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AI-ASSISTED CONTENT STRATEGY

Use of tools, benefits, and curriculum adjustments in communication degree programs in Ecuador

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ABSTRACT

Changes in the digital ecosystem and technological advances have transformed communication processes. This article examines the use of artificial intelligence in content production from the perspective of students and academic leaders in Communication programs in Ecuador. A mixed-methods approach is adopted, combining student surveys and semi-structured interviews with academic leaders. The results show that students use AI primarily as an operational tool to automate tasks and improve efficiency. Academic leaders acknowledge its productivity potential but warn of risks related to dependency, superficiality, and ethical concerns. The findings reveal a progressive and uneven institutional integration of AI.

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1. Introduction

Technological advances and cultural changes have transformed consumer behavior, habits, routines, and expectations. As hyperconnected audiences, consumers are exposed to a vast amount of information. This information overload causes their attention to wander. Modern consumers are empowered and selective individuals who prioritize content that adds value to achieving their personal and professional goals.

Brands must know how to tell stories to establish more authentic and closer interactions with their audiences. Creating, selecting, distributing, and amplifying content that is interesting, relevant, and useful to audiences requires time and resources.

The roots of artificial intelligence (AI) date back to the 1950s. However, in the last ten years, it has experienced exponential growth, driven by increases in computing power, the development of open-source software, the Internet, cloud computing, mobile devices, and big data (Kotler et al., 2021).

AI is defined as a set of computer systems capable of performing tasks that require human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, decision-making, and language comprehension (Russell & Norvig, 2021). These systems use machine learning models that learn patterns and relationships from large volumes of data (Mitchell, 1997). Deep learning, as part of these models, uses deep artificial neural networks that simulate learning and decision-making processes (Goodfellow, Bengio & Courville, 2016), inspired by the functioning of the human brain.

The evolution of AI has occurred in three waves (Lara Magaña & Arriaga Cárdenas, 2025; Sheth & Thirunarayan, 2021). The first wave, predictive in nature, focuses on manually coding symbolic knowledge to label and categorize multimodal data using predefined rules. The second wave, data-driven/generative, relies on large volumes of data and deep learning to generate new outputs from inputs. The third wave, hybrid and interactive, incorporates autonomous AI agents that combine structured knowledge, external tools, and human collaboration to perform complex tasks.

2. Adoption of AI in content production

The adoption of AI tools is a decisive factor for business competitiveness. Organizations integrate disruptive technologies, such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and big data, to reduce time, automate tedious and repetitive tasks, innovate business models, and scale processes (Kotler et al., 2021). Their integration across multiple sectors and disciplines improves operational efficiency, customer experience, and competitiveness (Vial, 2019).

AI has transformed strategic communication and marketing by enhancing both operational tasks and strategic processes. On the operational side, it automates content production, data analysis, and audience interaction management (Gündüzyeli, 2024). Strategically, it expands the ability to understand audiences and design data-driven strategies (Abed & Farrokhi, 2025). In this way, communication and marketing have shifted from relying primarily on professional intuition to data-driven decision-making.

Users consume information, comment, share, remix, and produce content, influencing the visibility, legitimacy, and reach of communication messages (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). In this context, they are considered dynamic actors within the communication process of brands.

Effective content production starts with understanding users. Its impact depends on proper execution, distribution through the right channels, and aligned timing. This requires analyzing the behaviors, motivations, expectations, and contexts of use of the audiences targeted by brands.

2.1. Artificial intelligence in communication

Generative AI (GenAI) marks a radical leap in power, sophistication, and utility. It uses deep learning models to simulate human creative processes and generate original, realistic content from massive training datasets (He et al., 2025), including text, images, audio, video, or code.

In marketing, AI has changed the paradigm. Although it is still perceived as intimidating and, in many cases, misunderstood technology, it is at the heart of precision marketing.

The concept of the audience is evolving toward a more complex vision, in which consumers act as creators, mediators, and modulators of the message, with a fluid, multifunctional identity (Zhao, 2019). Digital audiences are defined as users who can interact with, produce, circulate, and reinterpret content on digital platforms (Jenkins et al., 2018).

Generations Z and Alpha, considered phygital natives, grew up connected to multiple screens and interacting with advanced technologies such as virtual assistants, artificial intelligence tools, chatbots, immersive spaces, decentralized communities, and online games. In this context, they seek relevant, personalized, immersive, and fluid interactions at online and offline touchpoints (Kotler et al., 2024; McCrindle, 2024; McCrindle, 2022).

2.2. AI-assisted content strategy

Content is ineffective due to its volume, frequency, or technical sophistication. It acquires value through its ability to generate meaning, be relevant, and build sustained connections with specific audiences, depending on their cultural, media, and usage contexts (McQuail, 2010; Napoli, 2011; Jenkins et al., 2018). Content must solve problems, expand knowledge, or strengthen symbolic links (Pulizzi, 2014, Grönroos, 2017).

