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A World in Crisis:
The Role of
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An Issues Management Approach to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Ethics: A Crisis with the Rising Machines?

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Issues management, AI and Ethics

- An emergent issue for all sectors of public and private life is the rapid development and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- AI poses a vast number of positive potentials in public health, civil engineering, policing, media, and other areas.
- The ethical problems in AI are little explored by those who develop it.

Issues management, AI and Ethics

- Issues management is tasked with preparing the organization for potential risks and solving problems before they become crises.
- Public relations uses data analytics generated by AI in numerous ways. Risks? Privacy?
- The ethical problems associated with public relations use of AI are little explored and not yet completely understood, much less solidified. Issues arise for management.

Literature

- AI researchers and futurists are both positive and negative on machine consciousness and the ability to integrate ethical values and decision making (Davies, 2016).
- To date, no scholarly research in this area for public relations has been identified. The discussions of the ethical implications of AI in issues management and public relations exists primarily in the blogosphere.

Method

- Data were collected at the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AAAI) conference and the Arthur W. Page Society Spring Seminar, and individual phone calls.
- Through short surveys and interviews with AI specialists, from programmers in sensing, reasoning, and moving to robotics engineers, I examine the extent to which ethics is considered in AI as a potential issue, risk, or threat.
- Then I examine this data as compared with the extent to which public relations pros and educators consider AI ethics, also using short surveys and interviews.

Method

- *Meta: Are public relations scholars and professionals ready to address the issues, specifically the myriad complex ethical dilemmas, that will result from the AI revolution?*
- **RQ 1:** To what extent do AI specialist consider ethics and moral ramifications of AI in their work?
- **RQ 2:** What are the pressing areas of AI ethics that public relations specialists should use in their issues management?

Results

- By providing data to RQ 1, the need for ethical standards can be assessed.
- AI developers *overwhelmingly* did not think about ethical concerns.
- Those who did were philosophers who thought singularly about racial concerns; other ethical concerns were completely, vastly overlooked. (exs.)
- Concerns about privacy and data use/manipulation or strategic implications simply did not exist.
- AI philosophers express a need for “values alignment” but do not go further in specifying what these values are (or should be). (!)

AI Dev. Results

- “AI research is very opaque and poorly communicated, which is a barrier.”
- “Get more people of different backgrounds in the room.”
- “If AI becomes ethical, it will find a duty to annihilate the human race as the source of war, poverty, environmental damage and other afflictions on the world.”
- “We’re not really sure what the ethical protocols are.”
- “Haven’t thought about ethics until you asked.”

CCO Results

- RQ 2, public relations professionals were more aware of the ethical challenges posed by AI than those developing the tech.
- No public relations professionals used the term issues management to describe AI challenges.
- However, they described issues in privacy, security, data use, banking, equality, & access.
- Educator subsample recognizes ethical issues of AI to some extent but do not report teaching it.

CCO Results

- “Right now AI poses the biggest challenge in the banking industry – we have access to all the data and have few protocols to protect it.”
- “We are learning how to use it but don’t know the ethical barriers here. No one knows.”
- “We know it is going to pose problems and Facebook is one example. We just have not determined the best way to address those problems yet, but we are talking about it regularly.”

Results

- Ethical frameworks are **essential** for assessing and advising management on the complex changes brought by AI.
- An issues management approach should be used to identify risks, assess the potential impact, and engage in problem solving and use **ethical** analysis before the organization moves into use of AI.
- Public relations pros are more aware of the risks than AI developers, so we must **lead** in this area.

Implications

- By using an issues management approach to the ethical conundrums posed by AI, this study seeks to help identify and assess the potential ethical issues with which public relations must deal.
- Attention to these issues should foster a public relations industry that is ethically engaged and optimally prepared to engage in counseling the ethics of proactive AI implementation and use, rather than waiting for other fields, such as engineering or law, to define the ethics of AI in organizations.

Conclusion

- Issues management is central to identify emerging trends for an organization and managing issues of risk or uncertainty, helping to proactively prepare for the future: An AI future!
- Thank you!
- Questions are welcomed!
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