

BEYOND GREENWASHING AND AI-WASHING

Trust and Authentic Communication in the Age of Artificial Intelligence



Assist. Prof. Dr. Özden ÖZLÜ

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**Trust and Authentic Communication in
the Age of Artificial Intelligence**

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Trust, Communication and Contemporary Society	1
1.2. The Digital Trust Crisis.....	6
1.3. From Greenwashing to AI-Washing.....	11
2. UNDERSTANDING TRUST IN COMMUNICATION.....	15
2.1. What is Trust?	15
2.2. Trust and Credibility	18
2.3. Trust, Legitimacy and Reputation	21
2.4. Stakeholder Relationships and Trust.....	24
3. THE DIGITAL TRUST CRISIS	27
3.1. Misinformation, Disinformation and Malinformation... 30	
3.2. Social Media and the Erosion of Trust.....	33
3.3. Artificial Intelligence and the New Challenges of Trust.....	36
3.4. AI Washing and the Erosion of Trust	40
4. GREENWASHING AND ORGANIZATIONAL TRUST	44
5. REBUILDING TRUST IN THE DIGITAL AGE	47
6. THE FUTURE OF TRUST: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	52
7. CONCLUSION.....	55
REFERENCES.....	60

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Trust, Communication and Contemporary Society

Trust is one of the fundamental building blocks of social life and communication processes. Relationships among individuals, institutions, and societies are largely built on trust. In an environment where trust is absent, cooperation weakens, uncertainty increases, and the sustainability of social systems becomes more difficult. For this reason, trust is not only a central concept in psychology, sociology, or political science, but also in communication, public relations, and corporate governance studies (Luhmann, 1979; Giddens, 1990; Fukuyama, 1995; Göktürk, 2017).

With the development of modern societies, the nature of trust has also changed. In traditional societies, trust was largely constructed through face-to-face relations, family ties, and local communities. In modern societies, however, individuals are often required to trust institutions, expert systems, and technological structures with which they have no direct personal relationship. According to Giddens (1990), one of the most distinctive characteristics of modernity is the growing reliance of individuals on expert systems in order to sustain everyday life. Many structures, ranging from banking systems and healthcare services to

educational institutions and digital platforms, operate through the trust placed in them by individuals. Trust is therefore not limited to interpersonal relations; it also plays a decisive role in the relationships established with institutions, systems, and broader social structures. In this respect, trust may be regarded as one of the key mechanisms that contributes to the maintenance of social order and social integration (Giddens, 1990; Can, 2019).

In order to understand more clearly how trust has transformed across communication environments, it is useful to compare the main characteristics of traditional and digital communication periods. Table 1 summarizes the key differences between these two periods in terms of information production, verification mechanisms, and the ways in which trust is formed.

Table 1. The Transformation of Trust in Traditional and Digital Communication Environments

Dimension	Traditional Period	Digital Period
Information source	Limited number of institutional actors	Multiple actors
Information flow	One-way	Multi-directional
Verification	Editorial control	User responsibility
Basis of trust	Institutional authority	Transparency and verifiability
Risks	Lack of information	Information pollution and disinformation

Source: Prepared by the author.

As shown in Table 1, trust in digital communication environments is no longer based solely on institutional authority. It is also increasingly shaped by transparency, verifiability, and stakeholder participation.

A similar transformation has taken place in the field of communication. In the traditional media period, information flow was managed by a relatively limited number of institutional actors. With digitalization, however, the production and circulation of information have become largely democratized. The widespread use of social media platforms has enabled individuals to become not only consumers of information but also content producers. At first glance, this transformation appears to have created a more participatory and pluralistic communication environment. Over time, however, it has also generated new problems. Information overload, misinformation, disinformation, and difficulties of content verification have become among the most significant challenges of digital communication environments (Castells, 2010; van Dijck, 2013).

As the social influence of digital platforms has increased over the last decade, trust in institutions, media, and information sources has once again become a major issue of

debate. Public institutions, media organizations, corporations, and even scientific institutions are now being questioned more intensely by different segments of society. This tendency is also visible in contemporary research. For instance, the Edelman Trust Barometer reports show that trust in institutions varies considerably across countries and sectors, and that trust has become increasingly fragile (Edelman, 2024). In this process, the expansion of social media platforms, the growth of information pollution, and the increasing visibility of disinformation have also contributed to the weakening of trust. The difficulty of verifying content produced and circulated rapidly in digital environments increases individuals' suspicion toward institutions, media, and information sources (Babacan, 2014).

One of the reasons for the growing fragility of trust is the increased visibility of inconsistencies between institutional discourse and institutional practice. Digital communication environments make institutional activities more transparent while also enabling stakeholders to monitor organizations more closely. A company's environmental performance, working conditions, ethical practices, or technological claims can now become visible to the public much more rapidly than in the past. Digital native

generations evaluate corporate sustainability and social responsibility activities more critically and place greater emphasis on sincerity, transparency, and continuity (Yazar, 2026). In contemporary communication environments, corporate trustworthiness is therefore associated not only with the messages delivered by organizations, but also with the extent to which these messages are supported by actual practices. Research indicates that transparency, effective communication, and stakeholder engagement play a decisive role in the formation of trust in digital environments (Kesar, 2026).

This transformation has brought new debates to the field of strategic communication. On the one hand, organizations seek to create a positive image through themes such as sustainability, social responsibility, and technological innovation. On the other hand, stakeholders increasingly question the accuracy and credibility of these claims. The spread of AI-supported communication practices has led to renewed discussions about fundamental ethical principles such as transparency, accuracy, privacy, and responsibility (Özbay, 2025). Generative artificial intelligence is not only a technical tool in communication processes; it is also a structure that can shape discourse production and public perception (Konat & Kaya, 2026). The growing use of

environmental responsibility and artificial intelligence as central themes in corporate communication has therefore made the relationship between trust and legitimacy even more significant.

This book proceeds from this point of departure. Its main aim is to reconsider the concept of trust in contemporary communication environments and to discuss the effects of current communication problems such as greenwashing and AI-washing on trust, reputation, and organizational legitimacy. The central argument advanced throughout the book is that technological developments and sustainability discourses alone are not sufficient to generate trust. Trust can become sustainable only when it is supported by transparency, consistency, accountability, and human-centered communication practices.

1.2. The Digital Trust Crisis

The integration of digital technologies into everyday life has transformed communication processes in profound ways. Easier access to information, the widespread availability of content creation tools, and the global adoption of social media platforms have fundamentally changed how individuals communicate. At the same time, the opportunities created by digitalization have introduced

a range of challenges that have reopened discussions surrounding trust. A growing body of research suggests that trust has become increasingly fragile within contemporary digital communication environments (Edelman, 2024).

