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Brussels, 25 November 2024

New study shows how chief communication officers from the 300 largest European companies are tackling key challenges in geopolitical crises, artificial intelligence, and managerial learning.

The European Communication Monitor (ECM) is the longest-running and largest academic study exploring the field of corporate communications worldwide. In its latest iteration the study applies a completely new and ambitious research design: Interviewing a random sample of top leaders from the elite group of chief communication officers (CCOs) in the 300 largest companies headquartered in Europe– among them *Adidas, AXA Ferrero, IKEA, Nestlé, Santander, Siemens, Unilever*, and many more across all industries. The experiences, forecasts and observations from those shaping the future of the field are analyzed to provide unique insights into three topics that produce considerable tensions in managing contemporary communications:

- (1) the need of companies to deal with geopolitical risks;
- (2) the adoption of artificial intelligence in communication departments; and
- (3) the managerial learning practices of CCOs that ensure innovation and excellence.

The study is conducted by a team of six renowned professors from research universities across Europe and supported by key industry players. It meets the highest standards of scientific rigor and neutrality.

The full ECM 2024/25 Report (PDF, 48 pp.) is available for free at www.communicationmonitor.eu.

Unique insights into a rapidly changing profession that drives our societies

Leaders in business, politics, and education are now invited to explore the 50-page European Communication Monitor 2024/25 report to learn about key trends in communication from Europe’s leading companies that shape today’s societies in a profound way.

We are experiencing challenging times for businesses and societies around the world. The threats of political instability and economic stagnation in many countries are accompanied by groundbreaking digital technologies and promising initiatives that pave the way for sustainable and successful economies. Communication plays a major role in this development – for good or bad. More knowledge about managing communication in today’s volatile environments is needed to future-proof organizations and inspire leaders and practitioners to reflect on the latest trends and focus on new developments.

The European Communication Monitor is a one-of-a-kind research-based source of insight to learn about these trends. In this year’s edition of the largest and longest running international study on corporate communications, the European Communication Monitor provides data from an elite sample of chief communication officers (CCOs), representing the Top 300 companies in Europe. Never before have we had such robust and deep insight into leading communication practice with this level of sample seniority and with such scientific rigor. Different to wide-spread studies on the topic from consultancies or agencies, the European Communication Monitor excels in validity, reliability, independence and transparency – and makes its research results available to all for free.

Several pressing topics are covered in this year’s report, including the intricacies of dealing with geopolitical crises, the emergence of AI technologies in communication departments, and the handling of individual learning and growth for CCOs as the highest-ranking communication leaders. All topics are addressed and analyzed through the lens of tensions, a key concept that has shaped our current understanding of modern organizations and management. Based on a sophisticated empirical design, the ECM 2024/25 provides an innovative view into the current state of practice in Europe’s leading businesses, identifying emerging tensions at the organizational, functional, and individual level, and showing pathways to manage these tensions to ensure excellence.

The *European Communication Monitor* is an international academic study fulfilling the highest quality standards of social science research. Since 2007 it has been designed and executed annually by a changing team of renowned university professors representing different European countries, currently: Ansgar Zerfass (Germany), Aurélie Laborde (France), Alexander Buhmann (Norway), Ángeles Moreno (Spain), Ralph Tench (UK), Stefania Romenti (Italy). The non-profit project is formally organised by the *European Public Relations Education and Research Association* (EUPRERA) and is supported by partner organization who enable the project to conduct neutral and independent research: the Academic Society for Management & Communication, Centro per la Comunicazione Strategica (CECOMS), #NORA – The Nordic Alliance for Communication & Management, and Entreprises et Médias. Further, the project is supported by Fink & Fuchs who designed the report and the project website.

Experiencing and responding to key tensions in corporate communications

Tensions are created by contradicting yet equally important goals in decision-making. They force leaders and organizations to make tight choices. Managing tensions is ‘the new normal’ for communication leaders in fast-paced, globalized, competitive business environments – and at the same time a key driver of excellence. The ECM 2024/25 reveals how CCOs experience and handle tensions in three areas:

1) What it means to manage communications in times of geopolitical crises and risks

“In an increasingly polarized world, geopolitical risks put corporate communications under pressure to balance business perspectives with stakeholder expectations” says Professor Aurélie Laborde from Bordeaux Montaigne University. The report explores and shows how tensions emerge, for instance, when needing to respond to stakeholder demands for taking a stance while, at the same time, being forced to mitigate reputational and economic risks. “Due to such tensions”, says Laborde, “strategies and activities need to be reconfigured to meet the new challenges”. Data from the report support four main conclusions in this regard: (1) the key to effectively dealing with geopolitical risks in corporate communications is to set up an infrastructure of listening and scenario planning; (2) establishing, strengthening, and moderating discussions within global organizations is as important as monitoring external stakeholders and debates; (3) businesses should nurture a network of functional leaders and communication experts with diplomatic skills and sensitivity for value-based risks; and (4) more and more, managing corporate communications for a global company means choosing what to say and what not to say in situations of ambiguity and paradoxes.

