

REIMAGINING COMMUNICATION THEORY FOR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, DIGITAL MEDIA, AND PARTICIPATORY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

The rapid convergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital media, and participatory public engagement has fundamentally transformed contemporary communication, challenging assumptions that have traditionally underpinned communication theory. While classical communication theories continue to provide valuable explanations of message transmission, media influence, audience behaviour, innovation diffusion, and democratic participation, they were largely developed within communication environments characterised by human-centred interaction and institutional media systems. The review demonstrates that contemporary communication is increasingly shaped by the reciprocal interaction of human communicators, AI systems, digital platforms, algorithmic infrastructures, and participatory publics, thereby exposing theoretical gaps that individual classical theories cannot adequately explain in isolation. In response, the paper proposes the Artificial Intelligence-Augmented Participatory Communication Framework (AI-APCF) as an integrative conceptual model that redefines communication as an adaptive socio-technical ecosystem governed by continuous interaction, participatory engagement, adaptive feedback, and ethical governance. The framework extends communication scholarship by incorporating algorithmic mediation, AI-enabled communicative agency, and ethical responsibility into mainstream communication theory

while preserving the enduring insights of classical theoretical traditions. The paper concludes that the future relevance of communication theory depends on interdisciplinary integration rather than theoretical replacement and recommends empirical validation of the proposed framework across diverse communication contexts.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Communication Theory; Digital Media; Participatory Public Engagement; Algorithmic Communication; Communication Framework; AI-Augmented Participatory Communication Framework (AI-APCF).

Introduction

The history of communication theory is synonymous with communication technologies' development and social interaction's change. With the advent of print media and the explosion of broadcasting, each and every technological advancement of information has led to the reworking of theories from information theory's inception to the present. Theories such as Mathematical Model of Communication (Shannon & Weaver, 1949), Lasswell's Model (Lasswell, 1948), Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973), Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2003), and the Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989) have been used to explain media influence, audience behaviour, information diffusion, and public discourse to a great degree, and have shaped communication scholarship. These theories remain as good conceptual bases for studying communication processes.

But the development and progress of Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital media and algorithmically mediated communication have totally revolutionized the nature of communication. Today, intelligent systems are creating content, tailoring information, curating online interactions and, more than ever before, shaping public opinion, using algorithmic recommendations and predictive analytics (Dwivedi et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023). Meanwhile, audiences have become producers, distributors, assessors and re-distributors of information in highly networked communications spaces (Couldry&Hepp, 2017; van Dijck et al., 2018). Communication has, in turn, grown from a sender–receiver dynamics into complex eco-systems that involve constant interactivity among the human communicator, intelligent technologies, digital platforms, and participatory publics.

These technological advances have attracted a lot of interest in the academic world but literature is largely disjointed. Research in AI tends to be on technological possibilities and ethical issues, and in digital media, on the management of platforms or audience involvement or algorithmic effects. There are fewer studies that analyze the changes together and their implications on the philosophical underpinnings and the explanatory limits of traditional communication theories. Thus, communication scholarship is so far lacking in an integrated conceptual framework, which can explain communication processes in situations where human actors, AI systems, digital platforms and algorithmic infrastructures simultaneously influence communication outcomes.

In this context, this paper proposes to revisit the communication theory instead of discarding it, but by integrating it with the other disciplines. This does not try to challenge previous theoretical traditions, but rather the paper suggests that they need to be expanded to suit new contexts of AI, digital media and the participatory approach to public engagement.

Objectives of the study

1. To analyze the classical communication theories' philosophical underpinnings.
2. To critically analyse the importance of primary communication theories within the context of communication in AI-driven environment.
3. To understand the impact of Artificial Intelligence and digital media on the communication process in today's world.
4. To examine the implications for communication theory of participative public engagement.
5. To build an integrative conceptual framework for a new way to conceptualize communication theory in the context of communication in the age of AI and digitally mediated communication spaces.

Conceptual Review

The paper adopts a conceptual review approach that synthesises interdisciplinary knowledge from the field of communication studies, AI, digital media, platform studies and information sciences. It starts with an analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of communication theory, then explores the development of some of the key traditions and evaluates their significance in the context of communication in AI environments. The paper in turn examines the implications of digital

media and participatory public engagement, evaluates and challenges the current theoretical frameworks and introduces the Artificial Intelligence-Augmented Participatory Communication Framework (AI-APCF) as a new conceptual model for the understanding of the communication process in the context of intelligent and participatory digital ecosystems.

