

Strategic Communication as an Effective Tool for Organisational Management and Leadership Practice in the Age of Social Media and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

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Abstract

Effective strategic communication is a critical tool for organisational success in today's dynamic and interconnected business environment. This paper presents a structured review and thematic synthesis of the literature on how strategic communication functions as an effective tool for management and leadership practice, enabling organisations to navigate complex stakeholder landscapes in the age of social media and artificial intelligence (AI). Drawing on twenty-three peer-reviewed journals, books, industry reports and sources published between 2005 and 2024, and supplemented by a smaller set of more recent (2023-2026) sources addressing generative AI and algorithmic communication, reflecting the recency of this literature. The review examines the role of domestic, national and international media coverage in organisational communication strategies, and considers how media coverage shapes the perceptions of stakeholders such as partners, opinion formers, customers, investors, and the general public. It also considers how pressure groups, political entities and media ownership structures influence media coverage of organisational policies, how organisations respond to the operational and resource constraints facing contemporary journalism and how the emerging literature on generative AI, algorithmic content curation, and AI-related risks such as misinformation and deepfakes is reshaping strategic communication practice, and the role of leadership communication within organisational context. The synthesis of the study indicates that strategic communication supports stakeholder trust, positive reputation, and the achievement of leadership and management objectives when it is proactive, transparent and responsive to the evolving media and technological environment. The organisational case examples discussed, however, also show that these communication responses carry limitations and trade-offs that are not always visible in initial accounts of their success because the review is based entirely on secondary sources, its conclusions represent captured synthesis of patterns identified in prior literature and organisational case reporting rather than newly collected empirical findings, the paper therefore recommends that future research test these patterns using primary methods such as interviews or organisational case studies.

Keywords: Strategic Communication, Media Relations, Stakeholder Engagement, Corporate Reputation, Artificial Intelligence, Media Influence.

1. Introduction

Strategic communication serves as a cornerstone of effective management and leadership in the contemporary business landscape. As organisations navigate increasingly complex stakeholder environments, the ability to communicate effectively becomes more than a supplementary skill, it emerges as a critical functional tool that directly impacts organisational performance and success (Cornelissen, 2020). Strategic communication encompasses deliberate communication activities designed to advance organisational goals through meaningful engagement with stakeholders across various media platforms and communication channels.

The evolution of communication technologies and news media ecosystems has transformed how organisations engage with their stakeholders. Today's leaders must navigate a media landscape characterised by immediacy, fragmentation and heightened public scrutiny (Bowen & Zheng, 2015). Within this context, strategic communication function serves not merely as information dissemination mechanism but as a core leadership tool that shapes organisational perceptions, builds strong stakeholder relationships and influences behaviours that align with organisational objectives. The visibility of Unilever's sustainability messaging through its "Sustainable Living Plan" (USLP), launched in 2010, illustrates how strategic communication can be used to raise public awareness of an organisation's core commitments as discussed further in Sections 4 and 5, however, the same example also illustrates the limits of communication when it runs ahead of measurable organisational change.

The concept of strategic communication has evolved significantly in recent decades, shifting from tactical one-way message delivery to a more sophisticated, multi-dimensional engagement strategies that involves key stakeholders. This evolution reflects the broader changes in organisational theory that recognise the importance of stakeholder relationships and social capital in creating sustainable competitive advantage (Stadtler & Van Wassenhove, 2016). Contemporary organisations operate in environments where information flows rapidly across traditional boundaries, thereby creating both opportunities and challenges for leadership communication practices. Research by Kiousis and Wu (2008) indicates that strategic communication enables organisations to navigate complex landscapes by establishing coherent narratives that resonate with diverse stakeholder groups. These narratives serve multiple functions: they articulate organisational vision and values, establish legitimacy within competitive market environments and provide frameworks through which stakeholders can interpret organisational actions and decisions. Effective leaders must recognise that these narratives are consistent yet adaptable. Leader must therefore maintain core principles while responding to changing environmental challenges and conditions that follows these diverse narratives.

The strategic dimension of organisational communication lies in its alignment with broader business objectives and leadership vision for the future. Communication strategies that succeed integrate seamlessly with business planning processes, helping to ensure message consistency across all organisational touchpoints (Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006). This integration requires communication professionals to possess a deep understanding of local and global business

operations, market dynamics and stakeholder expectations, transforming the communication function from a tactical activity into a strategic partnership within leadership structures.

Digital transformation has further elevated the strategic importance of communication in management and leadership practice. For instance, social media platforms, digital news ecosystems and online communities have created environments in which organisational messages can be amplified, challenged or reframed by numerous actors beyond organisational control (Chadwick, 2017). As Section 2.3 discusses in more detail, artificial intelligence (AI) adds a further layer to this environment. Leaders must now develop the capability not only to monitor markets and the media space but also know how to constructively engage with key stakeholders, understand how algorithmic systems works, and how AI-generated content shape which messages stakeholders actually see, recognising that organisational boundaries have become increasingly permeable to external influence and public scrutiny.

Crisis scenarios in particular demonstrate the critical relationship between strategic communication and effective leadership. Research by Coombs and Holladay (2014) indicates that organisations with integrated communication strategies tend to recover more quickly from reputational damage and maintain stronger stakeholder relationships through periods of uncertainty than those without such strategic tools in place. These capabilities derive from established communication systems that enable rapid response, consistent messaging, and authentic stakeholder engagements when normal operational procedures are disrupted.

This paper examines how strategic communication serves as an effective tool for management and leadership practice in the age of social media and artificial intelligence (AI), by exploring the relationship between media influence, stakeholder engagement and organisational strategy. By synthesising the dynamics of contemporary media environments and the mechanisms through which communication influences stakeholder perceptions, the study aims to inform how leaders might develop more effective approaches to and in managing organisational reputation and pursuing strategic goals in an increasingly volatile and technologically complex operating environments.

