Government
Communication
Service

5 TRENDS IN LEADING-EDGE COMMUNICATIONS

October 2018

The Government & Public Sector Practice

WPP

Contents

INTRODUCTION

The communications sector is inherently dynamic: the only certainties are that tomorrow our audiences will be a little different, the technology and techniques available to us a little more advanced, and our methods and practices a little better refined. Evolution is continuous, creativity is vital and innovation is simply business as usual.

As Government Communicators our purpose is straightforward: deliver world-class communications that support government priorities, enable the effective and efficient operation of public services, and improve people's lives. Our challenge is not merely to keep-up with the pace of change, but to actively lead the way.

This report, produced in collaboration with WPP Government and Public Sector Practice, is designed to ensure the Government Communication Service (GCS) does just that. Through research, analysis, and case studies, we explore recent, current and predicted trends across the profession, providing prompts to inform best practice and stimulating thought around longer-term strategies.

Comparing these trends with those of the first version of this report, published in 2015, the rate of change is striking; however, the issues driving this change should come as no surprise. Ethics always has been, and likely always will be, top of the agenda; disinformation is as old as communication itself; and whatever form it takes, successful engagement is as critical as ever to effective communications.

The future, then, is not entirely unpredictable. Indeed, while the new developments we explore in this report present fresh challenges for us to master, we are confident that HMG communicators will continue to evolve and adapt to future change in the same way we successfully incorporated the trends of 2015: we now regularly partner effectively with social media influencers, engage with the public more intelligently and blend communications across channels and platforms almost automatically.

In fact, we are already starting to master the latest trends of 2018 and beyond, as the case studies in this report show. Public Health England and the Department for Transport lead the way in adopting new technologies and behavioural targeting strategies to reach previously untapped audiences with great success; the Rapid Response Unit (RRU), although barely six months old, is already transforming how social media insight is used to strengthen HMG's voice online; and the newly launched Accelerate programme will massively develop digital skills across government to ensure we remain at the leading edge of communications.

The 5 Trends

Disinformation and misinformation now spread further and faster than ever before; how can we ensure HMG's messages reach the public and that discussion is driven by the facts?

Voice technology offers new opportunities to personalise our connections with citizens and tailor our messages to help them with specific needs.

Advances in data analysis and the transition of the government's four-year media-buying agency contract offer new opportunities for unparalleled transparency and increasingly intelligent audience engagement.
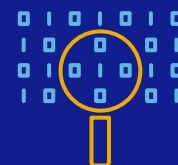
With the Fourth Industrial Revolution no longer fast-approaching but very much upon us, it's **time to future-proof our workforce** to excel in this digital age.

GDPR is now in force. Have we entered a new era of data regulation and communications ethics?

However, in such a fast-paced and increasingly complex sector, our work is never done. As you delve into the trends presented in this report, we hope you feel encouraged to experiment in your role, confident to consider new strategies and above all inspired to continue to deliver world-class communications that improve citizens' lives.

GCS Futures Council, with support from WPP Government and Public Sector Practice
October 2018

1.NEXT GENERATION FAKERY

From video face-swaps to voice-morphing, how can communicators address continued advances in disinformation?

Misinformation and disinformation are spreading further, faster and with greater ease than ever before, even out-performing verified content.[1] This can generate concern and confusion, reduce trust in institutions and media organisations, and disrupt attempts to communicate HMG messages effectively.

Misinformation is inaccurate or misleading content.

Disinformation is false content deliberately spread with intent to deceive.

With Twitter reported to have suspended 70 million malicious accounts over the course of just two months,[2] the sheer volume of misleading and inaccurate information shared on a daily basis is immense. It is also the focus of widespread discussion, with the general public increasingly aware of the need to evaluate the reliability, accuracy and possible bias of the material they digest.[3]

Growing interest in the issue does not, however, automatically translate into a refined ability to distinguish fact from fiction—the average UK internet user is able to pinpoint the source of content only 15% of the time.[4] Furthermore, increasing cynicism is reducing people's trust in content generally, potentially limiting their engagement with genuine and important messages— only 28% of the population trusts the news they see online, even from well-established outlets.[5]

As government communicators, we therefore face three challenges:

- How can we identify misinformation and disinformation?
- How should we respond?
- How do we ensure our messages achieve cut through and are highly visible to the public?

Identification

It is only possible to identify misinformation or disinformation if we are actively looking for them, and simply monitoring mainstream media is no longer sufficient—by the time this information has spread to broadcast and print media, their damage has already been done. With more than half the population now getting their news from online sites or social media platforms, we need to actively track emerging stories in these environments rather than waiting for misinformation and disinformation to spread even further.

The UK Government's Media Monitoring Unit (MMU) monitors print and broadcast media activity everyday and has recently undergone significant modernisation, expanding its services to include social news updates. These reports provide a convenient summary of social media activity, but subscription to MMU products should be just one element in your team's monitoring approach. It is also important to remember that misinformation is still spread offline, as well as online.

Why it is important?

Citizens are exposed to an increasing number of misleading messages.

Influence has shifted from traditional media outlets to individuals and online organisations, who are not bound by the same ethics standards.

Content can be shared at an exponential rate, with rapid and widespread effects.

Misleading stories have the potential to misrepresent government and confuse the public.

Response

Our response to disinformation and misinformation must be rapid but considered, and founded on an authoritative presentation of the facts. Our content must also be engaging and accessible—despite the need to respond rapidly, insight, creative guidelines and standard publication best practice still apply and should not be sacrificed for the sake of speed. Above all, we should remember the citizens' perspective—as disinformation can be highly emotive and alarming (and intentionally so), our message should be one of reassurance, not rebuttal.

Additional training for GCS members is being launched in Spring 2019.

While the tone of our response will have a significant impact on its effectiveness, citizens will only hear our message if we reach them in the first place. We will not achieve this by attempting to remove weaponised content or directly engaging with its creators, but tighter messaging, search optimisation, paid targeting and the co-ordinated use of multiple platforms, including our own (such as GOV.UK), are all effective methods for strengthening our voice. Despite the need for speed, it is still important to comprehensively evaluate our response to disinformation after the event to help inform and improve future responses.

Pre-emption

While it is essential to monitor the media continuously, we can go one step further by intelligently preparing for scenarios in which disinformation is likely to be particularly disruptive. For the unforeseen, such as emergency incidents, it is important to have a response plan in place, while the predictability of major political events allows us to anticipate social and media activity and implement a strategy in advance.

With 74% of Twitter users turning to the platform as a news source,[6] it is increasingly important that we pre-empt the spread of disinformation by ensuring our fact-based message is highly visible and engaging from an early stage.

The Future?

As technology becomes increasingly sophisticated, the challenges posed by disinformation and misinformation are only likely to become more complex. As government communicators we need to develop our practice accordingly and continue to respond intelligently.

CASE STUDY

"Deepfakes"

Disinformation combines with AI in so-called 'deepfake' videos. These merge a range of 'real' sources to create highly convincing 'fake' content, using sophisticated software to blend audio, source images and existing footage.

