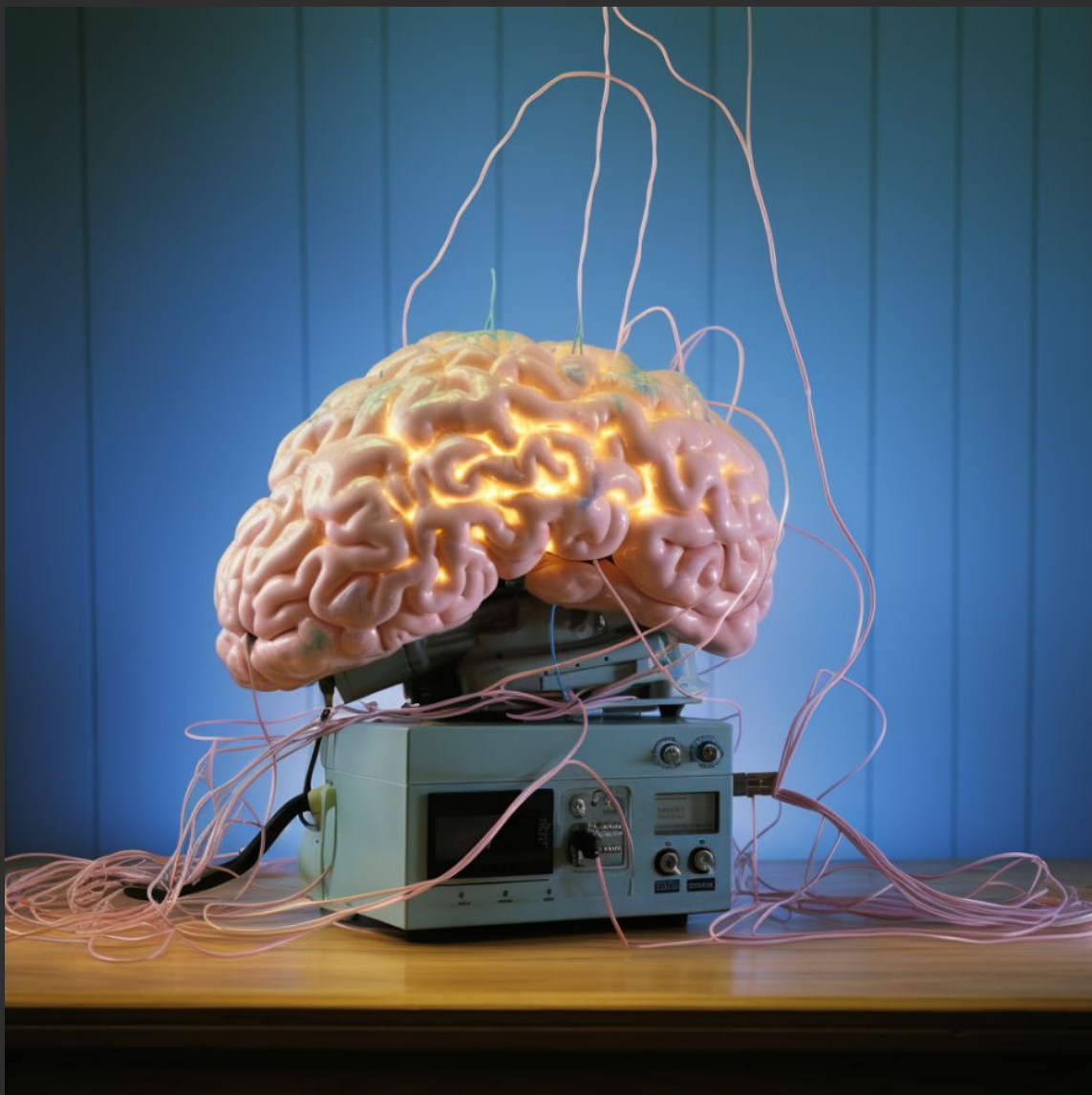


THE BROADSHEET

# NOT ANOTHER AI REPORT



FALL 2023

BROAD  
SHEET

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## AI IS ALREADY POWERING MEDIA

AI plays a major role across every part of the media value chain, so ubiquitous that it's easy to overlook.

