

curated by the usc center for public relations

the relevance report

leading trends, topics,
+ wisdom from the
communications leaders
behind the
annenberg school at the
university of southern california

2017

introduction



The mission of the USC Center for Public Relations (CPR) at the Annenberg School is to shape the future of the communications industry and those who will lead it. To that end, we have created the first annual Relevance Report – a forecast of topics and trends that will be important to communicators in 2017.

All of the contributors to this project are associated with the Annenberg School for Communications and Journalism at the University of Southern California. They include professors, students and members of CPR's advisory board. They are a diverse group of leaders in their agencies, industries and academic fields, who represent equally diverse points of view on the future of communications.

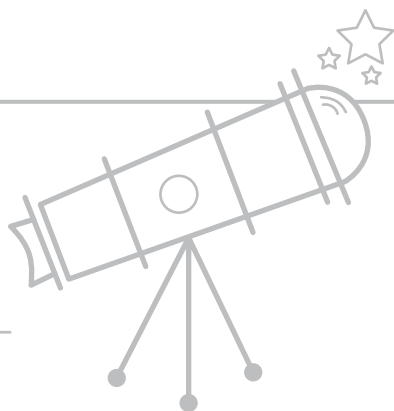
The Relevance Report is designed to give those studying and working in public relations a preview of what the coming year will mean for our industry, for our society and for our careers.

The pieces are brief and insightful and cover a broad range of topics from Cuba to China and from silent films to virtual reality. We hope the Report will become a valuable tool for those who want to remain relevant in one of the fastest-changing global professions. We plan to expand and enhance the content in the future. So please let us know what you think.

Many thanks to our contributors who took time out of their busy schedules to share their perspectives, to our staff members who manage the editorial, design and production process, and to our sponsors who make our work possible.

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Humana.


Meltwater
Outside Insight

GOLIN

table of contents

media

Come Closer, Bernadette Anat, Instagram	06
Mainstreaming of Video Streaming, Cindy Gordon, Nintendo of America Inc.	08
You Get What You Pay For, Gabriel Kahn, USC Annenberg	10
Learning from Machines, Alex Cohen, Apttus	12
Cutting the Cord, Stephanie Pulido, USC Annenberg	14
Looking into the Future with Outside Insights, Kaveh Rostampor, Meltwater	16
Sixty and Significant, Dr. Stacy L. Smith, Dr. Katherine Pieper, USC Annenberg	18

communications

Never Being Content With Content, Corey duBrowa, Starbucks	22
Influencers: Now More Than Ever, Deanne Yamamoto, Golin	24
Changing Skills for a Changing Landscape, Bob Feldman, PulsePoint Group	26
Navigating Social Geology, Dave Samson, Chevron	28
The Rise of Purpose, Burghardt Tenderich, USC Annenberg	30
Chief Gatekeeper?, Don Spetner, Weber Shandwick Worldwide	32
Virtual PR, Juan Garcia, USC Annenberg	34
Time to Retire Old Expressions, Bill Imada, IW Group	36
Global Policy in a Fracturing World, Jay Wang, USC Annenberg	38

technology

Return of the Silent Film, Tyler C. Stevens, Shareability	42
Virtual Reality is a Reality, Robert Hernandez, USC Annenberg	44
The Future of Online Shopping, Dan Tarman, eBay	46
Screaming into the Echo Chamber, Todd Defren, SHIFT Communications	48
China Technically, Glenn Osaki, MSLGROUP	50
Mr. Robot, Tony Weisman, Digitas LBi	52

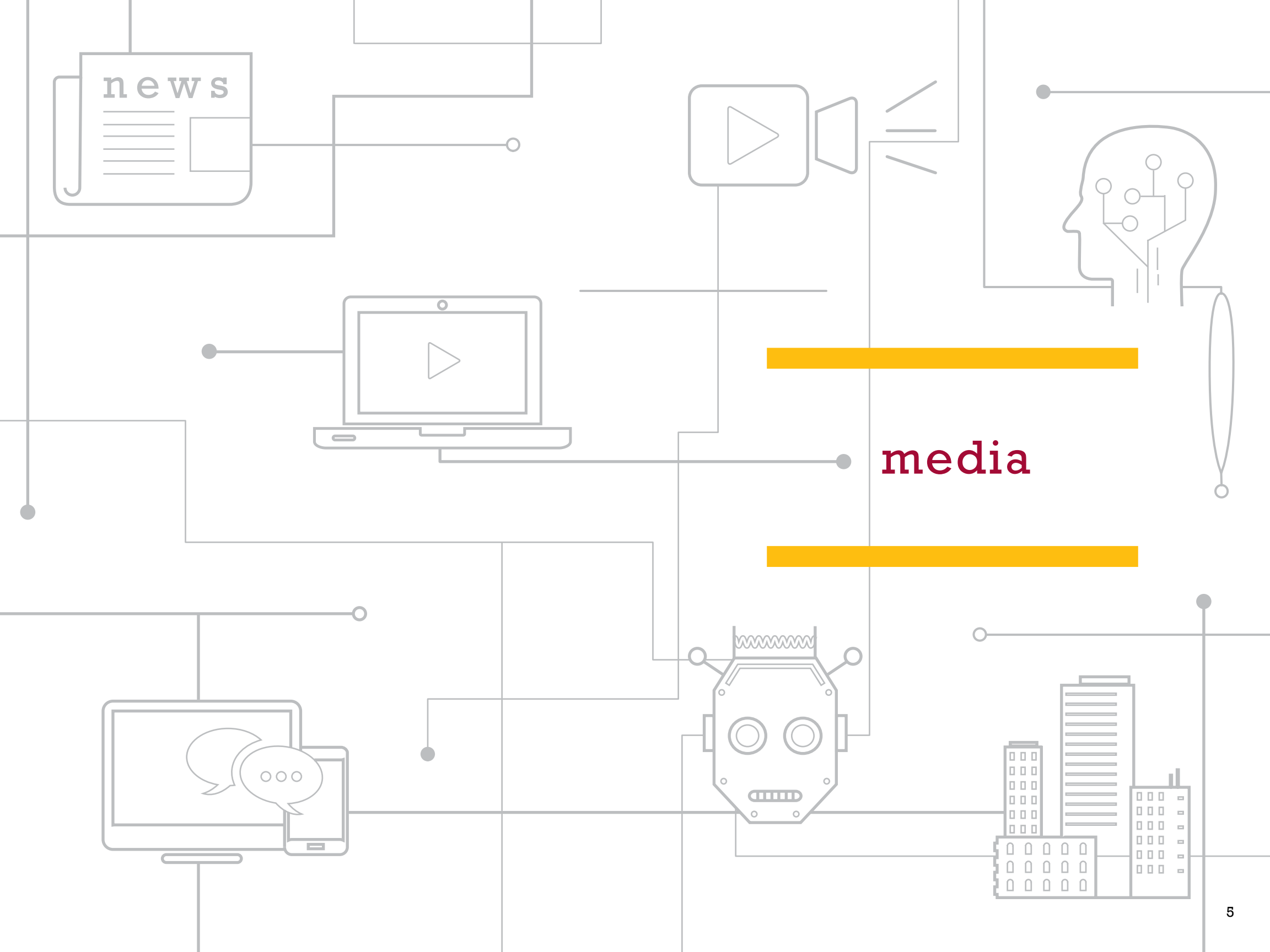
brand

Brand Building in Real Time, Heather Rim, AECOM	56
Seeking Relevant Insights, Robert Kozinets, USC Annenberg	58
The Omnichannel Customer Experience, Kirk Stewart, KTStewart	60
The Road to Relevance, Caroline Dettman, Golin	62
Reputation Requires Permission, Michael Stewart, Ketchum	64

people

Millennials in Management, Adrienne Cadena, Havas Street	68
Demographics and Race Reshape the Future, Julia Wilson, Wilson Global	70
Wheels Up for Cuba, Jim Olson, United Airlines	72
A Life Half Full, Tom Noland, Humana	74
Why Empathy and Why Now, Dr. Ernest J. Wilson III, USC Annenberg	76





news

media

come closer

bernadette anat



In the world of social media, innovations in 2016 were all about speed, efficiency and frenzied launching – it seemed like, every five seconds, a major social media app was coming out with a new feature to better serve their communities. Our messages could disappear; our faces could transform; our videos could tell much longer and more provocative narratives. With Instagram Stories, we went from only allowing the world to see your most precious, beautifully curated moments to being able to capture everything that happens in between.

In short: 2016 has been *a lot*.

My job at Instagram is to think about what is important to the everyday teen who is inundated with these updates; who is confronted daily with the thousands of surfaces on which they are expected to share their lives. I don't think the pace of product update launches will change – I think we all have to become accustomed to this breakneck Update Your App Every 12 Seconds pace. However, as we stumble confusedly into 2017 – or, personally, sprinting manically away from the moral garbage fire that was 2016 – I think the focus of next year's innovations will become a bit more humanized.

If this year's social media landscape seemed to poke young users with a message of *Share More*, next year's innovations will be telling us all one thing: **Come Closer**.

Here's how next year will get us all to bring our networks closer around us:

video: permanent, ephemeral and live

Present teen communities effortlessly and comfortably express themselves via video. (Us Olds, who clam up or run screaming when a camera is pointed at us, do not.) The three main means of vertical, mobile video broadcasting – Permanent, i.e. Instagram video or YouTube; Ephemeral, i.e. expiring Instagram Story or Snapchat videos; and Live, i.e. YouNow and Live.ly – will grow to the point of total fluidity and fluency in our younger teen communities. In short: All forms of video will proliferate and rule, and mobile teens will be totally fearless about using all of it. (Which will, naturally, terrify adults.)



the focus of next year's innovations will become a bit more humanized.

relevant comedy

Comedians are dominating video views on Instagram, and they're capturing young audiences simply by illustrating the tiny truths of normal lives. To seem #relevant, and to make the #relevant hilarious, is to be powerful. These video creators will be the keyholders to the rapt eyes and ears of millions of their teen fans, and teen-hungry brands will continue to flock and throw money and products their way, as they've done throughout 2016.

social good

The upcoming wave of teen communities consists of humans who know that the generations before them have, essentially, ruined the earth in countless ways and feel an instinctive responsibility to be a part of the solution. In the wake of this tumultuous election year, we will see unprecedented teen interest in causes, campaigns and products pointed toward preserving the earth, giving to those less fortunate, and displaying awareness and support around issues of social justice.

a return to IRL (in real life)

In the hundreds of conversations I've had with many teens – international and domestic, normal and "influencer-level" – they are all deeply grateful to social media for one thing: Giving them real-life communities. I am referring to the teen who finds a supportive LGBTQ family online, away from their conservative hometowns. The teen who shares photos encouraging total body positivity and filters her comment section to ensure only positive and enthusiastic conversation. Our teens are eager to bring their online circles of support to life, whether through organized meet-ups, fandom-focused events like VidCon or TwitchCon, or shooting a DM to a mutual follow near them and brainstorming new places to hang.

As media platforms, brands and PR professionals catch on to the fact that today's teen communities are not shallow or wasteful, but incredibly creative, powerful and hungry for deeper human connections, the landscape of media directed at teens must – and will – morph. I am incredibly optimistic about the forecast of teen community engagement in the next year. The kids are, have been, and will be, alright – we just need to listen to them, keep them connected and stay out of their way.

Bernadette Anat is a writer, producer and teen advocate living in San Francisco. She is currently a Producer on Instagram's Community team, focusing on Teens & Emerging Trends. Bernadette obtained her B.A. Public Relations from Annenberg and is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

mainstreaming of video streaming

cindy gordon



The writing, or in this case the video, is clearly on the wall.

As a marketing medium, video has amped up consumer conversion and click-throughs by a minimum of 80%, it's created a new tier of mega influencers with millions of followers and its mobile variant is jumping by orders of magnitude in volume and views. And if a picture is worth a thousand words, one minute of video is worth 1.8 million, according to one analyst's estimate on video's impact.

Marketers have gotten the message. In 2016, video ad spending exceeded \$5.5 billion and video ads will account for more than one-third of online ad budgets.

But for all the runaway momentum, video is about to become as stiff as an old-school infographic in the ever-evolving arc of "visual content marketing." Like every aspect of tech-driven convergence and disruption, video is being upended by the next big thing.

Ironically, in this case, video is being disrupted by itself.

I've seen it in my world of video games, where it seems like five minutes ago the rage was "Let's Play" videos, where gamers are entertained and educated by watching a YouTuber work their way through a game in a packaged video.

if a picture is worth a
1000 words,
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A fun and vicarious chance to feel like you're looking over a player's shoulder: Enter sites like Twitch that took out the one-step removed, virtual, "feels like" element of canned video and made the experience live and even more real and appealing in all its rough, unproduced and streamed authentic glory. Amazon thought enough of the idea to pay nearly \$1 billion for Twitch, and YouTube soon followed suit with its own live streaming gaming site.

The appeal of these live stream videos transcends the so-called video game fanboy because they tap into a much deeper consumer yearning for real and unaltered content – that just happens to be colorful, compelling and a little voyeuristic to look at with a community of co-viewers.

That's why we've seen the world rapidly shift from not just static video to live stream, but from desktop viewing to follow-you-anywhere mobile live streaming. What started with apps like Meerkat and Periscope has now taken hold as a foundational element of social media and stalwarts like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

Tapping into this trend might seem like an easy pivot for brands already dabbling in video or for those looking to get into the next new channel for direct-to-consumer communication. But it's not that simple. The challenges of not selling or pandering to today's digital native are magnified through the aperture of live video, unadorned of gloss and packaging. If brands don't raise the bar in creating real-time, unpolished, and authentic moments in their live streaming efforts, they will pay a painful price with clear-eyed video viewers.

As communication innovators, we have the chance to lead the mainstreaming of live video streaming if we don't stop at simply wedging our marketing messages into the stream.

Can we create live video experiences with energy and personality that interact with consumers' lives and loves in a manner that respects the medium, defines it further and makes a natural home for brand and product story-telling? Or do we play catch-up to this next trend, bolt on an ad or product placement and hope we don't get burned by consumer backlash?

Added bonus: The work we do here will position our industry better for future developments in emerging areas like augmented reality and virtual reality – all pieces of the bigger visual content puzzle.

Given the potential lasting nature of this medium, it will be worth the effort to lead the charge. The possibilities are as endless as the potential of a live video once the camera starts to shoot.

With more than 20 years of PR experience in consumer brands, Cindy Gordon joined Nintendo of America in March 2011 as vice president of Corporate Affairs. Cindy is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

you get what you pay for

gabriel kahn



40% of people get their news via Facebook



This expression, repeated to me by my grandmother, who came of age during the Depression, frames the current struggles of the news business. To put it bluntly, for close to two decades, readers of news have been fed the intoxicating proposition that they don't have to pay a dime. Now, it's becoming clear that the massive online advertising market that magically was supposed to make that all work is coming unglued. As it does, it is bringing about seismic shifts in the worlds of advertising and news.

In the mythology of online publishing, national brands were supposed to garner immense digital audiences, advertising would flock to them and money would fall from the skies. How were smaller, local news publishers supposed to compete? Simple. They attracted a more defined target audience, often distinguished by geography, so they could charge a higher rate and get by even with fewer eyeballs.