One of the primary factors contributing to the erosion of trust in digital environments is information overload. While information production and distribution in traditional media systems were largely controlled by established institutional actors, content creation on digital platforms has become highly decentralized. Although this development has increased the visibility of diverse perspectives and voices, it has also facilitated the rapid circulation of information that has not been adequately verified. Individuals are exposed to thousands of messages, news stories, comments, and visual materials every day, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish reliable sources from unreliable ones within a dense and constantly evolving information environment (Castells, 2010; van Dijck, 2013; Balçioğlu & Doğan, 2023).

Alongside information overload, misinformation and disinformation have emerged as central elements of the digital trust crisis. Although the digital age has

significantly improved access to information, it has also accelerated the spread of false and misleading content (Bermes, 2021). Disinformation has become a serious concern because it undermines informed decision-making processes and weakens trust within society. While misinformation and disinformation are not new phenomena, the widespread use of digital platforms has transformed them into threats capable of reaching audiences on a scale unprecedented in previous communication eras (Çaycı, 2025). Misinformation refers to the unintentional dissemination of inaccurate or incomplete information, whereas disinformation involves the deliberate circulation of misleading content with the intention of deceiving audiences. The speed and reach of digital platforms allow such content to spread rapidly and reach millions of users within a very short period of time. As a result, trust is affected not only in relation to media organizations but also in public institutions, scientific organizations, and private sector actors (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

The role of algorithms has also attracted considerable attention in discussions of the digital trust crisis. Social media platforms and digital service providers largely determine the content users encounter through algorithmic

systems. Although these systems are designed to personalize user experiences, they can also contribute to the formation of environments commonly described as echo chambers and filter bubbles (Hülür & Bayır, 2021). When users are repeatedly exposed to similar viewpoints, opportunities to encounter alternative perspectives may diminish, while polarization may intensify. Consequently, trust relationships within digital environments become increasingly complex and difficult to sustain (Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2018).

Another dimension of the digital trust crisis is the transformation of content production processes. The growing use of generative artificial intelligence has made it possible to produce text, images, audio, and video content more rapidly and at significantly lower costs. While these developments create important opportunities for communication professionals and organizations, they also raise new questions regarding the origin, authenticity, and reliability of digital content. Deepfake technologies, synthetic media applications, and automated content generation systems introduce new risks that may affect individuals' trust in the information they encounter online (Özbay, 2025; Konat & Kaya, 2026).

As a consequence of these developments, trust has become one of the most critical issues in contemporary communication. Organizations can no longer rely solely on visibility or message production; they must also develop communication practices that are transparent, consistent, and verifiable. The sustainability of trust in digital environments depends largely on the quality of stakeholder relationships and the degree of alignment between organizational discourse and organizational behavior. Research demonstrates that transparency, effective communication, and stakeholder engagement play a decisive role in building trust within digital environments (Kesar, 2026). Consequently, one of the central questions in contemporary communication concerns how more sustainable and trustworthy communication strategies can be developed in response to the trust crisis generated by digital transformation.

The practical consequences of this crisis are particularly evident in emerging communication practices related to sustainability and artificial intelligence. Discussions surrounding greenwashing and AI-washing have gained significance precisely within this context. Questions concerning the extent to which environmental and technological claims are supported by actual organizational

practices have become central to broader debates about how trust is established, maintained, and ultimately lost in the digital age.

1.3. From Greenwashing to AI-Washing

One of the most significant challenges facing organizations in the digital age is the ability to gain and sustain stakeholder trust. Today, consumers, investors, employees, and other stakeholder groups evaluate not only the products and services offered by organizations but also their environmental performance, ethical practices, and broader societal impact (Karakulle, 2025). Similarly, increasing attention is being directed toward the technologies organizations employ, their data management practices, and their investments in artificial intelligence (Winanto, 2025). As a result, sustainability and technology have become increasingly prominent themes in contemporary corporate communication strategies.

In recent years, sustainability has emerged as one of the most frequently used concepts in corporate communication. The growing severity of environmental problems, the increasing visibility of climate change impacts, and the prominence of sustainable development goals on the global agenda have encouraged organizations

to highlight their sustainability-related activities. Many organizations now place initiatives such as reducing carbon emissions, improving energy efficiency, expanding recycling practices, and developing social responsibility projects at the center of their communication efforts (Risteska & Boztepe Taşkiran, 2023). However, the widespread adoption of sustainability discourses has also introduced new challenges. Some organizations may present their environmental performance more positively than it actually is or portray limited initiatives as evidence of comprehensive environmental transformation. This tendency has generated growing concerns regarding the credibility of sustainability communication and has contributed to the emergence of the concept of greenwashing. In its broadest sense, greenwashing refers to attempts by organizations to create an exaggerated perception of environmental responsibility or to present themselves as more environmentally conscious than they truly are (Torelli, Balluchi, & Lazzini, 2020).

A similar process has become increasingly visible in the field of artificial intelligence. The rapid expansion of generative AI applications has strengthened organizational narratives surrounding technology-driven transformation. AI-powered products, data analytics systems, automation

solutions, and intelligent platforms are frequently promoted as sources of competitive advantage across a wide range of industries (Winanto, 2025). While many of these developments are based on genuine technological innovation, some organizations may employ AI-related terminology more extensively in marketing and corporate communication than their actual technological capabilities would justify.

This trend has given rise to a relatively new phenomenon known as AI-washing. AI-washing refers to the practice of exaggerating the extent to which artificial intelligence is used in products, services, or organizational processes, or presenting limited technological applications as advanced AI systems (Elhajjar & Itani, 2025). As in the case of greenwashing, the central issue is not the existence of the technology itself but rather communication practices that may mislead stakeholders. Research suggests that perceptions of AI-washing can contribute to declining trust and generate negative word-of-mouth communication among stakeholders (Joo, 2025).

Although greenwashing and AI-washing emerge in different contexts, both concepts share a common foundation: trust. In both cases, organizations may seek to

create a favorable image in the short term while exposing themselves to long-term risks such as reputational damage, stakeholder skepticism, and trust erosion (Alsaggaf, 2025). In the digital age, stakeholders pay attention not only to what organizations claim but also to the extent to which those claims are supported by observable practices. Inconsistencies between organizational discourse and organizational behavior are becoming increasingly visible and are identified more rapidly by the public than ever before.

For this reason, greenwashing and AI-washing should not be viewed merely as communication mistakes or marketing tactics. Rather, they are directly connected to broader questions concerning how trust is created, maintained, and ultimately lost in the digital age. The central challenge facing contemporary corporate communication is not whether organizations speak about sustainability or artificial intelligence, but whether they can support such claims through transparent, verifiable, and accountable practices.

