

COMMUNICATING IN CHAOS

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The information environment today is more chaotic than at any point in our 15 years tracking it.

The report that follows documents public perception and shifts in this environment across four key areas.

It all points to one place: a clear set of recommendations for communicating in chaos.

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Fracturing and consolidating at once

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COMMUNICATING IN CHAOS 2026

Over the past 15 years, Global Strategy Group's Business and Politics report series has tracked public perception of companies and corporate communications strategies as they intersect with politics and current events. Last year's report, the first edition of Communicating in Chaos, examined a fractious policy landscape and an increasingly challenging narrative environment for companies.

Today, the chaos is broader and more structural. Companies are navigating AI and misinformation, a media landscape consolidating at the top while audiences fragment everywhere else, and a saturated media landscape due to high-profile stories chronicling international conflicts, supply-chain disruptions, and an affordability crisis squeezing consumers. The Trump Administration is one driver of this volatility, not the whole story.

Even so, communicators are more willing than ever to speak out and engage on the issues core to their business.

This year's report aims to help, laying out data and expert analysis from senior GSG communications leaders to provide insights on how to break through in this chaotic environment.

TRENDS

Based on our survey research, in-depth interviews with senior GSG communications experts, and experience counseling private sector and non-profit leaders, we see the following trends shaping the communications landscape.

People are navigating a high-volume, fast-moving information environment, and they are struggling to keep up.

They are actively seeking out news across multiple platforms, but the constant flow of headlines, updates, and algorithm-driven content makes it difficult to fully process or understand what they're seeing. As a result, many rely on shortcuts to decide what to engage with and believe – for example, sources they trust or recognize, topics that feel familiar or relevant, and information that's easy to understand at face value.

AI is already a major factor in how people view and trust information.

Most people now assume news and information they see online may have been created or shaped by AI. This fuels a demand for expertise and credible information.

CEOs have a significant trust and credibility gap to make up.

People respond most positively to communication that explains what is happening and why, especially when it acknowledges risk or uncertainty. In contrast, avoiding questions, shifting explanations, or using hard-to-understand language quickly erodes confidence.



THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The places people get their news are fracturing and consolidating at the same time – and it is harder than ever to reach ALL your audiences.



THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE IS DEFINED BY CONSOLIDATION AND CHAOS

The media landscape is more fragmented than ever – and more consolidated at the top. Traditional outlets still matter, but journalists, audiences, and influence are moving across newsletters, Substacks, podcasts, YouTube, LinkedIn, TikTok, trade publications, and independent creators.

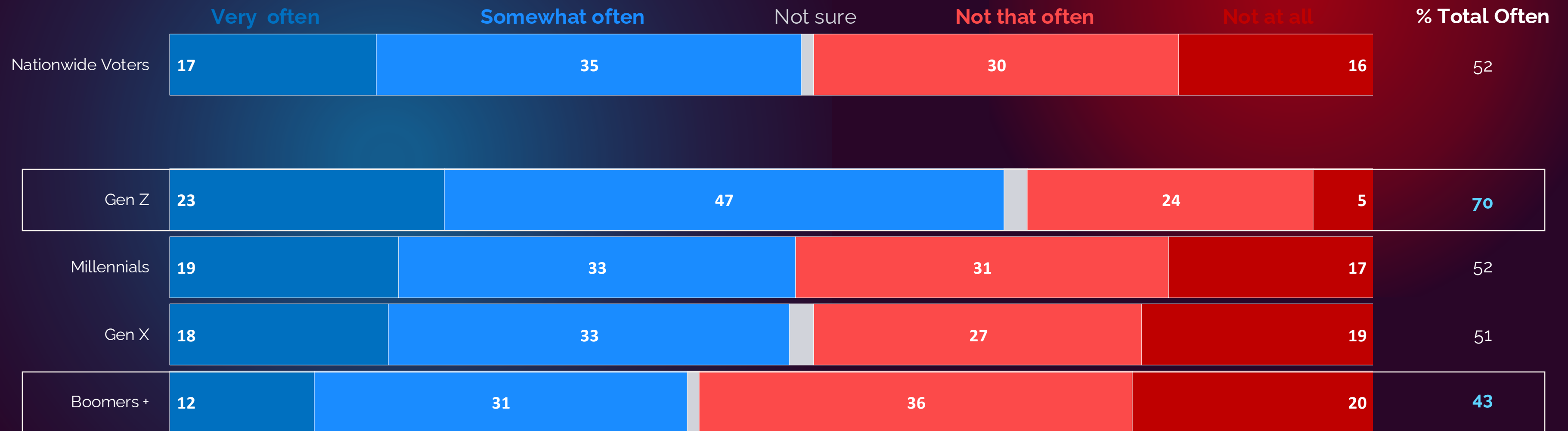
At the same time, ownership of the biggest players is concentrating, pushing more business-friendly and conservative voices into the mainstream.

