Mind the Gap

Results of the ComGap study in the United Kingdom

How the public and public relations professionals in the United Kingdom value leadership and social media

A. Zerfass, R. Tench & D. Kaufmann
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This report presents the key findings for the United Kingdom of the ComGap study. Additional information on the collaboration between EUPRERA and Ketchum is available on pages 31-33.
Outline of the study
Overview and research questions

- **Communicating leadership**: Both organisations and their leaders are facing audiences with increased expectations and a greater ability to share any criticism. Positioning organisations in society as well as CEOs and top executives as leaders are key issues for communication management today.

- **The realm of social media communication**: Organisations have integrated digital channels in their communication strategies. But the conversational potential isn’t always exploited. Many PR professionals are still struggling to tell their stories and to use the listening power of social media.
  - Do communication practitioners know how to reach their audiences when talking about their leadership ambitions and their leaders? Does this match stakeholder expectations?
  - What types of content and conversation do stakeholders expect an organisation to share on social media? Do PR professionals know about this?
  - What are the lessons PR professionals can learn from stakeholder expectations?

**Insights based on two empirical studies**

- **ComGap 2014**: It is a study based on thorough academic standards. It combines a representative poll among internet users in 10 European countries with a survey of 1,346 communication professionals in the same markets.

- This report presents the results for the United Kingdom.
A representative poll and a quantitative survey among PR professionals in the United Kingdom

Methodology

Samples: Representative online survey among 500 citizens and a survey among 155 communication professionals in the UK.

Demographics: The poll sample was weighted for age and gender to accurately represent the general population of the UK. The communicator survey includes experienced professionals (average age: 45 years) working in communication departments (79%), and public relations agencies (21%). 52% work as heads of corporate or organisational communication departments/agency CEOs.

Questionnaires: Six closed questions as part of larger web-based surveys, evaluated with descriptive and analytical statistics (SPSS)

Data collection: The poll was executed by market research specialist IPSOS in January 2014. The survey among communicators was executed by the researchers in March 2014 with personal e-mail invitations based on the largest database of communication professionals in Europe.

Gender distribution

Population

♂ 50%  ♀ 50%

Communication professionals

♂ 47%  ♀ 53%
Communicating leadership
The ComGap study explores four key questions on leadership and communication

1. How important is communication for effective organisational leadership?

2. Which communication activities are relevant for the leadership image of organisations?

3. Which organisational attributes are important to the leadership image of organisations?

4. What are the characteristics and behaviours of effective leaders?
Great leadership needs effective communication

- According to 91.6% of communication professionals interviewed, effective communication is extremely important for great leadership. The general population also values communication very highly, but only half of them (55.4%) agree with the extremely strong vote of the PR professionals.

- In this respect, the UK has similar results to most of its European neighbours except France, where leadership is more loosely linked to communication by the public.

### Importance of effective communication for leadership in the United Kingdom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance Level</th>
<th>Communication Professionals</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important (≥ 0.4 &amp; &lt; 0.7)</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important (≥ 0.7 &amp; &lt; 0.9)</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely important (≥ 0.9)</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q1: Generally speaking, how important is effective communication to great leadership?

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For this question, two original scales (PR professionals: 1-5, population: 0-10) have been recalculated to one uniform scale (0-1).
The UK: TV interviews and advertising shape leadership images

Q2 communicators: When stakeholders form a view on the leadership of a company/organisation, which five communications activities have the greatest impact on their opinion?

Q2 population: In forming a view on the leadership provided by a company/organisation, which five communications activities have the greatest impact on your opinion?
### Gaps: UK PRs value communication activities quite differently to the public

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gap</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>PR professionals</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Company/organisation website</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Print interviews</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>Television advertising</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Company/organisation social networking and microblogging</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Leader or company/organisation blog</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>In-person speeches/appearances</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17%</td>
<td>Print advertising</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>Online advertising</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>Formal announcement/news release</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Radio advertising</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q2 communicators: When stakeholders form a view on the leadership of a company/organisation, which five communications activities have the greatest impact on their opinion?

