The Importance of AI in Corporate Communication & Beyond

An Essay by Helena Suchochleb

October 21, 2023

While much has been written pondering the rise, importance and implications of AI regarding our schools and academia, much less has been said about how AI will impact our business communities and corporate communication in the future.

The Death of the Author vs. The Death of the Text?

Ever since Postmodernism's famous dictum of the Death of the Author raised interesting -- and, for academia, also very productive-- questions about the objectivity and interpretation of texts[1], we maybe need a second wave of self-questioning about the Death of the Author or even the Death of the Text following the introduction and consequent application of AI to our digital world.

Ever since Danish PM Mette Frederiksen gave a speech in Parliament earlier this year[2] which was partly written by AI, in order to demonstrate its advantages while also highlighting its potential risks, and German publicist Sascha Lobo hailed in the "end of irrelevant AI" at the end of 2022[3], AI-generated texts have been catapulted to the forefront of our public awareness, into which they had only slowly trickled until then.

And while teachers, professors and other educators frantically scuttled to understand the meaning of this watershed moment amidst another end-of-the-school-year frenzy involving semester wrap-ups, pre-planning and scheduling, directly after the pandemic brought about the greatest change in instruction methods and entire classes and seminars were held via different video conferencing tools, the next challenge in our shared digital world already looms at the horizon. Educators, much like students, have very different levels of IT know-how, and when then German chancellor Angela Merkel called the internet "unchartered territory" during Obama's 2013 visit to Berlin[4], consequently making the expression a

---

[1] Getsetnotes Educational Notes: "Postmodernism in Roland Barthes The Death of the Author" *[sic]*, https://getsetnotes.com/postmodernism-in-roland-barthes-the-death-of-the-author/, 07/04/2023.

[2] Business Standard Web Team: „Danish PM delivers Chat-GPT written speech to highlight risks posed by tech", *Business Standard,* 05/31/2023 (https://www.business-standard.com/world-news/danish-pm-delivers-chatgpt-written-speech-to-highlight-risks-posed-by-tech-123053100982_1.html , 07/04/2023).

[3] Lobo, Sascha (and ChatGPT): „Das Ende der irrelevanten künstlichen Intelligenz", *Der SPIEGEL*, 12/07/2022 (https://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/web/chatgpt-markiert-das-ende-der-irrelevanten-kuenstlichen-intelligenz-kolumne-a-b2afeb69-083d-4e69-8920-da5cad549d5f, 07/04/2023).

[4] Kämper, Vera: „Die Kanzlerin entdeckt #Neuland". *Der SPIEGEL,* 06/19/2013 (https://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/netzpolitik/kanzlerin-merkel-nennt-bei-obama-besuch-das-internet-neuland-a-906673.html, 07/04/2023).

hashtag employed somewhat sardonically by many commentators and spectators, you could already guess that the implications were huge for political communication as well.

However, it probably wouldn't be too far-fetched to say that even IT professionals might have issues with staying up to date in their field of expertise, as it encompasses a growing number of systems (which, by design, are sometimes incompatible) – I do not envy the HR staff writing IT job listings and having to "decode" the programming language(s), social media platforms, mobile and non-mobile devices, CMSs and operating systems these professionals would need to know in order to be a good candidate for the company's needs.

While millenials' teachers were mainly concerned about Wikipedia and students copying from each other and academia offered classes on proper citation alongside those for essay and scientific writing, Gen Z is now simultaneously faced with the reproach of "being dumbed down" by technology and having no creativity or original thoughts of their own. But mind you, this discussion is much older than we think and actually at the heart of a much earlier discussion relevant for many industries regarding reference, citation rules and copyright in the digital era.[5] Or, as Sascha Lobo writes,

> "The big, to-date unanswered question is whether OpenAI or Google, which, in the meantime, has also been sued, can somehow be held accountable for the training of their AI systems with unequivocally copyrighted texts – To make a decision here is less easy than one might think because it is a philosophical question rather than a legal one in the first place. Actually, OpenAI's creativity works much like the human one: From small, medium and large set pieces and also via mixing consumed content, it creates more or less new content. In the more-than-a-decade-old copyright discussion regarding the internet, this was called "Standing on the shoulders of giants". This insight by 12th century French philosopher Bernard de Chartres refers to the fact that all cultural and intellectual progress is built on the achievements of previous generations."[6]

Digitalization and Corporate Culture & Communication

While digitalization has become a buzzword in the political arena and the latest structural change to tackle in the economy, leading to the creation of rather recent jobs and positions such as the nowadays rather ubiquitous Social Media Manager, what has been less investigated are the long-term consequences for business or corporate communication and communiqués.

