

USC ANNENBERG CENTER FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS



# MIND THE GAP

2025

GLOBAL COMMUNICATION REPORT

**2025  
GLOBAL  
COMMUNICATION  
REPORT**



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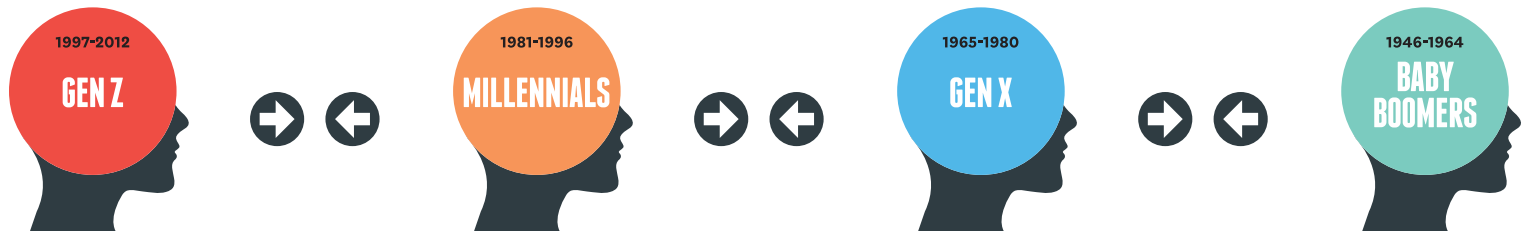
# FOREWORD

**By Fred Cook**

Director, USC Annenberg  
Center for Public Relations

Over the past decade, the USC Center for Public Relations has researched the most critical issues facing our industry — Ethics, Media, Technology, Polarization, Activism, Gen Z, Hybrid Work and AI. In our tenth Global Communication Report, we examine these forces collectively because they are all profoundly disrupting our work and redefining our profession.

We are witnessing unprecedented upheaval in communications. Traditional media outlets are being overshadowed by newer social platforms that politicians seem eager to ban. Polarizing opinions are dominating cable news, while social media influencers are emerging as credible information sources. AI is threatening to displace office workers, many of whom work from home. The list goes on.



These changes are evident, yet we each react to them differently, depending upon our education, experience and age. In a dynamic profession like PR, there are no instruction manuals to tell us what to do. Every generation approaches their work differently — with unique perspectives and tools. Generational differences propel us forward. New ideas come from new people.

That is why we approached this year’s research through a different lens. In the 2025 report, we present a macro view of the changes impacting the overall industry. Then, we break the data down into four age groups to discover how current and future leaders view the powerful trends shaping our profession.

During January 2025, more than 1,000 PR professionals participated in this study, across the four generations currently working or planning to work in Public Relations — Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X and Baby Boomers. They are from every level of seniority, in both agencies and in-house. Half are from the U.S.

The results reflect definite similarities and distinct differences of opinion between those who are well-established in their careers and those just starting out. Some findings are expected, others are surprising. No matter your age group, if you want to be part of PR’s future, be careful not to stand in its way.

In other words, MIND THE GAP.

# #PRFUTURE

To begin, this study asks a simple question about the health of an industry that in the past year has experienced significant mergers, acquisitions and layoffs. Despite economic, political, and technological disruptions, PR people remain positive about the future of their profession, with 74% of respondents saying they have a “very positive” or “somewhat positive” outlook on growth, while only 11% have an unfavorable or negative view. This positive outlook is shared across generations. In the coming pages, we explore whether the PR industry is overly optimistic or well prepared.

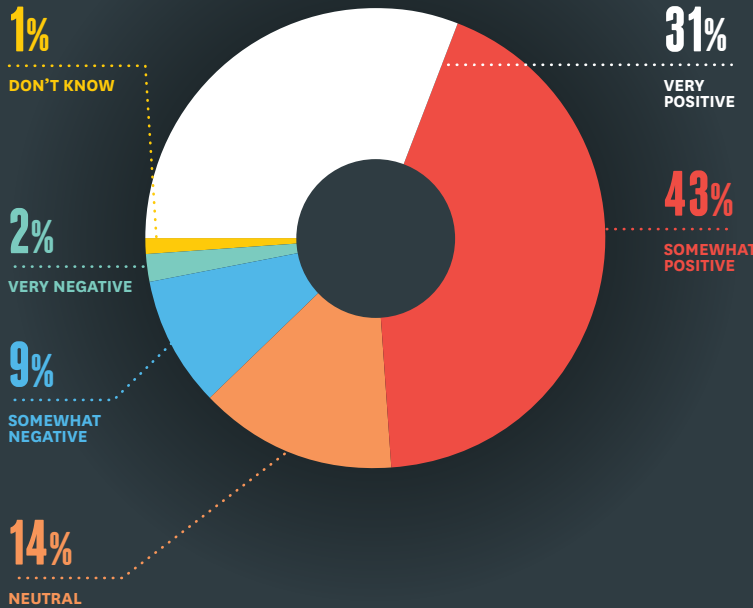


**The communications landscape—and what people expect of business—has changed. It’s on everyone to listen, uplift, and empower every generation, each with its unique values, perspectives, and talents. True impact comes from cross-generational collaboration, where every life experience drives more meaningful work.”**

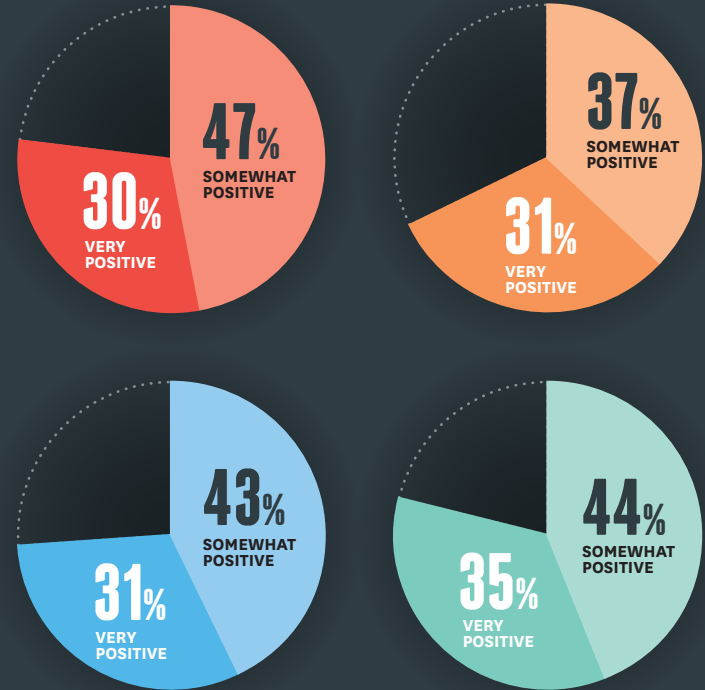
**Barby K. Siegel**  
Global CEO, Zeno Group  
USC Center for Public Relations  
Board of Advisers member

Overall, what is your outlook for the future growth of the public relations profession? Is it...  
(total)

GEN Z ■ GEN X ■  
MILLENNIALS ■ BOOMERS ■



Very Positive or Somewhat Positive... (by generation)



# FOUR TRENDS IMPACTING PUBLIC RELATIONS

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

1

HYBRID AND REMOTE WORK

2

CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE

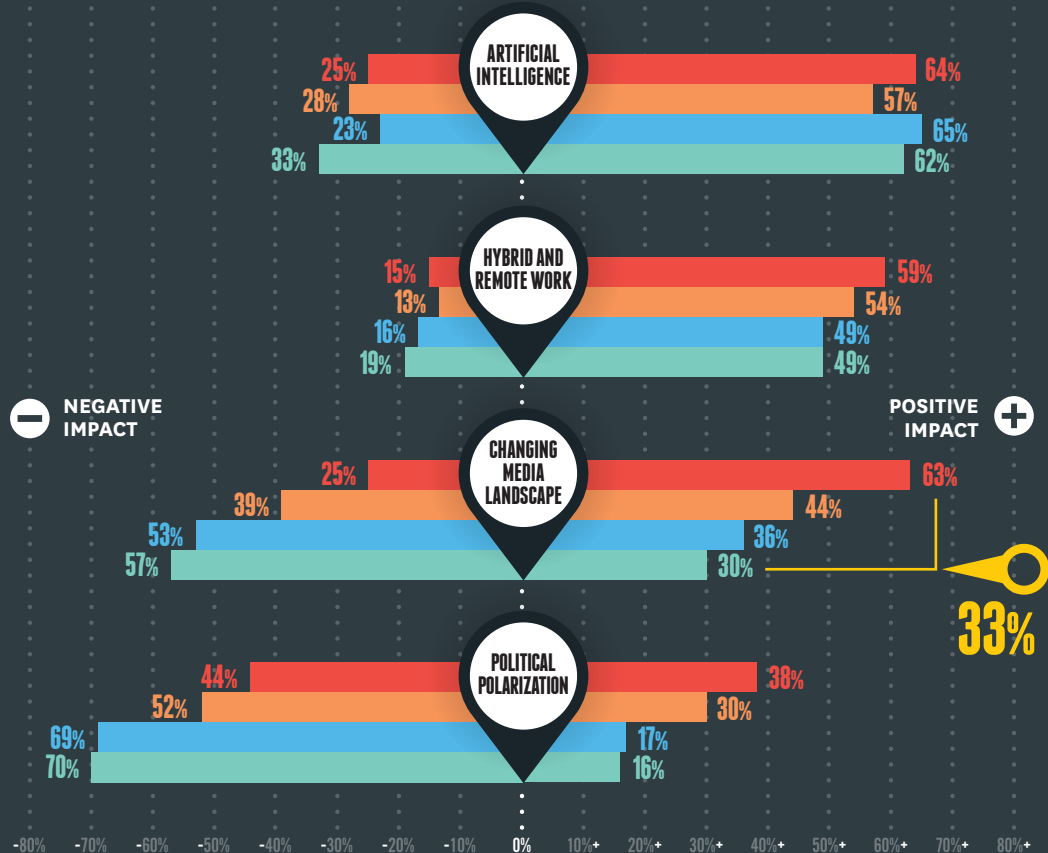
3

POLITICAL POLARIZATION

4

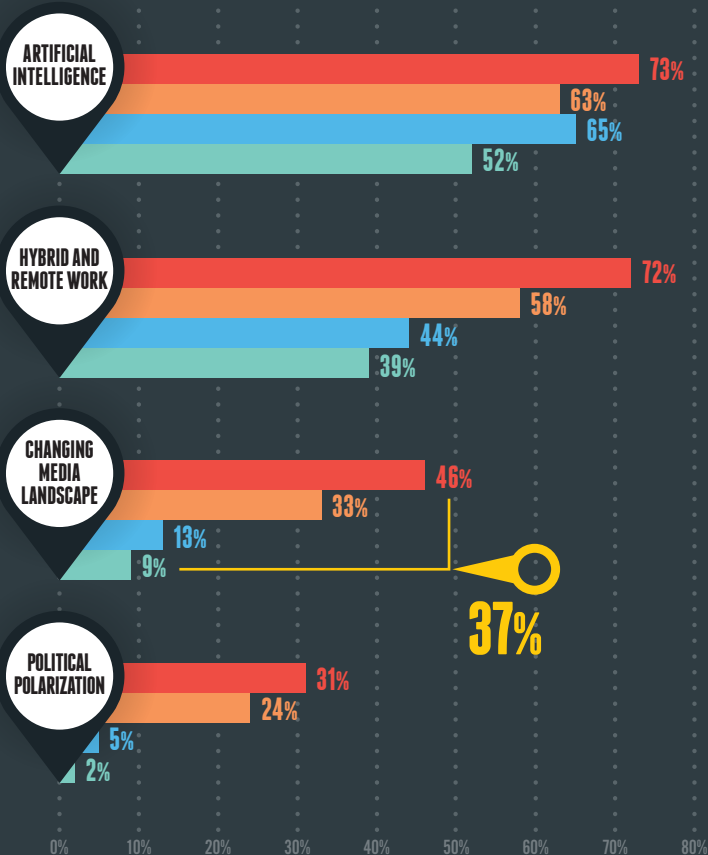
In your opinion, what type of impact will each of the following have on the future direction of the public relations profession?

