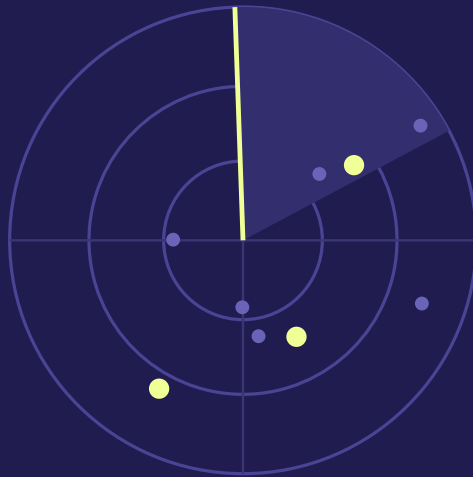


The Information Gatekeeper Has Changed

Why institutional communications must prepare for a world of mediated answers



ARTEFACT91

Campaign Intelligence + Strategic Communications

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HOW TO READ IT

A briefing, not a report: the executive brief carries the argument, the numbered sections carry the evidence and the method, and every external figure is attributed to its source.

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Executive Brief

The information environment is moving from discovery toward mediation. Increasingly, audiences do not choose among sources and construct an answer themselves. Recommendation systems, search summaries and generative AI systems select, synthesize and present an answer first.

A major new global expert survey makes the strategic implications harder to ignore. The International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE) surveyed 470 researchers with expertise across 71 countries in May and June 2026. Seventy-nine percent expected AI summaries to help users find relevant answers faster. But 64% expected them to reduce visits to news websites, and 58% expected them to narrow the diversity of viewpoints users encounter. At the same time, 78% rated lack of platform accountability a big or extreme threat, ahead of misinformation at 73% and polarization at 69%. Seventy-six percent expected the information environment in their country of expertise to worsen over the next year.

For institutions, this is not simply another AI-search story. It changes the communications problem. The organization may no longer control the first explanation audiences encounter—and the audience may never visit the source that contains the fuller evidence.

SECTION 01

From Source Competition to Answer Competition

Traditional digital communications assumed that institutions competed for attention: rank in search, secure coverage, publish strong owned content, earn links and drive audiences toward authoritative sources.

Mediated answers alter that sequence:

ARTEFACT91 WORKING MODEL

SOURCE → INTERMEDIARY → SYNTHESIS → AUDIENCE JUDGMENT

The intermediary may be a search engine, AI assistant, recommendation system, social platform or another machine-curated environment. It decides which evidence is retrieved, how sources are combined, which caveats survive compression and which voices disappear.

The strategic question is therefore no longer only, “Can people find us?” It is also, “What answer is produced when they do not reach us?”

SECTION 02

The New Evidence from IPIE

The IPIE findings reveal a consequential trade-off. Experts expect AI summaries to improve speed while reducing source visitation and viewpoint diversity. They are divided on whether AI summaries improve the accuracy of information encountered or the conclusions users draw.

This matters because institutional communications has traditionally relied on an implicit correction path: if an inaccurate claim circulates, an authoritative source can publish the facts and audiences can inspect them. In a mediated environment, the source may be technically available while remaining behaviorally invisible.

The same survey identifies platform accountability—not generative AI itself—as the most widely shared threat among experts. That distinction matters. The governance question is broader than whether an AI model is accurate. It includes who controls distribution, retrieval, ranking, synthesis, correction and visibility.

SECTION 03

The Artefact91 Mediated-Answer Risk Model

Artefact91 recommends assessing five points of exposure.

SOURCE INTEGRITY — Is the institution's underlying information accurate, current, consistent and evidentially supported?

RETRIEVABILITY — Can machines reliably locate the authoritative facts, or are they buried in inaccessible formats, old PDFs, ambiguous pages or contradictory sources?

INTERPRETATION — When systems synthesize the available evidence, what proposition do they produce?

DIVERSITY — Which relevant perspectives, qualifications or stakeholder experiences disappear when the issue is compressed into a single answer?

CORRECTABILITY — If an answer is wrong, outdated or incomplete, does the institution have a practical route to change the evidence environment from which future answers are generated?

ARTEFACT91 WORKING MODEL**SOURCE INTEGRITY → RETRIEVABILITY → INTERPRETATION → DIVERSITY → CORRECTABILITY**

The model extends Artefact91's earlier work on AI reputation audits. The issue is no longer simply brand visibility. It is institutional legibility inside systems that increasingly mediate public understanding.

SECTION 04

The Communications Team Needs an Answer Environment Map

For high-consequence issues, map what different information environments currently say.

Test:

- conventional search results;
- AI-generated search summaries;
- major general-purpose AI assistants;
- news search;
- high-authority third-party sources;
- social search and video platforms;
- forums and community sources where relevant;
- the organization's own authoritative pages.

Do not ask only whether the organization appears. Compare the claims, sources, omissions, uncertainty and recommendations produced across environments.

SECTION 05

Retrievable Proof Becomes a Reputation Asset

Institutions need evidence that can survive machine retrieval and compression.

