DEMOS

GENERATING DEMOCRACY
AI AND THE COMING REVOLUTION IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS

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CONTENTS

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HEALTHIER DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM

This project is part of Demos's programme on a *healthier digital ecosystem.* With digital technologies changing our world at an ever faster pace, we advocate for a healthier information environment with an internet and technologies that are designed, developed and deployed to protect and promote democratic values and human rights. Artificial Intelligence is having a profound influence on the way we communicate - a change which has accelerated with the advent of new forms of generative AI. So, in this research we investigated the implications of this for public discourse, trust and democracy and have made a series of recommendations for safeguarding trust in our democratic information environments.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been shaping the way we communicate for many years now: from data-driven microtargeting of campaign messages to social media algorithms amplifying certain kinds of content. However, the advent of new forms of generative AI has changed the game with tools like ChatGPT and DALL-E enabling anyone to create convincing synthetic content.

AI's integration in communications offers immense benefits such as streamlining content creation processes and enhancing engagement. Yet, these advantages must be tempered by a careful consideration of the risks. Irresponsible use of AI can propagate false information, erode trust, and exacerbate societal divides, posing grave implications for democracy. Fundamentally, AI-generated content can deepen existing difficulties in distinguishing between what's real and what's not, impacting public trust in the information they consume and even their engagement with political and democratic processes.

This year is one of the biggest years for democracy in recent decades: there are elections in India, Mexico, the EU parliament, and presidential elections in the US, Venezuela, and Taiwan. The UK general election will come no later than 28th January 2025. This offers political parties and communication experts new opportunities to create and personalise content at an unparalleled scale and pace.

Our research reveals a political communications industry poised to adopt new generative AI technologies at scale in 2024. However, there is a lack of guidelines and know-how to establish best practice on the use of AI in communications. The UK has established itself as an international leader in the field, convening the AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park in November 2023 and launching its new AI Safety Institute. But despite showing this international leadership, there is nothing in place in the short term to mitigate the risks we face in the coming year regarding political communications.

In this paper, we explore the current trends in how AI is being used in communications, how this is changing communications and the benefits and risks associated with this to communications producers, the public, the information ecosystem and wider society and democracy. Particularly we are concerned with communications in politics and government, the third sector, the media and journalism, and the communications industry.

Based on our extensive research with experts and members of the public, we make a series of recommendations for politicians, regulators, generative AI companies and communications professionals to all play their part in safeguarding trust in our democratic information environments at this critical juncture in both the technology and our electoral cycles. A table of these recommendations can be found in Section 3 of this report. We also set out a framework to guide responsible use of AI in communications, based on five key principles of AI:

1. Transparency
2. Accountability
3. Fairness and inclusivity
4. Privacy
5. Reliability

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been shaping the way we communicate for many years now: from data-driven microtargeting of campaign messages to social media algorithms amplifying certain kinds of content. As early as 2018 so-called "deep fakes" started to emerge to warn against the potential impact of deep fake AI on the political system.[1] In the last 12 months however, the game has changed significantly with the advent of new forms of generative AI, such as ChatGPT for text and DALL-E for images.

Anyone can now produce such deep fakes using easily accessible generative AI tools. Synthetic content is now cheaper and easier to produce, and therefore more widespread and there are a growing number of examples of where faked content has been produced apparently to damage political reputations. In October 2023 a relatively widely-shared fake audio clip of Labour leader Keir Starmer apparently abusing political staffers was released by an unknown account on X on the first day of Labour's party conference.[2] It sent a collective shiver down the spine of the political establishment as a sign of things to come.

Mainstream political agencies are testing out the use of AI too, prompting a debate about what constitutes legitimate uses of these technologies. In April 2023, the USA's Republican National Committee produced a video full of AI-generated images to paint a dystopian picture of what a second Biden term might look like, though the video clearly marked that the images had been generated by AI.[3] Despite generating some mainstream media coverage, the video was not especially successful as viral hits go, accumulating fewer than 320,000 views in its first seven months.[4]

This year is one of the biggest years for democracy in recent decades: there are elections in India, Mexico, the EU parliament, and presidential elections in the US, Venezuela, and Taiwan. The UK general election will come no later than 28th January 2025.

This unusually large and consequential political cycle is, for the first time, playing out in the context of widely accessible generative AI tools. For political parties and the communication experts that seek to influence them, there are new opportunities to create content at a scale and pace not known before, and to personalise it to a new degree.

This coming wave of synthetic content and the use of AI to reach audiences in political campaigns is still in its infancy. Yet, we are in a potentially dangerous grey area where the rules have not been set on how AI should legitimately be used in political communications, but the tools are widely available and therefore the norms of how they are being used are being established in real time.

The generation of AI-produced content can be expected to proliferate both within political communications and wider communications now that the barriers to access the technology are so much lower. 2024 will likely be the year that AI-generated content will truly take off and the rules of the game are established. Additionally, the use of AI in researching, optimising, targeting and analysing communications campaigns is likely to blur the distinctions between communications that use AI and those that do not.

The UK government has taken a pro-innovation approach to the regulation of AI, recognising the opportunities it brings.[5] It has established itself as an international leader in the field, convening the

1   Romano, A. Jordan Peele's simulated Obama PSA is a double-edged warning against fake news. Vox, April 2018. Available at:https://www.vox.com/2018/4/18/17252410/jordan-peele-obama-deepfake-buzzfeed [accessed 09/12/2023]

2   Sky News. Deepfake audio of Sir Keir Starmer released on first day of Labour conference. Sky News, October 2023. Available at: https://news.sky.com/story/labour-faces-political-attack-after-deepfake-audio-is-posted-of-sir-keir-starmer-12980181 [accessed 04/01/2023]

3   Thompson, A. First look: RNC slams Biden in AI-generated ad. Axios, April 2023 . Available at: https://www.axios.com/2023/04/25/rnc-slams-biden-re-election-bid-ai-generated-ad [accessed 04/01/2024]

4   YouTube. GOP: Beat Biden. YouTube, April, 2023. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLMMxgtxQ1Y [accessed 04/01/2024]

5   Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and Office for Artificial Intelligence. AI regulation: a pro-innovation approach. GOV.UK, March 2023. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-regulation-a-pro-innovation-approach [accessed 09/12/2023]

AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park in November 2023 and launching a new AI Safety Institute.[6] The 28 nations represented at the Summit signed the Bletchley Declaration, agreeing on the need for regular international AI safety summits, for now on a biannual basis, and agreed principles on the development and safety testing of advanced AI systems.[7]

But despite showing this international leadership, there are no short term measures to mitigate the risks we face in the coming year regarding political communications. The next UK election will play out under the same rules, despite the emerging and very real concerns about the impact of AI on election integrity. These concerns include generative AI being used to create disinformation, to create content that targets women, girls and minority groups in disproportionate ways, and to amplify such content to people via algorithms that create potential for misinformation and discrimination.

Communications, as explored in this report, encompasses the dissemination of messages, ideas and information to the public. Particularly we are concerned with communications in politics and government, the third sector (including charities and think tanks), the media and journalism, and the communications industry (which can include marketing, advertising and public affairs). Those producing communications in these areas have the power to shape the messages, news and information that we consume and learn from. In turn, they have the potential to influence public opinion, perceptions and discourse. This makes the responsible use of AI in communications an absolute imperative.

