



FLEISHMAN  
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# CORPORATE AFFAIRS TRENDS FOR 2025



16 December 2024

# Introduction

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Has there ever been a more challenging time to be a Corporate Affairs leader? CEOs, CFOs, and boards expect and demand more from communications than ever before. External stakeholders, from customers and investors, to politicians, can and do apply greater pressure than they have in the past. And the communications landscape is rapidly evolving, yet again. The growing ubiquity of misinformation and the widespread adoption of AI have major implications for how we grapple with every problem.

This report is an effort to look ahead to 2025. It is designed as a forecast, but each trend is grounded in firm data, observation, or discussions with our clients. It's the product of input from an array of FleishmanHillard's corporate affairs experts in the UK.

Any trend forecast necessarily involves opinions, with which you might well disagree. But there is one thing on which we probably can agree: The global communications landscape for businesses and organisations will be defined by its complexity. Whether your instinct is to embrace it, surf it, or simplify it, we hope the trends that follow will offer some useful perspective and practical help as you prepare for 2025.

## About the lead author:



*Marshall Manson is Chair of Corporate Affairs for FleishmanHillard in the UK. He has been an innovator in communications strategy, stakeholder engagement, digital comms, and campaign implementation for more than 25 years.*

# Corporate Affairs in 2025

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Beyond the global increase in uncertainty and unpredictability, there's another important landscape shift facing Corporate Affairs leaders:

While corporate affairs remains broadly focused on critical stakeholder audiences — investors, policymakers, employees, influential publics, etc. — those audiences' information behaviours are evolving more rapidly than ever.

They are consuming more content across a wider range of channels. Many key audiences are becoming inaccessible through traditional media.

Established and new channels from LinkedIn to Tik Tok are becoming more important.

Effective audience engagement requires a more nuanced and modern approach.

Traditional publishers and outlets remain vitally important in most situations, but an audience-led, data-driven, and channel-agnostic approach is essential for success.

But what trends will drive your communications focus in 2025? This report grapples with that question and offers a forecast of what lies ahead.

In the pages that follow, we explore 5 trends for 2025:

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**1. The Values Imperative:**

Managing the wave of politics

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**2. The Corporate Diplomat:**

Geopolitics becomes the day job

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**3. Ubiquitous Malignancy:**

Misinformation everywhere

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**4. Data Erosion & Accretion:**

New sources, new applications

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**5. AI Moves Ahead:**

Bigger things are coming

There are other topics we could have covered. ESG and DE&I leap to mind. But for us, the trends we have identified account for the forces moving the landscape on these and other critical issues.



# PREDICTIONS FOR 2025

New complexities, new opportunities







# TREND ONE: The Values Imperative

Managing the wave of politics



# Background

Politics is seeping into business through every crack and crevice, reshaping the corporate landscape in unexpected ways. Companies can become political targets — sometimes intentionally singled out by politicians, at other times simply caught in the crossfire as collateral damage.

One of the most significant entry points for political pressure is the workforce itself. Whether that be employees reacting passionately to legislation, court rulings, or policy shifts — there is a new pressure on leaders to take a stand — speak up or speak out.

But political opinions come at a cost. No one will thank you for disagreeing, and in today's polarised society, doing so can result in boycotts, reputational attacks, or sustained scrutiny.

And once you're under the spotlight, it can be difficult to find a way out. Visibility on one contentious issue might invite questions or criticism on another, compounding the challenge and creating new risks.





# Agree With Me or Else

Various surveys have suggested that consumers and corporate stakeholders want businesses to express opinions and have a point of view on issues.\*

That may be true, but it comes with a caveat: Only if you agree with them.

No audience will reward a business for expressing an opinion or taking a position with which they strongly disagree. And they might punish the business for having that disagreeable opinion in the first place.

\* For example, [this report](#) from Sprout Social, [this one](#) from Marketing Dive, or [this one](#) from Marketing Scoop.





# Much Maligned, Now Essential

Corporate values have become an at-work punchline. Too often developed in a bubble and the product of a lengthy, fluffy process.

Routinely expressed as cliché heaped on obvious, empty language. Trying to satisfy everyone but really saying nothing.

