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DOI: [https://doi.  
org/10.38140/com.  
v49i.8928](https://doi.org/10.38140/com.v49i.8928)

ISSN 2415-0525 (Online)

Communitas 2024 29:  
128-141

Date submitted:  
8 August 2024

Date accepted:  
1 October 2024

Date published:  
31 December 2024

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# APPROPRIATION OF ANALYTICS DATA IN PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

## ABSTRACT

Advances in technology allow organisations to collect and analyse huge volumes of data from a wide variety of sources. Analytics data (raw data to be analysed) gleaned from internal and external sources is transforming the world of business and also the public relations (PR) profession by informing decision-making. Despite the potential that analytics data holds for PR, few studies have examined how analytics data is being appropriated into PR functions. Premised on the excellence theory of PR, the concept of technological appropriation, and in-depth interviews with purposively selected PR practitioners, this study investigated how PR practitioners in South Africa are harnessing analytics data to enhance decision-making. The findings of the study confirm that PR practitioners are appropriating analytics data to enhance their practice. However, the appropriation of analytics data is still confined to the technical and managerial functions with little evidence suggesting that practitioners are harnessing analytics data to inform the PR strategist function. The findings suggest extending insights gleaned from analytics data to the PR strategist function for the profession to add more value to organisations.

**Keywords:** analytics data, data analytics, public relations, technological appropriation, decision-making, corporate communication, integrated communication

## INTRODUCTION

Advances in technology allow organisations to collect huge volumes of data from a wide variety of internal and external data streams (Kochbar & Weiner, 2016; Makwambeni *et al.*, 2023). The data gleaned from various data streams such as company websites, social network pages, organic social media conversations and government data is rapidly transforming the world of business and is considered the oil of the information economy (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013). The data assists organisations to improve their performance by providing critical insights about consumers, employees, competitors, the media, and other

critical stakeholders. Analytics data is adding value to contemporary organisations by providing key role players and decision-makers with intelligence that assists them to set objectives and to create better and more efficient strategies and tactics (Kochhar & Weiner, 2016). These authors (2016) state that organisations that have embraced analytics data are now able to make accurate predictions and deduce meanings and patterns that help them to make informed decisions.

A survey of the literature shows that the appropriation of analytics data in decision-making processes has made huge inroads into business-allied fields such as sales, marketing, and advertising. However, the potential that analytics data holds to improve public relations (PR) practice has received little attention thus far. Similarly, there is a paucity of studies that have sought to understand analytics data as a tool, or its utility and appropriation in contemporary PR practice (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015). Few studies in the field of PR have engaged with emergent concepts such as big data, data analytics (the process of analysing data) and analytics data (the raw data to be analysed), and the opportunities these present for PR functions (Weiner & Kochhar, 2016; Wiesenber *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, scholars such as Wiesenber *et al.* (2017) have called for studies that examine the use of analytics data in the field of PR in light of its perceived benefits.

The few studies that have engaged on analytics data in the field of PR have largely been conceptual in nature (Arcos, 2016; Kochbar & Weiner, 2016; Wiesenber *et al.*, 2017). These authors contend that analytics data has the potential to improve PR practice by providing intelligence that can be used to enhance technical functions such as media monitoring, audience targeting, and evaluating campaigns. These studies largely view analytics data as a useful tool for bringing greater efficiency and effectiveness to traditional PR functions (see Kochbar & Weiner, 2016). However, there is a scarcity of empirical studies that examine how PR practitioners are appropriating analytics data in PR practice. As a result, there is limited knowledge of how analytics data adds value to PR practice by enhancing Excellent PR (see Arcos, 2016). Arcos (2016) asserts that analytics data can add more value to organisations when it is harnessed to enhance the reflective role of the PR strategist. The role of the reflective PR strategist, as envisaged in Excellent PR, goes beyond the traditional technician and managerial functions to include gathering intelligence about the organisation's environment and stakeholders with a view to shaping the enterprise strategy (Steyn, 2009). Arcos (2016) posits that analytics data can enhance the strategic PR function by providing organisations with vital information that is needed to adapt their strategies to their dynamic and evolving contexts.

