

## Ethical challenges and resources for the communication profession

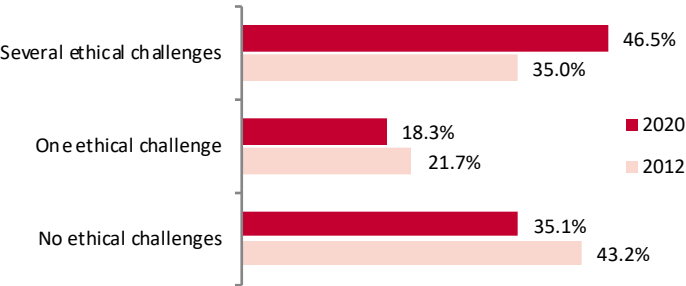
### Results of a survey in 44 countries

Ethical challenges and resources for the communication profession is one of the key topics explored in the European Communication Monitor 2020. Results are based on interviewing more than 2,300 practitioners working in companies, non-profits and other organisations including communication agencies across Europe. Detailed analyses are available for 22 countries and different types of organisations. Apart from ethics, the full report for this year's monitor also includes insights on cyber security and communications, gender equality in the profession, as well as the status quo and future requirements for competency development. The full report is available for free on [www.communicationmonitor.eu](http://www.communicationmonitor.eu).

### Ethical challenges in day to day work

Almost every second practitioner (46%) has experienced several ethical challenges in their day to day work during the last 12 months. A smaller portion reports about one issue (18%), while 35% haven't had any issues during that period. The overall share of affected communicators and the frequency of moral hazards and the has grown within the last years, as shown by a comparison with previous data from 2012 (see figure).

Number of ethical challenges encountered in day to day work



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Amount of practitioners with strong ethical concerns on ...	
Using bots to generate feedback and followers on social media	67.6%
Exploiting audiences' data by applying big data analyses	58.1%
Paying social media influencers to communicate favourably	55.4%
Using regularly looking sponsored social media posts and sponsored articles on news websites	54.0%
Motivating employees to spread organisational messages on their private social media accounts	40.8%
Profiling and targeting audiences based on their age, gender, ethnicity, job, or interests	30.2%
Editing entries about my organisation on public wikis	27.2%

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### Ethical concerns on social media

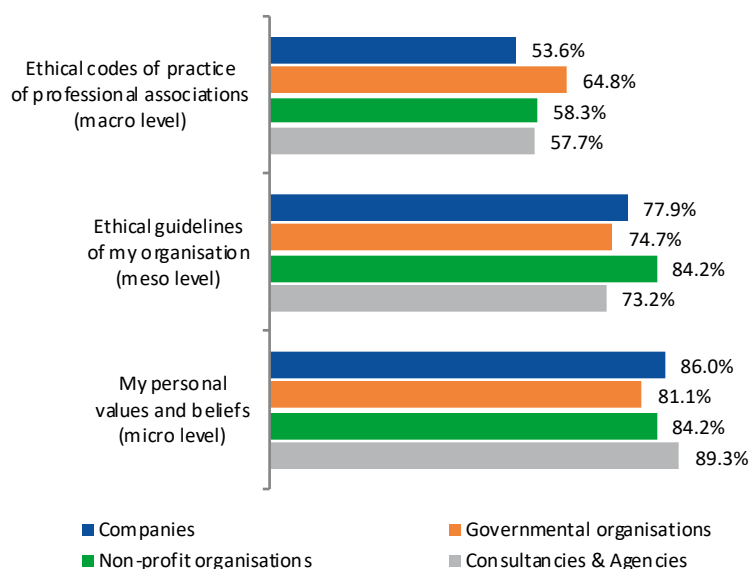
Digital technologies offer many opportunities for communications, for example by using social bots, big data analytics, sponsored content, and by involving social media influencers. Such practices are less institutionalised and rarely covered by codes of conduct compared to traditional media relations or advertising. This study shows that **most communication practitioners are challenged by those practices**: Two out of three state that using bots to generate feedback and followers on social media is extremely or very challenging in terms of ethics. The majority thinks the same for all other practices mentioned above. Less problems are identified when it comes to profiling and targeting audiences and editing entries in public wikis like Wikipedia (see table).