AI can bring a multitude of benefits to communications producers and those consuming communications. It enables content to be created more quickly and effectively by accelerating the process of initial research, collating and analysing large amounts of data and preparing drafts, freeing up human time that can be invested into more creative and impactful work. This can allow communication producers to make content that is more engaging and accessible to the public.

However, if the full benefits of AI in communications are to be realised, these benefits must be balanced with the risks. Irresponsible, and indeed malevolent, uses of AI can lead to outputs that amplify the amount of false and biased content in the information ecosystem while the use of AI to analyse personal data heightens the risk of privacy breaches and data biases. This not only leaves communications producers vulnerable to public backlash, reputational damage and legal issues, but also has much wider implications for society and democracy. Fundamentally, it can deepen existing difficulties in distinguishing between what's real and what's not, impacting public trust in the information they consume and even their engagement with political and democratic processes.

In the following sections, we explore the current trends in how AI is being used in and changing the communications of politics and government, the third sector, the media and the communications industry. We also look at the benefits and risks associated with this to communications producers, the public, the information ecosystem and wider society and democracy.

THE METHODOLOGY FOR THIS REPORT INCLUDES:

- **An evidence review** of the existing literature on the use of AI in communications in politics and government, journalism/media, the comms industry and the third sector.

- **Expert interviews** with stakeholders from across politics, journalism, the communications industry and the third sector.

- **Focus groups** with members of the public to explore their attitudes towards the use of AI in communications. We spoke to people who are most likely to be negatively impacted by the use of AI in communications - people from lower socioeconomic groups, people from ethnic minority groups, and women.

  As we expected the public to generally have low levels of AI awareness, we carried out two sessions with each focus group, asking participants to complete a small task between the first and second sessions to increase their familiarity with AI. This added a deliberative aspect to the research.

- **Two workshops** with stakeholders working with AI and communications to inform the recommendations section of this report.

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6   Manancourt, V and Bambridge, J. Rishi Sunak lays out vision for new global AI safety bodies. Politico, October 2023. Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/rishi-sunak-vision-global-ai-safety-institute/ [accessed 09/12/2023]

7   UK Government. Chair's Summary of the AI Safety Summit, 2023, Bletchley Park. UK Government, November 2023. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6543e0b61f1a60000d360d2b/aiss-chair-statement.pdf [accessed 09/12/2023]

Thus our findings and recommendations are rooted in the very latest insights into how generative AI is starting to shift political communications - and what the public and politicians are most worried about.

As a result, we make a series of recommendations for politicians, regulators, generative AI companies and communications professionals to all play their part in safeguarding trust in our democratic information environments at this critical juncture in both the technology and our electoral cycles. We also set out a framework to guide responsible use of AI in communications, based on five key principles of AI:

1. Transparency

2. Accountability

3. Fairness and inclusivity

4. Privacy

5. Reliability

These principles are well-established and we have compiled them from several frameworks developed by organisations and institutions like Google[8], Rolls Royce[9] the OECD[10] and the UK Government itself.[11] These principles reflect the concerns around AI use in communications that we have seen throughout our research.

While the government continues to discuss and develop policy and regulation to mitigate the risks of AI, this is a chance for communications producers to get ahead of the game and set their own standards for responsible use.

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8 Google AI. Our Principles. Google AI. Available at: https://ai.google/responsibility/principles/ [accessed 09/12/2023]
9 Rolls Royce. The Alethia Framework - Helping build trust in artificial intelligence. Rolls Royce. Available at: https://www.rolls-royce.com/innovation/the-aletheia-framework.aspx [accessed 09/12/2023]
10 The OECD. Policies, data and analysis for trustworthy artificial intelligence. OECD AI Policy Observatory. Available at: https://oecd.ai/en/ [accessed 04/01/2024]
11 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and Office for Artificial Intelligence. AI regulation: a pro-innovation approach. GOV.UK, March 2023. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-regulation-a-pro-innovation-approach [accessed 09/12/2023]

SECTION 1
KEY TRENDS IN THE USE OF AI IN COMMUNICATIONS

This section will look at how AI is being used in communications. Drawing on the findings from our evidence review and expert interviews, we have identified three key trends in the current use of AI - assisting with routine tasks, research and data analysis and content creation. This is supported by existing research which shows that content producers are expecting to dramatically increase their use of generative AI in these ways in the coming year, posing new questions about the authenticity of content.[12]

Routine tasks

AI is commonly being used in communications to assist with routine and rudimentary tasks. One particular task that it seems to be used quite widely for is gathering background information during the early stages of communications design. For example, a 2019 global survey of newsrooms found that over half of newsrooms had used AI to gather large amounts of material and content which journalists can then use to create news stories.[13] Some had also used it to sift through and categorise this information.[14] Further, government guidance has stated that civil servants can use AI to gather background information on a particular policy area to help them save time when producing policy briefings.[15] A survey of marketers by Hootsuite in 2023 found that 67% said they have already used generative AI to edit and refine text and that 86% expect to in the next year. Some 66% have produced text from scratch using generative AI and 85% expect to next year.[16]

As well as information gathering, a public relations expert we spoke to told us that AI is being used in the communications industry to create summaries and transcriptions, and even to identify relevant journalists to send press releases to. Another interviewee told us that AI is being used in the third sector to generate "routine text" for reports or other outputs:

12   Hootsuite. Social trends 2024. Hootsuite, 2023. Available at: https://hootsuite.widen.net/s/mgqjjznhsx/hootsuitesocialtrends2024_report_en [accessed 10/12/2023]

13   Beckett, C. New powers, new responsibilities. A global survey of journalism and artificial intelligence. LSE, November 2019. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2019/11/18/new-powers-new-responsibilities/ [accessed 10/12/2023]

14   Beckett, C. New powers, new responsibilities. A global survey of journalism and artificial intelligence. LSE, November 2019. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2019/11/18/new-powers-new-responsibilities/ [accessed 10/12/2023]

15   Cabinet Office and Central Digital and Data Office. Guidance to civil servants on use of generative AI. GOV.UK, September 2023. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-civil-servants-on-use-of-generative-ai/guidance-to-civil-servants-on-use-of-generative-ai [accessed 10/12/2023]

16   Hootsuite. Social trends 2024. Hootsuite, 2023. Available at: https://hootsuite.widen.net/s/mgqjjznhsx/hootsuitesocialtrends2024_report_en [accessed 10/12/2023]

"We're hearing that people are finding uses for it for things like annual reports… people are using the transformer type tools to generate routine text and experimenting with ChatGPT in different ways."

- Dr Mike Katell, Ethics Fellow at Alan Turing Institute

An interesting insight from our interviews was that people rarely could say how they should be using such tools in the workplace, or have a comprehensive understanding of how colleagues are actually using generative AI tools. Instead people had picked up in "watercooler" conversations, suggesting that the conversation about how to use AI to generate content is not being had in a strategic way or really understood by organisations' leadership. Many content producers are operating in grey areas where there are no set rules but norms are being established. This is an important finding to inform our recommendations.

Research and data analysis

There is evidence that AI is being used to support research and data analysis in communications planning. For example, a 2023 study on the global use of AI in Public Relations found that nearly half (47%) of those using AI technology are using it to speed up and improve their approach to desktop research while a further 39% are using the technology to help analyse data.[17] This typically involves using AI tools to analyse large volumes of data, such as consumer data, to identify patterns and trends that can be used to help shape marketing campaigns. One of our interviewees who works in the communications industry told us that AI can be used as a data analyst "assistant" in this way.

