



The State of Public Relations in Canada (2025)

Ethics, AI and reframing the professional field



Sponsored by:



Agenda

- The CPRS Thought Leadership Council
- What we set out to do in 2025
- Methodology
- The results: three core themes
- Questions and answers
- SOPR GPT
- Wrap up and thanks

The CPRS Thought Leadership Council

The CPRS Thought Leadership Council (TLC) is focusing on creating a made-in-Canada approach to research-driven, actionable ideas to advance the profession and elevate public relations and communications management as a critical part of organizational success.

Council initiatives:

- State of Public Relations report rollout
- CPRS Masterclass series
- National Conference programming
- Senior leader connects

What we set out to do

2020: First national survey exploring trust, ethics, and expectations for communications and public relations in Canada.

Canadians were asked about “communications and PR professionals” as one group.

New: Business leaders added as a third audience for deeper perspective on trust and ethics.

2025: The study split the sample, half saw “communications professionals,” half saw “public relations professionals.”

Methodology

The 2025 State of Public Relations Study and led by the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) to assess:

- Trust, identity, ethics, and AI in communications and PR
- Views from the public, professionals, and business leaders

Conducted through three integrated research streams (2025)

- Quantitative surveys
- Qualitative research
- Secondary research

Quantitative surveys

General Public Survey – n=1,512 (Leger, Spring 2025)

Randomly split sample: “communications professionals” vs. “public relations professionals”. Measured trust, ethics, credibility, AI awareness, and misinformation.



Business Leaders Survey – n=100 (Leger, Aug 2025)

Senior Canadian decision-makers. Explored trust in professional groups, leadership expectations, and AI priorities.



PR & Communications Professionals Survey – n=181 (CPRS, Spring 2025)

Open-link national survey of sector professionals. Focused on identity, ethics, AI use/policy, and role of associations.



Qualitative and secondary research

Qualitative Components

3 CPRS Conference Breakouts (Banff 2025):

trust, ethics, identity, megatrends

Dublin Conversations

#ConversationsFest:

association governance and global perspectives

CPRS Thought Leadership Council:

AI governance and inclusivity insights

Secondary Sources Reviewed

Elevation of Public Relations (2017)

What We Heard: Future of PR (2018)

2020 PR Perceptions Survey

2023 State of PR in Canada Study

Trust Me, I'm in PR (2025)

Three core themes

1. Naming and Identity

How we describe the profession, “communications” versus “public relations,” shapes trust, credibility, and belonging.

2. Artificial Intelligence and Governance

AI is transforming how professionals work faster than policies and ethics can keep pace.

3. The Role of Professional Associations

CPRS and similar bodies are shifting from gatekeepers to stewards of ethics, learning, and leadership.

What's in a name?

Trust and the terminology divide

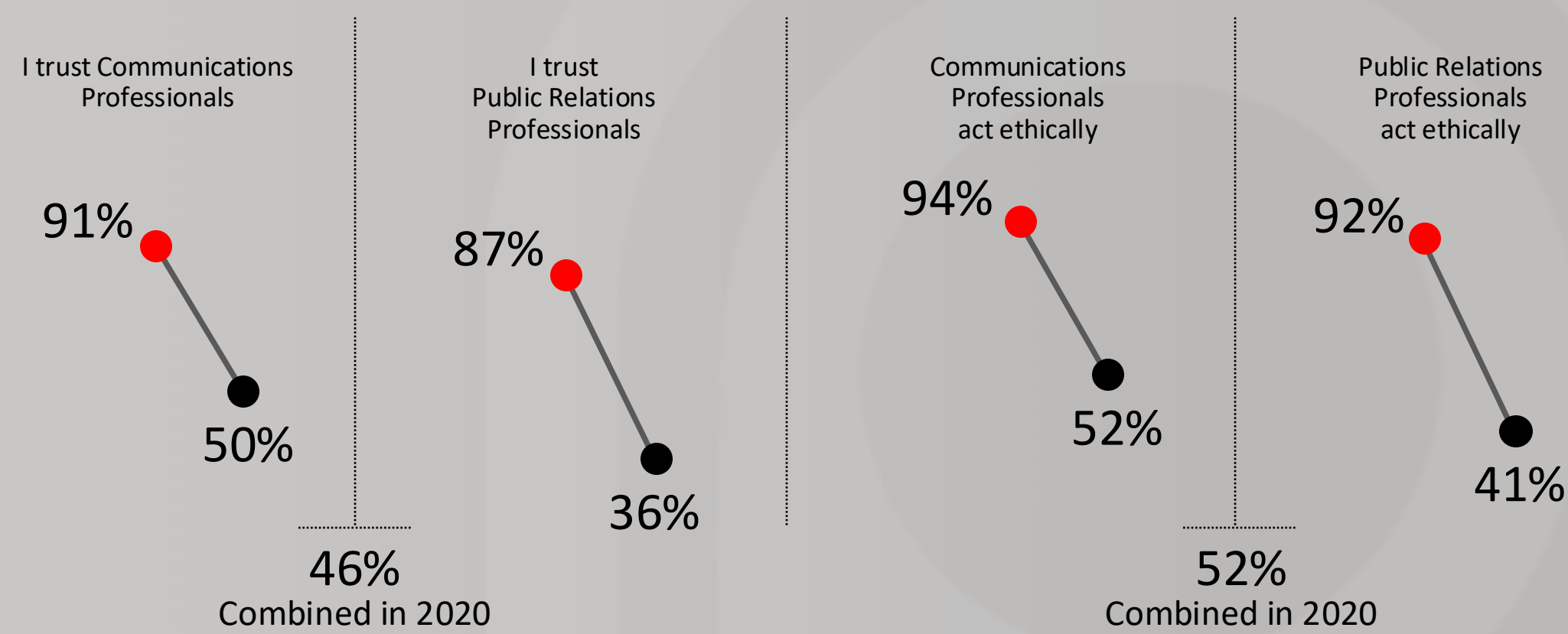
A profession or not?