2. UNDERSTANDING TRUST IN COMMUNICATION

Trust is one of the most fundamental elements of communication processes. The sustainability of relationships among individuals, organizations, and societies depends largely on trust. Across a wide range of fields, including public relations, corporate communication, media studies, and digital platforms, trust is widely recognized as one of the key factors determining the effectiveness of communication. For this reason, understanding the theoretical foundations of trust is essential for evaluating the trust-related challenges that emerge in contemporary communication environments. This chapter examines the concept of trust within the context of credibility, legitimacy, and stakeholder relationships.

2.1. What is Trust?

Trust is a multidimensional concept that can be defined as the development of positive expectations regarding the future behavior of individuals, organizations, or systems. In everyday life, people constantly encounter situations characterized by uncertainty. According to Luhmann (1979), trust is one of the fundamental mechanisms that enables individuals to make decisions in the face of

uncertainty and complexity. A certain level of trust is therefore necessary for maintaining social relationships, facilitating cooperation, and achieving shared goals. Trust reflects the belief that another party will behave in a manner that is honest, competent, and predictable (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

The concept of trust has been approached from a variety of perspectives across the social sciences. Research conducted in sociology, psychology, political science, economics, and communication demonstrates that trust performs important functions at both the individual and societal levels. Consequently, trust is not merely a concept used to explain interpersonal relationships; it is also regarded as a fundamental mechanism that enables the functioning of organizations, institutions, systems, and broader social structures (Rothstein, 2005). One of the key factors that enhances the importance of trust is uncertainty. Because individuals cannot fully predict the future, they often make decisions based on trust. Depositing money in a bank, receiving services from a healthcare provider, purchasing a product from a particular brand, or conducting transactions through a digital platform all require a certain degree of trust. In the absence of trust, individuals tend to

perceive higher levels of risk and become less willing to engage in cooperative relationships (Luhmann, 1979).

From a communication perspective, trust is one of the core elements that enables messages to be accepted and communication processes to function effectively. When a source is perceived as trustworthy, audiences are more likely to accept and internalize the messages being communicated. Conversely, a lack of trust can significantly reduce the effectiveness of communication efforts. Morgan and Hunt (1994) emphasize the central role of trust in sustaining long-term relationships. For this reason, trust is widely regarded as one of the foundational elements of public relations, corporate communication, and strategic communication, where the development and maintenance of long-term relationships are primary objectives.

The process of digitalization has introduced new dimensions to the concept of trust. While trust in traditional communication environments was often grounded in institutional authority and expertise, digital communication environments place greater emphasis on factors such as transparency, verifiability, and participation. Today, individuals evaluate not only what organizations say but also the extent to which their actions

support their claims. As a result, trust has become one of the most extensively discussed concepts in contemporary communication studies.

2.2. Trust and Credibility

Although the concepts of trust and credibility are often used interchangeably in everyday language, they have distinct meanings within the communication literature. Trust refers to individuals' positive expectations regarding the future behavior of a person, organization, or system, whereas credibility is primarily concerned with the extent to which that person, organization, or system is perceived as accurate, honest, competent, and consistent (Atmaca & Baş, 2023). In other words, trust reflects the quality and outcome of a relationship, while credibility constitutes one of the key factors that contribute to the development of trust. Within communication processes, credibility is widely regarded as one of the most important determinants of message effectiveness. Regardless of how strong a message may be, the likelihood of audience acceptance decreases significantly if the source is not perceived as credible (Işık, 2014). By contrast, messages originating from credible sources tend to be accepted more readily and possess greater persuasive power. For this reason,

communication research has long focused on concepts such as source credibility, message credibility, and media credibility.

Source credibility is associated with perceptions of the expertise, honesty, and trustworthiness of the individual or organization delivering a message. Statements made by recognized experts generally have a different impact from those made by individuals who lack sufficient knowledge or expertise on a particular issue (Umeogu, 2012). Perceived honesty also constitutes a critical dimension of credibility. If an organization has previously provided misleading information or failed to fulfill its promises, the effectiveness of its subsequent communication efforts may be significantly reduced. Consequently, credibility is not only related to possessing knowledge and expertise but also to demonstrating consistent and ethical behavior over time (Güven, 2016). Message credibility, on the other hand, concerns the accuracy, consistency, and verifiability of the information being communicated. Particularly in digital communication environments, individuals pay attention not only to who communicates a message but also to whether the information presented is supported by evidence and can be independently verified. Easier access to information enables users to compare different sources,

making verification processes an increasingly important component of communication practices (Çömlekçi & Başol, 2019). As a result, organizations are encouraged to adopt communication approaches that are more transparent, accountable, and evidence-based.

From a corporate communication perspective, credibility directly influences the sustainability of stakeholder relationships. Organizations are evaluated not only through their products and services but also through their social responsibility initiatives, sustainability practices, employee policies, and responses during periods of crisis. As consistency between organizational discourse and organizational behavior increases, credibility tends to strengthen. Conversely, the emergence of inconsistencies may result in declining trust among stakeholders (Gedikçi Öndoğan, 2021). For this reason, credibility is no longer viewed solely as the responsibility of communication departments but rather as the collective outcome of an organization's overall conduct and performance. Digitalization has introduced additional dimensions to the concept of credibility. The widespread use of social media platforms, the rise of user-generated content, and the increasing prevalence of AI-generated materials have made credibility assessments considerably more complex. Today,

individuals can compare organizational statements with information from multiple sources, access online reviews, and examine an organization's past practices with relative ease. Consequently, credibility can no longer be established solely through corporate messaging. Instead, it has become a strategic asset that must be continuously maintained, reinforced, and reproduced through consistent organizational behavior and transparent communication practices (Çömlekçi & Başol, 2019).

The relationship between trust and credibility also plays an important role in understanding the concepts of corporate reputation and legitimacy. When an organization is perceived as credible, stakeholder trust is strengthened; increasing trust, in turn, contributes to the development of a positive reputation and greater legitimacy over the long term. For this reason, contemporary communication scholarship considers credibility to be one of the primary antecedents of trust and recognizes it as a fundamental component of effective communication strategies.

2.3. Trust, Legitimacy and Reputation

Although the concepts of trust, legitimacy, and reputation are closely related within the corporate communication literature, they represent distinct dimensions of

organizational relationships. Trust refers to stakeholders' positive expectations regarding an organization's future behavior, whereas legitimacy concerns the extent to which an organization's activities are perceived as appropriate, acceptable, and justified by society. Reputation, in turn, reflects the cumulative evaluations and perceptions formed about an organization over time. When an organization is perceived as trustworthy, stakeholders are more likely to develop positive expectations toward it, and stronger trust can facilitate the acceptance of organizational activities. For this reason, trust plays an important role not only in interpersonal relationships but also in the processes through which organizations gain social acceptance and support (Balta Peltekoğlu & Ayan, 2023).

The concept of legitimacy primarily focuses on the relationship between organizations and society. Even when an organization operates within legal boundaries, it may still face legitimacy challenges if its actions are perceived as inconsistent with societal expectations. Today, issues such as environmental sustainability, social responsibility, diversity, inclusion, and ethical governance play a significant role in legitimacy assessments. Stakeholders evaluate not only economic performance but also how organizations fulfill their broader social responsibilities

(Gedikçi Öndoğan, 2021). This demonstrates that corporate communication extends beyond the simple transmission of information and serves as a mechanism through which organizational values and social responsibility commitments are made visible. The legitimacy literature emphasizes that social acceptance cannot be explained solely by compliance with laws and regulations. According to Suchman (1995), legitimacy refers to the perception that an organization's actions are desirable, proper, and appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms, values, and beliefs. Consequently, organizations are assessed not only according to their economic achievements but also according to their ethical conduct, social responsibility practices, and relationships with stakeholders. Particularly in digital communication environments, where stakeholders can monitor organizational activities more closely than ever before, legitimacy has become an asset that must be continuously maintained, negotiated, and reproduced. Consistency between organizational discourse and organizational behavior plays a crucial role in sustaining legitimacy.

Reputation, by contrast, is a strategic asset that may take years to build but can be damaged in a very short period of time. Communication activities, product and service

quality, employee relations, crisis management performance, and social responsibility initiatives all contribute to the formation of organizational reputation. Digital communication environments have made the relationship between trust, legitimacy, and reputation more visible and more immediate. Through social media platforms, organizational activities can be observed, evaluated, and criticized by wider audiences. As a result, maintaining a strong reputation in the digital age requires not only the preservation of trust but also the continuous reinforcement of legitimacy.

2.4. Stakeholder Relationships and Trust

Organizations do not operate solely for customers. Employees, investors, suppliers, media organizations, public institutions, local communities, and non-governmental organizations are also among the key stakeholder groups with which organizations interact (Freeman, Harrison, & Wicks, 2007). Today, organizational success is evaluated not only in terms of economic performance but also according to the capacity to establish and maintain sustainable relationships with diverse stakeholder groups. Trust lies at the core of these relationships. Stakeholders evaluate organizations not only

on the basis of what they say but also according to their past behavior and expectations regarding how they are likely to act in the future. While transparent, consistent, and accountable communication practices support the development of trust, contradictory messages and unfulfilled promises may lead to a loss of trust. In this context, trust is viewed not only as an outcome of positive relationships but also as a fundamental element that enables the continuity of stakeholder support (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The relationship between trust and stakeholder relations becomes particularly visible during periods of uncertainty and crisis. Stakeholders who trust an organization are more likely to demonstrate commitment, place greater confidence in organizational statements, and adopt more supportive attitudes in the face of negative developments. By contrast, when trust levels are low, the effectiveness of communication efforts may decline and stakeholder relationships may become increasingly fragile. For this reason, trust is regarded not only as a consequence of positive relationships but also as a strategic resource that sustains stakeholder support over time (Freeman et al., 2007).

In stakeholder relationships characterized by high levels of trust, cooperation develops more easily, support for the

organization increases, and the effects of potential crises can be more limited. Conversely, when trust is damaged, stakeholders may approach organizational statements with greater skepticism, and relationships between organizations and their stakeholders may become increasingly vulnerable. In digital communication environments, the consequences of trust loss can spread much more rapidly and affect organizational reputation within a short period of time. Stakeholder expectations also evolve over time. Today, stakeholders expect not only high-quality products and services but also ethical conduct, social responsibility, environmental sensitivity, and transparent governance practices (Gedikçi Öndoğan, 2021). Meeting these expectations requires more than effective communication activities alone. Communication practices must be supported by organizational behavior and concrete actions. Within contemporary corporate communication, trust is no longer viewed merely as an outcome of communication; rather, it is regarded as a strategic value that forms the foundation of the relationship between organizations and their stakeholders (Balta Peltekoğlu & Ayan, 2023).

Maintaining trust is a long-term and continuous process. An organization may spend years building trust, yet a

single crisis, ethical violation, or misleading communication practice can significantly damage it. In this respect, the preservation of trust is considered one of the most important organizational responsibilities for ensuring the sustainability of stakeholder relationships.

3. THE DIGITAL TRUST CRISIS

The widespread adoption of digital technologies has made access to information easier than at any other point in history. Through the internet, social media platforms, and mobile technologies, individuals can access developments occurring anywhere in the world within seconds (Castells, 2010). At first glance, such developments might be expected to create a more informed, more connected, and more knowledgeable society. However, digital transformation has not only generated new opportunities but has also introduced new challenges that have reopened discussions surrounding trust. In traditional communication environments, the production and distribution of information were largely controlled by established institutions. Newspapers, television organizations, universities, and public institutions held considerable authority in the creation and dissemination of information.

Digital communication environments, by contrast, have democratized information production by enabling individuals to become content creators themselves. While this transformation has increased the visibility of diverse perspectives, it has also made it more difficult to monitor information quality and accuracy (van Dijck, 2013).

Today, individuals are exposed to thousands of messages, news stories, comments, and visual materials every day. This dramatic increase in the volume of information does not necessarily make access to accurate information easier (Bermes, 2021). On the contrary, the simultaneous activity of countless information sources can contribute to information pollution. Particularly on social media platforms, the rapid spread of unverified content may create uncertainty regarding which information can be trusted (Çömlekçi & Başol, 2019). One of the major drivers of the digital trust crisis is the growing prevalence of misinformation and disinformation (Balçioğlu & Doğan, 2023). While inaccurate information is sometimes shared unintentionally, in other cases it is deliberately created and disseminated for specific purposes. The speed-driven and engagement-oriented nature of digital platforms enables attention-grabbing content to reach large audiences regardless of its accuracy. This phenomenon affects not

only individuals' information-seeking processes but also trust in institutions, media organizations, and experts. Another important factor is the role of algorithms. Social media platforms and digital services present content based on users' interests and preferences. Although these systems are designed to improve user experience, they can also result in individuals being exposed primarily to viewpoints similar to their own (Pariser, 2011). Reduced exposure to alternative perspectives may increase social polarization and weaken the perception of a shared reality. In environments where a common sense of reality becomes fragmented, trust relationships also tend to become increasingly fragile (Hülür & Bayır, 2021).

In recent years, the widespread adoption of generative artificial intelligence technologies has added a new dimension to discussions of digital trust (Konat & Kaya, 2026). AI-powered content generation tools can produce text, images, audio, and video materials that are often difficult to distinguish from human-created content. While these developments provide significant opportunities in terms of efficiency and creativity, they also raise new questions regarding the origin, authenticity, and reliability of information. In particular, fake images, synthetic videos, and misleading AI-generated content have the potential to

intensify existing trust concerns and contribute to the deepening of the digital trust crisis.

The effects of the digital trust crisis are not limited to individuals. Organizations are also directly affected by these transformations. Stakeholders can now verify organizational statements through multiple sources, examine online reviews, and easily access information about past organizational practices. As a result, maintaining trust has become more challenging than ever before, yet also more important than ever. In contemporary communication environments, trust can no longer be sustained merely through the production of persuasive messages; it requires consistent actions that support and validate those messages over time.

3.1. Misinformation, Disinformation and Malinformation

Understanding the digital trust crisis requires a clear distinction between different forms of false and misleading information. Not all inaccurate information is produced in the same way, nor does it generate the same consequences. In recent years, the concepts of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation have gained increasing attention within communication research and

have become a widely accepted framework for understanding contemporary information disorders (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Balcıoğlu & Doğan, 2023; Çaycı, 2025).

Misinformation refers to the sharing of false, inaccurate, or incomplete information without malicious intent. Such content is often disseminated by individuals who genuinely believe it to be accurate. Examples include social media users sharing news stories without verifying their accuracy or recirculating outdated information. The speed-oriented nature of digital platforms enables this type of content to spread rapidly and reach large audiences within a short period of time (Babacan, 2014). Disinformation, by contrast, involves the deliberate creation and dissemination of false information. The primary objective is to influence, manipulate, or mislead particular individuals, organizations, or communities. Fake news, fabricated content, manipulated images, and misleading statistics are commonly regarded as forms of disinformation. Such practices are particularly visible in political communication processes and during periods of social crisis, where efforts to shape public opinion become more intense (Sunstein, 2018). The concept of malinformation refers to situations in which accurate information is used with the intention of

causing harm. In these cases, the information itself is not false; rather, the purpose behind its disclosure raises ethical concerns. Examples include the publication of private correspondence, the dissemination of personal data, or the presentation of information outside its original context. Malinformation is therefore associated not only with issues of accuracy but also with broader concerns related to ethics, privacy, and responsible communication practices (Özbay, 2025).

The distinctions among these three concepts contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the causes of the digital trust crisis. While inaccurate information may sometimes result from individual mistakes or misunderstandings, in other cases it may emerge as the outcome of organized and strategic communication efforts. In both situations, trust in information, institutions, and communication processes can be significantly damaged (Edelman, 2024). In the digital age, protecting trust requires more than simply producing accurate information. It also requires the development of effective verification mechanisms capable of reducing the circulation of false and misleading content.

3.2. Social Media and the Erosion of Trust

Social media platforms are among the most influential communication environments of the digital age. Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, and similar platforms have significantly transformed the ways in which individuals access information, produce content, and interact with others. While the production and distribution of information in traditional media systems were largely controlled by established institutions, social media platforms have opened content creation to widespread user participation (Değirmenci, 2024). Although this transformation has made communication processes more democratic, it has also introduced new challenges related to trust. The formation of trust within social media environments is not limited to content shared by organizations. User comments, online reviews, and the experiences of other users also play an important role in shaping perceptions of trust. Particularly in digital environments, individuals often place greater value on the experiences and recommendations of other users than on corporate messages. This demonstrates that trust is shaped not only through organizational communication activities but also through user-generated content and online interactions. The ability of positive or negative experiences

to reach large audiences within a short period of time has accelerated both the formation and the erosion of trust compared to previous communication eras (Çömlekçi & Başol, 2019).

One of the most significant ways in which social media influences trust is through the diversification of information sources. Users no longer receive information solely from newspapers or television channels; they also rely on friends, content creators, online communities, and various digital platforms (Değirmenci, 2024). While the expansion of information sources facilitates access to diverse viewpoints, it can also make it more difficult to determine which sources are trustworthy. This challenge becomes particularly visible during periods of crisis and uncertainty. The operational logic of social media platforms can also contribute to trust-related problems. Many platforms prioritize content that is likely to attract user attention and generate engagement. As a result, highly engaging content often gains greater visibility (Pariser, 2011). However, content that attracts attention is not necessarily accurate or reliable. In some cases, emotionally charged, polarizing, or sensational content spreads more rapidly than verified information (Sunstein, 2018).

Algorithmic systems recommend content based on users' previous behaviors and preferences. While this enables individuals to access content that aligns with their interests more easily, it may also reduce their exposure to alternative perspectives (Pariser, 2011). Continuous exposure to similar viewpoints can gradually diminish the visibility of opposing opinions and limit informational diversity (Hülür & Bayır, 2021). In such environments, inaccurate information may be more readily accepted and existing beliefs may become further reinforced. The effects of social media on trust are not limited to individuals. Organizations are also significantly affected by these transformations. Today, stakeholders can evaluate organizational statements in real time, share their experiences online, and communicate their opinions regarding organizational activities to broad audiences (Alpsoy, 2026). While this environment encourages greater transparency and accountability, it also means that communication failures and ethical violations can become visible much more quickly than in the past.

Maintaining trust within social media environments depends not only on the sharing of accurate information but also on adherence to the principles of transparency, consistency, and accountability. Once trust is lost in digital

communication environments, rebuilding it can be extremely difficult. In the age of social media, trust has become a strategic asset that both organizations and individuals must continuously protect and cultivate.

3.3. Artificial Intelligence and the New Challenges of Trust

While the process of digitalization has reshaped the concept of trust, the widespread adoption of artificial intelligence technologies has accelerated this transformation even further. In modern societies, individuals conduct a significant portion of their daily activities by relying on systems that they cannot directly observe. From banking transactions and healthcare services to online shopping and news consumption, many activities are carried out through complex technological systems. According to Giddens (1990), modern life is largely built upon trust in abstract systems. With the growing use of artificial intelligence applications, the scope of these abstract systems has expanded considerably, giving trust relationships an entirely new dimension. In the past, individuals could often evaluate the credibility of information through the person or institution responsible for producing it. Today, however, a growing amount of

content is produced through collaboration between humans and machines. News articles, customer service messages, images, videos, and even academic content can be generated with the assistance of AI-powered tools. This transformation in content production processes makes it increasingly difficult for users to evaluate the origin and credibility of the information they encounter. The fact that a piece of content may be accurate does not eliminate questions regarding how it was produced; rather, it raises new concerns about its source and authenticity (Konat & Kaya, 2026).

