

## From AI-Simulated Debates to Shifts in Power

The 2026 Communication Management Radar identifies five strategically relevant developments

**Leipzig, April 15, 2026 – Current debates about the future and innovation revolve almost exclusively around AI. However, many critical changes also lie in the principles that determine how we work with technologies and make decisions. Digital tools are transforming corporate communications just as profoundly as they are reshaping attention spans and ways of thinking – and in doing so, they are shifting power and organizational structures. The new *Communication Management Radar* from the Academic Society for Management & Communication identifies five key developments that could have a significant impact on corporate communications: 1. Simulated Communication, 2. Constrained AI Agents, 3. Cognitive Drift, 4. Power Flux, and 5. Strategic Subtraction.**

For the study, a research team at Leipzig University analyzed current scientific publications and industry reports and gathered expert assessments from around 30 Chief Communication Officers and members of their leadership teams. The focus was on societal, managerial, and technological developments and their impact on communication departments.

*“The world of communications is at a turning point. Our study shows how the conditions for communication in the digital environment are fundamentally changing and how organizations can proactively shape communication strategies instead of being driven by change,”* says study lead Dr. Michelle Wloka. *“It becomes clear that this is not just about AI or digital tools, but about the broader dynamics of change that are relevant to corporate communications.”* Together with Professor Ansgar Zerfass, she oversaw the interdisciplinary study.

*“Communication departments need to redefine their role,”* adds Professor Zerfass. *“They face the task of understanding how attention, decision-making processes, and power structures are shifting within organizations and in the public sphere. Those who recognize these developments early can position corporate communications for the future.”*

### Five Developments with Strategic Relevance

#### 1. Simulated Communication: When Machines Communicate

Bots and GenAI systems now account for a growing share of digital communication. They generate responses automatically, while their sources often remain invisible. As a result, public discourse is becoming increasingly synthetic and harder to interpret. Communication departments therefore face greater challenges in assessing potential reputational risks. They need to adapt their monitoring processes and strategically align their approaches to maintain visibility in AI-driven information systems.

#### 2. Constrained AI Agents: Autonomous Systems in Use

AI agents are increasingly being explored and piloted for tasks such as research, monitoring, content creation, and campaign management, but they are not yet widely implemented in practice. While they can increase efficiency and speed, they also raise questions about transparency and accountability. Communication managers should therefore use such systems only in clearly defined applications, with human oversight and binding quality standards. Regulatory frameworks, such as the EU AI Act, are becoming increasingly relevant as they provide guidance for the use of AI in communications work.

### **3. Cognitive Drift: How AI Changes Competencies**

The continuous use of GenAI is altering learning and decision-making processes. Studies indicate that critical thinking, deep information processing, and independent judgment can be negatively affected. For communication departments, this poses risks of quality loss and increasing standardization of content. Targeted training, clear guidelines, and a conscious balance between automation and human expertise are therefore essential.

### **4. Power Flux: New Influence Architectures**

Influence is shifting: younger audiences are increasingly guided by creator economies rather than traditional media. Platform companies control reach, and hybrid working models are changing internal decision-making processes. Communication departments must continuously update stakeholder analyses, actively involve new actors such as creators, platforms, and internal networks, and adapt their strategies accordingly.

### **5. Strategic Subtraction: Communicate Less, but More Effectively**

Growing complexity leads many organizations to run more projects, tools, and initiatives. Strategic Subtraction means deliberately reducing efforts – ending measures with limited strategic value so that teams can focus on what matters most and work more effectively. Communication leaders must set clear priorities and more closely integrate strategy with execution.

**The full report is now available for download: <https://bit.ly/CMR-report>**

**Download the press release & media materials: <https://bit.ly/CMR26-press>**

#### **About the Communication Management Radar**

The *Communication Management Radar* is the evolution of the previous *Communication Trend Radar* developed by Dr. Michelle Wloka and Professor Ansgar Zerfaß. This research project at Leipzig University, supported by the Academic Society for Management & Communication, identifies five interdisciplinary phenomena spanning management, technology, psychology, and media that are likely to create both challenges and opportunities for corporate communications in the near future. The methodological approach has been expanded to combine scientific insights with practical experience: An in-depth qualitative analysis of relevant studies from disciplines outside communication management was paired with group discussions among communication leaders or their deputies from international corporations. This approach allows the authors to identify strategically relevant topics that provide guidance for practice and further applied research.

#### **Contact Persons:**

Tina Mühlbauer, Head of Communications & Operations

Email: [muehlbauer@akademische-gesellschaft.com](mailto:muehlbauer@akademische-gesellschaft.com) | Phone: +49 341 9735052

Lea Knabben, Head of Research Management & Knowledge Transfer

Email: [knabben@akademische-gesellschaft.com](mailto:knabben@akademische-gesellschaft.com)

#### **About the Academic Society for Management & Communication**

The Academic Society for Management & Communication, an initiative of the Günter Thiele Foundation for Communication & Management, was founded in 2010 and is regarded as Europe's leading non-profit think tank for strategic communication. It brings together more than 50 companies with five universities and universities of applied sciences from Germany, Austria and Switzerland, each with a strong research profile. In addition to fostering research and innovation, its core objectives



**AKADEMISCHE GESELLSCHAFT**  
FÜR UNTERNEHMENSFÜHRUNG & KOMMUNIKATION  
Eine Initiative der Günter Thiele Stiftung



**UNIVERSITÄT  
LEIPZIG**

include the transfer of knowledge between academia and practice and exchange within a network of leading thinkers – with a clear commitment to academic excellence and international visibility. Further information is available at [www.akademische-gesellschaft.com](http://www.akademische-gesellschaft.com)