## NEAR-TERM APPLICATIONS

A look at applications of AI that our clients expect to have a significant impact on the market in the coming year.

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR COMMS

Earning trust in an era of AI-driven noise requires a mastery of the most human forms of strategic thinking, relationship-building and creative storytelling.

## THE MOMENT

Hollywood goes on strike, a watershed moment in the emergence of AI that echoes many fictional Hollywood creations of the past.

## Tired of talking about AI? Too bad.

Trends come and go in our space. Remember 2016, when the success of Pokemon Go had everyone predicting that AR would take over media? Or just last year, when Facebook's rebrand had everyone issuing prognostications about the Metaverse?

The recent 'introduction' of generative AI tools has thrust artificial intelligence into the undisputed topic *du jour*. Plenty of hot takes have followed. Gartner has recently placed this surge of interest as the top of the "hype cycle," but we don't need Gartner to realize that we are at a moment of unprecedented reckoning. AI has arrived.

But we would be wrong to see this as just another passing fad. While fascination with generative AI may settle down, the application of AI (a catch-all term that includes machine learning, large language models, deep learning, etc.) to media will continue to march forward at breakneck speed.

For this issue of The Broadsheet, we have made an effort to understand how AI will impact – and has already impacted – the media business, not just in the creation and monetization of media, but also in our own field of strategic communications.

Our hope is that this helps to clarify and advance a conversation that we expect to be having for a long, long time.

## Hype Cycle for Artificial Intelligence, 2023



gartner.com

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Gartner.

We are at Peak Hype for AI, according to Gartner

# Machine-Driven News Requires Human-led Communications

News is nothing like it used to be. The past decade has seen fundamental changes to news distribution through search and social, monetization with programmatic advertising, and editorial with generative AI and personalization. Such upheavals dictate a parallel evolution in communications. As we'll see, in an era where public discourse is automated, algorithmic, and AI-driven, the role of communication is to be more human than ever before.

The public's attention to the news has also changed dramatically, with a proliferation of new ways to consume media and new algorithmic forces shaping sentiment. All of this has altered the business models that support news organizations while amplifying noise and eroding trust. The revolution in AI will only accelerate this trend.

News corporations once got their traffic through the front door, i.e., by people buying newspapers, tuning their dials, or going to a homepage. Facebook, Google and Twitter (Now X) changed that forever. Search and social platforms have taken over news distribution for a decade now, with permanent and unintended effects.

The consequences of social distribution are well-known by now. It has eroded the value of trusted news brands by placing their content in the context of user-generated content (UGC), fake news, and paid promotions, looking like any other user post. Algorithms designed to promote engagement wound up surfacing the most controversial and outrageous content – because controversy and outrage book engagement. Filter bubbles emerged, polarizing the discourse. For publishers, the economics of social distribution have changed suddenly several times, as mysterious changes to the algorithm have put many out of business overnight.

Search has been relatively stable, albeit more expensive and competitive. But that traffic is now in peril, too. A new round of AI-driven search engines has acquired the ability to offer answers to questions without referring to the publisher's content, obviating the need for external website links. This means that publishers are once again asking their audiences to come in the front door – a challenging and expensive transition.

## Consequences of Machine-Driven News

In short, the news business is tough to be in right now. The implications for comms professionals are profound. Journalists, the bedrock of news dissemination, find themselves navigating treacherous waters. Shrinking newsrooms means fewer reporters are shouldering amplified responsibilities. Given the circumstances, alternative platforms like Substack, Patreon, or podcasts appear to be more lucrative career paths for seasoned journalists than traditional positions at major publications. This shift translates to increased volatility, high turnover rates among journalists, and fewer, newer, and more time-constrained staff.



