



AN UNFILTERED LOOK AT WHAT'S PERCOLATING NOW

Below are key themes that dominated corporate communications news in January 2026.

CEO STATEMENTS AMID MINNESOTA UNREST SIGNAL A POTENTIAL TURNING POINT IN CORPORATE ACTIVISM & STAKEHOLDER TRUST.

Turmoil in Minnesota shone a harsh spotlight on corporate and crisis communication. [Campaign U.S.](#) reported that more than 60 CEOs of Minneapolis-based businesses issued a shared memo on ICE activity in the city. The strength and timing of these statements drew widespread criticism, as described by [Fast Company](#) and [Business Insider](#). Still, [Fortune](#) said this appears to be a breaking point, as once-silent global leaders are now speaking up. Could CEO activism help bridge the trust gap between consumers and companies? HAVAS' 2025 [Meaningful Brands](#) report shows nearly half of consumers have cut ties with brands they see as failing the society or planet. And [Just Capital](#) reported that only 53% of Americans believe large U.S. companies are very or somewhat just. This is at odds with public expectations: 80% believe business can be a force for positive social change.

Bottom line: Communication lessons from the murder of George Floyd in 2020 continue to ring true: Public statements and activity need to be backed up and contextualized to employee, customer and consumer audiences seeking leadership and answers. Using additional communication to help each group understand the environment for decision-making can help bring further clarity to a leader's role and actions. HAVAS Red Managing Director [Lesley Sillaman](#) says, "Corporate communicators find themselves in a state of permacrisis, forced to stay vigilant in a geopolitical environment seeking guidance. True leadership will be demonstrated via a willingness to face the moment with authenticity, consistency and transparency."

DAVOS MAKES ONE THING CLEAR: AI IS INEVITABLE, CREDIBILITY IS EARNED.

[The New York Times](#) noted that traditional World Economic Forum (WEF) priorities such as climate action, gender equity and human rights were sidelined in favor of business-driven technological momentum, with a focus on AI-based initiatives that create growth. WEF Interim Co-Chair and BlackRock CEO Larry Fink called for participants to create a "credible plan" for broad AI usage, the [New York Times](#) reported. Still, some executives and participants spoke of AI cautiously. JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon warned that rapid AI-driven layoffs could trigger civil unrest unless governments and businesses work together to help "save society," [Fast Company](#) wrote. And according to experts surveyed ahead of the summit, adverse outcomes of AI moved from 30th place among short-term risks last year to fifth place this year, per [Quartz](#). **(Cont.)**

(Cont.) If there's one takeaway from Davos, it's that AI will continue to lead global conversations in 2026, from its implications on the workforce to its impacts on the environment.

Bottom line: AI may dominate every global conversation in 2026, but communicators still determine how their organizations show up in a world defined by rapid change. Leaders are managing both the promise and the pressure of AI, evolving geopolitical risks and rising expectations from employees and stakeholders. "The only way to cut through this environment is with authenticity, consistent storytelling and evidence that proves your message is real," says [Joseph Giumarra](#), vice president, media relations at HAVAS Red. "Trust grows when companies are transparent about what is working and honest about what still needs attention. The organizations that will stand out this year are the ones that communicate clearly, demonstrate meaningful progress and stay grounded in data at a moment when credibility has never mattered more."

AI SHIFTS AND PLATFORM PIVOTS REWRITE HOW CONSUMERS DISCOVER BRANDS.

In a world where AI is increasingly the gatekeeper of brand discovery, visibility starts with ensuring your most important narratives are accessible and algorithm-ready. Nearly half of all consumers today rely on AI-powered search, according to [McKinsey](#). But the more consequential shift is where AI goes to find the information it serves back: [Adweek](#) reported that YouTube has overtaken Reddit as the top citation source for AI engines. LinkedIn is also rising fast as a trusted reference for chatbots, per new [SEMRush](#) data. Meanwhile, [TechCrunch](#) reported Netflix is expanding its ambitions beyond streaming series by integrating podcasts from iHeartMedia, Spotify and Barstool Sports — a response to [YouTube](#)'s explosive growth in podcast viewership. No doubt Netflix has also noted that YouTube is now the most-watched streaming platform in the U.S., as reported by [Nielsen](#).