Publishers were just as eager as readers to believe this fantasy, and they adjusted their distribution accordingly, flooding the Internet with free content. This system was brought down by the most basic law of economics: supply and demand. In a digital world, it is easy and cheap to create new advertising inventory (supply), but advertising dollars (demand) consistently grow in line with GDP.

Digital ad prices have been falling steadily with few exceptions. In the most recent quarter, overall advertising revenues at *The New York Times Co.* were down 7.7%. A former digital products executive at the *Los Angeles Times* told me that she had watched CPMs fall from around \$20 a few years ago to around \$2 recently. Some outlets that depended heavily on digital advertising, such as the *International Business Times*, have had to slash their newsrooms to adjust.

At the same time, digital advertising continues to be a boon for the two heavyweights -- Google Inc. and Facebook Inc. Google's revenues alone are greater than that of the entire global newspaper industry. They have little incentive to change the status quo.

Therein lies a thorny problem. For years, platforms, such as Facebook, Google and Twitter, had pushed the gospel that their interests were aligned with publishers. Make your content free and we'll send you more traffic and more money. But only one side of this equation is working. And though many publishers, at the behest of Facebook, crafted their audience acquisition strategy around the promise of finding readers on the social network, the Palo Alto firm recently demonstrated that love isn't a two-way street. In July it tweaked its algorithm to give higher priority to photos from friends and family than to news.

So these two industries, platforms and news, are starting to untangle themselves from what was always a dysfunctional relationship. But as it is with many separations, it isn't pretty. News publishers are now scrambling to squeeze more revenue directly from readers in the form of subscriptions, memberships, specialty paid products, conferences, or whatever else they can devise in a hurry. But after decades of being told that news was free, not every reader is willing to pay up. Banner ads are giving way to branded content in an attempt to create advertising that doesn't get immediately commoditized by Google. If you've noticed a proliferation of email newsletters in your inbox, it's because publishers now need to claw back that direct relationship with readers that they previously had ceded to the social platforms. It's a major shift toward producing and distributing content, and publishers have yet to figure it out.

Meanwhile, the platforms are where the eyeballs are. They have been migrating there steadily for years. According to the latest Pew research, 40% of people get their news via Facebook. This is hitting TV the way it's hitting traditional print outlets. This year, MTV's Video Music Awards found nearly double the audience (12 million) on Snapchat as it did on its linear television broadcast.

Gabriel Kahn is a Professor of Professional Practice of Journalism at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. Gabriel Kahn worked as a newspaper correspondent and editor for two decades, including 10 years at The Wall Street Journal.

learning from machines

alex cohen

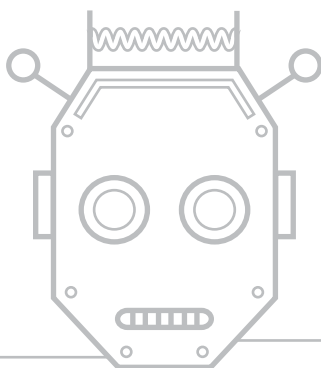


The future is now, and it is not picky: whether through self-driving cars, movie recommendations, or a guiding hand in a complex sales cycle, the effects of artificial intelligence are readily apparent across every industry. The media relations ecosystem is no exception. This is a field that prides itself on innovation, adaptation and being ahead of this curve.

Not long ago, the onset of digital communications and social media brought about a pivot in media relations so drastic that the entire industry tore up the playbook; we're still seeing the impact today. Below are just a few examples of these paradigm shifts, and how informed practitioners can negotiate them:

- Intelligent automation has flipped the script on how articles are created, published and shared; nationally respected institutions, like the AP, now employ advanced 'robot journalists' that generate content with complete independence. This is enabled by institutions like Automated Insights, using a data-based algorithm that powers their Wordsmith platform, generating millions of articles per week.
- If robots are breaking the news, what will warm-blooded people write about?
The repercussions, the results, the long-term benefits or consequences of whatever happens to be dominating the headlines. It's not yet time to negotiate with A.I. writers; instead, work with your clients to dig deeper into what your pitches are trying to accomplish. It is likely that the second layer of messaging will be of more interest to your media targets – their voice and opinion is the separating factor between human and machine, give them a chance to emphasize it.

**if robots are breaking the news,
what will warm-blooded people
write about?**



- Content curation for your favorite outlet's homepage is now, literally, a science. Some writers are allowed free reign to find subjects that interest them, but most are not in that position. Click-bait pays their rent and feeds them; if they are hungry for a well-viewed article, you must deliver it to them. This can be accomplished in several ways:
 - You must understand a site's priorities as well as the writers do. Don't be afraid to ask them directly, everyone benefits. For example, how does your favorite outlet's display algorithm work? If an article is going to stay on the front page it depends on it generating 1,000 shares or views in the first day, then you must work with your client team to disseminate it to their entire company, and your own organization's network as well. If views within the first few hours aren't spectacular, you might lose your chance to work with them a second time. Game the system by preparing these measures in advance of publication.
 - While often built in-house (to mixed results, circa Facebook's recent content syndication controversies), cloud entities like Domo offer a custom approach to these mechanics that use real-time analytics and behavior-based data to bring content to their users.
- Predictive insights and segmentation have brought a level of personalization to readers that they may not even be aware of. Don't underestimate the reach and value of a little-known writer, given modern search engine capabilities.
 - It's easy to aim high: no one forgets their first big hit in the *The Wall Street Journal* or *The New York Times*. However, these aren't always going to be the most tactically valuable pieces from your client's POV. Today, not only are niche topics and angles easy for an interested reader to find, they are often delivered to them directly. If there's a specific announcement or product capability that doesn't interest the biggest players in your media sphere, don't abandon it. Dig deeper and find the right spokesperson, even if it's a local outlet from somewhere that's decidedly un-local. Alternatively, pair the news with a more relevant story: if a new product feature isn't breaking down doors, how much does it benefit from a subtle mention of how it might impact the public markets? Not only does this land you an extra keyword for search engines to pick up on, it could tip the scales in terms of delivering results. From Google's ad displays to B2B-focused orgs like Netline, content syndication is booming due to its critical place in the lead generation pipeline.

As always, the best-informed professionals will adapt to new technologies. Don't view them as barriers to be overcome: understanding each new development is the first step in making it work for you.

As Director of Corporate Marketing, Alex Cohen is responsible for communications strategy and global branding for Apttus, the category-defining Quote-to-Cash provider. Alex Cohen is an USC graduate and an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

cutting the cord

stephanie pulido



As younger generations move further and further away from consuming content via traditional mediums such as print newspapers and magazines, it makes sense that even television is beginning to feel neglected. With the advent of online streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu, which allow you to personalize your entertainment selections the generalized nature of cable becomes unappealing. Instead millennials are gravitating towards their electronic devices such as their laptops and cellphones to engage with content.

The only major pull to maintain a cable subscription these days for millennials stems from live sports. Despite sporting events maintaining their real-time allure fairly well, even that is starting to diminish. ESPN from 2013-2015 lost about \$1.3 billion in revenue due to 7 million subscribers cutting the cord with their cable fees. Since subscribers account for the majority of ESPN's revenue this loss was not taken lightly. ESPN has thus recently decided to shift toward unbundling their network and will soon be rolling out niche sport streaming services while still maintaining prime content like basketball and football on television.

ESPN is not alone in this endeavor, as many television networks have launched their own online streaming services. The NFL recently partnered with Twitter to live stream 10 Thursday night football games this season. Their first live stream attracted 2.1 million viewers over the span of the Jets vs. Bills game and was praised for its accessibility, easy functionality and glitch-free interface. The overall thought process behind ESPN and the NFL offering their content via online streaming services is to allow viewers who may not have cable but are active online and value mobility to have the opportunity to access their content. Now, the tricky part is for networks to make a profit from these streaming services and for public relation practitioners to navigate this changing landscape.

Live award shows are similarly facing a rating crisis as TV viewership continues to plummet year after year. The ratings for MTV's infamous Video Music Awards have dropped for the fourth year in a row despite performances made by powerhouse acts, like Beyoncé, and constant onstage drama. MTV states that despite the drop in television ratings there was a 70% increase in online streams from 2015. The only problem with online streams is that they are not nearly as important to advertisers as television ratings. Advertisers continue to use the Nielsen rating system as a measurement of whether advertising on that network is profitable. As MTV's ratings drop so do those willing to advertise on that network which impacts MTV's profits. However, MTV is not alone, most networks are facing the same problem as they scramble to maintain relevance with their millennial audience and the advertisers who want to reach them.

Although millennials are shifting away from television as a prime source of content this in no way reflects a decrease in consumption of content as a whole. In fact, more content is being consumed now than ever before. The average millennial spends around 490 minutes a day with some sort of media and this number is expected to increase to 506 minutes by 2017. The only thing changing is how this content is consumed. The advancement of hand-held technology demands that communicators be increasingly creative in their approach to reaching younger target audiences.

As a millennial, I did not own a television during my years at college and only now have one because I live at home with my parents. But I never turn it on. I consume all of my media through my phone or laptop and exclusively watch shows and movies from these devices. One of my professors recently asked our class who owned a television and only half of the hands went up in a room of 20 public relations grad students. And most of the TV owners confessed they rarely turned them on and when they did they were often interacting with an electronic device at the same time.

The most effective way to target my generation is through social media, specifically through Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube. We appreciate the curated content marketed on these platforms and social media influencers who dominate them. As millennials continue to cut subscription fees and disconnect televisions, traditional communicators will lose a tried-and-true avenue to reach younger audiences. But millennial public relations professionals will always know how to find them.

Stephanie Pulido is a first-year graduate student in the Master's in Strategic Public Relations program at the University of Southern California.

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looking into the future with outside insights

kaveh rostampor



media intelligence
enables us to tune into
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A brand adds up to much more than a business asset or marketing metric. Brand activity includes a wide range of interactions. Pick any company and think of all the ways it tries to engage audiences in dialogue—and all the ways its audiences respond. With the right mindset and tools, tracking these interactions in the news and on social media can go far beyond shaping our approach to communications. It can tell us a lot about the business performance of a company as a whole, now and in the future, with the potential to change how we make even the most far-reaching strategic plans.

With media intelligence, business decision-makers can shift attention from internal processes to external ones. For many years, business intelligence has exclusively focused on proprietary data stored in ERP, CRM, and SCM systems to incrementally optimize operations. Media intelligence on the other hand enables us to tune into the never-ending stream of conversation within a business ecosystem.

Why limit our focus only to ourselves when we can just as easily look at our competitors, partners, customers and critics? By mining openly available data, we can know as much about them as we know about our own business. And we can respond to change while there's still time to do something about it.

Instead of limiting ourselves to reporting on past activity, we can now access real-time insight. Media intelligence draws on massive data sets capable of uncovering trends while they are still gathering momentum, before outcomes become inevitable. We are now in the position to anticipate the future, rather than react to the past.

This already sounds familiar to communication pros. They monitor their brand across hundreds of thousands of publications and billions of social media conversations. They do this every day. If they're proactive, they monitor competitors just as carefully. Even more importantly, they don't just address isolated media events as they arise, they use media intelligence analytics to uncover trends that are shaping brand perception in real time. They turn what most people think of as ephemeral, "of-the-moment" interaction into clear, actionable insight, the kind we call *outside insight*.

While corporate communications leaders have a head start in this arena, at Meltwater, we believe that outside insight will increasingly gain traction across business functions. New data will be added to the mix, including financials, job postings, real estate transactions, and patent filings. What do all of these data types have in common? They communicate intent. In other words, they open up a view into the future of companies, industries and markets.

A strong business can make adjustments as it goes, but as agile as your internal processes are, if you don't have the relevant input, it won't matter. External information, openly available on the Internet is one of the biggest underutilized resources for corporate decision-making today. Think of all the insight that can be had from directly talking to a customer at a focus group. Now imagine answers to all those questions already available to you online, if only you were able to get to them. The necessary media intelligence tools being offered to decision-makers are available, constantly being designed and refined. What are the business questions you've always wanted answers to?

Kaveh Rostampor is the Executive Director of Meltwater's Americas division. More than 25,000 companies use the Meltwater Media Intelligence platform to stay on top of billions of online conversations and to extract relevant insights. Meltwater is a sponsor of the Relevance Report.

sixty and significant

dr. stacy l. smith
dr. katherine pieper



Everyone is talking about inclusion in Hollywood, right? Most of these conversations are about race, ethnicity, LGBT, disability and gender. Yet, there is another “ism” facing the film business that is costing this industry hundreds of thousands of dollars per year. What I am talking about is ageism.

Did you know that individuals 60 years of age or older comprise roughly a fifth of the U.S. population? Despite that, characters in this age grouping are rarely seen on screen. Across the 100 top films of 2015, a full 14 did not show one male 60 years of age or older and 43 did not show one female. Older characters, just like those that are underrepresented racially or ethnically, disabled, or from the LGBT community are still facing erasure on the silver screen.

Further, when characters 60 years of age or above are depicted on screen, they are often trivialized or ridiculed. In terms of trivialization, a full 11% of the seniors depicted on screen die over the course of the plot. While death is a common theme in every individual's life whether in film or in reality, the way in which these seniors perished is of note. The number one cause of screen death was violence. A full 79% of all characters 60 years of age or older died as a result of physical aggression. Yet, in the real world, the number one cause of death is heart disease. This cinematic trend is problematic, as repeated exposure to media portrayals of aggression is associated with increased safety concerns and fear of victimization. If seniors see themselves on screen as victims, this may unnecessarily affect their views of security in real life.