Hovering above a fast-changing media landscape is President Trump continuing to set the daily agenda across mainstream, alternative, and social channels that consumes out-sized attention. Additionally, business leaders face challenges from the White House that aren't letting up, including agency scrutiny, critical social media posts, and threats of retribution.

For communicators, this means that earned media strategies can no longer be built around a single “top-tier hit.” The goal should be a sustained presence across the places where your audiences already are.

ABOUT HALF OF AMERICANS – AND EVEN MORE SO, YOUNGER VOTERS – FEEL OVERWHELMED BY THE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION THEY’RE FACED WITH

When it comes to news and information today, how often do you feel overwhelmed by the amount of information available?



NOTE: Bold numbers indicate statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence level. The margin of error on sub-samples is greater.

AUDIENCES ARE SPREAD ACROSS MORE PLATFORMS THAN EVER – AND IT'S NOT STOPPING

Niche Publications Go Mainstream:

No one embodies this more than Bari Weiss, who went from founding the Free Press to running the newsroom at CBS and soon CNN. Corporate consolidation is reshaping the editorial direction of major cable players – expect more conservative, business-friendly voices on air.

Major Journalists Depart for Substack and Podcasts:

As the creator ecosystem grows, Substack increasingly resembles old-school cable TV. Reporters like Don Lemon, Chuck Todd, Ryan Lizza, and Megyn Kelly have leveraged their name ID to build independent platforms.

Tech Industry Revolt:

As big tech founders and CEOs – especially in AI – grow unhappy with mainstream coverage, more are investing directly in media: OpenAI bought the podcast TBPN; a16z launched the daily show Monitoring the Situation.

CLOSER LOOK: DC

As The Washington Post cuts staff and exits whole beats, niche and specialty outlets are filling the gap – from new local players to right-leaning beltway tipsheets challenging POLITICO and Axios. A few to watch:

