to rely on.” (C04, l.184-186, translated to English)

Copyright uncertainties were raised by three company experts (C06, l.176-178; C01, l.163; C05), and according to C01, it might result in monotonous content if exclusively relying on AI-generated content, making it difficult for a brand to appear unique (C01, l.165-169). There are limitations and potential risks in automated image and video generation, which one expert believes may fall into a legal grey area (C06, l.177f.).

The question of ethical concerns was addressed by the experts in various ways. The societal discussion surrounding the potential job loss due to the use of AI in content areas was mentioned by two agency experts, who denied its impact (AG01, 1.163-165; AG03, 1.272-281), emphasizing that it is a societal development comparable to other technological advancements. There is a clear understanding that racist and sexist statements in AI outputs are based on the underlying programming and training data (AG03, 1.249-254; AG05, 1. 238-241; AG06, 1.258; C02, 1.319-322). An expert mentioned the issue specifically in the context of automated image generators like Midjourney:

“I have a problem with tools like Midjourney when it comes to generating people, because it's almost impossible to generate a female person in Midjourney that has normal human proportions and that makes it still partly useless for me in a stock photo area, simply because it's way too sexist. You can't get those 'superhero' proportions out of people.” (AG04-1, 1.326-330, translated to English)

Two experts also consider the ethical issue of environmental impact due to the high computational power required by AI tools, which results in high CO₂-emissions (AG05, 1.193-196; C06, 1.221-227), and contradicts the sustainability efforts of companies. An agency expert sees a fundamental ethical question in the general use of generative AI tools, questioning to what extent services should be fulfilled through their application:

“And in the end, it is perhaps also a fundamental ethical question. [...] If I am no longer authentic because I only pass on content from the AI, then of course I lose my reputation in advisory services and in the end also in communication. And that, I think, is the main risk.” (AG02, l. 202-213, translated to English)

This aspect is closely related to the risk of misinformation and deep fakes, which can lead to reputational damage if not properly verified (AG02, 1.210-212; C02, 1.245-258). This needs to be considered from two perspectives: on the one hand, companies face the risk of external attacks through false claims, and on the other hand, the lack of revision in AI-generated content poses the danger of spreading false information and losing credibility, as AI enables simplified content creation applicable for anyone without prior training:

“[...] Indeed, there is a need for safeguards against false claims and misrepresentations, as today's technology, such as Photoshop, already enables the creation of misleading content, but honestly, that would already be possible today without artificial intelligence. But it will be now applicable with ease by everyone.” (C05, 1.208-212, translated to English)

“[...] For example, this topic of deepfakes is of course also an extreme risk for companies, because we can now see in many areas how sensitive stakeholders and investors in particular are to new developments, and the value of certain companies could be extremely influenced by false information.” (AG04-2, 1.314-319)

All the interviewed experts consider human oversight as an essential final checkpoint (C01, 1.153-156; C02, 1.257f.; C03, 1.197-199; C04, 1.198-200; C05, 1.179-181; C06, 1. 235-238; AG01, 1.90f.;

AG02, 1. 187-190; AG03, 1. 208f.; AG04-2, 1.346-351; AG05, 1. 219f.; AG06, 1.152-154). In concrete examples, it becomes clear that the interview participants do not rely solely on AI for expert knowledge and focus on adding their own touch to AI-generated content. One expert describes AI as a "ghostwriter" (AG05, 1.227) that cannot write autonomously, as this could potentially result in the processing of false information. On the corporate side, it is evident that only through human oversight in public AI tools can the content align with the company's values and identity (C02, 1.367-374; C06, 1.160-164; C04, 1.213f.; C03, 1. 79-81, C01, 1.153-156). According to one expert, explicitly prohibiting copy-pasting AI-generated output ensures human oversight to maintain quality standards (C04, 1.198-200). Another expert emphasizes the importance of maintaining a certain uniqueness in language and a sense of recognition:

"I think we are simply a brand that still needs and seeks this human touch and here we also believe that an artificial intelligence would not be able to do that, to match our writing style or to ensure that at the end of the day the result is what you want to hear." (C02, 1.141-145, translated to English)

The experts were asked about specific cases in which they would not rely on AI support. In case of important press releases such as acquisition announcements or project communications (AG02, 1.195-203; AG01, 1.143; C05, 1. 57-60,193-198), expert opinions and opinion statements (AG05, 1.216-218), interpersonal consulting (AG06, 1.236-241), corporate and health-related topics (C01, 1.148f.), customer complaints (C02, 1.232-235), and corporate social responsibility initiatives such as charity actions (C04, 1.165-172), the interviewed experts draw the line for the use of AI in content creation. These are areas where human expertise and judgment are considered crucial and cannot be adequately replaced by AI.

Ensuring responsible handling

While only two out of six agency experts have not yet established internal measures such as a control mechanism and documented AI regulations (AG01, 1.186; AG05, 1.265), on the company side, five out of six interviewed companies (C01, 1.175; C02, 1.285-287; C03, 1.176f.;C04, 1.221; C06, 1.233f.) have not yet taken steps to ensure internally that AI tools for content creation are also used responsibly in the team. As evaluated above, the status quo indicates that AI tools are already being experimented with or regularly used in certain areas for support, but according to the experts, the use of AI tools is still a matter of personal responsibility and assessment. One interviewee on the agency side says in this regard:

"So far, internal regulations on the use of AI are only like "just try it out" and "just do it reasonably, do it responsibly". Currently, there is still a lot of individual responsibility for using it in a truly rational and responsible way." (AG05, 1.267-270, translated to English)

Six experts indicate that they have additional measures planned to address this gap for responsible handling in the near future. Three experts out of them see the opportunity for additional training to educate and provide content on a learning platform for the seamless integration of AI applications into work processes (AG01, 1.47f.; AG03, 1.259; C04, 1.193-202). Three experts (AG04-1, 1.151-154; AG06, 1.289-293; C03, 1.169f.) envision the establishment of a company-wide AI policy that goes beyond mere data protection restrictions in the future.

