The Role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on Enhancing Public Communication in Nigerian Universities: Focus at Federal Universities in South East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in facilitating public communication within Nigerian universities, in this case the University of South East Nigeria. It is imperative to recognize that universities make a significant impact on the knowledge economy worldwide. By conducting research and scholarly publications, they add to a deep comprehension of a wide range of fields and disciplines that subsequently drives economic growth and competitiveness. Public communications are a crucial aspect of universities because they help disseminate information, encourage interaction with stakeholders, and build the brand and reputation of the institution. Traditional methods of public communications, including press releases, media relations, and social media, might find it challenging to effectively communicate and connect with different audiences, especially during the digital era. Artificial intelligence (AI) is a revolutionary technology, one that can be leveraged to improve public communications in universities. Through AI algorithms and machine learning processes, universities are able to sift through large data sets, extract information regarding public opinion and sentiment, and optimize their messaging and engagement processes for target audience segments. The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of AI for optimizing public communications in university settings. This study was carried out five federal universities in south East Nigeria, the study employed survey research design, 6,782 employees of the five federal universities in South East served as the population for the study. A sample size of 378 Respondents was drawn using Taro Yamane Sampling Techniques. The instrument for data collected is a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher; data collected from the respondents were analyzed using simple percentage, whereas the hypotheses were at 0.05 significance level using chi square statistical instrument. The findings of the study revealed that: AI powered chatbot played positive significant role in enhanced academic inquiries in Federal University in South East Nigeria; AI powered staff portal played positive significant role in efficient staff communication in Federal University in South East Nigeria.
Keywords: Artificial intelligence, public communication, Universities, chatbot and staff portal

INTRODUCTION

Universities play a key role in shaping the future of individuals and society as a whole. Universities provide students with a broad spectrum of education, supplying them with skills and knowledge to thrive in their professional careers [1]. In addition to education, universities promote individual growth, innovation, and global citizenship. Among the biggest benefits of university attendance is the opportunity to attain specialized knowledge

and experience. Students are offered a vast array of study programs, allowing them to pursue their interests while developing valuable skills. Whether it is engineering, medicine, or the arts, universities have a wide range of fields, ensuring that students have the tools necessary for achieving their academic and career goals. As quoted in [2], universities, apart from studies in academic coursework, provide an opportunity for students to acquire important life skills. Extracurricular activities, internship, and volunteerism give students valuable experience in leadership, teamwork, and communication. These skills are invaluable not just to be successful in the work environment but also to have a successful personal life and achieve fulfillment. Universities are also incubators for innovation and entrepreneurship. Through assembling gifted students, top-level personnel, and industry experts, universities create an ecosystem where innovation is facilitated and the creation of novel ideas is catalyzed. Universities are at the forefront of groundbreaking research, as well as pioneering start-ups, advancing knowledge forward. [3], asserted that universities have a critical role to play in fostering international understanding and collaboration. Through the enrollment of students from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures, the institutions create a platform for cross-cultural interaction and collaboration. Not only does this enhance the learning experience, but it also prepares students for an ever-growing interdependent world. Universities are essential institutions that present students with a wide range of opportunities for growth, learning, and achievement. From academic and professional development to personal and social development, universities are catalysts for positive change in the world. Effective public communication, however, is critical for universities to achieve their goals.