This article contributes to the growing literature on analytics data and AI in the field of PR from a Global South perspective by examining how PR practitioners in South Africa are appropriating analytics data into their practice. It goes further to assess whether the appropriation of analytics data in PR practice adds value to South African organisations. The insights gleaned from the study are further articulated to broader discussions on how PR practitioners can leverage the full potential of analytics data to enhance their contribution to the organisation and its stakeholders.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Analytics data and decision-making in organisations

Recent advancements in technology such as innovations in machine learning and data analytics have exponentially increased organisations' capacity to collect an unprecedented amount of structured and unstructured data from internal and external sources. The analytics data gleaned from external and external sources now provides contemporary organisations with valuable insights that have the potential to drive and improve decision-making (Wiesenberg *et al.*, 2017; Weiner & Kochhar, 2016). Consequently, organisations across various fields have now embraced a wide variety of data analytic tools that turn high volumes of fast-moving and diverse data into meaningful insights (Haider & Gandomi, 2015). The analytics data derived from multiple data streams is being leveraged to inform evidence-based decision-making.

A number of studies have shown that organisations have adopted a wide range of data analytics tools to generate analytics data that guide their actions and decision-making on a day-to-day basis (Haider & Gandomi, 2015; Che *et al.*, 2013). Che *et al.* (2013) identify four main types of data analytics techniques employed by organisations to enhance decision-making: predictive, descriptive, diagnostic, and prescriptive.

Predictive analytics is mainly used by organisations to make valuable predictions about the future. This is done through uncovering patterns and relationships that are hidden in raw data. Predictive analytics categorise and predict occurrences, behaviour or phenomena based on regularities, patterns, and relationships, as well as networks that are largely invisible. The aim of predictive analytics is to prescribe or control actions (Haider & Gandomi, 2015). Banerjee *et al.* (2013) posit that descriptive analytics focus on what occurred, while diagnostic analytics help to explain why it occurred. Prescriptive analytics, on the other hand, is used to guide future strategies. It particularly enriches the management process by providing direction on what should be done when certain events occur (LaValle *et al.*, 2011). However, empirical studies done across the world indicate that organisations are not yet deriving full value from analytics data. A study by LaValle *et al.* (2011) conducted among business executives, managers, and analysts across the world found that analytics data is mostly used in a descriptive way to justify actions within organisations.

### Analytics data and PR

With the rise of analytics data and its increasing appropriation in fields such as marketing and advertising, a growing number of scholars have enumerated the opportunities that analytics data holds for the field of PR (Netzer *et al.*, 2012; Rogers & Sexton, 2012; Weiner & Kochhar, 2016). The debate surrounding the utility of analytics data for PR has led to the coining of the term "analytics-driven PR" to refer to the new development in the field where strategic decisions are increasingly influenced and informed by analytics data (Weiner & Kochhar, 2016).

A review of the literature on analytics data and PR shows that current studies have largely been conceptual. Although there is consensus among scholars that analytics data has the potential to enhance decision-making in PR practice, empirical research on the appropriation and use of analytics data in PR is scant and underdeveloped (see Arcos, 2016). There is a dearth of empirical studies, particularly from the Global South, which examine whether and how analytics data is being appropriated to enhance strategic decision-making in organisations.

Thus far, a few studies have engaged with the question on how analytics data can be harnessed to inform actions and decision-making in the field of PR (Phillips, 2015; Arcos, 2016; Weiner & Kochhar, 2016; Tam & Kim, 2019). Most extant studies view analytics data as critical in enhancing the efficacy of PR tactics in light of the overall business impact (Weiner & Kochhar, 2016). For example, Weiner and Kochhar's (2016) study found that analytics data is most useful for decision-making on PR campaign strategy development and for measuring and evaluating the impact of PR programmes and activities. In this article I argue that most studies that have discussed the role of analytics data in enhancing decision-making in PR and communication have narrowly focused on the technical and managerial PR functions and overlooked the PR strategic function that is associated with Excellent PR. There are limited studies that conceptually engage with how analytics data can be harnessed to inform the PR strategist function, which is more reflective in nature (see Steyn, 2009).

However, a more recent study by Tam and Kim (2019) highlighted the need to extend the use of analytics data in PR beyond the traditional technical and managerial roles to include the strategic PR function. According to Tam and Kim (2019) and Arcos (2016), analytics data should be appropriated with a view to enhancing the strategic PR function by informing its key intelligence-led roles, such as environmental scanning and boundary-spanning. This notable shift in the thinking surrounding the role of analytics data in PR has given rise to the notion of data-driven and intelligence-led PR. Data-driven and intelligence-led PR engages with how analytics data should be used to generate intelligence and insights that inform strategic PR (Arcos, 2016).