GEN Z ■ GEN X ■  
MILLENNIALS ■ BOOMERS ■



## Those who think this trend will make their jobs easier...

GEN Z ■ GEN X ■  
MILLENNIALS ■ BOOMERS ■



To better understand their positive outlook, we asked respondents to evaluate the impact four powerful trends will have on the future of the profession.

- Sixty percent of respondents said that AI will have a positive effect on the PR industry, while 28% thought that impact will be negative.
- The majority believe hybrid and remote work will positively impact future growth, with just 15% believing it will have a negative effect.
- Overall, 43% believe the changing media landscape will positively impact the future direction of the industry, while almost the same percentage see a negative impact.
- The majority view polarization as the most significant negative force impacting the profession, with only one in four believing it will bring positive benefits.

Across the board, PR professionals typically see their day-to-day work becoming easier because of AI. Gen Z is the most convinced, with almost 3 out of 4 saying AI will ease their workload. Only 39% of boomers feel positive about the impact of hybrid work, compared to 72% of Gen Z (a gap of 33%).

The changing media landscape and political polarization are viewed differently. Overall, 56% assert this ongoing media evolution will make their day-to-day work harder and a similar percentage (61%) share this belief about the effects of polarization on their work.

Gen Z is the only generation to feel more positive (46%) than negative about how changes in the media landscape will affect their day-to-day work. Compared to Gen X at 13% and Boomers at 9%. This 37% gap is a result of Gen Z preferring to create content on platforms they grew up with, versus pitching media they don't know.

They also grew up in the age of polarization, which is the thorniest issue for every age group. Veteran PR professionals know from experience how hard it is these days to take a stand on an issue that may alienate customers, employees or the government. Gen Z is the least troubled by polarization. Thirty-one percent say it will make their work easier compared to more than 5% for Gen X and Boomers at 2%, a gap of more than 25%.



# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

“ We often imagine AI as a single, monolithic force that will inevitably do something — good or bad. In truth, it’s a collection of powerful tools, ready for us to use thoughtfully, responsibly, and effectively.”

**Frank Shaw**  
Chief Communications Officer,  
Microsoft

For the past two years, the USC Center for Public Relations has focused on AI and all its implications for PR. We have conducted two industry surveys with WE Communications and published two Relevance Reports on the topic with Microsoft. This research has shown that AI is not only changing how we work. It is changing how we feel about work.

However, AI is still in its infancy, and its future impact is hard to predict. Will it foster misinformation, replace workers and lower the cost of public relations?

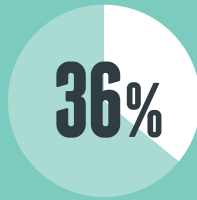
## Does your organization currently use AI in any of the following areas of public relations?



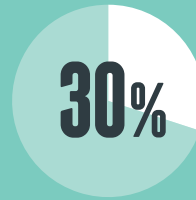
Social Media



Analytics and Research



Press Material Development



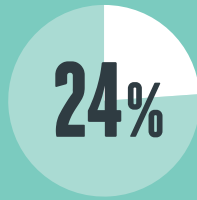
Marketing Communications



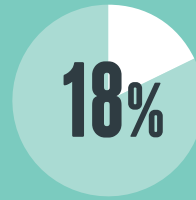
Creative Services



Internal or Employee Communications



Media Relations



Corporate Public Relations



Crisis Communications/Management



Events and Event Planning/Management



Public Affairs



Investor Relations

When asked about how people use AI today, the dominant responses were social media (43%), research and analytics (36%), and development of press materials (36%). Practices like investor relations (7%) and public affairs (11%) have much lower adoption of the technology.

Agencies are focusing their use of AI on their core services, including social media (52%), strategic communications (37%), press materials (46%), research/analytics (44%), and creative services (34%). In-house teams are more likely to use AI for internal communications (30%).

Overall, communicators believe humans will remain essential to the PR function. However, there is a difference in intensity. Eight out of ten Boomers and Gen Xers strongly agree about the essential role humans will play in the future of PR, while Gen Z and Millennials are less certain at 52% and 60%, respectively, a 30% gap between the oldest and youngest groups.

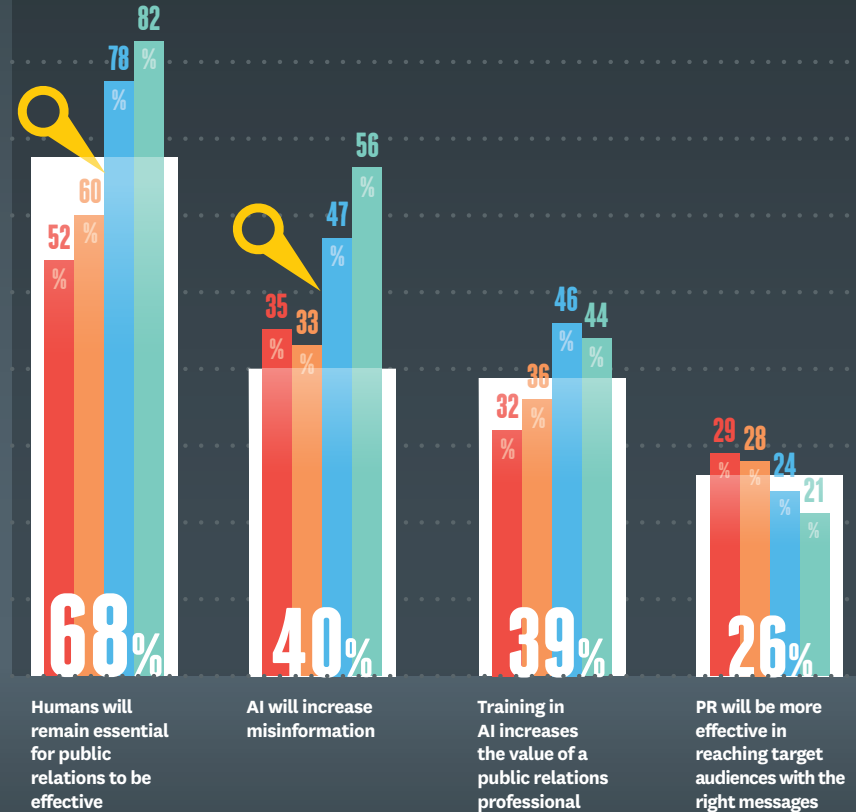
Sixty-eight percent of agency executives strongly agree people will remain essential for effective PR, that number is 14% higher than their in-house clients. This difference is likely a reflection of the current agency business model that depends on billable hours for generating income.

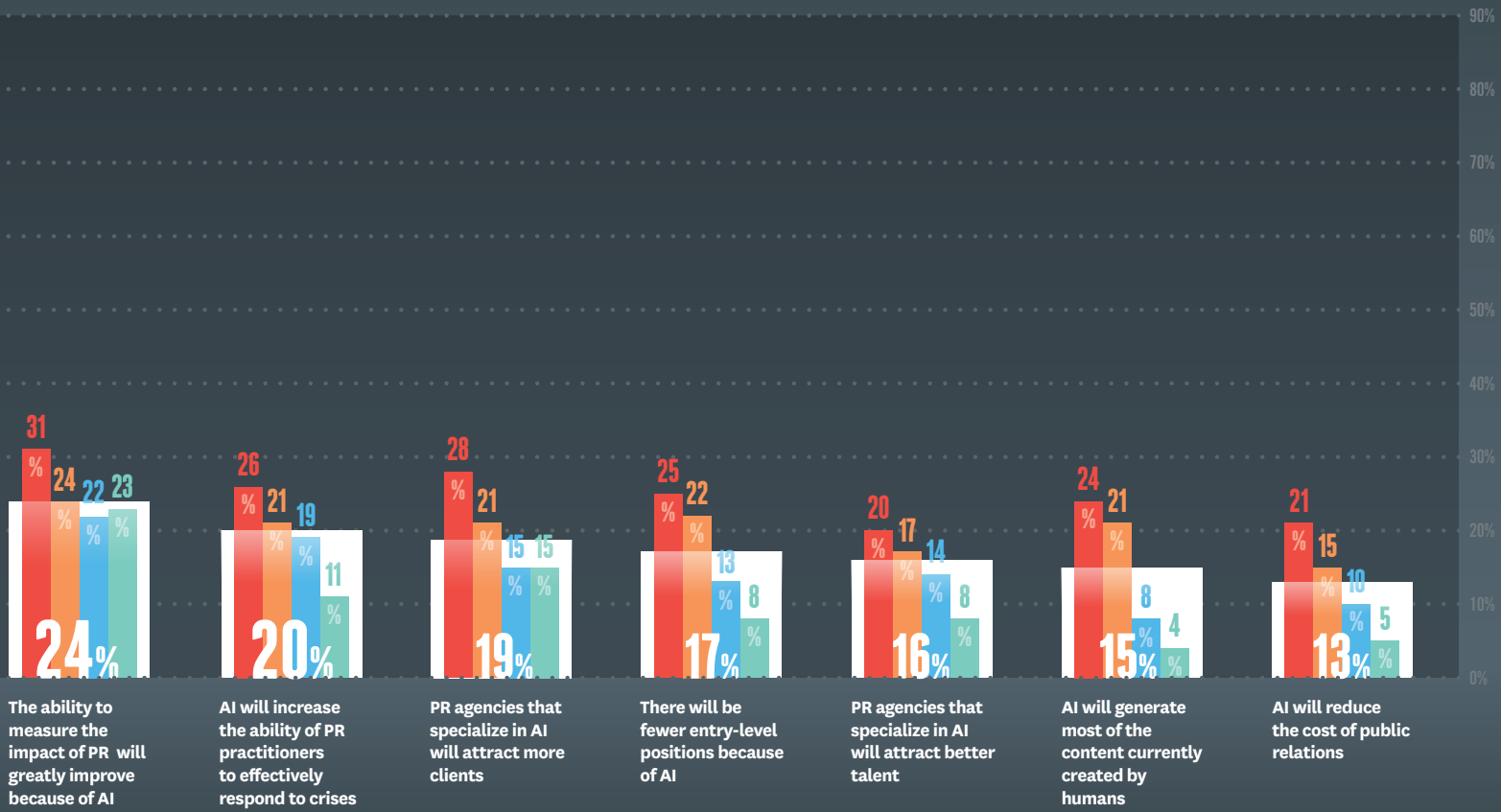
A generational gap (23%) exists between Millennials and Boomers on whether AI will increase misinformation, which reflects the optimism of younger PR professionals and the fears of those more established in their careers.

Gen Z and Millennials’ pragmatic outlook on pricing and hiring is based on their predictions that AI will dominate content creation — a core agency service. Twenty-four percent of Gen Z practitioners strongly agree that “AI will generate most of the content currently created by humans.” Compared to just 8% of Gen X who strongly agree with that statement, which is twice the 4% of Boomers.