THE 51ST 

TMZ

 **WASHINGTON
REPORTER**

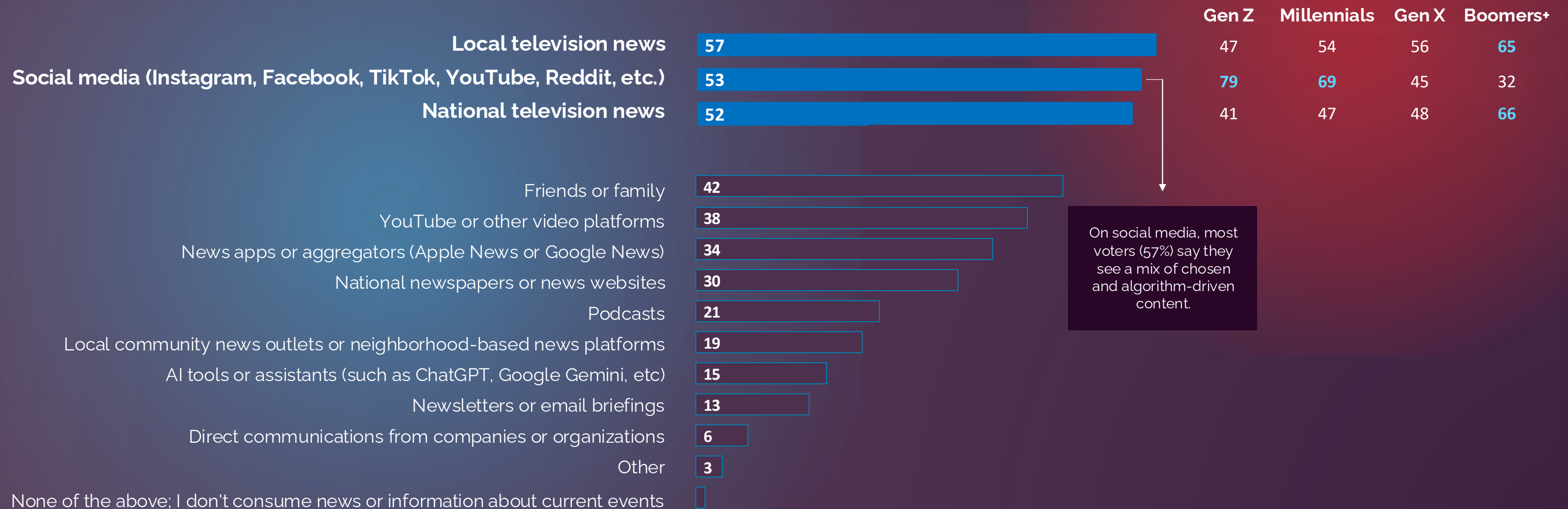


CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

In a noisy, partisan environment, what earns credibility is clarity
– delivered through the channels each audience already trusts.

NO SINGLE CHANNEL REACHES EVERYONE – NEWS HABITS SPLINTER BY GENERATION

Where do you get news and information about current events?



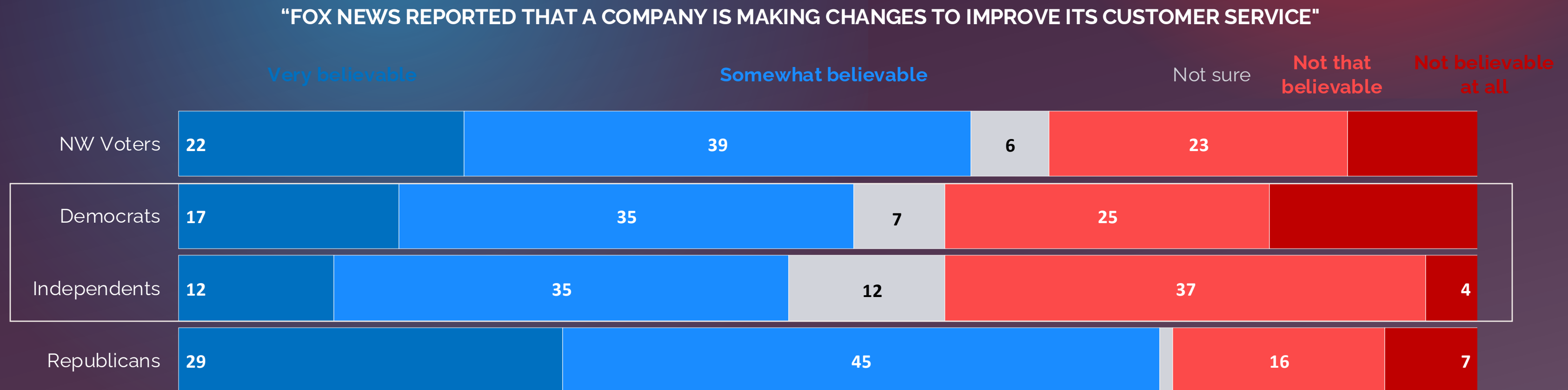
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PARTISAN PERCEPTIONS OF MAINSTREAM MEDIA SHOULD NOT BE A REASON TO DISENGAGE

How Americans perceive a media outlet changes how they will perceive news about your company in that outlet.

In fact, while 81% of Republicans said they would find a report about a company credible if it appeared on Fox News, only 58% of Democrats and 47% of Independents said the same.