It is a tool for establishing trust, understanding, and engagement among stakeholders. Through the use of public communication power, universities are not only capable of enhancing their reputation but also establishing a positive and healthy working environment. Public communication entails sharing information, ideas, and news to various stakeholders, including employees, customers, investors, and the general public. It is a process that is bi-directional and enables universities to hear the issues, comments, and recommendations of their stakeholders. Through interacting with these individuals directly, universities are in a position to learn insightful information and take informed decisions in accordance with their objectives and purposes. One of the greatest virtues of public communication is that it can establish credibility and trust. When universities make their actions, achievements, and challenges clear in a transparent way, they provide a positive example of accountability and integrity. Transparency inspires stakeholders to have faith, which increases more loyalty and support. When universities are truthful, they can also avoid misinterpretations and negative perceptions that may damage their reputation and achievements. Furthermore, public disclosure is extremely significant in enhancing employees' involvement and enthusiasm. Once employees feel they are informed and appreciated, their work motivation and commitment to the organization's success are greatly enhanced. Through the frequent provision of news, updates, and appreciations, universities can improve morale, decrease turnover, and increase productivity. Furthermore, strategic public communication can assist universities in recruiting and retaining the best by making known their distinctive culture and core values. The role of public communication in the attainment of organizational objectives cannot be downplayed. By communicating appropriately with stakeholders, universities can promote trust, ensure understanding, and optimize engagement. By the strength of public communication, universities are not only able to attain their objectives but also build a good and efficient work culture that functions to the benefits of all stakeholders. Conversely, public communication in the majority of universities in Nigeria is primarily carried out using traditional methods.

For decades, the conventional public communication mediums—television, radio, and newspapers—have been the prime sources of information. But as technology is advancing at a frenetic pace and social media continues to flourish, these conventional means are encountering enormous challenges in the online environment. Among the biggest challenges they face is the shrinking audience for conventional media. As more and more people consume information through social media and internet news sites, the conventional media are finding it difficult to retain their viewers. This change in consumer patterns has resulted in a reduction in advertising revenues, which has consequently caused the quality and volume of production by the traditional media to decline. Further, there is also the problem of limited coverage by the traditional media. Due to the advent of social media networks, people have world-wide and immediate access to information. Traditionally, however, media coverage tends to be targeted to a small geographic area or demographic group such that it doesn't reach its audience as far as it possibly could. In the current fast-paced world of digitalization in which information must be updated in a fast and efficient manner, the slow pace of traditional media in producing content and spreading important information that demand instant response. Hence the need for integration of digital of means of information dissemination in public communication most especially in the universities where enormous clear cut information are disseminated on daily basis for the smooth functioning of the university, with the advancement in information communication

technology, artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed various aspects of our lives, including public communications in Nigerian universities. The purpose of this research is to determine how AI can enhance the communication process within educational institutions, creating a better experience for the student and building a more varied learning atmosphere. AI-driven chatbots have also shown great promise in improving interactions between university administrators and students. By incorporating AI-powered chatbots, universities are able to provide instant support to students, addressing their concerns and questions as and when they have them. This not only saves time for both parties but also ensures that students receive accurate and reliable information, thus reducing the possibility of misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

Also, AI can be used to facilitate the availability of learning materials for students with disabilities. By creating AI applications that are able to convert written texts into Braille or sign language, institutions of higher education can make learning materials accessible to all students regardless of their abilities. Besides fostering inclusivity, this initiative also allows students with disabilities to achieve their optimum potential. Moreover, AI is able to enhance the efficiency of communication channels in institutions of higher education to a significant level. By examining communication flows and pinpointing bottlenecks, AI can help universities streamline their communication infrastructure to ensure that messages are conveyed in an efficient and timely fashion. This not only conserves valuable time but also reduces the risk of miscommunication, thereby improving overall communication within the university environment. Further, the adoption of AI in public communications in Nigerian universities has the potential to revolutionize the dynamics of student-administrator interaction. Through the adoption of AI-powered chatbots for accessing education resources, complemented by efficient communication channels such as the tailor-made staff portal, universities stand to create an inclusive and better-performing learning environment, a move that impacts overall institutional effectiveness. It is against this reality that the authors aim to find out how the use of artificial intelligence (AI) can transform administrative accounting and reporting in focus public organizations across Enugu State. Specifically the study is designed to investigate the role of AI powered chatbot in enhanced academic inquiries in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria and examining the role of AI powered Staff Portal in efficient staff communication in Federal Universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Public speaking

Communication is an unavoidable aspect of all human society, and it is "a vital factor in the modern age of international competition, for all business organization, whether situated in interiors or flourishing in big cities, is influenced by communication" [4]. The viability of any system relies on the nature of its communication. No exaggeration is done in stating that without communication, organizations as we know them simply could not exist. It is the method of carrying out key managerial functions. Managers guide organizational operations through communication. By virtue of this significant interaction, they coordinate, plan, organize, motivate, and control by the use of communication. Virtually everything an organisation does is preceded by communication. Communication is thus an indispensable ingredient in almost everything a manager does [5], [4]. Communication, being part of the daily routine, is a very important tool in the hands of organisations, irrespective of status. Defined as the method through which people within an organization exchange ideas and information relating to the operation of an organization or company [6], "all human interactions are form of communication and in this business world, nothing can be achieved without effectively communicating with employers, employees, clients, suppliers, and customers" [7]. It is reaffirmed by [8] that: In modern organizations has not only increased in complexity and diversity but has become a major determinant of overall organizational performance and success. The way the organization communicates with its workers is reflected in morale, motivation and performance of the workers. 70 per cent of organizational programmes fail because of poor internal and external organizational communication. [9] showed that "Organizations that develop effective communication processes are also likely to have positive work environments and be more effective at achieving their objectives." Therefore, communication plays a significant role to enhance employees' job satisfaction as well as other bottom-line advantages for the firm. Similarly, [10] emphasized that "The value of communication for the success of organizations and employees' wellbeing and motivation is unambiguous."

Artificial Intelligence (AI) AI is the utilization of machines and computers to perform activities attributed to human beings and apparently resembling human beings. Among all living creatures, a human being is recorded to possess unusual but super intelligence. Moreover, it is human beings that can think critically and act surpassingly intelligently than any known creature. When human beings now get machines to imitate and copy them in every sphere of life, then AI is born. This is the idea [11], attempted to describe when they defined AI as "machines that mimic human cognitive functions such as learning, understanding, reasoning, or problem-solving" (p. 5). Likewise,

[12] and [13] stipulated that AI is the "science and engineering of making systems that are able to do tasks usually associated with intelligent creatures such as learning, judgment, and decision-making" (p. 1). Thus, AI is the exploration of how to get computers to do things for which humans are presently superior [14]. Most particularly, AI has subfields that are termed machine learning and deep learning. Machine learning (ML) is the scientific study of algorithms that computer systems learn through experience, while an algorithm is a step-by-step instruction to be followed by AI [15]. Important, without algorithms, AI will never be capable of working effectively or making decisions wisely like human beings.

There exist AI systems that are made up of hardware and software, well designed to accomplish sophisticated objectives within the virtual environment. These systems perceive their environment through engaging in data acquisition, data interpretation, and critical thinking application, hence being in a position to determine the best way to carry out their predetermined objectives [15]. Artificial Intelligence in Education The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education has ushered in a new era of opportunities and challenges, more so in the field of educational testing. As scholars and researchers explore the implications of AI technologies, a complex landscape is uncovered, evidencing both the advancements and the critical deliberations that will shape the future of evaluation practices, particularly in Nigerian universities. The advent of Student-Facing AI, as represented by applications such as Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE), Automated Essay Scoring (AES), and ChatGPT, represents an unprecedented leap toward creating personalized and effective learning experiences. The AI tools have been developed with the vision to empower learners through real-time feedback on their work regardless of their locations in the world. But as [16] proposes, a fear exists among researchers that there might be displacement of conventional forms of assessment, particularly in the context of essay writing. Nevertheless, the potential of AI extends beyond students with Teacher-Facing AI, welcoming teachers with its benefits. This feature of AI technology, as highlighted by [3], helps teachers design assessments, monitor classrooms, and personalize instruction to meet the specific needs of each student. This coexistence of AI with educators has the potential of transforming how we teach, if the technology is implemented effectively.