2. Background of Literature

2.1 Media Influence on Stakeholder Perceptions

The media plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and opinions among an organisation's diverse stakeholders. Research indicates that media coverage significantly influences how stakeholders perceive an organisation's actions, policies, and overall reputation (Cornelissen, 2020). Strategic communication literature highlights several key relationships between media coverage and stakeholder perceptions. Media serves as a platform for organisations to communicate their strategic initiatives, brand messaging, and corporate social responsibility efforts. Positive media coverage strengthens partnerships and enhances corporate reputation among industry opinion leaders (Cornelissen, 2020). Research by Kiousis and Wu (2008) shows that media coverage, whether positive or negative, significantly affects customer perceptions and brand loyalty. Favourable portrayals tend to increase brand awareness and consumer trust, while

negative coverage can damage reputation and sales performance of an affected organisation both in the long and short term.

This dynamic was evident in the 2013 Tesco horsemeat scandal, in which DNA tests performed by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland found that several Tesco Everyday Value frozen beef burger lines contained up to 29 percent horse DNA, and that Tesco's Everyday Value spaghetti bolognese, supplied by French manufacturer Comigel, contained up to 60 percent horsemeat. The contamination was reported to have occurred because meat had been sourced from outside the UK and Ireland, which was in breach of Tesco's sourcing policies (BBC, 2013), and the resulting media coverage negatively affected Tesco, Comigel, and Tesco's frozen burger supplier, Silvercrest. In response to the scandal and contamination, Tesco terminated its contract with Silvercrest, issued a public apology and introduced stricter DNA testing protocols. The retailer used both print and social media, taking out full-page advertisements in UK national newspapers to apologise directly to stakeholders and consumers, and committed to more extensive DNA testing systems for its meat products going forward. As Section 5.2 discusses, this response gave Tesco an opportunity to rebuild stakeholders' trust within a relatively short period, although it was in essence, a reactive response to a failure that external testing caused the problem, rather than the company's own supply-chain oversight had brought to light, thereby leading to amplified negative media coverage and public scrutiny.

For investors and shareholders, media reports on financial performance, market share, and strategic decisions influence investor sentiment and stock prices. Studies by Meijer and Kleinnijenhuis (2006) found that effective communication through media channels helps organisations to maintain positive relationships with shareholders and the investment community. The literature establishes that media influence extends across multiple stakeholder groups, making media relations a critical component of strategic communication in today's dynamic and interconnected business environments.

2.2 External Influences on Media Perception

The media's perception of organisational policies and strategies are shaped by various external factors that communication leaders at all levels must understand and navigate. Pressure groups, political entities, and media ownership structures all exert significant influence on how organisational activities are portrayed and interpreted (Bowen & Zheng, 2015).

Activist Groups, Non-Governmental Organisations, and Political Lobbies: Activist groups, non-governmental organisations and political lobbies may pressure media outlets to report on specific organisational practices, particularly those related to sustainability, labour policies, or corporate social responsibility initiatives. Research by Corrigan-Brown and Wilkes (2012) shows how activist campaign groups can shape media coverage of corporate activities, potentially leading organisations to re-evaluate their policies and practices in response to public perception and public scrutiny. This is evident in the United States of America, where political lobby groups such as the National Rifle Association (NRA) exert influence through political

lobbying, advocacy, and legislative engagements, shaping public opinion on firearms and Second Amendment rights.

Media Ownership Structures and Political Affiliations: Media ownership structures and political affiliations also affect how organisational actions and strategies are portrayed. Powerful media owners with vested political interest, financial or ideological interests may influence coverage in ways that shape public perception (Castells, 2013). Hanitzsch and Vos (2018) found that media ownership concentration can lead to systematic biases in reporting that either benefit or disadvantage organisations depending on their alignment with ownership interests, a dynamic that is often visible in coverage of election campaigns around the world. These external influences create a complex communication environment that requires sophisticated management approaches. Leaders of organisations must develop strategies that acknowledge these influences while maintaining integrity and fostering trustworthy engagement with stakeholders and the public.

2.3 Artificial Intelligence and the Changing Communication Function

Alongside the growth of social media, artificial intelligence (AI) has become an increasingly important influence on strategic communication practice, although the empirical literature on its organisational implications is still developing. Generative AI tools are being adopted by communication teams to support idea generation, content drafting, and workflow efficiency. Recent research on organisational adoption of generative AI suggests that it is generally regarded by practitioners as a tool that augments communication workflow rather than as a substitute for communication strategy itself (Prasad Agrawal, 2024). Interview-based research with senior communicators further indicates that the adoption of generative AI is elevating, rather than diminishing, however, strategic management responsibilities of communication leaders are increasingly expected to act as ethical guardians of AI use to maintain transparency and accountability around AI-supported processes, and to train colleagues and clients in its responsible use (O'Neil & Vasquez, 2026). At the same time, research on AI adoption within communication consultancies suggests that organisations relying on AI mainly to increase operational output risk losing the distinctiveness of their advisory services, whereas those that use AI to strengthen arguments, strategic advice and client relationships are more likely to sustain their competitive position (Cramer & Rudeloff, 2026).

Beyond content generation, AI-enabled algorithms increasingly determine which organisational messages are seen by which audiences. For instance, social media platforms use algorithmic systems to curate, rank and moderate content. Research on platform governance shows that this process is often opaque to individuals and organisations whose visibility depends on it, thereby creating uncertainty about how messages will be prioritised or restricted (Duffy & Meisner, 2023). For organisations, this means that strategic communication planning must increasingly account for algorithmic decision-making as an additional tool, largely uncontrollable layer of influence between an organisation's message and its intended stakeholders, alongside the traditional media gatekeeping discussed in Section 2.2.