Q2 population: In forming a view on the leadership provided by a company/organisation, which five communications activities have the greatest impact on your opinion?
Gaps across Europe: Communicators in the UK view channels differently to their peers

Q2 communicators: When stakeholders form a view on the leadership of a company/organisation, which five communications activities have the greatest impact on their opinion?

Q2 population: In forming a view on the leadership provided by a company/organisation, which five communications activities have the greatest impact on your opinion?

Positive values indicate activities overestimated by PR professionals compared to the public, negative values indicate underestimated activities compared.

** Highly significant differences between population and PR practitioners in the UK (chi-square test, p ≤ 0.01).

Q2 / \( \hat{n}_{UK, Pop} \) = 500
Q2 / \( \hat{n}_{UK, PR} \) = 155
Q2 / \( \hat{n}_{UK, Pop} \) = 4.054
Q2 / \( \hat{n}_{UK, PR} \) = 1.346

Mind the Gap - Results of the ComGap study in the United Kingdom

08/11/2014
Trustworthiness is seen as the key leadership attribute in the UK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most important attributes for a company/organisation to be described as a leader</th>
<th>Rated among 5 most important</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>PR professionals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management **</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative **</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service **</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial strength *</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good place to work *</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect **</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental responsibility **</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality products/services</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer-focused</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philanthropic/Charitable **</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate social responsibility</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical business practices</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to communities</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Opinions about supportive attributes for leadership differ widely between the public and PR professionals in the UK.

Environmental responsibility is significantly underestimated by communicators.

Like in Europe at large, trustworthiness is the most important attribute for corporations and organisations in the UK to be seen as leaders.

Ethical business practices are more important for the population of the UK, compared to the European average.

Q3: Listed below are some attributes that might be used to describe a company or organisation. Please select the five that you feel are most important for an organisation to demonstrate to be considered a leader.

Mind the Gap - Results of the ComGap study in the United Kingdom 08/11/2014
The characteristics of effective leaders in the United Kingdom

- Both public relations professionals and the public in the UK agree on the most important characteristics and behaviours of effective leaders: leading by example as well as communicating in an open and transparent way help to shape leadership images.

- However, from the stakeholder’s point of view any leader has to admit mistakes as clearly and openly as they can. For PR professionals this behaviour has less priority.

- Professionals in the UK overestimated a clear overall, long term vision as well as the alignment of what leaders say and what their organisation does as important attributes of leaders.

Differing perceptions by communication professionals when compared with the public’s views

Most overestimated
Telling a compelling story about their organisation in simple language that is easy to understand

Most underestimated
Using inspirational rhetoric
**Top five behaviours of effective leaders in the United Kingdom**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>PR professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading by example</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admitting mistakes</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating in an open and transparent way</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling controversial issues or crises calmly and confidently</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing out the best in others</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q4: Listed below are specific behaviours often seen as being characteristic of effective leaders. When it comes to being an effective leader, how important is it to demonstrate each of the following characteristics or behaviours? Scale 0-1. Mean values.

For this question, two original scales (PR professionals: 1-5, population: 0-10) have been recalculated to one uniform scale (0-1).
Characteristics and behaviours of effective leaders in the United Kingdom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most important characteristics or behaviours to be demonstrated by leaders</th>
<th>UK population</th>
<th>PR professionals</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telling a compelling story about their organisation in simple language that is easy to understand **</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a clear overall, long-term vision **</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling controversial issues or crises calmly and confidently **</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating in an open and transparent way **</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making tough decisions **</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligning what they say with what they and their organisation does **</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading by example **</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing out the best in others **</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating an ability to work with different personality styles</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing respect for different cultures – at home and internationally *</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admitting mistakes</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using inspirational rhetoric</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking active steps to ensure diversity in their organisation</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing respect for the organisation’s history and culture</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q4: Listed below are specific behaviours often seen as being characteristic of effective leaders. When it comes to being an effective leader, how important is it to demonstrate each of the following characteristics or behaviours? Percentages indicate respondents who voted important (≥ 0.7 on the integrated scale 0-1; 4-5 on a 1-5 scale for communicators; 7-10 on a 0-10 scale for the general population).

