

Trends and Ideas

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I. Introduction

Corporate communication leaders are increasingly navigating a world shaped by fast-evolving societal expectations, transformative technologies, and the growing threat of mis- and disinformation. These factors aren't just external pressures. They are reshaping the core functions of internal communication, brand positioning, and reputation management. In 2024 and early 2025, three urgent trends have emerged that demand focused attention from communication strategists: employee activism, AI transparency, and disinformation. These trends interact and amplify one another, requiring corporate communicators to be not only reactive but proactive, ethical, and resilient.

II. Top Trends in Business & Society

1. Employee Activism and Internal Stakeholder Pressure

The power dynamic between employer and employee has shifted dramatically over the past few years. Fueled by greater access to information, changing generational values, and digital organizing tools, employees are now increasingly vocal about their company's political, ethical, and operational decisions. They no longer remain silent stakeholders; instead, they act as watchdogs and public-facing commentators. This evolution has profound implications for corporate communicators, who must balance transparency with alignment to broader organizational strategy. Mishandling employee unrest can rapidly escalate into a reputational crisis, amplified by media coverage and public scrutiny. Today, maintaining credibility with employees is not a luxury. It is a foundational component of business resilience and brand equity. As stated by Harvard Business Review: "Within the executive team there is a divide:

Some want to shut the employee down while others want to invite them into the strategic discussion” (Reitz & Higgins, 2024).

2. Corporate Transparency in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

As artificial intelligence becomes embedded into daily business operations, it’s creating both new efficiencies and new dilemmas. On one hand, AI tools are helping businesses analyze data faster, enhance customer service, and optimize logistics. On the other, they are raising red flags related to surveillance, bias, and consent. Transparency about how AI is being used—especially when it involves employee or customer data—has become essential. According to Axios, 35% of U.S. workers aged 18–29 believe that AI will reduce job opportunities in the future (Hart, 2025). When companies are vague or evasive about AI deployment, trust erodes. Corporate communicators must therefore be fluent in both the technical aspects of AI and the emotional implications of its adoption, ensuring that all messaging promotes clarity and choice.

3. Disinformation and the Corporate Response

The spread of disinformation—false information shared with harmful intent—has become a high-stakes challenge for businesses. In today’s media landscape, false narratives can go viral in minutes, distorting public perception and weakening stakeholder trust. Social platforms, especially visual ones like TikTok and Instagram, are volatile grounds for manipulated videos and deepfakes. According to the Institute for Public Relations (McCorkindale & Fajardo, 2024), disinformation thrives because it is often “more appealing than reality,” making corporate responses feel slow or less compelling by comparison. The consequences of delayed or insufficient responses are severe: stock drops, customer loss, and long-term reputational damage.

Communicators must act as both first responders and long-term reputation stewards, with the skills to identify, fact-check, and neutralize disinformation in real time.

III. Potential Case Studies

Case Study 1: Google Employees Protest Cloud Deal with Israel

In early 2024, Google faced a wave of internal unrest when hundreds of employees walked out and publicly opposed the company's \$1.2 billion cloud computing contract with the Israeli government. Protesters cited ethical concerns over the contract's role in the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict and organized both physical demonstrations and open letters demanding change. Google responded by terminating employees involved in the protest, triggering widespread coverage and internal backlash (O'Brien, 2024). The case illustrates the complex terrain communicators must navigate when employee values clash with company strategy. Especially in politically sensitive contexts. It raises important questions about internal dissent, brand positioning, and the appropriate role of corporate speech in global affairs.

Case Study 2: Zoom's Quiet Deployment of AI Features Sparks Backlash

In mid-2023, Zoom updated its terms of service to include permissions for using customer content to train its AI models. The change initially flew under the radar but was later uncovered by tech users and privacy advocates who criticized Zoom for its lack of transparency. The backlash spread quickly across social media and news outlets, prompting Zoom to revise its language and issue a clarifying statement (Picchi, 2023). This incident reflects how crucial it is for brands to lead with clarity when adopting emerging technologies. From a communication perspective, it also underscores the risk of assuming legal compliance equals stakeholder approval.

IV. Conclusion

The responsibilities of corporate communications professionals have grown far beyond press releases and media relations. As this paper shows, leaders must now manage rising employee activism, communicate transparently about emerging technologies like AI, and rapidly respond to disinformation. These trends demand not only strong messaging strategies, but also deep ethical engagement and technical agility. The case studies outlined here underscore the real-world impact of these shifts and the critical role communicators play in safeguarding trust and integrity in business today.

V. References

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