



Navigating AI in the Classroom: Ethical Tensions and Pedagogical Opportunities in Communication Courses

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Abstract

This study is twofold. First, it investigates college students' perceptions of generative AI tools in their learning experience, informed by surveys and practical experience. Second, it illuminates faculty experience in navigating the use of AI in their course design and assessment through meaningful reflection on their teaching practice. Using mixed methods and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as a framework, this research aims to explore innovative teaching strategies for integrating AI into communication education in an ethical way. Students' sense of agency in making decisions on the use of AI has improved over the semester after the faculty members refined their AI policy in the course design and provided active guidance. These findings reinforce previous research on how faculty and institutional guidance play a pivotal role in improving students' understanding of AI policies and the intention of using AI in the course.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, classroom implementation, college students, attitudes, UTAUT

According to the Pew Research Center (Kennedy et al., 2025), over 60 percent of American adults interact with AI several times per week, and roughly 75 percent of college-age adults use AI several times per week. As generative AI tools like Gemini, ChatGPT, and Google Bard become increasingly accessible, higher education faces urgent questions about responsibly integrating these technologies into the classroom.

From the perspective of the instructor, as highlighted in the meta-analysis of Crompton and Burke (2023), there are numerous tasks that can benefit from the implementation of AI, including adapting instruction for the needs of students, developing assess-

ments, and providing prompt feedback (Baykasoğlu et al., 2018; Dever et al., 2020; Verdú et al., 2017). Within communication disciplines—where creativity, analysis, and ethical reasoning intersect—AI presents exciting opportunities and complex challenges.

On the administrative side, there are also opportunities to benefit from AI implementation, particularly in areas such as communication efficiency, admissions, and annual reviews (Ahmad et al., 2022). Finally, from the students' perspective, AI presents a series of opportunities and challenges. The tools seem powerful and potentially useful for completing assignments and developing skills to feed into their

chosen discipline. Most students, however, express a desire for more clarity and direction from their university (Balabdaoui et al., 2024). While students are often early adopters of new technologies, they may lack guidance on using AI tools effectively and ethically in academic and professional settings. Faculty, meanwhile, are navigating how to balance innovation with integrity in course design and assessment. With potential benefits to all aforementioned parties, there remains trepidation about when and how to implement AI into the classroom.

This study examined perspectives across seven courses in a small, private Midwest university's college of communication through the lens of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The UTAUT model was developed by Venkatesh et al. (2003) as a synthesis of eight different theories of technology acceptance, diffusion, and use in an effort to simplify understanding what inspires adoption and continued use of new technological tools (Kiwanuka, 2015). In brief, the model holds that an individual's behavioral intention to adopt a technology, and their eventual use of it, is shaped by four core constructs: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The study explored student perceptions of AI at the beginning and end of the semester, informed by hands-on experience and faculty reflections on their experiences incorporating AI into their classrooms. This research aims to inform future pedagogical strategies for integrating AI into communication education in meaningful and responsible ways by capturing shifts in understanding, usage, and ethical concerns.

Literature Review

All over the world, students are reporting use of artificial intelligence to help them complete assignments, but with a sense of trepidation (Rowse, 2024; Perkel 2025; Moran & Ackerman, 2024; Zuniga et al., 2024). Despite these concerns, early data show the dominant users of the popular chatbot tool ChatGPT are learners (Fore, 2025). As these computer models can be used to “simulate human intelligence, thus creating new forms of teaching and learning”(Rodrigues et al., 2023, p. 2), such as personalizing learning for each student and creating collaborative learning opportunities. Individual teaching tools that enhance unique learning needs, like adaptive assessments,

real-time feedback, and data-informed instructional strategies, can all be created with AI. AI can also lend a helping hand to instructors by automating routine tasks, which can reduce teacher workload. Additionally, when taught and used intentionally, AI platforms can promote interactive learning environments while also sharpening critical thinking and problem-solving skills (G. Adil, 2025).

That being said, students are right to have hesitations around AI use; while there are many robust opportunities for enhanced learning with AI, there are also many possible pitfalls, especially around student learning and academic integrity (Rodrigues et al., 2023). One of the biggest challenges in this area for students is assessing and receiving misleading answers from the AI. (Gokcearslan et al., 2024). This misinformation is either due to problematic training sets imparting biases in output (Tomlin, Patterson, & Torrance, 2023) or to an error in interpreting the training data, often called “hallucinations” (Østergaard & Nielbo, 2023). Students may lack the critical thinking abilities or foundational knowledge needed to recognize these problematic responses. On the professor's side, the disadvantages of AI chatbots for the educator include assessing the originality of student work, evaluating the level of student preparation, and difficulty in developing AI-supported assignments. (Gokcearslan et al., 2024).

Assessing originality or maintaining academic integrity is one of the biggest areas of study in the emerging scholarship around AI and educational use of it (Rodrigues et al, 2023). This is because academic integrity serves as the institutional framework designed to ensure genuine and high-quality learning occurs (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025). Students must not merely understand the material; they need to be able to evaluate its content and demonstrate essential skills or knowledge to that effect. Plagiarism has always been a troubling factor in education because it disrupts the demonstration of learning (Balalle & Pannilage, 2025), but it becomes more troubling when plagiarism becomes as easy as typing a paragraph of assignment instructions into a chatbot that can produce a multipage paper with ease in a few minutes (Perkins, 2023).

As it stands now, research shows students do not understand what AI uses for educational purposes are acceptable and what uses would qualify as an ethical breach of academic integrity (Lund et al., 2025). Yet,

even though AI plagiarism or “AIgarism” as one study called it, is more nuanced and complex than traditional plagiarism, students can understand general guidelines if they can connect it to prior knowledge of academic integrity standards (Chan, 2024). Showing that in the age of generative AI, educating students about how to properly use AI tools and what uses cross the line becomes imperative. Investing in both “protective and detective” measures becomes paramount to ensuring academic integrity follows academic institutions into the AI age.

This focus on educating students about AI use, plagiarism, and academic integrity has branched off into a study of the importance of AI policies. This is because “the implementation of clear policies is an essential component to creating a culture of academic integrity” (Möller, 2021). Adopting clear university-wide policies in addition to crafting and discussing course-specific policies has emerged as a clear way educators can proactively help students navigate using AI as an educational tool (Lund et al., 2025). This has inspired many educators to adopt AI policies in their syllabi (Marshall & DuBose, 2024).

Syllabi statements are a great place to start, but the literature shows that what students need most from professors is active guidance (ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee, 2024; Wan, 2024). One study found that “in the AI assisted experiential learning process, not only does clear step by step instruction matter, but the first training or practice activity provided to students affects their learning” (Sun & Deng, 2025 p.61). Another showed that instructor guidance and encouragement had a significant impact on learning, for “supported students tend to explore AI resources more, which leads to deeper engagement in their studies” (Geroche & Guay, 2024 p. 60). A focus group study on college students and faculties found an increasing need for institutional guidance on ethical use of AI since professors may have vastly different AI policies in their courses (Powers et al., 2025). This study suggested that faculties should not only explain the rationale of their AI policies, but also give students room to discuss it. Instruction that facilitates student empowerment or self-determination can greatly improve student learning using AI tools (Peterson, 2024). Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of students' perceptions of support, agency, and legitimacy in shaping their engagement with AI technologies. Students' willingness

to use AI appears closely tied to how instructional contexts frame its purpose and ethical boundaries.

Assessing the Importance of Policies and Instructor Guidance through the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

Based on these preliminary findings, it seems clear that the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) could provide a useful foundation for understanding how students decide to adopt and engage with new technologies like AI. This is because, according to the model, actual technology use is shaped by a person's behavioral intention, which is influenced by four key constructs: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The strength of these predictors varies depending on factors such as age, gender, experience, and whether the use of the technology is voluntary or required.