Content marketing has gone from being an isolated activity to a structural component of digital strategy. It allows the creation of valuable content that offers relevant information, meaningful experiences, and functional and emotional benefits, with the aim of increasing audiences' willingness to interact and maintain long-term communication relationships (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). In this regard, 58% of marketing teams use GenAI to accelerate content creation processes. They even incorporate AI tools throughout the entire process, from research to real-time adaptation of the customer journey (Cyberclick, 2026).

Producing content that is oriented toward value, relevance, and engagement requires analyzing audiences, identifying behavior patterns, detecting trends and opportunities, and aligning these actions with strategic direction, clear objectives, resource allocation, editorial criteria, and human control (Wedel & Kannan, 2016).

The use of AI allows for the support, optimization, and scaling of content planning, production, distribution, and evaluation processes. Content must focus on audience needs. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze behaviors, consumption patterns, and content performance, and to incorporate AI for informed, contextualized decision-making (Wedel & Kannan, 2016).

2.3. Professional training and technological skills

Artificial intelligence has impacted on most professions, redefining processes, roles, and job skills. Thirty percent of professionals use AI tools (Thomson Reuters Institute, 2025), highlighting an adoption gap across sectors, organizations, and professional profiles. Many jobs have been displaced, while at the same time, job opportunities have opened that require workers with more advanced technical skills.

The impact of disruptive technologies on the world of work is referred to as occupational structure transformation. It is a gradual, structural process that generates sustained changes in the composition, functions, hierarchies, skills, and competencies of jobs within an economic and social system (Garmendia, 1997; Autor et al., 2003). This process requires accelerated professionalization of the workforce.

To address the constantly evolving occupational and digital transformations, higher education institutions must integrate digital competencies and adaptive skills into their curricula to promote digital literacy and AI literacy (Lumbi Salazar et al., 2025; Sandoval-Benavides & López-Ornelas, 2025). Mastery of these technologies requires not only digital competencies and adaptive skills to understand, use, and evaluate disruptive technological tools, but also critical thinking (Rodríguez, 2025; Lumbi Salazar et al., 2025).

AI is redefining the roles of communication and marketing professionals, requiring them to acquire technological skills to enhance critical thinking and strategic vision. These professionals must combine technological innovation with human creativity (Kwittken, 2025) to generate emotional connections and differentiated campaigns in saturated environments.

3. Methodology

Research methodology is a systematic, critical, and empirical process that uses procedures, techniques, and principles to guide the scientific investigation of a problem (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014; Sánchez Rodríguez et al., 2023).

This study is part of a non-experimental design, understood as a methodological strategy that collects data without manipulating variables, to observe and describe phenomena in their natural context (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014). This approach seeks to identify patterns, relationships, and trends among the variables analyzed.

3.1. Research objectives

Research objectives express what the research aims to achieve and must be clearly stated. They must be specific, measurable, relevant, and realistic (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014).

The research aims to analyze the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in content creation in communication degree programs from the perspectives of students and program directors in Ecuador, focusing on the tools used, perceived benefits, and curriculum preparation.

The **specific objectives** sought to be achieved with the research are:

1) Identify artificial intelligence tools used for content production and their main use cases.
2) Determine the perceived benefits of using artificial intelligence in content creation in terms of efficiency, task automation, and creative experimentation.
3) Analyze the academic preparation of communication degree programs for the integration of AI-assisted audiovisual content, considering use cases, changes observed in student projects, and curricular adjustments.

3.2. Research approach

The research approach integrates the theoretical and methodological frameworks that provide direction and coherence to the study (Vizcaíno Zúñiga, et al., 2023). To meet the objectives set, the research adopts a **mixed approach**, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to gain an understanding of the phenomenon under study (Vizcaíno Zúñiga, et al., 2023; Romero et al., 2023).

In the **quantitative approach**, understood as a systematic process for collecting and analyzing information (Pandey & Pandey, 2015), a survey was administered to students in communication programs in Ecuador. The aim was to use numerical data analysis to identify the artificial intelligence tools used for content production (Vizcaíno Zúñiga, et al., 2023; Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014). Using non-probability convenience sampling, a technique in which the researcher intentionally selects participants based on their accessibility and availability (Stratton, 2021; Pandey & Pandey, 2015), the research instrument was applied to 250 geographically dispersed students enrolled in communication programs in Ecuador, offered at the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (UTPL), the Universidad Nacional de Loja (UNL), the Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ), the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Santo Domingo (PUCE – Santo Domingo) and Ibarra (PUCE – Ibarra) campuses, the Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral (ESPOL), and the Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí (ULEAM).

The instrument consisted of a digital questionnaire composed of pre-established questions, organized in a logical sequence, with a response system using nominal and ordinal scales (Medina Romero et al., 2023). Its purpose was to analyze the students' perceptions of the defined variables (see Table 1).