"Using AI as an assistant…using it as a data analyst…ChatGPT plus code interpreter plugin is almost magic, give it a spreadsheet of data and ask it "what's that?" it kind of works out what it is and can detect trends and insights in the data"

- Andrew Bruce Smith, Managing Director at Escherman and Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) Fellow

AI-driven data analysis in communications can be seen across different sectors. For instance, one of our interviewees who works in the charity sector told us that AI is being used to analyse fundraising data to help make their fundraising campaigns more engaging. In political communications, AI has been used for micro-targeting whereby personal data is analysed to identify and tailor messages towards the interests of a particular audience.[18] One expert we interviewed told us that this type of micro-targeted political messaging is being done at greater pace and scale as a result of AI:

"If you had a psychological profile of each voter to target them individually, you can expedite this with AI"

- Dr Keegan McBride, Departmental Research Lecturer in AI, Government, and Policy at the Oxford Internet Institute

Content creation

In some sectors, we're starting to see AI increasingly being used for content creation. A public relations expert told us that while it's not mainstream yet, the use of AI for content creation in the communications industry is "about to explode".

One type of content AI is being used to create is social media posts. The 2023 study of AI in PR found that tools like Midjourney and Jasper are being used to generate creative ideas and content such as social media posts.[19] Further, in a blog for the consultancy On Think Tanks, Louise Ball argues that generating impactful social media content is one of the best ways think tanks can start using AI in their communications.[20]

Beyond social media, AI has also been used for journalistic reporting, particularly for data-driven reporting which involves analysing large datasets to develop news stories. For instance, our interviewees who work in journalism described how AI has been used for data-driven rudimentary reporting for quite some time, including for sports and financial reporting. News agencies have invested heavily in AI tools to produce content at scale, including the RADAR news agency in the UK which produces multiple stories from datasets.[21]

17   Provoke media. AI In Comms: Nearly Nine Out of 10 Pros See Opportunity As Governance Concerns Grow. Provoke Media, April 2023. Available at:https://www.provokemedia.com/latest/article/ai-in-comms-nearly-nine-out-of-10-pros-see-opportunity-as-governance-concerns-grow [accessed 10/12/2023]
18   Polonski, V. The good, the bad and the ugly uses of machine learning in election campaigns. Centre for Public Impact, August 2017. Available at: https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/insights/good-bad-ugly-uses-machine-learning-election-campaigns#:~:text=First%2C%20 the%20use%20of%20AI,the%20illusion%20of%20public%20support [accessed 10/12/2023]
19   Provoke Media and Sandpiper. AI IN THE COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY 2023 OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS. Provoke Media, 2023. Available at: https://www.provokemedia.com/docs/default-source/default-document-library/sp-pr-ai-report_final.pdf [accessed 10/12/2023]
20   Ball, L. How to use ChatGPT to improve your think tank communications. On Think Tanks, February 2023. Available at: https://onthinktanks.org/articles/how-to-use-chatgpt-to-improve-your-think-tank-communications/ [accessed 10/12/2023]
21   PA Media Radar. Radar: Combining the latest in AI with skilled writers to dynamically create high-quality content at massive scale. PA Media. Available at: https://pa.media/radar/ [accessed 10/12/2023]

In some instances, AI has been used by media outlets to write articles. For example, Buzzfeed has reportedly used AI to write travel guides.[22] The UK news publisher Reach has also used AI to generate similar articles published on local news sites, for example "Seven things to do in Newport", to test the potential of AI.[23,24] However, it should be noted that many newsrooms have developed guidelines which prohibit the use of AI to write articles,[25] suggesting that this particular use of AI in journalistic content creation is limited.

AI-generated content can also be seen in some political communications from politicians themselves. For example, polling conducted by YouGov on behalf of Cavendish, found that while the overwhelming majority (80%) of MPs in the UK say they have never used AI in their work, 3% said that they had used it for social media posts while a further 3% said they used it for campaign materials such as leaflets. There are also indicators that some MPs are using AI to compose their speeches - during a House of Commons debate on AI, MP Matt Warman claimed that other MPs have "confessed" to him that they have used AI to write their speeches.[26] Further, the Government's AI minister, Jonathan Berry, has said he has used AI-powered tools to write speeches.[27] However, many of our expert interviewees were not aware of politicians using AI to write their speeches, suggesting while this is an emerging use of AI, it is likely not currently that common or commonly admitted to. The fact that Matt Warman described MPs "confessing" to using AI to produce speeches suggests that there could be more such activity happening in secret or below the radar, as we heard from other content producers.

Other than politicians using AI, there have been multiple cases in recent years of AI being used malevolently to generate fake political content. For example, during the 2023 UK Labour Party conference, deepfake audio clips of Labour Party Leader Keir Starmer were circulated on social media which purported to show him verbally abusing party staffers and criticising the city of Liverpool where the conference was being held.[28] A similar incident happened in Slovakia, where a fake audio recording was created of Michal Simecka, the leader of the Progressive Slovakia Party, discussing how to rig the Slovakia election.[29] Both of these events caused substantial concerns among commentators and experts around the ability of AI to interfere with democracy by influencing public voting behaviour or damaging trust[30] - this is something we will discuss in section 2 of this report. Argentina's November 2023 election has been described as the "first AI election" in which both candidates used AI extensively to generate images of their opponent.[31]

The extent of the use of AI is still unclear

In many of these AI use cases, there remains a degree of uncertainty about the extent of its use, particularly the level of AI versus human involvement in specific tasks. For example, in cases where politicians and political parties are using AI tools to create leaflets or write their speeches, it is not clear whether AI is mainly being used to assist with creating this communication (for example, by helping to generate creative ideas) or to automate the content of this communication. According to one of our interviewees, this likely varies depending on how experienced politicians and political parties are with AI - those who are more familiar will be more likely to use AI at a greater scale in their communications planning and content creation.

Uncertainty also persists because communications producers are not always openly discussing their use of it. For example, one of our interviewees in the charity sector told us that AI is still in the "testing phase", particularly when used in content creation,

22   Futurism. BuzzFeed Is Quietly Publishing Whole AI-Generated Articles, Not Just Quizzes. Futurism, Available at: https://futurism.com/buzzfeed-publishing-articles-by-ai [accessed 10/12/2023]

23   Sweney, M. Mirror and Express owner publishes first articles written using AI. The Guardian, March 2023. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/mar/07/mirror-and-express-owner-publishes-first-articles-written-using-ai [accessed 10/12/2023]

24   In Your Area Community. From a Victorian market to twitching - 7 things to do with visitors to show off Newport. In Your Area, March 2023. Available at: https://www.inyourarea.co.uk/news/seven-things-to-do-in-newport/ [accessed 10/12/2023]

25   Heath, R and Fischer, S. Newsrooms grapple with rules for AI. Axios, August 2023. Available at: https://www.axios.com/2023/08/22/ai-rules-newsrooms-training-data [accessed 10/12/2023]

26   UK Parliament Hansard. Artificial Intelligence Volume 735: debated on Thursday 29 June 2023. UK Parliament, June 2023. Available at: https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-06-29/debates/A7914A68-9A5F-4928-90CE-CF1ADA2717C1/ArtificialIntelligence [accessed 10/12/2023]