In this regard, five experts have already implemented specific security measures, while the internal prohibition of generative AI applications is the furthest-reaching measure, as reported by one expert (C05, 1.25f.). However, the majority of experts who responded affirmatively mentioned that they have adopted regulations for handling AI tools, such as censoring real names (AG01, 1.144-151), inputting extensive confidential information into those tools (AG02, 1.229f.; AG06, 1.270-277), or inputting company-relevant information (C04, 1.195-197).

4.6 Future changes in corporate communications

Expected change in the distribution of roles in communication

With regard to a potential shift in the daily tasks of a communicator, the experts interviewed see the possibility of permanent outsourcing, especially at the "lower levels" (AG02, 1.261), while leaving the initial draft and basic text creation to AI tools (C03, 1.195-197; C05, 1.237f.; C02, 1.338-340). As a result, the focus of the tasks would then shift towards editing of AI-generated material and conducting final fact-checks (C03, 1.197f.; C05, 1.179-181).

“You work on a first draft basis, and you become a moderator and a text performer, text reformer, but you don't become a first drafter in many cases.” (C05, 1.238-241, translated to English)

One expert provides a comparison with outsourcing of elements to external service providers, whereby content creation in press and communication departments is often outsourced to agencies, which could simply diversify further in the direction of AI in the future (C02, 1.330-337).

However, experts relativise their statement on outsourcing and limit the impact to specific elements. Especially in customer contact and in the B2C environment, the human component is still essential, according to one expert:

“It is not my perception that very large institutional investors who want to invest 20 million euros are suddenly fobbed off with an AI or a bot in the initial contact.” (AG01, 1.203-205, translated to English)

The possibility that the general skills of communicators may change when content production can be outsourced is mentioned by one expert from agency side (AG04-1, 1.412-422). Contrary to the opinions of other experts that human advisory services are difficult to replace, one expert mentions that data-driven decision-making can be more rational due to the availability of more data points, potentially surpassing human capabilities (AG03, 1.294-303). However, a clear trend towards task transformation cannot be derived from the expert interviews and may be evaluated on a sector-specific basis.

Eight experts see personnel reductions as a result of outsourcing individual activities, with five experts from the agency side (AG02, 1.261f.; AG03, 1.310f.; AG04-2, 1.371-373; AG05, 1.278-281; AG06, 1.309-312) and three from the company side (C01, 1.182-185; C02, 1.355-357; C05, 1.249-251). However, a complete elimination of the human communicator role is not expected:

“And with that, maybe there will be a few less positions because people can create more in less time, or maybe from five editors there will only be four or something. The role will change, but the roles will still exist. With the graphic designers you can take it analogously.” (C05, 1.249-252, translated to English)

“I can imagine that the editorial teams that exist in some agencies, which are only there for writing, will shrink. This whole copyright issue, also something like writing social media copies, that will also shrink and will drive people more towards consulting.” (AG05, 1.290-293, translated to English)

The human function of strategic thinking and a human creative approach is still highly valued by the majority of experts (AG04-2, 1.368-370; AG06, 1.314-317; C03, 1.225f.; C04, 1.243-245; C05, 1.148), towards which the task focus is expected to shift. Consequently, technical area will gain importance, as with AI "you get an auxiliary instrument that you can use in any scale, depending on how you have fed the machine" (C05, 1.246f.). It becomes apparent, in comparison, that according to the experts' perspective, the services provided by a creative agency will increasingly resemble strategic consulting services (AG06, 1.309-314; AG05, 1.167-169, C04, 1.243-245). Furthermore, in the collaboration with journalists, one expert emphasizes that the interaction should not solely rely on AI tools:

“We have to be careful that we don't disappear because, as a communications agency, we have hidden behind tools a lot over the last few years [...] and sometimes neglected personal communication. [...] You cannot expect that because you can write texts, you are now in a good position to do communications work, because the AI can do that too.” (AG05, 1.282-289 translated to English)

In addition to the existing tasks, there is a need for training in giving commands to the AI, such as formulating prompts, which was explicitly mentioned by four experts (AG04-1, 1.158f.; C03, 1.197; C04, 1.286-288; C06, 1.250f.). As a result, the briefing process shifts its focus to the recipient, where

external service providers were previously briefed, and now instructions are given to an AI. Therefore, in-depth background knowledge is necessary to effectively communicate instructions to the AI:

Importance of human creativity

All the experts interviewed agree that AI applications are meant to complement the everyday tasks of communicators, rather than completely replace their roles. According to the interview results, human creativity remains paramount compared to AI-generated content. Eight experts assess that AI applications are not inherently creative (AG01, 1.214-217; AG04-1, 1.380-383; AG05, 1. 303f.; AG06, 1.323f.; C02, 1.382-384; C04, 1.263; C06, 1.260f.), as generative AI simply aggregates, reconfigures, and reproduces existing content:

“GPT-4 is in fact maximally generic. So, if you look at what the thing does - it calculates a sequence of sentences based on probabilities that it has somehow obtained from training data. That is, it actually only calculates words and takes the most probable. [...] The less details you type in, the less detailed and less creative it is, but at least it forms an average opinion.” (AG04-1, translated to English)

Five experts also sum up that the uniqueness of the output is not given (AG02, 1.189f.; AG06, 1.316f; C01, 1.207-209; C04, 1.264-268; C05, 1.269-271) if it is AI-generated, since the same input from open-source applications also generates the same output:

“Then there is the one-size-fits-all output. With ChatGPT or other artificial intelligence that is generally available and not customised, it will just spit out the same uniform mish-mash.” (C05, 1.271-273, translated to English)

Especially in competition and rivalry, human creativity is necessary to stand out (C01, 1.209-211). A specific "made by human" touch is considered by five experts (AG02, 1. 308-310; AG03, 1. 124; AG05, 1.312-314; AG06, 1.304f.; C01, 1.152f.) to result in an increase in human elements. In the content field, it is essential to highlight the sender of the content, as "authenticity will gain importance, along with creative content creation" (AG02, 1.310f.). Two experts envision that human creativity and AI-generated content will become separate categories, established in society like a trend, with neither dying out but rather gaining importance in different ways (AG03, 1.339f.; AG05, 1.314f.).

One expert holds the opinion that AI can even support human creativity to a certain extent.