2017 offers all
companies the opportunity
to engage the senior
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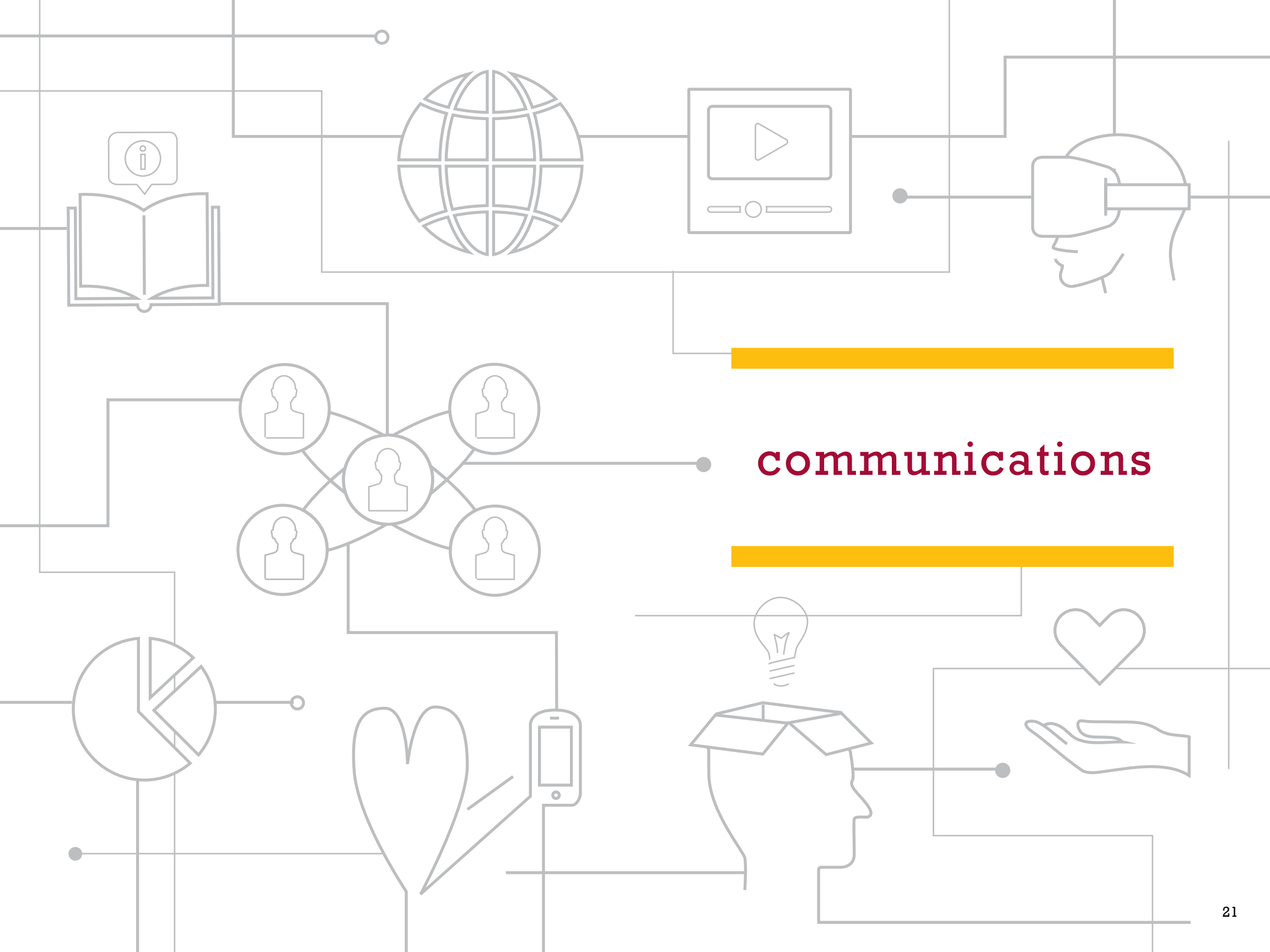
In terms of ridicule, film also illuminates just how disposable and disparaged seniors actually are. Of the 57 movies with a leading or supporting character 60 years of age or older, over half or 53% featured an “ageist” comment. Some of those quips include, but are not limited to, general comments about age (i.e., “You are nothing but a relic from a deleted timeline,” “Old ass gangster”) whereas others were about cognition (i.e., “You believe this senile horseshit?” “Wow, what was your major? Do you remember?”). Research suggests that possessing negative age stereotypes can have a deleterious effect on multiple health and wellness indicators.

Exposing these trends in film was the goal of our recent Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative report sponsored by Humana. In conjunction with the USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, we wanted our findings to make salient that seniors are being left out of the inclusion conversation in Hollywood. But seniors (and Baby Boomers) truly have the last laugh. According to an A.T. Kearney report from 2010, individuals age 50 and over commanded over three-quarters of U.S. financial resources.

As the Boomers age, the film industry must look to the future. Entertainment companies will leave money on the table by not engaging this audience. We have jumpstarted the conversation with our 2016 report, but 2017 offers all companies the opportunity to engage the senior audience in new ways. Our goal is to further explore film and television depictions in the coming year, while asking content creators to give seniors the chance to see themselves reflected on screen with dignity. This is good for seniors and for the bottom line.

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Dr. Katherine Pieper received her Ph.D. and M.A. in Communication from the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. She works with Dr. Stacy Smith at the Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative at USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism.



communications

never being content with content

corey dubrowa

Communicators are storytellers at heart. We thrive in shaping stories with compelling characters, natural tension and memorable perspectives. In our best moments this content engages audiences and elicits an emotional response. But as the media landscape evolves at a rapid pace and a younger audience is consuming information very differently than that of previous generations, it's clear that how we bring a story to life requires radical transformation.

- Pew Research Center shows that Newsrooms continue to shrink. Latest newsroom figures show 10% declines, leaving a workforce that is 20,000 positions smaller than 20 years prior.
- At the same time, trust in traditional news is also decreasing. Only 33% of people in the U.S. and 43% in Europe trust the news, according to Reuters Digital News report.
- This report also shows social sharing continuing to expand, with 51% of people globally using social media as a platform to find and share news.
- And video is becoming the top way information is consumed online. According to Pixability, more content is uploaded to YouTube in 60 days than all three major U.S. networks generated in the last 60 years. And Facebook users watch 4 billion video streams every day.

Faced with less trusted traditional media and more content in their social feeds, younger consumers are open to information from various content creators in a way they haven't been before. Edelman's 2016 Trust results show that when it comes to brands that young people follow, "companies that I use" and "employees of a company" outperform journalists and online personalities. Consumers are also clear in what content they want to see from brands, and the

Trust report shows there are four key factors that help content to break through:

1. **Informative/teaches consumers something new (87%)**
2. **Connected/part of a video series (78%)**
3. **Authentic/fits naturally with the company sponsoring it (76%)**
4. **Validates/includes a personal story (74%).**

At Starbucks, we've embraced and addressed this changing landscape by putting more emphasis in developing our own content, and leveraging our owned channels as well as new platforms and partnerships to reach our most important audiences. Just three years ago, we gave our online newsroom, which was merely a graveyard of press releases at the time, a transformation in which we were able to allow viewers (media, customers, our own employees, stakeholders, etc.) to share our stories on our chosen timeframe through compelling video, photography and people-focused story-telling. This allowed the content to fully come alive, and was a clear departure from our previously product-focused storytelling. Virtually overnight, the site became a true story-telling platform – from an average of 150,000 unique monthly views (UMV) before the



more content is uploaded
to youtube in **60** days than
all three major u.s. networks
generated in the last
60 years



reimagined site launched to more than 1.5 million UMV today. The greater impact is the earned media coverage linked directly to our stories and assets, which ranges between 450 million – 1 billion impressions each month.

This platform has been retooled over the past three years as we have recruited award-winning journalists, photographers and videographers to help dimensionalize our content. We've built a reservoir of trust through the newsroom, expanding our storytelling toolbox to reach audiences with rich multi-media assets and content development.

This fall we are expanding these efforts even further; embarking on a first-of-its-kind project to develop an original documentary series with story-telling at the core, and video as the primary channel to engage Starbucks customers in a way that hasn't been done before. Working with a respected journalist and Starbucks executive producer of social impact initiatives, we sought to find and tell stories of Americans who are taking action to drive positive change in their communities – at a time when there isn't much positive change being discussed through traditional media, preoccupied as they are with the election and its various byproducts.

None of these stories are directly connected to Starbucks, or to coffee. Instead, they are authentic, emotional stories that showcase instances of catalytic citizenship – extraordinary actions taking by ordinary citizens ("Upstanders") to make our communities and world better through the choices we all make everyday.

So far, the world has reacted positively to the notion of sharing this content across various owned properties and select media partners to inspire others to take actions in their own communities, big and small – these stories have generated nearly 75 million total views and 1 billion total earned media impressions (almost universally favorable) and most critically, drove results for our Upstanders and their programs.

The program was praised on floor of Congress and featured at the White House's inaugural "South by South Lawn" festival as a way to illustrate how everyday Americans are tackling the country's most difficult challenges. It's been a rewarding experience in which we have learned much and blown through every metric for success we had established for the program, even one that established Starbucks as a publishing platform – an outcome we weren't necessarily convinced would happen in our first attempt.

As we continue to look for new ways to share the Starbucks story, the same rule still holds true: know your audience and make the story meaningful (and accessible, in as many ways as possible) to that audience. By putting their needs ahead of the brand, we can deliver results for both.

Corey duBrowa is Senior Vice President of Global Communications and International Public Affairs for Starbucks. Corey is also an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

influencers: now, more than ever, a key to keeping pr relevant

deanne yamamoto

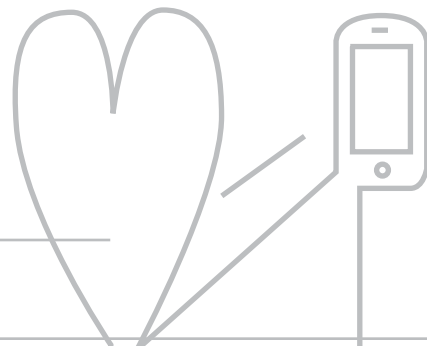
Public relations has long relied on the voices of third parties to reach people we care about. From the earliest days of our profession, we've earned valuable ink and airtime by building relationships and sharing stories with journalists and other opinion leaders.

And while credentialed media remain important in our work to change perceptions and behaviors, a new crop of tastemakers has risen, along with a variety of new ways to engage them.

Many of today's influencers weren't even in the consideration set just a few years ago. According to Variety, eight of the top 10 most influential personalities for U.S. teens are now YouTubers, not traditional entertainment stars like TV heartthrobs, athletes, or even prominent media figures. Every day, new influencers emerge in every imaginable platform – from blogs to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Vine, Pinterest and Snapchat. Many of them generate reach and engagement that eclipse the impact of conventional PR and marketing activities. Mounting evidence also shows their power to drive sales.

In many organizations, it's a jump ball as communicators, marketers and digital specialists all vie for control of this fast growing area. By the end of 2016, 60% of companies will have increased their influencer marketing spend year-on-year, reports AdWeek.

70% of influencers now expect to be paid for their work with brands.



reload the rolodex

PR practitioners have long been valued for our connections with journalists. But in today's world, we need to build broader relationships with a variety of tastemakers including both A-listers who command massive followings, and micro-influencers who can spark at least 2x more engagement with audiences, albeit at a smaller scale. Savvy communicators are establishing new connections directly and are also tapping influencer marketplaces that provide quick access to vetted creators. The connections of the past can't power the campaigns of the future and PR's ability to access new storytellers will help solidify our leadership of influencer programming.

know thy platforms

PR pros who work with influencers need to understand how content is crafted, distributed, and valued inside vastly different platforms. Every narrative isn't right for every platform, and we need to make informed choices about which platforms and influential voices inside them will deliver our stories best – whether through a blog post, Instagram photo, a promoted tweet, or even a Snap. Platform know-how translates into higher performing influencer programs that deliver more of what organizations want most: content, advocacy, and engagement.

mix pay-for-play in earned ways

Recent research highlighted by eMarketer suggests 70% of influencers now expect to be paid for their work with brands. PR professionals must embrace sponsored content and paid advocacy and be able to plan paid programs and execute with the same precision as our marketing brothers and sisters. But the rise of pay-for-play doesn't spell the end of earned influencer techniques – rather, it makes them more important. Branded social responses recognizing influencers, surprise and delight shipments, and even sharing exclusive news make creators more willing to collaborate in both paid and unpaid ways on an ongoing basis. While plenty of disciplines can manage paid programming, PR is best suited to oversee multi-faceted influencer strategies that blend paid and earned.

dig into the data

One of the biggest drivers of influencer marketing today is the abundance of data that aids planning and execution. Readily available data helps PR practitioners select the best influencers based on the historical performance of their content – how much reach, engagement, clicks, or even sales their content or advocacy historically generates. Today we can also analyze the makeup of each influencer's audience and target based on a whole host of factors including audience demographics, brand affinities, geographies and more. Let's face it – marketers have more experience using data to drive campaign performance. Modern influencer marketing offers PR a chance to catch up.

Influencer engagement isn't new to PR, but it's becoming a more vital part of the communication and marketing mixes of the future. Embracing modern techniques will help PR remain relevant in the future.

Deanne Yamamoto's 25-year agency career has been focused on enhancing brand relevance, engaging consumers and driving cultural conversation. She is currently Managing Director of Golin LA. Deanne is a graduate of the Annenberg School and an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

changing skills for a changing landscape

bob feldman

The pace of change in the communications landscape continues to have a profound impact on how companies think about the kind of talent they need.

Consider just the following:

Starbucks...A former senior journalist is now the company's "Editor-in-Chief" leading a new newsroom and content engine, including social media properties.

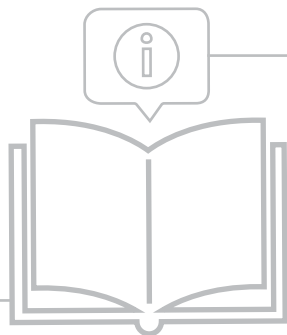
IBM...A new "employee cohort engagement expert" is responsible for defining, deeply understanding and engaging a cohort of employees. The expert defines their cohort based on data (role, employee type and observable behavior) and engages them through the content and channels that influence them most to believe, act and advocate for the company.

Chevron...A new data analyst analyzes public and private data to provide actionable intelligence that will enable Chevron to operate its business, and helps build predictive analytics tools and intelligence to identify business risks and opportunities.

These positions didn't even exist a couple of years ago. But the digital transformation of business has driven the digital transformation of communication. Today, the lines between "public relations" and "marketing" are blurring, as traditional media buying declines in importance and customer engagement ascends. "Company as publisher" is the new norm.

Corporate reputation management has accelerated in importance, and traditional internal communications has given way to digital "employee activation" on social platforms. The massive volumes of data, of great value only if they can be properly analyzed, have made data analysts one the "hot" new jobs in communications.

**all of us must embrace
the concept of continuous
learning to keep pace with
the unprecedented change
transforming our profession.**



The Arthur W. Page Society recently published "The New CCO: Transforming Enterprises in a Changing World," identifying three essential roles:

- The CCO as strategic leader and chief reputation officer.
- The CCO as cross-functional leader, breaking silos between communications and marketing.
- The CCO as leader in developing new forms of digital engagement.

In turn, I see four emerging competencies essential to enabling the CCO to play those roles:

business acumen

CEOs and business line leaders often view communications organizations as tactically focused, and not sufficiently oriented toward business performance accountability. If CCOs are to be trusted advisors at the highest levels and work across disciplines, they, and their teams, must establish a deep understanding of sales, marketing, information technology and finance.

digital fluency

As "digital natives" come to dominate the workforce, baseline digital competency is no longer adequate. Communicators must lead the way.

comfort with data and analysis

"I wasn't good in math," no longer cuts it. Communicators must grow comfortable analyzing and explaining data to make communications more targeted and effective, demonstrate their value, and measure their own effectiveness as employees.

creative thinking

Creative directors used to be found mostly in ad agencies. No longer. Compelling storytelling, data visualization, long-form video, etc., are now essential tools.

Globally, more attention and more resources are being poured into communications functions. But CEOs are also demanding more. Some senior communications professionals are rising to the challenge, but some are losing out to marketing heads or others to lead the communications function.

All of us – from the most senior to most junior professional – must embrace the concept of continuous learning and be sure to keep pace with the unprecedented change transforming our profession.

For those who do, the future has never been brighter.