About the study

The European Communication Monitor 2020 is based on responses from 2,324 communication professionals from 44 European countries, most of them senior leaders with more than 10 years tenure in the field. The strict selection of participants, a unique research framework based on established theories and statistical analyses fulfilling academic standards are key features of the study. Lead researchers Professors Ansgar Zerfass (Leipzig), Piet Verhoeven (Amsterdam), Ángeles Moreno (Madrid), Ralph Tench (Leeds) and Dejan Verčič (Ljubljana) are supported by national research collaborators who are professors at renowned universities across the continent.

Download the full report (PDF, 132 pp.) for free: [www.communicationmonitor.eu](http://www.communicationmonitor.eu)

## Resources used when dealing with ethical challenges



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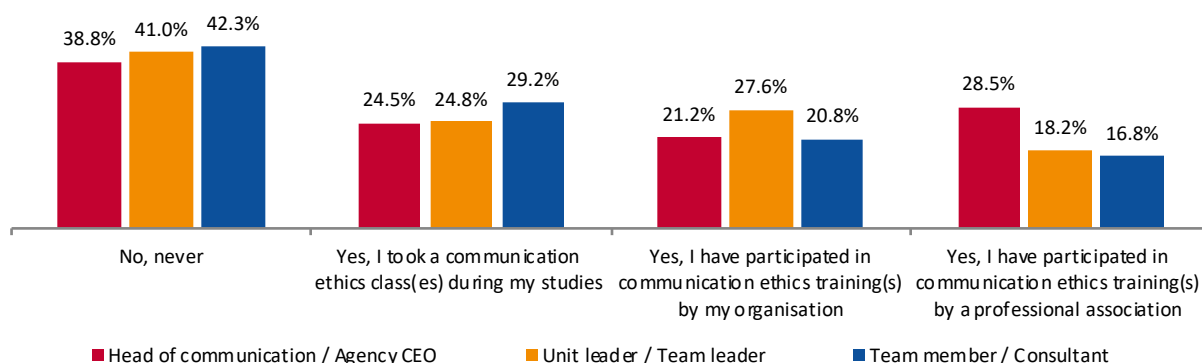
## Dealing with ethical challenges

Practitioners can rely on different resources when weighting alternatives and taking decisions. National and international associations provide **codes of ethics**, e. g. the Code of Athens, on the macro level of the profession. They are often taught in the classroom, but less relevant in the practice – 57% state they were important for them when dealing with ethical issues. Three out of four (76%) rely on **ethical guidelines issued by their own organisation** and a clear majority (86%) used **personal values and beliefs**, for example those based on family tradition, education or religion. Practitioners in the public sector use general codes of ethics to a larger extent, while organisational guidelines are most acknowledged in non-profit organisations (see figure).

## Deficiencies in developing ethical competencies

A potential solution for moral dilemmas in the profession are training opportunities in communication ethics. But **40% of communication practitioners in Europe have never participated in ethics training**. For those who did so, it was mainly during their studies and more than three years ago. Remarkably, many more communication leaders have participated in ethics training by professional associations than practitioners on lower levels (see figure).

### Have you ever participated in training on communication ethics?



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***"Strategic communicators in organisations and agencies are shaping public opinion. Against this background, the findings of our study indicate the need for developing stronger competencies in communications ethics: Focused, up-do-date, and regular trainings and guidelines are needed – especially for younger, less experienced professionals."***

**Alexandra Groß, Chairwoman, Fink & Fuchs AG**

Fink & Fuchs supports the European Communication Monitor as Digital Communications Partner  
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