“I once talked to a designer at our company [...] and she told me that when she has a picture, she has all the elements in her head - but she can't photoshop or draw everything herself, and tools like that can help her to get to the picture faster [...] And then it doesn't replace more creativity but enables much more of it. On a completely larger scale.” (AG04-1, 1.389-394, translated to English)

The views on the future of AI applications are based on speculation regarding the extent to which AI will continue to gain importance or eventually fade as a "hype topic" (C02, 1.421; AG02, 1.53). In summary, it can be concluded that AI cannot be viewed as a "vacuum" (AG06, 1.323), but rather requires a division into specific task areas. According to the experts, human creativity cannot be replaced but rather may vary in its dynamics and manifestations with the future implication of AI-tools.

5 Discussion

After conducting an analysis of the experts' statements, the results are compared and discussed in relation to existing literature and research. The findings are categorized and aligned with the research guiding questions, providing the foundation for addressing the overarching research question conclusively. Subsequently, the insights obtained from the exploratory research are synthesized and classified.

5.1 Results RGQ1 - Current use of generative AI tools

The current use of generative AI can be observed in the areas of text generation and editing, image generation, translation services, and outsourcing research. While the study conducted by Rosenberger et al. found that the utilization of AI systems in content creation had little significance in most communication departments at the time of the survey (Rosenberger et al., 2023, p. 37), this finding cannot be confirmed in the present research. According to Rosenberger et al., there was a lack of conviction and utility in the output of AI-applications (Rosenberger et al., 2023, p. 40), which opens up a the necessity for reassessment following the release of ChatGPT. The results of expert interviews in the current research indicate that automated content generation is being widely applied, and ChatGPT is perceived by communicators as a catalyst for introducing AI solutions into communication departments, gaining attention in the process. The analysis indicates that the majority of communication practitioners can be classified in an experimentation phase, although a concrete implementation strategy has not yet emerged. This aligns with the findings of the trend report by Beckett, which states that 63% of respondents have not developed a clear AI strategy, indicating a high degree of experimentation in the field of journalism (Beckett, 2019, p. 38). Although these findings are from 2019, they can be related to this study in the field of corporate communication due to the relevance of the topic and the focus on content generation. Communicators emphasize the importance of AI applications in the area of text generation, which extends to all textual elements and finds application in SEO optimization, social media, headline generation, and video scripts. It is evident that editorial work at various levels can be supported by AI applications, including tasks such as editing and proofreading, which can be outsourced to machine tools, thereby reducing workload. According to the interviewed experts, AI applications are particularly suitable for repetitive tasks and the generation of standard texts with minimal structural and content variations, as well as for consolidating simple information, which can benefit agencies in particular. It is assumed that repetitive tasks can be streamlined using AI tools, similar to using a template, which can then be customized by communicators based on specific requirements. AI tools are also being used for translation work, indicating a progressive development. According to Rosenberger et al., the percentage of communicators utilizing AI applications for content translation has significantly

increased compared to the base year 2020 (Rosenberger et al., 2023, p. 37), which development can also be confirmed in the present findings. However, it should be noted that translation tools like DeepL are often not directly associated with AI tools, as the current societal awareness focuses more on text and image generators, causing these translation tools to fade into the background. In the current use of AI-tools, there is no significant difference evident between agencies and corporate communicators, as both only partially implementing the new technology and are still in the early stages of strategizing and organizing the application of AI. Both groups see potential for general inspiration, even though agencies and strategic consultants are not directly involved in content creation. Instead, they view AI applications as a means to gain a "fresh perspective" (AG04-2, 1.35) or as an "additional new employee" (C06, 1.159f.). However, it can be assumed with further progress in AI application, there may be differences in the application of AI between agencies and corporate sectors in the long term. Standardized text generation and image creation can be handled in-house through tools on the corporate view, while using AI as additional source of inspiration and creativity can enhance primarily the daily work routine from an agency perspective. However, both sides can benefit from it.

The current internal positioning serves as a basis for responsible technology management, offers insights into new role distribution, and provides a solid foundation for guidance and publishing processes. The extent to which a communication department positions itself as technology-friendly towards AI depends on industry relations and corporate culture and is thus at the discretion of top management. On the agency side, there is already intense internal engagement with AI topics, which is necessary to stay up to date with current developments. It requires specific training for those responsible, which is already reflected in the emergence of additional educational formats. Overall, internal engagement regarding AI can be classified in the implementation of employee training, the appointment of specific individuals within a task force or test groups both on corporate and agency side. It is evident that a first-mover strategy is not being pursued by the interviewed experts, but there is a clear awareness of the potential among the communicators in both survey groups, indicating a high interest in intensive engagement with the topic. Currently, the implementation is focused on exploring and structuring internal processes to identify useful tools and define how they can be used within a given framework. An observant attitude towards competitors is also adopted to be part of the development while being prepared in case of possible negative events and reactions. On the agency side, it is evident that AI development is being handled similarly to other technological innovations and societal hypes, and therefore, internal messaging is based on technological openness rather than communicating challenges and fear.

On the other hand, the question of current external positioning reveals a split between agencies and corporate views. Overall, a clear reservation to external positioning becomes evident for various reasons. From the company's perspective, external positioning and labelling regarding the use of AI is not considered relevant at the time of the expert interviews, as this information is not demanded by the public or generally disclosed as part of corporate identity. Additionally, at the time of the interviews, labelling was not deemed necessary since the content created with the help of AI serves as a first draft and is further modified by employees, thus no pure AI output is published without human intervention. While the positioning of AI for corporate use is considered irrelevant, agencies are concerned about negative public perception. On one hand, services still need to be justified for clients to be willing to pay and perceive value in agency collaboration. This necessitates a new strategic positioning that goes beyond simply fulfilling the service with the support of AI tools. In a recent study on AI adoption in communication conducted by strategic communication consultancies PRovoke Media and Sandpiper, 31% of the surveyed 406 global communication professionals expect agencies to transparently indicate the use of AI in all their workpieces. Only about 19% of the respondents consider labeling to be irrelevant (Sandpiper & PRovoke Media, 2023, p. 16). This claim for transparency in agency cooperation is also reflected among the interviewed experts in this research. Another factor to consider is that clients may generally feel overwhelmed by the topic of AI, which is why agencies need to approach their clients on an equal footing and adapt to their reactions regarding their technological affinity and possible concerns. On the other hand, agencies face a certain expectation to constantly work at the forefront of progress, making external positioning regarding AI usage obsolete as it is perceived as a given by clients and therefore seems rather regressive. In summary, external positioning by agencies as a potential unique selling proposition (USP) primarily occurs through representative CEOs using private social media profiles or directly in client discussions to provide early clarification about the application. However, in the present study with only two experts (AG05, 1.132-134; AG06, 1.148), this only represents the minority perspective.

