AI-HED
Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education Teaching and Learning

AI-HED.EU

BEST PRACTICE · PILOT COURSE

Gamification in Public Relations Strategies

How AI was integrated as a creative and research support tool in a final-year elective at the School of Communication and Media Studies, Polytechnic University of Lisbon.

INFORMANT
ANTÓNIO AZEVEDO

INTERVIEW
13 MARCH 2026

INSTITUTION
ESCS · IPL · LISBON

COURSE AT A GLANCE

A final-year elective at the intersection of PR, gaming, and esports

5
ECTS CREDITS

17
STUDENTS

5th
SEMESTER

BA
BACHELOR LEVEL

COURSE OVERVIEW

Gamification in Public Relations Strategies

UNIVERSITY

School of Communication and Media Studies — Polytechnic University of Lisbon

PROGRAMME

Public Relations and Corporate Communication

COURSE LEVEL

Bachelor · 5th semester · 5 ECTS

TYPICAL STUDENT BACKGROUND

Final-year undergraduates with a solid grasp of communication and strategic PR principles. As an elective, the course attracts students with a particular interest in gaming, esports, and emerging digital communication environments.

PREREQUISITES

None — beyond enrolment in the Bachelor's programme.

SUMMARY OF AI USAGE

> AI was integrated as a creative and research support tool across practical exercises and project stages — combining hands-on creative tasks with structured reflection on the limits and responsible use of AI.

— ANTÓNIO AZEVEDO, COURSE TEACHER

SECTION 02

02

Learning outcomes

What the course set out to teach — and where AI made a difference.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Seven outcomes spanning culture, strategy, and brand activation

01 Describe the cultural relevance and economic impact of the gaming and esports industries.

02 Identify communication challenges and opportunities for brands in gaming environments.

03 Evaluate communication platforms, channels, and content formats used in gaming.

04 Design strategic communication plans adapted to gaming communities.

05 Create campaign proposals for endemic and non-endemic brands within the gaming ecosystem.

06 Analyse esports as a professional communication and branding environment.

07 Investigate emerging trends in gaming and assess implications for brand strategies.

AI SUPPORT · ILO 1

Accelerating discovery of cases and context

01

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOME

Describe the cultural relevance and economic weight of the gaming and esports sectors.

“

AI tools supported early research stages by helping students identify relevant case studies, brand activations, and recent industry developments. AI mainly accelerated the discovery of examples and contextual information — which were then validated in class through traditional research and group discussion.

AI SUPPORT · ILO 3

Comparing platforms, channels, and content formats

03

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOME

Evaluate different communication platforms, channels and content formats used in gaming.

“

AI helped students explore the communication potential of livestreaming, creator collaborations, and in-game activations. By interacting with AI tools, students generated comparative insights and identified strategic uses of different channels — refined afterwards through discussion and critical evaluation.

AI SUPPORT · ILO 4

Brainstorming strategic plans for gaming communities

04

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOME

Design strategic communication plans adapted to gaming communities.

“

AI was used during the ideation phase of strategic exercises — to brainstorm communication approaches, campaign narratives, and engagement strategies adapted to gaming audiences. Initial AI-supported drafts were then refined through class discussion, peer feedback, and instructor guidance to ensure strategic relevance and originality.

AI SUPPORT · ILO 5

Generating campaign concepts for endemic and non-endemic brands

05

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOME

Create campaign proposals for endemic and non-endemic brands activating within the gaming ecosystem.

“

AI supported the creative development of campaign concepts — brand activations, collaborations with gaming creators, and branded content ideas. Students explored creative directions and storytelling possibilities before refining final proposals. The focus stayed on AI as a support tool for ideation, not a replacement for the students' strategic thinking.

SKILLS ENHANCED

Where AI sharpened student skills

Creative ideation and strategic thinking — opened up a wider range of possibilities at the concept stage.

Prompt structuring — students learned how to provide context and constraints to get useful outputs.

Critical evaluation of AI outputs — judging quality, spotting bias, refining iteratively.

Faster contextualization of communication challenges within the gaming ecosystem.

