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HOW STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION DEALS  
WITH THE CHALLENGES OF VISUALISATION,  
SOCIAL BOTS AND HYPERMODERNITY  
RESULTS OF A SURVEY IN 50 COUNTRIES.

A STUDY CONDUCTED BY THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC RELATIONS  
EDUCATION AND RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (EUPRERA) AND THE  
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# 10 STARTING POINTS ...

## 1 VISUALISATION IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

94.4% of European communication professionals believe that visual communication will gain in importance. This is stimulated by a rising stakeholder demand for visual communication during the last three years. Consequently, most organisations use more elements like online videos, infographics and instant photos in their messaging. But only 4.6% have implemented advanced management processes for this and only one-in-ten professionals is highly skilled in the field.

## 2 SOCIAL BOTS – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The topic of social bots is largely neglected by many communication professionals. Only one third (35.9%) follow the debate about social bots and 15.9% have no idea about the topic at all. Social bots are mainly seen as a threat for public debates and organisational reputation alike. 73.2% agree that social bots present ethical challenges, although four out of ten respondents do also see opportunities arising from them and 14.7% of the surveyed organisations (will) use social bots until 2018.

## 3 STRATEGIC ISSUES

Coping with the digital evolution and the social web has been voted as the most important issue for communication management over the next three years, with 40.4% of the respondents holding this view. Yet, longitudinal data collected since 2007 from nearly 25,000 communication professionals across the continent has repeatedly found the strategic alignment of communication and organisational goals as the most important issue. This year the topic was only ranked second and supported by 37.5%.

## 4 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND INSTRUMENTS

Across Europe, social media and social networks are considered by far (90.4%) to be the most important channel to address stakeholders, gatekeepers and audiences. Other online communication comes second (83.1%), followed by press and media relations with online newspapers and magazines (82.4%). Longitudinal analyses show that new and social media technology complement traditional channels but they do not replace them. Accordingly, the shift towards online and mobile is consistently overestimated by practitioners. Media relations with print newspapers/magazines are still stronger than expected.

## 5 HYPERMODERNITY

A large majority of the surveyed professionals (71.5%) witness the cultural transformation towards a hyper modern culture in their country, characterised by a culture of hyper consumption, hyper change, and hyper individualism. Every second communicator (52.3%) confirms that this has already changed the communication between their organisation and stakeholders.

## 6 HYPERMODERN ORGANISATIONS

43.5% of the organisations surveyed are already changing from postmodern to hypermodern with characteristics such as continuous change, decentralised IT, rapid adjustments of the workforce, creativity and ethics of perceived responsibility. The transition to hypermodern culture is strongest in consultancies (57.2%) and private companies (51.8%). These organisations are ahead in sensing the trend towards an overarching consumer mentality and are more engaged in public debates about current societal issues.

## 7 BENCHMARKING AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Benchmarking is still a largely neglected field in strategic communication. Accordingly, communication departments generally have implemented fewer quality management processes (40.7%) compared to other organisational functions. If they assess their activities at all, they focus predominantly on the performance or impact of messaging activities (up to 51.1%). Benchmarking processes over time and between subunits (32.3%) or against externally validated standards of performance (22.5%) seem to be less relevant.

## 8 CONTRIBUTION OF COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENTS TO ORGANISATIONAL SUCCESS

When asked to reflect on the several contributions of communication departments to their organisation's success, communication leaders valued nearly all operational and strategic contributions quite high. Supporting operational goals/processes of other departments (86.8%), the daily management (86.7%) and the constant improvement of the department (85.8%) were mentioned most often. Convincing key stakeholders of the organisational strategy was rated the lowest. However, top managers are not aware of the full range of contributions that communications can deliver.

## 9 SALARIES

In 2017, almost every tenth communicator surveyed earns more than €150,000 base salary per year (9.1%). About one out of five (21.1%) earns less than €30,000 per year. The portion of communication heads and agency CEOs with an annual income over €150,000 stays relatively stable since 2009 (between 13.4 and 18.4%) as well as for other hierarchical levels (between 6.1 and 9.6%).

## 10 CHARACTERISTICS OF EXCELLENT COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENTS

Excellent communication departments are using quality management more intensively. They have also adopted all kinds of benchmarking approaches to a larger extent. They are better in implementing management routines for visual communication and are more likely to be based within postmodern or hypermodern organisations. Excellent departments are more open to external issues and are noticeably more engaged in public debates about current and more general societal issues outside the core business tasks.

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More than 5,000 communication professionals from over 80 countries are surveyed in each wave of the European, Latin American and Asia-Pacific Communication Monitor, making this the largest and only truly global study of the profession based on sound empirical standards.

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