Yes, much has been moved to the digital sphere, and while our data uses ever greater capacities and more space on servers and clouds and all industries have amped up and

---

[5] Suchochleb, Helena: "A Brief Guide to Essay Writing", 03/25/2020, p. 2.
[6] Lobo, Sascha: "Künstliche Intelligenz: Wie groß sind die Atome der Kreativität?", *Der SPIEGEL*, 07/12/2023 (https://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/web/kuenstliche-intelligenz-und-urheberrecht-wie-gross-sind-die-atome-der-kreativitaet-kolumne-a-05a5f8ae-1ff7-44f2-b7f2-3ca7a24d3fd5?sara_ref=re-so-app-sh, 07/18/2023, my translation of the German original).

enforced IT security, with two-factor authentication (2FA), password managers and advanced anti-virus software having become the new standard in this regard, we are very much aware of the potential and real threats of cyber attacks, shitstorms and the like, meaning we are much more in response-mode, forced to react and do crisis management rather than putting forward a productive debate or real future strategy on the issue. This, however, is important because we need time to assess developments properly and the rather new trend of instant historicization also raises the question of when we can really foresee the long-term consequences of such events and changes. Or, in other or easier words, we might only be able to correctly classify some events with a bit of hindsight while it often feels like all we can do in that very moment is weathering the storm.

While journalism and academic literature has certainly picked up on phenomena such as platform capitalism, BigTech and other relevant topics in today's political culture and economy, what I am more interested to explore in this essay are the consequences for text production or writing in the corporate world, i.e., what does the advent of AI like ChatGPT mean for corporate communication and text production across different industries? While we do not need to explain citation rules and intertextuality to academia and journalists, we might want to ask ourselves what will happen to corporations' Season's Greetings, communiqués, online bios and CVs as well as annual reports and corporate PR under "AI rule". While we have seen the rise of e-commerce during the pandemic and the implementation of chatbots in Customer Service and the spread of more and more forms of online payment systems, what's ahead during the digital transformation and how this will transform our economies in the long run certainly is a timely and important question for many trades.

Because almost everybody writes: The personal assistant tackling the overflowing inbox of e-mails, the employees drafting internal reports and newsletters circling the halls of corporations and being forwarded to different departments, the staff updating websites with relevant news or new information as far as external communication is concerned - all of this with the possible implications for a global audience in the back of our heads, which is a rather new phenomenon - Where websites were merely updated a few years ago, they now "go live" and our new social media tools expertly connect various platforms in order for us to schedule and plan our communication across a number of ever-growing channels.

On Quality & Quantity: A Tour de Force Through (Digital) Media History of the Past Decades

Whether this increase in the number of different Social Media channels has actually seen a corresponding upsurge in the quality of output of the material is an entirely different question altogether – and one we might not be able to answer fully yet. In the early post-millennial era, Web 2.0 promised the democratization of the internet but where traditional media had much more well-practiced and institutionalized MOs as far as agenda setting and gate-keeping mechanisms were concerned, most of this was rather ad-hoc work in progress as social media emerged as a new competitor on the world stage. This was before data theft

and protection rose to prominence during the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal in 2010 and troll farms, disinformation (#fakenews), hate speech and cyber attacks became pressing issues. While the internet, due to its structure, is very organized is some ways, this new realm of social media was and sometimes still is resembling a wildly growing garden rather than a well-tended plot in many regards, and we are still providing the structure to what is growing there in many ways while at the same time, somewhat belatedly, setting the rules to what we allow to grow there as well – in terms of speech, content etc. Netiquette is not only an issue for comment sections in online forums or magazines but for online communication in general.

…and communication has changed – Where the e-mails of students and clients increasingly resemble texts and the SMS and MMS are, if not forgotten then at least out-of-style, we should also keep in mind that we are yet to see which technology is a current hype and what has come to stay for good. Much like Blu-ray came to substitute the DVD, apps, QR codes and other tools have become the latest additions to our smartphones and mobile devices after the introduction of the Blueberry roughly a decade ago. These examples should serve as reminders that we do not know yet which of these devices, apps and platforms have come to stay, even though there are larger trends to be detected, of course. The way we are currently restructuring our entire online infrastructure may certainly be called a major paradigm change that will keep industries busy and jobs secure for another few years at least.

And where smaller firms with less financial means, less technical knowhow and human resources are already pondering what this means for their online representation, as they may still scramble to catch up with the developments of the past decades, larger institutions have much less trouble providing the resources, be they financial or in (wo)manpower: Universities provide online classes following the MasterClass format that hit the world wide web a few years ago and entire lectures have moved to YouTube, podcasts head off to compete with the good old radio (Remember "Video killed the Radio Star", anyone?[7]) while streaming services became a viable alternative during the pandemic to not only listen to music but also attend concerts played at home and in isolation via video conferencing. It's a brave new world out there indeed.