This means that companies need to keep a close eye on their audiences and remember that sometimes where a story appears is almost as important as what it says. Additionally, if outlets with a perceived political bias are where your audience is, ignoring these publications is a potential missed opportunity to reach more of your audience through channels they trust.





AUDIENCE INTELLIGENCE IS NOW THE FOUNDATION

Breaking through a fractured, bias-laden media environment takes message discipline and more media engagement – not less. Stories, TV hits, social posts, and podcasts get devoured in minutes and hours, so the answer is to keep showing up, consistently, and on message.

Algorithms and AI have made media consumption harder to map – and more important to understand. Investors still watch the business press and analysts; policymakers rely on newsletters, tipsheets, and niche DC outlets; consumers may see a story first on TikTok, YouTube, or local TV; employees encounter it on LinkedIn or internal channels.

That makes audience intelligence foundational. It is imperative to segment and analyze your core audiences to a higher level of detail so you understand not just what they consume but how information reaches them, and where to meet them with disciplined, sustained engagement.

CLEAR, DIRECT COMMUNICATIONS HELP COMPANIES BUILD CREDIBILITY

In our survey, 54% of voters say the most believable corporate content sets “clear expectations of what happened and why” – ahead of in-depth data and charts or content that pushes back on criticism directly.

The instinct to over-explain and overcomplicate must be managed. In a chaotic and overwhelming information environment, clear and direct communications win.

When you see companies communicating online, which types of content make you most likely to believe what companies are saying?



NOTE: Bold numbers indicate statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence level. The margin of error on sub-samples is greater.

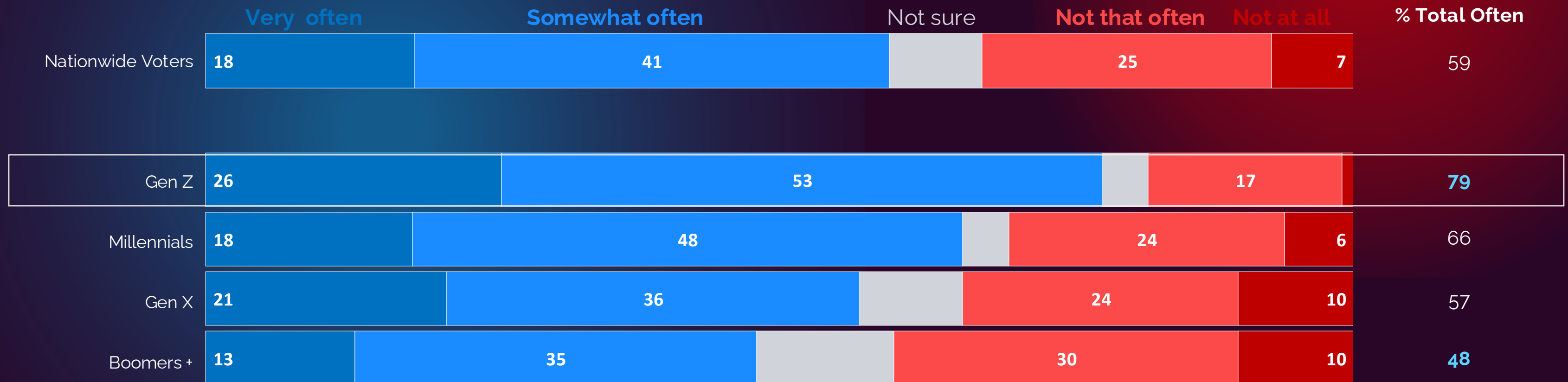


ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI is rewriting how people find, judge, and trust information – creating new value in earned and owned media, and new risks to plan for now.

MOST AMERICANS – ESPECIALLY YOUNGER ONES – BELIEVE AI IS ALREADY SHAPING THE INFORMATION THEY SEE

When you come across news or information online, how often do you think it may have been created or influenced by artificial intelligence?



NOTE: Bold numbers indicate statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence level. The margin of error on sub-samples is greater.