2) Artificial intelligence is a double-edged sword for communication departments

“While artificial intelligence promises vast opportunities for communication departments, the pace and uncertainty with which these technologies develop produce considerable tensions” states Professor Alexander Buhmann, BI Norwegian Business School. The report shows that the steady increase in AI implementation, together with the tensions that increased AI use raises, creates significant challenges for communication departments. There is a growing need for balanced approaches for managing the AI transition that ensures that communication teams and practitioners are able to retain or further develop their identity and standing in the organization. “In particular” Buhmann stressed “short-term efficiency increases through AI systems have to be weighed against potential long-term negative consequences. This requires situational awareness for the complex and ongoing process of digitalization in communications, as well as robust foresight for the task, structure, people, and technology dimensions of AI implementation”. The data from the report suggest five main aspects which need to be taken into account in this: (1) only trustworthy and ethical AI systems will be able to leverage the full potential of AI efficiency and effectiveness in communication departments; (2) communication departments need to build role-specific competencies among leaders and staff to ensure a robust and continuous assessment and use of AI tools; (3) limited AI applications within secure domains can foster learning from concrete yet ‘low stakes’ use cases and help mitigate risks; (4) the use of AI should be limited if data inputs might be sensitive (restricting inputs) or where results might be high stakes (restricting outputs); and finally (5) recognizing and managing team members' affective responses to AI-based change is essential to create a spirit of innovation and engagement.

3) Finding the success formula of managerial learning for communication leaders

“Acquiring new knowledge through various modes of managerial learning is crucial for chief communication officers to enhance their performance and future-proof their teams.” says Ansgar Zerfass, Leipzig University, “But many CCOs find it hard to spend enough time on personal development or to address inevitable tensions that arise.” As the report shows, such tensions arise when learning objectives clash with other priorities like maintaining current performance

or focusing on efficiency. ECM data suggests that most CCO learning occurs through experimentation or peer exchange, while professional discourse in the field is underdeveloped and academic research is often unknown. Further, dedicated learning opportunities for (prospective) communication leaders with an international scope are rare. Systematic learning is mostly aimed at general management competencies, while conceptual inspirations and resources for future-proofing corporate communications are rare. The report derives four main conclusions for what is needed in this area: (1) today's communication leaders must take responsibility for innovating themselves and their profession, allocating time for self-development and establishing shared frameworks and management tools is indispensable; (2) managerial learning should not be limited to business and leadership knowledge where other executives shine as well, but real discriminators are future-oriented competencies to manage and execute corporate communications; (3) impactful learning requires more than experimentation and peer exchange, it needs a reflective professional discourse at a similar level to debates in general management; and finally (4) the gap between academia and practice should be closed to foster personal and professional maturity through more reliable insights and conceptual ideas developed over time.

The ECM study will be conducted again in 2025/26

With the successful conclusion of the 2024/25 iteration of the study, introducing a new approach and design to the 18-year running international project, the team is now looking onward to continue with the research of seminal trends in communications focusing on the 300 largest companies in Europe. Thus, the ECM will continue to deliver leading insights into a rapidly changing profession that drives our societies.

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About the European Communication Monitor

The *European Communication Monitor* (ECM), started in 2007, has over the past decades grown into the largest and longest running collaborative research project in the field of corporate communications globally. It is organized by a group of professors who are world-renowned researchers in the field. Past study reports have been downloaded more than 230,000 times. Peer-reviewed journal articles based on the study have received multiple awards around the world. A book highlighting the pillars of communication excellence derived from the findings is available in several languages including English, Chinese, and Spanish. In 2024, the ECM has entered a new phase. The study design has been refined to focus on corporate communications exclusively and interview an elite sample of communication leaders representing the 300 top companies across Europe. The quality and neutrality of the study is guaranteed by a strong team of partners. A research team of six professors from the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and the Nordics covers different business cultures and languages of key markets. The non-commercial study is organized within the framework of the *European Public Relations Education and Research Association* (EUPRERA). It is supported by four initiatives representing communication directors of major businesses across Europe: the Academic Society for Management & Communication (Germany, Switzerland, Austria), CECOMS (Italy), #NORA (Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark), and Entreprises & Médias (France). www.communicationmonitor.eu