Evolution of Communication Theory: From Linear Models to Intelligent Communication Ecosystems

As with other disciplines, communication theory has developed over time as a result of changes in social, technological and conceptual perspectives of how humans communicate. Theories have been developed since the dawn of communication as a field of study and these theories attempt to explain the production, transmission, interpretation and use of information in society. While these theories originated in distinct intellectual streams, they all tried to account for communication by emphasizing the sending of messages, the power of the media, audience reaction, the diffusion of innovations, and the engagement of the public (Littlejohn et al., 2021). What they still have to offer is the conceptual framework on which the scholarship of today is built. The first generation of communication theories spoke to the context of mass media and institutional control of communication. According to linear models, such as Lasswell's Communication Model and Shannon and Weaver's Mathematical Model of Communication, communication is a linear process and involves a sender, a message, a channel, a receiver and feedback (Lasswell, 1948; Shannon & Weaver, 1949). These models greatly helped to understand aspects of information transmission, communication efficiency and message effects. They assumed, however, relatively stable communication patterns in which the communicative roles of the humans were clearly defined.

Later theoretical work moved away from the notion of message transmission to one of the influence of the media and audience behaviour. According to the Agenda-Setting Theory, media organisations shape the public agenda by creating prominence for issues, but do not make their audiences think (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The Uses and Gratifications Theory reoriented the audience as active individuals who choose media to meet their specific information, social and psychological needs (Katz et al., 1973). Thirdly, communication is supposed to happen within relatively stable institutional environments, where the production and dissemination of information is mostly controlled by professional media

organisations. Lastly, the later theories recognize the idea of feedback and audience participation, but communication is still primarily attributed to human agency. These theories were developed in the context of the media environments in which they were created, which is why these assumptions are fitting. But the swift integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), algorithmic systems, digital platforms and participatory media has revolutionised the ways in which communication is done today. There is a growing volume of research on the ways in which intelligent technologies are creating content, personalising information, providing news recommendations, controlling online content and shaping public engagement by making algorithmic decisions (Dwivedi et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023). Meanwhile, audiences are active producers, distributors, and critics of information in much networked digital environments (Couldry&Hepp, 2017). The communication is not limited to communication between human actors, but also to communication with intelligent computational systems involved in communication processes.

These advances do not reduce the relevance of the classical theories of communication, rather reinforce the need to critically reinterpret them. The theories remain relevant but need conceptual elaboration to understanding communication in the context of human–AI interaction, algorithmic mediation, platform governance, and digitally mediated public engagement. Challenge for the communication scholarship in the 21st century is not to discard the classical theories, but to add them to a more encompassing concept and theory that can account for the communication in the now intelligent, adaptive and participatory digital environments.

Table 1. Classical Communication Theories and Their Relevance in the AI Era

Classical Theory	Core Contribution	Principal Limitation in AI-Driven Communication
Shannon and Weaver’s Mathematical Model	Clarifies information transmission and communication efficiency	Treats technology as a passive channel and does not account for AI as an active communication actor.
Lasswell’s Communicati	Identifies the basic elements	Assumes linear, human-centred communication with clearly defined

Classical Theory	Core Contribution	Principal Limitation in AI-Driven Communication
on Model	of communication and media effects	communicative roles.
Agenda-Setting Theory	Explains how media shape public priorities	Does not adequately explain algorithmic agenda setting by digital platforms and recommendation systems.
Uses and Gratifications Theory	Recognises audiences as active media users	Underestimates the influence of AI-driven personalisation and algorithmic content recommendations on media choices.
Diffusion of Innovations Theory	Explains how innovations spread through social systems	Requires adaptation to explain AI systems that continuously evolve while being adopted.
Public Sphere Theory	Emphasises communication as the basis for democratic participation	Faces challenges in explaining fragmented, platform-mediated, and algorithmically curated public discourse.

The evolution of communication theory demonstrates that theoretical development has consistently responded to technological and societal change. The emergence of AI and digitally networked communication represents another transformative moment in this evolution, creating the need for conceptual models capable of explaining communication as a dynamic interaction among human communicators, intelligent technologies, digital platforms, and participatory publics.

Philosophical Foundations for Reimagining Communication Theory

Communication theories are rooted in philosophical assumptions that shape how communication processes are conceptualised, investigated, and interpreted. These assumptions influence scholars' understanding of reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and appropriate methods for studying communication (axiology and methodology). As communication environments evolve through

Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital media, and participatory technologies, the philosophical foundations underpinning communication scholarship require critical re-examination. Reimagining communication theory therefore begins with recognising that technological transformation challenges not only communication practice but also the philosophical assumptions upon which communication theories have traditionally been constructed (Craig, 1999; Littlejohn et al., 2021).