5.2 Results RGQ2 - Preparedness and confidence of communication practitioners

The evaluation of the general readiness and confidence in the use of AI in communication reveals a high level of self-initiative to engage with the current topic and the associated tools. The need to stay informed about AI implementation extends beyond one's own job scope, even when the adoption of AI is not directly driven by the employer. However, the current state of CommTech implementation depends on the extent to which the management level creates awareness, or an innovative corporate culture serves as a foundation. There is a split between respondents who perceive support from their executives and those who solely engage with generative AI tools in their personal capacity. This observation is more prevalent in the corporate environment, whereas the agency side shows a

consistent willingness to embrace AI, with executives fully attuned to its relevance. This can be attributed to a certain level of agility, as agencies are accustomed to adapting to new environments as part of their job scope, while corporate communicators often operate only within their own industry. Similar findings were reported in the Global CommTech Report by the PR-consultancy Purposeful Relations, which conducted a survey with 329 communications professionals from December 2022 to March 2023. In that study, 67% of agency participants stated feeling confident in the field of AI and CommTech, compared to only 52% on the corporate side. (Bruce & Bailey, p. 22). Virmani and Gregory surveyed 280 individuals in the communication industry, with 41.5% indicating that they feel capable of using AI applications but lack technical understanding. In the 2021 survey, 30% stated that they do not feel ready to apply AI knowledge in the workplace (Virmani & Gregory, 2021, p. 6). Zerfass et al. also concluded in their 2019 study of 2,689 communicators that there is a relatively limited understanding of AI application (Zerfass et al., 2020, p. 383). As the above-mentioned studies show, it is evident that as AI development progresses, the willingness to engage with it increases. Depending on the level of intensity in the workplace, confidence in AI application varies and is influenced by the availability of information and an internal embrace of experimentation, which is also supported by leadership. On the agency side, there is a certain foundational understanding of innovations due to the nature of the profession.

The interview participants identified the need for training and a lack of knowledge as the biggest challenge. It is closely linked to concerns that in a rapidly growing and ever-changing technological environment, information provision needs to be consistent and up to date. In line with Zerfass et al.'s study, the competence of communicators remains one of the challenges that companies and agencies have to address (Zerfass et al., 2020, p. 383) Furthermore, if the initiative to engage with AI technologies arises solely from personal interest, there is often a lack of time available in the workplace. The communication practitioners surveyed in the Market Intelligence Report by the F.A.Z. Institute also cite lack of capacity as the main reason why they cannot extensively delve into technological innovations (Czotscher, 2020, p. 5), as it would create an additional workload. Furthermore, employees need to be equally trained and engaged in the AI field, regardless of their prior experience or personal technological affinity. As emphasized by Zerfass et al., the perception of AI applications in the communication field is influenced by factors such as age, gender, and position, which may lead to varying perspectives (Zerfass et al., 2020, p. 383). Taking this aspect into account, organizations face the challenge of effectively integrating AI tools within teams in a way that is efficient and self-explanatory, enabling all employees to use them effectively. According to the findings of Bruce and Bailey, the key challenge lies in ensuring that the communication team is capable of properly applying technological innovations (Bruce & Bailey, p. 28). To achieve this, it is necessary for leaders to be able to perceive concerns and fears and address them in a way that allows

employees to view AI tools not as competition but as a complement to their tasks (C05, l.83f.). An additional challenge is ensuring data privacy and protecting intellectual property. According to the survey results of Czotscher, the ideal AI solution is one that is user-friendly, efficient, and guarantees data privacy (Czotscher, 2020, p. 10). Agencies face the challenge of maintaining client trust while openly utilizing AI applications for support, which need to be sealed through AI policies in contracts. On the other hand, comprehensive consulting is necessary to warn clients of potential data privacy risks, which can result in agency experts initially refraining from recommending work on sensitive topics with AI tools (AG04-1, l.136f.) or companies discontinuing their use for security reasons (C05, l.25). Furthermore, communicators need to have a comprehensive understanding of which tools are suitable for specific responsibilities in order to strike a balance between experimenting with and applying each tool, without causing inefficiencies. However, a certain level of autonomy is also necessary to stay abreast of innovations and avoid potential competitive disadvantages. Challenges such as lack of IT infrastructure or limited budget for implementation, as identified by Zerfass et al. (Zerfass et al., 2020, p. 383) could not be confirmed in the current study.

Another aspect of the current preparedness for implementation is whether companies and agencies have already adopted internal AI policies, which provide a regulatory framework for its use and offer guidelines for content creation with AI. The results of the expert interviews indicate that internal AI policies are more defined on the agency side compared to companies at the time of the survey. There is still no company-wide approach evident in terms of handling AI, and communicators rely solely on personal responsibility and discretion. This is also reflected in the AI Report by Sandpiper and PRovoke Media, which states that only 11% of the respondents claim to have already adopted policies for AI usage, while 36% indicate that they currently have no policies and do not plan to implement any within the next 12 months (Sandpiper & PRovoke Media, 2023, p. 15). Half of the interviewed experts in the current research stated that they already have measures planned for implementation in the near future to ensure security. This may include additional educational formats and training, as well as a defined contractual AI policy that all employees have to adhere to, similar to a privacy policy. This result highlights the fact that there is currently no clear strategy applied when experimenting with AI tools, although the willingness to integrate them into daily work is high. It also emphasizes the existing uncertainty regarding the extent to which sensitive information may be reused by AI tool operators or can even pose a risk to organizations. Agencies appear more confident in the application and implementation of AI and can leverage their role as strategic advisors to support companies in a long-term integration beyond experimentation. Companies and agencies that have already dealt with specific guidelines for working with AI ensure responsible use by refraining from including real names, confidential or company-specific information in open-source programs, and

even disabling individual tools across the organization until a legal framework is established at the policy level to protect companies from data misuse.