Bottom line: As brands race to master generative engine optimization (GEO), the winners will be those that use their full content arsenal to meet audiences — and AI — where they already are. "Discovery is no longer driven by search in isolation, nor by social in silos," says [Colten Gill](#), account director, social and content, HAVAS Red. "It's increasingly shaped by where AI looks first and where audiences spend the most time. And in 2026, those two forces are converging around platforms that prioritize robust, evergreen, high-authority content."

DEI: A ONE-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE.

One year into the second Trump Administration, DEI continues to be both a political and regulatory flashpoint in the U.S. and beyond. In the U.S., [HR Brew](#) documented the private sector recalibration: Roughly 63 Fortune 100 companies have rebranded or removed DEI messaging from public-facing websites; of those 63 companies, 54 made changes following the 2024 presidential election. Those who did not change messaging around DEI cite the business case for diversity in encouraging innovation, growth and alignment with company values, [Time](#) reported in February 2025. These nuances were intensified for companies with global footprints and U.S. operations. As [Bloomberg](#) reported in March 2025, international organizations with U.S. arms — including those in the banking, pharmaceutical and automotive industries — walked a tightrope between receiving **(Cont.)**

(Cont.) unwanted scrutiny and following international diversity regulations, such as the European Union's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and Singapore's Workplace Fairness Legislation (WFL).

Organizations continue to walk this tightrope into 2026. Leaders still feel "caught in the middle" between legal scrutiny, reputational pressures and evolving workforce expectations, [ESG Dive](#) reported. To meet the moment while remaining compliant, organizations are moving toward frameworks that center company culture and are tailored to — and reflective of — local workforce realities, reported in [Charter](#), [European Business Review](#) and [Entrepreneur](#). Consistent documentation around these frameworks — including time to promotion, attrition by cohort and participation in training — has become paramount as companies seek defensible decisions in more contested environments, as [HR Dive](#) reported.

Bottom line: The path forward requires connecting words to actions, action to impact, and impact to business goals. Communicators and business leaders play an essential role in forging this path. Lead with culture and compliance, and use consistent, credible messaging on how commitments show up as support. Articulate the business and fairness case — with the proof to back it up — and underscore the message that localized inclusion is legally sound, operationally smart, strengthens customer centricity and scales innovation.

AS ATTENTION FRAGMENTS, CULTURAL RELEVANCE IS BEING BUILT THROUGH INTENTIONAL, CREATOR-LED STORYTELLING THAT ACTIVATES NICHE AUDIENCES.

As algorithms become increasingly personalized, is pop culture losing its power to unite audiences around shared experiences? [The Wall Street Journal](#) asked this, while [Ad Age](#) reported that virality is now more hourly and less happenstance, becoming easier to achieve and replicate. At the same time, the unhinged, trend-jacking content that defined virality five years ago no longer feels exciting or new. With one exception: If it sparks widespread nostalgia, odds are it will be a hit. For example, [Business Insider](#) reported that brands and celebrities were quick to hop on the "2026 is the new 2016" trend. And [Marketing Brew](#) wrote about how B2B expense management platform Ramp's recent livestream of Kevin Malone from "The Office" processing receipts turned nostalgia into a viral, cross-generational engagement moment.

The smartest brands today are winning not by jumping on trends but by sparking conversation across multiple niche communities (HAVAS Red has written extensively about the "itch for niche" in our [2025](#) and [2026 Red Sky Predictions](#)). They're also mining comment sections for content and conversation. Take Topgolf's recent social campaign, born from a comment pointing out a collapsed net, according to [Inc.](#), and Dr. Pepper's new TV spot, which sprang from the comment-section response to a TikTok creator's quirky jingle, [Business Insider](#) reported.

Bottom line: Viral moments alone no longer guarantee cultural relevance. Brands are finding success by building connection through creator partnerships, comment-driven creativity and socially shareable offline experiences designed with niche communities in mind. "Legacy brands can still see social as an afterthought, so teams have had to shoehorn reactive, trend-ish content into existing campaigns as opposed to creating moments that are built to be social from the start," says Gill. "'Viral' content is a box to check but ultimately doesn't add anything new to the conversation when reach can equally be earned through paid support."