LEGAL AND REGULATORY CHALLENGES OF AUTOMATED CONTENT DISTRIBUTION IN PUBLIC RELATIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper explores the legal and regulatory challenges associated with automated content distribution in public relations, critically analysing issues of content control in Nigeria, including copyright concerns, misinformation liability, and conformity challenges. Using a descriptive survey method, data were collected from 342 respondents via online sampling and analysed using frequency distributions and averages. The findings reveal that automated content creation raises significant issues regarding plagiarism, originality, reservations, and ownership of the produced material, while current copyright laws are largely symbolic in protecting AI-generated content within automated distribution systems. The analysis also confirms that automated tools increase the risk of misinformation, yet public relations practitioners are often not held morally accountable when AI systems publish their content. Furthermore, the study uncovers that Nigeria's lack of clear legal frameworks exposes brands to legal and reputational risks, and organisational fact-checking and compliance policies remain unpredictable. The paper concludes that, despite AI's efficiency and innovative potential in public relations, its utilisation is hampered by inadequate intellectual property regulations, accountability issues, and weak regulatory structures. It advocates for reforms in Nigeria's copyright laws, the development of internal compliance policies by PR agencies, the institutionalisation of fact-checking systems, and proactive monitoring by professional bodies such as the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. To facilitate the responsible integration of AI into public relations practice, these standards must be established.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Public relations, Intellectual property, Fake news, Regulatory compliance, Nigeria

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming communication fields, including public relations (PR), by enabling automated content generation and distribution to be faster and more scalable. Large language model (LLM)- powered tools can draft and issue press releases, choose and structure social media content for different audience segments, and tailor audience segmentation for automated, audience-targeted ad campaigns. There is promise for greater efficiency, cost savings, and the speed with which the public discourse can be monetised or real-time public discourse before due acceptance controls. There are also legal and regulatory risks, particularly regarding intellectual property, liability for spreading misinformation, and communication laws (Scherer, 2016; Kirtley, 2023).

Intellectual Property (IP) Rights and AI are emerging issues. Artificial intelligence systems are trained on large datasets, many of which are copyrighted, raising questions about whether AI outputs infringe on copyrights and who owns the content. The lack of clarity about the ownership of artificial intelligence work is already a concern in the creative field (Samuelson, 2023). The relevant case law in the US and the UK has focused on the idea that copyright law is intended to protect human creative effort, and therefore purely AI-generated works fall outside the law's reach (Gervais, 2020). The situation is no different in Nigeria, where copyright law, and indeed, case law, rests on the principle of originality, which is a human act. This leaves the legal status of AI-generated public relations content in Nigeria in limbo (Okediji, 2022).

The issue of liability risk of misinformation is another significant issue. Automated content systems, at best, produce content with imprecise or misleading information. This could easily lead to potential defamation and unregulated advertising. Public relations firms and advertising agencies that

sustain and manage reputation and goodwill always face the risk of corporate mistrust and loss of equity when disseminating injurious misinformation. This can be problematic for public relations firms and advertising agencies whose reputations hinge on goodwill and corporate trust. The issue is further complicated if it is unclear whether the artificial intelligence (AI) programmer, the public relations firm, or the advertising agency is liable. The potential for liability for misinformation and unregulated advertising could outweigh the benefits of automation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Lastly, compliance with normative regulations varies from one country to another. The EU's AI Act, for example, passed the first piece of legislation requiring transparency and labelling of AI-generated content (Veale & Borgesius, 2021), while Nigeria and other African countries still lack the necessary, comprehensive legislation on AI communication (Osuji, 2023). Such diffused legislation is highly uncertain to public relations agencies and multinational corporations.

In this way, although AI has the potential to develop new and innovative strategies for disseminating content, it poses a challenge to legal and regulatory systems that have evolved around communication focused on people. Understanding these challenges is necessary to integrate AI into public relations and improve productivity. It is equally imperative that AI integration into public relations be made in a way that respects the basic pillars of practice: intellectual property, compliance, and truthfulness.

Statement of the Problem
The adoption of AI within public relations presents yet another paradox. While automation improves strategic communication, it also exposes businesses to greater legal and regulatory risk. This is especially true concerning the unresolved issues of authorship and ownership of AI works. AI technologies use tools to generate creative, written, or visual materials. As such, the creative works of PR firms are becoming more contested. This contestability is especially concerning from a copyright perspective, especially concerning litigation involving unlicensed creative works (Samuelson, 2023). Without formal recognition of AI's legal status, the IP rights of creators and the agency remain in the grey.