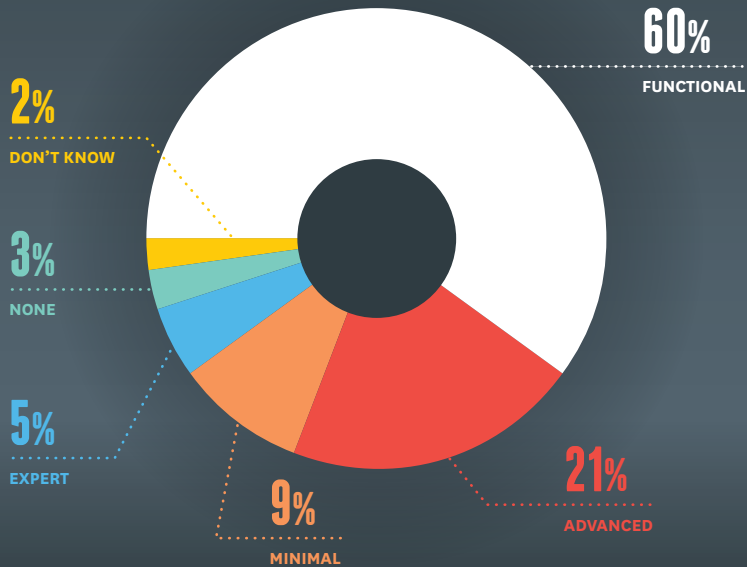
In a class project, one Annenberg graduate student developed a start-up plan for an AI-only PR firm that would service its clients for a monthly fee of \$15.99. Despite a lot of pushback on the low billing rates, the student wouldn’t budge. Most PR agency executives, who bill that much in one minute, would dismiss her idea as a fantasy. But her concept is a reminder that we need to Mind the Gap.

## How will AI impact the following areas of public relations over the next 5 years? Those who “Strongly Agree.”

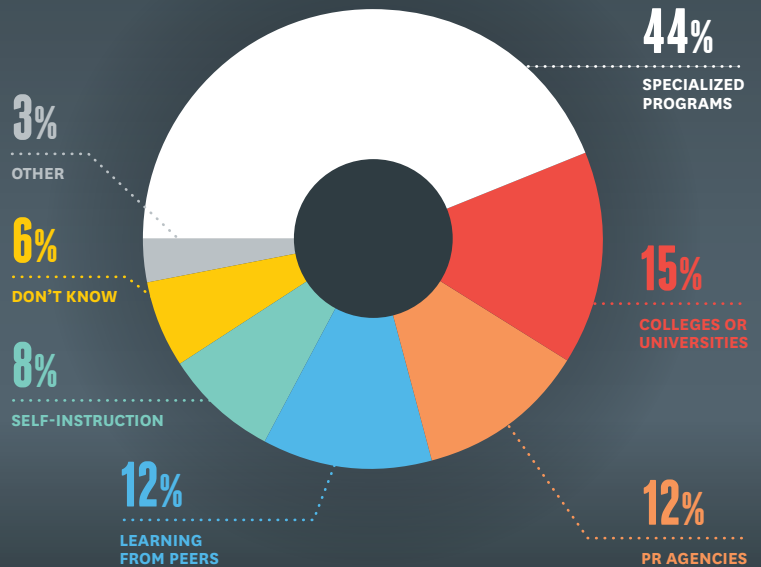




## What level of competency or experience should entry-level employees in public relations have in using artificial intelligence (AI)?



## Who, in your opinion, is best equipped to train entry-level employees in the use of AI in public relations?



The consensus is that entry-level employees don't need to be experts. More than two-thirds of Gen X and Boomers think that entry-level employees only need a functional level of competence with AI. If expectations are that low, serious expertise with AI should be a big advantage in a job interview — which will require more training.

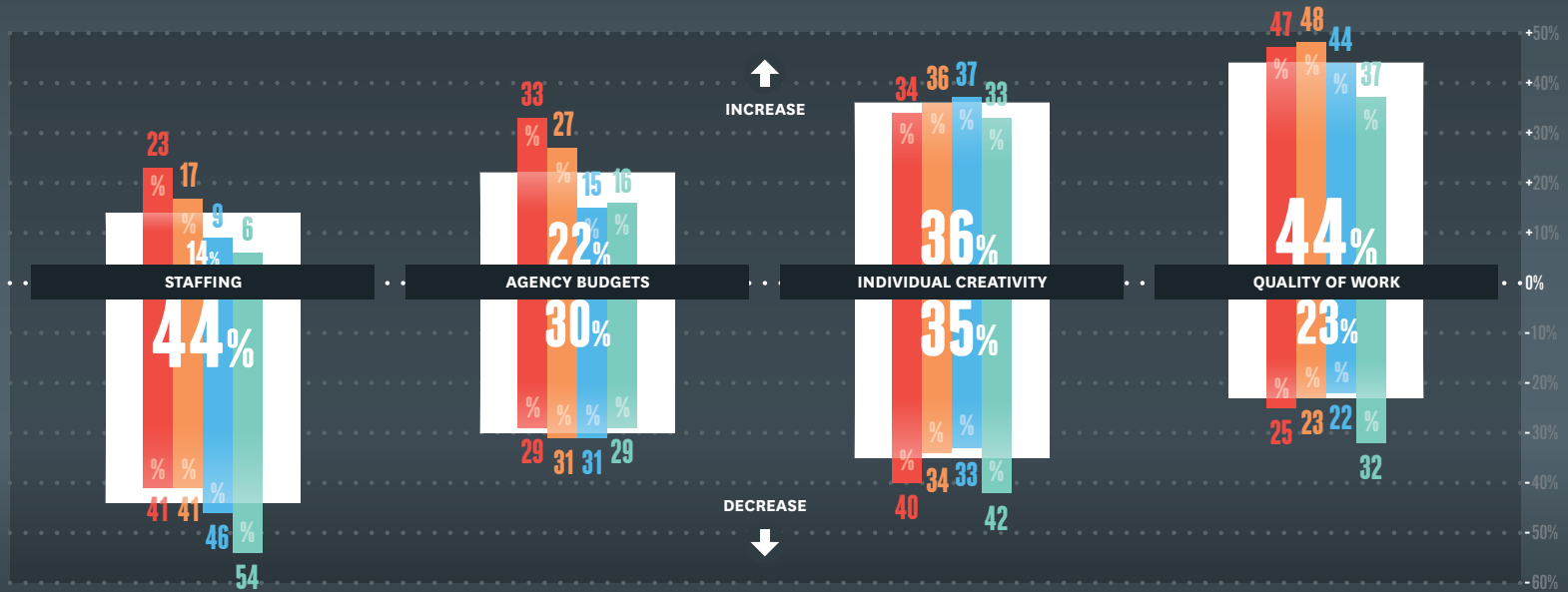
Only 15% feel colleges or universities are best equipped to provide training, even though some, like USC Annenberg, are integrating AI into every class. Similarly, only 12% think PR firms are a good fit for the task. PR professionals are more likely to look to specialized training programs (44%) than any other source. This huge gap presents a real business opportunity for agencies and academics to work together to prepare Gen Alpha for the AI world.

## How will AI change the practice of public relations in each of the following areas over the next five years?

INCREASE ↑ DECREASE ↓

TOTAL ■

GEN Z ■ GEN X ■  
MILLENNIALS ■ BOOMERS ■



What will the impact of AI look like in five years? In our crystal ball, the predictions are a little murky. Forty-four percent think staffing will be reduced, and 30% predict agency budgets will decline. At the same time, 44% expect the quality of work to increase, while 36% believe individual creativity will increase. Interestingly, the perspectives of those working in agencies and in-house are remarkably similar.

Although it is something of a concern for everyone, Boomers are particularly pessimistic about AI's impact on both staffing and the quality of work. Gen Z and Millennials are more optimistic about staffing and agency budgets, and they will be responsible for making those decisions.



# HYBRID AND REMOTE WORK

Over the past five years, the expectation of many working professionals has shifted from being in the office five days each week to either a hybrid model, where employees are on-site two to three days each week, or fully remote. As research we conducted last year showed, hybrid and remote work have both a positive and negative impact.

That study, conducted with the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), demonstrated the advent of remote and hybrid work has improved worker morale. At the same time, many internal communicators also reported a weakening of the culture at their organizations. In this study, we looked closer at how this trend is impacting the PR profession. First, by asking how many days respondents currently work in the office.

“ While the corporate machine tries to roll hybrid back under the guise of ‘improved collaboration,’ we’ve grown used to the flexibility, seen our mental health thrive, and won’t let it go without a fight.”

**Midori Jenkins**

Gen Z student, USC Annenberg Public Relations and Advertising Master of Arts program

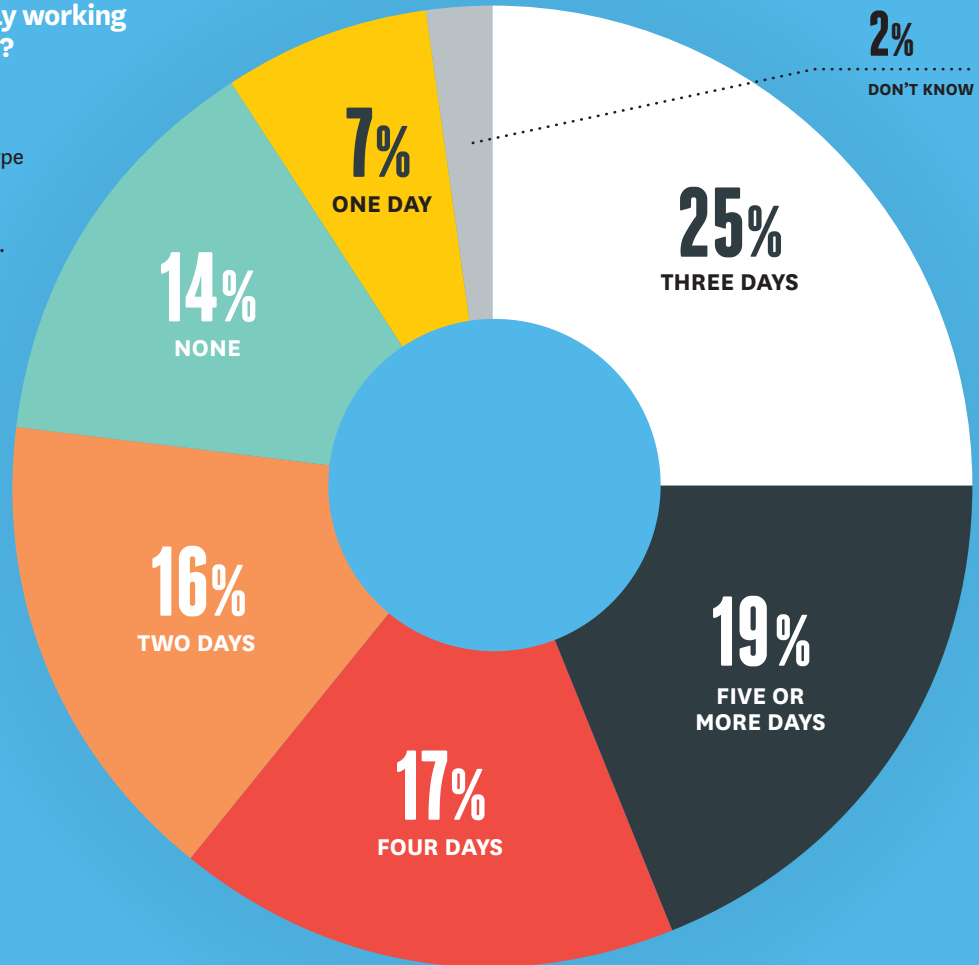
## How many days each week are you typically working at your company's or organization's offices?

The in-office total varies considerably by generation and type of employment. Gen Z and Millennials say they spend the most time in the office, an average of 2.98 and 2.96 days, respectively. Boomers spend the least: 2.58 days per week.

Gen Xers spend an average of 2.84 days in the office each week. Those working in PR agencies spend considerably less office time than their corporate counterparts. Agency professionals average 2.52 days in the office, compared to 2.94 days per week for those with in-house roles.



**AVERAGE AMOUNT  
OF DAYS IN OFFICE**



In every age group, the vast majority agree with the importance of flexibility, but opinions differ on whether hybrid and remote work will be in their future. The most seasoned professionals (Gen X and Boomers) are significantly less likely to predict that Work from Home will be the norm five years from now (a 16% gap between Boomers and both Gen Z and Millennials). As noted earlier, Boomers spend the least time in the office each week and many will be retiring soon.

Gen Z professionals (26%), not surprisingly, are much more likely than others (17% more than Boomers) to strongly agree that morale is higher for those who work remotely. These younger professionals are also more likely to agree it is unfair that some people can work from home while others must be in the office, which is consistent with previous research.