AI RAISES THE STAKES FOR EARNED AND OWNED MEDIA

LLMs and AI search capabilities are increasing the value of strong earned and owned media. LLMs pull heavily from top-tier coverage and high-authority company websites – 84% of LLM answers draw on earned and owned media, 27% on earned coverage alone – so what you publish now shapes how AI describes you later.

Most voters are skeptical of social media

(78%)

...and AI-generated information

(75%)

Almost half “always” take steps to verify information they see from both sources

AI-related crises will become more common as AI dominates search. Executives and corporate communicators need plans ready to respond to deepfakes, scrutiny of how they use AI, AI-enabled cybersecurity threats, and more.

When verifying information, voters are most likely to turn to search engines

(42%)

CEOS SHOULD PREPARE TO OWN INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT AI

AI is changing how information is created, spread, and consumed. It is also reshaping the workplace and creating high levels of anxiety among employees in an already uncertain economy. This dynamic is creating greater expectations for CEOs to communicate about AI.

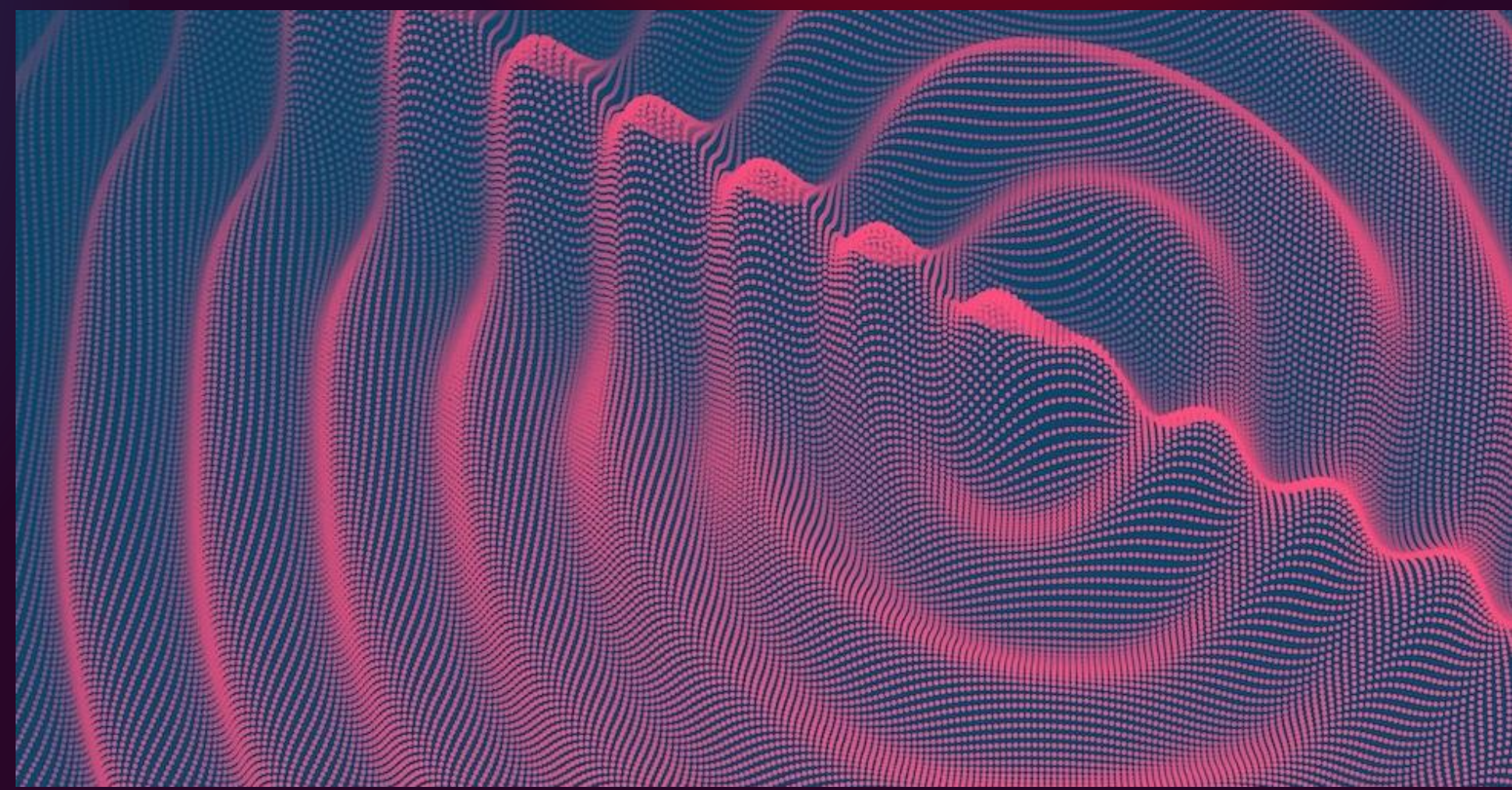
The need to communicate about how AI is being deployed within a company and integrated into employees' work lives is becoming essential. In these high-stakes communications, employees are likely to look to the CEO for explanations and answers to their questions. CEOs must be prepared to communicate their plans in a straightforward and direct style.