5.3 Results RGQ3 - Potentials of using AI in content production

While it is already apparent in journalism that AI applications are not only establishing themselves in the area of analysis, but increasingly so in the area of content production (Beckett, 2019, p. 20), this development is also noticeable in communication. There is significant potential for the implementation of AI in the areas of text and image generation. While it emerges from the analysis of the interviews that communicators are still in a testing phase, it is clear that for experts on the agency and company side, a more in-depth exploration beyond current use is feasible. The specificity here lies in the creation of first drafts that will change the central task steps of copywriting and editing. According to one expert (C05, 1.239-241), AI can potentially provide a first proposal, systematically reducing the actual textual workload and outsourcing part of the editor's position to AI. Additionally, AI could serve as an analysis and comprehensive research tool in communication, enabling a profound overview of the media landscape and identifying patterns for personalized audience targeting. From a conversation with an agency expert (AG04-1, 1.262-284), it becomes apparent that the dimensions of the GPT-4 model can deliver even more appealing results with just a few input prompts, creating a new decision-making basis for agencies and companies. However, it is also evident that human revision is still necessary to align with the company's language and specific conventions. It can be assumed, as already indicated in the expert discussion (C05, 1.195-197), that there will be a trend towards company-specific customized AI versions that have already integrated key messages and corporate language into their training data, thus providing tailor-made communication elements that require little to no "human-in-the-loop" interaction. This development is already underlined by the dynamic range of new tailored AI products on the market. For example, the AI company *retresco* coined the term "hybrid natural language processing," enabling the integration of generative AI and dynamic text generation in content creation. Users no longer have to set up conditions in prompts each time during the content creation process and can instead store corporate language elements and comparable company-compliant text blocks in pre-created text modules. This allows for even more time-saving creation of repetitive texts (*retresco*, 2023). The software company Adobe has also entered the market with Adobe Sensei, offering a tool extension to optimize content creation precisely through personalized AI applications and meet the demands of stakeholders (Adobe Sensei, 2023). In summary, the market trend towards personalized AI applications, along with the analysis of expert interviews considering the needs and expectations of AI tools, indicates that as the application in content production becomes more secure, customization for companies can be further expected. While "ChatGPT as the biggest technological advance since

the intervention of the internet" (Newman, 2023, p. 35) has been the prevailing view, the development of company-specific AI beyond open-source and online applications offers a future perspective that can continuously support and optimize content creation. It has the potential to benefit communication practitioners in the long run, going beyond the opportunity to create initial drafts.

Experts predominantly perceive disadvantages in a lack of integration of AI in a competitive disadvantage, which is assessed differently by agencies and companies. Corporate communicators recognize the potential for cost savings through staff reductions or the elimination of services that can be taken in-house through AI tools, thereby providing financial relief. On the agency side, the advantage is on time savings that AI-supported content creation can entail. Time-consuming tasks such as drafting, standardized text generation, or translation can be outsourced to AI, freeing up employees' time for more creative work, as highlighted by Panda et al. (Panda et al., 2019, p. 197). Time savings are a crucial factor in meeting the ever-increasing volume of content and remaining competitive, and according to Banholzer, AI is essential for responding to the challenges of the present time (Banholzer, 2020, p. 13). From an agency perspective, this is also a revenue-related issue as having a competitive advantage through AI usage enables serving multiple clients simultaneously. As a result, agencies are already early adopters of the AI development, building essential knowledge and experience that can be leveraged now to establish a strong position. However, it is also emphasized that AI should not be seen as an isolated solution, but rather as part of a continuous development that does not diminish the importance of human work. Consequently, experts primarily see the positive impacts of AI implementation in terms of time and cost savings, which have also been identified as the two main benefits of communication technology in the Global CommTech Report (Bruce & Bailey, p. 35).

5.4 Results RGQ4 - Risks of using AI in content production

The main uncertainties regarding the use of AI tools in content production lie in the field of legal regulations. In practice, it has become evident that there are significant gaps in knowledge and uncertainties, particularly when it comes to data protection. By now, attempts are being made to deal with the risk by not entering real names and confidential information into the open-source tools. However, this approach needs to be implemented in a consistent and error-free manner, as otherwise, censoring sensitive information would not be effective. A review of the current state of legal regulations shows, as mentioned in Chapter 2.4, that the impacts of generative AI are only vaguely covered by law up to now, leaving users confronted with insufficient data protection for corporate usage and gray areas. An example for concerns regarding intellectual property is the case of the South Korean electronics company Samsung, that led to extensive media attention. Employees inserted sensitive software code into the tool ChatGPT to solve an internal problem, resulting in the company

banning the use of generative AI tools due to the security risk (Gurman, 2023). In a hearing letter in April 2023, the State Centre for Data Protection in Schleswig-Holstein requested OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT and the associated language models from GPT to GPT-4, to provide answers to pertinent data protection inquiries regarding data processing, legality, the rights of affected individuals, and data security. OpenAI, however, has requested an extension to respond to these data protection questions (Hansen, 2023). One can therefore expect that OpenAI will provide a statement on this matter in the near future, which could provide further clarification. Currently, OpenAI's privacy policy states that as of May 1, 2023, data entered solely for API (Application Programming Interface) purposes will no longer be used for training and improvement (OpenAI, 2023b). However, for services like ChatGPT or DALL-E, the entered data is still used for further training unless users actively opt out (OpenAI, 2023c). From this information it can be inferred that using open-source applications of these generative AI offerings is not recommended when entering proprietary or sensitive data. This is supported by a statement from an expert from a technology company that has experienced a blockage of such applications. Therefore, it is recommended for organizations to implement own customized versions that can include ChatGPT databases in the form of an API, allowing them to integrate AI into their workflow while protecting their intellectual property. Furthermore, it is evident that translation applications like DeepL also need to be taken into consideration, as in the free version, entered content can serve as training data, while only the paid "Pro" service provides encrypted protection (DeepL, 2023). Although translation tools were only mentioned in connection with risks by two experts, it can be assumed that translation services are often not directly associated with AI applications, and therefore, risks to an organization's data protection may arise when using open-source translation providers without internal regulation. Uncertainties also arise in copyright law, particularly in the generation of image and video materials. According to Midjourney's policy, the open-source version of image creation is not permitted for commercial purposes, necessitating the purchase of a Pro license. Additionally, the Terms of Service state that copyright licenses for the input to Midjourney are transferred and can be further processed (Midjourney, 2023). In conclusion, the findings from the expert interviews underscore the need for clear guidelines from legislators to address legal concerns in order to respond to AI developments in the long term and provide businesses with confidence in adopting innovative AI technologies.