These constructs align closely with the questions at the center of this study. Faculty choices, syllabi statements, academic integrity policies, institutional resources, classroom norms, and students' perceptions of AI usefulness all operate as potential influences on student adoption of AI learning tools, making UTAUT a strong conceptual fit. Also of note, the model's attention to moderating variables such as age, gender, experience, and voluntariness of use supports a nuanced analysis of how different learners approach AI. By grounding the study in this framework, the authors can systematically examine which factors most strongly predict student engagement with AI tools and identify where instructional facilitation or institutional support may either strengthen or hinder adoption.

UTAUT was developed by combining constructs from eight different theories related to technology adoption and use. UTAUT pulls on constructs from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) which believes human behaviors are driven by intention and intention is determined by personal attitudes and subjective norms (Al-Suqri & Al-Kharusi, 2015); the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) which measures adoption by examining perceptions of usefulness and ease of use (Marangunic & Granic, 2014); the Motivational Model (MM) which explores whether individual motivation comes from internal or external factors (Venkatesh et al., 2003), the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) which explores how

perceived constraints or lack thereof impact desire to use or do something (Conner & Armitage, 1998), the Model of PC Utilization (MPCU) which examined facilitating or training conditions needed to lead to actual use of the technology rather than mere rally have up to 25 students per class, it allowed the participating faculty members to engage in meaningful conversations on their AI policy with the students.

Data collection involved a survey administered to students and written reflections from faculty members. Two surveys were administered at the beginning and the end of the semester to answer Research Question 1 and 2, which looked at students’ intention and intent to use AI in their academic and professional work through the four UTAUT’s constructs. Meanwhile, to answer Research Question 3a and 3b, which dove deeper into UTAUT’s Facilitating Condition from the perspective of faculty members, the researcher asked the participating faculty members to offer their written reflections after leading a class discussion on their course policy on AI and after evaluating students’ work on related assignments.

There were two phases of this study: the pilot study and the implementation phase. The pilot study was conducted in the fall of 2024. During the pilot study, seven faculty members within the College of Communication discussed their AI syllabus statement and the best practices in using AI in higher education and industry. They unanimously decided to use Stanford University’s guidelines to develop the AI syllabus statement. The six faculty members who were interested in participating in the study were later provided with a worksheet to reflect on their current syllabi’s policy and make adjustments as needed for the classes that they would teach. At the end of the study, only three faculties had the availability to provide their written reflection on their syllabi and active guidance on AI. The written reflections were collected in a Google doc and analyzed under the guidance of UTAUT’s Facilitating Condition. The answers were coded and categorized into two constructs namely clear expectation, which refers to the individualized AI syllabus statement, and consistent support, which refers to the facilitated discussion on AI use in the classroom. Each answer was compared and contrasted with the others until they reached saturation.

During the implementation phase of the study, participating faculty members were encouraged to finalize their individualized syllabus statements before

the start of the spring semester in 2025. They were also provided with two links to the surveys to be distributed to their students, along with instructions on the timeline. Each faculty member adopted a custom AI policy within their syllabus and assigned at least one project that required or encouraged the use of AI tools. On the first day of class, before any instruction about AI or discussion of course-specific policies, students were invited to complete an initial survey via Qualtrics; 188 students responded. This survey captured baseline data on students’ familiarity with, attitudes toward, and intended use of AI. A final survey, identical to the first outside of two questions asking students to reflect on the use of AI within the course, was administered at the end of the semester to measure any changes in attitudes and behaviors related to AI use in the classroom.

Results and Findings

Research Question 1 investigated how the exposure to AI tools through coursework influence students’ confidence and intent to use AI in future academic tasks. Meanwhile, Research Question 2 looked at how exposure to AI tools through coursework influence students’ confidence and intent to use AI in their professional careers. To answer Research Questions 1 and 2, a survey was administered to 188 students from pilot courses examining their attitudes toward AI in education. These pilot courses were taught by instructors participating in the College AI pilot program, each of whom had adopted a custom AI syllabus policy and assigned at least one project that encouraged the use of AI tools. All members of the Pilot Program were in the College of Communication at a small, private Midwest university.