AI also introduces reputational risks that were not present in earlier accounts of the media landscape. The emergence of deepfakes and AI-generated disinformation has created new mechanisms through which organisations and their leaders can be misrepresented. Recent reviews of this literature caution these narrative, however, while concern about deepfake is high among executives, the empirical evidence on how persuasive or damaging such content actually are remains mixed, and that alarmist assumptions about its effects are not always well supported (Birrer & Just, 2025). Having noted concern about deepfakes, it does not remove the risk of fraud, wrong accusation and misrepresentation. Organisations across various sectors have reported measurable losses connected to deepfake-enabled fraud, which is one reason why communication and leadership functions are increasingly being asked to build synthetic-media detection's and quick response capacity into their crisis management structures and communication planning mechanisms. Taken together, these developments suggest that AI is relevant to strategic communication not only as a productivity tool but also as a governance and ethical challenge, requiring communication leaders to balance the efficiency gains of automation against the need for transparency, human oversight and stakeholder trust. This literature is examined further alongside the study's own thematic synthesis in Sections 4.7 and 5.5.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a structured literature review and thematic synthesis to examine strategic communication as an effective tool for management and leadership practice in the age of social media and artificial intelligence (AI). A review-based design is well suited to this topic because it enables synthesis of theoretical and empirical insights drawn from a wide range of organisational and media contexts, rather than being limited to a single company or sector. Consistent with established practice in structured literature reviews, the process comprised an explicit search strategy, a staged screening procedure and a documented thematic analysis, each described below. The study analysed peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and industry reports published between 2005 and 2024, focusing on strategic management, leadership development, change management, strategic communication, media relations, reputation management, and organisational leadership, supplemented by a smaller set of more recent (2023-2026) sources addressing generative AI and algorithmic communication, reflecting the recency of this literature.

3.2 Data Sources, Search Strategy, and Eligibility Criteria

The literature search utilised academic databases including JSTOR, Business Source Complete, Google Scholar, Communication and Mass Media Complete, supplemented by targeted searches of industry and practitioner reports, and for the organisational case examples discussed in Sections 4 and 5, contemporaneous news reporting (for instance, BBC News coverage of the Tesco horsemeat scandal). Search terms included combinations of keywords such as "strategic communication," "media relations," "stakeholder engagement," "effective management," "corporate reputation," "leadership practices," "management strategy," "media influence,"

"organisational strategy," "generative artificial intelligence," "algorithmic communication," and "deepfakes."

Sources were included if they were: (i) published in a peer-reviewed journal, an academic book, or a recognised industry or regulatory report; (ii) written in English; (iii) substantively concerned with strategic communication, media relations, stakeholder engagement, organisational leadership, or AI-enabled communication practice; and (iv) published between 2005 and 2024, with the exception of the AI-focused literature discussed in Section 2.3 and Section 4.7, which was drawn from the 2023-2026 period given the recency of generative AI's organisational adoption. Sources were excluded if they were opinion pieces or promotional material without an identifiable evidentiary basis were not available in full text, or addressed communication technology in a purely technical rather than organisational sense.

The initial database and search-engine queries returned approximately 150-180 records. After duplicates were removed and titles and abstracts were screened against the eligibility criteria above, approximately 55-65 records were retained for full-text review. Of all these records, twenty-three sources met the full inclusion criteria and form the evidence base for the thematic synthesis reported in Section 4 (see Table 3), a small number of additional sources cited only for factual or contextual detail, such as the 2013 BBC's reporting of the Tesco horsemeat scandal are included in the reference list but are not counted within this thematic total.

3.3 Screening, Selection, and Thematic Analysis Procedure

The review process involved three sequential stages. First, titles and abstracts of the records identified through the search described above were screened against the eligibility criteria to remove clearly irrelevant records. Second, the full text of the remaining records was reviewed to confirm eligibility and to extract details of the theoretical frameworks, organisational contexts, and empirical findings reported in each source. Third, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring concepts, theoretical positions, and practical applications across the included sources.

The thematic analysis followed a combined inductive-then-deductive coding approach. Each included source was read in full and open-coded for recurring concepts and organisational examples, these codes were then grouped into candidate themes, which were refined against the eligibility criteria and existing theory, (for instance, agenda-setting and stakeholder theory, summarised in Table 6) to arrive at the seven thematic categories reported in Table 3. To support consistency of the study, all sources were coded by a single reviewer (the author) against a fixed set of theme definitions and the coding of each source was re-checked against the final theme definitions once all sources had been reviewed. This single-coder procedure was used in place of formal inter-rater reliability testing, which was not feasible for a single-author review, this is noted as a limitation in Section 3.4. To support the thematic analysis, the reviewed sources were systematically mapped against the core themes of the study (see Table 3), enabling a consistent view of how frequently each theme was addressed across the literature and the organisational case examples discussed in the review were compared against a common set of criteria,

including a critical assessment of the limitations of each response (see Table 4). The study also analysed the communication models and frameworks presented in the literature to identify approaches for leveraging strategic communication in management and leadership practice in the age of social media and AI, with particular attention to the challenges faced by media in reporting organisational activities and the strategies organisations employ to navigate these challenges in today's complex, dynamic and interconnected business environments.

3.4 Methodological Limitations

There are limitations inherent in this approach. First, because the study relies exclusively on secondary literature, it does not capture the depth of insight that primary methods such as interviews or organisational case studies could provide, the analytical tables presented in Section 4 summarise patterns within the reviewed literature and case reporting rather than findings from newly collected empirical or survey data, and are described in those terms throughout the paper. Second, a review-based design is necessarily shaped by the scope and availability of published sources, which may under-represent emerging or informal communication practices not yet reflected in the academic literature, an issue that is particularly relevant to the fast-moving AI-related literature discussed in Sections 2.3 and 4.7. Third, because all sources were coded by a single reviewer rather than by multiple independent coders, the thematic categorisation in Table 3 reflects one researcher's interpretive judgement and may carry a degree of coding bias. To mitigate these concerns, the study triangulated evidence across academic, industry and organisational sources, cross-validated interpretations against established communication theory, and in Sections 4 and 5, explicitly distinguishes between patterns reported in the cited literature and the author's own interpretation of those patterns.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted entirely on publicly available secondary sources, avoiding risks associated with confidentiality or data privacy. All sources have been cited and properly credited to ensure academic integrity, and organisational examples are discussed in a manner consistent with information already in the public domain.