Bob Feldman is a Partner and Co-founder of PulsePoint Group, a management and digital consulting firm with offices in Los Angeles and Austin. Bob is an Adjunct Professor in the PR Studies program at Annenberg. He also is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

navigating social geology

dave samson



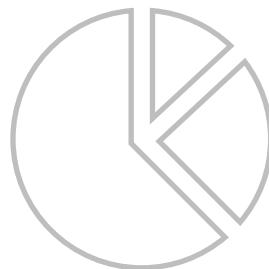
There is a saying in the energy business: "It's all about the rocks." In other words, our business is driven by geology – we go to where the resources lie. And depending on where those resources reside in the world, the complexity of the geology can vary greatly. Navigating the geology of the deep-water Gulf of Mexico is more challenging than dealing with the shallow waters of the Gulf of Thailand. As a result, we must adapt to differing geologies, using technology, data and ingenuity to extract oil and natural gas safely, economically and responsibly.

But mastering the earth's geologic formations is not enough to ensure business success. Our success is equally dependent upon our ability to manage above ground risks – the social geology. And just as the geology below the ground differs from location to location, the social geology differs, too. Managing the above-ground risks in Nigeria's Niger Delta is more complex than tackling the risks we see in California's San Joaquin Valley. And the stakes couldn't be higher. If we don't get the social geology right, we won't gain access to the geology below the ground – no matter how promising it might be.

The stakes for businesses outside the energy sector are equally high. Their success, too, is contingent on negotiating a more complex social geology that is characterized by ever-changing and disruptive technologies, shifting demographics and political trends, and more emboldened and activist stakeholders.

In response, companies are examining the central role and purpose of communications within their organizations. At the same time, smart communications teams are reinventing the function, taking full advantage of emerging technologies, new platforms and their access to vast amounts of data to better understand and interact with their stakeholders and increase the value they offer.

a predictive organization uses data and advanced analytics to create real-time, actionable intelligence to predict business risks and opportunities.



Here are four steps every communications team should take:

advance from being a proactive function to being a predictive function

Many communications groups have evolved from being little more than corporate-reporters to being proactive, stakeholder-focused teams. But it shouldn't end there. The aim should be to become a predictive organization that uses data and advanced analytics to create real-time, actionable intelligence to predict business risks and opportunities. With this step-change, communicators move from driving advocacy to driving actions that enable business outcomes. They become data and results-driven. And they establish themselves as indispensable business partners versus valued advisors.

transform your stakeholder engagement models

Many of today's stakeholder engagement models were created in an analog world, targeting a maturing baby boomer generation. We're now in a digital world defined by millennials with different worldviews and changing habits for consuming information. Smart communicators are changing their engagement models within this new context.

rapidly acquire new skills and keep advancing your capabilities

Every communicator must develop and acquire new capabilities in digital engagement, advanced analytics and content creation and distribution. Three years ago, most companies did not have a head of digital strategy and engagement. They did not have a head of insights or analytics. They did not have a data scientist, content strategist, behavioral scientist or stakeholder intelligence advisor on their team. These are some of the new roles being created by leading communications teams.

optimize talent by deploying a "trading floor" model

Hierarchical models suboptimize talent, delay people development and diminish the collective contributions teams can make. Leading communications teams are evolving to a "trading floor" model, deploying people based on skill, interest and initiative as opposed to tenure or where one falls on an organization chart. This approach is promoting reverse mentoring, faster talent development and the ability to take full advantage of everyone's unique capabilities.

These are some deliberate steps communicators can take to stay at the forefront in a world of constant change and disruption.

Dave Samson is the General Manager of Public Affairs for Chevron Corporation and chairman of The Arthur W. Page Society. Dave is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

the rise of purpose

burghardt tenderich



Recent campaigns and announcements focusing on social issues suggest that 2017 might be the year in which 'purpose' enters the corporate mainstream, and public relations will be a driving force. This trend goes hand in hand with the rise of corporate social responsibility (CSR), which in recent years has evolved from a niche communication topic to a mainstream platform of American corporations.

What we describe as 'purpose' encompasses two distinct types of strategies: first, the efforts of corporations to address social issues in conjunction with their brand messaging, and second, corporations announcing sweeping reforms to address internal shortcomings in areas of equality. Both have significant PR implications.

Major consumer brands are blending social issues with brand messaging—which frequently creates controversy. Well-documented examples include Cheerios' mixed race video, featuring a white mother, a black father and their mixed-race daughter—an ad that has faced racist backlash—as well as the 2014 Super Bowl commercial where Coca Cola celebrated America's diversity with a multi-language version of America the Beautiful.

In these cases communicators are taking rather significant risks as the taboo topics they address could potentially turn off existing customers. At the same time, these brands are taking powerful stands in an increasingly multicultural American society while appealing to social liberals and ethnic minority communities.

A powerful example for communicating purpose on gender issues is the Always "Like a Girl Campaign," intended to boost self-confidence in pre-teen girls. Positioning itself as an advocate for girls and women, Always drew attention to the mostly negative connotations invoked by the expression 'running like a girl' and showcased pre-teen girls redefining it to express power and confidence. This campaign won an Emmy for Outstanding Commercial.

In 2016, we're seeing an emerging new trend, which is poised for the mainstream in 2017: corporations are proactively announcing their intention and strategy for addressing internal inequalities.

2017 might be the year when "purpose" enters the corporate mainstream



San Francisco-based software giant Salesforce.com became the trailblazer declaring equality a core value for the company, and one of their first initiatives was evaluating and eliminating the gender pay gap. In September, Salesforce announced the hiring of Tony Prophet as its first Chief Equality Officer. He has been tasked with focusing on gender, LGBTQ and racial equality and reports directly to founder and CEO Mark Benioff. Needless to say, Salesforce's leadership on equality has led to an onslaught of invaluable positive earned media.

By the way, Prophet has his work cut out for him: 70% of the global workforce is male, as is 81% of his company's leadership. Likewise, its U.S. workforce is dominated by 67% white employees compared to 4% Latino and 2% black. These percentages are considered the norm in the affluent Bay Area's tech world.

Signaling a broader trend was the August announcement that 29 major corporations—including Apple, Facebook, Delta Airlines and Target—had signed on with the White House's Equal Pay Pledge, which is intended to eliminate the gender pay gap. Leading up to the announcement, Apple already disclosed in its Diversity Report that "Women earn one dollar for every dollar male employees earn. And underrepresented minorities earn one dollar for every dollar white employees earn."

The latest trend seems to be corporations taking it a step further by demanding gender and racial equality within their public relations and advertising agencies. In August, as part of its agency review process, General Mills demanded that "participating agencies are staffed with at least 50% women and 20% people of color within the creative department." Also in August, tech giant HP's Chief Marketing Officer Antonio Lucio sent a letter to its public relations agencies giving them "one month to come up with a plan to increase diversity and one year to begin implementing the plan."

The flurry of announcements in the second half of 2016 makes it likely that this trend will pick up steam going into 2017, and will move equality issues and other topics of purpose into center of branding and corporate communication.

Burghardt Tenderich is a Professor of Professional Practice and the Associate Director of the USC Center for Public Relations. He's the author of "Transmedia Branding," USC Annenberg Press 2015, together with Jerried Williams.

chief gatekeeper?

don spetner



When I started my career in public relations, I had to figure out a way to explain to my mom what I did for a living. I came up with a little presentation where I first showed her a press release I had written about a new product. I then produced a newspaper article about that very same product, and explained that I was the person who had persuaded the newspaper to write the article. My mom was thrilled. Except of course, for the fact that I still didn't have a steady girlfriend.

When I studied mass communications in college, we spent a lot of time talking about "gatekeepers." Gatekeepers were people who decided what was news, and what wasn't. In the public relations business, I came to learn that it was our job to know who these gatekeepers were, and to figure out how to influence their coverage of our clients.

Much has changed. Print and broadcast media have been irrevocably diminished by digital technology, and the notion that a group of "gatekeepers" can hold sway over what is news is almost laughable. We have ascended to an age of radical transparency, and it has profoundly altered the world of communications.

I experienced an epiphany over transparency about six years ago, when the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded and began spewing oil in to the Gulf of Mexico. Unfortunately for British Petroleum, the owners of the busted rig, a 24-hour "spillcam" had been installed that ceaselessly broadcast a live feed of black crude gushing in to the ocean. As I watched the live "spillcam" during every TV news segment, I realized that there was very little a skilled communicator could do to mitigate the impact of the crisis. The only real solution was to stop the leak.

In the past 18 months we've witnessed the launch of apps like Facebook Live and Periscope, meaning anything can now be broadcast live through your smartphone. This means that every company and every brand will have to contend with some version of a 24-hour "spillcam". Imagine that all customer encounters can be broadcast live to the world. Every dispute, every event, every mishap, every poor decision in your organization can be captured live, streamed, critiqued and second-guessed in real time. The age of transparency has shifted in to hyper-drive.

So how does this impact the role of communications professionals? It means we have to try and exert influence over how a company behaves. It means we have to work to ensure that a corporation's values are meaningful, and more importantly, that they are practiced and reinforced at every level of the organization. It means, perhaps, that we actually have to take on the role of corporate gatekeepers: because once something goes live, it's very hard to put it back in the bottle or put a good face on it.

Now how do I explain that to my mom?

Don Spetner is a Senior Corporate Advisor for Weber Shandwick Worldwide. Don is also an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

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to an age of radical
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virtual pr

Juan Garcia



As has already been touted by others, the era of virtual reality is finally upon us. Along with this new technology, and the numerous devices that enable us to step into the virtual dimension, there is a noticeable trend toward content creation for this new medium. This major uptick in the development and prioritization of VR content comes with many new and exciting opportunities for public relations professionals, as well as a few challenges.

vr content creators wanted

Just as the Internet and social media created the need for professionals who understand how to communicate on these platforms and what users of these channels want to see and engage with, so too will virtual reality create the need for a specific skill-set. This means that positions like virtual reality content creator and other more specific titles will soon become more prevalent, as will the need for training on this platform.

emphasis on the immersive, vivid and emotional

In public relations we are often told that storytelling is at the heart of what we do. Virtual reality presents a huge opportunity for anyone needing to tell a good story as a means for connecting with their audience. To effectively do this through VR, public relations professionals need to place a greater emphasis on ensuring that their content is more immersive and engaging than ever before. Attention to the details, strategic use of emotional language, imagery and themes, and vivid visuals are greater considerations when creating content for virtual reality.

nearly **80%** of gen. z respondents look forward to using vr technology.



expanding the brand

A brand is a delicate thing. Whenever we communicate on behalf of our brand, we need to make sure that what we say and show our audiences aligns with what that brand represents. Virtual reality is the most engaging and immersive technology that has ever existed – which means that content created to tell a brand's story on this platform will no doubt resonate more deeply. Brand content created for VR must therefore be held to greater scrutiny and standards before being released, as these will be the stories that our audiences really absorb. In virtual reality, a brand will either connect with stakeholders on a deeper and more emotional level, or it will quickly turn them away.

greater connection with gen. z

While connecting with Gen. Z has been something of a mystery for communicators in the past, there's plenty of evidence to suggest that virtual reality will be the prime opportunity for contact. The 2015 Virtual Reality Consumer U.S. Sentiment Survey conducted by Greenlight Insights found that nearly 80% of Gen. Z respondents look forward to using VR technology. This number was the highest among all age groups, and demonstrates why VR content will be a critical component in how organizations interact with a group of people who now represent over 25% of the American population.

By some estimates, the virtual reality sector could pull in as much as \$120 billion in five years. The 2016 Virtual Reality Industry Report claims that nearly 140 million advanced VR units will be purchased within the next decade. This means that there's still some time for communicators to start thinking about how they will work this new technology into their overall strategies. But make no mistake about it, the virtual revolution has arrived.

Juan Garcia is a second year Masters in Strategic Public Relations student at the University of Southern California.

time to retire old expressions

bill imada



As communicators, we often use or hear expressions designed to facilitate conversation. Many of these expressions are now part of our lexicon and are used liberally at business meetings and conferences. However, a wide array of expressions we commonly use are now overused, including idioms such as leveling the playing field; at the end of the day; and, walk-the-walk (and) talk-the-talk.

At a recent conference held in Europe, one American presenter after another used idioms that fell flat with international audiences. If we wish to remain relevant in a world that no longer revolves around the U.S., we need to think and act more globally. We can begin by finding new ways to communicate and eliminate terms such as the following.

(don't) reinvent the wheel

This continues to be used regularly in speeches given by executives as a way to discourage people from spending time and resources on processes that some view as being redundant or overused. In reality, this expression is redundant and actually discourages people from expressing their views, ideas and thoughts. Smart companies find ways to reinvent and realign themselves with their customers, employees and other stakeholders. And, if they can come up with a better, more efficient wheel, nothing should stop them.

think outside (of) the box

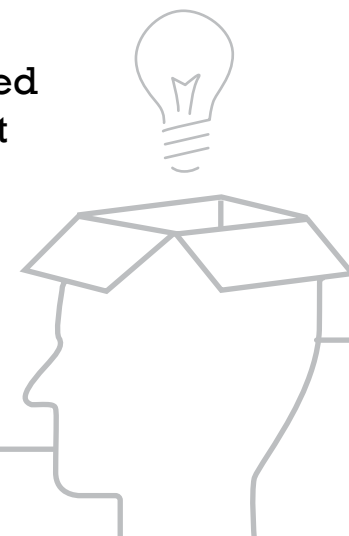
This term is commonly used to fuel creativity at meetings, but may also be the reason why executives look to outside consultants to find answers addressing their problems and challenges. Whenever this term is used, a message is sent to enterprise employees that their thoughts, ideas and suggestions are not quite good enough to solve the challenges of today and tomorrow. Smart companies think in the box first, enlist the right teams to address a potential challenge, and then step out when needed.

(we need) diversity and inclusion (d&i)

D&I is a term that is so overused that its significance is now lost on many senior executives. So instead of D&I, we should address what will really be a game-changer: representation and engagement (R&E). The smartest leaders focus on broadening representation at all levels of their organizations with people from different cultures, backgrounds, views and experiences. And rather than just reflecting the diversity of their communities and customer base, they actually live it by ensuring that their associates hail from the places they serve. But it cannot stop here. Senior executives must also facilitate and promote active engagement between all diverse faces and voices within their organizations; listen to their associates and customers about their interests, needs and aspirations; adopt clear, measurable and enforceable goals and objectives for increase to our academic institutions, businesses, governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations. Yet, we continue to marginalize our organizations and ourselves by using terms that keep us from progressing, innovating and being fully understood by our counterparts a round the world.

Bill Imada is Founder, Chairman and Chief Connectivity Officer of IW Group, a minority-owned and operated advertising, marketing and communications agency and an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

d&i is a term that is so overused that its significance is now lost on many senior executives.



global policy in a fracturing world

jay wang

The role of the private sector in public policy-making and communication has evolved over time, yet this role has remained primarily a domestic one. Given current disruptive technologies and the nature of globalization, businesses must now broaden their policy-making and advocacy roles to be transnational in scope. They must develop new capabilities and new partnerships to thrive in this dynamic, complex environment.