27   Dickson, A. Lord of the Supercomputers! Britain's AI minister is a hereditary peer. Politico, July 2023. Available at:https://www.politico.eu/article/lord-of-the-robots-britains-ai-minister-is-a-hereditary-peer/ [accessed 10/12/2023]

28   Sky News. Deepfake audio of Sir Keir Starmer released on first day of Labour conference. Sky News, October 2023. Available at: https://news.sky.com/story/labour-faces-political-attack-after-deepfake-audio-is-posted-of-sir-keir-starmer-12980181#:~:text=The%20first%20fake%20audio%2C%20posted,criticising%20the%20city%20of%20Liverpool. [accessed 10/12/2023]

29   Meaker, M. Slovakia's Election Deepfakes Show AI Is a Danger to Democracy. Wired, October 2023. Available at: https://www.wired.co.uk/article/slovakia-election-deepfakes [accessed 10/12/2023]

30   Robins-Early, N. Disinformation reimagined: how AI could erode democracy in the 2024 US elections. The Guardian, July 2023. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jul/19/ai-generated-disinformation-us-elections [accessed 10/12/2023]

31   Nicas, J and Cholakian Herrera, L. Is Argentina the First A.I. Election?. The New York Times, November 2023. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/15/world/americas/argentina-election-ai-milei-massa.html [accessed 04/01/2023]

so not all charities are "boldly admitting" that they're using AI. This limited transparency over AI use in content creation is a problem across different sectors and the true extent of its use may not even be known to managers or those in oversight roles. For example, one of our workshop participants said that many MPs may not be aware of their staff, like their speechwriters or parliamentary assistants, using AI to write policy briefings or speeches. As Matt Warman pointed out, MPs have privately admitted to using generative AI to help write their speeches but aren't publicly declaring this. Other surveys have suggested that younger members of the workforce are more likely to deploy the tools.[32] Given these workers are less experienced they might also have less understanding of what might be deemed acceptable use of AI. Potentially, a lot of this activity is happening underground and without transparency. This means that we cannot be certain about how commonly or frequently AI is used for content creation. What we can say is that it is likely to be more common than the available evidence suggests.

This important gap in the knowledge is a research finding in itself: we don't know how much these tools are being used, and to what effect, and therefore there could be a certain amount happening "below the radar". We will pick up this insight when we come later to describe our recommendations.

32   Hootsuite. Social trends 2024. Hootsuite, 2023. Available at: https://hootsuite.widen.net/s/mgqjjznhsx/hootsuitesocialtrends2024_report_en [accessed 10/12/2023]

SECTION 2
CHANGES, BENEFITS AND RISKS

Having identified the key areas of AI use, we now explore how this is changing communications, the benefits this can have for communications producers and wider society, and also the risks presented if AI is used irresponsibly.

In our focus groups, people's awareness of AI was very mixed. Some were regular users of generative AI tools; others could not even name an AI tool. While general AI awareness was mixed, people typically had low awareness of how it is used in communications and as a result were uncertain about what potential benefits and risks this could have. However, after presenting several real life case studies of AI-generated communications to them, people had clear concerns about some of these uses. People generally thought it was okay to use AI to create lighthearted content, but were strongly opposed to politicians using AI in their communications as it would make them seem less authentic.

The experts we spoke to identified multiple advantages AI brings to communications, particularly increased time efficiency. However, they stressed that AI is not always being used responsibly and cited numerous consequences, including the perpetuation

of bias, breaches of confidential and personal data, and other careless or malevolent uses.

There are a number of general principles that have been used by organisations and institutions, such as Google,[33] Rolls Royce[34] and the OECD,[35] to guide responsible use of AI. These often include the need for transparency, accountability, reliability, respect for privacy and upholding ethical values. Our research has found that if AI is used responsibly in communications and abides by these principles it can serve as a force for good, helping communications producers to produce more effective, engaging and accessible communications for their audiences. However, if used irresponsibly, AI can produce a range of undesirable consequences for communications producers, the public, wider society and democracy. Table 1 brings together the different ways AI is changing communications and the associated benefits and risks of each.

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33   Google AI. Our Principles. Google AI. Available at: https://ai.google/responsibility/principles/ [accessed 04/01/2024]

34   Rolls Royce. The Alethia Framework - Helping build trust in artificial intelligence. Rolls Royce. Available at: https://www.rolls-royce.com/innovation/the-aletheia-framework.aspx [accessed 09/12/2023]

35   The OECD. Policies, data and analysis for trustworthy artificial intelligence. OECD AI Policy Observatory. Available at: https://oecd.ai/en/ [accessed 04/01/2024]

TABLE 1

CHANGES	BENEFITS	RISKS
Decrease in the scale of human involvement in particular tasks, particularly routine tasks that can be easily replaced by AI.	Frees up time for more creative tasks. Allows money and resources to be redirected into more impactful work. The need for fewer humans can make communications more accessible to the public (e.g. chatbots).	If there is insufficient human oversight, AI-generated content could contain inaccurate or misleading information. AI-generated content could lead to a loss of authenticity and human empathy in communications.
Increase in the speed at which communications can be produced.	Allows communications producers to create more content.	The amount of content that contains misinformation and fake images can also increase, making it difficult for the public to trust the communications they consume. This can lead to disengagement with democratic processes. The amount of content that contains bias can also increase, perpetuating harmful stereotypes against marginalised communities. Protected trade marks or intellectual property may be infringed by generative AI, or there may be reputational consequences if AI uses without credit the style or composition of a particular artist for a commercial campaign.
Greater use of data in the process of creating communications.	Communications producers can more easily and quickly analyse large amounts of data, allowing them to detect trends and insights to create more effective advertisements and campaigns.	Personal and confidential data can be breached if communications producers don't know how to use this data responsibly. The data being analysed by AI could contain biases or be inaccurate causing biased or inaccurate content to be created.
More personalised and targeted communication being produced.	Can help communications producers better engage specific audiences. The public can access more relevant and personalised communication.	Micro-targeted communications can lead to some people only ever receiving particular information or very specific messages, making them less informed about wider issues and alternative viewpoints. This can weaken public debate and undermine democratic processes.

BENEFITS

First we will discuss the benefits associated with the use of AI in communications, drawing on findings from our evidence review, expert interviews and focus groups with members of the public. We found that AI is particularly advantageous for communications producers - using AI to assist with routine tasks is freeing up their time for more creative work while AI-driven data analysis is helping them to develop more effective campaigns. This can help a charity raise more money or a business sell more products, for example.

We found that communications producers tend to be the greatest beneficiaries of AI use. In addition, if used responsibly, AI can also be beneficial for the public by allowing them to see more personalised content that is of interest to them, and by increasing their access to important types of communications like charity helplines.

The process

Increased time efficiency for communications producers

Increased time efficiency is a key benefit of using AI for those producing communications. The ability of AI to speed up routine tasks means those working in communications will have more time to focus on creative and "human" tasks that AI cannot easily replace. For example, a 2019 survey of newsrooms found that making their work more efficient was one of the key motivations journalists' have for using AI.[36] According to Marina Anderson, a Forbes council member, AI in the communications industry can pave the way for better and more accessible human expression by eliminating monotonous tasks, like writing copy, giving comms professionals more time to connect with clients or work on creative endeavours.[37]

Our focus group participants also saw increased time efficiency as a key benefit. Many thought that it could help make the day to day work lives of communications producers easier and help them be more productive while others said that AI could free up time for people to be more creative.