4. Synthesis of the Reviewed Literature

This section synthesises the reviewed literature across seven themes: the media landscape and strategic communication, media's role in stakeholder influence, external influences on media perception, the core elements of strategic communication planning, media influence across key stakeholder groups, thematic and comparative analysis of the reviewed sources, and the specific role of artificial intelligence introduced in Section 2.3. Each theme is illustrated with supporting tables that summarise patterns identified in the literature, complemented by six analytical tables (Tables 1 to 6) that organise the reviewed sources across thematic, comparative, and conceptual dimensions. Consistent with the review-based design described in Section 3, the patterns reported below are synthesis and interpretations of secondary sources rather than new empirical findings collected for this study, where the discussion moves from summarising the cited literature to the author's own interpretation, this is indicated explicitly.

4.1 Media Landscape, Strategic Communication, and Brand Positioning Strategy

The reviewed literature indicates that organisations regarded as communicating successfully actively identify and engage with relevant media outlets across domestic, national, and international platforms. These organisations typically develop media engagement strategies that include specialised trade journals, broadcast media, radio talk shows and podcasts, online news portals, global business publications, and industry-specific journals (Picard, 2014). The literature further suggests that organisations achieving communication success differentiate their approach by media type and audience: specialised trade publications tend to be used for industry-specific messaging, while broader national and international outlets are used for reputation management and brand positioning strategy (Chadwick, 2017).

4.2 Media's Role in Stakeholder Influence, Brand Loyalty and Investor Confidence

The reviewed sources indicate that media influences stakeholder perceptions through multiple mechanisms. For partners and opinion formers, media coverage serves as a platform and vital tool for communicating strategic initiatives and corporate social responsibility efforts. Research by Vu, Guo and McCombs (2019) suggests that positive media coverage strengthens partnerships and enhances organisational reputation among industry leaders.

For customers and the general public, the literature suggests that media coverage affects brand awareness, trust, and brand loyalty, with favourable portrayals associated with consumer trust and positive brand associations, and negative coverage associated with reputational and sales damage (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). For investors and shareholders, positive media reports on financial performance and strategic decisions are often associated with good investment decisions and high stock performance, and effective media communication is described in the literature as helping organisations to maintain positive investor and partnership relationships, particularly during periods of organisational change or market uncertainty (Jiang & Luo, 2018).

4.3 External Influences on Media Perception

The reviewed literature points to several external factors that influences media coverage of organisational policies and strategies. Pressure and activist campaign groups, political groups, and political lobbies are described as exerting considerable influence on media reporting, particularly regarding environmental practices, labour policies, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Studies by Corrigan-Brown and Wilkes (2012) show how activist campaigns can shape media coverage of corporate activities. This dynamic was particularly evident during the 2008 financial meltdown, economic uncertainty and most importantly during election cycle of nations with weak economic output, high rate of youth unemployment, and job losses due to SME's running at loss and factories shutting down. For instance, in 2026, job cuts in major German automakers and the recent election victory of Germany's right-wing, Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) party in Saxony-Anhalt state elections, (September 2026), with 43.8 percent votes, exemplify political groups and political lobbies as exerting considerable influence, and as opinion formers on media reporting, particularly regarding immigration, border control and labour policies.

Media ownership structures are also identified in the literature as affecting how organisational actions are portrayed. Research indicates that ownership concentration in the media industry can lead to systematic biases in reporting that either benefit or disadvantage organisations depending on their alignment with ownership interests or political positions (Castells, 2013). For instance, media outlets owned by parent companies with clear political affiliations have drawn public criticism for overly partisan or sensationalistic coverage of corporate and political news.

4.4 Strategic Communication Planning Elements

The review identified five recurring elements of effective strategic communication planning across the sources examined and summarised in Table 1. The elements, components, and benefits shown in the table reflect the themes discussed in Sections 2 and 4.1- 4.3 and are drawn from the sources tagged against the corresponding themes in Table 3.

Table 1: Core Elements of Effective Strategic Communication Planning

Communication Element	Key Components	Leadership Benefits	Implementation Challenges
Media Relations	Proactive media outreach, timely response mechanisms and regular press briefings, media relationship building with key stakeholders and industry executives	Shapes external narratives, supports accurate reporting and representation, builds journalistic credibility and creates open communication channels with stakeholders such as industry partners and top executives	Resource intensity, maintaining message consistency, managing negative coverage and public opinion, media scepticism and lack of public trust.
Content Development	Press releases, multimedia assets, feature articles and digital content strategy through open and decentralised communication with key stakeholders	Supports narrative control, showcases organisational achievements and reinforces brand positioning, supports message consistency around recent achievements, upcoming projects and operational frameworks	Content oversaturation and production costs, maintaining service relevance across platform and behind the scene total coordination
Stakeholder Engagement	Regular stakeholder dialogue with key industry partners and top executives, industry association collaboration, focus groups, advisory panels and consultants	Supports trust and relationship building, provides feedback channels, helps align organisational messaging and supports advocacy networks for progress and	Balancing diverse interests, expectation management and resource allocation, measuring effectiveness and real progress

Communication Element	Key Components	Leadership Benefits	Implementation Challenges
		measurable improvement	
Reputation Management	Media monitoring and sentiment analysis, quick crisis response protocols, issue identification	Supports identification of emerging risks, thereby enabling proactive responses, supports organisational values, supports leadership credibility and organisational integrity	Information overload, rapid response requirements, resource constraints during cost-cutting measures or change management
Transparency & Accountability	Regular performance reporting, open communication channels with key stakeholders and industry executives, ethical frameworks with stakeholder feedback mechanisms	Supports organisational trust and strengthens stakeholder relationships, supports leadership credibility and reinforces core organisational values	Information sensitivity and competitive implications such as meeting diverse expectations and balancing transparency with organisational strategy.

