

Artificial Intelligence in communications Results of a survey across 46 countries

Knowledge, adoption and perceptions of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in strategic communication and public relations is one of the key topics explored in the European Communication Monitor 2019. Results are based on interviewing almost 2,700 practitioners working in companies, non-profits and other organisations including communication agencies across Europe. Detailed analyses are available for 22 countries and different types of organisations. Apart from AI, the full report for this year's monitor also includes insights on trust in the PR profession, public trust in different organisational advocates, challenges of building trust and transparency, the most important strategic issues for the profession, as well as content creation and distribution.

Personal knowledge about AI

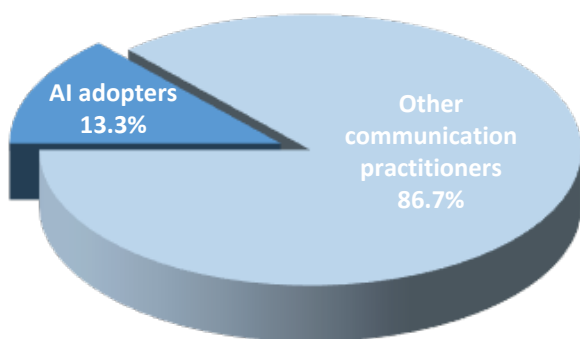
The survey tested whether communication practitioners understand what Artificial Intelligence is about by asking respondents to evaluate eight different statements. Four of them were correct (blue) and four incorrect (red).

In total, 15% of the practitioners have proven to be **AI experts** by classifying at least seven items properly. On the other hand, 7% of the surveyed professionals are **AI greenhorns** – they skipped the definitional question or the whole AI topic.

The largest portion of experts can be found in **Finland, Sweden and Germany**.

How communication professionals define AI	
Decisions and actions by software-driven agents	76.1%
Learning from experience	58.6%
Computer-assisted activities by humans	54.8%
Adapting to changing goals and unpredictable situations	35.7%
Processing natural language	34.6%
Understanding emotions	15.5%
Owning all human abilities	10.7%
Experiencing feelings	6.6%

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Personal experiences with AI

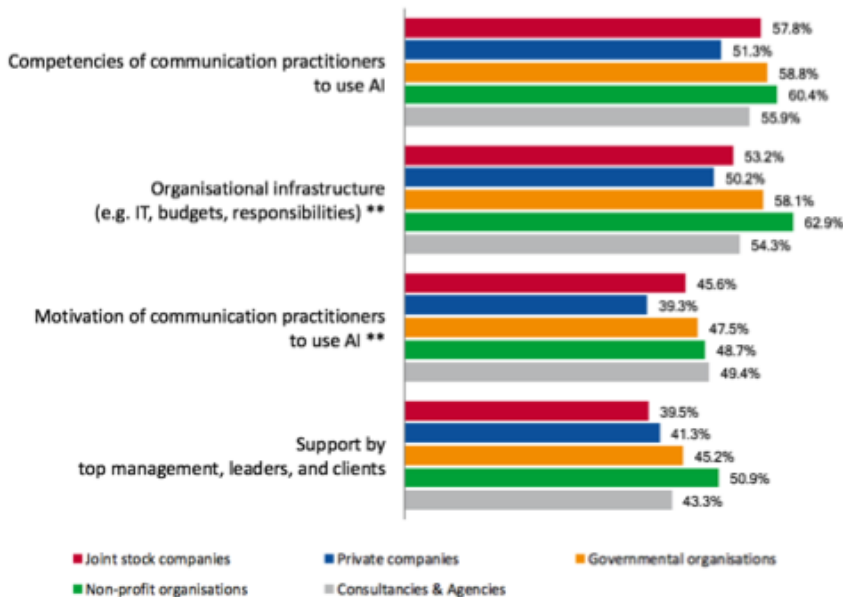
It is surprising how few communication professionals in Europe use intelligent assistants or devices at home and in the office today (e.g. Apple Siri, Google Assistant, or Amazon Alexa) – only 13%. Nevertheless, there is no significant correlation between the personal adoption of AI and the knowledge about the concept.

Excellent communication departments, which have been identified in the study based on the Comparative Excellence Framework developed by the ECM researchers, are characterised by a higher personal use of AI among team members (17%).

Impact of AI on communications

Three quarters of communication professionals across Europe believe that AI will change the **communication profession as a whole** (macro level). At the same time, every third respondent believes that the **routine work of their department or agency** (meso level) and the **individual job** (micro level) will rarely be impacted. Many seem to neglect that they are directly affected and thus underestimate the need to take action themselves.

Position in the **organisational hierarchy** matters: communication leaders (CCOs or agency CEOs) predict a stronger change of communications through AI than their unit leaders or team members, with significant differences on all levels.



© EUROPEAN COMMUNICATION MONITOR 2019 ** Highly significant differences (chi-square test, $p \leq 0.01$)

Challenges for implementing AI in communications

Across all types of organisations, 56% of the respondents think that it is difficult or very difficult to secure **competencies of communication practitioners**, followed by 54% who believe that different aspects of **organisational infrastructure** are hurdles. 46% identified **motivation of practitioners** as a challenge, and 43% said securing **support by top management, leaders and clients** was a stumbling block.

The figure on the left shows that professionals working in nonprofits rate organisational challenges for implementing AI higher, while motivation of practitioners is a strong concern in agencies.

Risks of bringing AI to communications

The communication profession has obviously a serious problem with human capital in the area of Artificial Intelligence. It is therefore not surprising that every second respondent sees **organisational struggles with varied staff competencies** as the major risk associated with the introduction of AI in communications. 43% believe that organisations will face problems because of **unclear responsibilities**. Only 20%, however, fear **loss of jobs, professional identity and core competences, or shrinking salaries**.

Surprisingly there is something that can be called an “AI divide” (contrary to the “digital divide”) between **generations**: communication practitioners in their twenties see the future of AI less positively than older colleagues, as they fear more risks.

About the study

The European Communication Monitor 2019 is based on responses from 2,689 communication professionals from 46 European countries, most of them senior leaders with more than 10 years tenure in the field. The strict selection of participants, a unique research framework based on established theories and statistical analyses fulfilling academic standards are key features of the study. Lead researchers Professors Ansgar Zerfass (Leipzig), Dejan Verčič (Ljubljana), Piet Verhoeven (Amsterdam), Ángeles Moreno (Madrid) and Ralph Tench (Leeds) are supported by national research collaborators who are professors at renowned universities across the continent.

Download the full report (PDF, 132 pp.) for free: www.communicationmonitor.eu



“Strategic communication is entering a new phase with the introduction of Artificial Intelligence, but not everyone seems to be ready for it. Our results reveal the main obstacles that the profession has to overcome.”

Professor Dr. Ralph Tench, Leeds Beckett University

President, European Public Relations Education and Research Association & ECM research team

“With a majority of communication practitioners predicting that AI will change the future of the practice, the competency gap highlighted in the study should be ringing loud alarm bells for all of us.”

Angela Howarth, Marketing Communications Director, World Green Building Council
Board member, European Association of Communication Directors (EACD)