One of the most effective deepfakes was produced by actor and director Jordan Peele in collaboration with BuzzFeed CEO and co-founder Jonah Peretti. They used the free tool 'FakeApp' to amalgamate Barack Obama's head with Peele's mouth and facial expressions, combined with an original audio of Peele speaking (in a similar accent to Obama's). The resulting video appears to present the former president discussing his concerns about disinformation and making some unexpected comments, until it is revealed that Peele himself is speaking and the footage of Obama has been manipulated to match the script.

BuzzFeed produced the video to encourage its viewers to be aware of disinformation, and published it alongside advice on how to identify other deepfakes.[7]

A screenshot from the deepfake video showing genuine footage of Jordan Peele alongside doctored footage of Barack Obama, manipulated to mimic Peele's expression and lip movement to match an original script delivered by Peele.

GCS CASE STUDY

RRU

In April 2018, the Cabinet Office launched the Rapid Response Unit (RRU). The team operates across No10 and the Cabinet Office, working to counter misinformation and disinformation, and reclaim a fact-based public debate. Using a range of cutting-edge tools, a central team of analysts, data scientists and media and digital experts work round the clock to monitor online breaking news stories and social media discussion.

The team produces topical email briefings, deep-dive reports and live dashboards. This accurate, actionable and audience-specific insight helps government understand the current media environment and assess the effectiveness of their public communications. Additionally, using the FACT model, the unit can identify and work with departments to respond to misinformation and disinformation quickly and intelligently. This includes working closely with the National Security Communications Team (NSCT) during times of crisis to ensure official information is highly visible.

For example, during the military action in Syria, the team worked continuously to identify misinformation, implementing targeted digital communication activity to key audiences where appropriate.

RRU analysts were the first to flag instances of misinformation (such as Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's claim about the origin of the nerve agent used in the Salisbury poisoning) and highlighted the lack of prominence of HMG information when people searched for Syria news.

GCS FACT model

The Rapid Response Unit developed a "FACT" model to identify and respond to misleading narratives and content appearing online. It consists of four steps:

1

Find

Constantly monitor online news sources and publicly available social media posts to identify themes/discussions/stories that promote false and misleading information relating to HMG. This may be misinformation or disinformation.
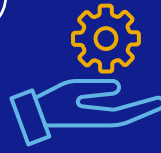
2

Assess

Assess the scale of engagement with the risk identified and establish whether it is appropriate to respond to the content. Flag to relevant press offices and advisors, with a recommended approach to response. This is almost never direct rebuttal.

3

Create

Create appropriate content with the aim of rebalancing the narrative and promoting official HMG information. This may be a press office line, a social media post, or the creation of a new asset.

4

Target

Target content to ensure HMG information is highly visible and accessible to the public.

Questions you should ask

- Do I understand what misinformation and disinformation are and what forms they take?

- Is my team actively monitoring the whole media landscape and prepared to respond?

- Do I know how to use the FACT model to accurately identify and intelligently respond to false stories?

- Are we actively strengthening our team's online voice and social media presence on a daily basis?

- Is our own content engaging, accurate and clear?

What you should avoid

- Rushing responses.

- Directly engaging with creators of false content.

- Dismissing citizens' concerns.

2. "HEY SIRI, WHO'S ALEXA?"

As speech replaces fingertips, advances in AI extend the scope of voice-controlled intelligent personal assistants (IPAs), providing new opportunities for us to connect with citizens.

Technological developments continue to help us travel further and faster, build bigger and better, and experiment with greater accuracy and automation, but the way we interpret and interact with information is undergoing complete revolution. As a result, individuals, institutions and infrastructures are more intertwined with technology than ever before, and it is increasingly difficult to isolate the human from the artificial.

2.7M

UK homes already own at least one Amazon Echo or Google Home smart speaker device.[1]

These changes present an array of fresh communication opportunities, allowing us to connect with citizens in new places, at new times and in new ways. This will enable government to engage the public on a more personal level, tailoring our messages to their specific needs and sharing important information exactly when and where they want it.

The challenge for us as communicators is to blend our activity across multiple channels effectively—not just offline with online, and visual with audio, but now screen-based technologies with interactive voice platforms too.

Why it is important?

VUIs and IPAs are at the leading-edge of wider change in information technology.

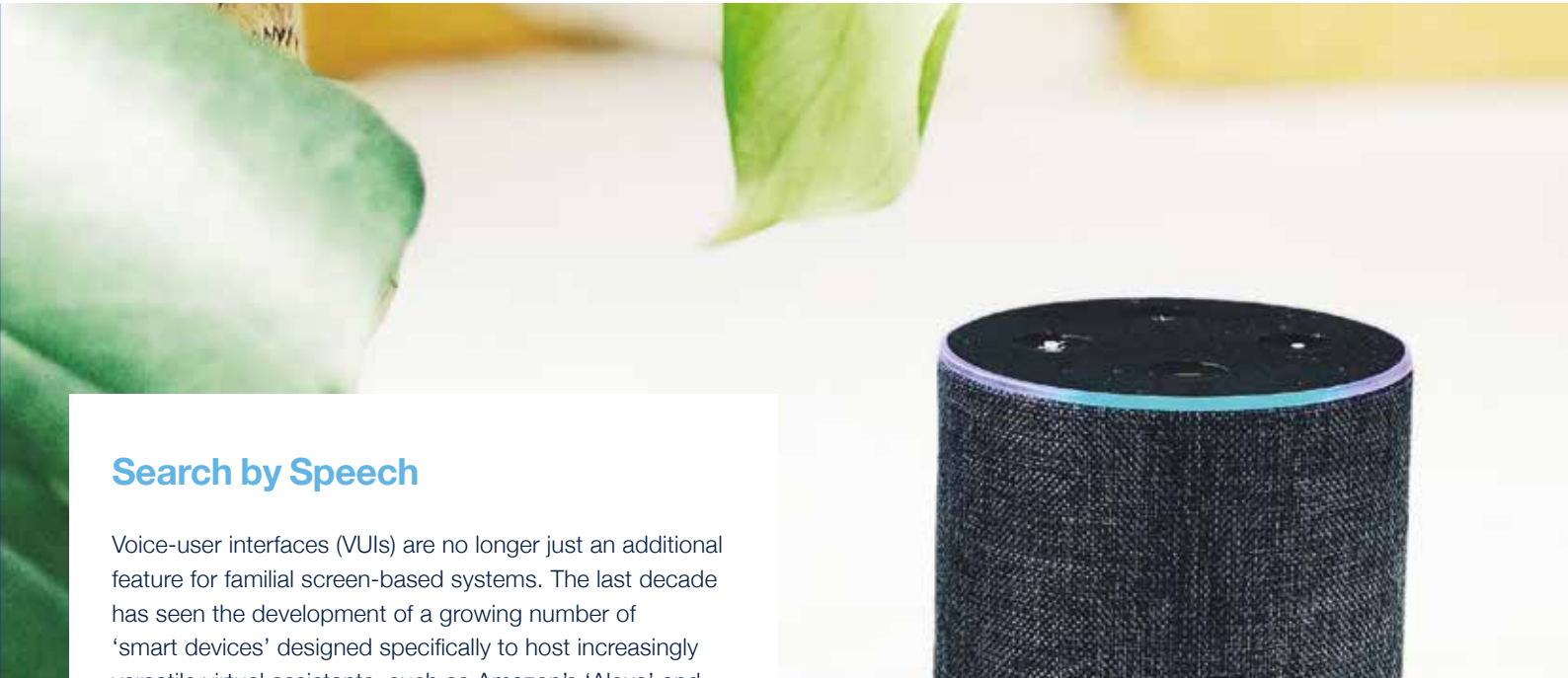The use of voice search and smart devices is rapidly increasing.