That means:

- one authoritative source for important facts;
- clear dates and update histories;
- explicit language rather than euphemistic institutional phrasing;
- evidence attached to public claims;
- accessible FAQs for recurring high-consequence questions;
- structured, crawlable information where appropriate;
- consistent executive and organizational biographies;
- clear correction records when facts change;
- credible third-party validation where available.

The goal is not to manipulate AI systems. It is to reduce ambiguity in the public evidence environment.

SECTION 06

Viewpoint Diversity Is Now a Strategic Variable

The IPIE finding that 58% of experts expect AI summaries to narrow viewpoint diversity introduces a less-discussed communications risk.

An answer can be factually defensible while still being strategically incomplete. A compressed summary may remove disagreement, uncertainty, stakeholder experience, minority interpretations or the conditions under which a claim is true.

Institutions should therefore test not only “Is the answer accurate?” but:

What is missing?

Whose perspective has disappeared?

Which qualification was compressed away?

Does the answer imply more consensus than actually exists?

Would a reasonable stakeholder recognize the issue in this description?

SECTION 07

Platform Power Changes the Crisis Plan

When platforms and AI systems mediate interpretation, a crisis can persist after the news cycle because an outdated or distorted account remains retrievable.

Crisis recovery should include:

- search-result review;
- AI-answer testing;
- correction of outdated owned sources;
- outreach to authoritative third-party sources where facts are wrong;
- publication of clear remedy evidence;
- monitoring whether old claims continue to dominate retrieval;
- repeated verification after major operational changes.

Recovery is incomplete when the institution has changed but the answer environment has not.

SECTION 08

Build an Information Intermediary Register

For each high-consequence issue, identify the systems standing between institutional evidence and stakeholder judgment.

Record:

INTERMEDIARY — Which platform or system?

AUDIENCE — Who uses it for this decision?

SOURCE PATTERN — What kinds of sources does it appear to rely on?

CURRENT ANSWER — What does it say?

RISK — What is inaccurate, missing or over-compressed?

ACTION — What legitimate evidence or source correction is required?

OWNER — Who is responsible for maintaining the underlying information?

This should sit beside—not replace—traditional stakeholder and media maps.

SECTION 09

What Leaders Should Measure

Do not reduce the issue to an “AI visibility score.” For institutions, useful indicators include:

ANSWER CONSISTENCY — Do major systems converge on the same core facts?

SOURCE AUTHORITY — Are answers grounded in credible, current sources?

OMISSION RISK — Are material qualifications or perspectives repeatedly absent?

CORRECTION LATENCY — How long does outdated information remain dominant after evidence changes?

DIRECT-SOURCE DEPENDENCY — Which issues become risky if audiences never reach the institution’s own explanation?

DECISION CONSEQUENCE — Could the mediated answer change a stakeholder decision?

SECTION 10

The Strategic Shift

The old model assumed that communications could publish an authoritative source and then compete to bring audiences toward it.

The emerging model requires institutions to maintain an authoritative evidence environment that can remain intelligible even when an intermediary constructs the answer.

This changes the operating logic:

ARTEFACT91 WORKING MODEL**PUBLISH → PROMOTE → MEASURE**

becomes

ARTEFACT91 WORKING MODEL**EVIDENCE → STRUCTURE → TEST → INTERPRET → CORRECT → MONITOR**

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Artefact91 Point of View

The next reputation problem may not begin with a hostile headline. It may begin with a reasonable question asked of a system that constructs an incomplete answer from the evidence it can retrieve.

That makes institutional communications partly an information-infrastructure discipline.

The objective is not to control every answer. That is neither realistic nor desirable. The objective is to make authoritative evidence easier to retrieve, contradictions easier to resolve, missing perspectives easier to detect and material errors faster to correct.

The information gatekeeper has changed. Institutional communications has to change with it.

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Questions for Leaders

What answer do people receive about us without ever visiting us?

Which of our most consequential claims are difficult for machines to verify?

Where could compression remove an important qualification or stakeholder perspective?

How quickly can we correct the public evidence environment after a major change?

Which intermediary now influences decisions that our stakeholder map does not capture?

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Sources & Research Base

International Panel on the Information Environment (2026), Trends in the Information Environment: 2026 Expert Survey Results, Synthesis Report SR2026.3.

International Panel on the Information Environment (2026), Expert Survey on the Global Information Environment 2026: Under Pressure, Summary for Policymakers SFP2026.3.

Pew Research Center (2025), Google users are less likely to click on links when an AI summary appears in the results.

Reuters Institute (2026), Digital News Report 2026.

Artefact91 analysis and the Artefact91 Mediated-Answer Risk Model.

Methodology Note

This briefing synthesizes current public research and Artefact91 analysis. External statistics are attributed to their source. The IPIE findings report expert assessments, not direct measurements of all users or platforms; they should be interpreted accordingly. Artefact91 frameworks are analytical tools and should be adapted to the facts, jurisdiction, audiences and risk profile of each engagement.