Developments in technology increasingly influence people's everyday lives, affecting how we manage our money and our health. Such developments—from the Internet of Things to the “sharing economy” to the consumerization of healthcare—call for a new set of global public policies to facilitate these technological advances and protect the rights of the consumer/public. However, most governments (of both home and host nations) have not yet caught up to this fast-changing pace as far as policy-making and policy communication are concerned.

In the meantime, the international order that underlies a functioning global marketplace for the past two decades is now under great stress. Notwithstanding its enormous benefits, globalization has sharpened political and economic divides concerning the nature and merits of the flow of trade, ideas and people. The rise of assertive nativism and re-nationalization in many parts of the world manifests the negative consequences of globalization. Moreover, in recent years some nations have enjoyed greater and more potent roles as rising powers (e.g., China, India, Russia); struggling nations and failed states (e.g., Iraq, Syria), however, continue to create chaos and turmoil, now with ramifications far beyond their own borders.

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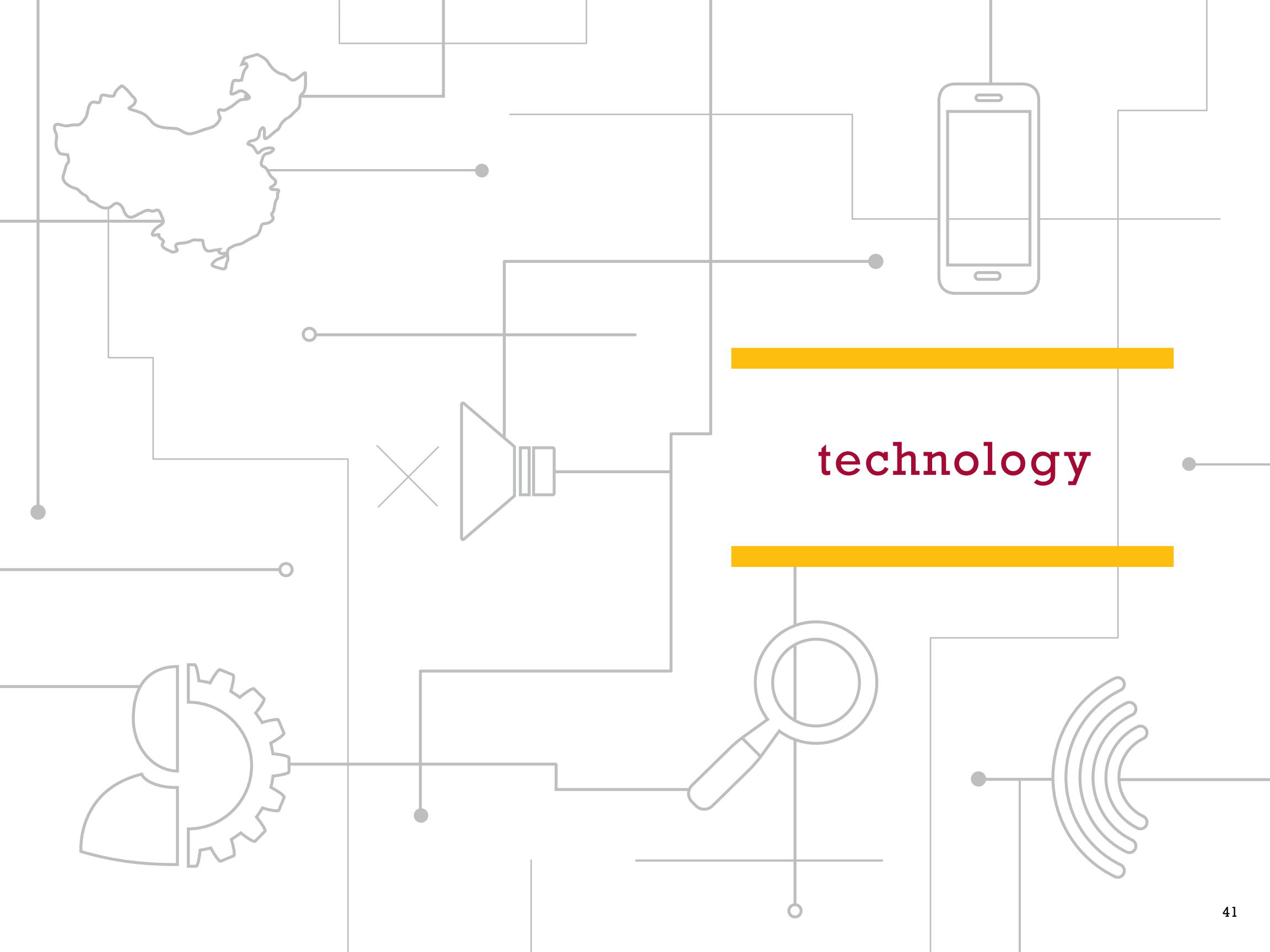


From Brexit and its fallout for the European Union's standing, to the geopolitical theater of the South China Sea, and to our sense of physical and personal security being wrecked by violent extremism, these shifting dynamics engender much uncertainty in state actions and policy priorities, while the consuming public is weary and on edge.

Policy advocacy by global business in such a fracturing environment is no easy task, as it involves governments of sovereign states as well as networks of the broader public. One possible solution lies in bridging the worlds of business and diplomacy. These two seemingly disparate worlds have much to learn from one another on effective global policy engagement. Now, more than ever, robust and creative public-private partnerships are critical in maintaining a stable marketplace and world. Businesses must take on aspects of the roles traditionally played by diplomats, as they navigate the complex international public policy arena. Likewise, the diplomatic community must embrace entrepreneurialism and innovative practice to remain relevant and vibrant.

To collectively forge a successful path forward, the private sector and the diplomatic community must consider the new skills and capabilities that are needed as businesses enter the global public debate and policy arena; how businesses can leverage diplomatic competencies and tools in modern statecraft to develop an effective engagement framework; and how diplomacy can reinvent itself in the face of disruptive technologies and emerging models of collaboration with business and community. In a word, the transnational nature of the digital business and the growing necessity of global policy engagement have now created a new, yet-to-be-explored, diplomatic space.

Jay Wang is an expert in Branding, Globalization, Organizational Communication, Public Diplomacy, and Public Relations. Jay is also the Director of USC Center for Public Diplomacy and a USC Associate Professor teaching in Public Diplomacy and Public Relations.



technology

return of the silent film

tyler c. stevens



video is essential

As communication professionals, we are all well aware that the use of online video should be a vital component in any campaign strategy. Daily views on YouTube and Facebook are pouring in the billions as cable and satellite subscriptions continue to plummet. We've all seen the statistics and there is no getting around it, video is a must to reach nearly any demographic under the sun. But even still, many of us are left scratching our heads asking, "how do I tap into this phenomenon?"

To help answer that question, let's first take a look at the ways in which people are consuming all this content.

the tv in your pocket

With video juggernauts YouTube and Facebook both reporting that over half of all their views occur on mobile devices and the rise of mobile-first video platforms like Snapchat and Instagram, it's no surprise that a recent report by Google/Ipsos found that "one in three adults between ages 18 and 54 use their smartphone as their primary device for watching online video."

Translation, if you are thinking video (and you should be) you must think mobile first.

85% of facebook video
views happen with the
sound off.



optimize for mobile

The first thing to do when thinking about optimizing for mobile is to pull out your smartphone. Open a few video platforms. Take note of the screen size and the way different platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) display the video player. Now look around you. You are probably in a public place. Maybe you are at the office, in a coffee shop, possibly outside. Bottom line, you are probably in a place that would make you think twice before blasting the audio from a video through your cell phone speakers. Some of you will have headphones nearby, but most will be left with a choice: Disturb people around you or watch the video on silent.

With this in mind, it's easy to believe Digiday's claim that "85% of Facebook video views happen with the sound off." There are several theories for why the videos are watched on silent, but with the majority of views occurring on mute it's best to optimize for silent playback.

become silent playback friendly

Here are a few quick tips to ensure your videos will still attract an audience, even if the sound is off:

Include captions - Facebook and YouTube allow you to add captions post upload, so this could still be an option for videos you have already published.

Create text driven video - As you plan future content, consider using text, graphics and other non-audio-dependent visuals to communicate your message. The education field has found that 65% of the population are visual learners, so despite silent video consumption trends visuals are often the more effective way to communicate.

Entice the viewer to turn their sound on - If you have a message that absolutely must be accompanied by audio, prompt the user to turn up the volume within the first five to 10 seconds of your content.

Bonus: Include Headphones - While the majority of your audience will likely have a smartphone on them at all times, chances are they don't always have headphones handy. When considering items to give to audiences at a conference or trade show, try pairing branded headphones with a video message on your website.

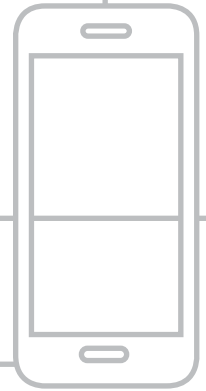
Tyler C. Stevens has spent his career exploring ways to use digital media technologies (like YouTube and social platforms) to connect artists and storytellers with audiences across the globe. Currently the Creative Director at Shareability, Tyler is a USC graduate and an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

virtual reality is a reality

robert hernandez



but the real gateway drugs
aren't these new headsets, but
the device we can't live without:
the smartphone.



After decades of hype, disappointment and broken promises, virtual reality has finally become a reality. As my son says when he swears it's true: for real life.

Thanks to a journalism student named Palmer Luckey, who left his Long Beach school to join USC and pursue the creation of head-mounted displays needed for VR, we have begun the new era of the next disruption.

And before you dismiss it as something for those techie kids, keep in mind that this is a lot more than just for gaming or a Hollywood movie.

The key here – compared to failed technologies like Google Glass or, dare I say, the Segway – is that there are numerous players, large and small, who handle each aspect of the VR experience: creation, distribution and consumption.

While the Oculus Rift, the device developed by Luckey, brought this dismissed industry back to life, his HMD is now accompanied by HTC's Vive, Microsoft's HoloLens and the PlayStation VR.

In addition to these high-end devices that range from \$600-\$800, there are extremely affordable viewers like Google Cardboard and Mattel's View-Master (yes, the toy introduced in the 1930s has been rebooted to hand virtual reality).

But the real gateway drugs aren't these new headsets, but the device we can't live without: the smartphone.

Thanks to YouTube, Facebook, mobile apps and startups like Vrideo, among others, the most widely-adopted device in history can display these experiences, even without a cardboard viewer.

See for yourself: Launch your YouTube app in your phone and search for "360 meet largest dinosaurs BBC One" or "The Verge Michelle 360" as examples of the growing number of diverse experiences.

You can also view many of these experiences through your computer's browser, especially through Facebook, which owns Oculus.

As they say, content is king. That's not only true but also essential for VR to be a mainstream success.

Soon the "wow" factors of gimmicks will fade and the power of this new form of immersive storytelling, if done right, will emerge as a new platform.

No, these immersive experiences will not replace print, TV or radio. But they will be a new and unique platform that offers unique opportunities from the storyteller, consumer and, well, advertiser.

Whether it's sponsorship through underwriting, or a logo at your feet, or having to pay for these experiences as we do digital movie rentals, there are several possible revenue streams that will enable brand messages that are more engaging and realistic than random popup, banner ads.

What we've already seen is that these immersive experiences can take you to refugee camps "Clouds Over Sidra" or "The Displaced" have you experience a car bombing "Project Syria", swim with dolphins "The Dolphin Project" and much more.

These experiences – despite their vastly different levels of quality and graphics – still successfully trick your brain into believing you are there. Studies have found that these experiences increase empathy and, in some cases, have even implanted memories.

Needless to say, the new era of immersive experiences will bring in new set of ethical questions that we will have to tackle as content creators and consumers.

But one thing is for sure, VR is here and it's more than just for gaming. For real life.

Robert Hernandez's primary focus is exploring and developing the intersection of technology and journalism. Robert is an Associate Professor of Professional Practice at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism.

the future of online shopping

dan tarman



The secular trend from offline commerce to online commerce continues to pick up pace. This is unleashing significant challenges for many retailers across the spectrum, as well as opportunities for those companies who are already well grounded in technology and ecommerce.

In this context, the landscape for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Virtual Reality (VR) are changing rapidly, powering a new era of innovation. Online shopping is becoming the focus of some of the most immediate and commercially-relevant consumer applications of these technologies. And we're just at the very beginning of what will become a torrent of developments in this space.

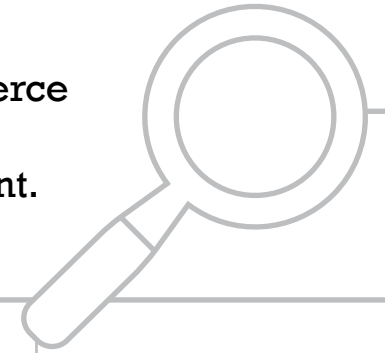
Already in 2016, eBay has launched the world's first virtual reality department store (<https://vr.ebay.com.au/>) and Stubhub is enabling fans to experience the actual view from their seats before making a purchase (<http://www.stubhub.com/view-from-section/>). These are merely the beginning and just modest "lower tech" examples of what the future holds for VR.

One particular area of interest in ecommerce is utilizing AI and machine learning to understand buyer intent, which enables companies to create and deliver a more personalized shopping experience to customers. This isn't about creating new ways to "spam" consumers; instead these technologies can make the shopping experience more efficient, tailored and ultimately satisfying.

The power of AI in commerce is to pivot from making recommendations based upon generalized customer behavior patterns to deep personalization based upon individual behavior— with machines learning over time to continually refine "knowledge" about what a person wants.

As an example, imagine you want to buy a scarf. Using AI, commerce platforms and tools will be able to predict whether you want a \$7 scarf or a \$700 scarf. They will know what color you want and whether you prefer natural fibers to manmade. And they will be able to anticipate the next thing you'll want to buy.

the future of online commerce may be a world where the search box is redundant.



While some people might find this level of consumer knowledge off-putting, if someone is already shopping online, isn't it preferable to more quickly find exactly what you want rather than searching and sifting through seemingly endless search results?

This marks an important change where online commerce will become increasingly conversational instead of primarily search-based. Whereas search was itself a transformational innovation, the future of online commerce may be a world where the search box is redundant.

For a company like eBay, with more than one billion items listed on the platform, bringing AI capabilities to life requires an underlying capability to catalog hundreds of millions of seemingly disparate listings. With this foundation in place, AI ultimately creates opportunities to further innovate the shopping experience.

We are just at the beginning of this new epoch as technology, commerce and consumer expectations converge. We believe in a future of smarter, more efficient and more personalized shopping which creates enormous opportunities for companies that are positioned to capitalize on these changes. Those players will be able to delight their customers and deliver a shopping experience that no one could have imagined just a few years ago. The future isn't just coming. It's here.

As eBay's Chief Communications Officer, Dan Tarman is responsible for managing, protecting and strengthening the Company's brand and reputation among key stakeholders. Dan also is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

screaming into the echo chamber

todd defren



We live in amazing times. We wear gadgets that track our health and nudge us to stay active. We play games on our phones that thrust us outdoors on silly quests. We no longer need to wonder if that restaurant will be good, or if that product will work for us: we have user reviews that point out the pros and cons before we make the purchase. We have the knowledge of Western civilization at our fingertips. And we have cat videos. So many cat videos.