* Significant differences between the population and the PR professionals (means, independent samples T-test, p ≤ 0.05).

** Highly significant differences between the population and the PR professionals (means, independent samples T-test, p ≤ 0.01).
Insight #1: Employees are ambassadors

Finding

For the vast majority of both PR professionals as well as the population communication is important or very important for effective leadership.

Recommendation for communication professionals

Communication enhances effective leadership, but it goes beyond the planned activities of communication departments.

The communicative behaviour of every manager and employee is important. Programs aiming at qualifying managers and employees to act as ambassadors of their organisation help to multiply the leadership impact of communications.
Insight #2: The comms team are trainers

Finding
Communication professionals in the UK see in-person speeches/appearances, as the communication tool with the biggest potential to shape leadership image. The public on the other hand sees TV interviews as the main tool.

Recommendation for communication professionals
Communicators should develop their skills for training and coaching colleagues in their public roles – from media training to a more general 360 degree consulting on how they are perceived.

To be accepted by top management, PR professionals need to base their advice on empirical findings – not on gut feeling.
Insight #3: It’s the customers, stupid!

Finding

Customer service and product quality are very important to the public when it comes to describing a company as a leader. However, customer service is significantly underestimated by communication practitioners who tend to favour more abstract attributes like innovation or management quality.

Recommendation for communication professionals

Getting closer to what the population expects from an organisation helps to improve leadership perceptions. A closer alignment between communicators and marketing/sales people might facilitate this.
Insight #4: Establishing trust is key

Finding

UK public and public relations practitioners agree: Trustworthiness is the most important attribute for any organisation that wants to be considered a leader.

Recommendation for communication professionals

Building trust across all stakeholder groups requires open and transparent communication – including the willingness to admit mistakes.

Most organisations need a cultural change to reach this goal, and communicators can support these efforts.
Insight #5: Walk the talk!

Finding

When it comes to the attributes of effective leaders, communication professionals overestimate the role of an organisation’s vision, while the population mainly stresses basic attributes like leading by example or admitting mistakes.

Recommendation for communication professionals

Again, counselling top representatives (not just the CEO) on their overall behaviour and interaction style is important for any communicator who wants to support the executive team on their way towards being perceived as effective leaders.
The realm of social media communications
Two key questions on social media

1. What types of content and conversation should organisations share using their own social media?

2. Which types of behaviour should companies exhibit on social media platforms?
Expectations towards social media communication in the United Kingdom

- According to UK PR professionals, stakeholders expect information on events or crises that affect customers (79%). However, the population itself rates this far less importantly (43%).
- The British public is more interested in product and service information about new or forthcoming products (48%) as well as current products (47%), as do the European population at large.
- Every third Brit expects organisations to share their financial news via social media, and this is clearly above the European average (24%).
- For both the population and UK PR professionals, the most important behaviour stakeholders expect companies to exhibit on social media is to interact with consumers and others. But public demand is very much lagging behind practitioners’ perceptions.
### Relevant content for social media channels in the United Kingdom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of social media content and conversation expected to be shared</th>
<th>Selected all that apply</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information on events or crises (e.g. weather, recalls, etc.) that affect customers **</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate social responsibility efforts **</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to comments on the organisation made by others **</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product and service information – current products **</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial news **</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product and service information – new or forthcoming products **</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal information about leaders (e.g. their biography) **</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on product safety *</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about manufacturing processes **</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deals and/or coupons offering reduced pricing for customers/members</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about where the company/organisation sources its products and materials</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like their European colleagues, UK professionals overestimate the importance of most topics, especially crises, third-party comments and CSR.