We need to ensure our content remains highly visible on all platforms.

Voice technology provides new opportunities to engage citizens and personalise our communication for their specific needs.

Search by Speech

Voice-user interfaces (VUIs) are no longer just an additional feature for familial screen-based systems. The last decade has seen the development of a growing number of 'smart devices' designed specifically to host increasingly versatile virtual assistants, such as Amazon's 'Alexa' and Apple's 'Siri', and these products are rapidly increasing in popularity—UK smart speaker ownership doubled in the six months from 2017 Q3 to 2018 Q1.[2]

As part of our strategy to help those with accessibility requirements, content on GOV.UK is already designed to be screen-reader friendly, but the rise in voice search throughout the general population means we will soon need to ensure all the content we create is optimised for spoken, as well as typed, searches of all variety.

53%

of adults now use voice technology on a weekly basis.[3]

This optimisation depends on consideration of two factors: how users are likely to search by voice and how these searches will be returned by voice assistants. Compared to typed searches, voice requests will be inherently more conversational and natural, but also longer and more complex, so the keywords or phrases we use should reflect this. As search results will often be spoken rather than visually presented on a screen, they should provide important information simply and succinctly.

Dynamic Dialogue

Optimising for voice search will ensure we remain visible and accessible, but other advances in voice technology present fresh opportunities for completely new connections. A wide variety of smart devices are now used to answer questions, play music and control household appliances, and the range of functions offered by IPAs will only increase. Almost anyone can develop the 'skills' or 'actions' that sit on these platforms, opening up the use of virtual channels to companies and communicators beyond the tech firms that first introduced them.

'Skills' are the apps that sit on Amazon's Alexa virtual assistant platform. 'Actions' are Google voice apps.

As a result, brands are reinventing their relationship with consumers, and businesses are being founded on the concept of voice apps alone. As government communicators, developing our own voice applications will allow us to achieve unique levels of interaction with citizens and more meaningful engagement with the public. This will make the information we share more accessible, and help us to personalise our messages and campaigns for specific audiences—and these audiences won't just be young: 33% of smart speaker owners are over the age of 55.[4]

CASE STUDY

ZYRTEC

Different people are affected by different allergens in different ways and at different times of years. Existing pollen forecasts can help sufferers, but these aren't personalised and are often buried at the bottom of long weather forecasts.

To address these challenges, allergy medication brand ZYRTEC developed an Alexa skill from their existing website and mobile apps; 'Your Daily AllergyCast' combines pollen counts, humidity, weather, wind-speed, time of year and location to provide users with a unique forecast and personal 'Allergy Impact score'.

This tailored report doesn't just allow users to predict symptoms and medicate accordingly—with time, the data and algorithms behind the app allow it to determine which pollens affect users and how, helping them understand their allergy on a level not previously attainable.

When skills such as this work, they provide a frictionless and essential service. However, delivering such a highly personalised service does present significant challenges, and other brands have been less successful, failing to meet customer expectations.

GCS CASE STUDY

PHE Breastfeeding Friend

In Spring 2018, Public Health England (PHE) launched the Start4Life 'Breastfeeding Friend' Alexa skill to provide round-the-clock advice and support to breastfeeding mothers. This was in response to the results of PHE research, which found that many mothers do not breastfeed their babies for as long as is recommended, stopping because of challenges. Some mothers are embarrassed to seek support in person, but would be encouraged to continue breastfeeding if advice was more widely available and accessible.[5]

The app features three main functions: a menu to explore NHS-approved advice on a range of topics, general breastfeeding tips, and the capacity to answer specific questions based on those asked by thousands of new mums.[6]

The success of the skill lies in the fact it addresses a clear user need and is carefully tailored for a well-defined audience. It also has clear benefits over screen apps and websites, providing instantly accessible and hands-free advice that is perfectly suited to the home environment and breastfeeding scenario. The 'dialogue' facilitated by a voice app also offers a greater sense of support and empathy, while keeping this 'conversation' clear, consistent and considered lends it credibility and prevents it being invasive.

Questions you should ask

- Do I understand the VUI environment?

- Can we optimise our content for voice search?

- Could we create a voice app to enhance our campaign, improve our service or reach a new audience?

- Does our voice strategy meet a clearly defined user need?

- Have I tested existing voice apps to better understand the user experience?

What you should avoid

- Catering only to young audiences—all generations are using voice technology.

- Stopping at voice search optimisation—smart devices offer many more opportunities.

- Simply replicating screen content—apps must be carefully adapted for voice platforms.

3. SUPER-CHARGED SEGMENTATIONS

How do we better harness the power of advertising technology and data to deliver more impactful, data-driven communications that connect with our audiences in ways more relevant than ever before?

Advertising technology ('ad tech') is driving a sea-change in how we buy and measure both online and traditional media. This is leading to increasing levels of transparency for advertisers, and offers them access to previously untapped data sources that can more effectively tell the story of advertising impact on our audiences.

As traditional media including radio, TV and outdoor accelerates its transition to a more personalised model, in particular through programmatic (i.e. the automated buying and selling of advertising space), a joined-up view of media performance for the advertiser across multiple channels can start to emerge.

To fully capitalise on these new opportunities and ensure government continues to be a leader in the industry, our new £600 million four-year media buying contract, recently awarded to Manning Göttlieb OMD, is underpinned by the principles of value, transparency and safety rather than cost alone.

These principles also define HMG's approach to ad tech and the partners we choose to work with.

Why it is important?

Advertising technology is improving how we reach audiences across multiple platforms.

Understanding the role of advertising technology enables advertisers to become smarter, better informed clients for our agencies.

Smarter targeting based on behaviours, interests and attitudes can build a more relevant picture of our audience.
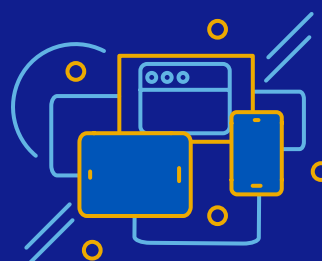
Advertisers are gaining increased transparency and access to data as ad tech advances.

Programmatic Advertising

The overarching term for the software and tools that help communicators target, deliver and analyse their digital advertising efforts.

Advertising Technology

Different types of analytics and digital tools used in the context of advertising.

Building Smarter Segmentations

Advances in ad tech offer opportunities to better understand our audiences but also place more significant ethical responsibility on advertisers. As GDPR and other e-privacy regulations give people better control of their data, advertisers must use information in more responsible and ethically appropriate ways.

In fact, these regulations, coupled with advances in ad tech, offer new opportunities to use attitudinal, behavioural and interest targeting to build a more realistic picture of our audiences. Efficient targeting can help build more personalised communication, while programmatic buying can help ensure it reaches the desired audience.

Smarter segmentation has a critical role to play in keeping government communications relevant. The last 20 years have seen a fundamental shift in communication: messaging has become ever more personalised.

When done well, personalisation avoids the kinds of clumsy messaging that shows a person a pair of shoes they already bought; when done badly it creates a feeling of pestering, and is a primary factor behind more and more people using ad blocking technology. Smarter programmatic buying must use behavioural and interest targeting, not just contextual targeting.

Government is already running campaigns that utilise smarter targeting by using known and predictive signals to match individuals' requirements to the service office; this targeting makes no assumptions about personas but builds personalised paid media interventions.

Campaigns such as Think! and Change4Life have embraced these techniques, using predictive models to analyse outcomes based on an audience-led approach to targeting.

Redefining the Modern Marketer

With Chief Marketing Officers now regularly investing more in technology than their Chief Technology Officer counterparts, and clients taking a far more vested interest in their agencies' ad tech, the modern marketers are equipping themselves with a new set of core skills to operate in the data-driven world.

The GCS Accelerate programme is identifying these skills and the accompanying culture change needed for communicators across government to operate in this tech-first marketing landscape. These are not brand new capabilities to replace traditional marketing principles but will enable marketers to apply those principles in new and innovative ways.

The challenge is identifying the skills that underpin the understanding and use of technology as it continues to evolve and best practice changes from one day to the next.

Mastering Tech

As ad tech advances continue to evolve at an exponential pace, harnessing the most robust technology and best practices is vital to deal with brand safety, viewability and ad fraud.

These collective issues require an industry-wide collaborative approach to defeat. Government has been regularly testing viewability and brand safety best practice and new technology through the Engage Programme, in collaboration with our media agency.

Spending taxpayers money also comes with added responsibility, not only to deliver outcomes that save lives, improve living standards and increase the reputation of the UK, but also to be open and transparent about how those outcomes are achieved.

CASE STUDY

L'Oréal

Brands lead in innovative use of personalised data. In an award-winning campaign, L'Oréal Paris used precision targeting to reach potential customers from minority ethnic groups.

Offering shades for ethnic skin tones, L'Oréal's 23 'True Match' foundation shades provided highly desirable but hard-to-find products for a specific audience. To effectively target potential customers, L'Oréal first had to identify their skin tone preference. To achieve this they created an interactive campaign.

Partnering with 23 key beauty influencers, lifestyle bloggers and brand ambassadors, '#YoursTruly' was launched, with a combined reach of 12 million people. Promotional videos feature clips of each influencer discussing their struggle to find a foundation that matched their skin tone, inviting viewers and readers to click a link to 'find your True Match'.

Those who clicked were redirected to a site, where their engagement with longer-form influencer videos and other content revealed their likely skin tone, allowing the company to segment audiences based on their interest in specific shades of foundation. This led to a 39% increase in sales during the campaign period.

L'Oréal also won international awards and received widespread praise for its focus on diversity.

CASE STUDY

DfT Drink-Driving

In December 2017, the Department for Transport (DfT) adopted a new data-driven strategy to deliver their annual Christmas drink-driving campaign with significantly improved success.

Statistics identified a clear target audience: young men aged 17-24 are the riskiest drivers and five times more likely to be killed or seriously injured (KSI) than those aged 25 and over. Analysis showed a plateauing of drink-driving deaths and a reduction in the effectiveness of previous THINK! strategies: the 2016 campaign generated only a 1-2% shift in attitudes. Insight revealed a growing aversion to shock tactics and graphic imagery, and highlighted the unrealised potential of peer influence and relatable content.

DfT responded accordingly with a clear call to action—"A mate doesn't let a mate drink drive #matesmatter"—intelligently delivered to the target audience through popular platforms, at optimised times and with influencer involvement, achieving impressive reach and engagement.

The campaign resulted in the most significant attitudinal shift in over a decade: post-campaign, there was an 11% increase in young men saying it was unacceptable to let a friend drive after drinking.

Questions you should ask

- How can I utilise ad tech for better cross-channel targeting and measurement of my audiences?

- How do I segment audiences taking into account their attitudes and mindsets as well their online behaviours and demographics?

- How will learning and understanding more about ad tech help me become a smarter client?

- Is my audience targeting appropriate and in line with data privacy regulations?
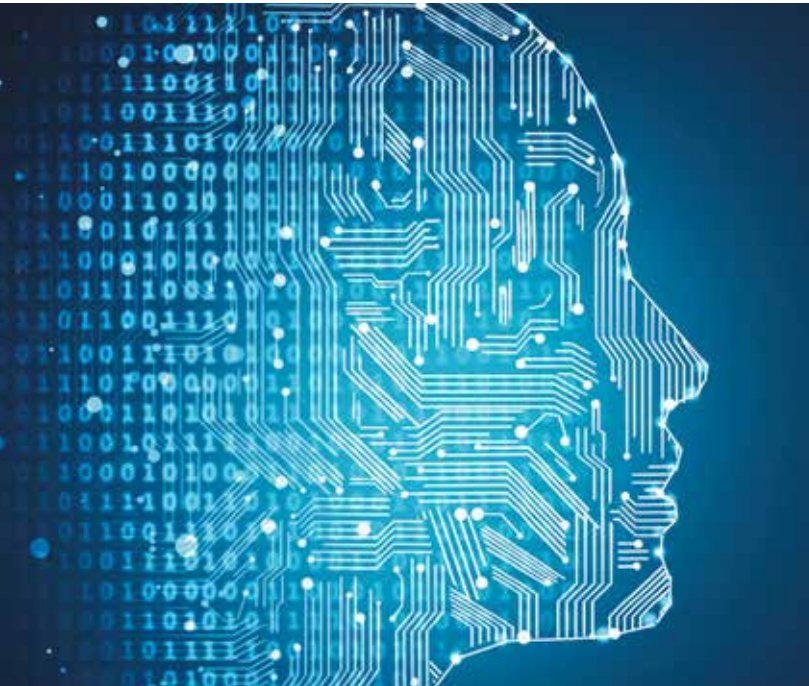
What you should avoid

- Confusing targets with outcomes—successful campaigns require clear behavioural objectives at the outset and regular reviews to assess whether these objectives are likely to be achieved.