## **Analytics-driven and intelligence-led PR**

PR studies over time have engaged with the question of how the profession can be practiced in such a way that it brings maximum value to organisations. The debates surrounding this topic have coalesced around what is now popularly known as the Excellence Study from which emerged the excellence theory of PR (Grunig, 2006). It is against this background that Arcos' (2016) seminal article posits that for contemporary organisations to derive maximum value from analytics data they need to harness the intelligence gleaned from the data to enhance the PR strategic role that defines Excellent PR. In a marked departure from other studies, Arcos (2016) contends that analytics data adds more value to organisations when it is galvanised by PR professionals to identify new societal issues and stakeholders' values, norms and expectations around these issues; and assisting in aligning organisational behaviour to what is socially acceptable. Arcos's contention is largely that analytics

data should be used to enhance the three critical pillars of the PR strategist, as conceptualised by Steyn (2006), namely, environmental scanning, organisational stakeholders, and societal issues.

The role of analytics data in providing critical intelligence to the PR strategist has given rise to the concept of intelligence-led PR that focuses on how analytics data should be used to generate intelligence and insights that inform strategic PR (Arcos, 2016). The concept of intelligence-led PR is premised on the notion that PR strategists can draw foreknowledge and other critical insights from analytics data. The foreknowledge and insights drawn from the data provide the organisation with intelligence that assists management to identify drivers of change and to anticipate and interpret developments in the environment. Thus, the intelligence drawn from analytics data contributes towards enhancing the strategic function of PR by providing accurate and reliable insights that inform decision-making in the organisation as a whole.

Analytics-driven and intelligence-led Excellent PR is characterised by the use of data to know, understand, and explain what is happening and is likely to happen within the organisation's environment and to their stakeholders (Arcos, 2016; Tam & Kim, 2019). It harnesses analytics data to perform the listening function as part of the environmental scanning and boundary-spanning function. It assists PR practitioners to identify potential PR problems, sense emerging issues, and identify active and activist publics who communicate about these issues. Moreso, analytics-driven PR harnesses data to understand the networks of issues associated with an organisation's public. In so doing it allows PR practitioners to understand stakeholders' experiences and respond timeously.

In agreement with Steyn's (2009) conceptualisation of the role of the PR strategist, analytics-driven PR uses the intelligence drawn from analytics data to strengthen PR strategists' anticipatory function (Arcos, 2016). The anticipatory function involves early detection of problems and issues and their potential impact on the organisation, identifying opportunities for the organisation, as well as researching and communicating the attitudes and opinions of stakeholders to the dominant coalition. Thus, analytics and intelligence-driven PR has the ability to empower PR strategists by capacitating them to extract insights from data from which they can draw conclusions and implications on a wide range of issues relevant to the organisation.

## Conceptualising Excellent PR and technological appropriation

This article's assessment of the appropriation of analytics data in PR practice in South Africa is informed by two broad concepts: concepts surrounding Excellent PR, and technological appropriation. While the concepts of Excellence PR are valuable in assessing the specific PR functions that have been enriched by analytics data, as well as whether the appropriation of analytics data in PR adds value to organisations, technological appropriation assists in understanding the diverse ways in which analytics data is being customised and reconfigured to suit the South African context and its peculiarities.

The excellency theory (Grunig, 2006) posits that for the PR function to add value to an organisation, PR practitioners should be empowered to participate in strategic management and contribute towards the development of the enterprise strategy. The theory contends that for PR to be excellent, it ought to become a strategic management function that goes beyond messaging, publicity, and media relations. It views the strategic function of PR more as a symmetrical framework of research and listening (Grunig & Grunig, 2008). In this light, Excellent PR becomes synonymous with the PR strategist function whose focus includes undertaking formal and informal information-gathering activities whose insights are then harnessed towards decision-making and strategic management in the organisation (Grunig, 2006).

According to Grunig (2006) and Steyn (2009), Excellent PR should be underpinned by environmental scanning, boundary spanning, and other anticipatory functions like issues management. These functions are viewed as critical in bringing an outside perspective to strategic decision-making (Grunig, 2006). The role of the PR strategist is to gather intelligence from the environment and harness it for scenario building, counselling of management, management of the behaviour of the organisation, as well as building relationships with stakeholders and other strategic publics. In other words, the main objective of Excellent PR as a strategic function is to build relationships with stakeholders as opposed to developing a set of messaging activities that buffer the organisation from its public.