"I've got a positive feeling [about AI]. If it's quicker and saving time, more productivity and creativity"

- Focus group participant

As well as saving time, AI can help organisations save costs on routine tasks, allowing them to redirect money into more creative, complex and impactful work. For example, one of our interviewees said that the greater efficiency brought by AI in newsrooms will allow more resources to be channelled into expensive investigative reporting. This could be particularly beneficial for smaller organisations. One of our interviewees from the charity sector highlighted how AI could help organisations that are "resource poor", by giving their staff more time to focus on the aspects of their work that are really impactful, such as building campaign assets.

> *"It [AI] has the ability to help you do more with less…taking some of the mechanical, time consuming tasks away from comms people so it frees them up for more creativity and innovation…that could be a really positive thing."*
>
> - Adeela Warley, Chief Executive at CharityComms

The products

Helping to build more effective communications

Another key benefit of AI to communications producers is that it can help them develop more effective campaigns and advertisements. The ability of AI to help communications professionals analyse large amounts of data means that they can create communications that better engage their audiences. For example, a 2022 study identified data analysis as the most critical advantage of AI in marketing as using AI to analyse large datasets can help marketers gain deeper consumer and audience insights, allowing them to better target their marketing campaigns and create more personalised content.[38] Similarly, one of our charity sector interviewees told us that using AI to analyse fundraising data is helping charity sector workers to create fundraising campaigns that better engage the public and in turn help charities raise more money.

36   Beckett, C. New powers, new responsibilities. A global survey of journalism and artificial intelligence. LSE, November 2019. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2019/11/18/new-powers-new-responsibilities/ [accessed 10/12/2023]
37   Anderson, M. How Artificial Intelligence Could Reinvent The Communications Industry. Forbes, March 2023. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2023/03/09/how-artificial-intelligence-could-reinvent-the-communications-industry/?sh=2ae00f25b7d4 [accessed 04/01/2024]
38   Haleem, A et al. Artificial intelligence (AI) applications for marketing: A literature-based study. International Journal of Intelligent Networks, 2022. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666603022000136#sec6 [accessed 04/01/2024]

Indeed, several of our focus group participants said that they preferred receiving personalised communication, like emails that are personally addressed to them and tailored to their interests, from brands and they would be more likely to pay attention to it over generic content. However, some did voice concern over how their data was being used to create this more personalised content - the impact of AI on data privacy is something we will discuss later.

It should be acknowledged that using AI for data analysis can be more advantageous in some situations than others. For example, we highlighted earlier how AI has been used for micro-targeting during political campaigns and according to one of our interviewees, increasing voter turnout and winning elections is a key reason why political parties are turning to AI tools. However, the effectiveness of campaigns that use micro-targeting has been contested - research by the Massachusetts Institute for Technology found that micro-targeted political ads did not have any advantage over ads that targeted broader demographics.[39]

Micro-targeting can also have downsides for democracy. Particularly, experts have expressed concern that microtargeting means people will only be exposed to very specific messages which will make them less informed or interested in the overarching political and policy issues at stake, making public debates less democratic.[40] Other uses of AI in political communications may be more advantageous however - for example, one of our interviewees told us that using AI-driven data analysis to create fundraising emails has been particularly impactful for political parties.

Helping to increase access to communications

AI is helping to make communications more accessible to the public. The ability of AI to take on or assist with tasks that in the past could only have been done by humans means that organisations can do more with fewer staff. In the charity sector, this has involved using AI to offer basic, essential advice to people 24/7 without having to wait for a human to be available to offer assistance.[41] One of our expert interviewees also cited this as an important and valuable use of AI in the charity sector.

Similar benefits of AI were recognised by some of our focus group participants. For instance, some said that they found chatbots, which can employ AI technologies, convenient and helped speed up their communications and experiences with customer services.

There is concern that this use of AI could lead to a loss of authentic human connection in communications, which could be particularly problematic for charities as this is a core part of their purpose. This could also be a problem for MPs - polling conducted by YouGov on behalf of Cavendish found that the most unacceptable way MPs can use AI in their work, according to the public, is to create emails or other correspondence. This could be because this is how MPs most closely and personally communicate with the public, so people want to be communicating with a human. Our focus group participants also expressed concern that using AI in communications could lead to a loss of human empathy in those communications with one person saying "sometimes you just want to speak to a human". However, AI is assisting and not necessarily replacing all human interaction here, and it means people can access at least some support while waiting for human assistance to be available.[42]

RISKS

We will now discuss the risks associated with the use of AI in communications, again drawing on findings from our evidence review, expert interviews and focus groups with members of the public.

We found that irresponsible use of AI in communications can have adverse effects on the public. Particularly, the increase in AI-generated fake content makes it more difficult for the public to trust the messages and information they consume which can have wider ramifications for democracy. For communications producers, if AI is used irresponsibly it can cause reputational damage to any organisation, politician or political party using AI in their communications. And as we will see, even well-intentioned use of AI-generated fake images can cause public backlash which we found can be particularly problematic for charities. There is also a significant risk to trust in communications from the simple fact of it being easy to create misleading videos, audio and authentic-looking written

39   Dizikes, P. Study: Microtargeting works, just not the way people think. MIT News, June 2023. Available at: https://news.mit.edu/2023/study-microtargeting-politics-tailored-ads-0621 [accessed 04/01/2024]
40   Zuiderveen Borgesius, FJ et al. Online Political Microtargeting: Promises and Threats for Democracy. Utrecht Law Review, 2018. Available at: https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.ivir.nl/publicaties/download/UtrechtLawReview.pdf&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1698748436435756&usg=AOvVaw140BZD8MOn--c3H5tIbW9K [04/01/2024]
41   Green, C. AI and the future of the charity sector. Charity Digital, February 2021. Available at: https://charitydigital.org.uk/topics/topics/ai-and-the-future-of-the-charity-sector-4848 [accessed 04/01/2024]
42   Green, C. AI and the future of the charity sector. Charity Digital, February 2021. Available at: https://charitydigital.org.uk/topics/topics/ai-and-the-future-of-the-charity-sector-4848 [accessed 04/01/2024]

communications: if anything can be 'fake' then some members of the public may give up on trying to distinguish what is 'real'.

We saw interesting divergences between public and expert views on some of the risks. The experts we spoke to were very concerned about the risk of AI-generated content containing biases that amplify prejudices and stereotypes against different social groups. However, as we will see, the members of the public we spoke to were less worried about the real world implications of AI-generated bias in communications.

The process

Data privacy

Using AI for data analysis in communications can risk the public's personal data being compromised. If personal data is shared in a generative AI tool, that then becomes publicly available on the platform and this is often not understood by users.

Data privacy issues can be amplified by the fact that many organisations do not offer sufficient guidance on how employees should use AI. One of our interviewees who has expertise on the use of AI in public relations told us that many communications organisations don't have audits in place to know if their employees are using AI and if they're inputting confidential information from clients into AI tools. He said this creates a real risk of confidential information and data being breached. Similarly, several of our workshop participants said that their organisations don't have robust internal guidance on what information they can and cannot put into generative AI tools. Another interviewee also told us that there is growing concern among the public about how AI tools are collecting and using their data.

