

Navigating the Pulse of Modern Communication

Godulla, Alexander; Buller, Christopher; Freudl, Vanessa; Merz, Isabel; Twittenhoff, Johanna; Winkler, Jessica; Zapke, Laura

Erstveröffentlichung / Primary Publication

Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Godulla, A., Buller, C., Freudl, V., Merz, I., Twittenhoff, J., Winkler, J., Zapke, L. (2024). Navigating the Pulse of Modern Communication. In A. Godulla, C. Buller, V. Freudl, I. Merz, J. Twittenhoff, J. Winkler, L. Zapke (Eds.), *The Dynamics of Digital Influence: Communication Trends in Business, Politics and Activism* (pp. 1-5). Leipzig <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-94683-2>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



UNIVERSITÄT
LEIPZIG

The Dynamics of Digital Influence

Communication Trends in
Business, Politics and Activism

Edited by Alexander Godulla, Christopher Buller,
Vanessa Freudl, Isabel Merz, Johanna Twittenhoff,
Jessica Winkler and Laura Zapke



Imprint

The Dynamics of Digital Influence: Communication Trends in Business, Politics and Activism

Edited by Alexander Godulla, Christopher Buller, Vanessa Freudl, Isabel Merz, Johanna Twittenhoff, Jessica Winkler, Laura Zapke

Book designed with the help of AI [Midjourney, www.midjourney.com] and by Kelly Busch, Alexandra Grüber, Anna Kollmer, Denise Kunz, Elise Mattheus, Noa Sandke

Editorial proofreading by Christopher Buller, Vanessa Freudl, Isabel Merz, Johanna Twittenhoff, Jessica Winkler, Laura Zapke

Linguistic proofreading and formatting by Kalkidan Classen, Stefan Eberherr, Patricia Görsch, Dominik Kewe, Julia Stumpf, Lotta Wegner

First Edition, Leipzig, 2024

Navigating the Pulse of Modern Communication

Alexander Godulla, Christopher Buller, Vanessa Freudl, Isabel Merz, Johanna Twittenhoff,
Jessica Winkler, Laura Zapke

In the fast-paced digital age, the landscape of strategic communication is undergoing a profound transformation. The convergence of technology, media, and public discourse has created a dynamic environment where traditional communication methods are being constantly redefined. "The Dynamics of Digital Influence: Communication Trends in Business, Politics and Activism" seeks to explore this ever-evolving terrain, offering a window into the current and future trends that are reshaping the way we communicate. The advent of digital platforms has democratized information dissemination, enabling voices from all corners of the world to participate in the global conversation. This shift has not only expanded the reach of communication but also introduced new complexities and challenges. For strategic communicators, understanding these nuances is crucial to effectively engage with diverse audiences and navigate the intricacies of modern media.

One of the most significant changes in recent years is the rise of social media as a dominant force in public communication. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and LinkedIn have become central to the way individuals and organizations convey their messages. These platforms are not just tools for personal expression; they are powerful channels for political discourse, environmental activism, corporate branding, and much more. Social media platforms have revolutionized the way we communicate, providing unprecedented opportunities for interaction and engagement. The accessibility and immediacy of these platforms have made them indispensable tools for individuals and organizations alike. However, this shift has also brought about new challenges, particularly in the areas of information accuracy, privacy, and the amplification of misinformation.

The speed at which information spreads on social media can be both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, it allows for rapid dissemination of important news and updates. On the other hand, it can lead to the spread of false information before it can be fact-checked. The phenomenon of "fake news" has become a significant concern, highlighting the need for media literacy and critical thinking skills among users. Moreover, the algorithms that drive social media platforms tend to create echo chambers, where users are primarily exposed to content that aligns with their existing beliefs. This can reinforce biases and polarize public opinion. For communicators, this means that crafting messages that can break through these echo chambers and reach a broader audience is more important than ever.