CEO visibility matters most in moments of controversy

(54%)

... and when addressing issues affecting employees

(34%)





EXECUTIVE VISIBILITY

Audiences trust experts over all other messengers, so the winning move is to position executives as genuine experts, not brand ambassadors.



THE COMMUNICATIONS RESPONSIBILITIES FOR CEOS ARE GROWING

Executive communications matter more than ever, from startups to the Fortune 500. The CEO role is now a communications role – leaders are expected to be public-facing messengers for their company's products, values, and issue priorities. But how that visibility builds trust has changed.

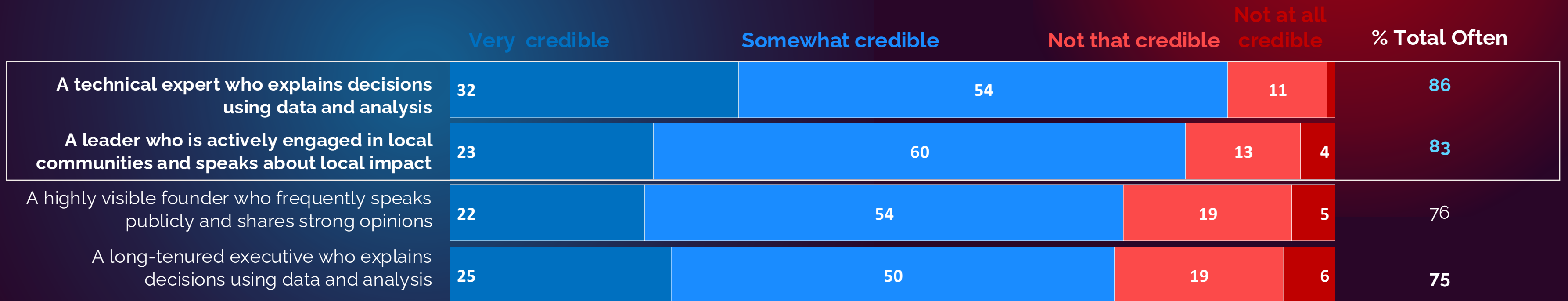
There is a trust gap in how much Americans trust third-party voices like industry experts (84%) and journalists (76%) compared to CEOs (64%).

Americans also put a premium on genuine engagement. The era of highly visible political figures – from President Donald Trump to NYC Mayor Zohran Mamdani – has shown that audiences connect with authenticity, and that expectation has carried into the corporate world.

CEOs are increasingly handling more communications to a broader set of audiences. The expectation now is that they show up as real people with expertise, not as polished executives reading from a script.

CORPORATE SPOKESPEOPLE SHOULD DEMONSTRATE THEIR EXPERTISE IN BOTH THE ISSUE THEY'RE SPEAKING ON AND IN THE COMMUNITY THEY'RE OPERATING IN

Imagine the following types of leaders speaking on behalf of a company about a controversial decision or high-profile decision. How credible would you find each of them?