**Ben Billingsley**  
Founder & CEO of  
Broadsheet Communications

The democratization of content creation, catalyzed by tools like ChatGPT, has flooded the market with generic content. Adding another layer of complexity, the proliferation of deepfakes and domain spoofing raises unsettling questions. AI tools can generate bots that are indistinguishable from humans, subpar websites can feign authenticity, and global figureheads can be mimicked with unnerving precision.

## What we need: Human-led Communications

As the media becomes more automated, comms need to become less so. The scattergun approach of rapid pitching is antiquated. The emphasis should shift to fostering profound human relationships, where brands supplement and enrich journalistic content rather than simply vying for mere visibility. There's a reason they call it *earned media* – and we have to earn it more than ever before. The onus is on brands to substantiate their narratives with good third-party sourcing, business outcomes, and data-driven insights.

With more AI-generated content, breaking through the noise becomes a more skillful practice, requiring a nuanced touch. For brands, this means having a real point of view on current trends, feeding back to an elegant and simplified messaging architecture. In tandem, comms agencies must become as invested in helping clients develop that point of view as they are in its dissemination. This implies creating truly premium content underpinned by robust research and data. Furthermore, diversification is paramount, transcending traditional written content to embrace dynamic mediums like podcasts and videos.

The seismic shifts in the media landscape necessitate a corresponding evolution in communications. **Trust and authenticity become the defining currency** as the boundaries between fact and fiction blur. Equipped with a keen understanding of these trends, comms professionals are entrusted with the formidable task of sculpting authentic, impactful narratives in an era of more noise, polarization, and skepticism. "Automated comms" – the rinse and repeat, spray and pray, high-churn style of traditional comms – is poorly suited to this new era in automated media. We need more thoughtful and strategic approaches and more bespoke offerings.

Earning media is getting harder and requires more human intelligence than ever before.

# AI IS ALREADY A PART OF MEDIA

A.I. STANDS FOR 'ALREADY INTERWOVEN'

*AI's recent rise to prominence has felt like a kind of accelerated leap, one where the future has come crashing headlong into the present. All of a sudden, we were forced to reckon with the possibility of far-reaching and fundamental change. But this kind of concentrated futureshock masks the real ways that AI already influences the media industry. As we can see, AI plays a major role across every area of the value chain, so ubiquitous that it's easy to overlook.*

## MEDIA DISTRIBUTION

**Social Media Algorithms:** The rise of Facebook and Google marked a significant shift in news distribution from traditional channels to digital platforms. Their algorithms displayed a preference for user-generated content, merging it with legitimate news, sometimes leading to the inadvertent promotion of misleading information.

**AI-powered Verification and Brand Safety:** To tackle challenges in the digital era, AI has become instrumental in fraud detection. Advanced algorithms and content recognition systems ensured that the content met brand safety criteria, preventing the propagation of damaging or misleading information.

## ADVERTISING OPTIMIZATION

**Dynamic Creative Optimization (DCO):** DCO platforms utilize AI to design ads based on real-time user behavior. These dynamically curated ads amplified user experience and secured superior ROI for advertisers. As content recognition becomes AI-enabled, DCO will have a much richer set of signals to optimize against.

**Auction Dynamics :** As programmatic advertising evolved, AI-driven dynamics began shaping the auction process. These tools determined the optimal bid for an ad placement based on predictive performance. Meanwhile, AI has transformed the traditional waterfall by empowering new forms of header bidding.

## EXCHANGES

**Programmatic Advertising:** This heralded a new age of automated ad buying and selling, promising efficient placements tailored to target audiences. Yet, the commoditization of publisher inventories brought along challenges, from plummeting CPMs to domain spoofing and fraudulent activities. Programmatic today has been a boon for the industry, but it has also been deeply disruptive.

**Propensity Modeling & Probabilistic Lookalike Audiences:** AI algorithms analyze consumer behaviors to model potential future actions. This enables advertisers to target lookalike audiences - groups that display similar behaviors or interests to existing customers, even without concrete deterministic data. Lookalike segments are now commonplace tactics.