How are products being manufactured? Are they safe? These are the questions that the UK public ask themselves more often than communications professionals do.

---

Q5 PR pros: Which of the following types of content and conversation, if any, do stakeholders expect a company/organisation to share using its own social media?

Q5 pop: Which of the following types of content and conversation, if any, do you expect a company/organisation to share using its own social media? Select all that apply.

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08/11/2014
The public in the UK expects different content compared to other European publics.

Q5 pop: Which of the following types of content and conversation, if any, do you expect a company/organisation to share using its own social media? Select all that apply.

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08/11/2014
What the British demand from companies on the social web

- Interact with consumers and others: 54% (professionals) vs. 91% (population) - Gap: 37%
- Allow consumers and others to comment on an experience with the company/organisation or its products and services: 48% (professionals) vs. 82% (population) - Gap: 34%
- Solicit feedback from consumers and others on product and service improvements and innovations: 43% (professionals) vs. 72% (population) - Gap: 30%
- Offer a direct line of communication with company/organisation management: 39% (professionals) vs. 68% (population) - Gap: 28%
- Work interactively/directly with consumers and others on product and service improvements and innovations: 36% (professionals) vs. 57% (population) - Gap: 21%

Q6 PR pros: Which of the following types of behaviour, if any, do stakeholders expect companies to exhibit on social media? Select all that apply based on your experience and opinion.

Q6 pop: Which of the following types of behaviour, if any, do you expect companies to exhibit on social media? Select all that apply.

Gaps: PR professionals tend to overestimate the demand for social media communications by the public.
Insight #6: Listen, listen, listen ...

Finding

Social media communication activities could be more efficient: communicators tend to overestimate what stakeholders expect from companies on their social media channels.

Recommendation for communication professionals

Listen to what your publics really want. Don’t follow each trend. Instead investigate the needs and potential for each approach. Get in touch on multiple social media channels and with different approaches (e.g. Tweeterview, Google Hangouts).
Insight #7: Storytelling is not a buzzword

Finding

The population of the UK is much more interested in product safety and how products are being manufactured.

Recommendation for communication professionals

Build on core services and achievements, but make other corporate information interesting by telling compelling stories. Storytelling is not a buzzword or separate content. It is simply an approach to create better content linked to the needs of your publics.
Insight #8: Close the gap

Finding

Generally, UK public relations professionals have insufficient knowledge about the expectations of the UK public concerning key issues like demonstrating leadership and using social media.

Major perceptual gaps indicate that several opportunities are not being utilised and resources are being directed inefficiently.

Recommendation for communication professionals

Strategic communication is a social science – which means that communicating leadership and interacting on the web should be based on detailed knowledge and research about public opinion and stakeholder demands.
Research partners

Ketchum – a leading global communications firm

- Ketchum operates in more than 70 countries across six continents. Named 2012 PR Agency of the Year (PRWeek and European Excellence Awards) and the winner of an unprecedented three consecutive PRWeek Campaign of the Year Awards, Ketchum partners with clients to deliver strategic programming, game-changing creative and measurable results that build brands and reputations. Ketchum is a part of Diversified Agency Services, a division of Omnicom Group Inc. [www.ketchum.com](http://www.ketchum.com)

European Public Relations Education and Research Association

- EUPRERA is an independent organisation that aims to stimulate and promote innovation in the knowledge and practices of public relations education and research in Europe. With members from more than 30 countries – among them most universities and professors focusing on research and education in communication management across the continent – its main objectives are fostering joint research and knowledge transfer between academia and practice. [www.euprera.org](http://www.euprera.org)

Partnering for advancing the profession

- EUPRERA and Ketchum cooperate in the fields of research and thought leadership by supporting the annual European Communication Monitor [www.communicationmonitor.eu](http://www.communicationmonitor.eu) and additional projects like this study.
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