4.5 Media Influence Across Key Stakeholder Groups

Building on the discussion in Section 4.2, Table 2 summarises how different stakeholder groups are reached through distinct media channels in the reviewed literature, the mechanisms through which media coverage is described as shaping their perceptions, and the strategic responses organisations are reported to adopt for each group. As with Table 1, the content of Table 2 reflects the sources discussed in Section 4.2 and tagged under the corresponding themes in Table 3.

Table 2: Media Influence on Key Stakeholder Groups

Stakeholder Groups	Primary Media Channels	Influence Mechanisms	Strategic Response Approaches
Investors & Shareholders	Financial press such as quarterly and annual analyst reports, financial news networks (e.g. Bloomberg TV, CNBC news alerts)	Financial performance reporting via news flashes and social media posts, strategic decision coverage and leadership profiles, market analysis and product development pipelines	Regular financial updates via news flashes and social media, executive media training, transparent reporting, analyst relationship building with key stakeholders and top executives of key sectors

Stakeholder Groups	Primary Media Channels	Influence Mechanisms	Strategic Response Approaches
Customers & Consumers	Consumer publications such as social and print media, product reviews, lifestyle media, sports news channels	Brand perception coverage and product reviews, corporate reputation stories such as customer experience narratives of products and services	Customer testimonials through influencer partnerships, true product messaging alignment, customer-centred storytelling, promo and periodic promotional pricing strategy
Employees & Talent	Industry publications such as professional networks and internal communications alignment with colleagues, employment media channels such as LinkedIn, Stepstone, and Hotelcareer.com	Organisational culture coverage, leadership profiles, workplace collaboration initiatives, industry recognition of staff and professionals	Employee advocacy programmes, leadership alignment communication frameworks, positive workplace storytelling, transparent internal messaging to key stakeholders
Regulators & Policy Makers	Policy publications in industry journals, government communications through legal media channels	Regulatory compliance frameworks, policy impact analysis and industry standard coverage, legal and ethical framework discussions with feedback mechanisms and measurable indicators	Position papers, industry leadership, policy engagements and regulatory relationship building with industry partners and top executives
Partners & Suppliers	Trade publications in social and print media, industry forums, business networks, supply chain media channels	Partnership announcements via newsflashes and social media post, industry trend coverage, supply chain narratives, innovation stories such as new research and development programmes	Joint communications, collaborative messaging, value-chain storytelling, industry leadership positioning, financial performance reporting via news flashes and social media post

4.6 Thematic and Comparative Analysis of the Reviewed Literature

To deepen the synthesis, the reviewed literature and organisational examples were further analysed across four dimensions: thematic coverage of the corpus of reviewed sources (Table 3), a comparative reading of the three organisational case examples discussed in the review, including their limitations (Table 4), a synthesis of media reporting challenges and their corresponding strategic responses (Table 5), and the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study (Table 6). Consistent with the review-based design described in Section 3, these tables present a structured synthesis of the reviewed literature rather than statistical output from newly collected quantitative or survey data.

Table 3: Thematic Distribution of the Reviewed Literature (2005-2026)

Theme	Representative Sources	Sources Addressing Theme (n)
Media influence on stakeholder perception and corporate reputation	Cornelissen (2020), Kiouisis & Wu (2008), Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis (2006), Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007), Vu, Guo & McCombs (2019)	5
External influences on media coverage (ownership, politics, activism)	Bowen & Zheng (2015), Castells (2013), Corrigan-Brown & Wilkes (2012), Hanitzsch & Vos (2018)	4
Crisis communication and reputational recovery	Coombs & Holladay (2014), Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis (2006)	2
Structural and economic pressures on journalism	Picard (2014), Rosenstiel & Kovach (2014), Lewis, Williams & Franklin (2008)	3
Digital and social media communication dynamics	Chadwick (2017), Castells (2013), Naveed et al. (2011), Veltri & Atanasova (2017)	4
Stakeholder engagement and cross-sector partnerships	Jiang & Luo (2018), Stadtler & Van Wassenhove (2016)	2
Artificial intelligence, algorithmic communication, and governance	Prasad Agrawal (2024), Duffy & Meisner (2023), Cramer & Rudeloff (2026), Birrer & Just (2025), O'Neil & Vasquez (2026)	5

Note: Counts reflect thematic tagging of the twenty-three peer-reviewed and industry sources reviewed for this study's thematic synthesis (see Section 3.2), several sources address more than one theme and are therefore counted under multiple categories, so column totals exceed the number of individual sources.

Table 4: Comparative Analysis of Organisational Case Examples Discussed in the Review

Organisation	Trigger Event	Primary Communication Response	Reported Outcome	Critical Considerations and Limitations
Tesco (2013)	Horsemeat contamination scandal	Contract termination with affected supplier, public apology via full-page press advertisements and stricter DNA testing protocols	Reported recovery of stakeholder trust and brand reputation (BBC, 2013)	The response was reactive rather than proactive, the contamination was uncovered by external DNA testing rather than Tesco's own supply-chain monitoring team, pointing to a

Organisation	Trigger Event	Primary Communication Response	Reported Outcome	Critical Considerations and Limitations
				due-diligence gap that preceded the communication response (BBC, 2013).
Unilever (2010)	Need to reposition long-term strategic direction under new CEO	Launch and sustained multi-channel communication of the "Unilever Sustainable Living Plan" (USLP) under Paul Polman	Reported strengthening of reputation for green initiatives, corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability leadership and reoriented strategic focus for the future of the organisation	Progress was mostly visible on targets Unilever could control directly, which include sourcing of raw materials, targets that depended on changing consumer behaviour proved harder to achieve, and several USLP-era commitments were later scaled back under subsequent leadership amid shareholder pressure for visible growth, illustrating the gap that can emerge between sustained communication and sustained delivery (Cornelissen, 2020).
CNN (2024)	Declining revenues and digital disruption in the news industry	Workforce reduction and consolidation of US, international and digital newsrooms into a single structure	Reduced operating costs, reflects a broader industry pattern of resource driven restructuring (Picard, 2014)	The restructuring addressed short-term financial pressure but did not resolve the underlying structural pressures on journalism funding discussed in Section 5.1. The resulting reduction in newsroom capacity may itself

Organisation	Trigger Event	Primary Communication Response	Reported Outcome	Critical Considerations and Limitations
				constrain the organisations' future access to experienced journalists (Picard, 2014).