Table 1. Survey: Analysis variables

Variables	Scale	Role	Category coding
AI Tools	Nominal	Independent (objective 1)	1=Conversational assistants and information search 2=Writing, editing, and academic support 3=Graphic design and generative imagery 4=Video, audio, and audiovisual content 5=Digital marketing, SEO, and analytics 6=Presentations, organization, and productivity 7=Technical AI, models, and frameworks

Variables	Scale	Role	Category coding
			8=Voice assistants and general utilities 9=AI uses without a specific tool declared
Areas where AI is most beneficial	Nominal	Independent (objective 2)	1=Productivity and task automation 2=Anticipation of trends and consumer behavior 3=Analytics, monitoring, and data analysis for decision-making 4=More effective audience segmentation 5=Strategic adaptation and proactivity 6=Personalized content generation 7=SEO optimization and organic positioning 8=Fast, multilingual translation 9=Cross-functional use in all areas 10=Sentiment analysis 11=Don't know/No answer
Perceived benefits of using AI	Ordinal / Likert scale	Independent (objective 2)	1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly agree

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

The **qualitative approach** seeks to explore and understand in depth the meanings and definitions of the situation from the human and contextual dimensions of the phenomenon studied (Salazar-Escorcia, 2020). As a research technique, a semi-structured interview was used to obtain opinions on behaviors and experiences, based on a flexible script that allowed for in-depth exploration of the topics addressed (Medina Romero et al., 2023). The research instrument was an interview form, a document that organizes specific questions by thematic blocks (Medina Romero et al., 2023), with the aim of analyzing the academic preparation of these programs to integrate audiovisual content assisted by artificial intelligence. The interview was administered to the coordinators/directors of the degree programs with whom contact was made (see Table 2); therefore, as with the survey, the sample was selected using convenience sampling.

Table 2. Interviewees: Coordinators/Directors

Degree programs	University	Acronyms	Code
Communication	Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja	UTPL	E1
Communication	Universidad Nacional de Chimborazo	UNACH	E2
Communication	Universidad Estatal de Bolívar	UEB	E3
Journalism	Universidad de Cuenca	UCuenca	E4
Communication	Universidad San Francisco de Quito	USFQ	E5
Communication	Universidad Nacional de Loja	UNL	E6
Journalism	Universidad San Francisco de Quito	USFQ	E7

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

The categories and subcategories used to identify use cases and successful experiences, as well as changes in student projects and curriculum adjustments, are detailed below (see Table 3):

Table 3. Categories, subcategories, and operational codes for use cases and success experiences

General category	Specific category	Operational codes
Use cases	Audiovisual production	Screenplay writing
		Storyboard creation
		Video production
		Podcast production
	Visual creation	Illustration design
		Graphic design production
		Visual identity creation
	Strategic production	Campaign development
		Online content production
		Business process automation
		Data visualization for decision-making

General category	Specific category	Operational codes
Changes in student assignments	Positive outcomes	Higher operational efficiency
		Improved visual quality
		Assisted creative experimentation
		Connection to the professional world
	Negative outcomes	AI dependency
		Lower conceptual depth
		Aesthetic homogenization
		Poor strategic argument
Curriculum adjustments	Content creation	Automated audiovisual narratives
		AI in practical subjects
	Pedagogical proposal	AI-related academic preparation
		New assessments
		Curriculum adaptations
		Assessment of academic processes
	Ethical governance and education	Enhancing critical thinking
		Declaration of use
		AI literacy
		Ethical governance of AI use

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

3.3. Discussion and results

The analysis of results combines a descriptive and comparative reading of quantitative and qualitative data to identify patterns, trends, and differences in the use of AI in content production, as well as in perceptions of its benefits, use cases, and levels of integration in training processes.

To **identify the AI tools used in content production and their main use cases**, a survey was applied to students. The initial adoption of AI in educational contexts focuses on automating specific operational tasks, whose impact depends on the level of adoption, the institutional context, and user skills.

The following **AI tools** are used for content production: ChatGPT (32.35%) as a conversational assistant for text generation, academic support, and question answering. Gemini (9.70%) as a general assistant for queries and writing. Canva (8.09%) for graphic design and visual resource creation tools. Microsoft Copilot (4.85%) for writing assistance tool. Leonardo.ai (3.77%) for image generation. Bing (3.23%) for information search. Grammarly (2.96%) for text correction.

