

# Future of Communications

3 actionable insights for what's next in stakeholder trust, employee activism and social influence

# Adapting communications value for the future

Today's speed of change is making it more urgent to define the value of the communications function for tomorrow.

Three key trends impacting the future value of communications offer perspective on the need for communications leaders to evolve the function's value proposition to escape from reactivity mode, overcome traditional views of communications as a service function and align with future business needs.

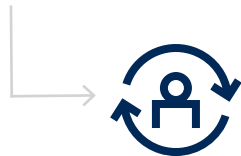
Chief communications officers (CCOs) can leverage this research to understand the key trends that will offer the best opportunities to evolve the business value of the function within the next three to five years.

## CCOs officers can use these trends to:

- ✓ Discover which future trends will have critical impacts on communications' value proposition, leadership and skills
- ✓ Evolve with these trends and optimize the value the function brings to the organization
- ✓ Overcome common obstacles to evolving communications' value proposition

## Communications leaders will become stewards of organizational truth to build/maintain brand trust

Diminishing consumer trust combined with generative AI (GenAI) reputational brand risks will challenge communications leaders to evolve reputation management into active stewardship of what is factual and true about the organization.



### The accelerators

- Continued **decline of public trust** in institutions, big brands, media platforms and governments
- **Slow regulation** on AI use and disinformation
- **Reduced critical thinking skills** among audiences



### The challenges

- **Accelerating** organizational response to threats against more fragile audience trust
- **Stanching** the flow of mis/disinformation
- Efficiently **monitoring and mitigating** faster-moving risks



### The opportunities

- ✓ Use a **human-in-the-loop protocol** to mature monitoring capabilities and identify mis/disinformation early.
- ✓ Establish a **source of truth for and about the organization via owned-channel safe spaces**, content authentication efforts and GenAI use disclosure.

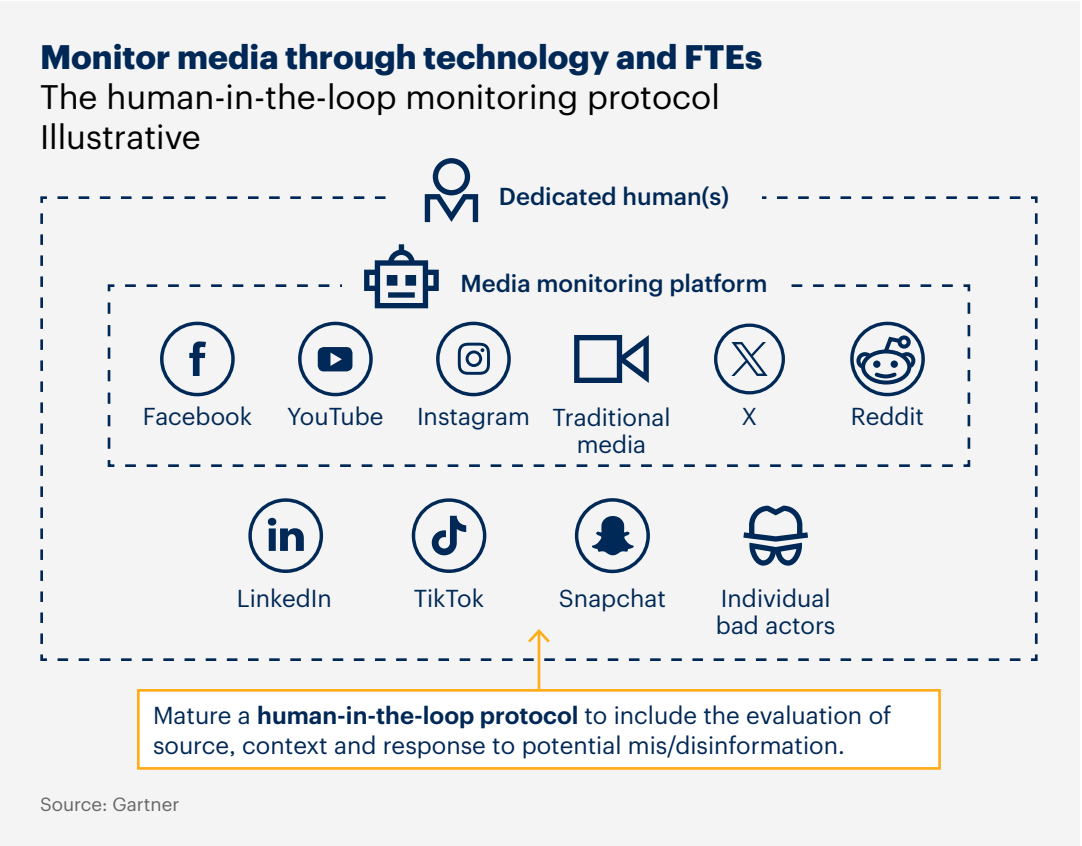
# Evolve reputation management into active stewardship of what is factual and true about the organization