Table 5: Media Reporting Challenges and Corresponding Strategic Communication Responses

Reporting Challenge	Underlying Driver	Strategic Response	Communication	Supporting Literature
Speed and immediacy of news cycles	24-hour news demand, competitive pressure between outlets	Ready-to-use press materials, rapid response protocols, pre-approved holding statements		Rosenstiel & Kovach (2014), Chadwick (2017)
Declining journalism resources	Falling advertising revenue, digital disruption	Providing structured, easily publishable content and data to reduce production burden on newsrooms		Picard (2014), Lewis, Williams & Franklin (2008)
Political and ownership bias	Concentrated media ownership, partisan affiliation	Diversifying media outlet relationships, building direct-to-stakeholder communication channels		Castells (2013), Hanitzsch & Vos (2018)
Activist and pressure group framing	Advocacy campaigns targeting corporate practice	Direct engagement with campaign groups, transparent policy disclosure		Corrigall-Brown & Wilkes (2012), Bowen & Zheng (2015)
Globalisation and fragmented narratives	Cross-border information flow, diverse audiences	Coordinated global and local messaging built around a consistent core narrative		Castells (2013), Kioussis & Wu (2008)
Rapid social media amplification	Bypassing traditional media gatekeeping	Social listening, sentiment analysis, and direct stakeholder engagement		Veltri & Atanasova (2017), Naveed et al. (2011), Vu, Guo & McCombs (2019)
AI-generated disinformation and deepfakes	Increasing accessibility of generative AI tools, limited public ability to detect synthetic	Synthetic media verification protocols, content provenance practices, executive and workforce training in identifying AI-generated contents		Birrer & Just (2025), O'Neil & Vasquez (2026)

Reporting Challenge	Underlying Driver	Strategic Response	Communication	Supporting Literature
	media			

Table 6: Key Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning the Review

Framework	Core Proposition	Relevance to Strategic Communication	Key Source(s)
Agenda Setting and Framing Theory	Media coverage shapes which issues the public regards as important, and how those issues are interpreted	Explains how organisations can influence stakeholder perception through message framing and media relations	Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007), Kiousis & Wu (2008)
Situational Crisis Communication Theory	Response strategy should match the level of organisational responsibility attributed to a crisis management	Provides a basis for evaluating organisational response choices during reputational threats	Coombs & Holladay (2014)
Hybrid Media System Theory	Older and newer media logics interact and co-evolve rather than one simply replacing the other	Frames the coexistence of traditional and social media within contemporary communication strategy frameworks	Chadwick (2017)
Stakeholder Theory	Organisational success depends on managing relationships with multiple, and sometimes competing, stakeholder groups	Underpins the study's stakeholder-centred view of communication planning	Cornelissen (2020), Stadtler & Van Wassenhove (2016)
Network Agenda Setting	Issues and attributes are linked in networks that travel between media agendas and public agendas	Supports analysis of how narratives spread and interconnect across platforms and amongst organisations	Vu, Guo & McCombs (2019)
Excellence Theory (AI-extended)	Two-way symmetrical communication and the communication function's strategic management role extend to organisational oversight of AI-supported communication processes	Frames communication leaders' emerging responsibility for AI transparency, ethics, and stakeholder trust	O'Neil & Vasquez (2026)

4.7 Artificial Intelligence in Strategic Communication Practice

Bringing together the sources tagged under the AI theme in Table 3, three patterns are apparent in the reviewed literature. First, generative AI is consistently described as a productivity and

augmentation tool for content creation, idea generation, and workflow efficiency rather than as a communication strategy in itself, with responsibility for strategic decisions and core judgement remaining with human input and oversight, and communication leaders of organisation's (Prasad Agrawal, 2024, O'Neil & Vasquez, 2026). Second, AI is fast changing the distribution mechanism, and not only the production side of communication:, algorithmic curation and moderation on social media platforms determine which organisational messages reach which audiences first, and in ways that are often opaque to the organisations concerned (Duffy & Meisner, 2023). Third, AI introduces governance and trust risks most visibly through deepfakes and AI-generated disinformation that existing crisis and reputation management frameworks were not originally designed to address, even though the evidence on how damaging such content proves to be in practice, it is still developing rather than settled (Birrer & Just, 2025). Taken together, the reviewed literature suggests that organisations able to combine AI-enabled efficiency with explicit governance safeguards transparency about AI use, and continued human oversight of message development are better prepared, and placed to protect stakeholders trust than those that adopt AI tools primarily for operational cost reduction or speed reasons alone (Cramer & Rudeloff, 2026).

5. Discussion

5.1 Challenges Faced by Media in Reporting Organisational Activities

The media industry encounters significant challenges in reporting organisational policies and strategies accurately. These obstacles include social, political, and cultural barriers that affect reporting quality and objectivity (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). Pressure groups, political groups, and political lobbies often attempt to shape narratives or suppress information that runs contrary to their interests, which can compromise the impartiality of media coverage (Corrigall-Brown & Wilkes, 2012). The globalisation of news media presents a further challenge, bringing diverse perspectives and agendas that make it difficult to present coherent narratives (Castells, 2013), leading to competing interpretations of organisational activities and complicating efforts to maintain consistent messaging. Furthermore, the speed and immediacy demanded by contemporary news cycles often prioritise sensationalism over contextual understanding and analysis (Chadwick, 2017).

Speed, Timing, and Quality: Speed, timing, and quality pressure creates additional strain on journalists and by extension on the organisations they report on. Journalists frequently operate under tight deadlines while needing to produce continuous quality content, which can sometimes compromise research quality and fact-checking processes before a story goes live (Rosenstiel & Kovach, 2014). This can result in inaccurate or incomplete reporting that misrepresents organisational policies and initiatives.

Financial Pressure, Declining Revenues and Digital Disruption: Financial pressure within the media industry further compound these challenges. Declining revenues and the disruption caused by newer, less experienced digital-first outlets have led to resource reduction across many major news organisations, including cutbacks in experienced journalism staff and investigative reporting budgets (Picard, 2014). For instance, in July 2024, Cable News Network, Inc (CNN) announced a significant workforce reduction and the consolidation of its US, international, and

digital news-gathering operations into a single newsroom structure, a decision that as Table 4 notes, its addressed short-term financial pressure without resolving the underlying resourcing challenge. Consequently, media outlets increasingly rely on pre-packaged information supplied by organisations, which can reduce reporting quality, independence and in-depth research on a subject before publication (Lewis et al., 2008).

5.2 Leveraging Media Constraints for Positive Outcomes

Despite these challenges, the reviewed literature suggests that organisations can strategically work within media constraints to support positive outcomes. By understanding media limitations, leadership can develop communication approaches that operate within these constraints while advancing organisational objectives (Kioussis & Wu, 2008).

Proactive Media Engagement and Building Strategic Relationships with Stakeholders:

Proactive media engagement represents a primary strategy for navigating these constraints. Organisations can provide timely and accessible information about their activities and policies, helping to shape narratives and support accurate representation in news and social media coverage (Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006). Building relationships with key media outlets and journalists can create opportunities for favourable coverage through exclusive access such as executive interviews, media events and broadcast appearances that highlight organisational achievements and initiatives. Organisations can further support the media's need for constant content by preparing ready-to-use materials, including press releases, briefings, public statements, and podcast or broadcast content, together with accurate distributable multimedia content and infographics (Naveed et al., 2011). This approach is described in the literature as helping organisational messages reach media outlets in a form that meets their production quality and needs, while supplying relevant content in a timely manner.

Tesco's response to the 2013 horsemeat scandal as discussed in Section 2.1 and summarised in Table 4, illustrates this approach: contract termination with the affected supplier, a public apology, and stricter DNA testing protocols supported a reported recovery of stakeholders trust. This should be read alongside the point made in Table 4, however, that the response followed an external discovery of the contamination rather than an internal one, the case therefore illustrates effective crisis management and strategic communication more clearly than it illustrates preventive supply-chain governance. Unilever offers a further and more mixed example. During Paul Polman's tenure as CEO, the company introduced the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP) in 2010 and communicated its sustainability initiatives across traditional, social, print, and digital channels, which is reported to have helped reorient the company's strategic focus toward long-term sustainability. As Table 4 notes, however, the parts of the plan that depended on changing consumer behaviour, rather than on Unilever's own operations proved harder to deliver, and a number of the plan's targets were later scaled back under subsequent leadership in response to shareholder pressure for stronger short-term visible growth. Reading together, the Tesco and Unilever examples suggest that sustained, well-resourced communication can support stakeholders trust in the short to medium term, but that its durability depends on whether the underlying organisational commitments are also sustained; this is the author's interpretation of

the pattern shown across the two cases rather than a conclusion stated in either of the sources cited above.

New digital platforms and social media present additional opportunities to work around traditional media constraints by enabling direct stakeholder engagement (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). Social media influencers, targeted campaigns, and owned media platforms allow organisations to shape narratives and communicate directly with key stakeholders with less reliance on traditional media intermediation, although, as Section 2.3 and Section 4.7 discusses, this same direct channel of communication is also where algorithmic curation and AI-generated contents introduces new uncertainties into how those messages are ultimately viewed, received and accepted, thereby creating new sets of opinion formers, individuals and group perceptions, and more importantly increasingly permeability to external influence and public scrutiny.

5.3 Interaction Between Media, Public Opinion and Organisational Strategy

The reviewed literature identifies complex relationships between media coverage, public opinion, and organisational strategy development. Media coverage is described as influencing stakeholder perceptions, which subsequently shape organisational decision-making and policy formulation (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Negative media coverage of environmental or social practices can generate public pressure that leads organisations to re-evaluate policies and strategies (Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006), while positive media coverage is associated with enhanced reputation and credibility, which can support strategy implementation and stakeholder buy-in (Kiousis & Wu, 2008).

Global news media amplifies these dynamics by extending their reach and influence across borders (Castells, 2013). Managers and their organisations must carefully consider how their activities are portrayed internationally, as this shapes perceptions across diverse stakeholder groups and markets. Social media further complicates these relationships by enabling rapid information sharing that can bypass traditional media vetting or controls, thereby creating alternative narratives and empowering individual and group voices that exert pressure on organisations (Veltri & Atanasova, 2017).

5.4 Innovative Approaches to Strategic Communication

The reviewed literature points to several approaches for strengthening strategic communication in management and leadership practice in the age of social media and AI. Data analytics and social listening tools can help monitor public sentiment across media platforms, by providing insight into how organisational policies and strategies are perceived (Vu, Guo & McCombs, 2019). This data-driven approach is described as supporting targeted communication strategies that address specific stakeholder concerns, supported by ready-to-use materials such as press releases, briefings, and recorded broadcast or podcast content distributed across traditional, digital, and print media channels.