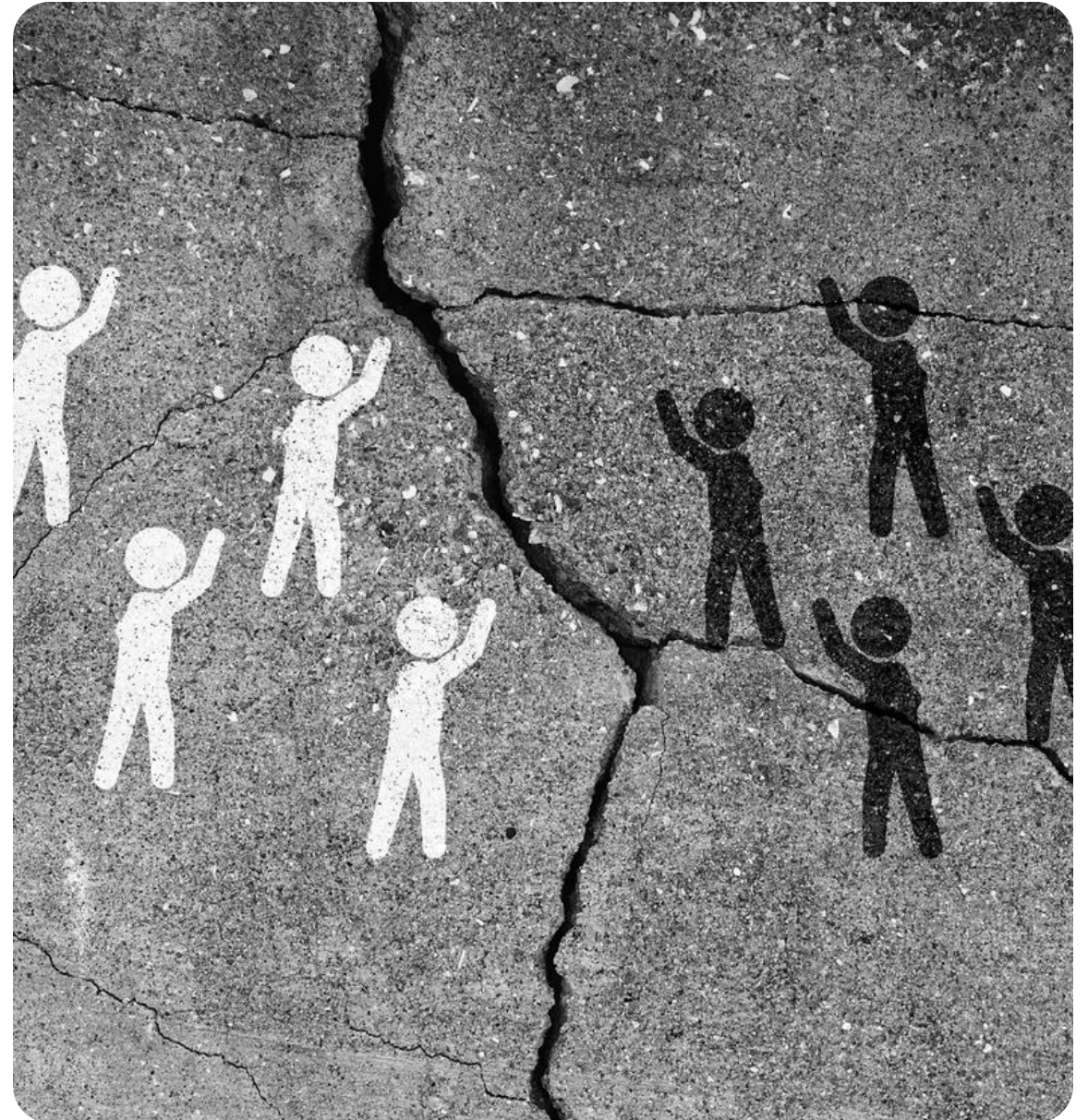
Now, they need to form the basis for considering whether to engage on an issue and the form and substance of your engagement.



# Defining “The Values Imperative”

Politics will continue to grow as a potential threat to businesses and organisations. No one is immune from becoming a target or collateral damage in some wider debate. Pressure from vocal employees will correlate with growing uncertainty, unpredictability, and norm-busting behaviour from politicians.

Therefore, businesses and organisations need to have a clear handle on their values, because they will be the essential basis for determining when and how to engage on any given issues.