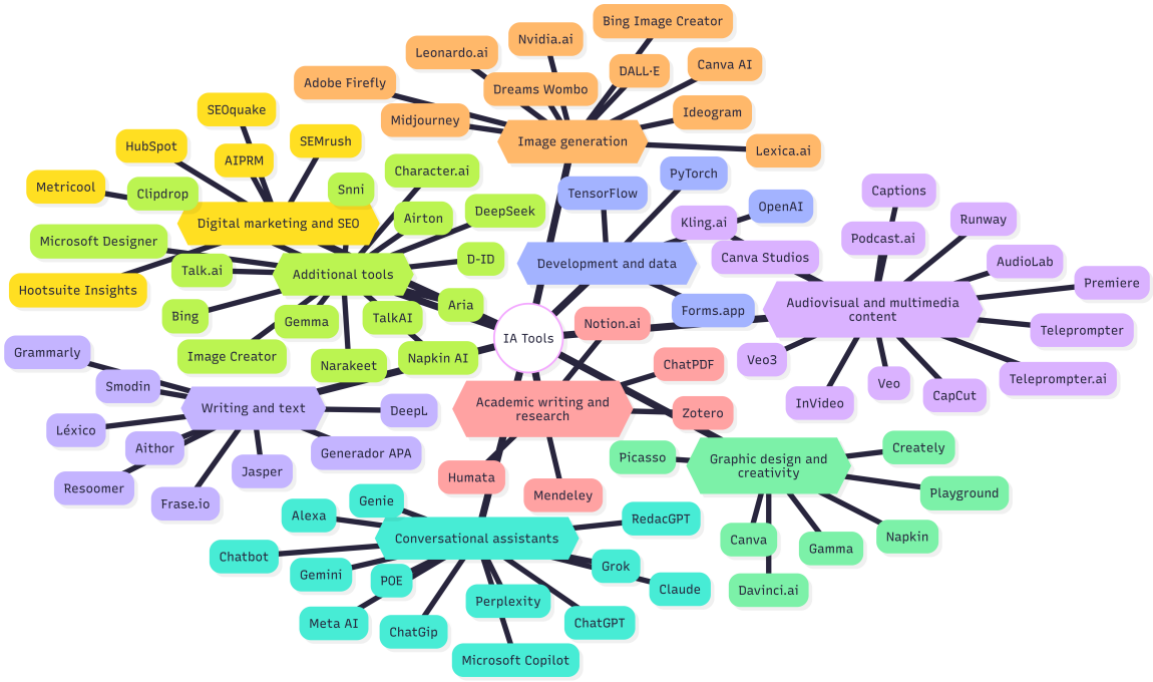
Claude, DALL-E, Midjourney, Cap Cut, and Perplexity are associated with more specialized and complementary uses, suggesting an exploratory phase. In the field of web and social analytics, digital marketing, and Search Engine Optimization (SEO), tools such as Metricool, HubSpot, and SEMrush are mentioned. In addition, some students mentioned unspecified tools, such as chatbots, virtual assistants, audiovisual production, image generation, or general academic use, classroom activities, marketing, and career guidance. A small group of students from UTPL and UNL reported not using AI tools. There is evidence of an adoption gap associated with individual student factors and institutional factors, such as curricular integration of AI.

The tools identified in Figure 1 were grouped into the following use cases. Conversational assistants and information search. Writing, proofreading, and academic support. Graphic design and generative imagery. Video, audio, and audiovisual content. Digital marketing, SEO, and analytics. Presentations, organization, and productivity. Technical AI, models, and frameworks. Voice assistants and general utilities. AI uses without a specific tool declared.

Students at the universities surveyed show a strong focus on using a single tool, ChatGPT, primarily as conversational assistants. At UTPL, Gemini, Canva, Copilot, Leonardo.ai, Grammarly, and Bing also stand out at different stages of content production, and a long list of tools is being explored for design and writing tasks. At UNL, use is concentrated on Copilot, Perplexity, and Bing as query and writing assistants.

At USFQ, Gemini, Midjourney, Canva, and ChatPDF are used for text generation and visual creation. At PUCE – Santo Domingo, there is an exploratory approach to the use of AI tools for both academic and creative purposes. ESPOL and PUCE – Ibarra show an incipient pattern, characterized by initial use of these tools. At ULEAM, a focused adoption is identified, centered mainly on ChatGPT.

Figure 1. Students. AI tools to create content.