Effort Expectancy (EE). Effort Expectancy (EE) reflects students’ perceptions of how easy AI tools are to learn and use. EE remained consistently high across the semester, with minimal change between pre- and post-semester surveys. At the beginning of the semester, 90% of students agreed that they were familiar with AI tools, compared to 92% at the end. Similarly, 84% of students initially agreed that AI tools are easy to use, increasing only slightly to 85% at semester’s end.

These findings indicate that students entered the course already perceiving AI as intuitive and highly accessible. This pattern suggests the presence of a ceiling effect—because baseline familiarity and ease-

Student Results

Table 1. Survey Result

Survey Item	Survey One – % Any Agree	Survey Two – % Any Agree
Effort Expectancy Items		
I am familiar with AI tools (such as ChatGPT or Google Bard)	90%	92%
I believe that AI tools are easy to use.	84%	85%
Performance Expectancy Items		
AI tools should be allowed and integrated into my education.	58%	67%
I believe that AI tools enhance the quality of my learning experience.	57%	62%
I believe that AI tools could be easily integrated into my coursework and study habits.	69%	71%
I understand how generative AI is used in the professional industry that I am studying.	53%	67%
I believe that AI tools will be useful in my future career.	62%	71%
I am concerned that AI tools pose a threat to my future job prospects.	53%	42%
Social Influence Item		
I believe the benefits of incorporating large language models in education outweigh potential risks and ethical concerns.	37%	37%
Facilitating Conditions Items		
I know and understand [my] University’s position on AI use.	83%	94%
I intend to use AI tools in this course.	16%	40%
I believe that the use of AI in education has been adequately addressed by my college/professors.	70%	82%
I clearly understand the teacher’s AI-related policies and best practices for this specific course.	79%	90%
I feel a sense of agency and confidence in making decisions about when and how to use AI tools for assignments in this specific course.	78%	82%
The use of AI tools in this course has positively impacted the quality of my work.	N/A	61%
I spend more time considering AI-related decisions for this course compared to other courses I am taking.	N/A	36%

of-use perceptions were already extremely high, there was little room for growth over the semester. Thus, EE was not a meaningful differentiator in student attitudes toward AI use in the classroom.

Performance Expectancy (PE). Performance Expectancy (PE) reflects the extent to which students believe AI tools are useful, beneficial, and relevant to academic or professional outcomes. In contrast to EE, PE increased meaningfully across the semester.

Agreement that AI tools should be allowed and integrated into education increased from 58% to 67%. Perceived enhancement of learning quality rose from 57% to 62%. Students also had a slight increase in reporting that AI could be integrated into their coursework and study habits (69% to 71%).

The largest observed gain was in students' agreement in understanding of how AI is used within their professional industry, increasing from 53% to 67%. Agreement that AI would be useful in their future career increased from 62% to 71%, while concern that AI poses a threat to future job prospects decreased from 53% to 42%.

Together, these findings indicate that students' perceptions of AI's value, legitimacy, and career relevance strengthened as the semester progressed. Structured, discipline-relevant exposure appears to have increased PE while simultaneously reducing job-related threat perceptions.

Social Influence (SI). Social Influence (SI) was operationalized as students' perceptions of whether the educational benefits of AI outweigh potential risks and ethical concerns. Agreement with this statement remained unchanged at 37% from the beginning to the end of the semester.

This stability suggests that students' perceptions of AI's broader ethical risk-benefit balance did not shift over the course, even as perceptions of usefulness and relevance increased. SI therefore appears to have remained neutral and externally anchored rather than classroom-dependent.

Facilitating Conditions (FC). Facilitating Conditions (FC) reflect the availability of institutional guidance, policy clarity, instructional support, and students' confidence in making AI-related decisions. FC improved across every measured dimension.