# How Do You Prepare for This?

- Review your values statement to ensure it is a clear expression of your shared principles.
- Develop a framework for assessing political issues that arise from within the business or from external sources.
- That framework should include an evaluation of the issue against your values.
- In short, if the issue doesn't speak directly to a core business value or commercial need, lean strongly against engagement.





# TREND TWO: The Corporate Diplomat

Geopolitics becomes the day job





# Background

The reappearance of populism in many countries has also driven a resurgence of nationalism. As the post-WWII settlement erodes, conflict has become more common and more likely. U.S. and European policymaking are drifting apart, complicating business decision-making — especially on regulation around climate, energy transition, and anti-trust.

For global companies, geopolitical pressures require that you are politically aware across all your key markets. And success in one market may require navigating geopolitical tensions with your home market or somewhere else.

Geopolitical forces can affect your business in unexpected ways, even if they originate in countries where you don't operate. Supply chain disruptions have grown more common. Disputes with workers or political unrest slow vital suppliers. Tension in key shipping routes slows transit or forces long detours. State-led cyber attacks can spread or be launched indiscriminately.



# Where Governments Fear to Tread

Increasingly, senior executives and corporate affairs leaders need to navigate complex geopolitical issues themselves, often with scant support from home-market government officials — and sometimes with outright opposition.

As globalism, especially the rules-based system governing global trade, comes under greater pressure, nation states are returning to more classical behaviours, acting overtly in their own national interest, often counter to the interests of their own major businesses.

The promise of substantial new tariffs from the incoming Trump administration in the U.S. could result in significant additional disruption to global supply chains and international relationships.



# Defining “The Corporate Diplomat”

Dealing with geopolitical pressures will command even more time and attention from corporate affairs leaders.

They — and their executives — will need to improve their skills as diplomats to understand the dynamics in an even wider range of stakeholders, smooth challenges, navigate complexity, and suggest solutions in international relations to navigate win-win and win-lose dynamics.

It’s a concept first defined by Deloitte in their recent study of attitudes and priorities among corporate affairs leaders.\* And in the few months since that report appeared, the trend has grown both in prominence and importance.

\* *Volatility & Value*. Mark Hutcheon, Hannah Shattock et al. October 2024. Accessed here: <https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/services/risk-advisory/research/corporate-affairs-report.html>





# How Do You Prepare for This?

- Aim to be more inclusive in the information and perspectives that you gather to inform corporate decision-making. Push well-beyond western views.
- Assess vulnerabilities that derive from tension between your key markets or from supply chain exposure.
- Hone geopolitical knowledge, go deeper on historical contexts, and expand information sources to fully prepare to advise executives on complex geopolitical issues.
- Develop skill sets tailored for diplomacy. Go deeper on negotiation and war-gaming, and rediscover your interest in political history.
- Then consider how geopolitical factors influence your most critical issues.

# TREND THREE: Ubiquitous Malignancy

Misinformation in everything, everywhere, all of the time

Misleading

Propaganda

FAK  
NEWS

Misinformation

Social  
media



# What Is a Malignant Information Environment?

Misinformation is everywhere, but it's rarely the dominant factor in a communications situation.

Even situations largely shaped by misinformation, inauthentic content, trolls, or bots also include some elements of fact or more objective news coverage.

Bots and trolls are now an industry — sophisticated, data-driven and well optimized.



# Background

In effect, every communications situation now includes element of malignancy.

