Editorial

The Role of Data and Artificial Intelligence for Progressive Public Affairs

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The significance of data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) has a profound impact on all industries, presenting both challenges and opportunities. Given its power and relevance, AI has not gone unnoticed in the public affairs sector. The upcoming German federal election in 2025 brings discussions about AI to the forefront, raising questions about the extent to which data will drive the public affairs field and how it will be handled.

AI-generated data provides valuable insights that can help to identify and model trends, patterns, and preferences among individuals. It enables a deeper understanding of the external environment and allows for more targeted communication and tailored messaging. This can be an efficient way to engage with stakeholders and ensure that information reaches the intended audience effectively. AI can also help to allocate resources of public affairs teams, eventually devoting more time to strategic activities and tactical considerations. However, there is a

clear need to address the legal framework for data collection and usage, particularly in terms of data protection.

In contrast to Germany, the United States of America place less emphasis on data protection, resulting in a more prevalent data-based political work. As a consequence, specific interest groups influence the political sphere more than the general American society can do. These circumstances are not desirable for us: We have the responsibility to maintain a perspective on issues relevant to society as a whole and to convey these across the social breadth. Professionals need to resist the temptation to only use AI data to develop strongly individualized content for specific groups. As an interface between politics, business, and society, professionals have the task of continuing to communicate issues in a holistic matter and being aware of its influential power.

Excessive tailoring or adapting of content using

AI-generated information poses two risks. Firstly, if lobbying is solely based on available data about individuals, it could impact democracy negatively. Over-reliance on such data might cultivate narrow echo chambers, an environment, where individuals are only exposed to information and perspectives that align with their existing beliefs. These circumstances can reinforce biases and further divide society, hindering the exchange of diverse opinions and limiting democratic discourse. Secondly, the sole consideration of AI data alone might perpetuate patterns and narratives that society aims to overcome, such as marginalization. Especially, since limited or biased data used to train AI models can further preserve bias in AI systems. It is therefore important to acknowledge the fact that AI is not a neutral technology. To use AI effectively and for the public interest, ethical and social implications of its use have to be understood and implemented into a company's AI governance system to ensure accountability, fairness, and transparency in its applications.

Given the listed facts, effective and progressive public affairs work must find a balance of AI-generated data and a network-oriented approach with personal interaction. The face-to-face interaction with stakeholders will still be key in building trust, foster relationships, and establish a deeper understanding of the concerns, needs, and aspirations. It provides an opportunity for listening, empathy, and reciprocal communication. Actively seeking dialogue helps in uncovering unspoken needs, identifying personal feelings and power dynamics, recognizing shared values, and forging alliances or partnerships.

We as public affairs professionals therefore aim to consider the interests of all involved and affected parties, in line with the values and principles of Union Investment: partnership, transparency, solidarity, and down-to-earthiness. These guidelines apply equally in both, the digital and analog worlds, to guarantee a progressive and successful effort in our public affairs work.