AI-SPECIFIC LEARNING OUTCOMES

No formal AI outcomes — but an implicit one

NO FORMAL ILO

“

The course did not include AI-specific learning outcomes. AI was integrated as a supporting tool to help students achieve the existing course outcomes around research, ideation, and strategic communication.

An **implicit objective** ran through the course: helping students develop a more informed, critical approach to AI — improving prompting skills, recognising the limits of AI outputs, and treating AI as a support tool that *enhances* rather than replaces critical thinking and creativity.

SECTION 03

03

Purpose & benefits

Why bring AI into this course — and what students and lecturer got out of it.

MAIN MOTIVATION FOR USING AI

A pedagogical bet on a tool already shaping the field

“

The motivation was pedagogical: expose students to AI as a tool increasingly present in communication and the creative industries — and use the pilot to explore how AI could be meaningfully integrated into teaching.

Students were encouraged to experiment, while developing awareness of AI's potential, its limitations, and its role as a **support tool — not a replacement for critical thinking**.

BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS

Hands-on practice plus a critical lens

— Experimented with tools increasingly present in the professional landscape — improving practical use and critical awareness of limits and biases.

— Explored a wider range of ideas in campaign and strategy work — overcoming creative blocks and accelerating early ideation.

— Built a habit of critically evaluating AI-generated outputs through class discussion and feedback — reinforcing the importance of human judgement.

BENEFITS FOR THE LECTURER

Not a shortcut — a prompt to rethink teaching

What it didn't do

“

AI did not significantly simplify the preparation or delivery of teaching activities. As a pilot, integrating AI required **additional planning, experimentation, and attention** .

What it did do

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Designing AI-inclusive exercises surfaced alternative ways to engage students, stimulate creativity, and structure activities — contributing to pedagogical development and prompting fresh formats beyond traditional approaches.

SECTION 04

04

Implementation details

How AI showed up in class — the tools, the access model, and the guidance around them.

HOW AI WAS USED IN CLASS

In-class exercises around real-world communication briefs

“

AI was integrated through practical exercises designed around scenarios that simulated real-world communication briefs in gaming and esports. Activities ran in class so the lecturer could guide, discuss, and critically evaluate AI-generated outputs alongside students.

AI also supported the **main group project** — primarily for mind mapping during plan development.

TOOLS & PLATFORMS

Three web-based tools, free tier, browser only

GENERAL-PURPOSE GENERATIVE AI

ChatGPT

Used throughout the course — both during in-class exercises and while developing final communication projects.

AI MUSIC GENERATION

Suno

Used in a specific in-class exercise — generating customised campaign song commercials.

VISUAL STRUCTURING

MindMap AI

Used in a practical exercise to help students structure and visualise ideas for the final communication plan project.

All tools are web-based and accessible through standard browsers — only basic devices (laptops or smartphones with internet access) are required.

ACCESS · FREE VS PAID

Free tiers recommended — equity built into the assessment

Free

RECOMMENDED FOR ALL STUDENTS

All tools used in the course offered free versions — the recommended option to ensure equal access.

“

There was no real control over whether some students chose paid versions (e.g. ChatGPT Plus). To neutralise that asymmetry, evaluation of AI-related activities focused on **how students used the tools** rather than the polish of the final output — so paid features did not translate into an assessment advantage.

GUIDANCE & SUPPORT FOR USING AI EFFECTIVELY

Guidance, hands-on support, and a collective debrief

Before — recommendations on effective tool use, basic prompting practices, and how to provide context for more relevant outputs.

During — the lecturer offered support and clarification as students worked through exercises.

After — results were discussed collectively: students reflected on outputs, identified limits, and explored how prompts could be refined for more personalised, strategically useful results.

AI IN STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Assessing the process, not the polish

YES Part of continuous assessment

“

AI usage was included in continuous assessment through the in-class exercises. Where AI use was required, evaluation focused less on the final output and more on **how students used the tools** .

Students were assessed on the depth of their interaction with AI, the quality of their prompts, and their ability to critically evaluate and refine AI-generated suggestions.

SECTION 05

05

Evaluation & risk management

How impact was measured — and how misuse was kept in check.

HOW AI IMPACT WAS EVALUATED

Pre-survey, post-survey, focus group, and continuous feedback

Pre-course survey — assessing students' prior knowledge and use of AI tools at the start of the semester.