In addition, the field of System-Facing AI presents groundbreaking solutions for educational institutions, eliminating bureaucratic tasks and improving overall efficacy. [17], pilot project, aimed at co-creating an AI teachers' and education developers' handbook, represents an effort of collaborative navigation through this changing environment of AI in education. These initiatives underscore the imperative of aligning technological innovation with pedagogical aims. As AI technologies infiltrate classrooms, attendant concerns emerge regarding equity, ethics, and the very Terms of assessment approaches. While AI-driven tools like ChatGPT afford efficiency and convenience, concerns raised by [6], regarding the potential for students to "outsource" (p. 352) their written work underscore a fundamental challenge. The prospect of diminishing creativity and critical thinking skills is looming large, necessitating a reevaluation of AI's role in facilitating student learning instead of substituting it. In addition, the effectiveness and validity of AI examinations, specifically in assessing the aspects of writing like coherence and creativity, are being questioned [18]. This calls into question the balance between automated processes and holistic judgments provided by human raters. The study of [19] on continuous and adaptive assessment through AI reveals the potential benefits of these technologies. Yet, a critical gap in the literature still remains premised on the lack of adequate strong evidence on their long-term impacts. Artificial Intelligence in Public Communication. Artificial Intelligence (AI) may be defined as "a system's ability to correctly interpret external data, to learn from that data, and to use learning to achieve some goal or task by means of adaptive flexibility" [20]. AI is fast emerging as an indispensable tool for organizational decision-making and is being embedded in the very fabric of contemporary work life, often without individuals even realizing it. AI is enhancing human capabilities while at the same time directing and influencing people in different industries like medicine, transportation, education, finance, research, and manufacturing. Today, companies use AI and machine learning technology for various reasons, including augmenting capabilities, increasing market share and revenues, maintaining sales records, gathering customer or product information, developing successful business strategies, and generating lots of news stories inexpensively, efficiently, and likely with fewer errors than a human journalist [20].

AI also performs fundamental roles in individual lives. Virtual assistants based on artificial intelligence, such as Alexa, Siri, Google Assistant, and Cortana, assist people with everyday tasks such as reminders, recommendations, adding events to their calendars, and ticket booking [21]. As with other sectors, AI is also transforming the public relations and communications sector [22], [23]. Globally, there has been growth in, and use of digital communication technologies for various purposes and reasons. The public relations and communication field already indicates several possible applications of AI, ranging from analytics to targeting, from content creation to

chatbots, and from measurement practices to strategy development and crisis communication [24]. Scholars argue that AI features like conversational tone, responsiveness, and social presence can affect user engagement or satisfaction [22],[25]. These features are also bound to have implications for organisation-public relations. As [26], using AI tools to generate personalized messages can allow public relations practitioners to become more efficient in their work. [27] believe that AI is influencing public relations and communication practice, such as social media monitoring and posting timeliness in times of crisis. They argue that such changes may have beneficial outcomes, including improved organizational reputation perceptions. Generative AI tools like ChatGPT, Jasper AI, Midjourney, and Synthesia represent a small subset of the ever-growing diversity of AI technologies capable of generating images and videos based on written texts and scripts. As of now, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of AI tools, services, browser extensions, and apps. It is likely their number will only expand over the next few years [28]. Previous literature has spoken of implications of AI on the public relations and communication practice, for instance, the possible threats and pitfalls of AI [29], [30], [31] [32]. Although new technologies like AI are transforming the public relations and communication practice, little empirical research examines the influence of AI on the practice [29]: [33]. Recent research has shown that professionals lack adequate knowledge about the concept and its application in communication [34], [35]. Further, problems, including fear of AI, misinformation or disinformation, and privacy or risk concerns, have persistently arisen [36]. The situation appears even worse from an African, and specifically Ghanaian, perspective. Notwithstanding that recent years have seen a rapid growth of digital technology applications in Africa, little information exists on knowledge and application of AI in public relations and communication management in Africa. On the contrary, literature in the global north shows a turn in scholarship on AI [37], [38], [32]. This creates a gap that must be filled if African public relations and communication professionals wish to make a meaningful contribution to the global discourse.