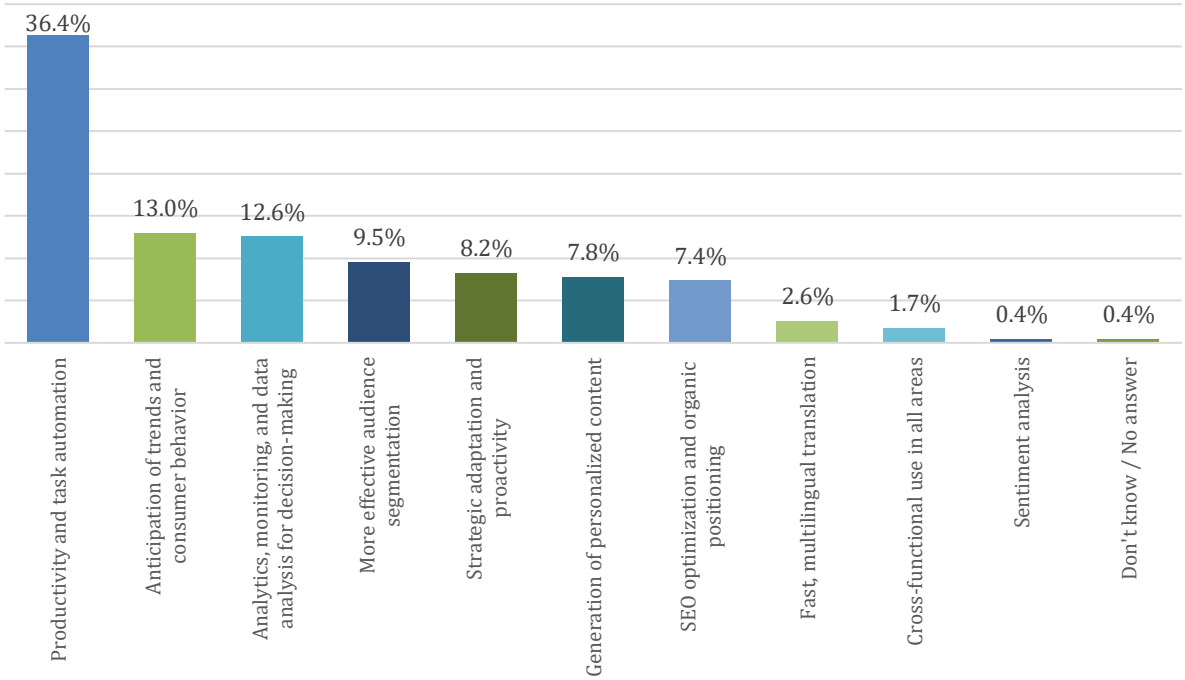


Source: Own elaboration on Mermaid.live, 2026.

This shows that the tools are used as operational support in content production processes, rather than as a resource in strategic functions such as deep audience understanding, data-driven planning, and informed decision-making.

To **determine the perceived benefits of using AI in content creation**, the strategic priorities stated by students were analyzed. The results indicate that the **AI strategic priority** is to improve the efficiency of the content production process rather than to redefine the communication strategy (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Students. Areas where AI is most beneficial.



Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

High priority is given to productivity and task automation (36.4%). At a medium level are the anticipation of trends and consumer behavior (13%), analytics, monitoring, and data analysis for decision-making (12.6%), audience segmentation (9.5%), and strategic adaptation and proactivity (8.2%). In contrast, low priority is given to personalized content generation (7.8%), SEO optimization and organic positioning (7.4%), rapid multilingual translation (2.6%), cross-functional use (1.7%), and sentiment analysis (0.4%). Overall, AI is prioritized as operational infrastructure, analytical support for decision-making, and a creative and interpretive tool. The findings show that AI is not established among students as a tool for creative experimentation, but rather as a resource associated with team productivity and performance.

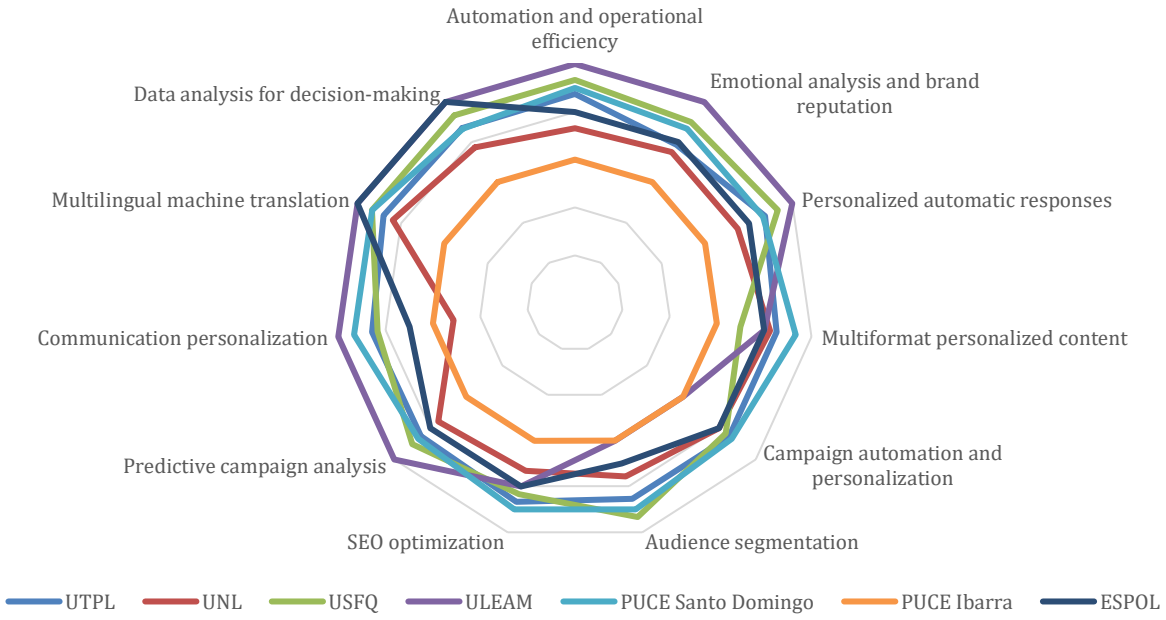
The data show that the universities analyzed have varying levels of AI adoption. AI tools are used for the generation of personalized content, strategic adaptation and productivity, SEO optimization and organic positioning, as well as for cross-cutting use in all these areas.