Post-course survey — capturing how perceptions and practices had evolved by the end.

Cross-course focus group — organised with students from several pilot-programme courses.

Continuous feedback — collected informally from students throughout the semester.

METRICS & KPIS

Qualitative insights, not quantitative targets

YES

“

No predefined quantitative KPIs or target metrics were established beforehand.

However, an evaluation process was conducted through qualitative methods, including pre- and post-course surveys, informal student feedback collected throughout the course, and focus-group discussions.

FORMAL COURSE EVALUATION

Assessed within AI-HED, not in the standard institutional review

NO

Outside the institution's standard process

> The course is part of a pilot programme exploring AI integration in higher education. AI use was therefore **not included** in the institution's standard course-evaluation process. Instead, AI integration was assessed separately within the AI-HED project through dedicated surveys and feedback activities.

RISK MANAGEMENT IN AI USE

Supervised classroom use as the main safeguard

YES In-class exercises by design

Most AI usage took place during in-class exercises — letting the lecturer monitor interaction and ensure AI **supported learning rather than replacing critical thinking**.

Students shared and discussed their prompts and interaction process; assessment focused on how AI was used, not only the final outcome.

The supervised classroom setting proved effective at maintaining engagement and preventing passive use or over-reliance on the tools.

SECTION 06

06

Overall impact

What changed — for the teaching, the learning, and the student work.

OVERALL IMPACT ON TEACHING & LEARNING

> Positive — and in line with expectations. AI helped students explore more ideas during creative and strategic exercises and supported experimentation. It did not radically transform learning, and it brought additional responsibility to ensure the tools did not become a substitute for critical thinking.

— ANTÓNIO AZEVEDO, COURSE TEACHER

IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Moderate but positive — students still owned the strongest ideas

Accelerated the contextualisation and research phases of student work — gathering relevant examples and insights more efficiently.

Enriched several projects by suggesting additional creative directions and strategic possibilities.

The **strongest ideas consistently came from the students themselves** — AI mainly served to expand, refine, and deepen those initial concepts.

Functioned as a complementary support that enhanced exploration and development — not a fundamental change to core learning outcomes.

MAIN CHALLENGES & HOW THEY WERE MANAGED

Stopping students from outsourcing the brief

The challenge

“

Some students simply input the assignment brief into AI tools and asked for complete solutions. Similar prompts produced very similar responses across the cohort — a clear sign of **superficial or overly dependent** use.

How it was managed

“

Continuous reinforcement of proper AI use, with concrete examples shown back to students. Individual feedback and class discussions encouraged deeper prompting, more critical evaluation of outputs, and greater **personalization** of AI-assisted work.

SECTION 07

07

Scalability & transferability

How this experience travels to other courses — and what it would take to support that.

SCALING TO OTHER COURSES AND NEED FOR INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Yes — with two forms of institutional support

100%

YES — SCALABLE

AI is already a reality across professional fields and can be relevant to a wide range of academic disciplines.

What scaling would require

Institutional guidelines for responsible AI use — helping students and teachers understand good practice and ethical considerations across all courses.

Equitable tool access — institutional licenses or educational partnerships, ensuring students aren't constrained by free-tier limitations.

KEY ADVICE FOR EDUCATORS

Four practices that make AI integration work

Get hands-on first. 01

Familiarise yourself with the tools you plan to introduce — both their capabilities and their limitations.

Assess process, not output. 02

Focus on how students use AI in the process, rather than only evaluating the final outcome.

Show good examples in class. 03

Demonstrating effective AI use helps students understand how the tools can support their work.

Intervene when AI becomes a shortcut. 04

Provide continuous feedback and step in when students lean on AI instead of using it to deepen their thinking.

AI-HED
Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education Teaching and Learning

A pilot that opened space for ideation — without losing the student's own voice.

COURSE
Gamification in Public Relations Strategies

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António Azevedo

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ABOUT AI-HED

An Erasmus+ cooperation project on AI in higher education

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PROJECT PARTNERS

Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences

University of Applied Sciences BFI Vienna
Economics Management Finance

UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB
FACULTY OF ORGANIZATION AND INFORMATICS
VARAŽDIN

ESCS
SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES