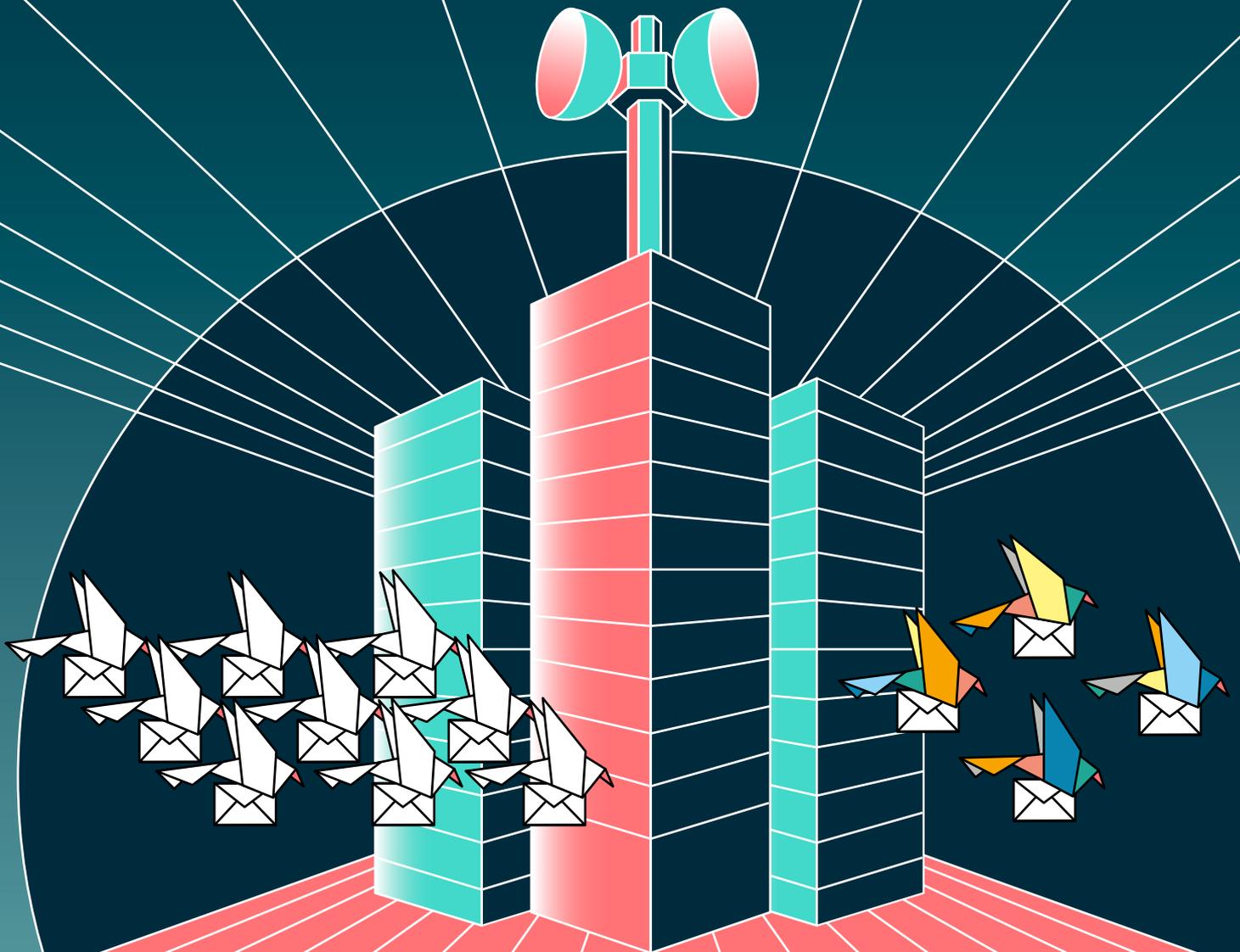


RETHINKING COMMUNICATION



W.I.R.E.

THINK TANK FOR BUSINESS, SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

A SMART WORLD CALLS FOR INTELLIGENT COMMUNICATION

A plea for renewed awareness.
And what communication can contribute.

After the discovery of language, writing, telephone and telefax, digitalization promises to be the next quantum leap in communication evolution: transitioning to a world of tailored messages in which target groups can be reached wherever they are, and in which everyone finds what they are looking for – with greater speed and efficiency.

Today, digital technologies are already boosting the volume of shared information as well as the speed of transmission. About 215 billion e-mails a day are sent worldwide. And new channels and platforms are continually opening up distinct and largely interactive information exchanges that enable institutions to establish dialog with their stakeholders.

I AM THE MESSAGE

At the heart of tomorrow's communication is the essence of digitalization: radical personalization and a focus on the individual – based among other things on automated analysis of large volumes of data on personal behavior and interests. These are gathered from interconnected everyday objects in the so-called Internet of Things and form the core of ready-made content: social network activities linked to location functionality and health-related data – such as those recorded by smart glasses that in future will also analyze interests and media consumption behavior. As a consequence, the behavior of target groups will also serve as the basis for continuous newly improved segmentation – and predict future interests. So for example, nutrient saturation and food compatibility in one's own body, sorted by subcutaneous sensors, would become the basis for augmented reality, supermarket communications activities that support customers when shopping, or Investor Relations' focus on specific interests of analysts. At the same time, it will be easier to understand which communication channels the various target groups use in order to steer the dialog to where individuals are. Taken as a whole, this opens up an increasingly multifaceted but smaller scale of communication that promises more efficiency and quality – yet ultimately reinforces the complexity.

MARGINAL UTILITY OF THE FLOOD OF DATA

In addition, this prospect of "smart" (from a technical perspective) and increasingly perfected communication sets limits on companies and public institutions, and in particular poses four fundamental challenges for the design of the communication tools of tomorrow:

 1. The excessive strain on target groups is growing rapidly. What many label information society is in reality a data society in which ever more individual content is passed straight into the public arena. As a result almost no one reads a newsletter today, elaborately designed intranet pages lead a shadowy existence. More and more information is transmitted but far fewer are paying attention.

 2. With the debate shifting to social networks companies are losing control of the information flow within the Internet community. Shitstorms, persistent conspiracy theories and the reality that people prefer to offer online criticism rather than praise cannot be managed at will.

 3. Contrary to its original promise the Internet has emerged as a place sorely lacking in transparency. The credibility of statements and their initiators are increasingly called into question by the high frequency and manipulation of fake news. Companies that traditionally make a case with statistics and facts are losing a key cornerstone of their credibility.

 4. Because news spreads ever more dynamically companies also need to respond to the reactions of receivers in real time. The shrinking half-life of web content fuels swift communication – the quality diminishes and the message does not hit home.

Consequently, the wants and needs of stakeholder groups are changing. While the attention span of users declines, their desire for explicit and exclusive information – and direction – increases. Communicating louder and faster on all channels will not generate more, but actually less awareness, and undermine credibility.

DIFFERENTIATE OR DIE

The way to intelligent, trustworthy and effective communication is achieved by a fundamental new definition. First the bad news: there is no ideal solution, no rules set in stone that are eagerly proclaimed in marketing seminars and keynote addresses. Now the good news: there are guidelines to help develop appropriate strategies. In essence, the aim is to define one's own particular way of doing things that mirrors the company or DNA, contrary to the pull of current norms and standardized demands of social media. It is appropriate for a technology company to use algorithms and chatbots, for example, but that is not suitable for a private bank.

The starting point is to define the prospective needs of the various stakeholders. So, it makes sense that in many sectors the key will no longer be a speedy and comprehensive supply of facts, it will be about direction or focus. For companies that means not neglecting the call for quality by increasing the quantity of information. Besides the packaging of messages for the receiver, attractive formats necessitate a distinct restriction to relevant channels that are in a position to appropriately capture one's individual information – in form as well as content – tailored to the characteristics of the particular platform. At the heart of this is a focus on long-term values as the sole and essential basis for building trust with all stakeholders.

Authenticity becomes a key differentiator and can be communicated credibly by taking a self-critical view of one's own errors, for example. But it will be real people committed to the company or public institution setting it apart in the digital arena. These so-called "influencers" are to a lesser extent celebrities with endorsement deals, but more likely highly trusted people with authentic images on the net who become influential ambassadors of brands and ideas and make conscious subjective selections.

Going forward communication will not only disseminate content; it will become a key interface that identifies, analyzes and translates market and stakeholder trends to support strategic decision-making in their own companies and public institutions. Control over digital opinion-making is limited. By contrast there is a growing opportunity to not only pronounce one's own set of values but also make them tangible through dialog. For the corporate communication of the future, being different means not just doing things differently but more importantly, doing different things – turning off Facebook is a real option.

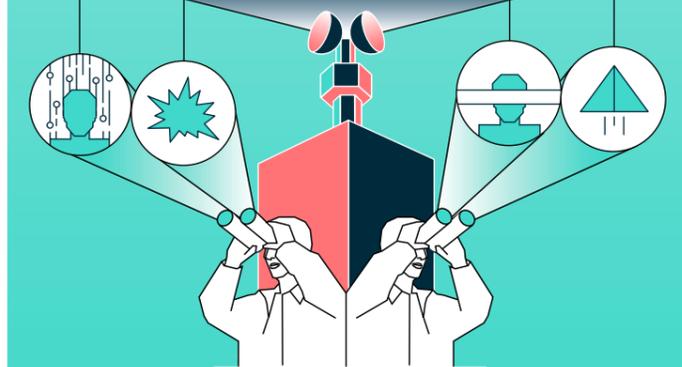
Stakeholder stress from information overload

Loss of control in social networks

Acceleration of the spread and shorter half-life of content

Diminishing credibility through lack of Internet transparency

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE COMMUNICATION



ENHANCE QUALITY

DEVELOP ECOSYSTEMS

ENSURE AUTHENTICITY

FOCUS ON VALUES

ASSUME ROLE OF INTERMEDIARY

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND IDEAS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



Identify curators



Less is more



Facebook OFF



Communicate self-critically



Rely on robots



Understand customers



Embrace complexity



Balance format, content and channel

FUTURE COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

PROCESS AUTOMATION

Algorithms are able to independently produce simple image, video, text and language content based on data sets, and autonomously direct the transmission of content to receiver. Furthermore, an exchange between human and machine gradually develops into functioning conversations by computerized players – social bots.

- + Higher speed of messaging transmission
- + Lower costs through efficient production methods
- + Quality enhancement and error prevention
- Information overload
- Standardization of content and minimal differentiation from competitors
- Trivialization of messages as a result of limited capabilities and lack of algorithm creativity



INTELLIGENT INFRASTRUCTURE

The outfitting of objects with embedded computers permits recording, storage and exchange of data. The Internet of Things turns passive objects into active participants in a digital network that is not only able to communicate with one another, but also with humans.

- + Better understanding of user behavior due to additional data from the offline world
- + New channels for storytelling
- + Linking digital messages to physical experiences
- Data uncertainty, risk of manipulation, lack of system integrity
- Stress of permanent accessibility
- Dehumanization of communication

VIRTUALIZATION OF INTERACTION

The physical world gains digital extension or even a completely simulated alternative from immersive technologies such as augmented and virtual reality. Users can interact in real time within these new worlds of artificial content and maintain social dialog with avatars.

- + Generation of close proximity between message and receiver
- + New decision-making criteria due to information gain
- + User immersion as a result of the design of communication worlds with multiple sensory impressions
- Stress of overstimulation
- Decoupling of reality and illusion



SOCIAL PLATFORMS

Social networking and messaging services are the new human communication sites. Ecosystems are emerging with pre-defined requirements for the kinds of communicated content, not only for private interaction but also for the dissemination of news and messages.