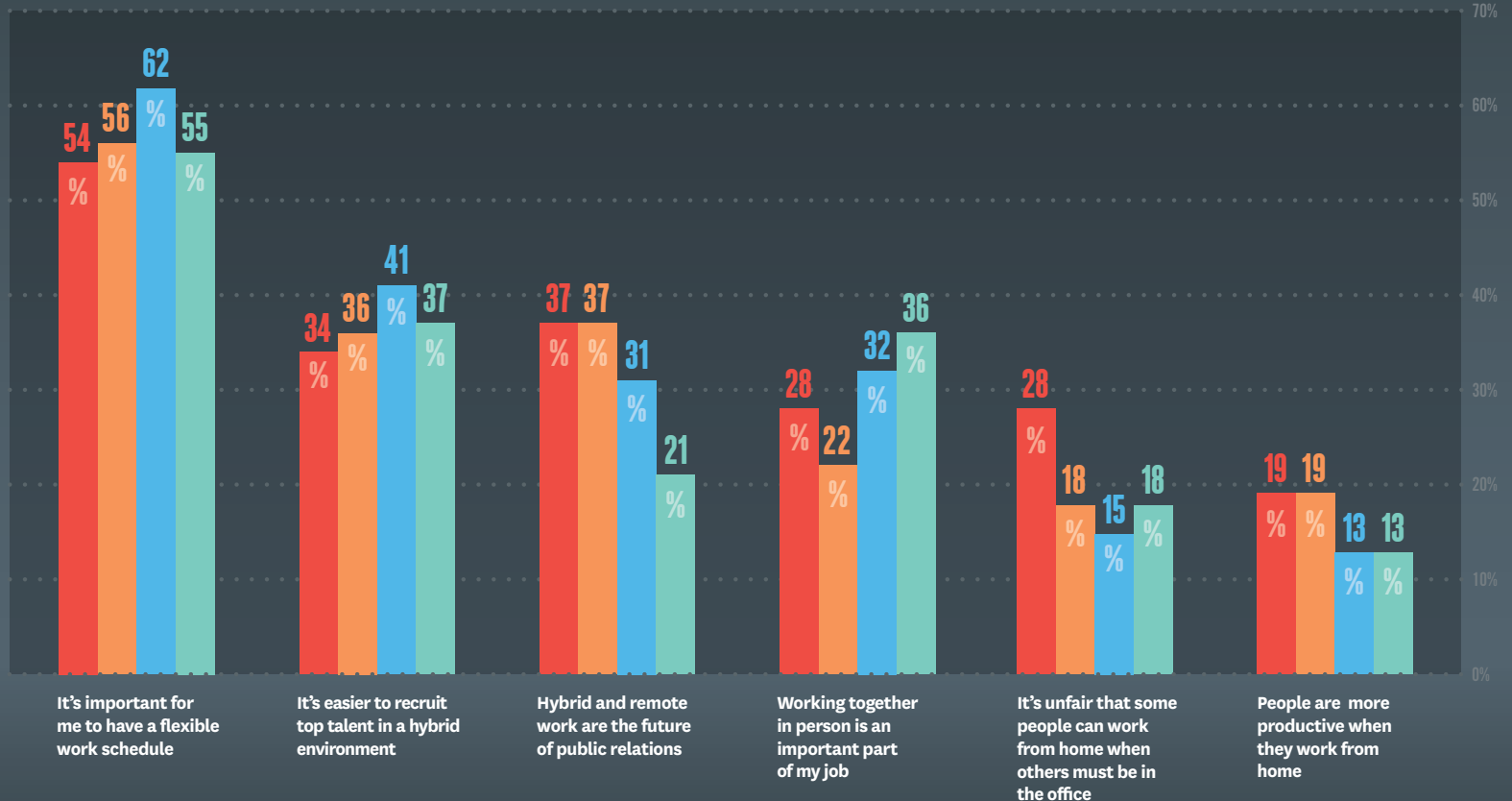
**All signs point to remote and hybrid work remaining desirable among all employees. As values shift with new generations in the workforce, communicators must continue to watch this space, leveraging their ability to bridge employee needs with the C-suite's vision."**

**Matt Tidwell**

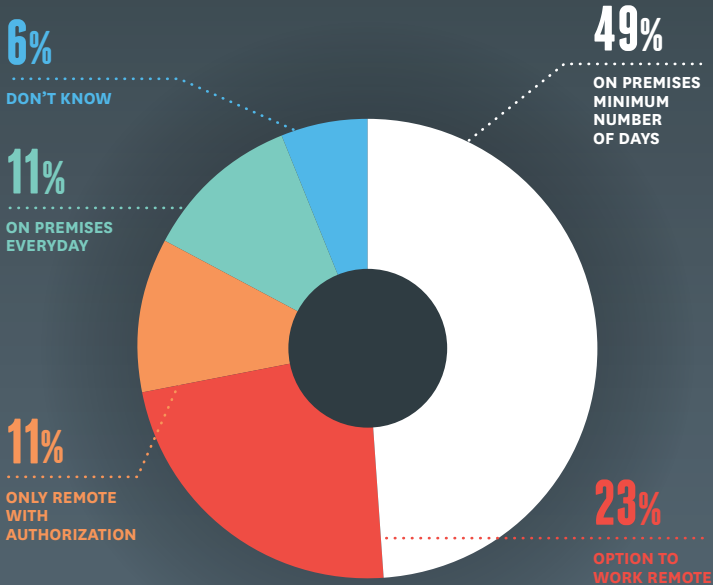
IABC Board Member, Director of Professional Studies at the William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Kansas

## How will hybrid or remote work impact the practice of public relations over the next 5 years? Those who “Strongly or Somewhat Agree.”

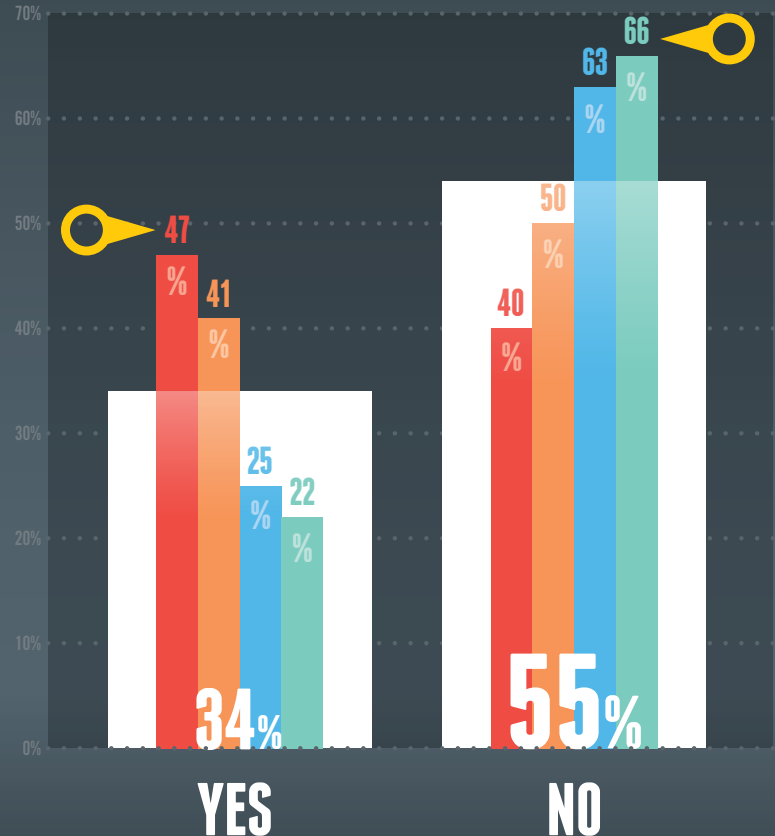
GEN Z ■ GEN X ■  
MILLENNIALS ■ BOOMERS ■



Which one of the following do you expect will be part of your organization's future policies, practices, and procedures on "working from home" or other forms of "remote work" for these employees?



Would you be willing to take a reduction in your pay and compensation to be able to work from home rather than go to the office?





The biggest gap in requiring employees to be in the office full-time may be between management and staff. The expectation for many PR people is that the future will allow for some form of hybrid or remote work. Half expect they will have to be on premises a minimum number of days each week, and about a quarter expect to have an option to work remotely. Only 11% expect to be on premises every day.

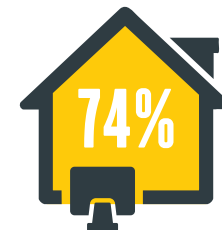
In-house PR professionals face greater challenges on issues surrounding return-to-office compared to those who work at agencies. While their attitudes toward hybrid are similar, there is one key difference — those who work in-house are twice as likely to say their organizations want everyone in the office five days a week. This finding is consistent with reported trends among many large companies (e.g., JPMorganChase, Amazon, Goldman Sachs) that are requiring all office-based staff to be on premises five days each week.

The numbers are even more revealing when you look at the generational gap between those willing to take a pay cut and those who are not. This chart resembles two opposing staircases. With Gen Z at the top of the “Yes” side and Boomers topping the “No,” creating a gap of 25%, that needs to be addressed thoughtfully.

PR agencies who are implementing a mandatory return to the office are facing a serious uphill battle. Working from home has become so popular that 28% of agency employees surveyed said they would take a pay cut to be able to work at home.

But even more in-house communicators (36%) would reduce their salary to work from home. This gap between agencies and in-house is likely due to the greater flexibility currently being offered to agency staff. Both numbers are an indication of the passion PR people have for flexibility.

Despite their personal perspectives on working remotely, 74% of PR professionals in mid-level or higher positions would hire a talented candidate regardless of where they’re located. Long-distance staffing was common during the pandemic when everyone was remote. Post-pandemic, some believed that everything would return to normal, but when they realized communications can be done effectively from anywhere, normal moved from the boardroom to the bedroom. Will it go back? Not without a fight.



**WILL HIRE REMOTE CANDIDATES**



# CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE



Being able to adapt to change has never been more important. The next generation of PR professionals will need creativity and curiosity to reach people in innovative new ways.”

**Josh Rosenberg**

CEO, Day One Agency

USC Center for PR Board of Advisers member

The rise of social media and the demise of legacy media is not a new trend. It has been happening since 2005, with the launches of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Since then, newspaper circulation and broadcast TV viewership have dropped by more than half. These were the channels that public relations relied upon to share stories and deliver messages. Today, those media outlets have lost their reach and their relevance.

**How relevant will each of the following types of media channels be in meeting the objectives of communication programs in 2030? Those who say “Very Relevant.”**



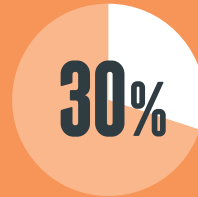
**Social Media**



**Podcasts**



**Smart Phone Apps**



**Influencer Promotion**



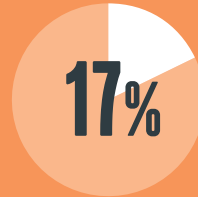
**Paid Advertising**



**Online Newspaper or Magazine Stories**



**Press Releases**



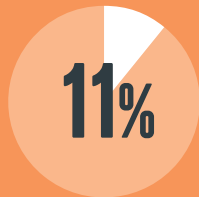
**Celebrity Endorsement**



**Network Television**



**Print Newspaper or Magazine Stories**



**Cable News**

The media channels that are thought to be most relevant in the next five years are not surprising, but they do present a growing challenge to the PR industry, with social media being dominant and traditional outlets (network television, print outlets and cable news) losing their relevance.