Indeed, several of our focus group participants expressed concern about how their data was being used when companies use AI tools to help produce their communications. Particularly they were concerned about not knowing how their data is being used, how the data of children and teenagers is being used, and not being clearly asked for their consent for their data to be used. As one person told us:

"We provide them [companies] data so they can send us personalised messages…so at some point we provide such data we don't know if it is protected by these companies"

 - Focus group participant

The products

AI can create and amplify mis/disinformation in communications

A fundamental risk of using AI in communications is its ability to generate false or misleading information. According to polling conducted by YouGov on behalf of Cavendish, 70% of MPs are worried AI will increase the risk of misinformation and disinformation while 64% agree that the rise of AI-generated content exacerbates existing risks of misinformation and disinformation.

This is particularly relevant to generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT. These tools learn from the data they are trained with, so if this data contains inaccuracies the AI tool could then produce misleading or incorrect information itself. The mechanism by which large language models operate additionally means that even if all training data is accurate they can still generate errors. More advanced models seem to be reducing this error rate, but are nowhere close to eliminating it. This is commonly known as AI "hallucinations".[43] This can then lead to communications producers unintentionally creating and publishing content that contains inaccurate information. For example, multiple AI generated articles published by a US media outlet CNET were found to contain substantial factual inaccuracies, including on important topics such as financial advice.[44]

In some use cases, it is still possible to have a human manually check in detail any AI-generated form of communications. But in other cases, AI is often being asked to generate targeted email communications based on demographic information of a household against a manifesto or product catalogue and at a scale that would be impossible to check one by one. Such communications could be generally high-quality and highly-targeted, but would not be subject to individual review, leading to the potential for some serious misfires.

43   Weise, K and Metz, C. When A.I. Chatbots Hallucinate. The New York Times, May 2023. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/01/business/ai-chatbots-hallucination.html [accessed 04/01/2023]
44   Thorbecke, C. Plagued with errors: A news outlet's decision to write stories with AI backfires. CNN, January 2023. Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/25/tech/cnet-ai-tool-news-stories/index.html [accessed 040/01/2024]

One of our interviewees told us that in journalism there will always be a human "somewhere in the chain", including to conduct a final review. However, as shown by the error-filled articles produced by CNET, these human-driven quality checks are not always in place or that effective in mitigating the risk of false information being published.

Alongside this, AI is making it easier for fake information to be amplified and spread. In an article for the tech magazine Wired, Professor Kate Starbird explains that someone can use generative AI to "write one article and tailor it to 12 different audiences. It takes five minutes for each one of them."[45] This suggests that not only can AI be used to create fake content, it can be used to produce this content quickly and at scale, and target it to particular audiences. The risk here is not only that unintentional misinformation can spread more easily, but malevolent actors can produce more effective disinformation campaigns. There has been significant discussion in academic and technological fields about improving transparency and provenance of information by citing data sources for any summarisation or decision-making so that end users can investigate data and make decisions for themselves. We will return to look at some of these watermarking technologies in the recommendations.

It should be acknowledged that the impact of generative AI on misinformation has been contested. Recent analysis by Felix Simon from the Oxford Internet Institute found that the impact has been "overblown" partly because increasing the supply of misinformation does not necessarily mean people will consume more of it and even though generative AI can improve the quality of misinformation, this does not mean the public will be more likely to believe it.[46] Some of our focus groups questioned whether AI will have much impact on amplifying misinformation, as so much fake and inaccurate content already existed before AI. However, other participants felt the risk of misinformation and fake AI-generated content can still impact people's ability to trust what they see which, as we will discuss later, can have ramifications for democracy.

AI can create content that perpetuates biases

A further risk of using AI in communications is that it can perpetuate bias. This is because the data AI is trained on can contain human biases - including racial and gender prejudices and stereotypes. Several of our interviewees described this as a fundamental risk - one person told us that cultural biases that reinforce western cultural hegemony are often "lurking" in datasets AI is trained on, and this is a problem because this data is used to produce communications globally, including in countries outside of the West.

There is concern that this bias risks perpetuating stereotypes and discrimination in communications content. One of our interviewees who works in the charity sector told us that because AI is "hoovering up" existing data that can contain social biases, communications that have used AI can end up reinforcing and perpetuating existing stereotypes. The 2019 study of the use of AI in newsrooms found that there was concern that algorithmic bias could lead to discrimination against certain social groups or views in journalistic work.[47]

While the risk of bias is clearly a key concern of those working in AI and communications, this risk may not be so salient for the public. In our focus groups, most people felt strongly that bias against certain social groups in AI and communications was wrong. However, they did not express much concern that this would have any significant real-world impact on society or on them personally. Others questioned whether the AI tools are really what we should be concerned about, as they are simply reflecting inequalities and prejudices that already exist in society. When we showed participants an example of real-life AI-generated bias, one person responded:

> "I don't blame AI for providing these images - if AI is only going off information it's being given, if you look at the whole world, there are few people of colour in high paying positions - if AI is taking in all that information, you would expect it to produce an image like this; reflecting inequality"
>
> - Focus group participant

So, while the implications of AI-generated bias in communications for wider society is uncertain, it is clear that the AI risks creating communications that contain and perpetuate biases against certain social groups. Additionally, models can be fine-tuned after deployment in ways that can reinforce biases: an early Microsoft chatbot known as "Tay" had to be

45   Benson, T. This Disinformation Is Just for You. Wired, August 2023. Available at: https://www.wired.com/story/generative-ai-custom-disinformation/ [accessed 04/01/2023]

46   Simon, F. Fears About The Impact Of Generative AI On Misinformation Are Overblown, Says Oxford AI Researcher. Oxford Internet Institute, October 2023. Available at: https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/news-events/news/fears-about-the-impact-of-generative-ai-on-misinformation-are-overblown-says-oxford-ai-researcher/ [accessed 04/01/2023]

47   Beckett, C. New powers, new responsibilities. A global survey of journalism and artificial intelligence. LSE, November 2019. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2019/11/18/new-powers-new-responsibilities/ [accessed 10/12/2023]

withdrawn permanently after being trained by users to produce highly racist outputs, for example.[48] Even well-intentioned efforts of much more advanced modern models can produce perverse results: the image generator Dall-e 3 includes hidden prompts intended to improve the diversity of its outputs, but in some situations this leads to a prompt asking for a "jailed tech exec" to generate a black man or Asian woman in the jail cell, rather than the more typical white man.[49] This reinforces the importance of having human oversight when AI is being used to produce communications to check and remove these biases.

Using AI in communications could negatively impact public perception

The use of AI could harm an organisation's reputation among the public, particularly if it is used to generate content that contains fake images, false information or plagiarised work. For example, the human rights charity Amnesty International used AI-generated photos depicting protests in Colombia: they said this was to protect protesters from retribution and included text saying the images were AI-generated.[50] They faced backlash for the use of these images and removed them from social media, suggesting that even when organisations use such images with transparency and good intentions they can still face criticism.

This is partly because using AI-generated images can cause people to question the credibility of the communications they're seeing, and in turn the credibility of the organisation producing the content.[51] One of our focus group participants told us that they would trust a brand less if it had used fake content in any of its communications.

Further risks of brand damage arise from replicating the style of an existing artist, or intellectual property theft. Some artists are already suing AI companies for copyright infringements.[52] Even the act of appearing to replace skilled workers with "robots" can lead to reputational damage for a company.