Storytelling and Content Marketing: Storytelling and content marketing represent a further approach identified in the literature, proactively shaping narratives around organisational

activities (Corrigall-Brown & Wilkes, 2012). Creating content that highlights organisational impacts and aligns with stakeholder values is described as supporting trust and strategic communication implementation. Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan again illustrates how sustained and high-visibility messaging can reinforce an organisation's strategic narrative to the public, subject to the caveat set out in Section 5.2 above.

Collaborative Media Partnerships and High Contextual Coverage: Collaborative media partnerships offer opportunities for in-depth and high-context coverage of organisational initiatives (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). Such partnerships are described as helping organisations to counter the pressures created by resource constraints and external influence while building credibility with key stakeholders. For instance, through direct engagement between activist or campaign groups and senior organisational leaders to find common ground for future improvements.

Employee Advocacy Programmes and Authentic Workforce Voices: Employee advocacy programmes are described in the literature as amplifying organisational messages through authentic workforce voices (Jiang & Luo, 2018). Empowering employees to share their experiences and perspectives is associated with a sense of ownership among staff while shaping external perceptions. Strategic partnerships with other organisations such as NGO's and industry groups are also described as helping organisations address complex social and environmental issues collectively, supporting credibility and positioning organisations as responsible corporate citizens (Stadtler & Van Wassenhove, 2016).

5.5 Artificial Intelligence, Opportunities, Risks and Governance Implications

Building on Sections 2.3 and 4.7, the reviewed literature point to sets of opportunities and risks that AI poses for strategic communication as a leadership function, beyond its use as a content generation tool. On the opportunity side, AI-enabled social listening and sentiment analysis extend the data analytics approaches discussed in Section 5.4, allowing organisations to monitor stakeholder sentiments at a scale and speed that would not be feasible manually (Vu, Guo & McCombs, 2019; Prasad Agrawal, 2024). Automated content generation and algorithmic decision-making can also support the rapid-response and ready-to-use materials described in Section 5.2, in principle reducing some of the resourcing pressure that Section 5.1 identifies as constraining both journalism and organisational communication teams.

On the risk side, three concerns recur in the reviewed literature. The first is misinformation and deepfakes; AI-generated content can be used to fabricate false statements or events attributed to organisations and their leaders, although the evidence on how persuasive such content proves to be in practice remains mixed for now, executives report substantial concern about the reputational and financial exposure it creates (Birrer & Just, 2025). The second is algorithmic opacity; because platform algorithms, rather than organisations themselves increasingly determine which audiences see which messages first and how they see it, strategic communication planning has to account for a layer of influence that is difficult to observe or predict directly (Duffy & Meisner, 2023). The third is the erosion of distinctiveness that can

occur when AI adoption is used mainly to cut operational costs rather than to strengthen strategic advice, a pattern identified in research on communication consultancies that plausibly extends to in-house communication functions facing similar cost pressures (Cramer & Rudeloff, 2026).

For leadership and management practice in the age of social media and artificial intelligence (AI), the literature converges on the view that responsibility for AI governance in communication is shifting toward senior communicators themselves, who are expected to combine technical fluency with ethical and relationship-focused role; verifying the provenance of AI-assisted contents, maintaining transparency with stakeholders about where AI has been used, and training colleagues in its responsible application (O'Neil & Vasquez, 2026). In the author's interpretation, this suggests that AI governance in strategic communication is best understood as an extension of the transparency and accountability element already identified in Table 1, rather than as a wholly separate discipline. Organisations that have already invested in transparent, stakeholder-centred communication practice may therefore be better positioned to absorb AI-related risks than those introducing transparency measures for the first time in response to an AI-specific incident.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Stakeholder Perceptions in Building Trust and Relationships: Strategic communication have emerged as a critical tool for effective management and leadership practice in today's dynamic, interconnected business environments and within organisations. The study and review synthesis indicates that strategic communication is associated with organisational performance through its effect on stakeholder perceptions, trust, relationships, and through the environments, it helps to create strategy implementation frameworks. By synthesising media dynamics and stakeholder engagement processes described in the literature, the review offers leaders a structured way to consider communication as a strategic asset rather than merely an information dissemination function.

Key Patterns Identified in the Reviewed Literature: The synthesis points to several patterns with implications for management practice, each of which reflects a recurring position in the cited sources rather than a new finding generated by this study. First, the reviewed sources suggest that organisations benefit from developing comprehensive approaches to media engagement that acknowledge both opportunities and constraints in the current media landscape, investing in relationships with key media outlets while also developing direct communication channels with stakeholders. Second, effective strategic communication is described in the literature as requiring an understanding of the complex interplay between media coverage, public opinion, and organisational strategy, which may help leaders anticipate challenges and opportunities in the communication environment. Third, the literature on innovative approaches, including data analytics, storytelling, collaborative partnerships, employee advocacy and increasingly AI-enabled tools associates these practices with stronger communication effectiveness and stakeholder engagements, subject to the governance considerations discussed in Section 5.5. Fourth, the reviewed sources consistently link transparency and accountability to trust and to the ability to implement strategic initiatives, a pattern that this review's own comparative analysis in Table 4 also illustrates through the contrast between Tesco's reactive but

ultimately transparent crisis response, and Unilever's partially unmet longer-term sustainability commitments.

Contribution to Strategic Communication Literature: The study therefore contributes to existing understanding of strategic communication as more than a support function. The literature synthesised here consistently treats it as a leadership and management competency tool and mechanism that is linked to organisational performance and long-term sustainability practice, while adding a more developed account of how generative AI, algorithmic communication, and AI-related governance risks are reshaping that competency. Because this review and study is based entirely on secondary sources and organisational case reporting, these patterns should be understood as a synthesis of the existing literature rather than as independently verified empirical findings. Future research should therefore build on the thematic patterns identified in this study using primary methods, such as interviews with communication leaders or organisational case studies, and should continue to track how emerging technologies and evolving media ecosystems, including AI-enabled monitoring, content generation, and governance tools further transform strategic communication in practice.

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