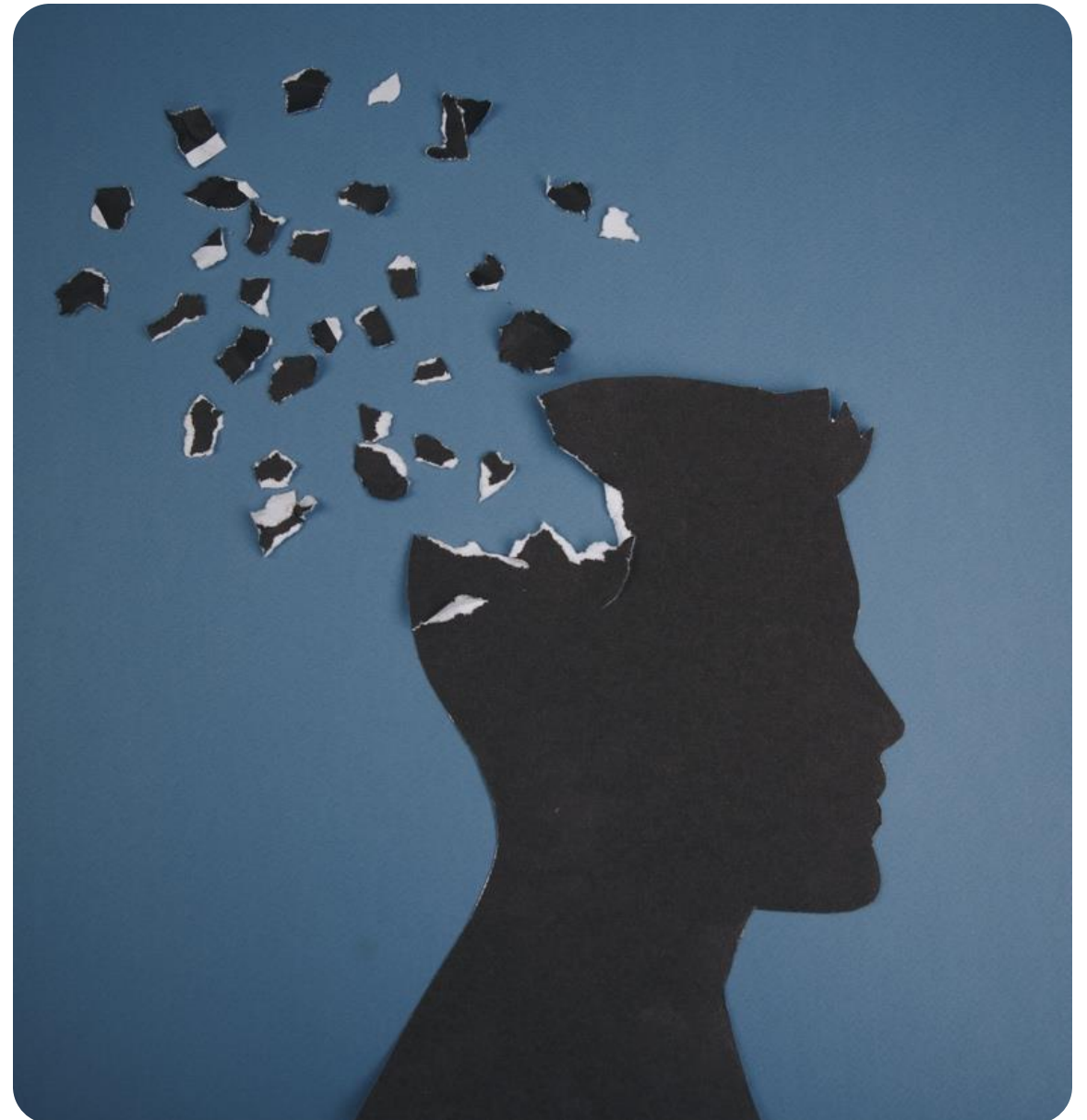
Every conversation about your business includes elements of misinformation, myth, or mistake.

The question is: How much?

Communicators need to better understand the balance of authentic vs. inauthentic content in any given situation. The influence of malignancy will be more significant in some situations than others. A minor myth is no big deal. A deep fake video of your CEO announcing a fake merger is a critical problem.

Dealing with misinformation requires a different set of techniques than conventional communications or crisis response. Managing a sophisticated bot attack can require an altogether different approach.

The potential for AI-driven deep fakes ratchets up the threat-level.





# Defining “Ubiquitous Malignancy”

Misinformation, fake news, and bots will continue to grow as significant elements in any communications situation involving every business or organisation. So, dealing with “misinformation” can no longer be a stand-alone capability. Assessing and determining whether to deal with the inauthentic elements of a situation will become even more critical, and solid preparations for managing a malignant information environment are now essential.



# How Do You Prepare for This?



- Develop methods for discerning authentic from inauthentic content and a framework for assessing when to intervene to counter misinformation or bot activity.
- Prepare for highly misleading or counter-factual coverage, even from reputable publishers.
- Be ready to engage audiences directly rather than relying on media or fact-checkers.
- Techniques drawn from behavioural science are essential for combatting misinformation, and these may be at odds with historical communications best practices.
- Combatting inauthentic content requires engagement with audiences' emotional cues, not just rational arguments or statements of fact. Consider how these requirements sit within your existing tone of voice.