But while the media have changed, the basic questions and worries around the topic have not – If we remember that even the arrival of the printing press in its time was accompanied by worries of what this would do to the future generation, it seems fair to state that media angst has been a narrative as old as time itself. Media have become the (sometimes trick) mirrors through which we all see ourselves in ever-growing HD. Questions of self-perception of a rather philosophical nature also hint towards how far we can trace some recurring issues back in time throughout humanity.

---

[7] The Buggles' "Video Killed the Radio Star", released in 1980, was the first video to play on MTV when it was launched.

Writing in and for the Digital Age

While the elder amongst us may remember that already children in the 1980s were deemed to have a shorter attention span than the previous generation, digitalization has certainly fed this attention argument where words like "click bait" and the increasing polarization of media and political discourse are product and structure alike in their medial (self-)representation, feeding our 24h news cycles. Now that even social media have news feeds determined by algorithms, making Facebook's timeline so yesterday, while younger generations have switched to different platforms and messenger services altogether, the German saying that "nothing is as old as yesterday's paper" certainly seems to ring true for social media as well. Whoever remembers how hashtags have shaped global communication and debates over the past few years and has also read some research on what heavy smartphone and social media use does to our brains, doesn't necessarily only have to worry about our children because let's face it, we all work online these days; in fact, collaborative working has become a new buzzword in work environments around the world.

This essay, for instance, was originally drafted as an article until I realized I had much more to say on this topic than just a few paragraphs ready to be published on LinkedIn. Our writing adapts according to the nature of the medium; and in order to gather an audience's attention span (attention being the currency media runs on), we stick to the brief message rather than the much longer essay which would allow for argumentation or at least a deeper look at an issue of such prominence and importance. Thinking and writing, structuring one's thoughts takes time, the peace and quiet we rarely have in our everyday lives these days; it also requires a certain distance and detachment to the issue at hand as well as knowledge and experience.

Because what do we learn when we learn how to write? We learn how to record something in written forms, to structure our thoughts, to tell a story and to give our writing a certain structure. These structures determine different genres: The letter, the e-mail, the essay, the book review, the written speech, the short story, the essay, the blog or the autobiography are all different forms of writing. When we learn how to speak and write we also learn different registers and styles of writing, such as scientific writing and its characteristics, literary texts and productions such as novels, drama, poetry etc. In companies, we write e-mails, annual reports and put content on websites while we have internal documents, surveys and info sheets circling amongst or staff.

Taking a look at the diversity of genres and text styles, the question then is how good AI actually is at mimicking these techniques and what consequences this has for text production in general. The only thing that seems certain is that our entire written culture will be affected by writing in and for the digital age. Will handwritten communication die out eventually? Will ChatGPT write our future novels, autobiographies, our dramas, our slogans and song lyrics? Basically, all professions and industries having to do with writing will be affected, which means this discussion merits input from authors, poets, journalists, copywriters, client services, speech writers, teachers and students, web editors and so on

and so forth. And we haven't even started to discuss the ethical implications of AI-generated writing, something that the aforementioned German article and the Danish PM's speech certainly addressed, however (in)directly. What are the consequences for copyright law if texts are, at least partly, AI-generated? Do we list ChatGPT as co-author next, the way Sascha Lobo did in his article? Who does our fact checking? Do we outsource this task to technology as well? While Google maps our streets outside, our online infrastructure is being remapped by digitalization as well. We urgently need strategies of how to deal with this new phenomenon, also outside of academia in the business world, as board rooms and office floors (and, since the pandemic, also our impromptu offices at home) will be affected by this as well.

AI in Literature & Film

As old as the problem is that now presents itself in a new guise, as old is the criticism of computers, AI and machine learning and what it will do to us as human beings and our civilization. While the ancient Greek myth of Pygmalion already tells the story of a sculptor who makes an ivory statue representing his ideal of womanhood and then falls in love with his own creation[8], one of the more recent and rather fascinating treatments of the topic can be found in Richard Powers' 1997 novel *Galatea 2.2*, which –referring to that ancient myth– recounts the story of a teacher asked by his former alma mater to train and teach a computerized brain, a machine called "Helen", the literary canon in an attempt to make it pass the comprehensive exam in English literature. The question if machines can indeed develop a consciousness and learn how to be human is one of the central themes of the book, of course.[9] As the teacher basically tries to feed the machine with language and an entire cultural heritage, the book also implicitly raises the question of canonization (What does AI have to know?) and discusses the problem of objectivity, as the machine is being "taught" or "fed" by humans (This is actually somewhat reminiscent of the idea of video replay in sports with the hope to get more accurate and fair referee decisions – As if the idea of human failure would be too much to take.) As for canonization, the question obviously is what happens when we no longer have libraries, photos and museums and other material recollections of our lives and all of this moves online or to the cloud, much like a lot of digital archives have already done.