Ethical risks are perceived differently by experts. While the restructuring of job structures and the potential loss of jobs are seen by experts as a natural process of innovative development and not considered problematic, the linguistic output in terms of racism and sexism is negatively evaluated. Particularly on the agency side, there is a clear awareness of these concerns, as emphasized by an expert in the use of image generators, which even renders their use impractical (AG04-1, 1.329). On the corporate side, the relevance of linguistic adjustments may vary depending on the subject matter,

as long as no communication materials are created that include ethically questionable statements. Therefore, a higher sensitivity to ethical concerns can be observed on the agency side, which is also confirmed by the findings of the Global CommTech Reports by Bruce and Bailey, showing that a majority of agency respondents' express confidence in their ethical understanding. Only 20% of agency respondents would rate their ethical capabilities as low, compared to approximately 34% on the corporate side. (Bruce & Bailey, p. 42), which indicates a slight shift in ethical awareness on the agency side. According to two interviewed experts (AG05, 1.210-212; C06, 1.221-227), the ethical principle of sustainability (Floridi et al., 2018, p. 17) also raises concerns, as the use of AI has to align with the sustainability goals of companies, and the computational power required for AI is associated with high emissions. The study by Strubell et al. points out that the training and development processes of NLP applications emit greenhouse gases equivalent to the emissions of five average cars over their lifecycle (Strubell, Ganesh, & McCallum, 2019, 1f.). Although these estimates are from 2019, it can be assumed that the energy supply to power these AI applications does not come solely from carbon-neutral energy sources today and thus represent a significant problem for climate protection in the long run. Furthermore, there exist ethical concerns in the area of misinformation and deepfake creation. With the easy accessibility and free availability of AI tools, anyone can create false information, which necessitates a thorough verification of the output. Additionally, organizations may face false accusations that can lead to reputational damage. These concerns require a human oversight and check-up before the AI-generated output is published in practice. Within organizations, AI is seen as a "ghostwriter" (AG05, 1.227), providing a fresh perspective and support. In their study on the creativity of AI tools, Haase and Hanel conclude that machines can keep up with human abilities in ideation processes, but that human creativity in general is needed to formulate the prompt in order to even initiate the process (Haase & Hanel, 2023, p. 9). This is also confirmed in the approach of the experts interviewed. However, AI is not considered a tool that makes human labour completely dispensable in content creation processes. To ensure the uniqueness and originality of the content, as well as appropriate language and expression of organizational messages, editorial revision and a final check is still carried out by communication practitioners themselves.

5.5 Results RGQ5 - Shifts in collaboration between agencies and companies

The interviews of communication professional reveal that the collaboration with agencies and strategy consultants could undergo long-term changes. AI tools have the potential to replace certain paid services but need to be differentiated according to the work involved. In general, consulting services are perceived to be challenging to replace in practice. It is evident that creative agencies, however, need to realign themselves in order to survive in content creation processes as AI continues to advance. On the agency side, there is an awareness that their work will need to be distinctive

enough to clients and demonstrate clear added value in order to justify paid services. This necessitates addressing the extent of generative AI tool implementation in agency services right from the contract stage. In practice, it is clear that, according to agency experts, a certain level of caution is necessary in the implementation of AI, as there is concern that it may intimidate clients or trigger a negative response. However, it can be expected that as the relevance of AI increases on the corporate side, there will be a greater openness to the topic as long as transparency in its application is maintained and the value proposition for the clients is evident. Agency respondents also anticipate a growing expectation from the corporate side, which could translate into higher demands for speed and quality of deliverables.

In the overall development of communication work, there is a noticeable trend of outsourcing standardized and repetitive tasks, as well as the use of AI solutions for generating initial drafts and providing inspiration for basic texts. However, it is not expected that AI will completely replace entire job areas. The extent of AI implementation also depends on the target audience, as client interaction and B2C communication are considered irreplaceable in practice. Unlike the categorization of task reduction by communication technology into primary and functional support activities by Brockhaus and Zerfass (Zerfass & Brockhaus, 2021, p. 208), there is no clear distinction possible in the case of generative AI applications, as they encompass both aspects. If one considers the role distribution in the STAKE model by Aspland, as described in Chapter 2.2.4, the practice shows that it only partially applies (Aspland, 2017, p. 21). While strategic alignment is necessary, a deeper engagement at the organizational level and an educational and advisory role of the communication department are not universally evident from the expert reports. Instead, it should be individually considered based on each company's circumstances and is not solely driven by communicators. This indicates that the role of communicators in the digital transformation process of AI applications has so far been limited to the micro-level (Rosenberger & Niederhäuser, 2019, p. 81), as the concrete implementation and role definition are still an ongoing process in practice. The role of leadership is changing to become guides and motivators for the use of AI tools in the content creation process, requiring a certain level of openness to encourage communicators on the corporate and agency sides to engage with AI. This is supported by the concept of the “Chief Culture Officers” introduced by Rosenberger et al., where corporate communication leaders are expected to drive the cultural shift towards technological know-how (Rosenberger et al., 2023, p. 8). Particularly on the agency side, long-term personnel reductions and contract reductions are conceivable, as the production of texts and images can be outsourced to AI, leading to a shrinking of positions such as copywriting and editing. Creative agencies may also shift their focus towards consultancy services. When working with journalists, personal contact remains crucial to maintain deep stakeholder relationships. Furthermore, it can be expected that the skill set of communication practitioners will be complemented by developing a technological

understanding for prompt formulation and providing instructions to AI to achieve the best possible output. This means that the communication role is no longer solely defined by editorial skills but requires a sense of guiding AI applications and subsequently reviewing and adapting the AI-generated output.