The risks to brand reputation will be greater in some sectors and organisations than others, particularly those that rely profoundly on public trust. For

example, one charity sector interviewee told us that the use of deepfakes in charity communications could cause members of the public to lose trust in that charity, which could have severe consequences - public trust is the bedrock of the charity sector, and it would not survive without this trust.

As well as harming brands and organisations, the use of AI in political communications could also harm the public's perception of individual politicians. Particularly, it could damage an MP's authenticity. Several of our focus group participants said that if an MP used AI in their communications then the message they are communicating would not feel authentic, and they couldn't trust that the politician actually believes what they are saying. When discussing politicians using AI to write speeches one person said:

> "It should be their personality and how they properly feel, otherwise we could all do it… not sure if you believe it or not, should be them writing it not using an app."
>
> - Focus group participant

Similarly, one of our expert interviewees said that the public will never tolerate politicians "artificially outsourcing their opinions."

AI can make it more difficult for people to know what is and isn't true

The use of AI in communications, particularly for content creation, risks making it more difficult for the public to trust the content they see. As AI advances, the content it produces is becoming increasingly realistic.[53] One of our interviewees who works in journalism told us that there have been cases where fake AI-generated content has been dressed up to look like it comes from a genuine news publication, making it more difficult for people to distinguish between real and fake journalism.

Indeed, several of our focus group participants said that the existence of AI-generated communications would make it more difficult for them to trust what

48   Schwartz, O. In 2016, Microsoft's Racist Chatbot Revealed the Dangers of Online Conversation. IEEE Spectrum, November 2019. Available at: https://spectrum.ieee.org/in-2016-microsofts-racist-chatbot-revealed-the-dangers-of-online-conversation [accessed 04/01/2024]

49   all, J. Techtris – we didn't start the fire (that was Sam Bankman-Fried). Techtris, November 2023. Available at: https://www.techtris.co.uk/p/techtris-we-didnt-start-the-fire [accessed 04/01/2024]

50   Taylor, L. Amnesty International criticised for using AI-generated images. The Guardian, May 2023. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/02/amnesty-international-ai-generated-images-criticism [accessed 04/01/2024]

51   Taylor, L. Amnesty International criticised for using AI-generated images. The Guardian, May 2023. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/02/amnesty-international-ai-generated-images-criticism [accessed 04/01/2024]

52   Cho, W. Scraping or Stealing? A Legal Reckoning Over AI Looms. The Hollywood Reporter, August 2023. Available at: https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/ai-scraping-stealing-copyright-law-1235571501/ [accessed 04/01/2024]

53   WSJ Podcasts. WSJ's The Future of Everything. WSJ Podcasts, September 2023. Available at: https://www.wsj.com/podcasts/wsj-the-future-of-everything/real-or-ai-the-tech-giants-racing-to-stop-the-spread-of-fake-images/b93076fc-38d7-45cd-91f5-4ddf72887fc7 [accessed 04/01/2023]

they see. One said that it would "make them question things more" and that, in particular, they would not be able to trust any images. Another said that it would make them trust the media less.

Beyond the media, AI-generated content can also make it more difficult for people to trust political communications. One of our expert interviewees suggested that this could lead to wider disillusionment with democratic processes:

> "With manufactured content with AI coming through…political messaging, which is already subject to a good deal of scepticism, will now be under increased scepticism… making them [voters] lose faith that their vote matters at all or that anything they hear is true"
>
> - Dr Mike Katell, Ethics Fellow at Alan Turing Institute

Indeed, according to the Journal of Democracy, AI-driven inauthentic content can lead people to distrust the entire information ecosystem, including the media.[54] This in turn could worsen already low levels of trust in government, which could make the public reluctant to engage with political and democratic processes altogether.[55]

54   Kreps, S and Kriner, D. How AI Threatens Democracy. Journal of Democracy, October 2023. Available at: https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/how-ai-threatens-democracy/ [accessed 04/01/2024]
55   Kreps, S and Kriner, D. How AI Threatens Democracy. Journal of Democracy, October 2023. Available at: https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/how-ai-threatens-democracy/ [accessed 04/01/2024]

SECTION 3
RECOMMENDATIONS

Our research reveals a political communications industry poised to adopt new generative AI technologies at scale in 2024, at a politically sensitive time and without the guidelines and know-how to establish best practice uses while mitigating some of the risks. Across the stakeholders we interviewed there was a sense of people using these tools in ad hoc ways, not always being candid about how they are using them, and unsure about how they *should* be using them. One of the most important insights came in the Cavendish polling of MPs, which revealed that over two-thirds of MPs are worried AI will increase the risk of misinformation and disinformation, and two-thirds agree that political parties and politicians should be transparent about how they are using AI tools for political campaigns. Political actors need guidance on how to achieve these improvements before we get into an election period.

The government is on the front foot on the "frontier" risks of highly capable AI systems in its hosting of the AI Safety Summit and the setting up of the AI Safety Institute. However there is a risk that these actions focus so much on the potential existential risks of AI that they miss the more immediate risks that are coming down the track on election integrity in the 2024 bumper year of elections.

What follows is a series of recommendations for communications professionals, industry associations and for regulators and lawmakers to seek to mitigate the downsides and to maximise the chances of making use of AI in a way that is constructive and

ethical. Our recommendations are designed to set out steps that need to be taken by different actors in this system in order to start to introduce safeguards now. We subsequently set out a Framework for Responsible Use of AI designed to help actors develop their own policies to improve political communications at this pivotal moment.

These recommendations are not designed to tackle "bad actors" in the system who knowingly and willingly manipulate tools for destructive or political ends. They are designed to give the people actively engaged in political communications - from politicians to communications professionals - a starting point for ensuring that they don't inadvertently contribute to the risks we have outlined above.

TABLE 2

	WHO?	WHAT?	RATIONALE
1	Political parties	Political parties should publish their own guidance on how their campaign teams will use AI in their political campaigning.	Political parties should lead by example and be transparent and clear about their use of AI in the election, according to the framework we set out below. While this will not mitigate the risks of outside actors generating false content, it will show leadership and start to define the social norms about use of AI in elections.
2	Political parties	Political parties should form a cross-party consensus on how to be transparent about the use of AI to generate imagery in election campaigns	If a cross-party consensus isn't reached, there is a risk that the issue of "deep fakes" becomes politicised and weaponised in campaigning.
3	Political parties	Political parties should commit to not amplifying any content about their opponents that they suspect to be materially deceptive.	Political actors should set the best standards of behaviour in their campaigning and not amplify anything they suspect to be false.
4	Regulators and lawmakers	Regulatory bodies (and where relevant politicians) should consider the fitness of purpose of existing communications regulation in the AI era. Proactive review may help protect public trust, by helping to avoid cases in which bad outcomes take place and usual sanctions cannot be applied.	It is not clear at this stage whether new AI-specific regulations on communications or political communications would be necessary, but it does seem likely that existing laws would benefit from expert examination as to their fitness of purpose in an era where no human may have been meaningfully involved at any stage of generating and targeting a communication. Do existing mechanisms and sanctions still work appropriately in such cases? It is important that regulators act now.
5	Regulators	Regulators should fund ongoing research into the use of and attitudes towards AI in communications.	Most of the public is still unlikely to have directly encountered AI-generated content, even if they are aware of its possible use. Given the situation is likely to evolve rapidly over the next few years, ongoing research into how AI is used, how it is received and accepted, and where the issues lie will help communications professionals make informed choices and give informed advice.
6	Generative AI companies	Invest in further developing watermarking to show the provenance of material produced by AI.	There are promising examples of watermarking being developed by generative AI companies with automatic labels that show the provenance of AI-generated material.