The matter of who should be held accountable for the dissemination of misinformation is likewise problematic. AI can create outputs that contain errors, biases, or defamatory content (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). In public relations, where the management of reputation is one of the most important processes, such errors can rapidly escalate into a loss of reputation and legal crisis. Who is liable in the absence of legal precedent: the AI system developer, the brand content author, or the public relations professional who uses it (Kirtley, 2023)? This ambiguity creates a risk of ethical breaches in the profession.

The geopolitical landscape is uneven when it comes to regulations. The European Union is the first to try to regulate AI governance through the AI Act (Veale & Borgesius, 2021), which imposes obligations on transparency and risk-based categorisation. In the African context, or in countries like Nigeria, legal frameworks for the use of AI in the creative and communication industries are still being developed (Osuji, 2023), making compliance and best-practice adjustments more complicated for international public relations firms and local companies operating in countries with opaque regulations.

Technology and legal ambiguity are a potent combination. Public relations practitioners may lose the trust and confidence of the people they are meant to serve without defined strategies for regulatory compliance, misinformation, accountability, and the vexed issue of obtaining fair use copyright privileges. This study aims to identify these gaps and emphasise the necessity of regulated, responsible automation of public relations content distribution.

Objectives of the Study
1. Examine the intellectual property challenges associated with AI-generated and distributed content in public relations.
2. Analyse the challenge of liability for misinformation when brands and public relations agencies depend on automated content distribution systems.
3. Assess regulatory compliance challenges and legal frameworks overseeing the use of AI in public relations content distribution.

Conceptual Review
Automated Content Distribution in Public Relations

Automated content distribution utilises digital technologies, primarily artificial intelligence, to produce, curate, and distribute content and communication materials across channels with minimal to no human involvement. Within the scope of PR, automated social media toolkits, tailored communications, AI-assisted narratives, automated press releases, and story creation are examples of automation (Wiencierz & Röttger, 2019). The rise of generative AI technologies has further expanded automation capabilities to include the mass creation of textual content, images, and even videos, as well as entire multimedia campaigns (Kietzmann, Paschen, & Treen, 2018).

Automation in PR offers Time and cost savings, as well as the ability to achieve consistent message automation and distribution. Thus, organisations can achieve a consistent presence and automated message distribution, even in the fast-paced digital environment (van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). In addition, automation enhances the precision with which communication messages are tailored to and segmented for various audiences, thus increasing productivity. The automation of PR, however, has come to attract, and in some cases, deserves criticism, mainly about the issue of automation overexploitation. In the PR field, the human factor, automated messages, and communications machine speak to the issue of personalisation, judgment, and the core of automated PR (Fieseler & Meckel, 2020).

Accountability is another facet of the concept. While human communicators can be held accountable for lying, making defamatory statements, or violating copyrights, for automated systems, that line of responsibility becomes blurred. When an AI tool generates content that is infringing or inaccurate, it is unclear whether liability rests with the developer, the public relations practitioner, or the client (Kirtley, 2023). Such ambiguity situates automated distribution not only as a technological advancement but also as a multifaceted socio-legal issue that fundamentally questions the ethics of professional communication.

Legal and Regulatory Challenges in AI-driven Communication
The predicament that legal and regulatory challenges pose to organisations is ensuring that content created and content distributed by AI complies with laws related to advertising, broader legal considerations, and, more importantly, intellectual property. One of the fiercest legal battles involves IP. For example, copyright law generally protects original works of human authors. Because many jurisdictions—including Nigeria—do not recognise works devoid of human creativity as copyrightable, AI-generated works are left unprotected by copyright law, creating a "copyright gap" that leaves them used in public relations unprotected and disputed.

Another issue is the lack of accountability for producing false or misleading content. Automated systems tend to "hallucinate," meaning they make statements that are factually inaccurate and not grounded in reality. In the field of public relations, this could lead to defamation, misleading advertising, or violation of consumer protection laws. The lack of accountability is controversial primarily because responsibility is shifted, leaving it largely unregulated. Accountability could be placed anywhere between the AI developers, the public relations planners, or the clientele.

The challenge these shifting regulations create is not to be overlooked. The European Union Artificial Intelligence Act is an example of this, as it imposes transparency, risk, and accountability obligations on developers and users of AI (Voale & Borgesius, 2021). On the other hand, countries such as Nigeria lack strong AI-specific legislation, and agencies have no choice but to adapt and work with poorly suited existing legal regulations (Osuji, 2023). The poorly coordinated rules across the globe create uncertainty, hindering local agencies' efforts to ensure compliance. This poorly coordinated legislation creates uncertainty regarding compliance for multinational public relations firms and local agencies.

