

**Public Relations Society of America**  
**Board of Ethics and Professional Standards**  
**Code of Ethics Case Study Series**

**AI-Generated Press Releases and Bias**

Your PR firm is helping a company that is launching a new AI-powered personal assistant app. You use an AI writing tool to generate a press release.

*AI-Generated Press Release Excerpt:*

*"Introducing 'Serena,' your intuitive AI companion! Serena is designed to simplify your life, anticipating your needs before you even realize them. From scheduling appointments to managing your smart home, Serena is always there, ready to assist with a gentle, reassuring presence. Her feminine voice and helpful demeanor make interacting with technology a truly delightful experience. The modern woman will find Serena especially invaluable in balancing her busy schedule and managing family life. Serena is available for download on all major app stores."*

You are starting to get some feedback from consumers, which includes complaints about the gendered language and stereotypes.

**1. Define the specific ethical issue/conflict.**

- The ethical issue in this scenario is the use of **gendered language and stereotypes** in promotional content, which may perpetuate bias and alienate certain audiences.
- Specifically, the press release:  
Assigns a gender ("her feminine voice") to the AI assistant without necessity, reinforcing the stereotype that caregiving, scheduling, and household management are inherently feminine roles.
- Although the text does not describe Serena herself as a modern woman, it frames "the modern woman" as the archetype who will find Serena especially invaluable—implying that this role and need are gender-specific.
- Risks excluding or offending users who do not identify with these assumptions or who view such framing as outdated or discriminatory.
- Raises a responsibility issue for the PR professional to ensure inclusive, respectful, and unbiased communication that avoids reinforcing societal stereotypes.

**2. Identify internal/external factors (e.g., legal, political, social, economic) that may influence the decision.**

**Internal Factors (Within the PR Firm):**

**Firm Culture and Values:** A firm with a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) will likely prioritize correcting the press release and implementing preventive measures. Conversely, a firm that prioritizes profit over ethical considerations might resist making changes or downplay the issue. According to the PRSA Code of Ethics, the value of *Fairness* emphasizes respect for all audiences and the avoidance of bias in communications—an explicit link between DEI and ethical practice.

**Leadership's Stance:** The leadership's attitude towards DEI and ethical communication will significantly influence the PR professional's decision. If leaders are supportive, it will be easier to take corrective action. If they are dismissive, it will be more challenging.

**Fear of Client Pushback:** The PR professional might fear losing the client if they push too hard for changes. This fear can be a powerful internal factor, especially if the client is important to the firm.

### **External Factors (Outside the PR Firm):**

**Public Opinion and Social Media Backlash:** Strong public reaction and negative social media attention to the gendered language will put pressure on the firm to take action. The potential for reputational damage is a powerful external motivator.

**Media Coverage:** How the media portrays the situation will influence the firm's response. Negative media coverage can amplify public criticism and increase pressure to correct the mistake.

**Client's Reaction:** The client's reaction to the feedback and the PR firm's proposed changes will be a major external factor. A cooperative client will make it easier to take corrective action. A resistant client will create a significant challenge.

**Legal and Regulatory Environment:** While there may not be specific laws against gendered language in press releases, broader regulations related to discrimination and advertising standards could be a factor, especially if the language is particularly egregious.

### **3. Identify key values.**

- **Honesty:** The press release, even if unintentionally, misrepresents the AI assistant's potential user base by implying it is primarily for women. This lack of accuracy and truthfulness in portraying the app's appeal relates directly to honesty.
- **Fairness:** The gendered language and stereotypes in the press release are not fair to all potential users of the app. It excludes and potentially alienates individuals who do not identify with the described "modern woman" stereotype, impacting their perception and potential use of the technology.
- **Advocacy:** Communicators should promote responsible AI use for unbiased messaging.

**4. Identify the parties who will be affected by the decision and define the public relations professional's obligation to each.**

Potential Users of the App:

- The gendered language and stereotypes may alienate or discourage potential users who do not identify with the described "modern woman" stereotype. This limits the app's reach and potential adoption.
- The PR professional should correct the misrepresentation and ensure future communications are inclusive and respectful of all genders. This aligns with fairness and honesty.

The Client (Tech Company):

- Negative feedback and potential backlash from the press release can damage the client's reputation and brand. The client may also face financial consequences if the app's adoption is limited due to the biased language.
- The PR professional needs to provide honest feedback to the client about the negative impact of the press release. To offer solutions and alternative communication strategies that are inclusive and promote a positive brand image. To act as a responsible advocate, guiding the client towards ethical and effective communication.

The Public Relations Firm:

- The firm's reputation is on the line. If they are seen as perpetuating harmful stereotypes, it can damage their credibility and future business prospects.
- The PR professional needs to take responsibility for the oversight in allowing the biased language to be published, and to learn from the mistake and implement processes to prevent similar issues in the future.

The AI Writing Tool Developer:

- If the issue is widespread, it could raise questions about the AI's training data and potential biases in its output.
- You need to provide feedback to the developer about the issues found in the AI-generated content.

Employees of Both the Tech Company and the PR Firm:

- Employees may feel embarrassed or concerned about working for companies that are perceived as perpetuating gender stereotypes. This can affect morale and internal culture.
- It would help to acknowledge the concerns of employees and reinforce the companies' commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The PR professional can help advocate for open communication and provide training on inclusive language and communication practices.

The Media:

- The media play a role in disseminating the press release and may report on the controversy surrounding the gendered language.
- You should be transparent and responsive to media inquiries. To acknowledge the issue and communicate the steps being taken to address it.

## **5. Select ethical principles to guide the decision-making process.**

**Free Flow of Information:** Specifically, the provision that states "A member shall preserve the integrity of communication channels." Using language that reinforces stereotypes and excludes potential audiences compromises the integrity of communication. It doesn't present information in a fair and accurate way.

**Disclosure of Information:** This section emphasizes honesty and accuracy in communications. The press release, by using gendered language, is not presenting an honest and accurate picture of the app's potential user base. It's skewing the perception of who the app is for.

**Conflicts of Interest:** While not a direct conflict in the traditional sense, there's a conflict between serving the client's immediate needs (releasing a press release quickly) and the broader need to communicate ethically and inclusively. The PR firm needs to balance loyalty to the client with their responsibility to the public and the profession.

## **6. Make a decision and justify it.**

The PR professional should:

- Immediately revise the press release to remove gendered language and stereotypes.
- Issue a corrected version, explaining the change if asked by stakeholders or media.
- Provide feedback to the AI tool developer to address bias in generated outputs.
- Advocate to the client for broader systemic changes—ensuring not only that this press release is corrected, but that the technology and future communications reflect inclusive, bias-free practices.
- Implement internal training and guidelines within the PR firm to prevent similar issues.

By taking these steps, the PR professional serves the client's interests while upholding the profession's ethical standards. This approach goes beyond a tactical fix—it addresses the root cause of the problem by influencing the AI tool and shaping long-term communication strategy.