The 2013 and 2014 movies "Her" and "Ex Machina" tackled similar issues in that the former tells the story of a lonely author who falls in love with his new operating system and the latter that of a young programmer who, as part of an AI experiment, is asked to test the "human qualities" of a female robot.[10] What is interesting about these machines is that they

---

[8] "Pygmalion | Greek Mythology", *Encyclopedia Britannica*: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pygmalion , 07/04/2023.

[9] Cohen, Robert: "Pygmalion in the Computer Lab", *The New York Times (Sunday Late Edition)*, 07/23/1995 *[sic]* (https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/06/21/specials/powers-galatea.html?scp=1&sq=Connectionism&st=cse, 07/04/2023).

[10] The Internet Movie Database: "Her" (2013) & "Ex Machina" (2014,) https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1798709/ & https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0470752/?ref_=nm_flmg_t_32_act, 07/04/2023.

are always embodied by a female character or quality (In the first movie, the operating system has a female voice; in the second movie, the robot has a human face and a metallic body with breasts), while the men are trying to form a connection with that unknown creature - The feminist critique baked into that, of course, being that humans are replaced with an artificial female catering to every of her client's needs while always being pleasant and patient. Just to give some historical perspective, Siri and Alexa were introduced to the market and households in 2011 and 2014 respectively; both also have female names and voices, as do many other GPS and navigation systems.[11]

The Imperfections of AI to Date

For the time being, we may still console ourselves with the fact that technology is not (yet) perfect, which everyone who has ever tried to work with Google Translate can attest to – but also there, technology gets better and better while machine learning has acquired its own hashtag. The tricky part with translation usually is that different languages have different grammatical structures, letters and signs and even different writing directions (as in the case of Hebrew, for example). Writing uses and relies on metaphors, idiomatic expressions, allegories and other symbolic value(s) which are often lost in *literal translation*, which machines are rather good at, which is why online translation may help you with your vocabulary but much less so with larger texts using specific terminology as well as a specific register. Also, language always evolves – Think about how youth language or teenage slang have always existed and are still birthing new terms in order to distance themselves from official language or the language used and taught at school and at home. A lot of the expressions that were and are invented show great creativity in describing fleeting or recent social phenomena or trends from younger people's point of view. In Germany, the DUDEN, the country's official dictionary, has even issued its own dictionary for teenage slang, with an annual contest and selection of the word or expression of the year. If we take into account that there exist more than 6900 languages worldwide[12], the question is how "fluent" AI will be able to speak and/or translate all of these. To summarize, powerful tools already exist and they become increasingly better at creating more complex texts and supplying an ever-greater knowledge.

A Call to Action

So, what do we make of all this? As lawmakers, business owners, writers of all professions, as teachers and students, we need a healthy and thorough debate on the change technological progress brings about. The media landscape has already been altered by the advent of social media in ways we are still pondering and dealing with: From hashtags, search engines and new ways of linking to content creation, from free YouTube videos and

---

[11] vgl. Wikipedia: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siri_(Software) & https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_Alexa, 07/04/2023 sowie Bosch Thermotechnik GmbH: „Sprachassistenten: Die Meilenstein der Geschichte" (2023), https://tiarda.com/de/de/geschichte/, 07/04/2023.

[12] Anderson, Stephen R.: "How many languages are there in the world?", *Linguistic Society of America Brochure Series: Frequently Asked Questions, 2010* (https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/how-many-languages-are-there-world, 7/04/2023).

cloud storage, powerful platforms have emerged, giving us access to an equally powerful pictorial language. As we outsource our knowledge and cultural production to technological platforms, who has the monopoly on future written production seems to be one of the most pressing questions of our time but also one that we need to keep asking as we enter the future and try to shape it in our states and institutions.

Another question closely linked to this is the question of the environmental effects of AI – As humanity yearns for ever greater storage space on servers and clouds, where does the electricity come from running these supermachines and what are the energy costs related to this and for the production of new mobile devices? As briefly touched upon earlier, IT security is another big sector dealing with the question of how to keep our common IT infrastructure safe (Safe from whom is another question whose answer might vary quite a bit, depending on your point of view).

Most importantly, however, all industries must reflect on what these changes mean for their work moving forward and how we set the proper guidelines to adapt to them. This is a task for governments, programmers as well as professional associations, to name just a few actors, but it seems like an issue on which we need everyone's input. It's a call to action that we need for our jobs and our everyday lives alike. Where "digital detox" has become an expression and hashtag of its own, some of us have obviously decided to at least temporarily "pull the plug".