Trust in artificial intelligence cannot be explained solely through technical performance. Users expect systems not only to generate accurate results but also to operate in ways that are fair, transparent, and accountable. When algorithmic decision-making processes are opaque, difficult to audit, or based on undisclosed data sources, the development of trust becomes considerably more challenging. Winanto (2025) emphasizes that ethical principles and transparent governance are just as important as technological advancement for the sustainable adoption of artificial intelligence applications. From a corporate communication perspective, artificial intelligence offers significant opportunities. Organizations increasingly use

AI tools for audience analysis, content creation, customer relationship management, and crisis communication. As Kesar (2026) notes, digital technologies can enhance stakeholder engagement and accelerate communication processes. At the same time, the growing visibility of technological practices is transforming stakeholder expectations. People are no longer concerned solely with the messages organizations communicate; they are also interested in understanding how those messages are produced.

One of the issues that has attracted growing attention in recent years concerns organizational claims regarding the use of artificial intelligence. Some organizations present technologies that they employ only in limited ways as more advanced than they actually are or emphasize AI capabilities primarily as a marketing tool. This phenomenon, commonly referred to in the literature as AI-washing, can widen the gap between perceptions of technological sophistication and actual organizational practices (Elhajjar & Itani, 2025). Joo (2025) demonstrates that trust in organizations may decline when users perceive AI-related claims as exaggerated or misleading. Similarly, Song, Hou, Ouyang, and Hao (2026) argue that inflated or deceptive statements regarding artificial intelligence may

generate positive impressions in the short term but can produce significant backlash effects over the long term. As the gap between stakeholder expectations and actual experiences grows, the erosion of trust becomes increasingly likely. For this reason, artificial intelligence should be understood not only as a technological innovation but also as a strategic communication issue that raises important questions regarding organizational honesty, transparency, and accountability. According to Fukuyama (1995), trust is one of the fundamental elements that enables complex social relationships to function effectively. This observation remains highly relevant in the age of artificial intelligence. The sophistication of technology alone is not sufficient; equal importance must be given to the trustworthiness of the actors who develop, implement, and communicate these technologies. In the future, discussions surrounding artificial intelligence will focus not only on technical capabilities but also on the broader question of how trust can be established, maintained, and protected in increasingly technology-driven societies.

3.4. AI Washing and the Erosion of Trust

Artificial intelligence has become one of the most powerful corporate narratives of recent years. Organizations increasingly place AI technologies at the center of their communication activities in order to demonstrate innovation to investors, customers, and other stakeholder groups. The widespread belief that artificial intelligence can enhance efficiency, speed, personalization, and competitive advantage has made it a highly valuable element of corporate communication (Elsayed, 2026). However, growing interest in artificial intelligence has also intensified discussions regarding the accuracy and transparency of organizational claims about technology. The concept of AI-washing refers to situations in which organizations present their use of artificial intelligence, technological capabilities, or AI-related competencies as more advanced than they actually are (Elhajjar & Itani, 2025). Some organizations label systems involving only limited levels of automation as artificial intelligence, while others rebrand existing technological applications under the AI label. Although this approach may initially appear to be a marketing strategy, it can have significant implications for trust. Trust is not only associated with creating favorable perceptions but also with maintaining

consistency between stakeholder expectations and actual experiences (Mayer et al., 1995).

The emergence of AI-washing is driven not only by technological competition but also by stakeholder expectations. Today, investors often show greater interest in companies associated with innovative technologies, consumers may perceive AI-enabled products as more advanced, and media organizations tend to give increased visibility to AI-related developments. In such an environment, organizations may use AI narratives as a strategic differentiation tool. However, as stakeholder theory emphasizes, organizational success depends not merely on generating positive perceptions but on meeting stakeholder expectations in a sustainable manner (Freeman et al., 2007). There are notable similarities between AI-washing and greenwashing. While greenwashing involves presenting environmental performance more positively than it actually is, AI-washing involves portraying technological capabilities as more sophisticated than they truly are. In both cases, a gap emerges between organizational discourse and organizational practice. Although this gap may generate positive impressions in the short term, it can ultimately lead to declining trust,

reputational challenges, and weakened stakeholder relationships (Alsaggaf, 2025; Torelli et al., 2020).

Research suggests that users do not evaluate AI-related claims merely as technological features. Such claims also serve as indicators of an organization's honesty, expertise, and trustworthiness. When stakeholders believe that statements regarding artificial intelligence do not accurately reflect reality, they may question not only the specific product or service involved but also their trust in the organization as a whole (Joo, 2025). Once trust is damaged, rebuilding stakeholder relationships can be a lengthy and challenging process. The consequences are not limited to consumer perceptions. Exaggerated claims regarding AI capabilities may influence investment decisions, attract regulatory scrutiny, and shape employee expectations toward the organization. From a corporate communication perspective, the verifiability of technological claims has become more important than ever. Digital environments allow stakeholders to compare organizational statements across multiple sources, access expert evaluations, and monitor the extent to which technological promises are actually fulfilled (Edelman, 2024).

Among the long-term consequences of AI-washing, the erosion of trust stands out as one of the most significant risks. Although exaggerated or misleading claims regarding artificial intelligence may generate short-term visibility and attention, a backlash effect may emerge as the gap between expectations and actual experiences widens. Such outcomes can affect not only the success of a particular campaign but also the overall credibility of the organization (Song et al., 2026). Maintaining a clear distinction between communicating technological innovation and misrepresenting technological reality is therefore of critical importance. Sustaining trust in the digital age requires organizations to adopt a more transparent and accountable approach to communicating their use of artificial intelligence. Stakeholders are increasingly concerned not only with whether AI is being used but also with why it is being used, how it functions, and what limitations it possesses. In the age of artificial intelligence, trust is built not by exaggerating technological claims but by communicating technological realities openly, accurately, and honestly.