As a result, legal and regulatory issues concerning AI-driven communications go beyond simple compliance with existing legislation. Accountability, responsibility, and trust in communication surface as additional challenges. For public relations practitioners, these issues raise not only legal concerns but also questions of credibility and the ethical responsibility of practice in a highly automated environment.

Empirical Review
Research has highlighted the merging of digital and automated technologies into automated systems for public relations (PR) practice, focusing mainly on adoption, ethics, and communication effectiveness. Due to the exponential growth of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital communication technologies, communication industries in Nigeria have begun to attract scholarly interest.

El-Kasim (2020) examined the acceptance of social media relative to public relations (PR) practitioners in her Nigeria-focused study, 'Use of Social Media for Public Relations in Nigeria: An Application of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology.' Using structural equation modelling to analyse survey data from 513 respondents spread across the country, the study concluded that adoption of social media in PR practice is significantly influenced by performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and social influence. The study argued for the need to implement abiding digital training and planned digital organisational approaches. Although the survey identified factors related to adoption, it did not address the unanswered questions about the legal ramifications of automated content. This is the gap the current paper seeks to fill.

Equally, Orji-Egwu, Oyeleke, and Nwakpu (2019), in their study titled "Adoption of Digital Media in Public Relations Practice in Ebonyi State," investigated how public relations practitioners engage with digital channels. Through qualitative interviews, the study found that practitioners used digital tools for press releases, media relations, and event promotion. Nevertheless, infrastructural challenges and poorly developed technical skills hindered the realisation of the potential benefits. The authors recommended improved ICT training and the development of digital infrastructural facilities. Although the study was useful in identifying operational challenges, it, like others, did not account for the legal and regulatory challenges of digital and automated communication, especially with respect to accountability for misinformation and the copyrighting of computerised communication.

The most recent work by Olowu (2025), titled Artificial Intelligence and Public Relations Practice in Nigerian Banks examined AI integration in communication within the banking sector. This study employed a mixed-methods approach and revealed the use of AI technologies for customer interaction and communication content generation. Nevertheless, weak communication infrastructure, limited human resources, and a lack of guiding regulations to strengthen the use of AI technologies available in the study impeded the integration of artificial intelligence. This study suggested a public relations staff-level regulatory framework, along with guiding policies and infrastructure. The findings resonate with the present survey of compliance, where Olowu's work scope was limited to banking.

Nyitse and Agbele (2023) examined 'Ethics and Artificial Intelligence in Nigerian Journalism and Public Relations', in which legislation and focus group discussions assessed practitioners' perceptions of AI ethics, with plagiarism, lack of content accuracy, and manipulation identified as primary concerns. Respondents expressed concern about the potential for AI to undermine credibility in journalism and public relations. The authors endorsed the use of strong ethical codes and human oversight as requirements for the utilisation of AI, aligning with the present study's focus on misinformation and accountability; it, however, did not address issues of intellectual property.

Hassan (2023), in his research 'Social Media and Disinformation in Nigeria's Electoral Process', presented empirical evidence of politically motivated automated content sharing and the dissemination of disinformation. Using a nationwide sample of interviews and focus group discussions, the research found that election-period disinformation is politically driven, algorithmically disseminated, and deepens ethnic and religious divisions. He advocated for more robust regulatory measures and strengthened fact-checking.

Uwalaka (2022), in 'COVID-19 Misinformation in Nigeria: Patterns, Sources, and Effects', notes that automated misinformation was spread on social media, causing panic and negative health behaviours. This research, based on surveys conducted in six states in Nigeria, applauded the use of corrective communicative approaches and descriptive digital verification. While the study focused on the politics and health crisis, the negative impact of misinformation and automation was evident. This shows that the automation of public relations and communications is still in the research, development, and planning stages in Nigeria and around the world, despite rapid technological advancements.

The present research seeks to address this gap in scholarship and to understand the unique challenges of public relations and brands in Nigeria in the context of the latest communication technology, AI. Drawing on Nigeria's unique and legal regulatory framework, the research advanced scholarship in public relations, technology, and communications in Africa.

Theoretical Framework
Technological Determinism
Technological Determinism, a notion articulated by McLuhan, holds that communication technologies do not constitute neutral instruments; they heavily influence interpersonal relationships, the organisation of

society, and socio-cultural frameworks (McLuhan, 1964). In these terms, "the medium is the message," meaning the communication medium itself fundamentally alters the dynamics and consequences of interpersonal communication, outweighing the significance of the content.