About the survey organiser

The *European Public Relations Education and Research Association* (EUPRERA) is an autonomous organisation with nearly 500 members from 40 countries. Its mission is to enhance and promote innovation in the knowledge, research,

education and practice of strategic communication. Through its membership of universities and other research associations and bodies, EUPRERA is a global leader on high profile transnational research projects and networks. More than 200,000 scholars and practitioners can potentially be reached through its extended communication channels and partnership arrangements. www.euprera.org

Graphics to be used for publication

Free for publication if one of the following references is used:

“Source: www.communicationmonitor.eu” or “Source: European Communication Monitor 2024/25”



Graphic 1

Caption: **ECM 2024/25 Report – available for free at www.communicationmonitor.eu**

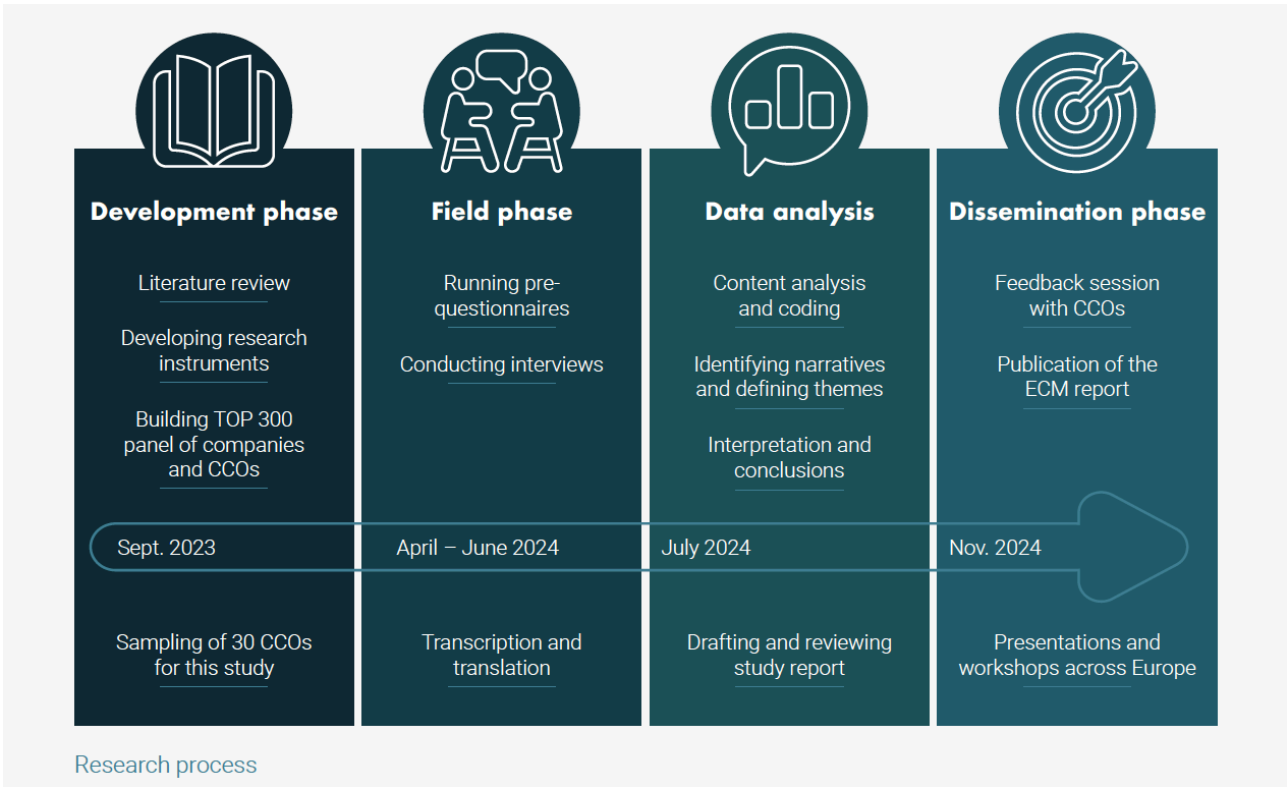
Source: European Communication Monitor 2024/25

Graphic 2



Caption: **The ECM research: Professors and Ansgar Zerfass (Germany), Aurélie Laborde (France), Alexander Buhmann (Norway), Ángeles Moreno (Spain), Ralph Tench (UK), Stefania Romenti (Italy).**

Source: European Communication Monitor 2024/25



Research process

Graphic 3

Caption: **The ECM research approach**

Source: European Communication Monitor 2024/25