*/imagine C-3PO as Don Draper*



## AUTOMATED CONTENT

**Robot Journalism:** Companies like Automated Insights and Narrative Science harnesses AI's potential to auto-generate news articles. These tools have become particularly handy for churning out data-heavy reports on topics like financial markets or sports results, and have found a home among major publishers in these and other categories.

**Image Analysis and Video Production Enhancement:** Platforms like Google Cloud Vision and AWS Rekognition ushered in an era of efficient visual content categorization for media entities. Simultaneously, video production has witnessed a revolution as AI tools parsed raw video data to concatenate clips as per pre-set norms, optimizing the entire production process.

## MEASUREMENT

**Sentiment Analysis:** Advanced AI tools have monitored and analyzed public sentiment around specific subjects or products, granting media enterprises valuable insights to shape their content or marketing strategies. Sentiment analysis is a key driver of engagement and impact measurement.

**Multi Touch Attribution:** AI has reshaped attribution models by analyzing vast amounts of data from various touchpoints, pinpointing not only which interactions led to a conversion but also their respective weights. These advancements have been largely dependent on persistent identifiers like Cookies and MAIDs, and are therefore in jeopardy.

# NEAR-TERM APPLICATIONS

REAL-WORLD DEVELOPMENTS THAT WILL HAPPEN *BEFORE* THE SINGULARITY



Ray Kurzweil predicts that the “singularity event,” (ie. the moment when AI eclipses human intelligence) will occur in 2029. But what happens before that?

Amid all the speculation of where AI might take us in the next 5-10 years, it’s become more difficult to discern where it will go in the next 5-10 months.

At Broadsheet, many of our clients are in a position to tell us. Here are a few applications of AI that they expect to bring to market in the next calendar year.

## MEDIA PLANNING

The days of manual, traditional media planning appear to be numbered. AI applications are already on the horizon that will automate media plans, drawing from historical data and aligning them with specific campaign objectives. It’s not only a question of saving time; early signs indicate that AI-generated plans show a higher chance of success and efficiency.

## CONTEXTUAL

As AI becomes more sophisticated in its understanding of language and context, it’s leading to a major leap forward in contextual targeting. Contextual is evolving beyond keywords to a full semantic understanding of content and pages, including images and video. This elevated contextual understanding is, in turn, unlocking new possibilities for creative optimization and audience targeting.

## IDENTITY RESOLUTION

In a fragmented media landscape, ensuring a unified view of the consumer journey is challenging. AI simplifies this by finding patterns across massive amounts of unstructured data, deduplicating user identities and offering resolution across devices and IDs. Most ID resolution today is based on deterministic matches, but that may change as AI redefines the possibilities of *probabilistic* matches.

## FRAUD PROTECTION

Digital fraud, especially in the form of non-human traffic, malware, and bots, has been a persistent challenge in the media industry. AI now offers a shield against these threats by preemptively identifying and blocking them, ensuring advertisers get genuine engagement and publishers maintain their platform’s credibility. Conversely, AI also will become weaponized by fraudsters. The arms race continues – but with much more powerful arsenals.

## AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION

Audience segmentation is pivotal for targeted advertising. AI now amplifies the power of first-party data, segmenting audiences in innovative ways and even predicting potential interest areas, ensuring that content reaches the most receptive users.

## CREATIVE ANALYTICS

Imagine understanding the most engaging aspects of an ad creative as it airs. AI-driven analytics achieves this by breaking down the core elements of an ad, monitoring audience responses in real-time, and optimizing content to focus on the highest-performing concepts, ensuring maximum engagement.

## CUSTOMER JOURNEY OPTIMIZATION

AI tools monitor user behavior in real-time, adjusting experiences on-the-fly. This ensures audiences remain engaged, whether through content recommendations, ad placements, or timely prompts.