A hand holding a smartphone is shown in a circular frame. The background is dark with a network of white dots and lines. Overlaid on this are several social media icons: a heart, a thumbs-up, and a speech bubble, each with a red notification bubble containing a number. The overall aesthetic is digital and data-driven.

# TREND FOUR: Data Erosion & Accretion

New sources, new applications

# Background: Erosion

Our understanding of the communications landscape has been dominated by social media listening and monitoring of text articles for more than 15 years.

But social media listening has been overreliant on Twitter (now 'X') because it was the only truly open platform.

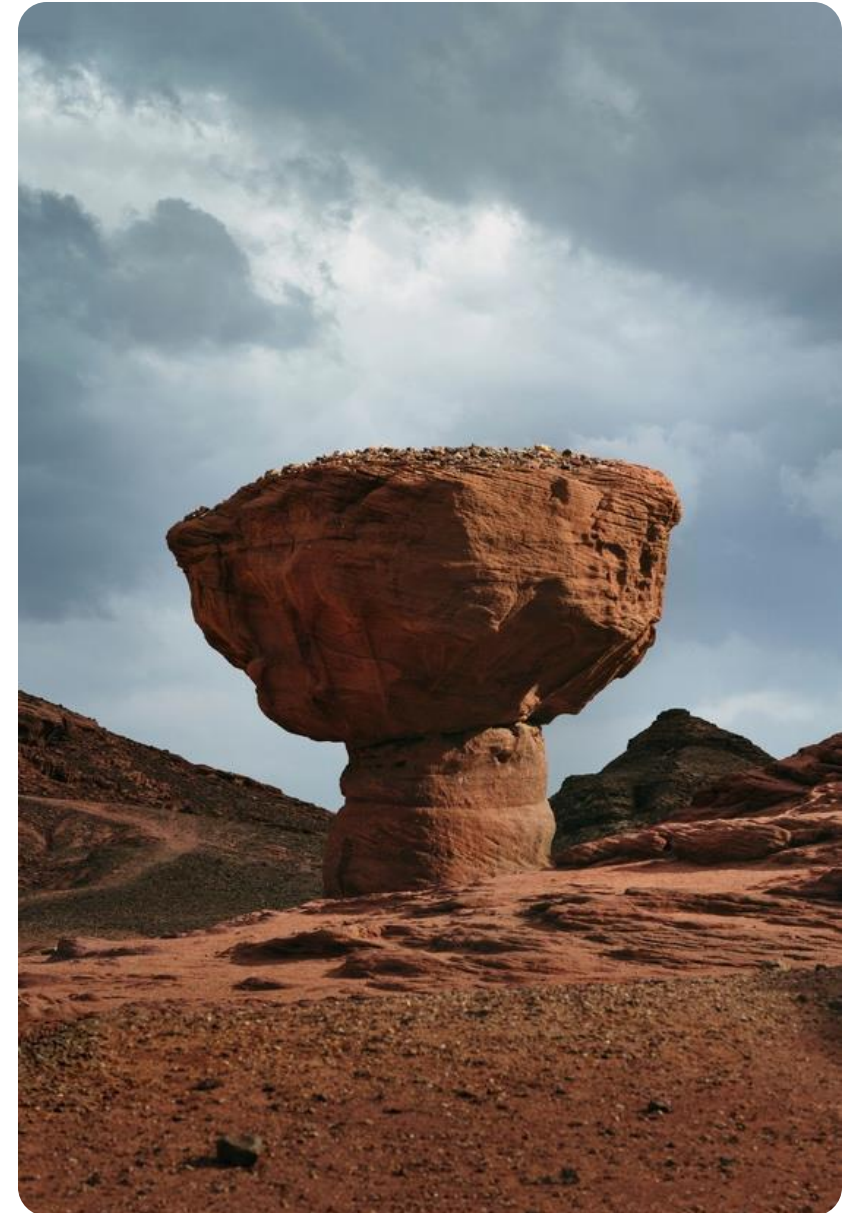
And because Twitter users in almost every country included key politicians, journalists, commentators, and cultural figures, we could view Twitter as a useful, leading indicator on tactical communications management, developing issues, and broader trends.