To build and maintain brand trust in a period of diminishing consumer trust combined with GenAI risks, communications leaders should:

- 1. Enhance social media monitoring capabilities.** Establish a human-in-the-loop protocol so employees are equipped with the resources and training they need to monitor brand risks on platforms.
- 2. Build owned-media credibility.** Establish your organization as the ultimate source of truth in an era where distinguishing between real and fake content is harder than ever.



“You can only combat what you can see. CCOs cannot afford to wait for platforms or governing bodies to establish better moderation policies.”  
 Amber Boyes, Gartner Director Analyst



## Communications leaders will become mediators of workplace tension to meet employee demands

Employees have higher expectations than ever, with employee-led activism up 40%. Communications leaders will need to anticipate and mitigate tension between employees and the organization to meet changing employee demands.



### The accelerators

- Increasing **diversity in the workforce** — generationally, geographically and culturally
- **Variance** in communication norms, preferences and expectations
- Rising **economic and geopolitical anxiety** among employees



### The challenges

- Efficiently **creating resonant messaging** and delivering it on preferred channels to an increasingly diverse workforce
- **Synthesizing** conflicting, contradictory and/or ambiguous employee perspectives and feedback **to inform decision making**



### The opportunities

- ✓ **Give employee voices a “seat at the table”** by integrating feedback into organizational decision making.
- ✓ **Use AI-enhanced message personalization** to meet diverse needs while reducing information overload.
- ✓ **Preempt employee issues** from escalating to crises by tracking risk factors and strategically intervening.

# Anticipate and mitigate “hot spots” of tension between employees and the organization

As the pendulum of employee-employer power dynamics continues to swing, employees’ demand for transparency and personalization from employers will strengthen. To mitigate workplace tensions to address entrenched demands, CCOs should:







- Prepare a “seat at the table” for employee voices by integrating feedback early into organizational decision-making processes.
- Select AI-enhanced tools that can implement messaging personalization to reduce information overload for individual employees.
- Preemptively deescalate employee issues.



**“The trend of employee demands is an organizationally sized challenge. CCOs can lead the way with careful employee listening and AI-powered personalization.”**  
Emily Earl, Gartner Senior Principal, Research

## Use personalization to meet employee demands

Sample applications of AI use cases to internal comms

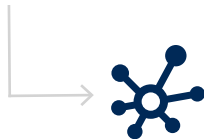
 Query and response	 Employee chatbot	Enable employees to quickly find the information and documents they need using a chatbot trained on organizational strategy and policies.
	 Message testing	Test messages with GenAI tools that provide feedback based on how audiences are predicted to respond.
 Content development and modification	 Content personalization	Customize messaging for individual employees by using AI to dynamically assemble content modules based on employees' characteristics and consumption preferences.
	 Localization	Translate content to accommodate different languages, speakers or publishing formats.

Source: Gartner



## Communications leaders will become influence navigators to reach their audience and mitigate risk

Consumers are spending less time on social media than ever before and are more reluctant to receive branded content, leading communications leaders to shift social strategy to analyzing and engaging within influential community networks.



### The accelerators

- **Deterioration of social media experience** due to junk users and content, oversaturation of paid posts and mass user exodus
- Continued **transference of trust to individuals** (e.g., friends, family, influencers)



### The challenges

- **Reaching audiences** on noisy major social media channels with fewer humans
- **Mitigating risk** in a consistent way across a dispersed landscape of outbound engagement
- Gathering sound **audience listening insights** when there is less public activity



### The opportunities

- ✓ **Target relevant communities** of interest by analyzing and tracking them to hubs where they share information.
- ✓ **Leverage the strongest engagement opportunities** by observing community norms and needs on niche channels and using AI to personalize content creation.

## Shift social strategy to analyzing and engaging within influential community networks

Audiences are increasingly elusive on digital channels. This is, in part, thanks to the perceived decline in their experience of social media. To maintain influence with target audiences, CCOs must shift social strategy and begin engaging audiences within influential niche communities.