Emotional engagement has always been a key component of effective communication, but its importance has been magnified in the digital age. The virality of content on social media is often driven by its emotional impact. Posts that evoke strong emotions, whether positive or

negative, are more likely to be shared and commented on, increasing their reach and influence. Understanding the emotional triggers of different audience segments is crucial for communicators. This involves not only tapping into universal emotions like joy, anger, and sadness but also tailoring messages to the specific cultural and social contexts of the audience. Effective emotional engagement can build stronger connections with the audience, fostering loyalty and advocacy. However, there is a delicate balance to be maintained. Over-reliance on emotional manipulation can backfire, leading to cynicism and distrust. Authenticity is key; messages that resonate on an emotional level must also be grounded in truth and integrity to maintain credibility.

Corporate communication has also evolved significantly in the digital age. Companies are no longer just engaging in one-way communication through traditional advertising and public relations. Instead, they are participating in a continuous dialogue with their stakeholders, facilitated by social media and other digital platforms. This shift has brought about the concept of “corporate listening”, where companies actively monitor and respond to conversations about their brand. Digital listening tools enable companies to track mentions, sentiments, and trends in real-time, providing valuable insights that can inform their communication strategies. By listening to their audience, companies can address concerns, build relationships, and enhance their reputation. Moreover, the rise of corporate influencers has added a new dimension to corporate communication. These individuals, often employees or executives, use their personal social media profiles to advocate for their company and share industry insights. Their authentic and relatable content can humanize the brand and build trust with the audience.

Meanwhile, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing the field of communication. From content creation to data analysis, AI tools are being increasingly integrated into communication practices. These technologies offer numerous benefits, including increased efficiency, personalized messaging, and enhanced creativity. AI-powered tools can generate content at scale, tailor messages to individual preferences, and analyze vast amounts of data to uncover trends and insights. This allows communicators to focus on more strategic tasks, such as crafting compelling narratives and developing innovative campaigns. However, the integration of AI also presents challenges. There are ethical considerations related to data privacy and the potential for algorithmic bias. Additionally, while AI can augment human capabilities, it cannot replace the creativity, empathy, and nuanced understanding that human communicators bring to the table. A balanced approach that leverages the strengths of both AI and human intelligence is essential.

As we look to the future, it is clear that the field of communication will continue to evolve at a rapid pace. Technological advancements will bring new opportunities and challenges, requiring communicators to stay adaptable and innovative. The ability to navigate this dynamic landscape will be crucial for success. Continuous learning and professional development are

essential. The communication landscape is constantly changing, and staying up-to-date with the latest trends and technologies is crucial. This requires a commitment to lifelong learning and a willingness to embrace new ideas and approaches. Ethical and responsible communication practices are more important than ever. In an era where misinformation and disinformation are rampant, communicators have a responsibility to ensure that their messages are truthful, transparent, and respectful. By adhering to high ethical standards, we can build trust and credibility with our audiences. Critical and strategic thinking is paramount. Effective communicators must be able to analyze complex situations, identify key issues, and develop innovative solutions. This requires a combination of analytical thinking, creative problem-solving, and strategic planning.

These topics are dealt with in a total of six chapters based on current studies. Their topics and authors will now be briefly presented.

In their study “You Talk, We Listen, Everyone Benefits: A qualitative study of value creation through digital corporate listening for different company sizes on the German market”, the authors Stefan Eberherr, Alexandra Grüber, Lea Limpert, Sophie Steindorf, and Johanna Twittenhoff examine to what extent B2C companies of different sizes operating on the German market create value from the customer voice through digital corporate listening. New technologies enable customers to communicate directly with companies, often in real time. Companies are visible on more channels than ever before and need to manage all the input that these developments bring. When adapted efficiently, digital corporate listening can contribute to a company's value creation. But where do companies in the German market stand when it comes to using digital corporate listening? This question is answered by means of qualitative interviews with communication professionals responsible for digital corporate listening. The results provide insights into the status quo of digital corporate listening and its value creation for companies of all sizes.

The integration of generative AI in communication agencies is explored in the second chapter by Abel Fekade, Nico Keppeler, Elise Mattheus, Isabel Merz, and Lotta Wegner. Their study “Intelligent communication? Use of generative AI applications in communication agencies” investigates how agencies implement AI, its impact on client perceptions, and the subsequent strategic adaptations. Generative AI tools like ChatGPT and DeepL are transforming the industry by enhancing efficiency, creativity, and content quality. Framed by the Technology-Organization-Environment model, the study examines applications ranging from creating press releases to managing strategic programs and automating responses. Despite the benefits, concerns about data protection, content accuracy, and the need for specific prompting skills remain significant challenges. The findings underscore substantial operational benefits and call for further research to understand AI's long-term implications and refine its integration into agency practices.