This is particularly true when referring to the automated distribution of suspicious content within the practice of public relations. The ethical, legal, and regulatory frameworks of public relations shift as AI technologies are integrated to produce and disseminate content driven by automation. The potential of automation in expanding messages beyond human oversight raises difficult questions about the automation of communication technologies and public relations, including extraterritoriality, reckless misinformation, copyright abuse, and the erosion of human accountability (Gunkel, 2020).

Through the lens of Technological Determinism, this research acknowledges the incorporation of AI in the practice of public relations not only as a question of productivity but as a transformation of the foundational architecture and governance of communication. Such a theory helps understand the implications of the uneven advancement of technology and the law, leading to the rapid cultivation and deployment of technology as a disorganised, ungoverned entity. Thus, from McLuhan's perspective, we can appreciate automation as a structural disruptor that requires new regulatory frameworks.

Stakeholder Theory
Stakeholder Theory, first articulated by Freeman (1984), posits that organisations make strategic decisions by considering the interests of all stakeholders, not just shareholders. While shareholders are included, stakeholders also consist of employees, customers, regulators, surrounding communities, and the wider society impacted by the organisation's activities. The theory hence emphasises communication within organisations, as well as the practice of responsibility, accountability, and ethical organisational decision-making.

In public relations practice, automated content distribution influences a broad range of stakeholders. For example, customers may become victims of misleading content produced by AI, journalists may challenge automated news releases and the ownership of related intellectual property, and regulators may levy fines on organisations for misinformation and non-compliance with data protection laws (Floridi & Cowls, 2019). Brands and public relations agencies, when considering stakeholders, cannot prioritise efficiency and reach alone, as public trust, user rights, and ethical and legal standards must also be safeguarded.

This theory thus richly informs the intersection of AI-driven public relations and regulation. It contextualises compliance within the range of stakeholders as a potential liability rather than a compliance burden. Furthermore, it intersects with the discourse on corporate responsibility in the digital landscape, especially as accountability and transparency are demanded of brands that employ AI. This is especially prevalent discourse in Nigeria.

Methodology
The descriptive survey design outlines the most effective means of researching a defined population's opinions and perceptions without manipulating any variables. This survey design was selected because it is needed to systematically address the legal and regulatory challenges posed by automated content distribution to the public relations industry. The target population included registered members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) and communication managers at corporations and public relations firms across Nigeria. As of 2023, NIPR reports over 5,000 registered members. This population was selected because it encompasses individuals involved in automated systems for content creation, brand management, and communication strategies. The sample size for this population was determined to be 370 using Yamane's (1967) simplified sample size formula for a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques was applied. Direct access to practitioners experienced with automated content systems was achieved through purposive sampling, while corporate public relations, professional associations, and digital communication systems enabled convenience sampling.

Data collection was conducted using a structured online questionnaire in Google Forms, distributed via a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree to disagree strongly. The questionnaire was assessed for validation by three experts in media law and communication studies. They evaluated the items' clarity, relevance, and alignment with the intended research objectives.

The online questionnaire link was disseminated through LinkedIn forums for communication

professionals, corporate communication WhatsApp groups, and email lists. Potential respondents were informed of the study's objectives and assured that their responses would be anonymous and that participation was voluntary. Of the 370 targeted respondents, 342 completed questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 92.4%. The returned data were analysed using descriptive statistics, which included frequency distributions and mean scores.

Result and Discussion
Table 1: Intellectual Property Challenges

STATEMENT (Variable)	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	Mean
Automated content creation raises concerns about plagiarism and originality.	152	110	30	28	22	342	4.00
Ownership of AI-generated content is unclear in PR practice.	140	120	25	34	23	342	3.95
There should be copyright protection for automated PR content.	160	115	26	22	19	342	4.11
My organisation has policies guiding the use of AI-generated content.	90	100	40	65	47	342	3.31

Note: *SA = Strongly Agreed, A = Agreed, U = Undecided, D = Disagreed and SD – Strongly Disagreed*
Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2025

Table 1 results indicate that there is major intellectual property issues related to automated content distribution in public relations. The percentage of those who agreed that automated content creation is an issue of plagiarism and originality was high (SA=152; A=110; Mean=4.00). This observation supports previous academic claims that AI-based systems tend to reuse existing information, thereby increasing the risk of intellectual property theft (Tack and Piech, 2022). Equally, Oduwole (2023) noted that, in the Nigerian context, most public relations agencies fail to verify the originality of AI-generated press releases, making content ownership issues even harder to resolve.