- + Rise of new communities for target group-specific communication
- + Reinforced credibility and authenticity through direct sender/receiver exchange
- + Virality through platform dynamic
- Loss of control of information flow
- High fluctuation of relevant channels
- Restricted design scope due to platform-specific requirements

SYSTEMATIC DATA PROCESSING

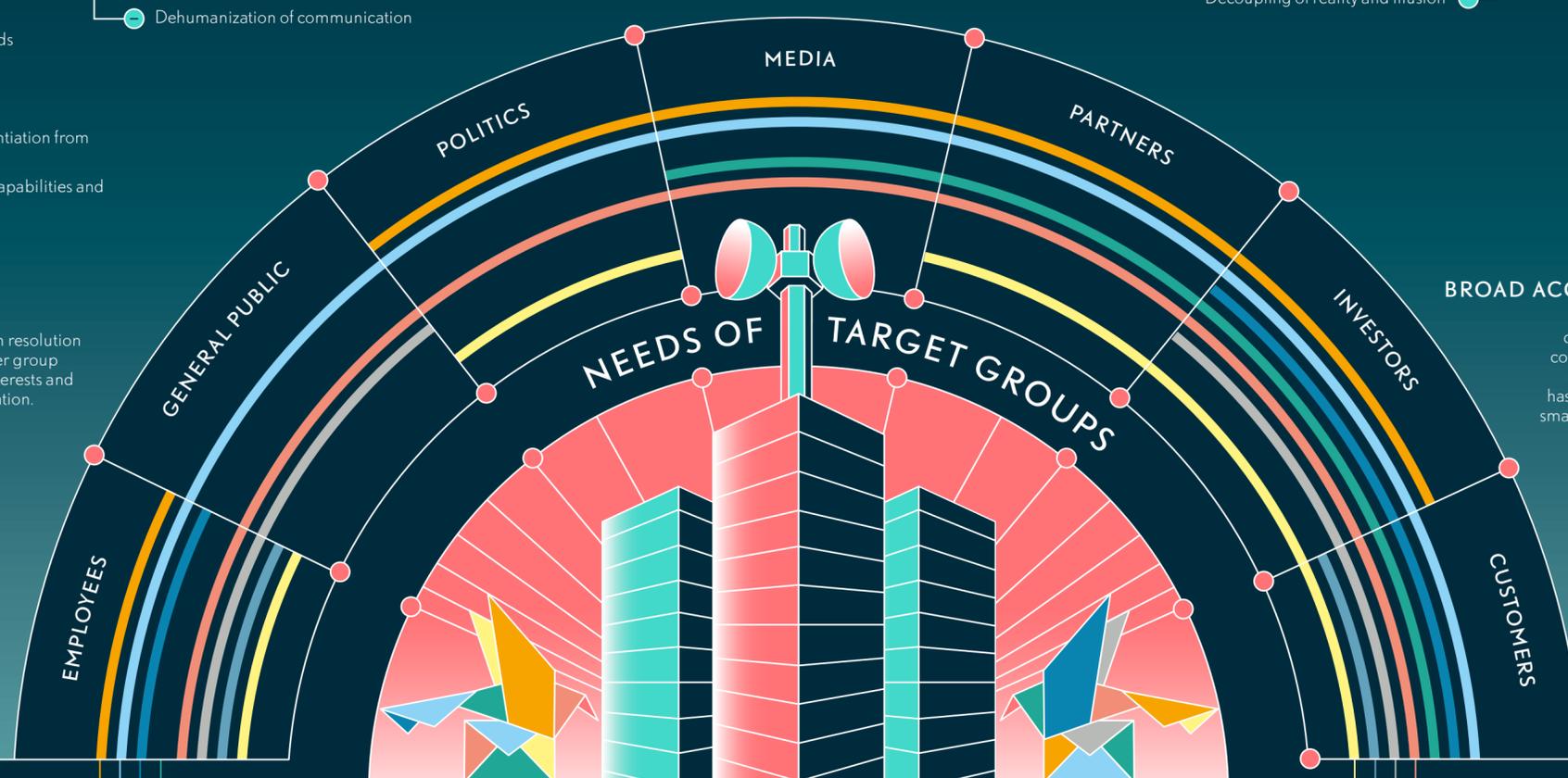
The evaluation of large volumes of data permits high resolution analysis of user behavior resulting in new stakeholder group segmentation. Big-Data analyses can infer future interests and facilitate specific evaluation of campaigns and means of communication.