Complementing Grunig's work on Excellent PR, Steyn (2009) provides a South African perspective on the strategic role of PR. Steyn (2009) developed the term "reflective strategist" to refer to the inward role of the PR strategist. According to Steyn (2009), the PR strategist as a reflective strategist acts as a sensor who selects information on what is considered to be socially responsible behaviour in society. They encourage members of the organisation to balance their behaviour in relation to societal expectations, values and norms. They assist in making the organisation deserving of trust; explain to top management the impact of their behaviour on key external stakeholders; function as an early warning system to top management before issues erupt into crises; and perform the role of an advocate for external stakeholders by explaining their views to top management. As a critical part of the dominant coalition, the reflective strategist reduces uncertainty in strategic decision-making by interpreting the external environment to top management. Steyn (2009) further views the role of the reflective strategist as located at the macro or societal level. It is an information acquisition that assumes an outside-in approach to strategic management and makes strategic contributions towards the enterprise strategy. Focused on strategic reflection, the reflective strategist acts as a coordinating mechanism between the organisation and the environment by providing management with an outside (societal) perspective that assists them to reflect on the organisation's position in the bigger context with the aim of balancing organisational goals with the well-being of society.

The concept of technological appropriation relates to how individuals change and recognise technologies to respond to their political, economic, social and organisational settings, and working practices (Janeck, 2009). The concept is built on the notion that when technology is introduced, individuals and groups may embrace, appropriate,

and use it in novel ways that are motivated by their goals. Technological appropriation encompasses the normal customisation and reconfiguration of technology to suit local needs. However, it also acknowledges the fact that technology may be appropriated for reasons other than those that it was originally intended for (Dourish, 2003; Orlikowski *et al.*, 1995).

A number of studies generally regard technological appropriation as positive and beneficial to both individuals and their organisations (cf. Baillette & Kimble, 2009). Baillette and Kimble's study (2009) reviewed Francophone and Anglophone literature and found that the idea of appropriation when used in conjunction with ICT is mostly seen as having positive connotations. This view is echoed by Obijiofor (2003) who contends that whenever innovative technologies are introduced, the expectation is that there will be improved efficiencies and attendant economic benefits. Thus, new technologies are always assumed to be appropriate. Although studies that employ technological appropriation in the context of PR are scant, the concept has been widely studied by scholars in media and communication to understand the appropriation of new technology in the broader field. De-Lima-Santos and Mesquita (2021) employed technological appropriation as a lens to examine how the use of new technologies is affecting news organisations. Similarly, Munoriyarwa *et al.* (2021) used the concept to determine the extent to which AI has been adopted, as well as how journalists and editors perceive its appropriation in news-making practices in Africa.

## METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study made use of an interpretivism-informed qualitative methodology to understand how PR practitioners in South Africa are appropriating analytics data into their practice. An interpretive approach enabled the researcher to gain access to first-hand primary data on how PR practitioners construct and experience analytics data in their day-to-day work (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected PR practitioners across the corporate sector in South Africa. The participants were drawn from the mining sector, agriculture, retail, insurance, accounting, and government. Particular attention was paid to the role and experience of the PR practitioners. The selected sample consisted of PR practitioners with at least three years of work experience who perform technical, managerial, and/or strategic functions in their organisations. The diversity of the PR professionals sampled was meant to enable the researcher to gain a nuanced understanding of the use of analytics data across the three broad PR functions, as identified by Steyn (2009). A total of 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with PR professionals in South Africa between June and October 2021. While the sample used in the study is small and not representative of all PR professionals in South Africa, the intention was not to attain generalisability but to understand particularities.

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews was transcribed and the transcriptions were subsequently checked to ensure accuracy. The data analysis process involved selecting, appraising, and synthesising the corpus of data collected using semi-structured interviews. The data was then analysed and coded thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) and Denscombe's (2007) recommendations.

Descriptive qualitative paragraphs about the identified themes, supported by quotations, were developed in line with the three major PR functions. The themes were then related back to the literature review and the conceptual framework of the study in order to understand whether the appropriation of analytics data by PR professionals in South Africa enhances Excellent PR.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study show that PR professionals in South Africa have widely appropriated analytics data at the micro and meso levels to perform the implementation and information disposal roles of PR technicians and managers at the operational level (Steyn, 2000; 2007). Very few PR professionals who participated in the study have begun to harness analytics data to strengthen the strategic PR function associated with strategic reflection. These findings resonate with the technological appropriation that holds that the appropriation of technology is shaped by among others contextual peculiarities. The appropriation of analytics data in South Africa seems to cohere with findings of previous studies that have shown that the managerial and technician roles, as opposed to the strategic role, dominate PR practice in South Africa (Steyn, 2009).