Astronauts from Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*, hide from their sentient HAL 9000 computer (HAL could read their lips)

# Navigating Trust in an AI-driven landscape

*In an era of computer-generated mistrust, the role of PR is more vital than ever*

Across both the communications and advertising fronts, AI-induced havoc has already begun. Consider [the rise of “malvertising” schemes](#) that use AI-generated ads to entice users to click on malicious links, and [the new challenges for brand safety](#) as junk content becomes exponentially easier to spin up and pass on to media buyers. Trust, especially in communications, is built on accuracy and truthfulness – and in the age of generative AI, the truth is easier to mimic and much harder to come by.

It's important to note that the impact of AI on trust is complex and multifaceted. While AI has the potential to enhance efficiency and convenience, it also introduces new challenges and risks that can influence how individuals and communities perceive technology and those who develop and deploy it. If [bots can be programmed to pass as people](#) and [global leaders can be deepfaked](#), how can we believe the information we read, hear, or see? It's an issue that key experts on AI have called an existential threat to interpersonal interaction, democracy, and the social fabric.

It's heavy stuff, but it's also the key to PR professionals' role in the *Brave New World* ahead. After all, our essential business is building trust and credibility. PR is an industry that stands at the nexus between brands and institutions, reporters and the public – and helps each one believe in their work and the messages they share.

We build trust between our clients and their customers that their brands are worth buying from and partnering with. Trust with editors and reporters that our stories are worth considering. And most importantly, the trust of our clients that we can serve as the proper stewards to bring their narrative to the world. It's no coincidence that one of the most celebrated rankings in the PR world is Edelman's [Trust Barometer](#). In an era of the breakdown of trust, our role is to help our clients repair and protect the trust between customers and their clients.

A focus on trust is more than just a philosophical framing for a changing work environment. Instead, it's a framework that can help us understand the coming era. While AI can provide an enormous lift in automating day-to-day tasks – **there's an important distinction between work that's done and trust that's earned.** Executing tasks is what machines are built for. Conversely, trust hinges on insights, strategy, relationships, and the ongoing work of making those relationships strong. All of that is human work grounded in empathy, perspective, and a deep understanding of the human element. Trust is a job for people.



**Kyle Kuhnel**

Managing Director  
Broadsheet Communications

For instance, what kind of long-term relationships are the brands you work with looking to foster with the people they serve? What corporate image are your clients looking to convey, and what messages will best deliver on those ideas? How does a client's culture impact the way they communicate? These are deep strategic questions that – at least for now – algorithms alone can't answer.

Similarly, an AI tool can help you draft a press release, manage press lists, and develop content – saving you countless hours of work ([PrProphet](#), [PressPal](#) from Muck Rack, and [Propel's Amiga](#) are just three tools that fill these roles). But AI won't be able to tell you the underlying message you should share with the reporter – and certainly can't replace a genuine working rapport you've built with your contacts that drive them to trust your pitches over the many others they could respond to on any given day.

If you're in the tactics business, AI that automates the tasks amounts to a serious – perhaps insurmountable -- challenge. But for the strategically-focused agencies, thinking in terms of trust provides a path to opportunity. In the near term, it can help guide questions about what to automate, what to leave in human hands, and how to handle human-AI hybrid tasks.

Trust-building also gives us a roadmap for the future. What can your business provide that leans into trust – from more strategic positioning to more community-building outreach? Now where can generative AI make these efforts easier to create and amplify? The answers to these questions can be your roadmap for the AI-enabled years ahead.

And what of the future of trust more broadly? Will the trust that holds us together – and that's tethering every day – crumble under the stresses of AI?

All of this gives me real optimism for the PR industry. In an era of decaying trust, the strategies we build give communicators a fighting chance.

