



Solving the Rubik's Cube of Corporate Reputation: 7 Key Insights from the USC's 2023 Global Communication Report



Report by the University of Southern California's Annenberg Center for Public Relations in
Conjunction with The Worldcom Public Relations Group



By **Stefan Pollack, President, [The Pollack Group](#)**

The 2023 Global Communication Report conducted by the University of Southern California's Annenberg Center for Public Relations states, *"Managing a new corporate reputation is like solving a Rubik's Cube. Every move is connected to another. Changing the squares on one side of the cube impacts the squares on another side. Each turn either moves you closer to a solution or farther away."* In addition, the report surveyed consumers, employees, investors, and PR professionals to understand their expectations and preferences regarding corporate communication. As a result, the report sheds light on the changing landscape of corporate communication and reputation management.

Reputation management has always been a core element of the PR industry. But the "rules of the game" have changed, forcing us to think about reputation differently. It has become complex. With the vital advent of the social media landscape, sharing opinions with the rest of the world is uncontrollable and unlimited. As such, disgruntled workers can post a negative opinion on Glassdoor, dissatisfied customers can ruin a business on Yelp, and fuming voters can create a revolt on Facebook.

The report found that *"consumers are more demanding, employees more vocal, and investors are scrutinizing every aspect of a company's behavior."* As such, corporate reputation is the determining factor for the success of products or services, what jobs are attractive and selected, and what stocks in which to invest.

Based on the research, the puzzle of a new corporate reputation can become easier to solve than expected by *listening* closely to what all three stakeholder groups are saying.

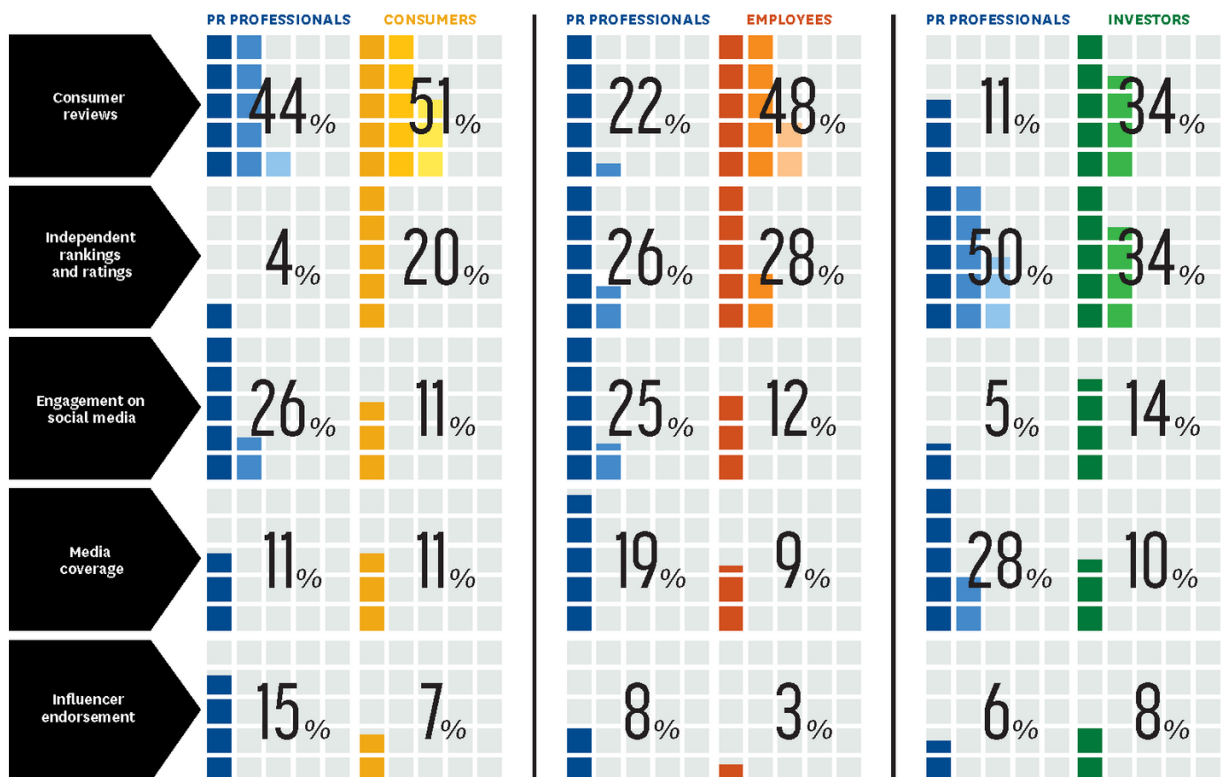
Here are seven key takeaways from the report:

1 Consumer reviews and independent rankings

The report found that consumer reviews of products and services and independent rankings and ratings will be the most critical elements of a company's communications to all three groups in the next five years. This highlights the importance of transparency and authenticity in corporate communication.