In the overall analysis, it is evident that the importance of human creativity is still highly valued in practice. The use of AI for content creation is not a replacement for human functions but rather a process enhancement to support creativity. Experts dismiss the notion of machine creativity, recognising that the output generated by text generators is too generic and lacks the ability to produce a certain "outside-the-box" twist. It is seen as a mere collection of the most probable text segments. Furthermore, it is believed that human skills remain more competitive and essential for successfully differentiating oneself from competitors. On the agency side, there is a belief that the demand for exclusively human-created content will continue to rise due to the AI movement, as a certain level of authenticity is required to stand out in the mass of content. In summary, the overall development of AI should be viewed as a dynamic process that does not eliminate individual human positions or render them obsolete. Instead, it involves reconfiguring the flow of specific processes and should not be examined in isolation.

5.6 Summary - Answering of research question

This research aims to answer the question of to what extent content production processes in corporate communications are shaped by the use of AI, while drawing a comparison between the perspectives of agencies and corporate communication practitioners. As an exploratory study, it provides a foundation for practical applicability in the field of content production and offers insights from different perspectives on how communication practitioners assess the technology. The key findings of the research can be highlighted as follows:

Outsourcing repetitive tasks and creative inspiration to AI

Implementation of AI applications in content production processes can significantly contribute to outsourcing repetitive tasks and alleviate the "fear of writing" or lack of creativity by serving as a source of creative inspiration. This gradually replaces purely editorial tasks, transforming the daily work routine to focus on refining and adapting texts rather than starting from scratch.

Agencies more agile in internal use of AI

Compared to the perspective of communicators in the corporate environment, agencies demonstrate a more intensive internal engagement with AI on a strategic basis. This is evident through activities such as employee training, task forces, and test groups. While both groups of interviewed experts are

currently experimenting with the use of AI, agencies exhibit a more structured approach to its implementation in work processes.

AI as a point of differentiation: Agencies hesitate, companies question relevance

Communicators do not perceive AI as a topic to position themselves externally. Companies are cautious in addressing corporate identity issues and have not yet faced external inquiries on this topic. On the other hand, agencies are hesitant because they are expected to be well-informed and capable of handling the topic by their clients, and they fear that actively communicating about AI may make them appear outdated. However, there are also concerns that if AI can perform tasks traditionally handled by agencies, their added value, which justifies payment, may be questioned.

Self-initiated try-outs instead of employer guidance and support

The confidence in using AI tools is dependent on the extent to which communication practitioners engage with them and is strongly influenced by their own technical affinity. Currently, the instruction and engagement for AI adoption are not driven by employers but rather by self-initiative. As a result, differences in the degree of implementation can be observed depending on the work area and previous projects.

Knowledge gaps as biggest challenge

The main challenge and key to successful implementation of AI tools in content creation processes are perceived to be knowledge gaps and the need for continuous training. The emerging and evolving nature of AI leads to the introduction of numerous new tools. This creates a need to stay updated on the latest possibilities and trends, which can be difficult to achieve within the constraints of daily work. Additionally, it is important to ensure that even individuals with less technical affinity are equally supported in using AI applications to fully harness their potential.

AI Potentials: Corporates save costs, Agencies save time

Companies see the greatest potential in outsourcing individual work steps to AI, which can ultimately lead to reducing their in-house teams or cutting down on contract services with agencies, resulting in cost savings. Agencies, on the other hand, primarily see the potential for time savings, allowing them to serve multiple clients and allocate the saved time to other work steps such as strategy and creativity. This can lead to long-term competitive advantages in the market.

Working with customized AI versions for optimized output

In practice, AI outputs often need to be adjusted afterwards to incorporate nuances such as corporate language and brand messaging. To ensure that the output reliably reflects the company's identity,

customized AI versions are a way to fully harness the potential of AI support. Furthermore, this approach allows for control over the data used for training, thus minimizing concerns regarding intellectual property and data privacy.

Repositioning of creative agencies towards consultancy services

Balancing transparency and client expectations in the application of AI is crucial in the collaboration between agencies and companies, which is why the use of AI may be contractually established in advance. There is a need for alignment between being perceived as an innovative organization at the forefront of technology, without overwhelming or raising concerns among clients. Agencies will need to clearly define the added value of their services in the long term to justify their fees. Creative agencies that focus solely on the creation of communication materials may face declining demand and need to develop additional business models to continue providing value.

Main uncertainty in legal issues

Data protection, copyright issues, and concerns about misinformation and reputational damage are the biggest uncertainties in the application of AI, preventing the use of AI support for sensitive and important processes and topics. Depending on the interpretation of providers' policies, users may be exposed to inadequate data protection, while the increase of generative content requires fact-checking. The legal framework is still too vaguely defined to protect users from all the risks associated with AI, posing ongoing risks to intellectual property and sensitive data of companies and agencies.

Ethical perspective: Concerns about discrimination and sustainability

Ethical concerns regarding job displacement in cognitive tasks are not seen as problematic, but rather as part of a continuous innovation process that changes or requires reorientation of jobs. However, linguistic and visual discrimination are considered problematic, although it is acknowledged that the ethical orientation always aligns with the machine's training data. The sustainability aspect, due to the high carbon dioxide emissions from computational power, is also considered, as companies and agencies should consider the impact when striving to achieve their sustainability goals.

Human oversight and creative thinking are irreplaceable

Despite the abundance of easily and quickly generated content, genuine human creativity continues to be highly valued and even gains significance. It remains to be seen to what extent AI integrates into society and establishes itself as a fixed component. The publication of AI-generated content without prior human review is excluded by agency and corporate communicators. AI is a complement to human capabilities and simplifies the content creation process in collaborative work steps such as

initial drafting, translation, and editing. However, it does not replace entire human professions and cannot be examined in isolation, but has to be weighed up according to the area of application.