# WHAT AI MEANS FOR COMMUNICATIONS

**MORE NOISE, LESS SIGNAL MEANS IT'S TIME TO REALLY EARN YOUR EARNED MEDIA**

**Communications stands at the nexus between brands and institutions, reporters and the public.**

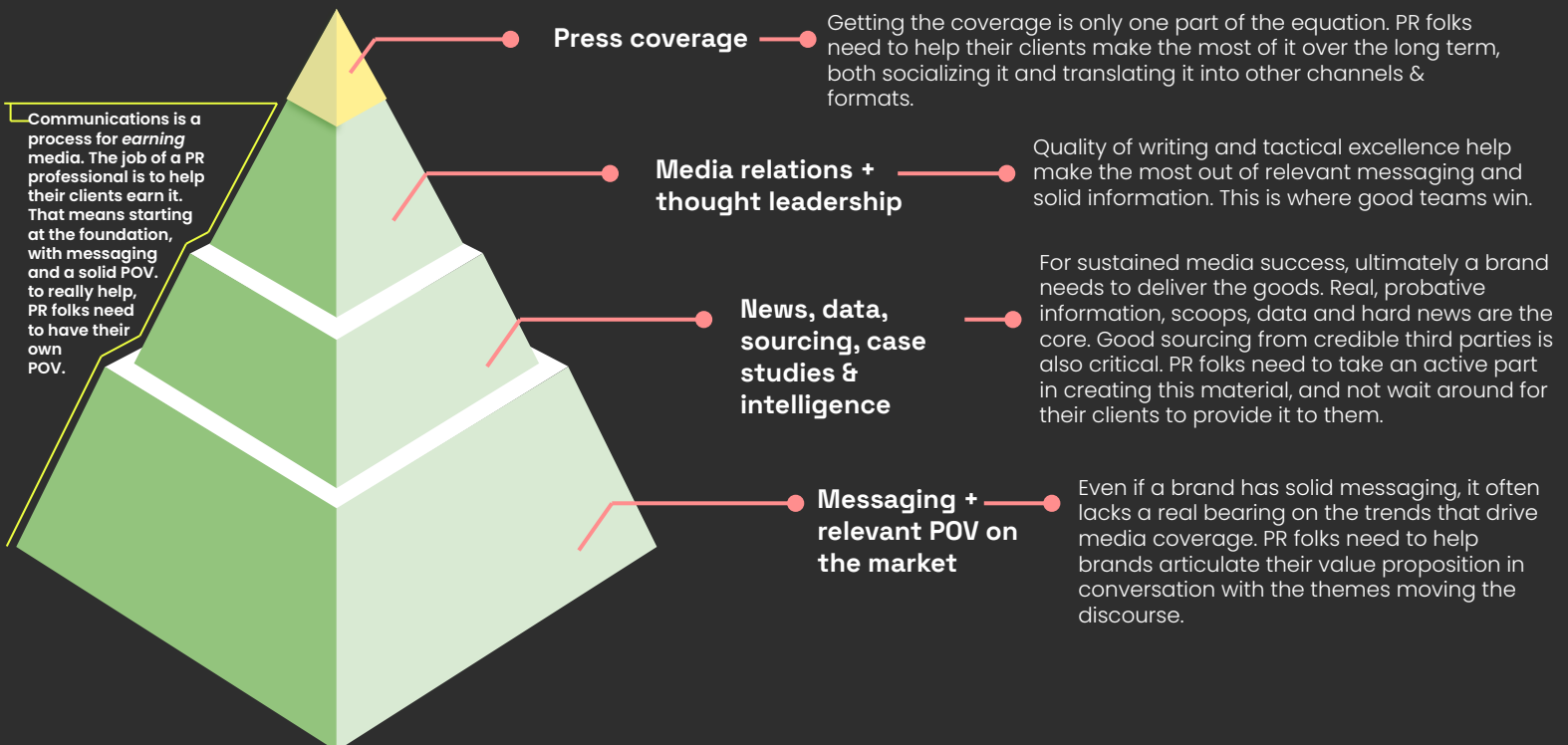
**PR's essential business is building trust and credibility.**

*While AI can provide an enormous lift in automating tasks – there's an important distinction between work that's done and trust that's earned.*

*Executing tasks is what machines are built for. Conversely, trust hinges on insights, strategy, relationships, and the ongoing work of making those relationships strong. All of that is human work grounded in empathy, perspective, and a deep understanding of the human element.*

*Trust is a job for people. And in a PR context, earning trust in an era of AI-driven noise requires a mastery of the most human forms of strategic thinking, relationship-building and creative storytelling.*