			At the moment tests have suggested that they are currently imperfect systems that can be broken, evaded or even corrupted.[56] It's vital that this adjunct technology is improved in order to maintain trust and transparency in the use of AI.
7	Industry associations	Industry associations should produce and regularly revise guides to 'best practice' with AI.	Most consideration of AI is focused on the relatively simple use-case of AI-generated imagery or video, but hybrid use cases will become more frequent and raise far more complex issues. AI, of a sort, is already in use to produce A/B targeted email messaging, but as AI advances, this could become far more advanced and differentiated. If codes are static, they could quickly become outdated – meaning that a process of regular revision would generate much more value.
8	Companies, charities and communications agencies	Companies and agencies alike should proactively develop their own internal guidance on ethical and effective AI use. Annex one of this document sets out a framework of principles that companies may wish to consider when developing such a framework.	One important principle is consistency of approach in how AI is deployed – without full consideration of what constitutes 'communications' there may be inconsistencies that could cause backlashes. For example if call centres use AIs that appear to be human and this is not disclosed, even as AI use in advertisements is communicated.
9	Communications professionals	Communications professionals should proactively educate their clients on AI.	Some companies may have no interest in using AI for their own communications, but may find themselves blindsided if an activist group, rival company, or online hoaxer makes use of such technologies in a negative way against them. Responding rapidly relies on an understanding of what is and is not possible in terms of moderation on modern social networks, and what is and is not effective in terms of responding to misinformation or disinformation.

These recommendations will lead to a series of actions for different actors to establish a working model for best practice use of AI in political communications. Guidelines will differ according to the actors, but should be underpinned by a common framework that focuses on transparency and clarity of use. One of the most troubling insights of our research is the potential that people might be using these tools "below the radar" and might even be hiding their use. So this framework is designed to encourage transparency for a more legitimate use of generative AI tools.

56 Knibbs, K. Researchers Tested AI Watermarks—and Broke All of Them. Wired, October 2023. Available at: https://www.wired.com/story/artificial-intelligence-watermarking-issues/ [accessed 04/01/2024]

FRAMEWORK FOR RESPONSIBLE USE OF AI IN COMMUNICATIONS

This framework is designed to help people working in communications to create their own policies for the use of generative AI. This framework should be used as a guide by organisations to develop their own policies on how to use AI in a way that is responsible, ethical and mitigates the risks of AI to both their own organisation and the public. Communications teams need clarity on the opportunities and risks of using AI in their work and the public need to be able to trust the communications they consume - following the principles and requirements set out in the framework will ensure this clarity and trust is achieved.

Drawing on our research and existing AI frameworks, we have identified five key principles that shape this framework - transparency, accountability, fairness and inclusivity, reliability, and privacy

PRINCIPLE 1: Transparency

Clearly communicate your use of AI to all relevant parties when necessary

- In what situations is it important for you to declare your use of AI to the public? For example, is it only important for you to declare it when it's been used to create content or is it important when used at any stage of the process?

- In what situations is it important for you and your employees to declare any use of AI internally?

Provide clear explanations of how AI has been used in your communications

- Have you considered when you need to explain how you have used AI in your communications?

- Have you considered how to make these explanations easy to understand for different stakeholders including the public and your employees/colleagues?

PRINCIPLE 2: Accountability

Have appropriate levels of human direction and control over your use of AI

- Have you considered how much human direction and control over AI is needed at all stages of the process of creating communications, including the planning and content creation stages?

- Have you considered who in your organisation is responsible for mitigating the risks of

AI producing undesirable outcomes (like misinformation and biased content etc.)?

- Do you have relevant data and technology policies setting out security requirements, platform security and tool restrictions? Do you have regular audits in place to understand how people are using these technologies?

Abide by relevant laws, regulations and ethical standards

- Have you considered who in your organisation needs to be aware of these relevant laws, regulations and ethical standards?

- Have you considered how to make these laws, regulations and ethical standards?

Allow all relevant parties, including the public, to provide feedback on your use of AI

- Do you have accessible and clear monitoring and feedback mechanisms in place for different stakeholders including the public and your employees?

PRINCIPLE 3: Fairness and inclusivity

Do not produce any communications products that contain social biases when using AI, unless this serves a socially beneficial purpose (e.g. to demonstrate the potential for AI to be biased)

- Have you considered the potential for your use of AI to produce social biases that discriminate against particular groups in your communications?

- Are the people using AI in your organisation aware of the potential for AI to generate biased content?

- Are the people using AI in your organisation sufficiently trained on how to spot bias in your outputs from generative AI tools?

Consider how AI could adversely impact your employees

- Have you considered the impact your use of AI could have on your employees?

- Have you considered how the use of AI changes their work both in the short and long term?

- Have you considered whether your organisation's use of AI could lead to job losses that could be avoided?

- How is your organisation's use of AI degrading your employees' skills in ways that might be regretted later?

PRINCIPLE 4: Reliability

Do not intentionally or unintentionally produce communications that contain inaccurate or misleading information when using AI

- Have you considered the potential for AI to produce inaccurate or misleading information in your work?

- Are the people using AI in your organisation aware of the potential for AI to generate misinformation?

- Are the people using AI in your organisation sufficiently trained on how to fact-check and review outputs from generative AI tools, including best practice in prompts?

PRINCIPLE 5: Privacy

Respect people's right to privacy when using AI

- Have you considered how any AI tools you use will interact with the public's personal data?

- Have you considered what data/information is acceptable to input into generative AI tools and what data is confidential?

- Are all the people in your organisation who are using AI aware of relevant data privacy regulations? Do you have permission to share peoples' data in these contexts?

CONCLUSION

Our research has shown how the communications industry is undergoing a transformation with the new promises made by generative AI technologies. Different organisations are at different stages in this transformation and the biggest changes are likely to "explode" (as one of our interviewees put it) in 2024 just as the UK, like many of the major democracies in the world, are going to the polls. There are huge opportunities to reach new audiences, with personalised content that is targeted at new scales. But there are also risks: that deep fakes will further degrade the trust in the information environment, that data will be used in ways that perpetuate bias and discrimination and that bad actors will exacerbate these risks to corrupt democracies and undermine trust.

Our recommendations are designed to provide actions that can be taken right now, as the technology is developing so rapidly and significant democratic events are taking place in the forthcoming year in the UK and abroad. Legislation will ultimately be needed to safeguard our democracies. However, even prior to the explosion of generative AI in the past year, this has proved very difficult for governments to effectively achieve. So these recommendations are designed to give the major players in political communications steps they can take now to ensure that they are using AI in effective ways that don't contribute to any degradation of the legitimacy of our elections.

We are in a new emerging phase of "norm setting" around the use of AI in political communications. The recommendations are designed to urge those most invested in a trusted political system - politicians, regulators and communications professionals - to play their part in modelling best practice in the use of AI by developing guidelines for its use that live up to the framework of principles we describe.

We urge all those involved to act now and put in place such guidelines to protect our democracies through this time of change.

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