Theoretical Framework: Institutional Theory

Institutional theory came into existence in the 1970s and has been shaped by numerous scholars throughout the years. Some of the contributors who have significantly contributed to the theory are [39], [40], and [41]. Institutional theory investigates the ways in which organizations change and conform to their environments' norms, values, and routines [39]. It looks into the external pressures that affect organizational action, along with the internal processes through which such actors react to such influences. At the center of institutional theory is the prominence of legitimacy and the institutional logics that define organizations' actions and decisions [40], [41]. The study of the application of AI to improve the economic side of public universities will greatly gain from the employment of institutional theory as its theoretical framework. Public universities bargain through complex institutional contexts bounded by government policy, funding agreements, and external pressures. Institutional theory explains how external pressures influence the adoption, integration, and usage of AI in public universities. With the use of this theoretical framework, the study can analyze the institutional forces that compel the adoption of AI in these institutions, and the resulting changes in their economic facets. It is able to delve into how institutional logics, including the quest for efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness to stakeholders, propel the implementation of AI into classroom management, cost reduction, and fiscal management processes. Institutional theory is also capable of explaining the isomorphic pressures that public universities experience in the implementation of AI. Isomorphic processes can lead universities. Recent studies, for instance, have cited the influence of institutional pressures in enabling the adoption of AI in universities. [42] established that government policy and funding structures significantly influenced the adoption of AI technologies in universities. They stressed the significance of institutional legitimacy and being aligned with the national education agenda. Lastly, the use of institutional theory as the general framework enables closer examination of the institutional environment that public universities work within and the effects of such institutional forces on the adoption and role of AI in support of their economic dimensions.

Empirical Review

[43] compared research on AI utilization in education with an emphasis on OpenAI's Generative Pretrained Transformer (GPT) and its potential application to taking and giving tests, learning, and teaching at the university level. It was discovered that while there has been impressionistic hype about GPT-3 capabilities, it also has serious weaknesses and sometimes commits very silly mistakes.

Despite its limitations, including few word characters, an inability to produce diagrams, and persistent network error messages, the AI tool managed to respond to several pertinent questions related to assessment, learning, and teaching. It was concluded that ChatGPT would especially be useful for instructors in stimulating more innovative approaches to teaching and learning. In a related study, [44] explored around 100 news articles through content

analysis to elucidate how ChatGPT disrupts higher education across Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The findings revealed a prevailing unease regarding academic integrity and highlighted various ways in which students might be dissuaded from utilizing ChatGPT. Also, fewer papers had examined how and why ChatGPT would be effectively utilized in teaching, learning, and assessment. Additional studies, conducted by [45], evaluated the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards AI based on Planned Behaviour Theory (PBT) as the research guide. The researchers conducted a survey of 796 pre-service teachers from Nigerian universities based on a structural equation modeling approach to analyze the data gathered. The researchers discovered that the pre-service teachers possessed a highly positive behavioral intention towards learning AI on all dimensions except self-efficacy, which did not directly produce actual AI learning behavior. Thus, the research that has been read hitherto revealed that perception can not only affect what individuals learn but also how they learn. This is due to the fact that perception encompasses the awareness of environmental elements in the form of physical sensation, qualified through the eyes of experience, and works as a process of non-conscious expectation founded on past experiences, thus forming the foundation of future learning. In order to support this claim, [46], characterized perceptual as a necessary precursor to cognitive development. What is seen or heard will depend on what one already knows and how he reacts [46].

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out five federal universities in south East Nigeria, the study employed survey research design, 6,782 employees of the five federal universities in South East served as the population for the study. A sample of 378 respondents was drawn through Taro Yamane's sampling techniques. The instrument used to collect data was a structured questionnaire that had been prepared by the researcher; data obtained from the respondents were subjected to simple percentages, while the hypotheses were subjected to testing at a significance level of 0.05 via the chi-square statistical tool.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Research Question 1

What are the effects of AI-powered AI powered chatbot in enhanced academic inquiries in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria?