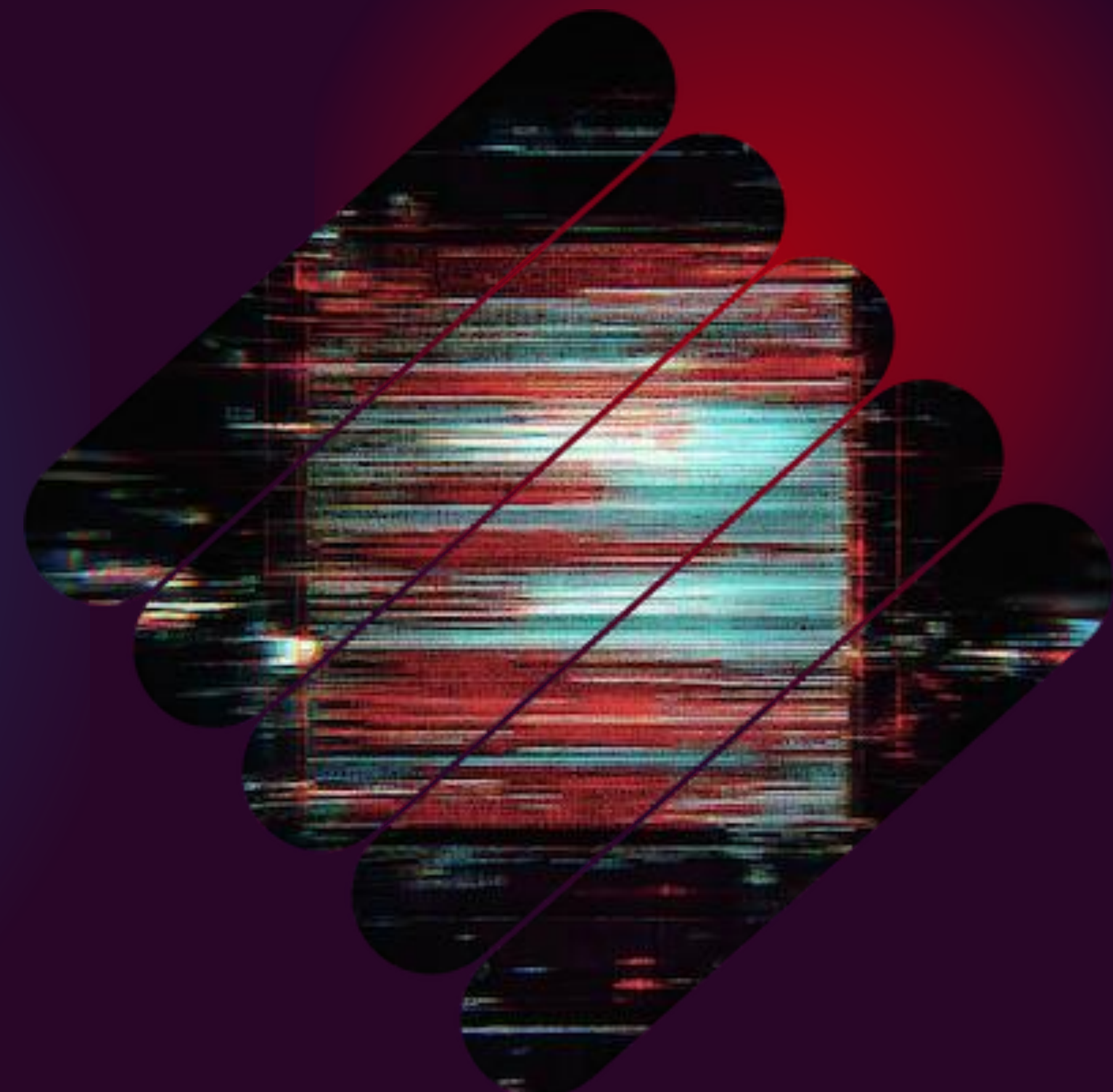


EXPERTISE IS CORE TO BUILDING TRUST

Americans are far more likely to believe industry experts (84%) or journalists (76%) than companies or CEOs directly.