**DO WHAT IT TAKES TO EARN YOUR MEDIA**



# THE MOMENT

## RAGING AGAINST THE MACHINE

Frank Herbert's 1965 novel *Dune* takes place in a distant human future – and its backstory, always the best part of science fiction – looms large. At the beginning of the first novel, humanity is generations removed from a time called the "Butlerian Jihad," a colossal conflict between humanity and its own AI creations born from the zenith of the computer age. This war led to the prohibition of creating machines with human-like minds, compelling society to focus instead on developing their human capabilities. Focus on human potential, rather than technology, gave rise to specialized beings like the Mentats and the Bene Gesserit, each with their own forms of supercognition. *Dune* tells the story of humanity in a post-AI future – a story worth revisiting as we grapple with the realities of an AI-driven present.

Herbert's saga also resonates beyond its fictional setting, mirroring the AI-induced tribulations of our current moment. In a life-imitates-art twist, actors are staging their own version of the "Butlerian Jihad." Denis Villeneuve's highly anticipated [Dune: Part Two](#) has been pushed to next year amid the ongoing WGA/SAG-AFTRA strike, which grew from a contractual dispute into a watershed moment in the rise of artificial intelligence. In the midst of Hollywood's most severe labor dispute in six decades, emerging AI technologies are heightening fears and transforming business disagreements into existential questions: what does it mean to be human? In an era where [actors can be deepfaked](#) and [entire shows can be created from scratch with AI](#), these are also very practical questions.

Just days before the postponement, *Dune*'s Princess Irulan (Florence Pugh), joined the picket line where protesters carried signs saying "AI is Not Art" and "Humans Only." SAG-AFTRA put out a [statement](#) arguing that, "human creators are the foundation of the creative industries and we must ensure that they are respected and paid for their work." Is this a bad episode of *Black Mirror*?

Generative AI, in the form of large language models like ChatGPT and image/video generators like Runway, Stable Diffusion and Midjourney, has provoked this sudden reckoning across society. But generative AI is only the most visible manifestation of a deeper technological revolution already well underway. And actors, unique in that they are A) famous and B) unionized, are only the most visible population fighting the implications. Imagine if Amazon workers were unionized and famous!

Without a doubt, everyone in every business in every sector will be impacted, and that's certainly true of the areas Broadsheet focuses on the most: the data, media and advertising sectors. The scope of such changes are hard to fathom, but we are already watching them take place.



/imagine: Crewdson photo of the aftermath of the war against the machines in Frank Herbert's *DUNE*

Based on our work with clients, we have recently been introduced to new products applying AI to customer experience, analytics, media planning, performance measurement, content creation, dynamic creative, contextual targeting, audience segmentation, identity resolution and fraud prevention, just to list a few. These developments, several of which are being announced in the next few months, will reshape the industry as we know it.

The intense surge of interest in AI that has spurred this rush of product development has also produced an overwhelming saturation of hot takes and bad opinion articles.

We are conscious not to add to that pile. But we would not be doing our job as analysts if we did not at least attempt to make sense of what this all means – both for our clients and for ourselves.

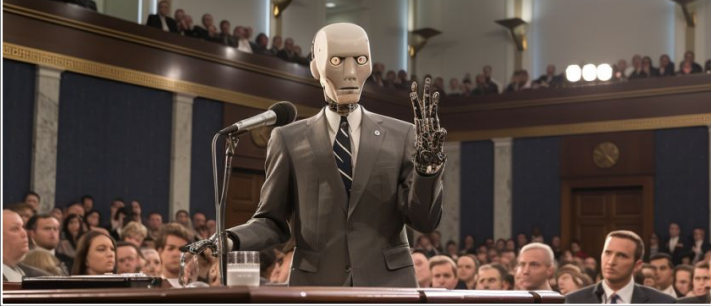


/imagine: florence pugh as princess irulan protesting in front of a building



# NO GOING BACK

CAN OUR ADAPTATIONS MATCH THE PACE OF CHANGE?