Another issue that was highly highlighted was the uncertainty of ownership rights in AI-generated content (Mean=3.95). Respondents generally accepted that establishing ownership in public relations practice remains problematic. This echoes the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO, 2021), which argues that authorship has historically belonged to human authors and that AI-generated works are in a legal vacuum. The findings of this study are supported by Adeoye (2022), who discovered that legal practitioners and communication experts were unsure of the applicability of copyright laws to AI-generated content in Nigeria.

Moreover, there was strong support for copyright protection of AI-generated public relations content (SA=160; A=115; Mean=4.11), aligning with international demands for new intellectual property regimes that treat AI as a co-creator or as a device that must be attributed (Gervais, 2020). The regulatory changes suggested by respondents indicate a need to implement proactive reforms to Nigeria's copyright law, as the existing law (Copyright Act, 2022) lacks direct provisions regarding AI outputs.

The respondents were divided on whether their organisations have policies regulating the use of AI-generated content, with a Mean of 3.31. Although some organisations have started applying guidelines, many respondents did not agree or strongly agreed, indicating a policy gap. This confirms Aina's (2023) argument that most communication agencies in Nigeria use AI tools without clear internal regulations, placing them at risk of reputational and legal consequences.

Table 2: Issue of Liability for Misinformation.

STATEMENT (Variable)	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	Mean

STATEMENT	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	Mean
Automated tools increase the risk of spreading unverified or false information.	170	115	20	22	15	342	4.18
Public relations practitioners should be held accountable for misinformation distributed by AI tools.	140	120	30	32	20	342	3.96
AI-driven misinformation damages public trust in brands.	165	118	25	19	15	342	4.16
My organisation has fact-checking mechanisms for AI-generated content.	95	105	40	60	42	342	3.34

Note: *SA = Strongly Agreed, A = Agreed, U = Undecided, D = Disagreed and SD – Strongly Disagreed*
Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2025

Table 2 results highlight the urgency of the problem of misinformation liability when using automated public relations tools. The vast majority of respondents believed that automated tools pose a risk of spreading unverified or false information (Mean=4.18). This is consistent with the argument of Lazer et al. (2018), who have shown how misinformation can be propagated more quickly via an algorithm-driven platform than through traditional human-mediated communication. At the local level, Nwobueze (2022) found that Nigerian media houses are increasingly struggling to keep up with automated tools that post unverified content, which supports the participants' perception in this study.

Another key issue was accountability for misinformation. There was a general agreement among the respondents that public relations practitioners should be held liable for misinformation spread by AI tools (SA=140; A=120; Mean=3.96). It aligns with the position of Tandoc et al. (2018), who argued that human supervision cannot be replaced because algorithms cannot be ethical. Adeyemi (2023) observed in Nigeria that communication professionals emphasised the importance of regulatory agencies holding practitioners accountable when AI-driven campaigns mislead the masses. These works demonstrate that, although AI automates work, it remains the responsibility of human public relations agents.

The harmful impacts of misinformation on brand image were also highly confirmed (Mean=4.16). Respondents believed that AI-generated misinformation undermines brand trust, a finding similar to that of Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018), who demonstrated that fake news propagates faster than the truth and thus undermines brand trust. In the local context, Ojo and Agbaje (2022) found that Nigerian customers do not trust companies that fail to address online misinformation, a finding particularly relevant to public relations.

But, the willingness of organisations to fact-check AI-created content was comparatively low (Mean=3.34). Most of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that fact-checking mechanisms exist in their organisations. This is indicative of policy lapses within internal policy frameworks, as CDD (2019) reported poor institutional capacity to manage misinformation in Nigeria. It also aligns with Adebanjo (2024), who stated that the majority of public relations agencies in Lagos have not developed organised systems for monitoring misinformation, thereby exposing them to reputational risks.

To conclude, these findings demonstrate four important lessons: Automated tools make misinformation more dangerous. Public relations practitioners continue to be viewed as responsible actors. The misinformation generated by AI undermines brand trust. Nigerian organisations have not yet developed a system of fact-checking.

Table 3: Regulatory Compliance Issues and Legal Frameworks.