Table 1: The respondents view the effects of AI-powered AI powered chatbot in enhanced academic inquiries in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria

the effects of AI-powered AI powered chatbot in enhanced academic inquiries in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria	Frequency	Percent
AI powered chatbots plays a significant role in answering frequently asked questions	60	15.87
AI powered chat plays significant role in providing study materials and resource	86	22.75
AI powered chatbot plays significant role in offering personalized learning recommendations	72	19.04
AI powered chatbot plays significant role in assisting with research and citations	82	21.69
AI powered chatbot plays significant role in enhancing language learning and writing skills	78	20.63
Total	**378**	**100.0**

Source: Researcher (2024)

From the findings of table 1 above, 15.87% of the respondents were of the view that AI powered chatbots plays a significant role in answering frequently asked questions; 22.75% concurred that AI powered chatbot plays significant role in providing study materials and resources, 19.04% affirmed that AI powered chatpolt plays significant role in offering personalized learning recommendations, 21.69% agreed that AI powered chatboy plays significant role in assisting with research and citations, and finally 20.63% agreed AI powered chatbot plays

significant role in enhancing language learning and writing skills. From the findings of the table above it could be inferred that AI powered chatbot enhanced academic inquires in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria.

Research Question 2:

What are the effects of AI powered staff portal in efficient staff communication in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria.

Table 2: The respondents view on effect of AI powered staff portal in efficient staff communication in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria

The effect of AI powered staff portal in efficient staff communication in federal universities in South East Nigeria	Frequency	Percent
AI powered staff portal enhance staff communication in federal universities in South East Nigeria	64	16.93
AI powered staff portal facilitate automated administrative task which invariably enhance public communication in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria	76	19.59
AI power staff portal leads to improved information dissemination	62	16.40
AI powered staff portal facilitate prompt feedback leading to enhanced decision making in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria	90	23.81
AI powered staff portal leads to enhanced collaboration among staff of Federal Universities in South East Nigeria	86	22.16
Total	378	100

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2024)

From the findings of table 2 above, 16.93% of the responded were of the view AI powered staff portal enhance staff communication in federal universities in South East Nigeria, 19.59% agreed that AI powered staff portal facilities automated administrative task which invariably enhance public communication in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria, 16.40% affirmed AI powered staff portal leads to improved information dissemination in Federal Universities in South East, 23.81% concurred AI powered staff portal facilitate prompt feedback leading to enhanced decision making in Federal University in South East, while 22.16% were of the opinion that AI powered staff portal leads to enhanced collaboration among staff of Federal Universities in South East Nigeria. From the findings of the table above it could be inferred that AI powered staff portal has positive significant effect in efficient staff communication in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria

Summary of findings

The summary of the findings could be summarized as follows;

- AI powered chatbot played positive significant role in enhanced academic inquiries in Federal University in South East Nigeria
- AI powered staff portal played positive significant role in efficient staff communication in Federal University in South East Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The empirical research conducted on the role of AI in enhancing public communication in federal universities in Southeast Nigeria has revealed significant findings. The integration of AI technologies has proven to be a transformative tool in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public communication within these institutions. The study has demonstrated that the implementation of AI-driven communication systems has led to improved accessibility and dissemination of information among students, faculty, and staff. By leveraging AI algorithms, universities have been able to streamline communication channels, automate routine tasks, and provide personalized support to individuals within the academic community. Furthermore, the research highlights the positive impact of AI on fostering engagement and collaboration among stakeholders. By utilizing AI-powered platforms, universities have been able to facilitate seamless communication, encourage active participation, and promote a sense of community among students, faculty, and administrative personnel. Overall, the findings of this empirical research underscore the potential of AI in revolutionizing public communication in federal universities in Southeast Nigeria. As AI technologies continue to evolve and become more integrated into educational institutions, it is anticipated that further advancements will be made in enhancing communication, collaboration, and overall academic success. The integration of AI in public communication within federal universities in Southeast Nigeria has proven to be a valuable asset in improving accessibility, efficiency, and engagement. As the adoption of AI technologies continues to grow, it is expected that even greater benefits will be realized in the future, ultimately contributing to the advancement of education and the betterment of the academic community.

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