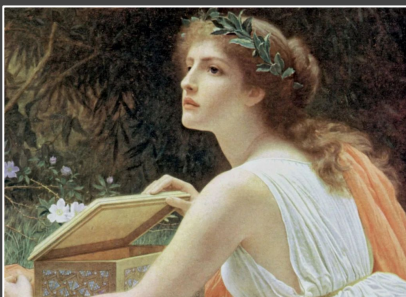
*Regulate me, please!*



*She's out of the bottle*

*AI systems with human-competitive intelligence can pose profound risks to society and humanity, as shown by extensive research and acknowledged by top AI labs. Advanced AI could represent a profound change in the history of life on Earth, and should be planned for and managed with commensurate care and resources. Unfortunately, this level of planning and management is not happening, even though recent months have seen AI labs locked in an out-of-control race to develop and deploy ever more powerful digital minds that no one – not even their creators – can understand, predict, or reliably control.*

- **Future of Life Institute Open Letter to Pause AI**



*Let me just open this box real quick*



*You thought I'd stay in the bag?*

On March 29, 2023, a group of AI experts and industry leaders asked everyone to slow down. They want a break on creating AI systems more advanced than GPT-4. Their main worry? Moving too fast might lead to big, unexpected problems. Tech companies do not usually ask the world to stop them; this is new territory.

The issue isn't AI itself, but the runaway pace of its development. If we had more time to get used to AI, we could make better rules and plans step by step. This slow and steady approach would let companies, decision-makers, and regular folks learn and adjust. Right now, though, according to the developers themselves, AI is moving too fast.

President Biden's team came up with an "AI Bill of Rights" in response. It says AI systems should be safe, shouldn't treat people unfairly, should respect our private data, should let us know when they're being used and why, and should give us the option to choose human help when we need it.

George Davis, CEO at Frame AI, agrees this is the right approach: make AI benefit everyone and involve everyone in the process, with governments and companies working together to keep competition alive.

Others argue it's too late. Making rules now might not only fail to stop AI's progress, but might even give less scrupulous companies and governments an unfair advantage. The genie is out of the bottle, the cat is out of the bag, Pandora's box is open. There's no turning back – so why try?

The open letter calling for a moratorium shows the challenge. Moratoriums are not generally how innovation happens or how the global economy functions; there is really no mechanism for it. Without a government with the authority to step in, it becomes a question of self-restraint – competitive companies agreeing to set down their efforts all at once. They won't, even if they think they should.

*"Should we let machines flood our information channels with propaganda and untruth? Should we automate away all the jobs, including the fulfilling ones? Should we develop nonhuman minds that might eventually outnumber, outsmart, obsolete and replace us? Should we risk loss of control of our civilization?"* asks the open letter, somewhat rhetorically. "Such decisions must not be delegated to unelected tech leaders," it concludes. No doubt, but it's also unlikely that our current regulatory system has the efficiency or the authority to make those decisions, either.

Good AI policy is already underway, but it's hard to imagine that it will go into effect in time to forestall the disruptive effects on society and the economy. That's why the policy conversation will likely soon shift from regulating AI to addressing the social externalities of its rapid development. As AI systems replace roles previously held by humans, the inevitable job losses will likely thrust the concept of universal basic income (UBI) into the policy spotlight. With fewer people working due to AI automation, governments might pivot their tax structures, perhaps considering 'robot taxes' on companies opting for AI over human labor. These are only speculations – but they feel less fantastical than the prospect of moratoriums on future development.

Again, the issue with AI is not the technology itself but the pace of its development. Given enough time, all the jobs lost would be created elsewhere, all the social impacts could be addressed through the market or government policy. But in the job market and elsewhere, the risk of near-term disruption is very real. And to pretend otherwise is wishful thinking.

We always welcome your feedback on these newsletters. Feel free to suggest topics, articles, research, and to offer opinions and criticism.

Write Alex Wolf at [alex@broadsheetcomms.com](mailto:alex@broadsheetcomms.com)

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## SOURCES