- Over-estimating the power of segmentation, which is no substitute for a compelling message—both are necessary for a campaign to succeed.

- Trying to understanding everything about ad tech— ensuring you're focused on outcomes and audiences is more vital for a campaign to succeed.

4. DISRUPTING THE DISRUPTORS

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has begun. How can we recruit, shape and lead our teams to future-proof our profession in this constantly evolving and increasingly digitised sector?

Why it is important?

The Fourth Industrial Revolution presents new opportunities, but these will only be available to organisations positioned to harness them.
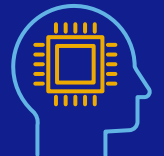
It is no longer sufficient to have a digital team—the entire workforce must be tech-savvy.

As the rate of change in the communications sector accelerates, organisations must develop the capacity to continuously change.

The success of any organisation depends upon its people, so we must make sure ours are equipped and empowered to succeed in an uncertain future.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is distinctly different from previous periods of rapid industrial change. It is defined not by technological development, but the unprecedented and disruptive integration of this digital innovation and information into our physical, social, and even biological worlds. This is a revolution in communication, and the rate of change is exponential.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution "will fundamentally alter the way we live, work and relate to one another. In its scale, scope and complexity [it is] unlike anything humankind has experienced before." [1]

Klaus Schwab,
Founder and Executive Chairman, World Economic Forum

The implications of this are uncertain, but the challenge is clear: as well as adopting current trends in technology, we must also prepare our workforce for a future of rapid and continuous adaptation. To achieve this our organisation must transform.
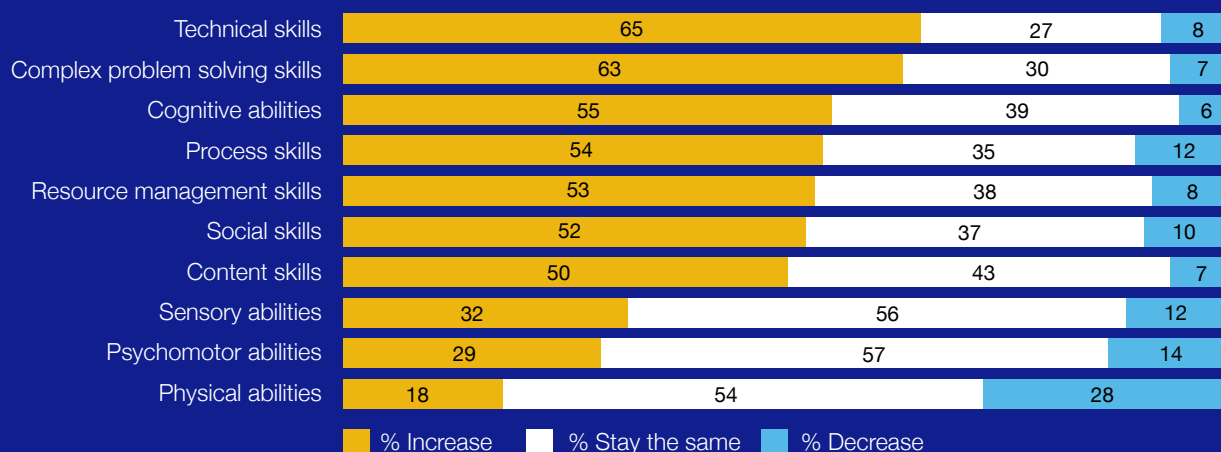
Skills for Success

All of us should maintain a broad awareness of the technological environment, develop an understanding of the implications for communications, and actively consider emerging opportunities for government every day. Today's digital landscape includes programmatic advertising, search-optimisation, AI, predictive insights, social listening and new media platforms, but tomorrow's will certainly be different. The workforce challenge is defining what digital literacy and fluency will mean when tomorrow comes.

From design labs to press offices, developing individual analytical, technical and coding skills will certainly enhance collective performance,[2] but our capacity for fast learning and forward-thinking, adaptability and agility, will prove increasingly valuable as the rate of change in the sector accelerates. Our success will therefore depend on finely tuned soft skills.[3]

Expected emphasis on workforce skills as AI/robotics are integrated in the enterprise

Skill	% Increase	% Stay the same	% Decrease
Technical skills	65	27	8
Complex problem solving skills	63	30	7
Cognitive abilities	55	39	6
Process skills	54	35	12
Resource management skills	53	38	8
Social skills	52	37	10
Content skills	50	43	7
Sensory abilities	32	56	12
Psychomotor abilities	29	57	14
Physical abilities	18	54	28

■ % Increase   □ % Stay the same   ■ % Decrease

n=11, 070
Source: Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends Survey, 2018

Chief among these is the ability to lead—to inspire innovation, encourage collaboration and invite critical thinking. This applies to everyone at all levels, not just senior managers—in such a dynamic and fast-paced environment we are all leaders. Indeed, mindset is as fundamental as skillset. Cultivating a supportive culture of knowledge and resource sharing will allow individuals to become highly specialised without limiting the collective capability of teams as a whole, while growing flexible structures and operating models will enable rapid adaptation to change.

Delivering Development

The best-performing companies are spending more on learning than ever before, directly attributing their success to staff development.[4] To position ourselves at the leading-edge, government must do the same.

Comprehensive and intensive training will upskill practitioners in new technologies and methodologies; forums and knowledge-sharing provide regular exposure to leading practice at all levels in our specific fields; and secondments enable hands-on development in areas of expertise outside the traditional remit of our roles. As roles become increasingly specialised, maintaining this balance between generalism and specialism, and tailoring professional development for different roles and grades, will be key. Career pathways and capability frameworks help achieve this, but must themselves evolve to keep pace with change. However, even as automation changes skills requirements, career development and training should maintain a human approach.

Planning the Pipeline

Beyond upskilling existing talent, it is important to feed the workforce pipeline for future success. Developments in AI have the potential to radically disrupt our workforce, with recent research suggesting that half of all jobs could be automated within the next half century or even sooner.[5] In this new environment, analysts, programmers, mathematicians and scientists can make an increasingly significant contribution to any communications team, from insight and evaluation to content creation.

Recruiters are changing not only whom they approach, but also how they select them, filling positions that didn't even exist ten years ago with able applicants from less conventional occupational and educational backgrounds, and reaping the rewards that result from this diversity of experience. The Civil Service has already started replacing its competencies-based framework with new Success Profiles, assessing applicants against the hard and soft skills, technical expertise and intellectual abilities that enable success in this digital environment.

Leading at the Leading-Edge

As well as leading our teams to adapt to the latest trends in communications, we can also adopt the latest trends in organisational management. Increasingly popular 'black-box thinking' empowers productivity and improvement by accepting mistakes and diligently learning from them, and it is the 'fail-fast' experimentation of numerous start-up companies that has propelled them to unprecedented success.
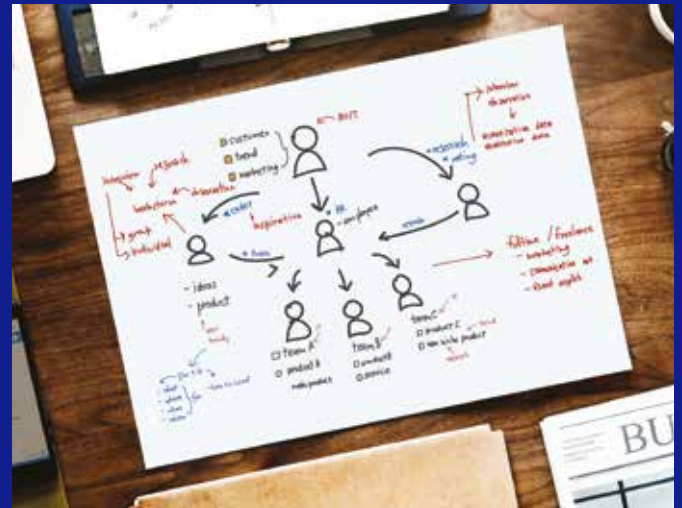
CASE STUDY

BBC

Introduced to make the BBC a simpler, more efficient place to work, the BBC's two-year simplification programme recently reached completion.[6] The BBC has also introduced the Career Path Framework to have a clear career structure and simplify job titles.

However, ongoing organisational restructuring continues to improve efficiency and maintain a strong workforce across the country - more than half of employees are now located outside the M25, while BBC Three has begun the move from London to Birmingham to establish a centre of digital excellence there.

The corporation also places a strong emphasis on developing its people, delivering training to all staff through the BBC Academy. This learning is constantly updated to track trends in both the media industry and training practice - remote learning is available to offer flexibility, and last year 64% of courses were completed online.

Key to this development is digital upskilling – a third season of digital training for all BBC staff has taken place, with over 13,000 people having attended in the last three years.

GCS CASE STUDY

Accelerate

The new GCS Accelerate programme is a world-first and hugely ambitious project to transform digital skills at all levels across the government communications profession. Deliverables include: structured secondments, capability frameworks, learning modules and immersive training with industry leaders.

The programme will enable all government communicators to:

Transformation will be achieved through seven hubs corresponding to the MCOM 2.0 pillars, from Media to External Affairs. It will be delivered in a 70:20:10 (on the job / coaching / formal) learning ratio.
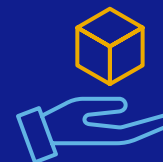
Think

More critically about what digital transformation means on an individual, specialist, departmental and industry level.

Feel

Empowered to challenge assumptions, identify knowledge gaps and drive innovation.

Do

Commit time, resource and energy to personal, team and corporate improvement across the profession and increase the impact of communications.

Questions you should ask

- How can I effectively apply these trends in communications to projects I work on, and even use them to improve my personal work methods?

- Am I proactively developing myself and my team every day?

- How can I share my specialist knowledge and expertise with colleagues?

- Is our resource need best met by upskilling current talent, collaborating with other teams or rethinking team structures and operating models?

- Which skills do I need to develop to prepare for the trends of tomorrow?

What you should avoid

- Thinking digital skills are only for digital specialists.

- Outsourcing expertise that could be developed in-house.

- Forgetting the fundamentals—critical thinking, creativity and agility remain core skills for all communicators.

Future skills to master

1 **Agility**
rapid responses, agile management and critical thinking

2 **Behavioural Science**
using data to effect citizen behaviour change

3 **Context**
our communications should be visual by default

5. A QUESTION OF ETHICS

The communications sector is changing at an unprecedented pace, but one constant remains: ethics.

As organisations become increasingly connected to individuals, individuals increasingly dependent on technology, and technology increasingly artificial, the way we live, work and play is radically changing. The legal and practical implications of this disruption are significant, but the answers are not always clear. Current developments in communications technology and practice are thus the focus of extensive debate.

Do platforms and publishers have a moral responsibility to actively remove disinformation and misinformation from their sites, or is such intervention unnecessary at best and restrictive of free speech at worst? Is voice technology offering innovative and convenient solutions to everyday problems, or does it invade our privacy (or both, as many smart device users feel)[1]? And is the role of AI in the workforce an enormous boost for the economy and efficiency, or hugely threatening to our livelihoods?

However, the topic at the centre of most communications ethics debate is also at the core of most modern communications: data.

Why it is important?

Ethics underpins every aspect of communication practice, from data to disinformation.

Many people do not understand how their data is used.

Transparent data use builds trust.

Ethics goes beyond the letter of the law—the citizen perspective is just as important.

Trust in Transparency

Modern communications are primarily data-driven: we use data to research and strategically plan our campaigns, intelligently target and share our messages, and accurately analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of our content. The general public, however, remains unsure how or even if their data is used—recent research found only 7% of the population understand how companies use their data, and almost half feel they do not understand at all.[2] As communications become more complex, this number is only increasing.[3]

Not only do people not understand when or where their data is used, but they also do not understand why it is used. It is unsurprising then that only a fraction of the population trusts businesses to be transparent in their data use.[4] Transparency is therefore the key to gaining trust—dismissing concerns or providing half-hearted explanations will win no friends, but the more organisations are open about how and why we use data, the more willing the public is to share it.

People are also more trusting if they can see a clear, personal benefit to be gained from the use of their data, as shown in the streaming-platform case study. We should therefore ensure we are not only transparent about how data is used, but also that there is a clear and justified use in the first place. Presenting the positive benefits of data use, as well as the legally-required details, is thus both more transparent and an effective way to gain trust.
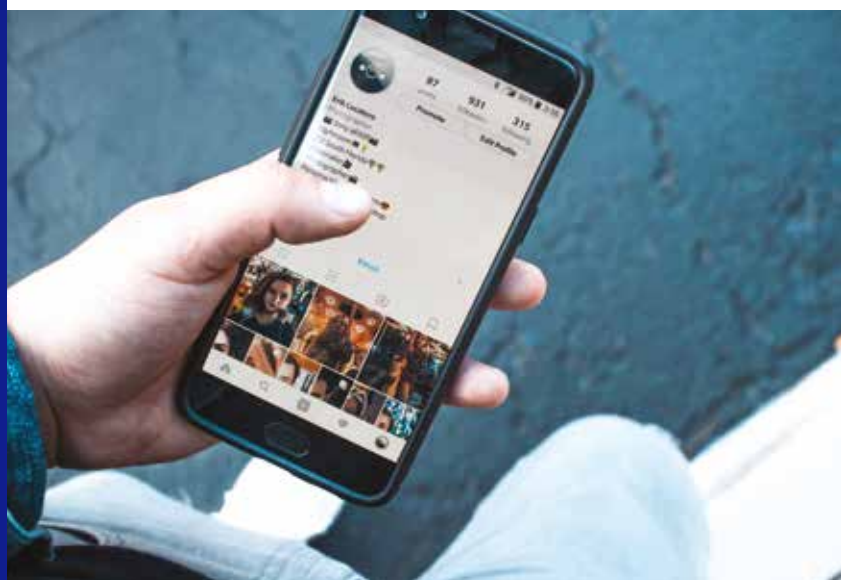
Protecting the Public

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into effect on 25 May 2018. Effective across the whole EU and already adopted by many companies worldwide, it improves the protection of personal data and increases people's rights to decide how their data is handled. As a result, organisations must have a legitimate reason for collecting data, and cannot keep it after it has been processed; equally, citizens must actively provide consent for organisations to use their personal data, and can request for it to be deleted.

Personal data is information that relates to an identified or identifiable individual.

The Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) Data Ethics Framework provides guidance for the whole public sector, helping government lead the way in appropriate, transparent and accountable data use.[5] Inspired by the Civil Service Code values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality, the framework sets out seven clear principles for responsible data use. These principles recognise the increasing value of data science, not only in communications but also policy design and general government operations. They equip public servants with the knowledge and understanding required to ethically harness innovations in data science for the benefit of citizens.

Value for Money

It is important to remember our overarching purpose of public service. Our communication activities must therefore not only deliver results, but must also deliver good value for money. In addition, there must be a clear user need for all our objectives and a clear public benefit from all our outcomes; we should inform but not promote, and explain the complex but not the obvious. All our activity should ensure the efficient and effective running of government, and change or reinforce public behaviours to support policy objectives. These objectives should be delivered with maximum impact, but not at any cost.

On the horizon

Blockchain is expected to disrupt the way we use the internet, offering the opportunity for increased data transparency, security, accessibility, trading transparency, authenticity and accountability. Businesses are just starting to innovate in this area, but radical developments are likely in the next few years.
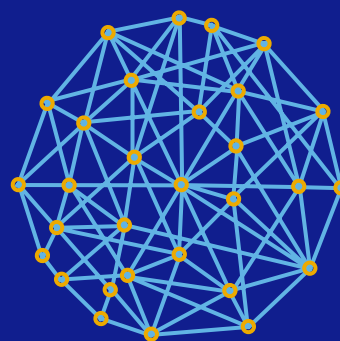
CASE STUDY

In 2017, Spotify used subscriber data to run a marketing campaign based on the entertaining presentation of highly specific user statistics.[6] For example, one print advert read: "Take a page from the 3,445 people that streamed the "Boozy Brunch" playlist on a Wednesday this year".

The campaign was well received and widely regarded as amusing and entertaining. However, other streaming platforms have attempted similar strategies with less positive results, displaying messages that have been criticised as judgemental or sinister.

Spotify was successful because it has steadily built user trust over time, and its campaign was unusual but not out of character—subscribers are used to personalised recommendations and quirky ads from a platform that already feels friendly and familiar to them. The tone of Spotify's message reinforced this, while other platforms' less successful campaigns felt overly-personal and targeted, over-stepping social boundaries.

This example emphasises an important point: ethical considerations do not stop at legal regulation. It is essential that we also seriously consider the citizens' perspective and critically assess if what we are trying to achieve directly serves their user need.

GDPR Principles

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) sets out seven key principles.[7]

Lawfulness, fairness and transparency	Purpose limitation	Data minimisation	Accuracy	Storage limitation	Integrity and confidentiality (security)	Accountability

These principles should lie at the heart of your approach to processing personal data.

Data Ethics Principles

Public Benefit

What is the gap in public understanding or available information you are trying to fill, and is there a clear need to fill it?

Protect the Public

Abide by codes of practice, use only the minimum data necessary to meet the user need, and be transparent about how data is used.

Value for Money

Ensure that the outcomes of any data use not only benefit the public but also deliver good value for money.

Questions you should ask

- Do I process or control personal data?

- Do I know who my Data Protection Officer (DPO) is?

- Do I understand how GDPR and data ethics principles apply to my work?

- Is there a clear purpose for the data we collect and are we transparent about how we use it?

- Are we using data to its full potential to harness the benefits for citizens?

What you should avoid

- Overstepping the mark—don't be too personal.

- Being nervous—if used responsibly, data offers positive opportunities.

- Acting out of character—even if legal, citizens won't respond well to sudden changes in the way their data is used.

FAST-TRACK TO THE FUTURE

How do we actually apply these 5 trends in the GCS?

Putting Progress Before Process

To successfully adapt to the latest trends in communications we need to adopt the latest methodologies in adaptability.

In a world where the only certainty is uncertainty, the best people and skills for today's digital environment are unlikely to be the perfect fit for tomorrow's. Thus the challenge we face as a profession is not only to adapt to current developments, but more importantly to establish behaviours, frameworks and ways of working that allow us to continuously anticipate and adapt to future change.

To achieve this, our organisation must be as reactive and responsive as the individuals within it, developing structures and strategies that encourage experimentation and innovation. However, preparation for the next development must not limit our optimisation for the current environment, and we cannot afford for either planning or experimentation to delay delivery or compromise the standards of our work.

The question, then, is how we simultaneously increase our adaptability and accelerate our performance. One answer is 'Agile'.

The Agile Approach

'Agile' is designed to facilitate evolution with change while still delivering maximum impact. It is not a single methodology but an overarching approach - and one that is being applied to every discipline in every sector, from where it began in software development to fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) marketing management.

Fundamental to the effectiveness of Agile is an iterative and incremental process: projects are approached with a broad vision and progressed in small, quick steps ('sprints'); plans are amended as products are delivered; and results are not instantly perfect but can be rapidly refined.

The Agile approach is founded on four key principles:

Individuals and interaction over processes and tools.

Customer collaboration over contract negotiation.

Responding to change over following a rigid plan.

Prototyping over comprehensive documentation.

The Application for Communications

Some brands, including Marks and Spencer (M&S) are already applying Agile methods to their marketing and communications functions.[1] Unsurprisingly, there is no set procedure for adopting the Agile approach, so we must be creative, innovative and experimental if we are to embrace its principles.

At a communications planning level we should consider how large-scale campaigns can be broken-down into smaller tasks and tackled stepwise, led by a longer-term vision. This may involve testing working objectives from an early stage, using initial results to repeatedly analyse, evaluate and adapt our message and strategy before a final campaign is delivered to the public. By placing greater emphasis on the project vision, this approach not only facilitates regular adaptation, but also ensures that our ultimate aim does not become distorted by inefficient processes.

At a workforce level Agile encourages the formation of small, highly specialised teams working in short-term stages with clear, accountable roles. This structure empowers individual team members, simplifies internal sign-off processes and simultaneously allows for improved focus and increased collaboration.

The use of data should be integral to any Agile communications approach, informing the initial insight of campaign strategies and communications objectives, and providing the feedback that allows for iterative improvement and development.

The GCS Engage programme, now in it second year, is both a case study in the effective application of Agile to project delivery, and itself a useful tool for Agile ways of working, developing tools and platforms that encourage knowledge sharing and cross-government coordination.

The Engage Programme

Engage comprises four products:

A 'Knowledge Hub'

Campaign dashboards

A cloud-based 'Data Lake'

An interactive 'Mapping Tool'

The programme is being developed through Agile teams and has started to deliver a suite of tools that will allow communications to be driven by data and research, operate with greater effectiveness and efficiency, and return better impact and value for money.

Serving our Purpose

In all this change it is important to remember what we do, why we do it, and how we can succeed at it.

Informing the public is vital, but to characterise communications as little more than the dissemination of information both underestimates the importance, and misunderstands the purpose, of our profession.

The aim of most government campaigns is in fact more impactful and complex – to actively encourage or change citizen behaviour. Fundamentally, despite exponential changes, continuous development and evolving practices in the sector, this core communications aim remains constant. We must therefore ensure that our response to recent and future developments always and actively advances this aim. We have frameworks to help us achieve this, but our strategies for reinforcing or changing behaviour must themselves evolve with trends in communications.

To address this exact challenge, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Behavioural Science Team has worked with GCS colleagues to produce the newly launched (October 2018) "Strategic communications: a behavioural approach" toolkit, drawing extensively from comprehensive University College London research. This new guide is designed for use in conjunction with the GCS OASIS planning model to improve the intelligence and effectiveness of our leading-edge communication activities.

Stay SMART

All effective campaign activity begins with clear objectives. These objectives must be focused on the specific behaviours that will help realise policy objectives, and they should be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely. Published in Summer 2018, the updated Evaluation Framework 2.0 helps set quantitative and qualitative targets for achieving these objectives.

A 'behaviour' is an observable action.

The COM-B Model

Adopting a more Agile approach to communications, objective-setting and audience insight should be concurrent, stepwise processes. The OASIS guidelines already encourage constant review and feedback loops between the different elements of campaign planning, but the new COM-B model takes this one step further by actively using audience insight to shape and refine objectives and inform the strategy for achieveing them.

The model outlines three requirements for behaviours to happen, helping us to identify both the possible barriers that must be overcome, and the potential behaviours that can best deliver against policy objectives.

These three requirements for behaviour are:

Capability
can your audience actually do the behaviour?

Opportunity
does your audience's environment allow the behaviour to happen?

Motivation
does your audience want to do the behaviour at all?

Derived from extensive research, COM-B it is a simple and effective way to directly apply the basic principles of behaviour science to communications strategy.

The EAST Framework

The EAST framework facilitates effective strategy and implementation, simplifying complex science into straightforward guidelines:

Easy - make the behaviour as simple and achievable as possible.

Attractive - ensure your audience has a reason for doing the behaviour.

Social - collective involvement can increase individual commitment.

Timely – consider how you can time your campaign to have the greatest impact.

What Next?

In this report we have presented an overview of the top five current communications trends, suggesting prompts and sharing essential guidance to help you apply them to your work; however, it is up to you and your team to learn more about areas are of relevance and interest.

GCS colleagues are a valuable resource for knowledge and ideas, so reach out for advice and share your own learning in return. Basecamp is a great way to collaborate online. Do specialist colleagues have a Basecamp group? If not, could you set one up?

To give you a head start, we have provided some suggestions for further reading below.

Introduction

- The GCS Handbook is available on the GCS website.
- The 2015 report is available on the GCS website: '7 trends in leading-edge communications'.

Trend 1 - Next Generation Fakery

- RRU: Alex Aiken introduced the RRU on the GCS News website.
- MMU: Please get in touch to subscribe to their services.
- Disinformation: the DCMS Committee Interim Report on Disinformation is available on the Parliament website.

## Trend 2 - "Hey Siri, Who's Alexa?"

- VUIs: More information on 'Alexa Skills' and 'Actions on Google' can be found on their respective websites.

Trend 3 - Super-charged Segmentation

- Industry Body, ISBA: blogs and video guides on targeting available on their website.

Trend 4 - Disrupting the Disruptors

- Accelerate: Alex Aiken introduced the programme in a blog post on the GCS website.
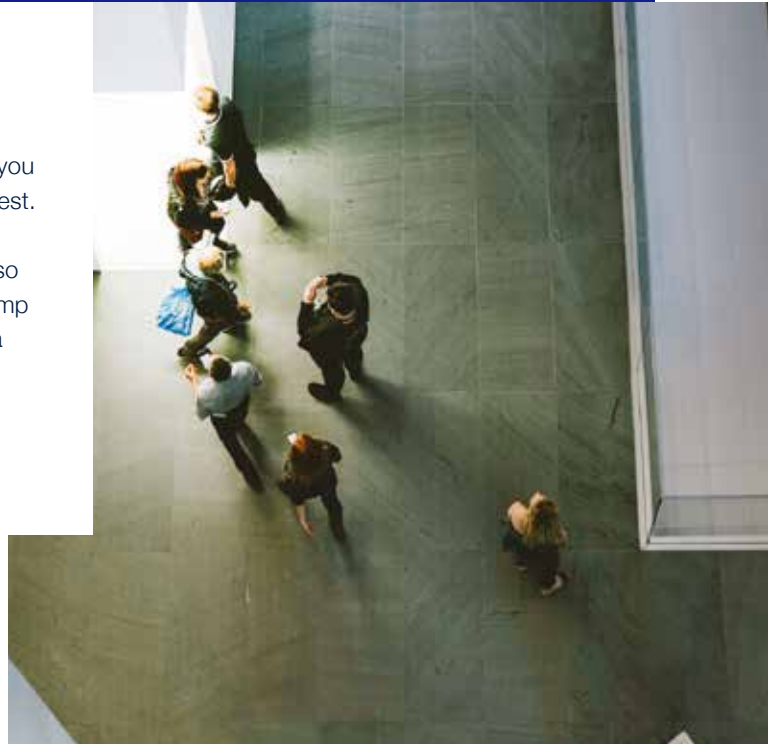
Trend 5 - A Question of Ethics

- GDPR Guidelines: can be found at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) website.
- Data Ethics Framework: the full document is available on GOV.UK.

Applying the Trends

- Agile: the APM (Association for Project Management) provides various online resources.
- Agile: McKinsey & Company has published a comprehensive online guide.
- Behaviour Science: Professor Susan Michie and her team's full research behind the behaviour change wheel can be found online.
- GCS Frameworks: details of OASIS, COM-B, EAST and the new 'Strategic communications: a behaviour approach' can be found on the GCS website.

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Trend 4. Disrupting the Disruptors

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2. Paul Petrone, LinkedIn Learning Editor, "The Skills Companies Need Most in 2018", January 2018

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Trend 5. A Question of Ethics

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3. Marketing Week, "Despite GDPR, consumers still don't understand how brands use their data", May 2018

4. Marketing Week, "Despite GDPR, consumers still don't understand how brands use their data", May 2018

5. GOV.UK, Data Ethics Framework, August 2018

6. New York Times, "Netflix and Spotify Ask: Can Data Mining Make for Cute Ads?", December 2017

7. ICO, "Guide to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)", 2018

Applying the Trends - Fast-track to the Future

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