4. GREENWASHING AND ORGANIZATIONAL TRUST

As environmental issues have become increasingly visible on a global scale, sustainability has emerged as one of the key factors shaping not only organizational operations but also communication strategies. Reducing carbon emissions, protecting natural resources, implementing circular economy practices, and developing social responsibility initiatives are among the sustainability-related activities most frequently emphasized by organizations today. This approach is closely associated with the sustainability perspective, which argues that organizational performance should be evaluated not only through economic outcomes but also through environmental and social impacts (Elkington, 1997). Stakeholders now assess organizations not solely on the basis of financial performance but also according to their contributions to society and the environment. Growing interest in sustainability practices has led to increased scrutiny of organizational claims regarding environmental and social performance (Lagasio, 2024). The increasing number of studies examining discrepancies between ESG reporting narratives and actual organizational practices can be regarded as an indicator of this trend. As sustainability has become more prominent

within corporate communication, environmental claims and sustainability discourses have also become subject to more critical evaluation by stakeholders (Karakulle, 2025). Consequently, the extent to which environmental communication reflects genuine organizational practices has become an As a result of these developments, the concept commonly referred to as greenwashing has attracted growing attention within the literature. Greenwashing can be defined as the practice of presenting an organization's environmental performance more positively than it actually is or creating a discrepancy between environmental claims and organizational practices (Alsaggaf, 2025). Some organizations emphasize environmentally friendly initiatives while downplaying or ignoring the negative impacts of their activities, whereas others portray limited environmental actions as evidence of comprehensive organizational transformation. As the gap between communication efforts and organizational reality widens, significant risks emerge in terms of trust.

At the center of greenwashing debates lies the trust relationship between organizations and their stakeholders. Within corporate communication, credibility is closely associated with the principles of accuracy, consistency, and transparency. When environmental commitments are not

supported by organizational practices, stakeholders may question not only a specific sustainability campaign but also the overall credibility of the organization. The erosion of trust can generate long-term consequences for reputation, legitimacy, and stakeholder support (Güven, 2016). Torelli et al. (2020) emphasize the direct relationship between environmental communication and stakeholder perceptions. When organizational environmental claims are perceived as credible, positive evaluations may be strengthened; conversely, when such claims are regarded as insincere, stakeholder skepticism tends to increase (Hong et al., 2026). Today, broader access to information enables stakeholders to verify environmental claims more easily than in previous periods. Merely being visible within sustainability communication is no longer considered sufficient. Stakeholders increasingly expect environmental claims to be supported by concrete evidence, measurable outcomes, and observable practices.

Digital communication environments are among the factors that increase the visibility of greenwashing practices. Through social media platforms, independent research, online news sources, and civil society initiatives, organizational environmental performance can be monitored more closely than ever before. As Risteska and

Boztepe Taşkiran (2023) emphasize, digital communication environments facilitate more transparent evaluations of sustainability practices. These environments also contribute to the rapid identification of inconsistencies between environmental discourse and actual organizational behavior. Greenwashing should therefore not be regarded merely as a short-term communication problem. Over time, discrepancies between environmental claims and organizational practices can erode stakeholder trust, weaken organizational reputation, and undermine legitimacy (Şahbaz, 2025). The frequent questioning of environmental claims may also create a more skeptical communication environment in which even organizations that genuinely pursue sustainable practices face increased scrutiny. Greenwashing thus represents a significant challenge that affects not only the credibility of individual organizations but also the overall credibility of sustainability communication itself (Alsaggaf, 2025).

5. REBUILDING TRUST IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Building trust often requires a considerable amount of time, yet it can be lost within a very short period. With the widespread adoption of digital communication

environments, this fragile nature of trust has become increasingly visible. Through social media platforms, online news sources, and user-generated reviews, organizational activities can be continuously monitored and evaluated by stakeholders. The growing influence of digital reputation, artificial intelligence applications, and cybersecurity risks on corporate communication processes has further highlighted the strategic importance of trust (Bozkurtlar & Akgün, 2026). A communication mistake, ethical violation, data security incident, or misleading corporate statement can quickly reach large audiences and negatively affect an organization's credibility. Findings from the Edelman Trust Barometer (2024) indicate that stakeholders evaluate organizations not only on the basis of their statements but also according to their concrete actions and social responsibilities. In such an environment, understanding how lost trust can be rebuilt has become just as important as maintaining trust itself.

The rebuilding of trust should be regarded as a strategic process that requires continuity in the digital age. In order to restore trust, organizations must first accurately understand the causes of trust loss. The organizational trust model developed by Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) demonstrates that trust is closely associated with

perceptions of competence, integrity, and benevolence. Trust tends to deteriorate when stakeholders believe that an organization lacks expertise, behaves dishonestly, or prioritizes its own interests over those of others. For this reason, trust repair efforts should focus not only on communication messages but also on addressing the underlying causes of trust loss. Within the corporate communication literature, transparency, accountability, and consistency are frequently identified as essential elements in rebuilding trust. Two-way communication and stakeholder feedback mechanisms also play a significant role in trust repair processes (Karayel Bilbil & Kasar, 2019). Attempts to conceal problems or avoid responsibility often deepen trust loss rather than resolve it. By contrast, openly acknowledging problems, providing clear explanations, and communicating concrete corrective actions can positively influence stakeholder evaluations of an organization (Atmaca & Baş, 2023). Trust restoration therefore requires more than verbal statements; it must be supported by observable actions and behavioral change. The trust repair literature suggests that organizations may adopt a variety of strategies following trust violations. These include apologizing, accepting responsibility, implementing corrective measures, and providing forms of

restitution to affected stakeholders. However, the effectiveness of these approaches depends largely on the nature of the trust violation and the expectations of stakeholders. In cases involving ethical misconduct or misleading communication practices, explanations alone are rarely sufficient; stakeholders also expect tangible improvements and meaningful organizational change. Consequently, trust repair should be understood as a multidimensional process that requires communication efforts and organizational behavior to be aligned and evaluated together (Kramer, 1999).

Meeting stakeholder expectations plays a decisive role in restoring trust. As emphasized in the stakeholder approach proposed by Freeman, Harrison, and Wicks (2007), organizations are responsible not only to shareholders but also to all stakeholder groups affected by their activities. When trust has been damaged, stakeholder expectations must be carefully analyzed, and communication strategies should be designed accordingly. Otherwise, inconsistencies between organizational discourse and stakeholder experiences may persist. Trust repair has become more complex in the digital age than in previous periods. Stakeholders can compare organizational statements across multiple sources, access independent evaluations, and

easily examine an organization's past practices. Findings from Edelman (2024) further indicate that trust is associated not merely with organizational rhetoric but with observable organizational performance. Restoring trust therefore requires a strong alignment between communication activities and actual organizational practices.

In the digital age, trust repair is no longer a process that organizations can manage simply by controlling their own messages. Social media platforms, online review systems, and user-generated content continuously expose organizations to public evaluation and scrutiny. Stakeholders can discuss organizational statements in real time, compare them with alternative sources, and share their experiences with wide audiences. To protect digital reputation, organizations must engage in open dialogue with stakeholders, respond promptly to criticism, and continuously monitor perceptions of trust within online environments (Bozkurtlar & Akgün, 2026). In digital communication settings, silence, delayed responses, or insufficient explanations often intensify trust loss rather than mitigate it.