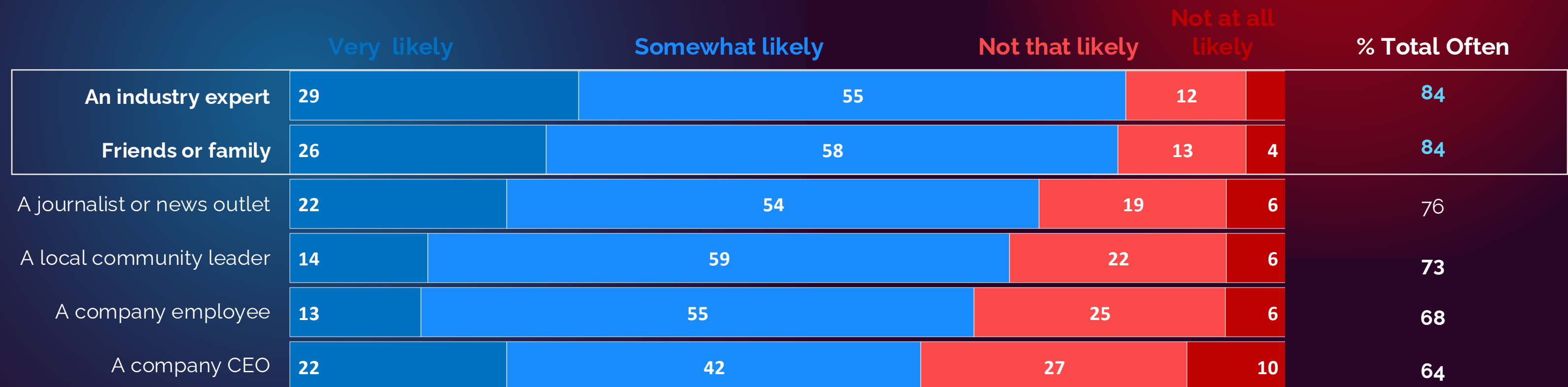
Expertise is the common thread. To build credibility, a leader's earned media and thought leadership profile should lean hard into subject-matter depth – demonstrating real, complex command of the issues that matter to their audiences.

The platforms reward it, too. A Wall Street Journal op-ed still matters, but so does a sharp LinkedIn post or a podcast clip – and LinkedIn's algorithm is built to surface content that signals genuine expertise and authenticity. The winning strategy moving forward is to elevate leaders as credible voices alongside other trusted experts, not to package them as brand ambassadors – and to do it everywhere your audiences are.



AMERICANS TRUST THIRD-PARTY VOICES – LIKE EXPERTS AND JOURNALISTS – MORE THAN DIRECT CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

When information about a company and a decision it made is shared – for example, a policy change or business decision – how likely would you be to believe if it came from each of the following?



* Results among Independents should be interpreted directionally due to smaller sample size.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Know and segment your audiences

Audience intelligence is foundational – understand where each of your audiences gets information and how it moves through their networks.

Show up more often, in more places

In a fractured landscape, a single top-tier hit no longer breaks through. Drive consistent, on-message presence across the platforms your audiences look for and get served information.

Don't overlook niche, trade, and independent outlets

They reach targeted, highly engaged audiences, carry expert credibility, and often read as less partisan than mainstream press.

Invest in earned and owned media for the age of AI

LLMs pull from top-tier coverage and high-authority owned content – what you publish now shapes how AI describes you later.

Communicate about AI clearly and transparently

Be direct about how you use AI and what it means for your workforce, and have a plan ready for AI-related risks.

Position executives as authentic experts, not brand ambassadors

Audiences trust expert voices above all. Elevate leaders as credible, genuine experts alongside other trusted voices.

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Methodology: Global Strategy Group conducted an online survey of 1,000 nationwide voters between April 2 – 7, 2026. The margin of error at the 95% confidence level is +/- 3.1%. The margin of error on sub-samples is greater.

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