● Profession ● Industry ● Practice ● Sector ● Field

Professional Field



Common preference for communications



Business Leaders – Trust and Ethics Gap



63%

trust
**communications
professionals**



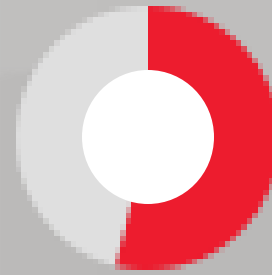
51%

trust
**public
relations
professionals**



66%

view
**communication
s professionals**
as ethical



54%

view **public
relations
professionals**
as ethical



67% & 87%
Both titles rank
below
**journalists
(67%)** and
**subject-matter
experts (87%).**

Communications
professional is
preferred to describe
their profession more
than twice as often
as **Public Relations**
professional.

29%
Public Relations
professional

Newer CPRS members
(1-9 years): 83% prefer
communications professional

67%
Communications
professional

Women prefer
Communications
professional: (75% vs
50% of men)

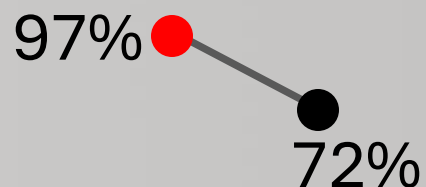
And yet ...

The split in results only occurs when asking about trust and ethical behaviour – all other answers are not statistically different.

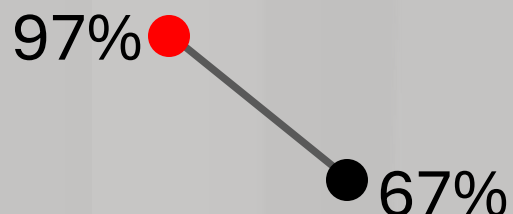


The split in results only occurs when asking about trust and ethical behaviour, no statistical differences in other areas.

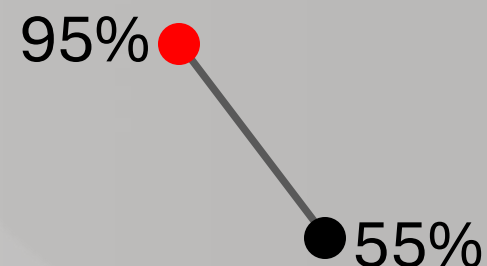
The work of PR/Comms professionals is important for their organizations



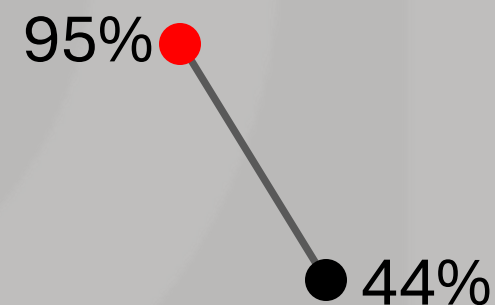
PR/Comms professionals build relationships between organizations and their clients and customers



PR/Comms professionals help organizations listen to and understand their clients and customers



The work of PR/Comms professionals makes a positive contribution to society



Business Leaders

Similarly, business leaders identified strategy, thought leadership, stakeholder engagement, and organizational listening as top priorities for their communications management and public relations professionals.



What the data is telling us

- The trust gap between titles is consistent across all audiences.
- Professionals' identity has shifted toward "communications."
- The gap is about language, not capability.
- Perceptions of ethics and professionalism improve with broader terminology.