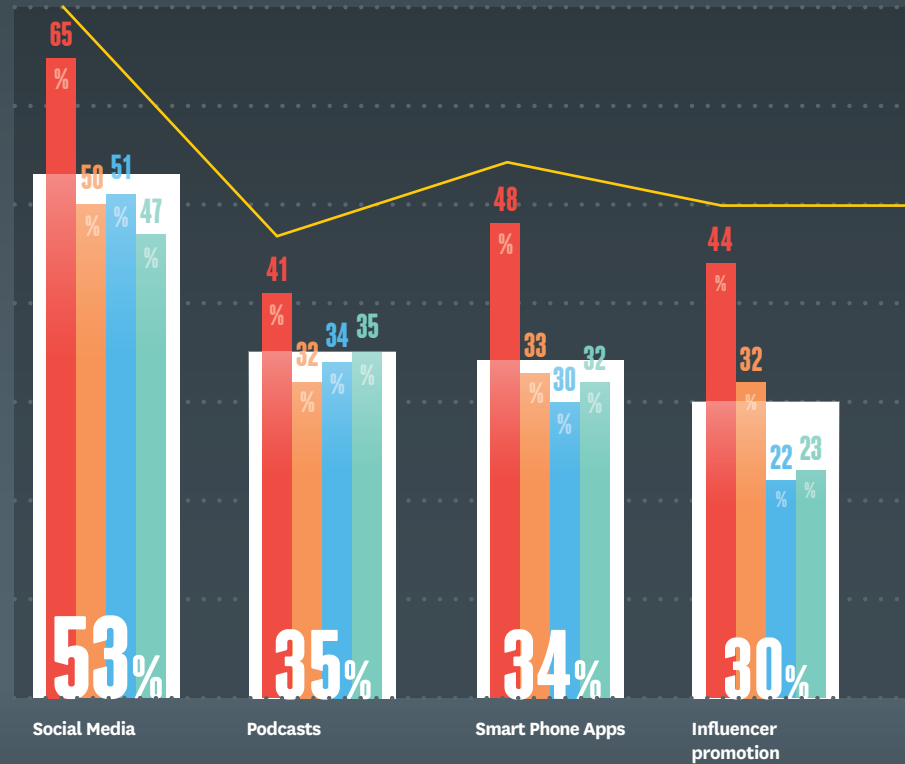
Traditional media (network television, print newspapers and magazines, cable news) will be the least relevant going forward, with social media (53%) most relevant, along with podcasts (35%) and smart phone apps (34%).

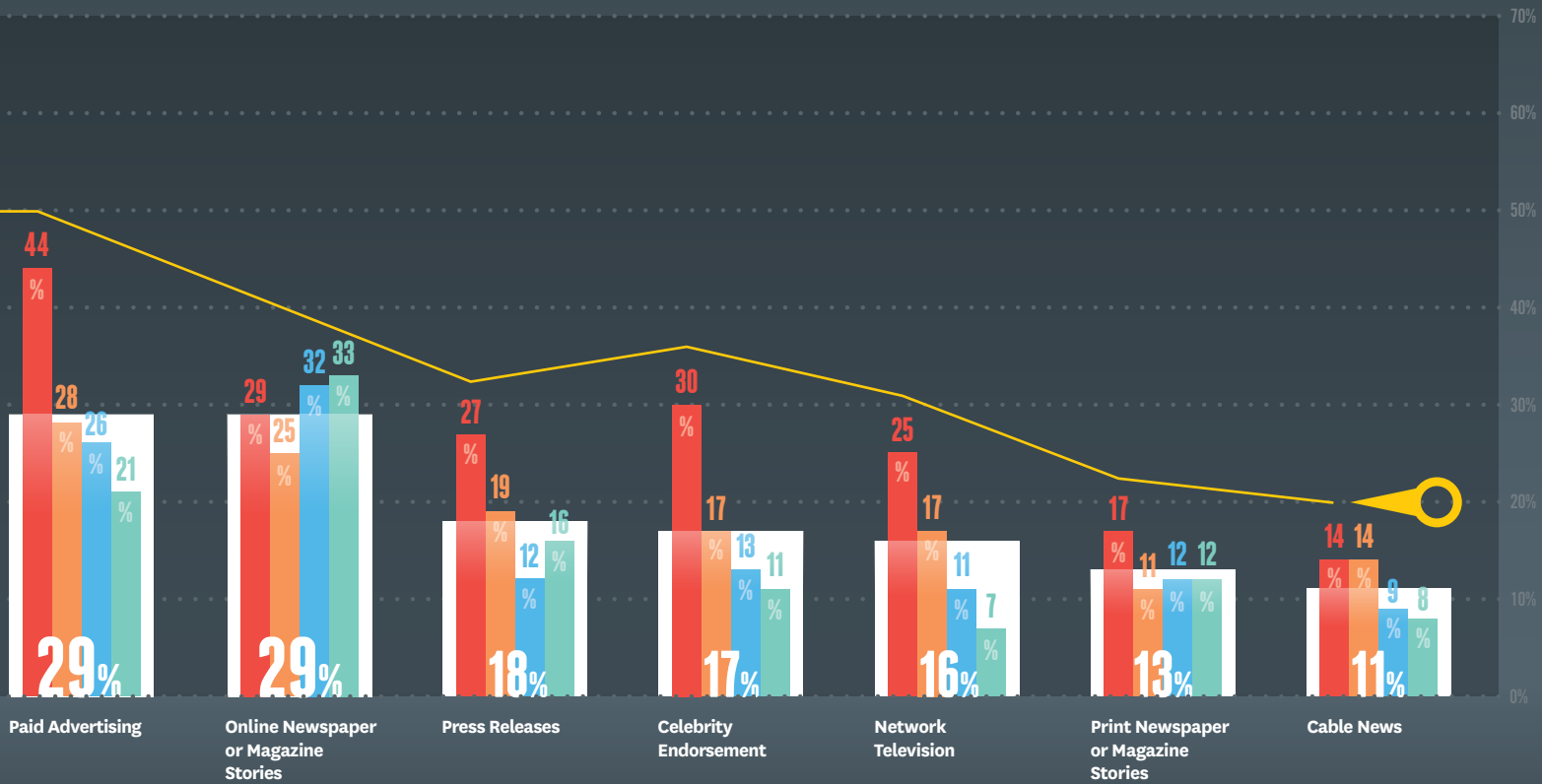
Gen Z is an outlier on almost every type of media channel. Two-thirds of the younger PR professionals believe Social will be “very relevant” in 2030, which is significantly higher than the other three age groups (18% difference with Boomers). Similar gaps exist with paid advertising, podcasts, and influencer promotion, where Gen Z is far more bullish than their older colleagues.

Gen Z practitioners understand the rise of influencers and appreciate the subtleties of working with people their own age, who are often highly-paid “celebrities,” whose independence could potentially harm a brand’s reputation. Gen Z can also relate to their individual needs better than older executives, who are used to more formal relationships.

Gen Z even likes press releases more than their older colleagues. Not because they create news. Because they are the best way to make accurate company information searchable on the web. PR Newswire reports that 100,000 press releases were distributed in a 12-month period, proof they are still alive and kicking.

## How relevant will each of the following types of media channels be in meeting the objectives of communication programs in 2030? Those who say “Very Relevant.”

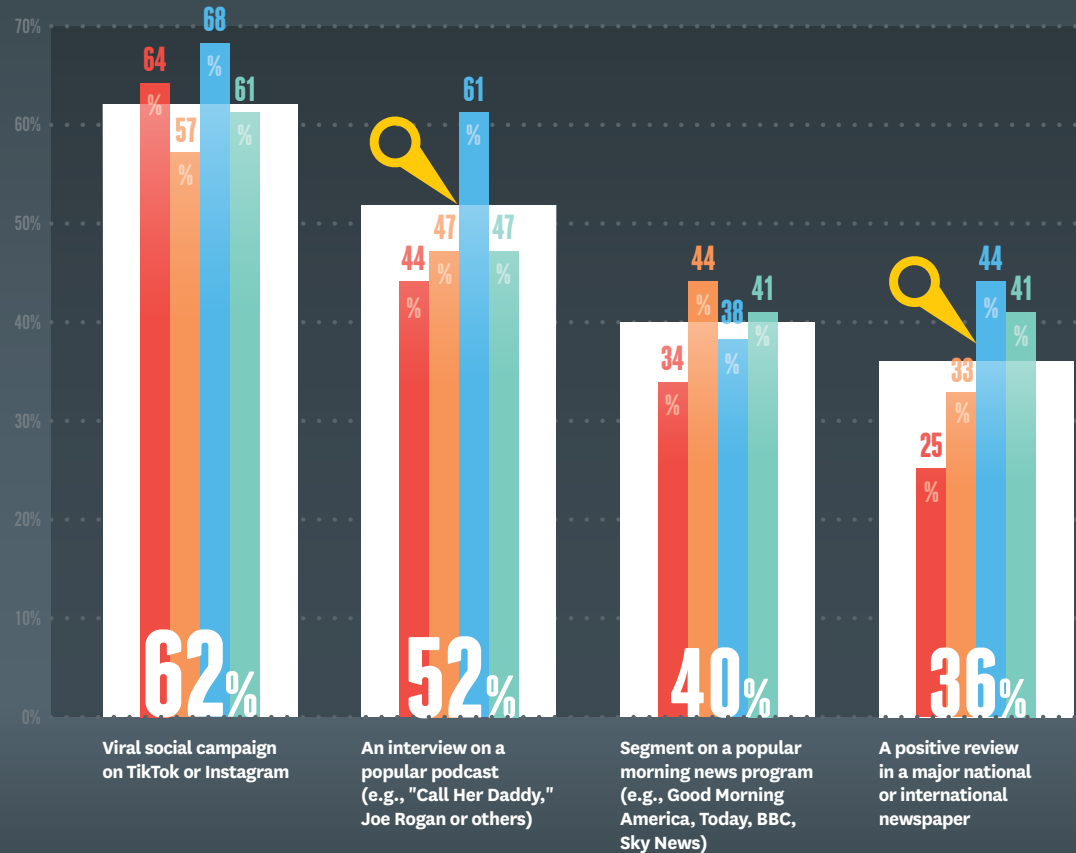


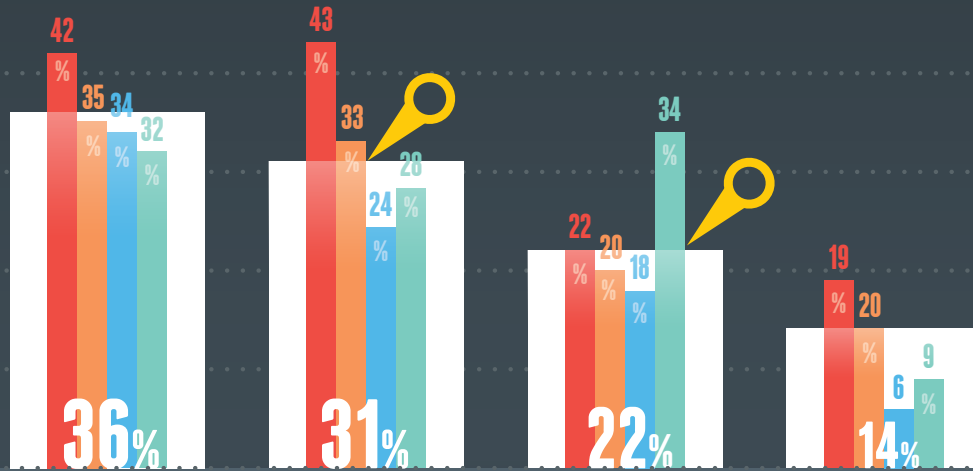


## In your opinion, which three of the following are most effective in meeting the objectives of a marketing campaign?



Looking at the relevance of social media, it is not surprising that everyone seems to feel a viral campaign on Instagram or TikTok is the most desirable strategy to market a product, followed by podcasts and a segment on a morning show. However, there is a significant gap between Gen Z and the rest of PR professionals in the value of a positive national newspaper review — long understood as the “gold standard” for public relations campaigns. Only 25% of the younger professionals cited newspapers as an effective approach, compared to 44% of Gen X, a 19% gap. Gen X is very high on podcasts. Boomers are more likely to cite the effectiveness of cable news.