Its established role as the “go-to” place for breaking news helped make it indispensable during crisis situations.

Now, X usage is declining, so the critical mass of opinion leaders is no longer present, reducing its value as proxy for wider insight.

Platforms like TikTok, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and others block comprehensive monitoring and some are effectively invisible.

At the same time, news consumption is moving away from text articles towards audio (mostly podcasts) and video.





# Background: Accretion

But new platforms are emerging. Bluesky and Reddit are open, but probably not representative or comprehensive, especially outside the USA.

New modes of data collection paired with AI are opening doors into audio and video.

And other techniques are helping us develop a more fulsome view of audiences.





# Defining “Data Erosion & Accretion”

The steady demise of X, a shift away from text articles, and flight to podcast and video platforms for news will accelerate in 2025, making it much harder for communications decision-making to be truly data-driven.

While new tools and techniques are emerging which will offer new and probably better ways to make tactical communications assessments, understand audiences, and measure results, the landscape will become more cluttered and require a more sophisticated approach to drawn out vital strategic and tactical insights.



# How Do You Prepare for This?

- Strongly encourage data and tool partners to expand their coverage and deploy AI to assess podcasts and video.
- Learn to expect views from multiple platforms but consider the audience profile differences on each. A reaction on one platform won't necessarily be the same as another. You'll have to look across everything to get a clear picture.
- Push for data visualisations that build that clear picture.
- Build and improve intelligence networks. Content travelling in walled-off platforms like WhatsApp will virtually never be captured by tools. You need colleagues and friends to be on the look out with the means and methods to report significant moments.

# TREND FIVE: AI Moves Ahead

Gen AI is operationally valuable, but bigger things are coming





# Background

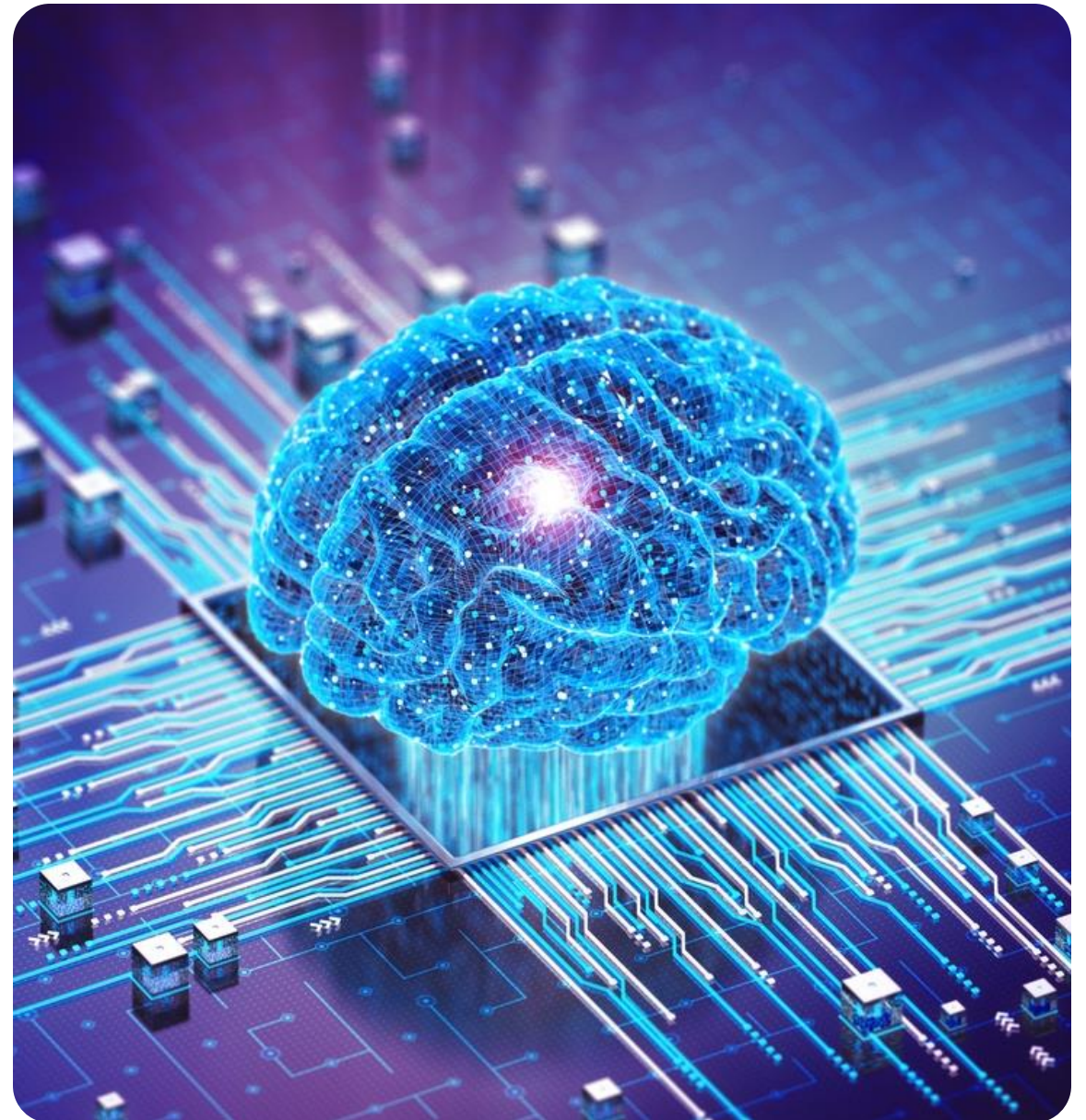
AI is everywhere. Duh.