### Appropriation of analytics data at the micro-organisational level

#### *Use of analytics data to enhance PR strategies and tactics*

The findings indicate that PR professionals in South Africa have appropriated analytics data to enhance the role of the PR technician, which is performed at the micro or programme or implementational level (Steyn, 1999). This role is associated with the output function of PR practitioners. It is involved with programme implementation through the preparation and dissemination of PR tactics. The findings further indicate that PR professionals in South Africa are mainly using analytics data to plan, implement and evaluate PR programmes. Analytics data is being harnessed to inform decision-making surrounding the tactics and strategies to use to improve the efficacy of PR programmes. At the programme level, analytics data is enabling PR practitioners to gain insights on audience behaviour and characteristics with a view to targeting their audience more efficiently and effectively. The appropriation of analytics data at the micro level is articulated by one of the participants as follows:

Analytics data influences the choices we make in terms of which channels we use, and what content we post to social media or traditional media. Analytics help us to know what time our audiences are online; we are able to know the exact time we should send messages to them to get better results. Analytics data helps us to better target the populations that we want. For example, at the moment, we are trying to reach adolescent young women and trying to identify where these people are, what media they consume, and what kind of content they consume. So basically, the analytics data that we collect is used to inform our communication strategies, re-strategise where we are lacking, or find where the gaps are. It also helps us to understand what content works so that we can expand on it or upscale on that kind of content that is doing well.



This shows that analytics data has become valuable in executing the expressive task of the PR professional at the functional and implementation strategy level (Steyn & Niemann, 2014). PR practitioners are eliciting data on audience reach, audience age, likes, comments, shares, reposts, clicks, and active times from analytics data. This data enables PR professionals to develop more effective campaigns and strategies and to also direct how and where the budget is spent. As argued by Stacks (2011), knowledge is needed for the design and implementation of communication campaigns. Such intelligence has to be provided at an early stage, thereby offering a timely foundation for defining the communication strategy and the key messages.

Analytics data also provides PR professionals with more objective and scientific ways to strengthen their programmes at the micro and meso levels. The findings show that PR professionals have appropriated data analytic tools such as Google Analytics, WebDATARocks, and Hootsuite to gather analytics data to enhance their programmes. According to the findings, WebDATARocks has been appropriated to visualise data about campaigns. The data analytics tool summarises and aggregates data in a way that provides PR professionals with insights in real time. In similar vein, Hootsuite has been embraced to strengthen the effectiveness of programmes and campaigns. Hootsuite provides PR professionals with a clear and concise overview of Facebook, X, and Instagram activity. With the rise of celebrity culture and social media influencers in South Africa and globally, PR professionals have also begun to use analytics data to choose influencers who will drive their campaigns and programmes at the micro level. PR practitioners who participated in this study said that analytics data helps them to identify influencers based on the nature and characteristics of their followers and the influencer's audience reach and interests, among other factors.

The findings further indicate that PR professionals have appropriated analytics data for process evaluation purposes, which involve monitoring the performance of programmes and campaigns. Analytics data assists them to break down the specifics of PR programmes and campaigns:

We want to achieve as wide a reach as possible with our communication, and therefore monitor our analytics to see what does well in which media, and then push our messages even more in that media. We use Google Analytics to measure webpage visitation. We can then determine which pages do well, and make changes to promote important pages which do not get wide visitation. We use analytics data to measure traffic or number of users going in and out of our webpages and we are able to pull out and break down specifics of the data we have into groups.

These findings resonate with previous studies that have shown that analytics data can be harnessed to enhance the efficacy of PR tactics and strategies (Weiner & Kochhar, 2016).

#### *Analytics data and PR measurement*

The findings further indicate that analytics data is also increasingly used to measure the impact of PR programmes and campaigns. While PR professionals at the functional level use the feedback derived from analytics data to improve their tactics

and strategies, PR managers harness analytics data at the meso level to measure the performance of their campaigns with a view to justifying to management and clients the return on investment (ROI). The criticality of analytics data for PR measurement is captured by one of the PR managers who participated in the study:

We use big data analytics as a reporting tool when it comes to putting together a report once a campaign has been completed. This helps show the management and client the amount of engagement picked up by the campaign as well as how well the message was received. Data would be on results of coverage received by media and how many hits the media release received. If this is shared via social media as well, we would look at how well it reached the audience based on impressions. Management appreciate our role when we quantify things, not just share abstract views about our success.