Public endorsement from a celebrity like Taylor Swift

60-second commercial on a major sporting event (e.g., Super Bowl, World Cup or Olympics) with a celebrity

A segment on a major cable news network (e.g., CNN, Al Jazeera)

An article in a celebrity or gossip magazine (e.g., People, US, Hello, OK, Paris Match)

Gen Z communicators chose a 60-second Super Bowl commercial with a celebrity more often than the other groups, possibly because many of those commercials are targeted to their demographic. For example, when Frito Lay wisely offered \$1 million to young creators to produce the new Doritos Super Bowl commercial, it created a huge buzz on the USC campus, because an entry by two students was named a finalist.

In 2024, the hype was even greater because Taylor Swift was in the stands. As a result, 24% more Swifties, ages 18 to 24, tuned in — boosting viewership to a record of 127.7 million.

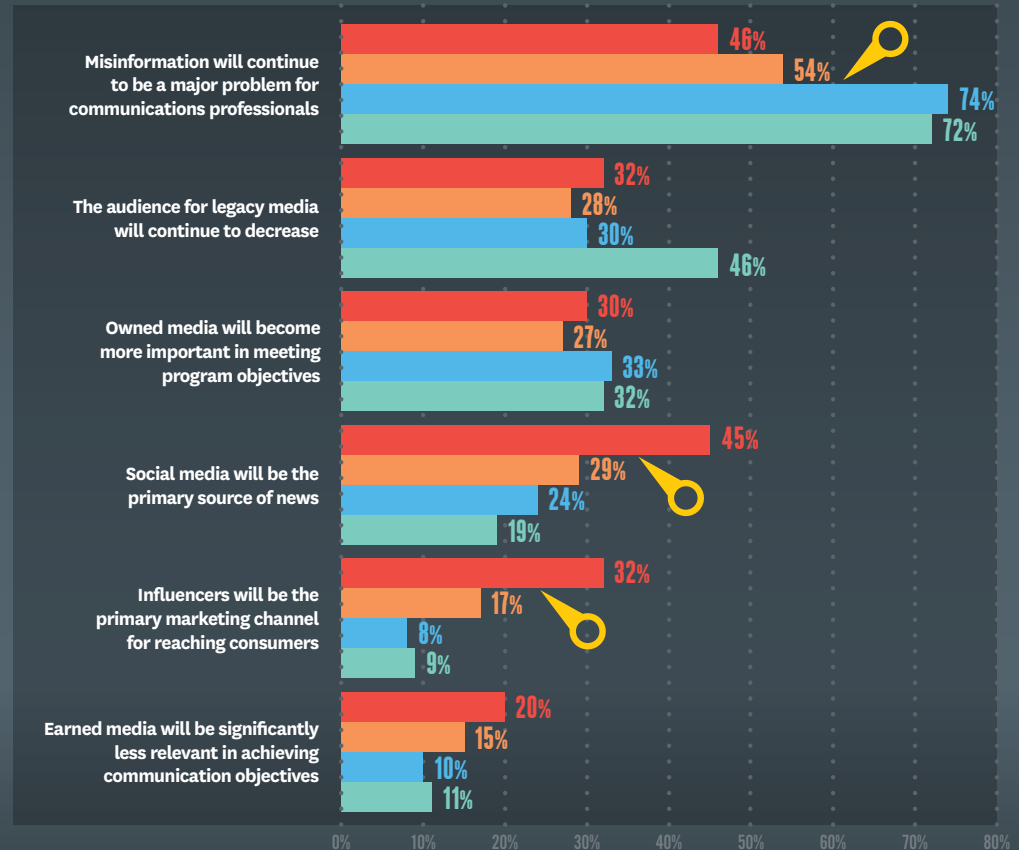
If Gen Z is correct, it seems inevitable that social media will become a primary source of news, and influencers will be a core part of many marketing programs.

The spread of misinformation tops the list of concerns created by this shift to social media. There is a general feeling that the demise of mainstream media will result in an increase in fake or inaccurate news, and no one will be around to correct it.

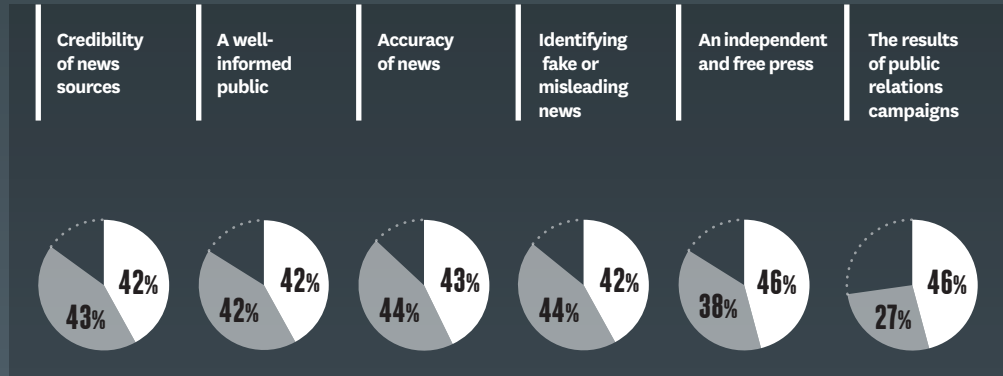
This belief is particularly strong with Gen X and Baby Boomers. By contrast, Gen Z and Millennial practitioners are significantly less concerned with misinformation by a margin of 26%. Living online, they have developed an innate sense of what is real and what isn't. But AI may make detection more difficult.

If misinformation is the most serious problem with AI, PR agency leaders should be looking to hire internal fact-checkers to protect the reputation of their agency and their clients — especially since social media platforms (Meta, X) have discontinued their own fact-checking.

## How will the changing media landscape impact the practice of public relations over the next 5 years? Those who “Strongly Agree.”

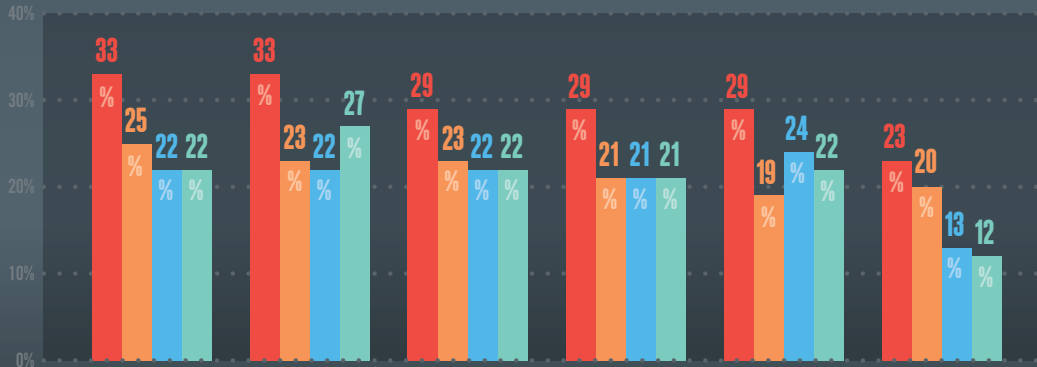


## In your opinion, what type of impact will the changes in traditional media have in each of the following areas?



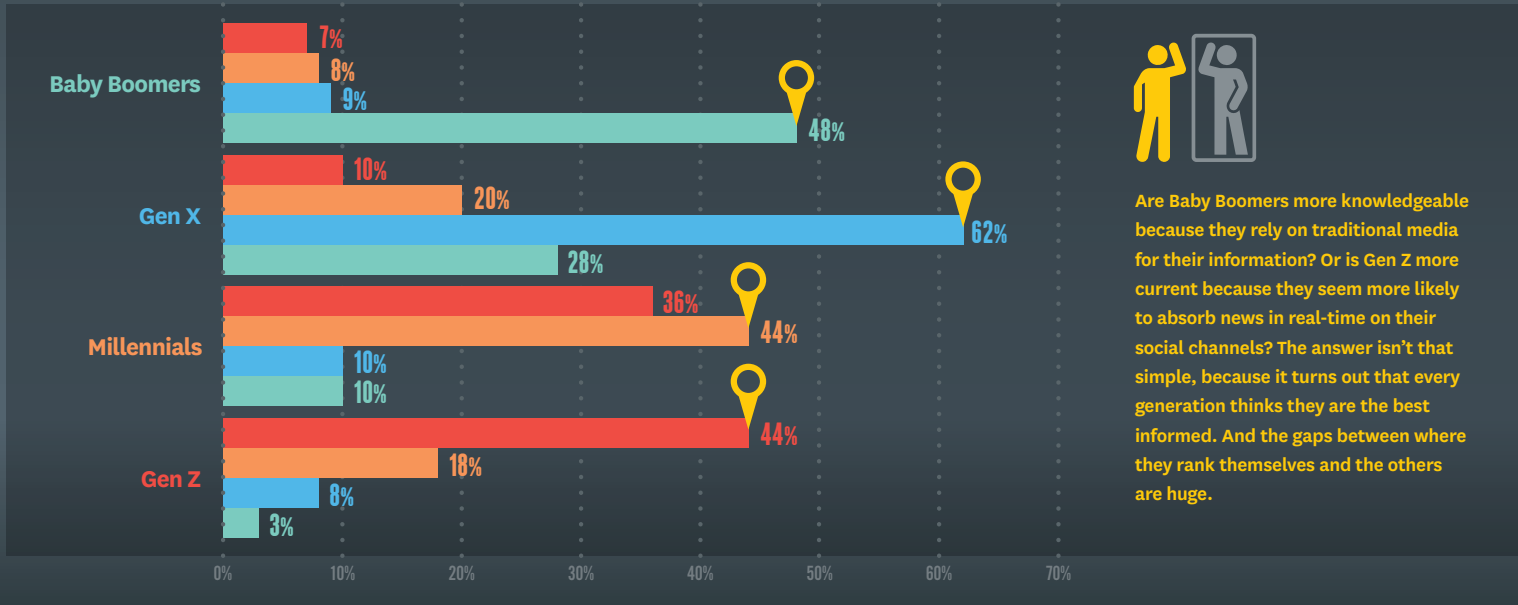
Overall, there is a split opinion about whether the changes in traditional media will have a positive or negative effect. Opinions are equally divided about the impact of changes on an independent and free press, accuracy of news, the credibility of news sources, and a well-informed public. The one exception is that for the results of public relations campaigns where the impact is much more likely to be seen as positive (46%) rather than negative (27%). One in five (18%) say these changes will have little or no impact on campaigns.

## “A Major Positive Impact”... (by generation)



Compared to older groups, Gen Z is more likely to see benefits to credibility, a well-informed public, and an independent free press. However, 74% of Gen Z believe that banning TikTok is a breach of their freedom of speech, which is double the percentage of the two older generations.