6 Conclusion

The process of content creation in corporate communication is not only influenced by the digital transformation but also faces challenges from media exposure, network structures, and the battle for attention. The development from communication for stakeholder influence to targeted communication with desired content, known as CommTech development, aims to find new ways to engage target audiences and optimize internal processes in a rapidly evolving landscape. With OpenAI's launch of the ChatGPT chatbot, the focus has shifted to the application of generative AI, which has become a central topic in the communication industry. AI has the potential to revolutionize the work of communication practitioners by not only streamlining processes but also generating entirely new content. However, the implementation of AI brings about changes in established workflows for communication professionals. This impact is not limited to the corporate environment but also extends to the collaboration between agencies and strategy consultants, whose services could be replaced by AI applications. While generative AI solutions hold hopes of addressing current challenges, leveraging competitive advantages, and freeing up additional capacities for creative and strategic work, they are accompanied by ethical concerns and limited legal protection. The current AI hype has shifted scepticism towards issues of data privacy, copyright, misinformation, and biased agenda-setting, for which the existing legal framework may be insufficient. Authentic communication with stakeholders remains a priority for building trust and strengthening reputation. Therefore, it is crucial to identify and explore the possibilities and limitations of AI implementation, as "it will be easier than ever to create 'good looking' and highly plausible multimedia content, but it will also be harder than ever to separate what is real from what is fake, misleading, or doctored" (Newman, 2023, p. 36).

This research aims to compare the perspectives of communication practitioners from agencies and the corporate sector who have already engaged with generative AI. The analysis of 13 qualitative semi-structured interviews reveals that AI tools in corporate communication will not solely take over content production and completely replace human labour in this field. Instead, they lead to a fundamental transformation of existing work processes that can be complemented by AI applications. Repetitive tasks are outsourced to AI, and content creation is accelerated through the inspiration provided by AI tools. Human oversight remains crucial for accurately reviewing and adjusting AI-generated content. Despite the societal relevance and disruptive potential of AI in transforming organizational processes, communication practitioners have not yet utilized AI for external positioning. On the internal front, agencies demonstrate a certain level of progressiveness, which can be attributed to their agility in project management and the nature of their work structures. Knowledge gaps and the need for training pose the biggest obstacles to implementation, alongside legal

uncertainties. As a result, companies currently approach AI implementation on an experimental basis rather than as part of a comprehensive strategy. The greatest potentials are seen in time and cost savings, which can ultimately lead to a competitive advantage for those who embrace AI in the content process. While open-source applications may still require more human editorial work, customized AI versions trained on corporate language deliver better output. However, AI does not fully replace human creativity but rather supports its realization, making it essential for valuable multimedia content and trust-based stakeholder relationships. The findings aim to provide an overview of the current state in the communication industry and serve as a guide for communication practitioners in handling and approaching AI applications. They can be utilized to support decision-making processes or contribute to critical engagement with the topic.

The current surge in AI applications marks another milestone in the ongoing digital transformation, offering opportunities to produce fast and high-quality content that can enrich both external and internal communication. Communication practitioners should be guided by integrity and ethical responsibility, demonstrating openness and adaptability to embrace innovations. They should also focus on acquiring strategic competencies to optimize collaboration between humans and machines, thereby maximizing the benefits and balancing the challenges, as Aspland summarizes “we can either allow automation to heavily de-humanise Corporate Communications or we can embrace it as once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reinvent the role we play inside and outside the workplace“ (Aspland, 2017, p. 28).

6.1 Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the following limitations of this scientific study. While Chapter 3 provides a clearly documented methodology to ensure a transparent and replicable approach, the qualitative analysis is still subject to the researcher's knowledge and personality, highlighting the need for future quantitative studies to validate the findings. The recruitment of experts from various industries on the corporate side aimed to obtain a broad representation, but the experts' statements should be interpreted within this context. It is crucial to question whether industry-specific factors influence the current readiness and assessment of potentials and risks in corporate communication, opening up opportunities for further research. Moreover, this study faces the challenge of operating in a field characterized by highly dynamic developments and constant innovation, potentially causing the findings outdated. It is also inevitable that other researchers may have delved deeper into the topic, potentially surpassing the relevance justification of this research. While the focus of this study is on content production in corporate communication, the interviewed practitioners on both the corporate and agency sides are involved in interdisciplinary processes, which may influence their experiences and perspectives. Additionally, literature and research reports from marketing, public

relations, journalism, and employer branding were considered and adapted to corporate communication workflows, but deviations resulting from this interdisciplinary approach cannot be fully ruled out. Furthermore, the expert sample in this research only included individuals who already have experience with AI applications, limiting the generalizability of the findings to companies and agencies already actively engaged in AI. The extent of prior AI experience required for expert selection was not initially defined but should be differentiated in future studies to enable meaningful comparisons. The translation of interviews from German to English may introduce distortions or biases that need to be considered. The study did not differentiate between operational and strategic communicators, as evidenced by strategic communication leaders providing insights into teamwork and the bigger picture, while operational practitioners mainly discussed their own experiences with tool applications. A distinction between external and internal communication could yield different results, as potentials and risks should be re-evaluated in each context. Additionally, it is recommended to separately examine the practices of agencies and consultancies to assess their expectations regarding potential changes in collaboration with companies.

6.2 Implications for future research

In addition to the research limitations outlined above, the focus on AI application in corporate communications offers various future research directions. Firstly, it would be interesting to replicate this study after three to five years to account for the rapid developments in AI and provide companies and agencies with sufficient time to position themselves in this field. Additionally, examining the age differences among the interviewed experts could provide valuable insights into AI attitudes, as digital natives are expected to be more confident in handling technological advancements compared to older communicators. While this research focuses on the role of communication in the content production process, other tasks such as information retrieval or content enhancement present additional workflows that are affected by generative AI applications and could be explored further. The scope of AI investigation can also extend beyond generative AI and encompass data analysis and evaluation, providing further insights into the digital transformation of the communication industry. Furthermore, it is possible to highlight the recipient side and evaluate stakeholders' perceptions and acceptance when agencies and companies integrate AI applications into their external communication and content creation processes. Banholzer argues that AI implementation is mainly realized in large-scale corporate communications within corporations (Banholzer, 2020, p. 21). It may be interesting to confirm or disprove this assumption in future research. Additionally, assessing the willingness to adopt AI in medium-sized enterprises could be explored, as communicators in this sector may benefit from workload reduction, budget savings, and accelerated content creation facilitated by generative AI. Further research could also explore the application of AI in B2B and B2C communication, as

different stakeholder approaches are required. Given the timeliness, relevance, and various research opportunities in the field of AI application in communication, it is expected that research in this area will continue to expand.

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Appendix

For the appendix, please refer to additional document.