We are entertained.

An oft-mentioned result of creating a world that caters to our whims is the ossification of our worldviews. It's so easy to manipulate our filters; to have our news spoon-fed in our favorite shade of red or blue. Soon any narrative that threatens our cocoon-like reality becomes an existential threat.

Broadly, this has been called the "echo chamber effect." Folks from the tech side of our culture describe it as "narrowcasting." Unlike broadcasting – the hallmark of mainstream media, which reaches all people indiscriminately – narrowcasting is about tapping into the finely-tuned, curated message. Isn't it great to only consume the news we want from only the sources we respect?

The problem is that narrowcasting amplifies the most extreme trends, theories and voices beyond their customary home on the fringe. Tribalism gains ground as our tech not only filters news, but also "helpfully" offers up additional "links we might enjoy" – but which in reality only add to the depth of the rabbit hole.

So the conservative become more conservative; moderates are expelled from the Right. Similarly, extremists on the Left increasingly call for a level of liberal purity unlikely to appeal to the broader populace. And we are left with uncompromising platforms and harmful rhetoric that tears at the fabric of national goodwill.

**narrowcasting amplifies the most extreme
trends, theories and voices beyond their
customary home on the fringe.**

Technology did this. Dark forces previously muted and confined to grubbier quarters, now abetted by technologies that enable anonymity and content filtering, are on the rise and in the open. It's become all too easy to create narratives that support our sects' worldviews, and to cherry-pick data to build a wall around our opinions.

What we require to fix this situation is a little less me-me-me and a lot more e pluribus unum. Can the technology that brought us to this point be harnessed to lead us back into the light?

It starts with turning off the filters. Few of us will do so on our own, so we'd need to rely on a new set of algorithms to do the work for us.

What if every article we read was annotated with objective data from a reliable source?

What if every "liberal" or "conservative" article we read surfaced an article featuring a countervailing viewpoint that was automatically added to our reading list?

What if every time a politician is mentioned online, you could automatically see their biggest political donors? (Actually, this exists. It's a browser extension called Greenhouse, developed by a 16-year-old!)

What if social sites like Facebook and Twitter could use Artificial Intelligence to determine when a post was getting "too hot" and crafted rulesets to enforce more courtly behaviors? I'm not talking about stifling debate; I am talking about safeguarding "civility" as a normal course of action. Dangerous? Maybe. Again, I am not suggesting we be limited in WHAT we talk about, but in HOW we talk about it. Would that be any more dangerous than the road on which we now find ourselves?

Technology fanned this fire in our culture, and technology certainly can offer tools, like the Greenhouse extension noted above, to help. But it all starts by amping up our humanity, by realizing that the social constraints enforced "IRL" extend to the online world. That means saying no to staying anonymous; that means not posting something online that we wouldn't want our friends, neighbors or colleagues to see.

But technology alone didn't cause this mess, and technology won't be the panacea. As professional communicators and patriotic Americans, PR pros have a role to play, too. We are the architects of messages, creators of branded content and guardians of the storyline. Whether a student who aspires to be part of the action or a weary, wary comms vet who's seen everything, it's incumbent on us all to view our role not just as fighters aiming to win the day's news cycle, but rather as the curators, protectors and promoters of rational narratives.

Wittingly or not, if we help create a world wherein no one can be trusted, anarchy won't be far behind, and that's not good for business. Or, for the world.

Todd Defren is CEO of SHIFT Communications and is a recognized social media and public relations innovator. Todd is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

china technically

glenn osaki



If Pokémon Go will forever be blocked in China, how can Augmented Reality games and Virtual Reality shopping become a reality? Don't be dismayed. Even if the world's largest video gaming market (\$22 billion in revenue last year, overtaking the U.S. for the first time) will never "catch 'em all," AR/VR is the real deal in China. More than 2,000 VR experience centers have been established in China since 2014. And Chinese gamers can choose from more than 800 AR games and apps produced in China that don't feature the cute yellow Pikachu.

Recognizing that one of the few events of 2016 that could exceed the popularity of Pokémon Go was the Rio Olympics, China's largest internet company, Tencent, launched a massive Olympic torch relay AR campaign through instant messaging system QQ. By scanning the Olympic torch picture displayed on your friend's QQ account, the QQ Penguin will appear in augmented reality through your mobile phone screen to "light" the torch for you. Geo-localization ensures that users passing the torch are actually in the same GPS coordinates. Users get a torch icon after passing the AR torch to others, igniting the passion and pride of each virtual torchbearer. As the torch passes along a preset number of times, these virtual torchbearers can unlock AR animations for the next city along the route, ultimately reaching the final destination of Rio de Janeiro.

This is just one of many innovative marketing and communications programs to leverage new technologies in China, where there is no digital divide by geography or age. To stay on the leading edge in China (and around the world), here are a few thought starters when deploying AR/VR:

**over one-half of china's
e-commerce sales
are made with
mobile devices.**



mobile first, mobile only

China is the world's largest smartphone market, representing 30% of global sales. According to eMarketer, 87.5% of Chinese Internet users access the web via their mobile phones, compared to only 74.6% of U.S. Internet users. Even more startling is that over one-half of China's e-commerce sales are made with mobile devices, compared to about one-quarter in the U.S. Total m-commerce sales in China are five times greater than in the U.S. The growth of m-commerce is so fast that China is not only a mobile-first market—it will soon become a mobile-only market!

the next frontier: v-commerce

In China, big industries such as tourism, automotive and real estate are using VR/AR technologies to present vivid and immersive experiences to attract and impress consumers. But if retail and FMCG brands can't allow users to pay in the virtual world, such marketing initiatives will fall short.

Alibaba has been leading the VR scene in China and in September launched its latest innovation, VR Pay, which allows consumers to purchase directly on Buy+, Alibaba's virtual shopping platform, simply by nodding their heads or making other gestures to log in to their payment accounts. This is the first complete VR shopping experience to go all the way through payment, and will allow Alibaba to lead the future of v-commerce!

resident xi jinning live streaming in vr?

2016 dawned the era of live streaming in China. With 360-degree panoramic videos already available in VR on the Alibaba-backed Youku Tudou video site, the next step is for live streaming in VR. In March this year, the National People's Congress—China's esteemed annual gathering of legislative bodies and Communist Party bigwigs—was recorded and covered by journalists using 3D and VR technology. Can you imagine China's 1.3 billion consumers interacting face-to-face with President Xi Jinping through VR live streaming? It could happen in China first!

So with all this advanced technology, Chinese marketers must innovate now with VR/AR in their communications initiatives, or risk their brands losing relevance and appeal to the demanding and fast-adopting Chinese consumer. And if you still pity the Chinese for not being able to access Pokémon Go, don't worry: China's own location-based, monster-catching game called CitySpirit Go is the most-downloaded app on the Apple iOS store in China! And did I mention it was launched on March 24 – more than three months before Pokémon Go was released in the U.S.?!

A 29-year company veteran, Glenn Osaki is the President of Publicis Groupe's flagship strategic communications and engagement consultancy, MSLGROUP in Asia. Glenn graduated from USC and is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

mr. robot

tony weisman



The technologies of artificial intelligence, including natural language processing and machine learning, are big contributors to an explosion of robots in the modern world. But what is a robot?

Robots are things to which we give agency.

I prefer this definition to the one in the dictionary -- "a machine capable of carrying out a complex series of actions automatically" because it draws attention away from the technology and towards the purpose of it, and ultimately its consequences.

Here are three non-technical things that are contributing to an explosion in robots:

they're getting better at coping with the new

Getting things done in the real world is messy. The rows of robots we're used to seeing in factories have traditionally depended on the whole environment being very controlled. Cutting-edge robots like Boston Dynamics' Atlas cope amazingly with rough terrain and other changes in the environment.

One branch of artificial intelligence research is working on "artificial general intelligence" (AGI), which can cope with any kind of new situation. With last year's acquisition of DeepMind, most recently famous for beating the best human players of the game Go, Google released software that learned to play a whole range of video games only from looking at the pixels on the screen. It's like a baby opening its eyes for the first time and 24 hours later beating the best human player of Breakout.

uber is temporarily using people to plug a gap that it hasn't yet filled with machines.



we spend more time with digital channels

The fact that the communication between people is often mediated through technology makes us more comfortable when some of us end up communicating directly with machines. Uber, for example, is really a robot transportation company. It's temporarily using people to plug a gap that it hasn't yet filled with machines. Its order for 100,000 semi-autonomous Mercedes S-class cars and its investments in research are clear indications that when it can eliminate the drivers, it will. And we will already be used to the idea.

we tolerate them better

People who have tried autonomous cars for any length of time report that, while initially alarming, the experience becomes mundane very quickly, and their desire to drive fades. And autonomous cars are not the only robot presences in the world. Domino's Pizza has produced robots that happily trundle alongside pedestrians to make local deliveries. Amazon and Matternet are developing autonomous airborne delivery drones. The EHANG 184 is a Chinese autonomous aircraft that transports humans.

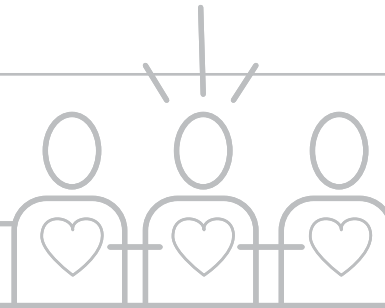
what the explosion of robots means for you and your customers

How fast habits can change. When any technology is cheap and effective it's amazing how fast people can go from not thinking it's necessary to forgetting what they ever did without it. If you're skeptical, remember life before your smartphone— if you can. Or, buy a robot vacuum cleaner.

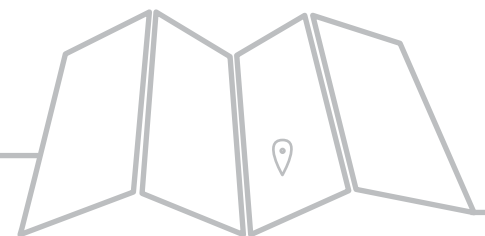
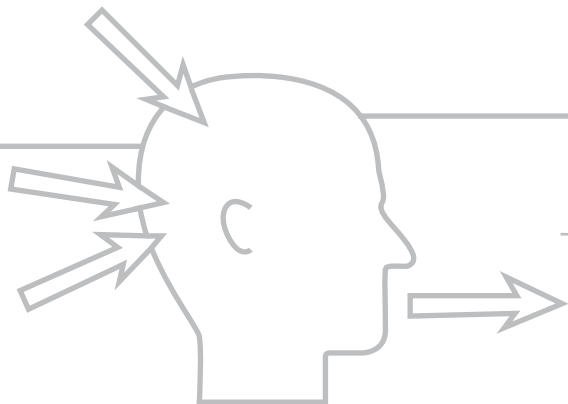
The reason I like the definition of "giving agency" is the implication that you tell your robot what outcome you want, not all the steps needed to achieve it. It means we see robots doing things on our behalf and that means the robots will need to coordinate with each other. Do you have a strategy for marketing to robots?

But if a machine is acting on your behalf, who is responsible for its actions? After all, you defined the goal, but it figured out how to do it. There is much talk about this in the context of autonomous cars, but the problem is much broader. Regulations and laws will inevitably struggle to keep up. Customers will need to understand who is really accountable and trust them. Who will you trust to act in your interest?

As CEO of DigitasLBi North America, Tony Weisman sets the strategic course and vision for the agency's largest region, with clients including American Express, Sprint, Delta and eBay. Tony also is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.



brand



brand building in real time

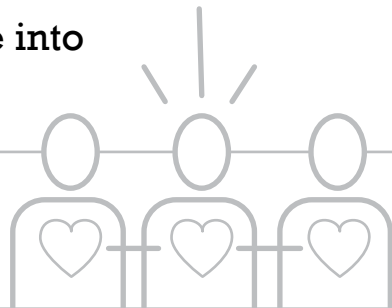
heather rim

Two years ago, my former employer moved its headquarters for the first time in decades. As I left our old building on moving day, I marveled at the overflowing recycle bins and donation boxes brimming with service plaques, trophies, file racks, and outdated technology. All obsolete. All left behind. It dawned on me that here was the perfect metaphor for the massive changes taking place in communications and marketing.

The digital age has shredded paper; dissolved place, and transformed time from discrete units of past, present and future into a single, flowing now. It has changed the formation of public identity from a carefully crafted presentation of organizational character and purpose into a stream of impressions established moment by moment as we move through the world. It has replaced the voice of authority with an opportunity—and, ultimately, a demand—for personal connection in nearly every interaction humans choose to engage in.

Virtual reality is one of the biggest game-changers for communications and marketing – and my team is taking our lead from the many experts at AECOM who have adopted this technology as a competitive advantage. As part of the world's leading integrated infrastructure firm, we're seeing first-hand how VR is transforming traditional design and engineering practices and improving communication and collaboration. For example, employees in disparate locations, each wearing a headset, can simultaneously view a complex structure as if it were a model on a table in front of them. Or, even simulate what it would be like to move through its structural framework.

the digital age has transformed time from past, present and future into a single flowing now.



At the same time, our communicators and marketers are reimagining how internal and external stakeholders interact with our brand story. We see VR as a powerful way to help people experience, and more importantly, personalize our promise to deliver a better world. We're shifting away from perfectly crafted one-way messages and static media, and inviting people to join us in virtual worlds and create their own story lines with us. In our new office in central London, United Kingdom, for example, we've introduced a virtual reality experience that allows guests to interact with 3D holograms of our projects through our main lobby window using a lightweight headset. Just a few months earlier the solution would have been a beautiful glossy brochure, or a formal welcome video at the front desk.

One of the greatest challenges brands face is to create an emotional connection with their audience – something that's very challenging to achieve with even the most exquisitely designed communications or marketing materials. But when you literally immerse people in your brand story the potential for engagement rapidly unfolds. At a recent campus recruitment event, for example, we created tremendous excitement by swapping out our standard brand video for a VR experience where potential employees could interact with a project they would actually get to work on if they were hired. And for the giveaway? No squeeze balls. Google-cardboard Goggles, of course.

Whatever your organization, there's tremendous power in bringing people, and their ideas, into your brand story. The best communicators and marketers will shift from creators to enablers of that journey.

Heather Rim is Chief Marketing and Communications Officer for AECOM. She obtained her Master's degree in Communication Management from the Annenberg School. Heather also is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

seeking relevant insights

robert kozinets

What do executives from Nivea, Adidas, Campbell Soup, Wells Fargo, PepsiCo, BMW and dozens of other companies know about social media research that could change the public relations field in 2017? First, they know that their core customers and publics are changing rapidly because of technology and the dynamic communications it enables. Second, they know their strategies and tactics should be based on the best understanding possible of that communications reality. Third, they know that quality research is needed to gain powerful insights from social media data. Before I explain the research that is needed to understand this reality, let me talk about the research situation facing public relations.

technological change

There is no question that technology has altered the playing field for PR just as it has for marketing and advertising. Tablet computing, ecommerce, mobile advertising, constant connection, and the open social media environment are transforming the way consumers and publics around the world communicate.

pr research

As a field, PR has lagged far behind marketing in its development and application of new, sophisticated research techniques to understand this new reality. According to many pundits, research in the PR field often fails to use rigorous scientific methods, such as random sampling or proper survey forms.

pseudo-research

"Pseudo-research" which is conducted to bolster a particular point of view or managerial intuition is also a big problem.