## In your opinion, which generation do you believe is best informed about political, social and current events?

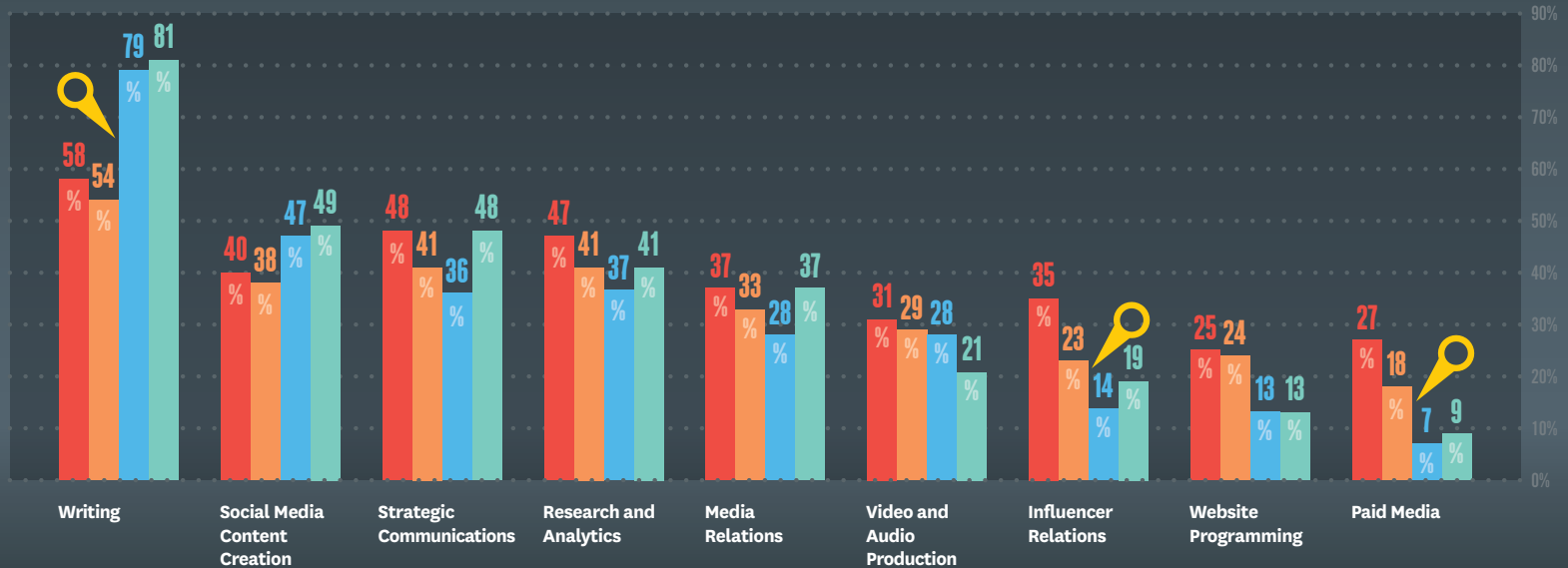


Given their different media preferences, it is logical to ask which generation is best informed about political, social and current events. It seems logical that every age group would have its own definition of what it means to be informed. But this level of divergence represents a bigger problem. If veteran PR executives think they know more about what's going on in the world than those on the way

up, they may dismiss their ideas. Conversely, if newcomers to the business ignore the knowledge accumulated by their older colleagues, they will make the same mistakes. We shouldn't underestimate someone else's knowledge just because they don't get their information from the same place we do.

## How important is experience for entry-level employees in each of the following areas? Those who say “Very Important.”

GEN Z ■ GEN X ■  
MILLENNIALS ■ BOOMERS ■



Despite disagreement about media, there is some consensus about what experience is important for entry-level employees. Writing topped the list, followed by other traditional skills, including content creation, strategic communications, and research. Only one-third mention media relations.

Looking at those skills through a generational lens, it is interesting to note that Gen Z and Millennials rank writing at the top of their list but more than 20% lower than the other groups. For them, writing a prompt or a post will be more relevant than writing a press release. Gen Z also values experience with influencers and paid media significantly more than their senior colleagues.



# POLITICAL POLARIZATION

# 4

After studying the dynamics of polarization for five years, we've learned that it is more than a disagreement about an issue. It has become a strategy for raising funds, attracting viewers and getting votes. Even though the issues that are considered controversial change, the overall level of polarization has stayed the same.

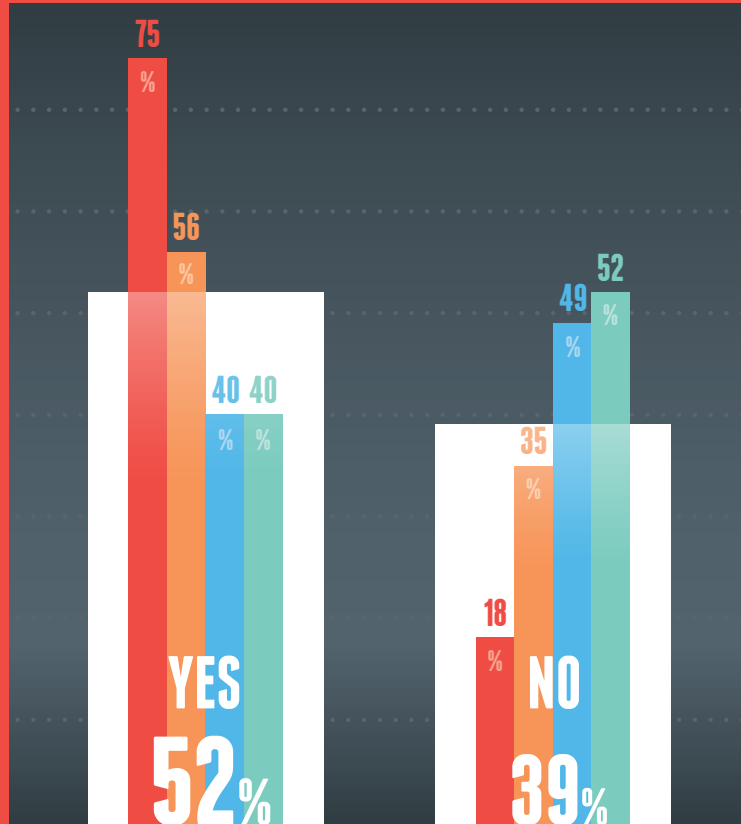
In 2022, we predicted that purpose-driven communications would overcome the forces of division. We believed future communicators would spend the bulk of their time addressing the problems facing society on behalf of their clients and companies.

But polarization proved to be a more powerful force. In the past two years, many companies have deemphasized their social programs in fear of being canceled by those who hold different opinions.

“Polarization in our society makes compromise on our most important issues difficult at best; the result is turmoil, uncertainty and an absence of widely accepted facts, all of which is bad for business and communications.”

**Bob Feldman**  
Founder, Dialogue Project at Duke University  
USC Center for PR Board of Advisers member

In your opinion, do companies have a responsibility to advocate for or support social issues even if these issues are not directly relevant to their business?



DECREASE  
IN 3 YEARS

37%

For the last three years, we have asked PR professionals if they believe companies have the responsibility to address social issues. And each year, the percentage that answered “yes” has dropped — from 89% in 2023 to 85% in 2024 and 52% in 2025. A drop of 37% in three years is a huge gap.

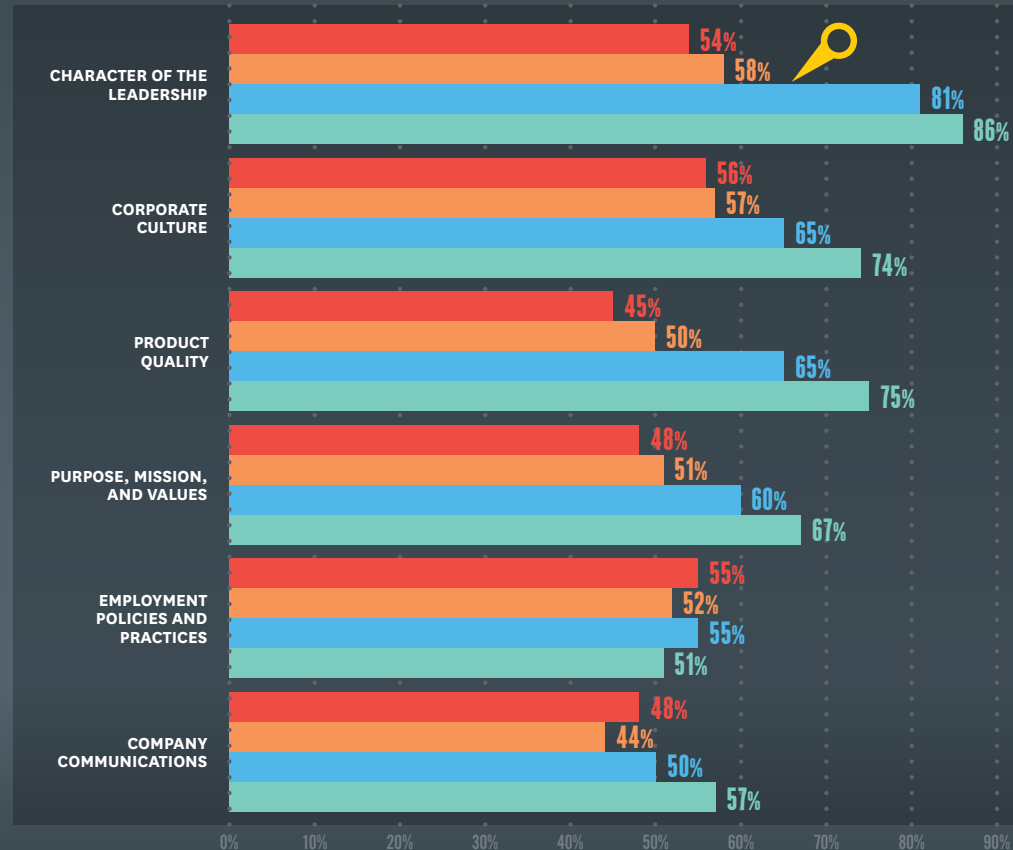
Polarization is a root cause of this dramatic shift. Corporate executives have realized that standing up for an issue or a cause in a divided society is risky business. They all watched in horror as Bud Light sales plummeted because their customers were unhappy about the brand’s association with a transgender influencer.

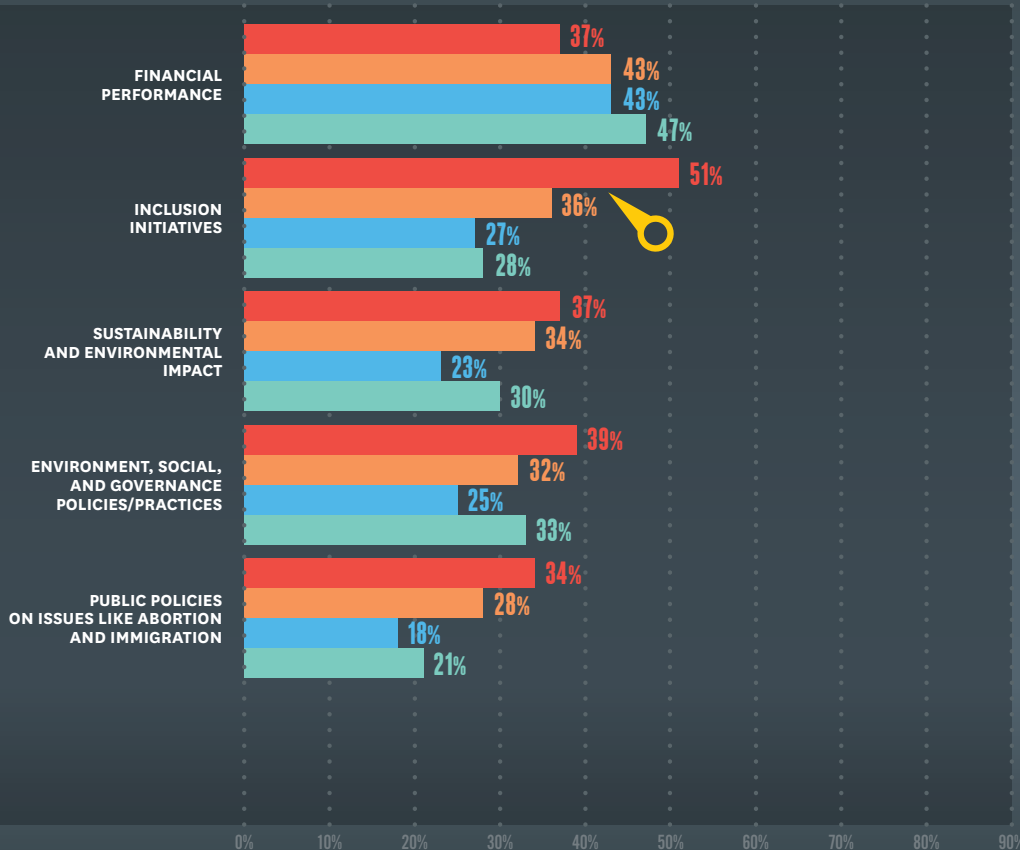
We are living in an era where being woke is increasingly divisive. When you examine the data through a generational lens, the results mirror each other. Younger communicators are still serious about corporate purpose, while the older ones are losing their conviction.