- + Better understanding of user segments and the particular impact of specific communication channels
- + Customized formulation of messages
- + Projections of right time and place for transmitting information
- Limited wealth of information as a result of redundant data analysis
- Threat to privacy
- Inaccurate interpretation of data

BROAD ACCESS TO PRODUCTION RESOURCES

The proliferation of computers and smartphones has democratized production methods for the generation of communication content. Not only have the obstacles to the development of messages fallen, but digital connectivity has enabled the content communication of individuals and small businesses to have potentially greater scope with less cost and effort.

- + New internal and external sources of communication content with creative potential
- + Growing reach and reinforced credibility by involving customers and partners as "influencers"
- + Lower costs through production outsourcing
- Fragmentation and dilution of business messages
- Diminishing quality of outputs due to lack of experience of external producers
- Dependence on external communicators



TRANSPARENT AND OBJECTIVE PRESENTATION OF FACTS IN REAL TIME

LONG-TERM CLASSIFICATION OF LATEST TRENDS IN PROVIDING DIRECTION AND SHAPING OPINION

IDENTIFICATION BY TAKING INTO ACCOUNT INDIVIDUAL EXPECTATIONS AND VALUES

KNOWLEDGE HEAD-START THROUGH MESSAGE EXCLUSIVITY

NEEDS

SIMPLICITY IN ACCESS AND USE OF DIGITAL SERVICES

INSPIRATION FOR PRIVATE AND PROFESSIONAL PLANS

EXERTION OF INFLUENCE TO STRENGTHEN SELF-EFFICACY

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY WITH CLEAR DEFINITION OF ADDED VALUE OF DATA RELEASE

NEEDS

ASSUME ROLE OF INTERMEDIARY

ENSURE AUTHENTICITY

ENHANCE QUALITY

DEVELOP ECOSYSTEMS

FOCUS ON VALUES

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND IDEAS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

IDENTIFY CURATORS
Involve credible "influencers" as messengers

RELY ON ROBOTS
React to simple enquiries in real time with social bots, but do not use them in active communication

LESS IS MORE
Minimize the frequency of news and reduce number of digital channels

UNDERSTAND CUSTOMERS
Develop databases in consultation with users and protect privacy

FACEBOOK OFF
Move away from social networks and link digital with analog

EMBRACE COMPLEXITY
Provide direction rather than simplify

BALANCE FORMAT, CONTENT AND CHANNEL
Design platform-specific messages and target content to individual devices

COMMUNICATE SELF-CRITICALLY
Recognize own mistakes early on and inform assertively

**“THOUGHTS, LIKE FLEAS,
JUMP FROM MAN TO MAN.
BUT THEY DON'T BITE EVERYBODY.”**

George Bernard Shaw

W.I.R.E. is one of Europe's leading interdisciplinary think tanks. In ten years of engaging with global trends in business, science and society, the Swiss idea laboratory has focused on identifying new trends early on and translating them into strategies and areas for action by private companies and public institutions.

At the interface between academia and practical application, W.I.R.E.'s critical mindset and political neutrality mark it as distinctive. Its key topics are the digital economy, social innovation and future-proofing. The think tank places its expertise at the service of the general public, private enterprise and public agencies, in fields ranging from life science, financial services and media to food and industry.

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