Analytics data assists PR managers to justify their contribution to the organisation's bottom line. Moreso, the appropriation is also simultaneously positive to management who have long sought to quantify and justify the contribution that PR makes to organisations' bottom line. PR professionals appropriate data analytic tools such as Newsclip and Ponolelo to assist them to gauge the performance and impact of their work:

We use analytics data to report back to clients regarding content, coverage and media relations. Due to the old AVE [Advertising Value Equivalency] being ruled out almost globally, data analytics tools have been prominent for showcasing results to management and clients. We mainly use Newsclip and Ponolelo. They are good for showing management and clients whether the content was negative or positive when seen by the media, as well as how much coverage was picked up from each media release disseminated to the media.

Thus, instead of relying on traditional tools for measuring and evaluating their work, PR professionals performing both technical and managerial functions at the micro and meso levels have embraced analytics data and data analytic tools to assist them to efficiently measure the impact of their work.

#### *Appropriation of analytics data at the meso-organisational level*

According to Steyn (2009) and Engelbrecht and Ferreira (2022), the role of the PR manager is performed at the meso level. It involves the development of communication policies and programmes; managing information input; determining what and how it should be communicated to the publics; as well as identifying, managing, and anticipating threats coming from external and internal environments. In the age of social media, the role of the PR includes social media campaigns and is also associated with boundary-spanning where information is shared internally with the relevant decision-makers to help develop an overall corporate communication strategy (Dozier & Broom, 2006). PR managers have appropriated data analytic tools such as Newsclip, Pear and Brandseye for media monitoring and sentiment tracking and analysis:

We use data analytics to gauge how well we do in the media. We also identify negative sentiments and measure how wide negative publicity spread. Data analytics act as an early warning system to flag issues that may become crises. It is essential for measuring sentiment on certain topics.

From the above, it is clear that PR managers are using data analytic tools to draw analytics data to perform their managerial functions at the meso level. However, this article contends that the current use of analytics data by PR professionals is yet to percolate the macro level where PR strategists harness data to influence the dominant coalition at the macro or organisational level (see Steyn, 1999; Engelbrecht & Ferreira, 2022). The data analysed reflects little utilisation of analytics data by PR professionals in decision-making at the macro level where data can be potentially harnessed to determine the approach an organisation takes towards communication with stakeholders.

#### *Appropriation of analytics data at the macro-organisational level*

Arcos (2016) as well as Wiencierz and Röttger (2019) posit that for analytics data to add value to organisations, it needs to be appropriated not only at the micro and the meso levels, but most importantly, at the meso level where the PR strategist can influence both the dominant coalition and the enterprise strategy. In this light, harnessing analytics data at the meso level entails drawing critical intelligence as part of media monitoring, environmental scanning, social listening, issue tracking and using the insights gleaned to identify strategic stakeholders, detect and anticipate changes in the environment, as well as identifying issues that affect the publics' attitudes and opinions toward the organisation. It further involves intelligence gathering for policy formulation, corporate strategy formulation, and strategic role-playing (Steyn, 2009).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought to understand how analytics data is being appropriated into PR practice in South Africa. Using the concept of Excellent PR, the study further assessed whether the current use and appropriation of analytics data in PR practice add value to organisations. The findings of the study show that analytics data has been widely embraced by PR professionals in South Africa. It is used to strengthen the PR technician and managerial functions at the micro and meso levels. However, analytics data is still underutilised at the PR strategic function that is reflective in nature and associated with Excellent PR. These findings suggest the urgent need by PR practitioners in South Africa to embrace analytics data at the macro-organisational level if they are to add more value to organisations. Analytics data holds potential for PR practice and organisations in South Africa. It has the potential to assist PR professionals to tap into critical insights that will influence management to adapt organisational strategies to societal values, norms, and expectations while also balancing the quest for the realisation of organisational goals. More needs to be done to harness analytics data to perform the reflective strategist function. This will allow the PR strategist to effectively perform their role of counselling management on what is considered socially responsible behaviour, while also encouraging members of the organisation to balance their behaviour in relation to societal expectations, values and norms.

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