In a world of rapid change and tightening competition, this combination of factors does not lead to success. In 2017, PR professionals are going to need reliable evidence and stronger, more broad-based insight into the changing audience and its dynamic communications ecosystem. How can PR achieve this? By building an understanding of the different research choices available. Quality research today means research that does not just describe what is going on in the public world—providing information such as bar charts, word clouds, and statistics—but focuses on the most relevant elements for problem-solving and decision making and then explains it in a human sense. This is what I mean by Relevant Public Insight. Seeking Relevant Public Insight helps PR professional by revealing the deep-seated motivations, thoughts, fears and dreams that drive belief and action among relevant segments of consumers and publics.



Although most companies are stuck in the same old rut of using expensive focus groups and surveys, there are effective new methods being applied. Companies as diverse as Intel and Hormel have hired full-time anthropologists as consumer insight specialists. New projective methods allow deep dives into the unconscious mind. And new "technology native" methods like social search and netnography (the method which I invented 20 years ago) open up a new window on social media conversations. Consider some of these methods more closely.

social monitoring

One technology-based research method that has gained popularity in recent years is called social monitoring. Social monitoring uses software tools to capture textual data based on recognizing certain keywords, and then sorting them by qualities such as their frequency, their appearance on certain sites, or even on whether they relate to negative or positive sentiments. Less powerful tools for doing social media monitoring, such as socialmention.com, are available for free online.

metaphor elicitation

The research firm Olson Zaltman developed the ZMET technique, which uses visual metaphor elicitation to reveal deep-seated feeling about brands and products. A ZMET study can run well into six figures. Another Boston-based firm called ProtoBrand has taken the basic metaphor elicitation technique and used online technology to crowdsource it, providing larger and more select samples for understanding people's emotional and subconscious realities.

netnography

Netnography is an adaptation of the time-tested anthropological technique of ethnography specifically designed to generate Public Insights from social media and online interactional data. Both social monitoring and netnography are "digital native" methods. However, where social monitoring is general, statistical, programmed, and decontextualized, netnography is local, cultural, flexible, and holistic. Compared to metaphor elicitation techniques, netnography dives into shared unconscious metaphors and natural language, but is broader and focuses on providing a clear picture of the relevant communication networks and platforms through which they are shared. That leads to smarter communications strategies—with traditional and social media.

With boutique netnography research firms like Hyve and Netnografica, are forward thinking organizations that exploring this new frontier of Relevant Public Insight. For instance, when Campbell Soup wanted to understand how to maximize customer engagement on its recipe and meal planning website, it turned to netnography to guide its customer experience redesign. When Nivea wanted to identify opportunities for a new deodorant, it used netnography to understand its unmet customer needs. That understanding led to Nivea developing a very successful new non-staining deodorant.

In 2017, public relations professionals will help companies face ever-greater threats. They are going to encounter unique brand challenges, new technologies, and more surprising public responses. Seeking Relevant Public Insight, public relations professionals have an unprecedented opportunity to use cutting-edge research to meet these challenges head on and develop more culturally and technologically aware communications than ever before.

Robert Kozinets is an expert in Cultural Consumer Insights, Digital Marketing Strategy, Ethnography, Netnography, Social Brand Engagement, and Social Media Analysis. Rob is the Jayne and Hans Hufschmid Chair of Strategic Public Relations at USC Annenberg.

the omnichannel customer experience

kirk stewart



Today's omnichannel retail world places increasing pressure on brands to create a seamless customer experience at every possible touchpoint. Life used to be relatively simple for retail brands – carry the right merchandize, display it creatively, provide a positive in-store experience and service the customer post sale.

However, consider these staggering statistics. According to Forrester Research total e-commerce sales are expected to hit \$434.2 billion by 2017, up from \$258.9 billion in 2013, and then estimated to grow to \$523 billion by 2020. That's more than a 105% increase in just eight years. Gartner predicts that in 2017 U.S. mobile commerce will account for 50% of total digital revenue, up from 15% just five years ago.

The omnichannel experience is rapidly transitioning from a fashionable buzzword to the essential means of commercial engagement for brands. From a brand's website to its social media channels to the actual brick and mortar stores, the consumer buying experience must be delivered personally, powerfully, emotionally, and consistently across multiple channels.

And how valuable is this experience? Gartner reports that 64% of consumers think that the customer experience is more important than price when choosing a brand.

Increasingly, customers use multiple screens and physical locations to make and complete a purchase. They may see a product on Etsy, Pinterest, or on a social media app on their smartphone, later look up the price on their computer and then ultimately complete the transaction on a tablet or at a retail location. The customer experience, including everything from the expression of the brand promise, product design and retail presentation to ordering and returning and yes, paid, earned and owned communication, must be consistent across all these channels to maximize purchase behavior.

75% of shoppers are using their mobile device in store to research products or talk with friends about their purchases.



Soon, brands may have access to "purchase now" buttons on social media sites such as Facebook and on TV streaming services so consumers will not have to stop what they're doing to buy something on a brand's website.

The need to capture consumers' attention across all channels extends into retail stores themselves. In a 2015 research report, InReality found that 75% of shoppers are using their mobile devices in store to research products or talk with friends about their purchases.

In response, beacon technology, which uses Bluetooth devices installed in stores to connect with customer's smartphones, is increasingly being implemented by brands around the world. It could ultimately prove essential to differentiating a brand's in-store experience by eliminating lines, tracking customer data to facilitate purchasing decisions or sending a customer a personalized product offer.

Beyond the confines of retail outlets, companies like Lowe's are utilizing Virtual Reality by allowing customers to visualize their completed DIY projects. Other brands are exploring integrating VR with platforms like Amazon Fire to create "virtual fitting rooms," giving consumers the opportunity to "try on" clothes at home before making their purchases.

With consumers placing increasing emphasis on "experiences" as an essential part of their purchasing decisions and buying process, successful brands must maximize the potential of this omnichannel world by creating personalized, one-of-a-kind interactions with each customer that ultimately drives purchase and loyalty.

Kirk Stewart is the Founder and CEO of KStewart, a firm focused on enhancing value for 21st century organizations through integrated corporate communications campaigns. He is a USC graduate and is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

the road to relevance

caroline dettman



As a chief creative officer, I have spent the majority of my career developing ideas that will make (or keep) a brand relevant to its audiences. For inspiration, look no further than the James Bond franchise as the holy grail of relevance. For more than 60 years, the franchise has kept the DNA of the brand consistent (women, cars, martinis, cool gadgets and catching the bad guys) and made it relevant for the times through whom they cast and how they film.

As brand marketers, we should all be obsessed with relevance. We should be asking ourselves these three questions:

Is my brand Relevant or Irrelevant?

It's one or the other. And it's critical to understand where you are relative to your competitors.

What does being "relevant" actually mean (and why should I care)?

At first glance, being "relevant" sounds fleeting. Like being "hot" or "famous." But great brands and people stay relevant for a long time. And they work at it every day, which is why it's the single most important brand measurement there is.

Why should we care?

Relevance is what attracts and keeps people paying attention to a brand, and moves them to engage.

audiences deal with **9,000**
messages, ads, warnings
and bits of information
each day.



paying attention vs. being ignored

Relevance is the proverbial tip of the spear. If we're relevant, we break through the mental spam filters. The filters we've all developed to manage the deluge of messages we are bombarded with every day. If we're irrelevant, then we don't penetrate those spam filters.

great brands are relevant for decades

Relevance + time = \$\$\$\$. There are some who have done the impossible. In an ever-changing world, they have stayed relevant for decades. As I mentioned earlier, James Bond is one of these success stories. But others that have gotten it right include The Rolling Stones, Apple, Maya Angelou, Nike, The Simpsons, Coke, Tiffany and University of Cambridge.

Some haven't: Kodak, Blockbuster, Tower Records, Nokia, Blackberry and HMV. From on top of the world to buried. Some were victims of technology. Some rested on their laurels. Many had a good run, but they didn't stand the test of time.

how can i create, measure and grow relevance

Relevance is not a simple concept. It's multi-dimensional, it's regional and it's category-specific. But while social scientists and others have studied what creates permission, what compels people to pay attention, and what creates engagement, there hasn't been a study that rigorously examines the building blocks of brand relevance. Until now.

In partnership with USC's Annenberg School for Communications and Journalism, Golin conducted an exhaustive global factor analysis that confirmed that there are 15 dimensions that consistently drive brand relevance like distinctive, effective, purposeful, provocative and welcoming.

These 15 'building blocks' of relevance combine in different ways and to different degrees to create unique "Relevance Fingerprints" for every brand and category. For the first time, we can pinpoint what makes a brand or a category relevant – and act upon it.

Understanding a category's Relevance Fingerprint – especially which brands are delivering on which dimensions – is the key that unlocks successful engagement strategies.

Today's audiences have shorter attention spans than goldfish – and they deal with 9,000 messages, ads, warnings and bits of information each day. We used to create ideas based on profound insights without really attacking what makes an insight profound. Today, our insights can be grounded in relevance. As marketers, that's something we can all get excited about.

Caroline Dettman is Chief Creative and Community Officer for Golin, an integrated agency with PR, digital and content at its core. Caroline has 20 years of experience delivering creative campaigns for clients including Clif Bar, Humana, Unilever and Mattel, among many others. Golin is a sponsor of the Relevance Report.

reputation requires permission

michael stewart

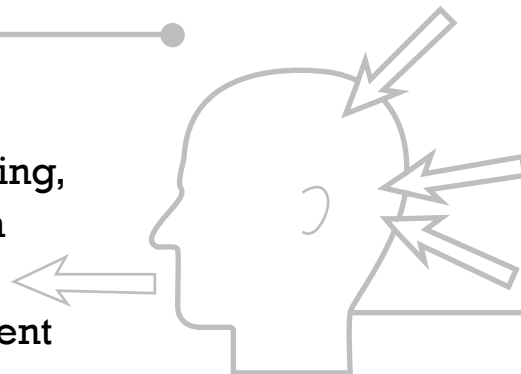


Control. Protect. Safeguard. These are the words you often hear when it comes to corporate reputation. They are now of a bygone era. We exist in an age where information is shared instantly, and radical transparency is becoming the new normal. When a company's reputation can be discussed, observed, celebrated and criticized by any person on the planet — from employees, to a YouTube star, to a disgruntled customer — with the megaphone of social media, it can no longer be controlled.

That control will continue to evaporate with a company's reputation being dictated by its stakeholders. Organizations still maintaining a commitment to the old terms are doomed to failure in this new era of citizen journalism and instantaneous, non-stop news delivery. The future of corporation reputation requires a new approach.

The new reality is that "businesses exist at the will of the people" and that reputation is truly co-created by key stakeholders. Listening before leading, and looking at reputation through the lens of your audience, is the new foundation for a successful reputation management approach. This can be described as Reputation by Permission, a modernized perspective on corporate reputation developed by Ketchum that is adapted to today's realities and a quickly changing future.

**listening before leading,
is the new foundation
for a successful
reputation management
approach.**



Gaining this permission in 2017 will be more difficult than ever as the economic, political and social environment has created even higher levels of:

skepticism

Trust in corporations and their leadership has never been lower and company's continue to display behavior that justifies these levels of distrust.

extremism

Polarized and harden viewpoints have nearly eliminated any mutual understanding making it even more challenging to open people's mind to different points of view.

noise

An overwhelming volume of messages, digital conversations and expanding number of channels make it harder than ever to break through the clutter, persuasively reach stakeholders and build credibility.

The growth in these trends creates an incredibly difficult environment for modern-day corporate reputation strategies. However, those companies that actively engage all stakeholders, fulfill their requirements, and gain the permission needed to succeed in today's era of transparency and authenticity can still find success.

If you question this premise, simply look to the recent issues that continue to increase cynicism, such as those within the global auto and financial industry, fast food in the U.S. and China and the impact of data breaches on both public and private organizations.

In 2017, a company must understand that if it wants its reputation to positively contribute to its business goals and its bottom line, the points of view and opinions of its many audiences must be fully understood, respected and addressed. More than ever before, corporate reputations are now in the hands of a company's many stakeholders, not the other way around.

Michael Stewart is a Vice President in Ketchum West's corporate practice with expertise in corporate reputation, brand development, and issues management. Michael is an Annenberg graduate and a board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.



people

millennials in management

adrienne cadena

Each generation has an identifiable set of values. These values often affect the way each generation communicates in their professional lives. Historically, we have seen a shift in management style from Baby Boomers to Generation Xers and now we will experience yet another shift to Millennials.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are more than 83 million millennials, who make up approximately one quarter of our nation's population. By 2020, millennials will form 50% of the global workforce.

Therefore, it is in 2017 and beyond that we need to start understanding how millennials working their way into management roles will begin to reshape an organizations' future as well as the industry as a whole.

There are four main ways that millennial leaders will affect change within the global communications industry:

performance

Millennials react positively to receiving constant feedback themselves, but not in the outdated annual performance review format. It is for this reason that they might be the generation to do away with performance reviews all together and opt for a high-touch approach. This will allow them to deepen their engagement with their team members and to create clear career paths and opportunities for those who work for them. Building others' skills and championing collaboration come naturally to millennial leaders and will help organizations perform at their highest level. Leaders from this generation will challenge both their company and employees to strive to be better, make positive change and create innovative solutions that often involve more updated digital experiences.

by **2020**,
millennials will form
50% of the
global workforce.



the work life blend

Gone are the days of clocking in at 8 a.m. and out at 5 p.m. Not only has technology changed this dynamic, but millennial managers are fast-forwarding this trend. Millennials, including those in leadership, don't mind working long hours so long as they have the flexibility to do so from wherever they like and whenever they find it convenient. As leaders, millennials are expected to embrace non-traditional behaviors by their employees and will provide opportunities for flexibility. While this flexibility is appealing to employees, the around-the-clock work mentality might be a watch out for increased turnover.

people first

While past generations may have leaned heavily on top down communication or involvement on a need-to-know basis, millennials have a different approach. Millennial leaders tend to be good listeners and care about relationships first. In fact, this generation often cites empowering others to succeed as being their top reason for becoming a leader. They want to create an environment for openness, transparency and collaboration. Compassionate leadership style will be the trademark of millennials in management.