Digital Transformation is impacting the field of communication management in many ways. As this transformation unfolds, the role of communication managers is being redefined, requiring a fresh set of competencies to navigate the changing terrain effectively. In chapter 3, Christopher Buller, Sophia Koderer, Denise Kunz, Jule Schepers, and Julia Stumpf analyze the changing competency profiles of professionals in the field due to latest AI developments. Their paper, titled “Communication management 2.0: A qualitative survey on the effects of AIs on the competence portfolio in communication management”, raises the question of how the evolution of artificial intelligence in businesses influences the competency profile of communication managers. The study, which utilized both systematic surveys and qualitative open-ended interviews with 15 German experienced communication managers of different companies, reveals a dual trend: the increasing reliance on AI for operational tasks and the evolving perception of communication managers' roles. Despite the clear trend towards AI integration, the study highlights a significant variation in how companies implement these technologies.

In the domain of professional networking, the interplay between personal branding and corporate representation has never been more intricate, particularly on platforms like LinkedIn. Chapter 4, derived from an in-depth analysis conducted by researchers Kelly Busch, Kirsten Göthel, Dominik Kewe, Carl Krauß, and Laura Zapke, examines the strategic self-staging of corporate influencers (CIs) within the German-speaking LinkedIn community. Their chapter “Self-staging or brand authenticity? A qualitative content analysis of German-language LinkedIn posts by high-reach corporate influencers” employs the theoretical framework of impression management to examine the content of 100 LinkedIn posts from the Top Voices program. This analysis aims to elucidate the strategies employed by CIs to construct their public personas and reflect the image of their corporate brands. Guided by Kuckartz's structured qualitative content approach, the analysis uncovers the diverse topics addressed by these influencers. The analysis reveals that CIs not only share insights on educational pursuits and personal growth, but also blend in their personal life experiences, thereby adding a layer of relatability and authenticity.

The fifth chapter examines the populist communication strategies employed by the German political party “Alternative für Deutschland” (Alternative for Germany; AfD) on the social media platform TikTok. The party's growing popularity on this platform has led to an increased focus on its communication on TikTok. In their qualitative content analysis, titled “Right-wing populist communication of the AfD party on TikTok. To what extent does the AfD use TikTok as part of its communication to win over young voters?”, the authors Kalkidan Claasen, Anna Kollmer, Malte Schlage, Alicia Schöpflin, Jessica Winkler, and Hannes Witterspan raise the question of to what extent the AfD use TikTok as part of its communication strategy to win over young voters. Based on the investigation of 120 videos from six accounts using the framing theory, the results show that AfD communication covers topics such as security, anti-

establishment attributes, and identity politics. Moreover, the linguistic and stylistic devices employed by the AfD on TikTok and the extent to which the party adheres to current platform rules are investigated. The findings underscore the necessity for democratic parties to adapt their communication strategy on the TikTok platform in order to ultimately reach not only young voters, but also the growing electorate.

Finally, this book concludes with a paper “Emotionality and fact orientation in environmental activism: A comparative content analysis of the communication of Fridays For Future and Letzte Generation on Instagram” by Saskia Damaschke, Vanessa Freudl, Patricia Görsch, Louisa Marko, and Noa Sandke that explores the role of emotionality and fact-orientation in the communication of the two environmental activism groups “Fridays For Future” (FFF) and “Letzte Generation” (Last Generation; LG) on Instagram. Activism can have a significant impact on political and economic changes. Although both groups emerged from the need to tackle the climate crisis, FFF relies on peaceful protest while LG employs more radical courses of action. In light of their different choice of means of protest the authors examine the ways in which they communicate and mobilize. Since they suggest the emotionality and fact-orientation has a significant influence in this, they employed framing theory. With the help of collective action frames, it was possible to investigate how the movements represent themselves and climate change. To gain understanding of the use of different frames they utilize a comparative qualitative content analysis of 283 image and video posts on Instagram. The results provide insights into the framing strategies which can help political decision-makers to better understand and take into account the concerns of environmental movements.