2 Influencer endorsements and media coverage

Surprisingly, these were ranked as the least essential elements of corporate communication. But, again, this suggests that consumers, employees, and investors are becoming more discerning and skeptical of traditional marketing tactics.



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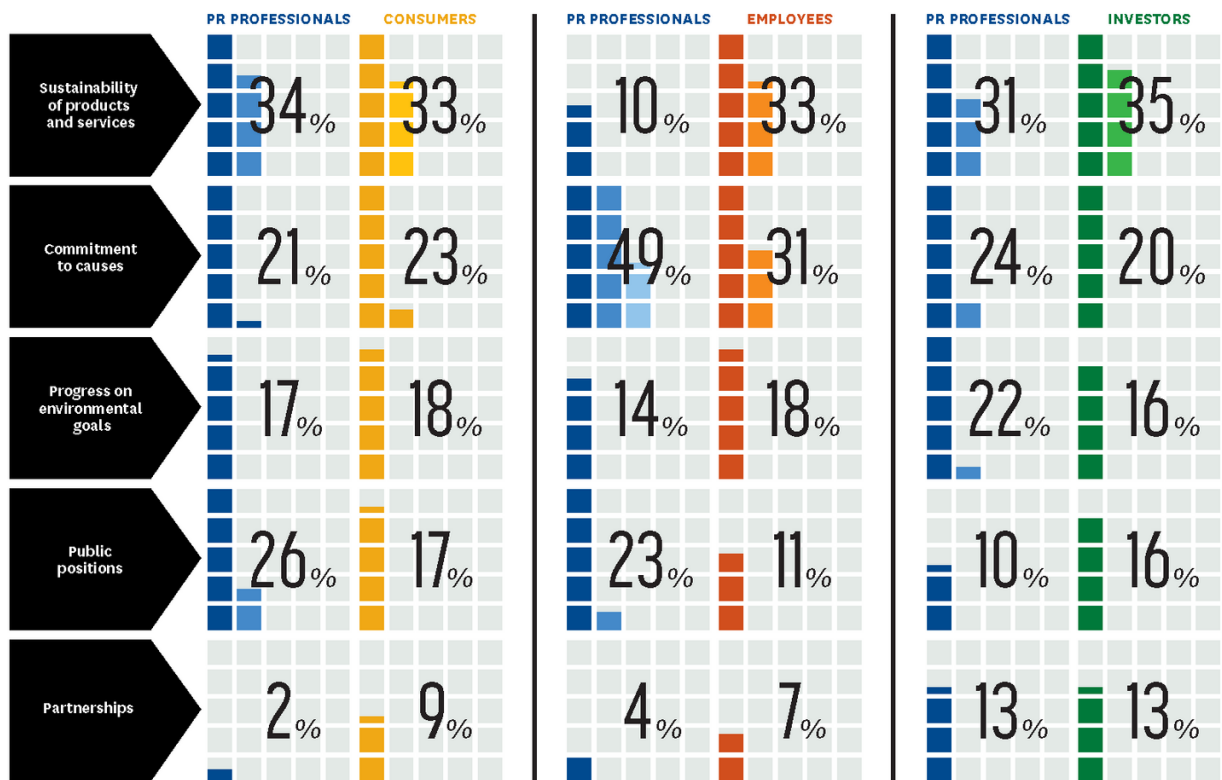
Social purpose

Commitment to relevant causes and sustainability of products and services were the top two choices for social purpose elements that impact reputation. This underlines the growing importance of corporate social responsibility and sustainability in the eyes of stakeholders.

4

“Woke” companies

“Woke” means that companies take a public stand on societal issues. Contrary to today’s common thinking, investors are more likely to invest in a company considered “woke” than consumers were to buy from one. “Woke” means that companies have a mission beyond just financial performance and therefore become more attractive to investors.



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Corporate culture

The report found that corporate culture is essential to current employees but less than business performance. This highlights the need for companies to prioritize both business performance and employee satisfaction.

6

Strategic vision

All three groups agreed that a strategic vision for the future ranks higher than quarterly earnings and stock price. Companies must focus on long-term goals and communicate their vision effectively to stakeholders.

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ESG (environmental, social, and governance)

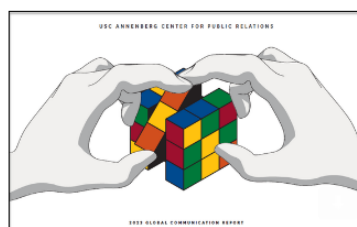
The report found that ESG still needs to be better understood by consumers and employees. Still, many see its potential as a comprehensive story-telling platform and a means of influencing what products are being bought and where to work. This highlights the need for companies to educate stakeholders about their ESG initiatives and their impact.



Different stakeholders get their information from different sources, such as third-party analysts, news reports, or opinions on social media. In an environment where “*everyone is talking and no one is listening*,” messages delivered with precision through specific and relevant channels per stakeholder can break barriers. The ‘Rubik cube’s multiplexity’ can be converted into simple solid colors by paying close attention.

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Communication Report**



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