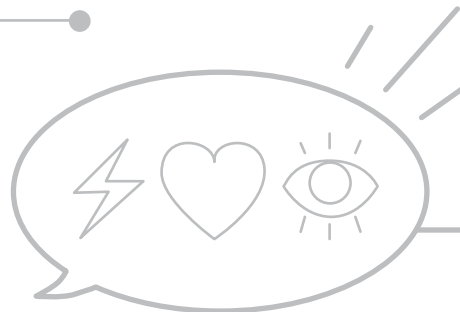
While our industry may continue to change, public relations and communications will always be about relationships. Having a new generation of leaders embrace this type of emotional intelligence should help retain key talent and strengthen the industry as a whole.

change makers

One conclusion we saw from our 2016 Global Communications Report was that we all need to embrace change since the industry is becoming more complex and challenging. Millennial leaders are well suited to address this issue head on, as they like to take on challenges and are able to use their strong adaptation skills to guide others through change. They thrive when setting new goals and solving problems, which keeps them motivated and highly passionate about what they do.

As an industry, we should utilize this digital savvy generation of leaders to help us navigate through the uncertainty of our new normal.

Adrienne Cadena is the Vice President at Havas Street, the agency's brand activation arm. She received her undergraduate and graduate degrees from USC Annenberg and is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.



demographics and race reshape the future

julia wilson

The historic 2016 presidential election will have a major impact on Americans and our way of life. The people have chosen Donald John Trump as their 45th president, a Washington outsider elected to the nation's highest office.

new political leadership

The tone and modus operandi of our new leader of the Free World, as well as his selection of cabinet members, will not only shape and drive public discourse, but will either heighten or lessen the unprecedented domestic and global anxieties that surfaced over the past year. As a non-traditional politician, the next president's leadership style is indisputably a departure from that of any past American president. His ability to compromise, work across party lines, and encourage racial and ethnic inclusiveness, will be integral to the Administration's and America's success, and will determine whether our sorely divided country can heal and unify.

race relations

Regardless of one's personal political beliefs, Trump's election is indeed a referendum – Americans want major change in Washington. He will not only need to address traditional domestic and international issues, but also the state of American racial tensions, which parallel that of the turbulent 1960s. If these issues are not addressed openly and fairly by the new Administration, civil unrest may ensue and threaten our nation's very existence. While Americans have been promised new jobs and the rebuilding of American inner cities, many remain suspicious of whether the "law and order" discussed during the election are really code words that spell continued inequality for people living in communities of color.

demographic shifts

Contributing to this uneasy atmosphere are significant demographic shifts in the U.S. By 2040, minorities will become the majority demographic, with Hispanics leading the list, many of whom are fearful of the new Administration's stance on immigration. In some parts of the country, such as Los Angeles and Southern California, Hispanics are already the leading ethnic group and Asians, the fastest growing ethnic group. The new Administration's mandate must include these pluralistic voices.



the pr industry must promote positive images of people of color to enhance understanding and promote goodwill



emerging leaders

As they assume a more prominent role in American politics, some Hispanic politicians seem destined for influential national leadership roles including: Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, former L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Rep. Joaquín Castro and his brother Julian Castro, who heads the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development.

There also are new leadership opportunities in the African American community, where leadership has traditionally not only come from politics, but from the clergy, unions and the entertainment and sports worlds, and now include leaders such as NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick of the San Francisco 49ers, actor and activist Jesse Williams and the iconic Beyoncé.

African American and other minority leaders in business and media will also become more vocal and help shape social narratives. And they do not speak with one voice. Such business leaders include Ken Chenault, Ursula Burns and Indra Nooyi. In media circles, leaders include Oprah Winfrey, Shonda Rhimes, Michael Eric Dyson, Cheryl Boone Isaacs who are challenging the status quo and offering a different perspective of how we see the world, and represent it.

Other likely emerging African American leaders are: former First Lady Michelle Obama; New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker; Los Angeles City Councilmember Marqueece Harris-Dawson; and African-Asian-American Calif. State Attorney General Senator Kamala Harris. Emerging Asian American leaders include: Rep. Ted Lieu (Calif.) first elected in 2015; and Rep. Grace Meng (N.Y.), who was first elected in 2012.

public relations industry challenges

As we move forward under a Trump Administration, the news media and their comrades in PR are facing new and formidable challenges -- including reflecting society's changing demographics inside their own organizations.

The PR industry has a leadership role to play during these shifting socio-political times. Our industry and clients must adapt to the changing demographics and become a force for including pluralistic voices in our social discourse. Hispanic and African American consumers wield economic influence. By 2020, the buying power for these ethnic consumer groups are expected to increase to \$1.5 trillion for Hispanics and \$1.4 trillion for African Americans. Our PR campaigns must also reflect good judgment, journalistic excellence, a sense of inclusiveness and social responsibility, with a goal of unifying our country's people.

Finally, as a major player in American society, the PR industry must participate, along with the news media, in promoting more positive images of people of color to enhance understanding and promote goodwill throughout our great nation, and beyond.

Julia A. Wilson is the CEO & Founder of Wilson Global Communications, an international public relations consultancy in Washington, D.C. that specializes in connecting Americans to opportunities in foreign countries. She received BAA's 2016 USC Outstanding Alumna Award, and is a member of the Board of Advisors to the USC Center for Public Relations.

wheels up for cuba

jim olson



In December 2014, President Obama unlocked the door to normalizing U.S. and Cuba relations – a door that is about to swing wide open in the months ahead when scheduled commercial flights operated by U.S. airlines will take off for Havana and other Cuban destinations for the first time in more than half a century. Additional travel and business restrictions are expected to ease even further, making it imperative for communications leaders to be ready to seize upon a new era of political, cultural and business opportunities.

U.S. government restrictions on travel to Cuba have historically been a barrier for non-Cuban Americans wanting to make this journey unless they were part of a tour group. But in March, the Obama administration green-lit “people-to-people” travel allowing Americans of all backgrounds to experience the Cuban culture without traveling as part of a group.

Consider a recent poll commissioned by United Airlines following the administration’s authorization of people-to-people travel found that nearly one-third of all Americans are interested in traveling to Cuba. That interest rises dramatically among younger Americans, ages 18-29, to 44% and interest is highest in the West (37%) and Northeast (36%). With nonstop flights recently approved from 13 cities across the U.S., including New York/Newark, Houston, Los Angeles and Miami, among others, Cuba will soon be within a few hours’ reach for tens of millions of Americans.

In fact, more than 100,000 Americans visited Cuba in 2015 and as travel restrictions continue to ease, over time the island can expect more than 10 million American visitors per year. Coupled with the billions of dollars expected to be driven to U.S. businesses and the thousands of jobs that are projected to be created in Cuba as a result of stabilized relations, it’s easy to see why this has so many business leaders excited about Cuba.

Beyond making travel to the island easier for Americans – and for Cubans to the U.S. – the Obama administration has authorized exports to entrepreneurs and other private sector actors in Cuba; exports by U.S. citizens traveling to Cuba for business or academic work; and exports to improve internet connectivity and usage. Additionally, private sector and state trade delegations no longer require federal permission to travel to Cuba, and U.S. companies no longer need federal approval to send equipment to private agricultural cooperatives in Cuba.

Admittedly, the initial path to Cuba won’t be turbulence-free. Many of those who have visited Cuba recently will tell you that there are sizeable social, political, infrastructure and technology issues ahead. But with agreements already in place for several forward-thinking companies to do business in Cuba, such as those listed below, the trail is already being blazed.

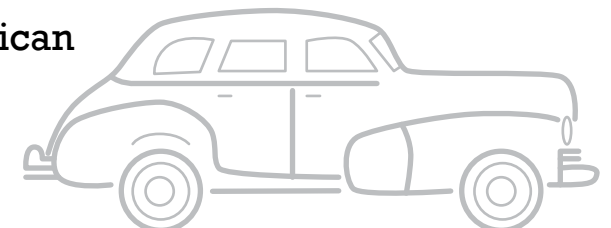
- Airbnb: Began offering Cuban accommodations to authorized U.S. visitors in 2015
- Caterpillar: Signed an agreement to distribute construction equipment in Cuba
- Cisco: Opened an IT academy in Cuba
- Google: Signed an agreement with Cuba to expand Wi-Fi and broadband access
- Marriott: Cleared by U.S. government to do business in Cuba
- PayPal: Authorized to allow money transfers to Cuba
- Starwood Hotels and Resorts: Signed an agreement to operate three hotels in Cuba
- Verizon/Sprint: Will offer roaming voice and data services in Cuba
- Western Union: Launched remittance services from across the world into Cuba

Regardless of the organization you lead or represent – whether private or public, small or large, corporate or academic, government or NGO – there has never been a more important or exciting time to understand and prepare for the opportunities that Cuba will present in the years ahead.

Strategy is about choice – and as we consider the beachfront of competing opportunities ahead of us, Cuba is a worthy contender for any communicator, advisor or educator desiring to stay relevant in 2017.

Jim Olson is Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications at United Airlines. He earned his MBA from the University of Southern California’s Marshall School of Business. Jim also is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.

over time the island can
expect more than
10 million american
visitors per year.



a life half full

tom noland



it is our obligation to portray aging with optimism



Senior citizens have become the largest and fastest growing segment of the U.S. population – a demographic shift that is influencing everything from health care to media stereotypes. The 10,000 baby boomers who turn 65 every day are challenging the way society views “old age” and even how seniors view themselves.

To explore how this changing perception of aging impacts the well-being of aging Americans, Humana conducted a quantitative survey to determine how people aged 60 and over perceive the traits associated with growing older.

Although the survey unearthed many insights about aging Americans, the findings around optimism are most intriguing. Our data analysis suggests a link between a “glass half full” mentality and better mental and physical health.

Specifically:

- Older Americans who rated themselves as very optimistic about aging tended to be the most active physically, socially and in their communities.
- Optimistic seniors also reported a much lower number of physically unhealthy days per month on average: 2.84 for the most optimistic, compared to 12.55 physically unhealthy days for the least optimistic.
- The most optimistic also felt on average 12 years younger than their actual age, while those who are least optimistic felt on average seven years older than their actual age.

The survey also asked respondents to rate how they feel about the depiction of people aged 60 and over in pop culture: film, television, commercials and so on. Overwhelmingly, the respondents believed media portrayals of their own demographic are inaccurate. On average, they rated the media’s accuracy level as 5 or less on a 10-point scale. Aging Americans who did feel the media accurately portrays them spend more time thinking about aging than the average senior and have a higher level of fear around aging than their peers.

To examine society’s attitudes about aging, we also partnered with Stacy L. Smith, Ph.D., and her team at the Media, Diversity & Social Change Initiative at USC’s Annenberg School. Their research looked at how people 60 and over are portrayed in movies because evidence is mounting to link cultural attitudes and physical and emotional health.

USC’s research showed that, despite being 18.5% of the overall population, few characters aged 60 and over are represented in film. And when they are, these characters often face demeaning or ageist references. These negative and stereotypical media portrayals do not reflect how aging Americans see themselves, or their lifestyles, according to the Humana survey.

So where do we go from here? As a society, we need to acknowledge that an implicit bias against aging Americans exists and do something about it. If seniors with an optimistic view of their place in the world perceive themselves as much younger than their biological age and report feeling unhealthy fewer than three days a month, it is our obligation to portray aging with optimism.

As communicators, when we talk about diversity and inclusion, we must add “age” to the list of race, religion, gender and sexual preference. We must all work together to overcome outdated perceptions and portray aging Americans in a more positive light, just as they see themselves.

Tom Noland is Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications at Humana, a leading health and well-being company and a sponsor of the Relevance Report.

why empathy and why now

dr. ernest j. wilson III

After four years researching the main talent that businesses across the country seek in their top-performing executives, empathy emerged as a surprise winner. It makes sense in retrospect, but it was not what our USC Annenberg team originally expected. So why empathy, and is it really more relevant to our contemporary conditions than other values?

Empathy is the capacity to put yourself into the position of the other and feel what they feel and think what they think, to walk in their shoes. It is essential for the survival of human societies, and when it is in short supply, bad things can happen like social conflict and war. In all societies most humans possess it to greater or lesser degrees, all the way back to wandering bands on the plains of Africa. Empathy is not exactly a skill, and more like a particular kind of acquired emotion or attitude, but it is an attribute that can be nurtured.

So why is empathy so special and highly sought today? I believe there are four main reasons -- the emergence of new consumers, the dynamics of the new labor market, the intermediating impacts of digital technologies and, beyond the market, societal dynamics in contemporary politics.

At a moment when disruption marks so many markets, the intuitive, non-linear understanding of others that we associate with empathy is essential to understand new consumers and clients, especially in the context of globalization and the need to operate simultaneously in multiple markets from Shanghai to Chicago. Certainly quantitative 'consumer research' using formal questionnaires will take us part of the way to 'actionable insights' but possessing a feel for the perspectives of one's potential customers in a dynamic environment is equally essentially.

**declining empathy in markets and
in politics erodes basic trust,
putting democratic capitalism at
serious risk.**



Second, with the massive generational shift in the availability of talent as Millennials replace Boomers in the work place, empathy toward their outlooks and expectations are key. How to get in the heads of the people one needs to recruit, manage and retain? Fertile land and oil fields are no longer the premier source of riches today, it's TALENT. Our conversations with experts in the fields of executive recruitment and HR, and our own research on USC graduates, show clearly that the need for empathy, and its supply, varies considerably over time: new entrants possess intellectual curiosity and some empathy; their seniors in the C-Suite have gained strategic insights and 360 degree thinking, but their empathy levels seem to decline as they rise.

Third, we have all watched colleagues or family members seated around a dinner table each staring into a screen while ignoring their fellow diners. Young children are being socialized to be more engaged with the faces on the screen than those in seats around them. Sherry Turkle and others have noted the decline of empathy and civility provoked by our near-addiction to always-on social media. Adding extra levels of mediation between people can disintermediate more immediate and empathy-producing direct human interactions.

These three structural shifts are exacerbated during this election season, as the presidential campaigns have been notable for their extraordinarily low levels of empathy, whether between left and right, Republicans and Democrats, or other differences over policy that have been cynically transformed into sharp ideological divisions by aspiring politicians and demagogues. The give and take of principled compromise upon which democracy is founded cannot flourish if the contestants do not value the need to work hard to see the world through the eyes of those with whom they disagree. The erosion of norms of what is acceptable to say has given way to permission, even encouragement, for contestants to scream at one another rather than reasoning together. Such an anti-empathy trend is fed by, and feeds into, the other three factors discussed above.

So, if empathy is essential in markets, it is equally valuable in civil society more broadly, whether for the PTA or the presidential elections. Declining empathy in markets and in politics erodes basic trust, putting democratic capitalism at serious risk.

But empathy does not stand alone in companies or communities. Our research also revealed several other 'soft' skills in high demand today. Indeed, empathy lives in an interwoven ecology of complementary values: cultural awareness, intellectual curiosity, adaptability, and 360-degree creativity.

For companies in communications and media this ecology is the base-line of success -- or failure -- in the modern, digital, post-industrial system that we all inhabit. Empathy is not enough for full success, but it is certainly the bedrock on which we all must build. If we deny the basic empathetic credo of understanding and accepting others different than ourselves, then we shortchange opportunities to get multiple perspectives into the room and around the table to create the futures we all should want to build for ourselves and our children.

Ernest J. Wilson III, Ph.D., is Walter Annenberg Chair in Communication and Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California. He also is a professor of political science, a faculty fellow at the USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School.





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