This is not a new debate

LEADERSHIP

The Death Of 'Just PR This': Why Modern Media Relations Isn't What You Think



By [Kathleen Lucente](#), Forbes Councils Member.
for [Forbes Agency Council](#), [COUNCIL POST](#) | Membership (fee-based)

Published Feb 06, 2025 at 07:00am EST

LEADERSHIP

Why Public Relations (As We Know It) Is Dead



By [Nathan Miller](#), Former Forbes Councils Member.
for [Forbes Agency Council](#), [COUNCIL POST](#) | Membership (fee-based)

Published Jan 21, 2020 at 07:30am EST

PR vs communications: One wins headlines as the other wins trust, long-term growth

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 02, 2025 - 3 min read

Robert Phillips: PR is dead, long live the new model

Feature

In Robert Phillips' ideal world of doing business many of your jobs would simply not exist, finds Daniel Farey-Jones.

by [Daniel Farey-Jones](#) | April 20, 2015

What it means for us

- Canadians, professionals, and business leaders agree on the value of the work: ethics, trust, and strategy.
- The gap lies in the **name**, not the function.
- Continuing to use only “public relations” risks limiting understanding of the field.
- Inclusive language that combines both terms can strengthen relevance, trust, and belonging.

Artificial Intelligence

Adoption outpaces governance

AI and governance

How are professionals using AI?

AI is changing the field but not yet redefining it.

How do Canadians and business leaders view AI and ethics?

Professionals see AI as a tactical accelerator, not a strategic driver. Governance, ethics, and policy are still catching up.

Where are the gaps in policy and leadership?

AI usage in the professional field



55%

AI use - 55% use AI weekly or more often.

Main uses: content creation and data analysis.

73% say AI has a positive impact on their work.

90% agree AI must be used ethically

Only 27% report a formal AI policy in their organization.

General Public



76%

believe fake
news affects
public opinion



57%

expect AI
to be used
ethically



79%

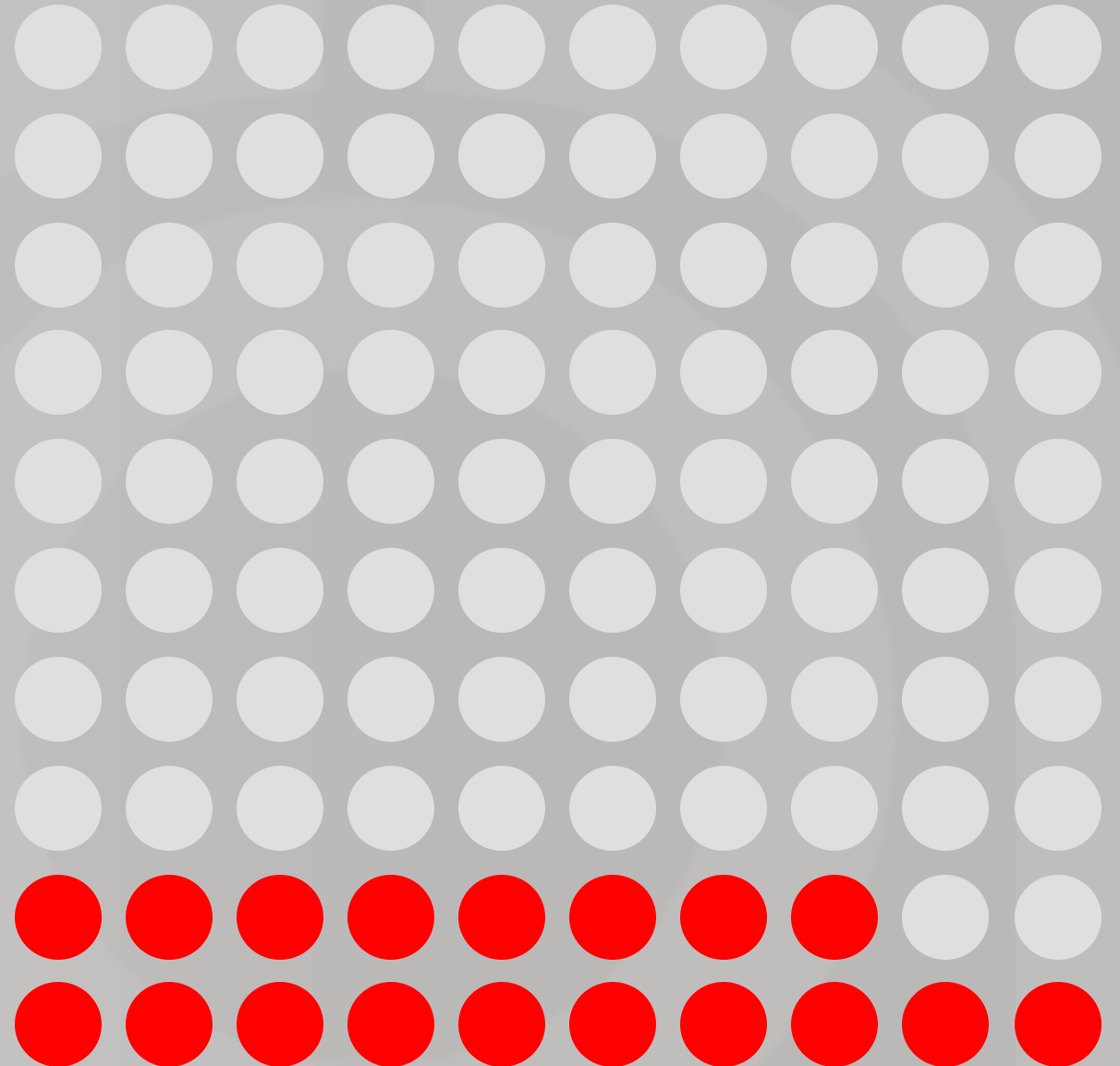
expect
professionals
to address
misinformation