Restoring lost trust is not merely a matter of correcting negative perceptions through communication activities. In the digital age, trust has become a dynamic relationship that is continuously produced, negotiated, and reassessed. The ability of organizations to build long-term trust depends on integrating transparency, ethical conduct, consistency, and stakeholder-oriented communication into their organizational culture. Trust repair initiatives undertaken during periods of crisis or reputational damage can generate lasting results only when they are supported by these fundamental principles.

6. THE FUTURE OF TRUST: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Throughout history, trust has been one of the fundamental elements of social relationships, economic activities, and organizational structures. However, the development of digital technologies, the widespread adoption of data-driven decision-making systems, and the integration of artificial intelligence into everyday life have reopened discussions regarding how trust is formed and maintained. Today, individuals are required to place trust not only in organizations and other people but also in algorithms,

digital platforms, and invisible technological systems. As artificial intelligence becomes increasingly influential in decision-making processes, trust in systems that individuals cannot directly observe has become even more significant (Nowotny, 2021). Rather than diminishing the importance of trust, this transformation has made it more complex, multidimensional, and central to contemporary communication environments.

In the future, the development of trust will be shaped not only by technological advances but also by ethical principles, governance mechanisms, and organizational responsibility. The growing prevalence of artificial intelligence systems, increasing concerns regarding data use, and the expanding societal influence of digital platforms demonstrate that trust can no longer be viewed merely as a technical issue (Paliszkievicz, Guerrero Cusumano, & Gołuchowski, 2022). The need to redefine ethical principles within communication processes is becoming increasingly evident (Özbay, 2025). Similarly, scholars emphasize that the long-term success of artificial intelligence applications depends not only on technological capability but also on transparency, accountability, and responsible governance practices (Winanto, 2025).

One of the most significant challenges organizations will face in the coming years is maintaining a balance between technological innovation and trustworthiness. While artificial intelligence, big data, and automation systems provide important advantages, questions regarding how these technologies are used continue to increase. Stakeholders no longer evaluate only the quality of products and services; they also question how decisions are made, how data are collected and used, and how transparent technological processes are. This trend suggests that trust will become increasingly associated with explainability, accountability, and responsible innovation. As technological systems become more sophisticated, organizations will be expected to provide greater transparency regarding the operation, limitations, and potential consequences of these systems.

At the same time, the digital age presents not only new risks but also significant opportunities. Digital platforms enable organizations to communicate with stakeholders more rapidly, gather feedback more effectively, and strengthen trust relationships through ongoing interaction. Social media, online communities, and interactive communication tools can support more transparent, participatory, and stakeholder-oriented communication

practices (Zamoum, 2026). Continuous dialogue with stakeholders makes it possible to strengthen trust not only during periods of crisis but also throughout everyday communication processes (Kesar, 2026). The accelerating pace of digital transformation indicates that trust will become an even more important strategic resource in the future. Technological capability, innovation, or visibility alone will not be sufficient to ensure sustainable success. The long-term legitimacy of organizations will depend largely on their ability to maintain trustworthy relationships with stakeholders. In the communication environment of the future, trust will be viewed not merely as a value to be protected but as a strategic asset that must be continuously created, strengthened, and reaffirmed.

7. CONCLUSION

Trust remains one of the fundamental elements necessary for sustaining relationships among individuals, organizations, and societies. The effective functioning of communication processes, the development of long-term stakeholder relationships, and the preservation of organizational legitimacy all depend to a large extent on trust. However, the widespread adoption of digital

technologies, the growing influence of social media platforms on communication processes, and the rapid development of artificial intelligence applications have made the formation and maintenance of trust far more complex than in previous periods. In the digital age, the production and circulation of information have accelerated, communication processes have become more participatory, and access to information has expanded considerably. At the same time, misinformation, disinformation, and manipulative communication practices have become increasingly visible and influential.

This book has examined the concept of trust from a corporate communication perspective and explored the new risk areas that have emerged in the digital age. Throughout the discussion, trust has been shown to play a decisive role not only in interpersonal relationships but also in the interactions among organizations, technological systems, and stakeholder groups. In particular, digital communication environments demonstrate that trust cannot be established solely through organizational discourse. Instead, it must be supported by transparency, consistency, verifiability, and accountability. Greater access to information, increased visibility of organizational activities, and the widespread use of online evaluation

mechanisms have transformed trust into a dynamic construct that is continuously monitored, assessed, and renegotiated by stakeholders.

The concepts of greenwashing and AI-washing examined throughout this book illustrate some of the most significant contemporary threats to trust in the digital age. Both practices involve presenting environmental or technological performance more positively than it actually is. Although such approaches may generate favorable perceptions in the short term, they can ultimately result in stakeholder skepticism, reputational damage, and the erosion of trust. The increasing ability of stakeholders to identify inconsistencies between organizational claims and organizational practices has made trust more valuable—and more vulnerable—than ever before. Consequently, the central challenge of contemporary corporate communication is not simply communicating about sustainability or artificial intelligence but ensuring that such claims are supported by genuine organizational practices. Greenwashing and AI-washing should therefore not be viewed as entirely separate phenomena. Both emerge from discrepancies between organizational discourse and organizational behavior and represent different manifestations of trust erosion in the digital era.

Trust is not a concept that can be managed solely by communication departments. Rather, it emerges as the outcome of organizational governance practices, ethical decision-making processes, stakeholder relationships, technological applications, and everyday organizational behavior. Producing effective messages alone is insufficient for building trust. Organizations must ensure consistency between communication activities and organizational practices, respond to stakeholder expectations, and demonstrate corporate responsibility through concrete actions. When trust is lost, its restoration depends not only on explanations and public statements but also on observable improvements, meaningful change, and sustained organizational commitment.

Looking ahead, the increasing prevalence of artificial intelligence systems, the expansion of data-driven decision-making processes, and the growing societal influence of digital platforms will make trust an even more critical issue. Individuals will be required to place trust not only in organizations but also in algorithms, digital platforms, and technological systems that often operate beyond direct human observation. This development further increases the importance of transparency, ethical responsibility, explainability, and accountability. Regardless of how

rapidly technology advances, trust will continue to be grounded in human expectations, social values, and perceptions of fairness and integrity.

In conclusion, trust remains one of the most valuable strategic resources available to organizations in the digital age. Its sustainability depends on accurate information sharing, adherence to ethical principles, open dialogue with stakeholders, and communication practices that are consistently supported by organizational behavior. In an environment increasingly characterized by practices such as greenwashing and AI-washing, trust should be understood not merely as a value to be protected but as a strategic necessity that must be continuously created, strengthened, and reaffirmed.

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