Agreement in understanding of the university's AI policy increased from 83% to 94%. Agreement that AI use had been adequately addressed by instructors or the college increased from 70% to 82%. Agreement

in understanding of course-specific AI policies rose from 79% to 90%, while students' agreement in their sense of confidence and agency in making AI-related decisions increased from 78% to 82%.

Importantly, intention to use AI tools in the course increased substantially from 16% to 40%. In addition, 61% of students at semester end reported that AI use positively impacted the quality of their work, while 36% reported spending more time considering AI-related choices in this course compared to others.

These findings indicate that students experienced greater structural, institutional, and instructional clarity regarding AI use, and reported higher levels of practical support and confidence in navigating AI-related academic decisions. FC therefore emerged as one of the most dynamic predictors in the model.

Summary Across Constructs. Across the semester, Effort Expectancy remained stable and high, suggesting that ease-of-use was not a barrier at any point, and students entered into courses with a belief in the ease of using AI platforms. Performance Expectancy and Facilitating Conditions increased substantially, while Social Influence remained unchanged. The observed increase in Behavioral Intention appears to align most strongly with gains in PE and FC, rather than with EE or SI.

These results informed the next phase of the study, faculty reflections on the outcomes of using AI within their courses. The faculty reflection illuminated their thoughts on the efficacy of their AI syllabus statement, the class discussion and student assignments. Alongside the quantitative findings, these insights will help evaluate the impact of AI integration on student learning and guide future pedagogical practices within communication education.

Faculty Findings

Research Question 3a asked how faculty members at the College of Communication reflected on their policy on using Artificial Intelligence in their syllabi. This question centered on UTAUT's Facilitating Condition, providing perspectives from faculty members who were expected to provide clear expectation and consistent support, which were essential for students' adoption of the technology (Mahande & Malago, 2019). Faculty participants reflect on the clear expectations that they set upon their students through their individualized AI syllabus statement.

To answer this question, the faculty participants were asked to share their AI syllabus statement. After that, they were asked to reflect on the changes that they incorporated after they were provided with the faculty guide for creating AI syllabus statements from Stanford University's Center for Teaching and Learning. Some questions that were asked include: Please walk us through some of the highlights in your new AI syllabus statement. What do you think of the efficacy of your new AI policy? How confident are you in guiding students through making decisions to use or not to use AI in your assignments? What were some of the considerations that you used when you decided to use AI in your course?

Three faculties responded to the written reflection in the limited time. UTAUT's construct, Facilitating Conditions, helped analyze the institutional support for navigating the technical details in creating the individualized AI syllabus statement. The faculty members reflected that the activity to build an AI use syllabus statement helped them craft a clearer and more intentional AI syllabus statement since it encouraged them to emphasize clarity, rationality, quality assurance plan, and prompt recommendation. It also helped them recognize the gap in the syllabus statement guidelines provided by the university. Professor Three said the worksheet was helpful to create a clear AI syllabus statement because the university's boilerplate language for AI syllabus statement was "too general".

"Thinking about the rationale of my AI policy has encouraged me to explain to the students why one particular assignment can benefit from the use of AI and why it may not be helpful for another assignment that has critical thinking as the learning outcome. It also gives me more confidence in showing students how to use the tool and how to spot its weaknesses."

– Professor Three

Similarly, Professor Two said the process of building an AI use syllabus statement was immensely valuable as it necessitated the parsing out of those tasks of any given assignment that were central to learning outcomes from those tasks that were not linked to learning outcomes. He said once that separation was complete, it was a much simpler process to determine when and how AI should be implemented.

"Frankly, even outside of the AI conversation,

that sorting of tasks based on the learning outcomes would have been useful. And, in the classroom, I was able to more-directly articulate what each assignment and task was trying to accomplish. It gave students my rationale and therefore provided clarity as to when AI should be utilized."