Interpretivism offers a complementary perspective by viewing communication as a process of meaning-making shaped by social, cultural, and contextual interpretation. Rather than treating communication as the transmission of objective information, interpretive approaches recognise that meaning is negotiated through interaction among communicators and audiences (Littlejohn et al., 2021). This perspective has become increasingly relevant in digital communication environments where users actively create, remix, and reinterpret content across networked platforms. AI-generated communication further complicates this process by introducing computational agents capable of participating in meaning construction (Couldry&Hepp, 2017; UNESCO, 2021). From a critical perspective, reimagining communication theory requires greater attention to issues of algorithmic accountability, digital inclusion, surveillance, misinformation, and the ethical governance of AI-enabled communication.

Constructivist perspectives further extend communication scholarship by emphasising that knowledge and social reality are continuously produced through interaction. Within digitally networked societies, communication increasingly involves collaborative knowledge production among individuals, communities, organisations, and intelligent technologies. Participatory communication, citizen journalism, online activism, and user-generated content demonstrate that communication has evolved into a co-creative process in which audiences actively contribute to the production and circulation of meaning (Carpentier, 2016; Jenkins, 2006). Instead, explaining intelligent communication ecosystems requires combining empirical analysis, contextual interpretation, ethical reflection, and interdisciplinary synthesis.

Taken together, these philosophical traditions demonstrate that communication theory has continually evolved alongside changes in society and technology. While classical philosophical perspectives remain relevant, the emergence of AI, algorithmic mediation, digital

platforms, and participatory public engagement exposes new conceptual questions regarding communicative agency, technological mediation, ethical responsibility, and collaborative meaning-making. Accordingly, this paper adopts a pragmatic and interdisciplinary philosophical orientation that preserves the enduring insights of classical communication scholarship while extending them to explain communication within intelligent and digitally mediated ecosystems. This philosophical position provides the foundation for the Artificial Intelligence-Augmented Participatory Communication Framework (AI-APCF) developed later in the paper.

Artificial Intelligence, Digital Media, and the Reconfiguration of Contemporary Communication

The convergence of Artificial Intelligence and digital media represents one of the most significant transformations in the history of communication. Earlier technological innovations, including radio, television, and the Internet, primarily expanded the speed and reach of communication while leaving human communicators at the centre of message production and interpretation. In contrast, AI-enabled technologies increasingly participate in communication processes by generating content, personalising information, moderating online interactions, predicting audience behaviour, and supporting decision-making (Zakaria et al, 2025 & Şenyapar, 2024). Consequently, communication is evolving from a predominantly human-centred activity into an adaptive socio-technical process in which intelligent systems function as active participants rather than passive technological tools (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Russell & Norvig, 2021).

This transformation is reinforced by the rapid expansion of digital media platforms that have fundamentally altered the production, circulation, and consumption of information. Social media, search engines, streaming services, and collaborative online platforms have decentralised communication by enabling individuals, organisations, governments, and communities to communicate directly with global audiences. Unlike traditional mass communication systems characterised by institutional gatekeeping, digital platforms facilitate multidirectional communication in which users simultaneously produce, consume, evaluate, and redistribute content (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; van Dijck et al., 2018). Communication has therefore become increasingly interactive, networked, and data-driven.

A defining characteristic of this new communication environment is algorithmic mediation, algorithms determine the visibility, prioritisation, and dissemination of information through recommendation systems, search rankings, news feeds, and content moderation mechanisms. These computational processes increasingly shape public attention, influence media exposure, and affect civic discourse by determining what information users encounter and how they engage with it (Napoli, 2024). Consequently, communication is no longer mediated solely by editors, journalists, or organisational communicators; algorithmic systems have become influential actors in structuring public communication (Abdujabbarovna, 2026).

Artificial Intelligence further accelerates this transformation through generative AI, conversational agents, predictive analytics, and intelligent recommendation systems (Miller et al, 2024). These technologies support content creation, automate customer engagement, enhance strategic communication, facilitate multilingual communication, and improve public service delivery. Governments employ AI to strengthen digital governance and citizen engagement, organisations use AI to personalise stakeholder communication and analyse public sentiment, while educational institutions increasingly integrate intelligent tutoring systems and AI-assisted learning platforms (Angelis, 2026, UNESCO, 2023, & World Economic Forum, 2025). These developments demonstrate that communication technologies no longer merely transmit information but increasingly influence how communication is created, interpreted, and experienced.