Business Leaders

Only

18%

See AI as a priority
for professionals



|| We're running with AI
before we've learned to
walk with policy.

||



Tactical focus limits credibility and influence.

Weak governance exposes organizations to reputational risk.

Lack of policy fuels misinformation and bias.

Lead in AI governance and policy development.

Align AI use with ethics, trust, and reputation goals.

Position communications as a business driver, not only a content producer.

The way forward

AI use is high, but leadership is low.

Professionals see AI as a tool, not a strategic capability.

To lead, the profession must:

- Build skills in AI literacy and governance

- Move from content creation to policy and strategy

- Demonstrate how AI supports organizational trust and value

CPRS can lead by developing training and ethical guidance.

The role of associations

From gatekeepers to stewards

Associations remain essential to the professional field. Their role is shifting from gatekeepers to stewards of ethics, learning, and leadership.

Canadians support ethics in public relations.



A horizontal bar chart with a red bar representing 86% and a white bar representing the remaining 14%. The percentage '86%' is written in white text inside the red bar.

86%

More than 86% agree that CPRS should uphold and enforce a professional code of conduct.



A horizontal bar chart with a red bar representing 67% and a white bar representing the remaining 33%. The percentage '67%' is written in white text inside the red bar.

67%

And 67% of Canadians say organizations should only hire professionals who hold an APR designation.

Role of professional associations

	Professionals	Canadians
Enhance public trust, credibility, and respect of the profession	97%	87%
Be a champion for the industry	96%	86%
Advocate for the ethical practice of public relations	96%	85%
Enhance the code of professional standards with appropriate policies, education, and training	96%	85%
Provide direction on the ethical use of artificial intelligence	92%	83%
Enforce ethical code violations	83%	79%

|| We must be seen to be
leading in ethics.

||

|| CPRS should take a
stand when ethical lines
are crossed.

||

Evolving expectations

Professionals want CPRS to be visible in setting standards and addressing unethical practice.

Younger professionals want flexible, participatory membership models.



Traditional models under pressure

Younger professionals are less likely to join formal associations.

Digital platforms now offer networking without accountability.

The value of associations must rest on ethics, credibility, and utility.



Again – not a new discussion

What We Heard (2018) called for associations to enable purpose and values.

Elevation of Public Relations (2017) urged renewed focus on standards and advocacy.

Trust Me, I'm in PR (2025) reinforced the need for public understanding and legitimacy.

The 2025 study shows these priorities are now **urgent**.

CPRS – leading with ethics and building on credibility

CPRS already demonstrates the leadership the profession is calling for:

- A strong and respected Code of Professional Standards supported by members and the public
- Visible ethical leadership and advocacy for responsible practice
- Trusted voice on AI ethics and governance through new tools and guidance
- National network that delivers learning, mentorship and accreditation
- A commitment to transparency, inclusion and professional excellence

A professional field, in transition

The 2025 State of Public Relations Report shows a field:

- Wrestling with trust and identity
- Adopting technology faster than governance allows
- Re-evaluating how professional associations create value

Our call to action

Revisit our name with a lens of inclusion and clarity.
Reflect what matters to professionals and how the public sees our value.

Take a leadership role in AI governance.
Move from using AI tactically to guiding how it shapes organizations and society.

Reimagine professional associations.
Position CPRS as an engine of ethics, innovation, and flexible learning.



The SOPR GPT

What it is

CPRS's custom AI tool built from the *2025 State of Public Relations* research. Helps members explore data and insights interactively.

Why it matters

Makes research more accessible and engaging.
Encourages evidence-based discussion across the profession.

Use with care

Based only on official CPRS sources.
The report and this presentation are the primary references.

Thank you