– Professor Two

Faculty members participating in the research clearly stated in their syllabus which assignments in their course that could or could not benefit from using AI and explained the rationale. They allowed AI use by students for certain assignments as long as they disclosed it upon submission, showing that they uniformly emphasize transparency in their AI policy. The professors allowed the use of AI for specific purposes that would help kickstart the project or streamline the work, such as ideation, data organization, outlining, editing, and graphics development.

Research Question 3b asked how faculty members at the College of Communication reflected on their policy on using Artificial Intelligence in their course assignment(s). This question also centered on UTAUT's Facilitating Condition, providing perspectives from faculty members who were expected to provide clear expectation and consistent support, which were essential for students' adoption of the technology (Mahande & Malago, 2019). The faculty participants reflected on the consistent support that they provided in the form of a dedicated discussion session on their AI policy in their course assignment(s) and their observation on the students' willingness or hesitancy in the use of AI. The reflection questions include: You have walked through your students with your AI policy for your course. Please describe your observation of the discussion session on AI with your students. What were some of the surprises that you found after reflecting on the students' discussion questions? What was your observation on their assignment submissions?

The findings revealed how the class discussion on the benefits and setbacks of AI use that was done before launching the assignments helped faculty members recognize areas in which students still have a gap in knowledge about AI. This class discussion revealed the UTAUT's Facilitating Conditions, which provided supports for the students in understanding the class' policies regarding the use of AI since each facul-

ty may have different policies.

“While students appreciate AI’s utility, many remain uncertain about where to draw ethical lines. This tension showcases the importance of having open discussion about what the ethical uses of AI are within academia and the professional world.”

— Professor One

Meanwhile, Professor Two recognized that open communication about AI helped minimize the fear about crossing the line because they could build “a conversation without embarrassment or shame.” Students increasingly became more comfortable asking questions such as, ‘would this be something that AI might help with?’ and ‘is this an area to use AI, or would that be something that I shouldn’t do?’

Professor Three was surprised to find that fewer than 10 percent of the students used AI in their assignments. Hesitancy and embarrassment in using AI were an area that could be explored later in focus group discussions in future studies. Exploration in this area may also add a new understanding on students’ perception on the Performance Expectancy and their behavioral intention toward the acceptance of the use of AI. Most students properly disclose their use of AI as explained in the syllabi, which suggests that they benefited from the more intentional AI syllabi statement and the class discussion.

Discussion

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings reinforce the central proposition of UTAUT that perceived usefulness and structural support meaningfully shape intention to use emerging technologies. Students entered into their courses with a generally high perception of AI tools as easy to use and intuitive, as reflected in their answers to our EE survey items. Their stable answers across the course suggest that ease of use is not a meaningful barrier to AI adoption among undergraduate students.

Instead, the largest perceptual shifts emerged in Performance Expectancy and Facilitating Conditions, indicating that what changes over the semester is not whether students can/will use AI, it is their perceptions of when, where, and how to use it. Across the semester students reported increased agreement that AI tools could: be integrated into coursework, enhance learning quality, and be useful in their profes-

sional futures. These findings align with prior research identifying Performance Expectancy as the strongest predictor of technology adoption (Taiwo & Downe, 2013), and they suggest that guided, discipline and profession-specific exposure helps students understand AI’s usefulness and its limitations. Notably, students reported reduced concern that AI would threaten their future job prospects. This was supported by faculty reflections on students discovering the limits of AI’s abilities at the time. Rather than amplifying fear, AI integration in the classroom helps situate AI as a complement rather than a competitor for human work. One explanation for this paired shift, the rising confidence in AI’s career usefulness (62% to 71%) alongside falling concern about its threat to job prospects (53% to 42%), is that hands-on, discipline-specific exposure reframed AI from an abstract competitor into a concrete professional tool with discoverable strengths and limits. As students encountered where AI was genuinely useful and where it fell short in their own field, they appear to have come to view it as a tool to be directed rather than be displaced by. The same firsthand experience that revealed AI’s practical value also exposed its boundaries, which would simultaneously raise its perceived career relevance and temper the sense of it as a wholesale replacement for their future labor.