STATEMENT (Variable)	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	Mean
There are no clear legal frameworks in Nigeria regulating AI in public relations communication.	160	115	25	24	18	342	4.10

	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	Mean
Public relations agencies need compliance policies for automated content distribution.	155	120	22	28	17	342	4.07
Lack of regulation exposes brands to legal risks in using automated tools.	170	110	20	25	17	342	4.14
Government and professional bodies should establish guidelines for AI in public relations practice.	180	115	15	20	12	342	4.24

Note: **SA** = *Strongly Agreed*, **A** = *Agreed*, **U** = *Undecided*, **D** = *Disagreed* **and SD** – *Strongly Disagreed*
Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2025

Results in Table 3 show that regulatory compliance and the lack of lawful frameworks to regulate AI-based public relations are of great concern in Nigeria. Most respondents strongly concurred (SA=160; A=115; Mean=4.10) that there is no explicit legal framework governing AI in public relations communication. This aligns with Gervais (2020), who noted that there are uncertainties regarding intellectual property and liability regulations for AI-generated content worldwide. On the local front, Aina (2023) highlighted that the current Copyright Act (2022) and data protection laws in Nigeria do not expressly address the output of AI-generated works, creating important legislative gaps.

Another area in which the respondents strongly agreed was the importance of public relations agencies in initiating compliance policies for automated content distribution (Mean=4.07). This aligns with Kapitan and Silvera (2018), who proposed that self-regulation in the communication industries is necessary when laws are always behind technological use. Equally, as Adebanjo (2024) found, Nigerian digital marketing agencies have begun drafting internal AI-use policies, but they are not consistently implemented.

Another important observation was that brands are at risk of legal action due to the lack of regulation when automated tools are used (Mean=4.14). This aligns with Brkan's (2019) argument that when companies are not properly overseen, they risk being sued, having their reputations damaged, and losing consumer trust. Eze and Chukwu (2022) reported some brand crises in Nigeria related to unverified automated campaigns, which corroborate respondents' opinions that regulation is long overdue.

The greatest consensus was documented regarding the necessity of government and professional organisations to set specifications for AI applications in public relations practice (Mean=4.24). This is an overwhelming endorsement of proactive governance, consistent with the European Commission's (2021) recommendations that ethical and legal frameworks should be implemented alongside the adoption of AI in communication sectors. Udo (2023) observed that professional bodies in Nigeria, including the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), have yet to provide official guidance on the use of AI, despite its continued rise among practitioners.

Conclusion
This paper reviewed the legal and regulatory challenges of automated content distribution in public relations, with particular attention to intellectual property, misinformation accountability, and compliance. The results showed that although AI technologies are actively adopted in public relations practice, they pose significant risks that have not been considered in Nigeria's legal and institutional context.
In the domain of intellectual property, the research found significant agitation over plagiarism, originality, and rights to AI-generated content. Respondents emphasised that there are no definite rules governing rights and protections, which attests to academic findings that current copyright laws lag behind technological progress (Aina, 2023; Gervais, 2020).

Regarding misinformation liability, the results indicated that automated tools accelerate the spread of misinformation and unverified information, harming public trust in brands. There was strong agreement among respondents that public relations practitioners must be accountable for the ethical and factual integrity of content produced and shared by AI, supporting both international (Vosoughi et al., 2018) and

national (Adeyemi, 2023) viewpoints that AI can be used as an instrument, but the problem of misinformation cannot be committed to machines.

In conclusion, regarding regulatory compliance, the survey demonstrates a resounding consensus that Nigeria lacks well-defined legal frameworks to govern the use of AI in public relations communication. The practitioners realised that internal compliance was an urgent issue and demanded that the government and professional organisations, such as the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), develop guidelines. This reflects wider calls globally for AI-specific governance structures (European Commission, 2021).

Finally, although AI offers radical efficiency and innovation in public relations, it is not yet adopted in Nigeria, and the lack of intellectual property rights, responsibility for misinformation, and appropriate regulatory frameworks makes its adoption challenging. Public relations agencies are likely to put brands at risk of legal, ethical, and reputational damage unless deliberate changes are made. This paper thus highlights the importance of proactive legislation, organisational policy formulation, and professional regulation to ensure the ethical and legally viable application of AI in public relations.

Recommendations

According to the results of the current research, the following suggestions are put forward to handle legal and regulatory issues of automated content distribution in public relations:
1. The laws regarding copyright and communication in Nigeria need to be updated to address AI-generated content explicitly.
2. Public relations agencies must establish internal policies regarding the ethical use of AI tools.
3. Organisations should develop verification mechanisms that minimise the chances of misinformation.
4. The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) must offer ethical standards and training on the use of AI.

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