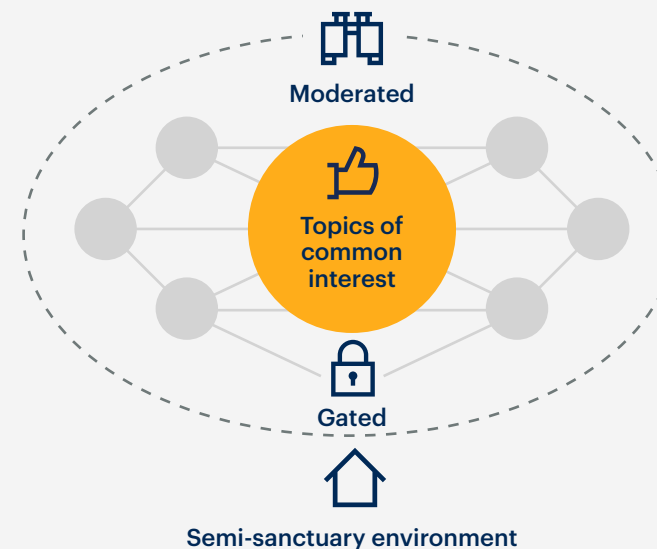
- Evaluate capabilities to identify brand-relevant communities of interest by following influential individuals to their niche communities.
- Verify whether identified niche communities are relevant, active and receptive to the brand before resourcing engagement with the community.
- Learn existing community norms and audience needs to inform how to best engage the target audience and share brand resources tailored to the community's needs.



**“Our external audiences are like sand through the fingers right now — they’re slipping away from the digital channels we can see them on, and the exodus is building its own momentum.”**

Dorian Cundick, Gartner VP Advisory

### Characteristics of niche communities






- Opportunity for hypertargeted brand connection
- Higher-than-normal receptivity
- Higher-than-normal likelihood to interact

Source: Gartner



# Gartner Engagement Plan: Future of Communications

Initiatives and Milestones 	Key Challenges 	Target Outcomes 
Prepare for disruption and position your organization to capitalize on unique opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience trust in corporate communications and brand messaging is diminishing</li> <li>• Shifting power dynamic of the employee-employer contract</li> <li>• Information overload is driving disengagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evolve business value of Communications function</li> <li>• Establish organizational readiness and prepare for future disruption</li> </ul>

	Phase 1	→ Phase 2	→ Phase 3	→ Phase 4
Research and Tools	<b>Explore</b> findings and insights from <a href="#">Adapting Communications' Value for the Future</a> on how Communications can evolve with future trends and optimize the value the function brings to the organization.	<b>Explore</b> <a href="#">Improving Organizational Trust With Executive Communications</a> to learn more about how low trust negatively impacts the organization and how to address this challenge. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Especially relevant for trend 1</li> </ul>	<b>Explore</b> <a href="#">Communications' Role in Managing Change Fatigue</a> to understand the drivers of change fatigue and how to best manage it. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Especially relevant for trend 2</li> </ul>	<b>Shift</b> from a reputation-protection to reputation-building mindset using <a href="#">Gartner's Guide to Proactive Reputation Management</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Especially relevant for trend 1</li> </ul>
	<b>Complete</b> your <a href="#">Score assessment</a> to evaluate the effectiveness of your current Communications function and opportunities to position your organization for future disruption.	<b>Utilize</b> <a href="#">Protect Your Brand From Generative AI Risks</a> for insight on how to balance opportunity with the tangible risks GenAI presents, to protect reputation.	<b>Learn</b> how to leverage influential employees to surface feedback early in change planning with <a href="#">Case Study: Use Influential Employees for Change Management Planning</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Especially relevant for trend 2</li> </ul>	<b>Leverage Tool:</b> <a href="#">Communications Value Proposition Template and Example</a> to create a Communications value proposition to educate new or existing senior executives on the business value of Communications.
Expert Advisory	<b>Engage</b> in FYFI (First Year, First Inquiry) with a Gartner expert to explore how your Communications milestones and challenges can be addressed by GCL's capabilities.	<b>Review</b> the results of your Score assessment with a Gartner expert to identify areas of opportunity.	<b>Discuss</b> best practices and tactics for safeguarding audience trust and stewarding organizational truth with a Gartner expert.	<b>Explore</b> best practices to demonstrate Communications' connectedness to enterprise vision, and convey the value and impact of Communications to the enterprise by consulting with a Gartner expert.

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