The large change in the items related to Facilitating Conditions further highlights the pivotal role of faculty and institutional guidance. Students’ reported understanding of institutional and course-specific AI policies increased substantially across the semester, as did students’ sense of agency and intention of using AI in the course. Those patterns strongly reinforce the literature suggesting that policy clarity, explicit rationale, and meaningful discussions shape ethical AI engagement over purely rule-setting (Lund et al., 2025; Wan, 2024). The faculty reflections further demonstrated that crafting intentional AI policies prompted instructors to align AI use with learning outcomes. This reinforces the idea that facilitation of technology is best when implemented as a pedagogical change, rather than a logistical change. These gains, however, warrant caution. Even as students’ intention to use AI in the course more than doubled (16% to 40%) and their sense of agency grew, their agreement that AI’s educational benefits outweigh its risks and ethical concerns, the study’s Social Influence item, remained flat at 37% across the semester. This

divergence is itself a finding worth taking seriously: rising willingness to adopt AI was not accompanied by a corresponding rise in students’ critical weighing of its risks. Such an imbalance carries real pedagogical danger, as it suggests that facilitation can accelerate adoption faster than it cultivates the ethical scrutiny needed to use these tools responsibly. Guided integration must therefore pair encouragement of use with deliberate attention to ethical reasoning, lest the very clarity and support that make AI feel legitimate outpace students’ capacity to interrogate its limitations, biases, and potential for harm.

These findings highlight the evolving role of AI within communication education and underscore the need for intentional, guided integration of these tools into pedagogy. While students are generally familiar with AI and see its potential utility, their hesitations—particularly around ethics, academic appropriateness, and future job impacts—suggest that communication programs must address these concerns directly. Embedding AI literacy into coursework can help students critically evaluate and ethically apply these technologies within media, public relations, and advertising contexts. Moreover, communication faculty have a unique opportunity to model responsible AI use, fostering both technical proficiency and reflective engagement. By bridging the gap between accessibility and intentional application, communication programs can prepare students not only to use AI, but to lead conversations about its implications in professional and public discourse. Our contribution to the scholarship on technology acceptance lies in the faculty member’s enhanced role in establishing performance expectancies and facilitating conditions. Further, by connecting tasks to learning outcomes and professional practices in the discipline, the conceptualization of social influence moves beyond the immediate social group and into the student’s given professional landscape. Lastly, this study lends further support to the ongoing body of research showing UTAUT’s applicability to AI adoption and use.

Limitations and Future Research

Though this study produced several important outcomes, it was not without limitations. One limitation of the current study was that it explored generative AI use for course-specific tasks rather than also including broader implementation or implementation outside of the classroom. Future research should con-

tinue to explore student use of AI in a more holistic manner. For example, future studies might include AI use in areas such as across multiple courses, work responsibilities, student groups, and personal communication. A second limitation to this study is that it did not include the instructor’s own experiences and use of generative AI. Another limitation of the study was the smaller number of faculty members who completed the final reflection survey. Despite the enthusiasm to participate in this study at the beginning of the semester, future research should account for the hectic situations that the faculty participants face at the end of the semester and plan to collect the data accordingly. A further limitation concerns measurement. In the student survey, the Social Influence construct was captured with a single item, whereas the other constructs were each measured with multiple items. This single-item operationalization limits the reliability of the Social Influence measure and constrains comparison with the other constructs; it may also partly account for the absence of any observed movement on this item across the semester. Future research should employ a validated, multi-item Social Influence scale to assess this construct more robustly. Similar to the recommendation for expanding the scope of use for students, future research might also approach faculty from a more holistic manner, examining use in areas for faculty such as research, teaching, service assignments, administrative duties, academic program design, and personal communication. This broader approach might also parse out distinctions between faculty use and student use. Therefore, future research should compare the perceptions held by course instructors and students of each other’s use to explore how perceptions align (or don’t align) with realities of AI use.

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