Students perceive the benefits of AI in content creation as efficiency and automation, rather than as a resource for creative experimentation. At UTPL and UNL, the emphasis is on SEO optimization and organic positioning, personalized content generation, strategic adaptation, and proactivity. In these cases, AI takes an operational approach, aiming to produce more and better by accelerating processes, improving team performance, and responding quickly to communication requirements. At USFQ, a more structural perception is observed, reflected in the use of AI in all areas analyzed.

In Figure 3, the weighted averages show that students' level of agreement regarding the use of AI in strategic communication scores 4.29 out of 5, indicating a positive assessment, though with clear differences between institutions. Variables such as automation and operational efficiency, personalized automatic responses, automation and personalization, and data analysis for decision-making show high values in most of the universities analyzed.

Multiformat personalized content and communication customization have high levels of agreement, suggesting that students recognize the benefit of AI in tailoring messages, formats, and languages to the diverse audiences targeted by brands.

Figure 3. Students. Weighted average levels of agreement regarding AI use.



Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

ULEAM and USFQ show higher levels across most variables analyzed, reflecting a positive perception of AI's benefits in automation and operational efficiency, personalized automatic responses, predictive campaign analysis, and data-driven decision-making, with low variability in responses. UTPL and PUCE – Santo Domingo rank at a medium-high level in the variables of multi-

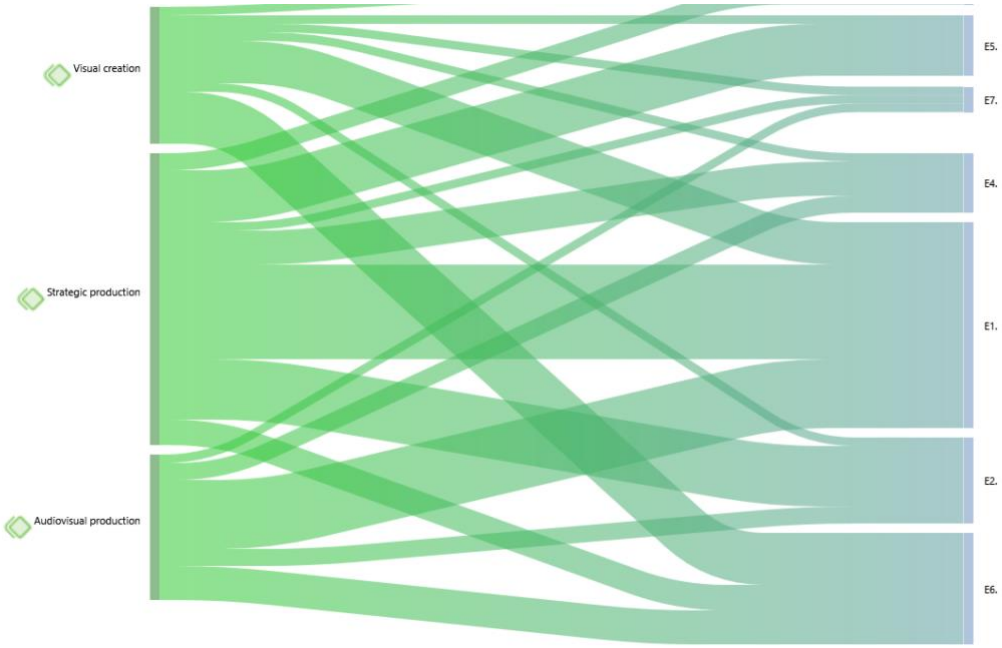
format personalized content, communication personalization, SEO optimization, and campaign automation and personalization. PUCE – Ibarra has lower levels in all variables.

Overall, the comparative analysis shows that students have a positive assessment of the benefits of using AI in communication processes, especially in automation and operational efficiency, personalized automatic responses, personalized multi-format content, and data analysis for decision-making, with differences between the analyzed universities in their degree of integration and maturity of implementation.

The **analysis of academic preparation in communication degree programs** shows a progressive, heterogeneous, and cautious integration of artificial intelligence in the creation of content for academic practices and projects. In general, the distribution and density of discourse focus on content creation, audiovisual production, and the positive impacts of AI use, dimensions that are considered the core of practical integration. In contrast, negative impacts, ethical governance, and training are less frequently mentioned, pointing to areas that require institutional strengthening.

In the **use cases** category, considered the primary indicator of operational academic readiness, executives identified specific applications of AI in audiovisual content creation, visual creation, and strategic production (see Figure 4). Experiences are mainly concentrated on practical subjects, integrative projects, and spaces for applied experimentation, such as laboratories.

Figure 4. Stankey diagram – coordinators/directors. Use cases.



Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

- AI is used in different stages of pre-production and audiovisual production, specifically in scriptwriting, storyboarding, technical scripts, video editing, and podcast production. Its integration into technical and creative processes allows for the optimization of time and resources.

E1. Points out that "AI is used to speed up information search processes, scriptwriting, storyboards, and technical scripts. [...] and has been applied to audiovisual production and podcasts."

- Experiences related to the use of AI as a support for visual creation show conscious integration into communication products, where it is used as a narrative resource, for example, illustrations, graphic lines, and other visual elements.

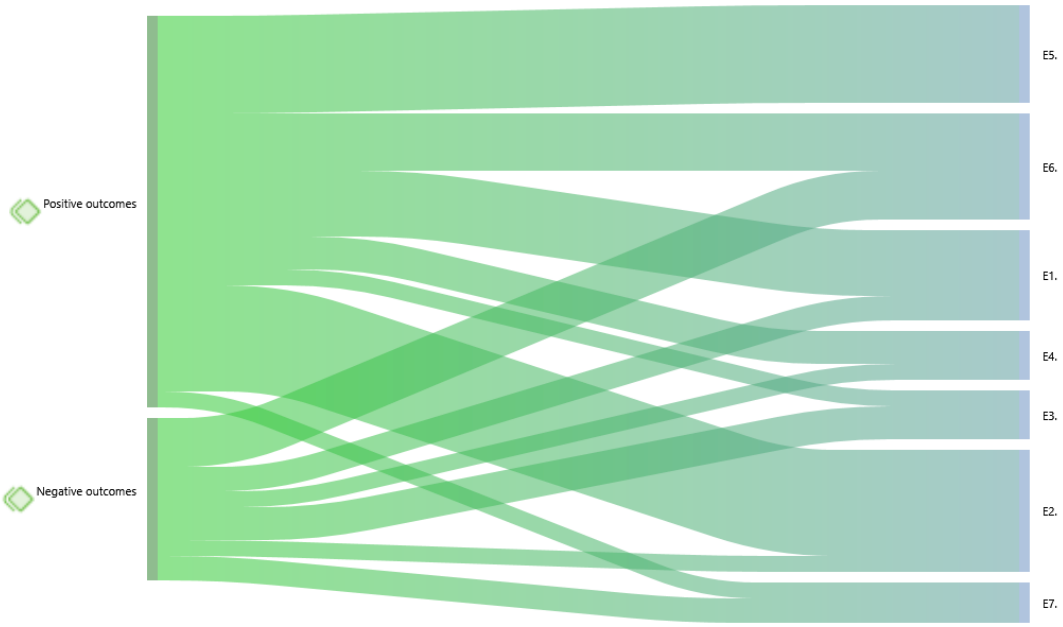
E6. "They used AI-generated illustrations, declaring their use as a relevant narrative resource, which was key to the journalistic report on health," reinforcing their role in supporting the creative process.

- AI is also implemented to streamline processes, support decision-making, and organize information. A positive symbiosis can be observed in its application in real campaigns, process automation, and data visualization, to the extent that it is combined with professional judgment.

E5. "Products incorporating AI are being seen, raising the bar for results."

In **changes in student assignments**, coordinators/directors identified both positive and negative aspects of using AI in academic work and student assignments (see Figure 5). As in the previous category, experiences focus on practical subjects, integrative projects, and applied experimentation.

Figure 5. Stankey diagram – coordinators/directors. Changes in student assignments.



Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

- Among the positive outcomes, there is consensus that AI contributes to improving visual quality, operational efficiency, and creative experimentation. AI-generated outputs are often refined according to professional standards. The integration of AI into pre-professional practices has even led to job offers. They even mention that graduation rates increased when students were taught how to use AI correctly in their degree projects.

E3. Academic work is "more educational and attractive."

- Among the negative outcomes identified are dependence on technology, reduced conceptual depth, and strategic weaknesses. The lack of argumentation and contextualization of proposals reveals shortcomings in the justification of communication decisions.

E6. "Students submit projects without sufficient knowledge, as they are quickly produced using AI."

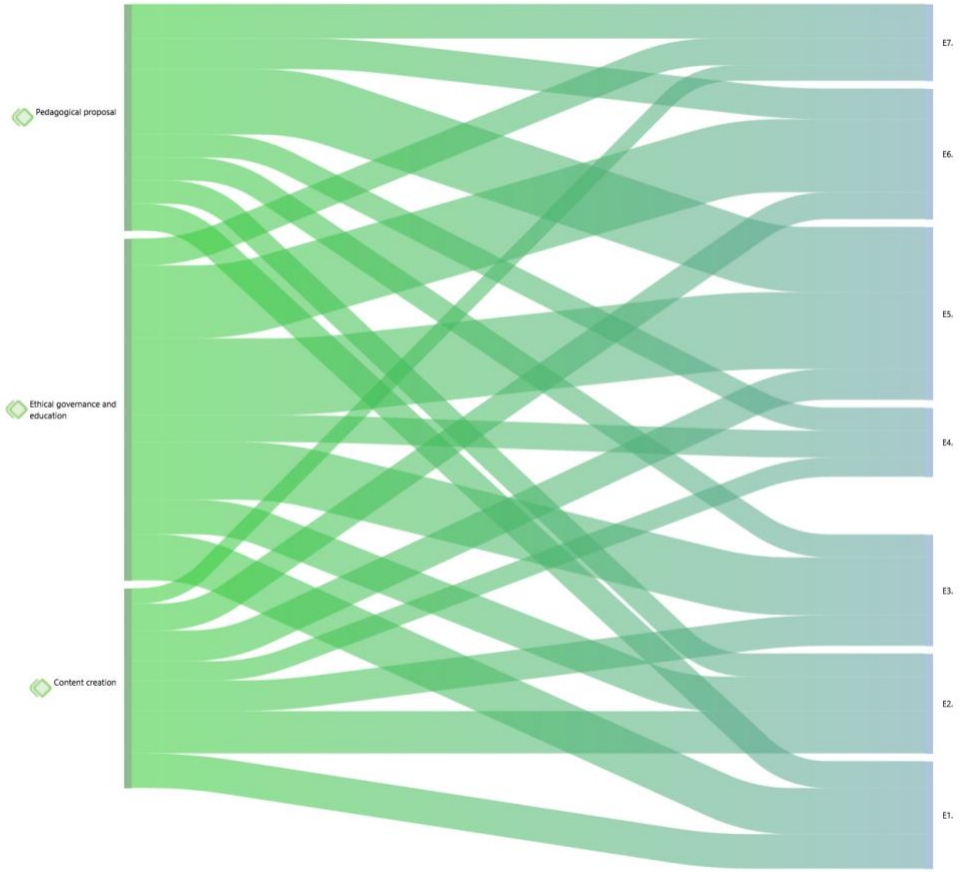
In the **curricular adjustments** category, the responses of educational institutions to the use and effects of AI are explored (see Figure 6). There is a consensus on the need to integrate these technologies without neglecting conceptual foundations, critical thinking, and the definition of clear policies for responsible use.

- In the field of **content creation**, practical subjects and integrative projects incorporate the use of AI as a support for scriptwriting and content creation, which are then adapted to specific contexts.
- When analyzing the **pedagogical proposal**, micro-curricular adjustments in some practical subjects are mentioned, and the need for teacher training, syllabus updates, the incorporation of practical activities, and the revision of methodologies is highlighted. Likewise, the importance of reinforcing critical reading, information verification, and content contextualization is highlighted.

E5. Emphasizes that "the university's responsibility is to train students with discernment, capable of using AI intelligently."

E4. Mentions that "the creation of a degree program whose core focus is the management of AI applications" is being evaluated.

Figure 6. Stankey diagram – coordinators/directors. Curricular adjustments.



Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

- Finally, executives point to the importance of **ethical governance and education** as key elements in establishing clear policies that regulate the responsible use of AI, including a declaration of use, promoting AI literacy, and reinforcing ethical commitments. Some interviewees emphasize the need to incorporate ethics as a cross-cutting theme in training.

E3. Proposes that "at the beginning of each academic cycle, a commitment be signed with students regarding its use as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, learning."

3.4. Conclusions

The research concludes that communication students' adoption of artificial intelligence tools is concentrated in a small number of generalist tools, with a marked trend toward conversational AI. This pattern indicates adoption driven by accessibility, ease of use, and immediate functionality, rather than

technical specialization. This low diversification may even suggest that the integration of AI into student training depends more on individual teaching practices than on curricular adjustments.

Regarding the main uses of AI, the results show that its applications focus on the operational phases of the communication process, such as text generation, visual creation, and audiovisual production. AI acts as technical support to optimize production times and processes. Therefore, it is not established as a necessary resource for strategic planning, audience analysis, or communication performance evaluation.

The perceived benefits of using AI in content creation primarily relate to task automation and improved operational efficiency. Its use is valued for its ability to accelerate processes, increase productivity, and facilitate rapid responses to communication requirements. It should be noted that creative experimentation and innovation play a secondary role, suggesting they are not a central creative resource but rather a tool for optimizing content performance.

The integration of AI into communication degree programs is advancing gradually and unevenly. A comparative analysis confirms that the universities studied exhibit different levels of integration and maturity. Although its use is becoming established in practical subjects and applied integrative projects, these differences are associated with pedagogical approaches, institutional capacities, and levels of digital literacy. Some institutions are exploring diverse uses, while others have more focused or incipient adoptions.

Research shows that artificial intelligence has established itself as an operational support in communication training, geared toward efficiency and automation, but not as a strategic and critical component of the teaching-learning process. This underscores the need to adopt curricular integration models that integrate technology, critical thinking, professional ethics, and strategic decision-making in communication.

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