These generational differences also influence why people choose to work on behalf of a company, whether in-house or through an agency. Older PR people consider the character of leadership as the most important criterion followed by corporate culture. They value these attributes significantly more than Millennials and Gen Z. In contrast, the percentage of Gen Z communicators who say inclusion initiatives are very important is almost double that of Gen X. This means corporations that retreat from these initiatives will likely have a recruiting challenge.

## How important are each of the following to you personally when you consider working on behalf of a company or organization?

Those who say "Very Important."





A similar gap exists on the importance of public policies on issues like abortion and immigration, even though these rank lower for all age groups. The long-term question is whether younger PR executives will retain their passion for social change and drive business in that direction or will they become disillusioned like their predecessors?

While commitment to purpose-driven public relations programs is expected to increase, over half of PR professionals expect commitments to inclusion initiatives to go the opposite direction over the next five years.

These predictions vary considerably by generation. Gen Z is optimistic about the future of corporate commitments. By comparison, fewer Boomers expect to see these programs expand. As they take on greater leadership roles in companies and agencies, will Gen Z live up to their image and steer the PR industry back to purpose or take it in a new direction?

Companies in the “sin” industries (tobacco, firearms, gambling) will be particularly challenged when looking for public relations talent. Seventy percent of all professionals will not work on behalf of a tobacco company, 65% will not work on behalf of a firearms manufacturer, and 53% will not work on behalf of a company that runs gambling operations.

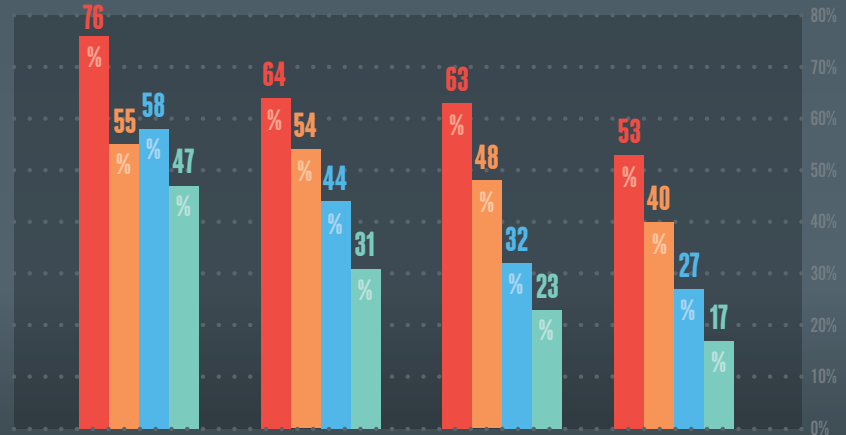
Gen Z holds stronger opinions about not working on behalf of companies that have a negative environmental impact — specifically mining and oil where the gap is the largest.

## Over the next five years, how do you anticipate corporate commitments to each of the following will change?

INCREASE ■  
DECREASE ■

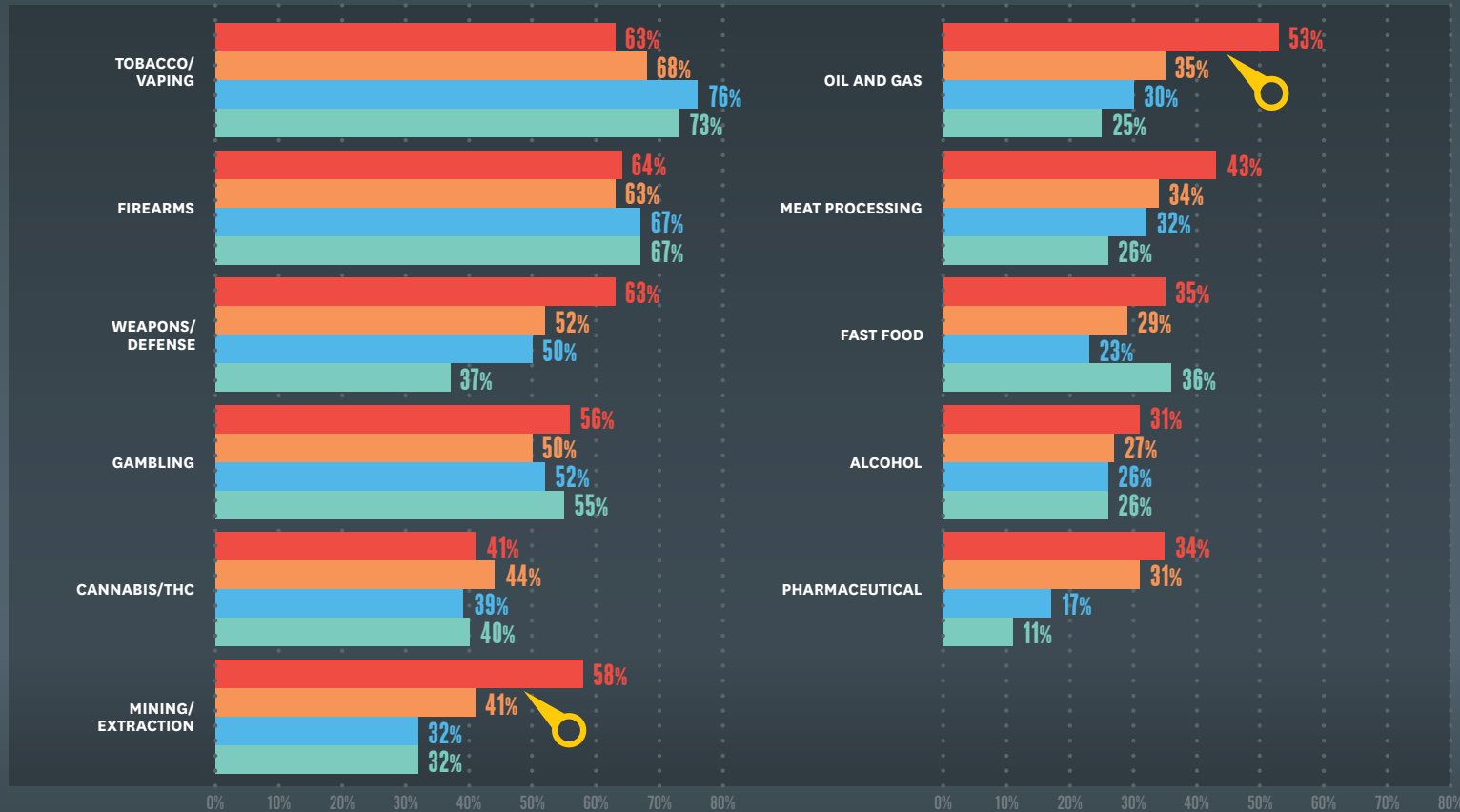


## “Anticipated Increases”... (by generation)



# Would you refuse working for companies or organizations in any of the following industries?

GEN Z ■ GEN X ■  
MILLENNIALS ■ BOOMERS ■



# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE FUTURE?

**Public relations is entering a period of major disruption that will redefine the profession over the next decade. The future of the industry depends upon how tomorrow's leaders address the issues we are beginning to face today, especially the four we have identified.**

## **The Trends**

**Artificial intelligence will reshape how we work, how we staff and how much we are paid.** If we embrace and encourage the use of these new tools, humans will remain core to making communications more creative, targeted and effective. Those who adopt this new technology will replace those who ignore it.

**Working remotely is no longer considered a privilege.** Today, flexibility is the expectation of most PR professionals, especially the younger ones. The ability to work from home will attract and retain top talent. But it will also require innovative approaches to training, staffing and culture.

**The media landscape will continue to shift from legacy media to new platforms and influencers.** PR professionals can adjust to these changes by continually experimenting with new channels that connect brands with their followers, as long as they address concerns about credibility and misinformation.

**In the current polarized climate, corporate priorities are shifting to adapt to a new political reality, which may not align with the values of employees and customers.** Communicators must balance the risks and rewards of publicly standing up for their values or remaining silent to avoid negative attention.



## The Gaps

This study has uncovered numerous generational gaps. The good news is we don't have to close the gaps. We just need to recognize that each generation reacts to change differently based on their own life experiences.

We are fortunate that the next generation of industry leaders possesses a vision for what will be a challenging future. As this report shows, public relations is being transformed by powerful forces that we can't control or avoid. Gen Z is well positioned to face these challenges, because they are not bound by preconceived notions. But they will need support. Educators must equip them with advanced skills, ethical standards, and a flexible mindset. Employers need to teach them the business, listen to their ideas, encourage them to experiment with their work and their lives.

## The Next Gen

Based on this research, here is a list of recommendations for Gen Z — and anyone else who wants to be part of the future.

- **Develop new skills:** Focus on developing proficiency with AI tools and digital platforms because these will be integral to every aspect of communication. Understanding how to visualize data, manage social media, and engineer effective prompts will be essential to success.
- **Engage with influencers:** Familiarity with social media and influencer marketing is crucial because these channels are becoming primary sources of news and information. Entry-level professionals should have a strong grasp of how to create engaging content tailored to various platforms, while being aware of the challenges posed by misinformation.

- **Search for compatibility:** Entry-level communicators should seek employment with organizations whose actions align with their own values. They should also consider jobs that offer the level of flexibility they require.
- **Prepare for polarization:** Be aware that polarization plays a critical role in PR strategy. Vet every idea with people who have different opinions. Use the latest technology to stay ahead of the issues that threaten your company or your clients.
- **Master content creation:** Strong writing skills are still a valuable asset in PR. Focus on honing abilities in various creative formats, including strategic messaging, social media posts and engineering effective prompts.
- **Practice soft skills:** Al Golin used to say, “Don't let high-tech replace high touch.” Interpersonal communications will always be PR's superpower. The most valuable relationships are built in-person, not online.

## The Future

The PR industry is changing. We must prepare for that change by empowering Gen Z. Companies that adopt their recommendations for new technology and new media and support their desires for workplace flexibility and social engagement will outpace companies who do not. It's that simple.

To foster innovation and collaboration in this new world order, older generations will need to embrace change more rapidly, find common ground more easily and get out of the way more often. If we Mind the Gap by staying tuned to what our younger colleagues are telling us and accepting that their ideas might be different than ours, the future will be in good hands.

The data for the 2025 Global Communication Report was collected through an online survey fielded by the USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations from January 9 through February 1, 2025.

The survey asked questions regarding artificial intelligence, hybrid and remote work, the changing media landscape, political polarization and their impacts on the public relations profession. 1,077 respondents took part in the study.

The study used non-probability sampling methods, where participants volunteered for participation in the study. The sample for the study was derived from databases of public relations professionals including from the Center for Public Relations at USC Annenberg. Leading trade and professional associations specializing in public relations and corporate communication also distributed an email invitation to participate that included a link to the online questionnaire. The Center for PR board of advisers and their companies and agencies also distributed the survey.

Respondents to the survey were screened for employment in public relations or related functions and included those working at public relations or communications agencies (26%), public companies (17%), private companies (22%), government (15%), non-profits (7%) and higher education (13%).

Half of respondents (51%) were from organizations operating in the United States, 11% from the rest of the Americas (Canada, Mexico, Latin America), 10% from Europe, 4% from Asia, and 2% from the Middle East. 22% represented global companies.

One-third of the respondents (31%) were from organizations with fewer than 100 employees and an equal proportion (32%) were from organizations with 2,500 employees or more. Three in four (77%) were in senior level positions.

Nineteen percent of respondents identified as Gen Z, 36% as Millennials, 31% as Gen X and 12% as Baby Boomers.

Women comprised 57% of the sample and men 35%. The remaining respondents said they were non-gender conforming or preferred not to identify.

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