Its most significant impacts are, arguably, not in communications. AI is changing how we do healthcare research, design cars, build aircraft, and even forecast the weather.

For communicators, generative AI built on large language models is making our work faster and more efficient.

GenAI is helping us sift through complex data and understand communications environments better. (See Trend 1 above.)

It also helping us create, refine, improve, and optimise new and interesting text, audio, and video content.





# AI As Comms Channel?

When social media was on the rise from 2005 to about 2009, it was easy to see its potential as a place where people would communicate and interact with one another.

AI is already changing how we as individuals find, discover, and consume information. It is beginning to disrupt Google's position as portal to the web. (Although TikTok is arguably a more immediate threat.)

But it's not yet clear how AI will change the way in which we interact with one another.

It's hard to believe that we're headed for a world where my AI avatar chats with your AI avatar. Although, if the current state of LinkedIn is any indication, that's probably wrong.





# There Are Limitations & New Models Could Change It All

Generative AI built on large language models is, even in its most advanced forms, sophisticated mimicry.

The tools we are all testing and trialing are, as yet, unable to learn from themselves and don't really know what they know.

As a result, for now, GenAI tools still require considerable human oversight to ensure accuracy.

Nevertheless, researchers are developing and deploying new models which will likely change everything. These models are based on radically different approaches compared to LLMs and will have greater capability for self-learning and better memory.

Early use cases include using such tools to analyse large, complex data sets with low data quality and still provide valuable insights.

# Defining “AI Moves Ahead”


AI currently offers to drive considerable efficiency and value for communicators. In the next 6–12 months, certain deliverables will be entirely replaced by AI. There is a substantial transformation job to do in virtually all comms organisations to embed capabilities from the current crop of GenAI tools. Implemented in the right way, GenAI tools can help cut through day-to-day clutter and free up scarce human brain time for more valuable work.

And pressing forward with a transformation journey will help ready comms organisations for more considerable disruptions that are likely to follow, as new forms of AI come into more general use.





# How Do You Prepare for This?



Most comms organisations (or semi-rogue individuals) are trialing GenAI tools, some more extensively than others. Press forward and expand those trials. Identify specific tasks and functions where GenAI should always make the first attempt.

Take advantage of AI to help make sense of complex data landscapes (see Trend 3) or malignant communications environments (See Trend 2).

If your employees' full-time roles focus on producing comms outputs (e.g., analysts analysing single data sources or executives drafting press releases), it's essential to reposition them now as advisors who guide the strategic use of AI, leveraging their expertise to elevate deliverable quality and integrate data sets that enhance AI performance.

# Thank you for reading!

Got questions? Need advice on how to grapple with any of these trends? Want to debate or dig deeper? We've got the experts who can help:

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