Table 2. From Classical Communication to AI-Augmented Communication

Dimension	Classical Communication	AI-Augmented Communication
Primary communicators	Human actors	Human actors and AI systems
Role of technology	Communication channel	Active communication participant and mediator
Information flow	Predominantly linear	Multidirectional and networked
Gatekeeping	Editors and media institutions	Human editors and algorithmic systems
Audience role	Primarily receivers with feedback	Active co-creators, collaborators, and influencers

Dimension	Classical Communication	AI-Augmented Communication
Content production	Human-generated	Human- and AI-generated
Feedback	Periodic and sequential	Continuous, real-time, and data-driven
Decision-making	Human-centred	Human–AI collaborative decision-making
Communication environment	Institutional systems	media Adaptive digital ecosystems
Major governance concern	Media regulation	AI ethics, algorithmic accountability, privacy, transparency, and digital inclusion

The transformation outlined above provides the conceptual basis for reassessing the explanatory capacity of classical communication theories. While these theories continue to illuminate fundamental communication principles, they do not fully explain communication environments characterised by algorithmic mediation, intelligent computational actors, and participatory digital publics.

Limitations of Classical Communication Theories in the Era of Artificial Intelligence, Digital Media, and Participatory Public Engagement

The rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital media, and participatory communication has exposed important conceptual limitations within many classical communication theories. Although these theories continue to provide valuable explanations of communication processes, they were largely developed within media environments characterised by identifiable human communicators, institutional gatekeepers, and relatively stable patterns of information exchange.

Early communication models, particularly Lasswell's Communication Model and Shannon and Weaver's Mathematical Model of Communication, conceptualise communication as a structured process involving identifiable senders, messages, channels, receivers, and

feedback (Lasswell, 1948; Shannon & Weaver, 1949). These models remain foundational because they explain communication efficiency, message transmission, and information flow. However, they assume that communication originates primarily from human actors and that technologies function as neutral transmission channels.

Theories explaining media influence including Agenda-Setting Theory and Gatekeeping Theory have historically focused on the ability of media institutions and professional journalists to determine information visibility and shape public priorities (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). These perspectives were developed within communication systems where editorial institutions exercised substantial control over information production and distribution. Digital platforms have significantly redistributed this communicative power. Algorithms increasingly determine which information users encounter through recommendation systems, personalised news feeds, search rankings, and automated content moderation (Napoli, 2024). Uses and Gratifications Theory represented an important shift by recognising audiences as active participants who intentionally select media to satisfy particular informational and social needs (Katz et al., 1973). While this perspective remains influential, contemporary digital communication increasingly involves algorithmic personalisation that shapes user exposure before conscious media choices are made. Recommendation systems, predictive analytics, and behavioural profiling influence content selection through computational processes that continuously adapt to user behaviour (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Similarly, participatory digital platforms have transformed audiences from consumers of communication into collaborators, content creators, citizen journalists, and networked communities that simultaneously produce, distribute, and evaluate information (Jenkins, 2006). These developments suggest that audience activity is increasingly co-produced through interactions between human preferences and algorithmic systems, extending beyond assumptions embedded within classical audience-centred theories.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory continues to provide valuable insight into the adoption of new technologies (Rogers, 2003). However, AI differs from many earlier innovations because it evolves continuously after adoption through machine learning, software updates, and adaptive algorithms. Consequently, innovation adoption increasingly becomes an ongoing process rather than a discrete event, requiring theoretical perspectives capable of explaining continuous technological adaptation. Similarly, the Public Sphere Theory remains central to

understanding democratic communication and public deliberation (Habermas, 1989). While digital technologies have expanded opportunities for public engagement, they have also introduced new challenges concerning information integrity, digital exclusion, algorithmic bias, and the concentration of communicative power within technology platforms (UNESCO, 2021).

Towards an Integrative Communication Perspective

Collectively, these limitations reveal a common pattern. Classical communication theories generally conceptualise communication as a predominantly human-centred process occurring within relatively stable institutional environments. Contemporary communication, by contrast, functions within adaptive ecosystems characterised by reciprocal interactions among human communicators, Artificial Intelligence systems, algorithmic infrastructures, digital platforms, and participatory publics. Importantly, these observations do not invalidate classical communication theories. Rather, they demonstrate that no single theory independently explains the complexity of intelligent communication ecosystems. Linear models continue to explain message transmission, media theories illuminate agenda formation, audience theories clarify communicative behaviour, innovation theories explain technology adoption, and democratic communication theories remain essential for understanding civic participation. Their explanatory value persists, but each captures only part of the contemporary communication landscape.

It is this theoretical gap that motivates the development of the Artificial Intelligence-Augmented Participatory Communication Framework (AI-APCF), proposed in the following section as a contemporary model for understanding communication within intelligent and digitally networked societies.

The Artificial Intelligence-Augmented Participatory Communication Framework (AI-APCF)

The preceding analysis demonstrates that no single classical communication theory sufficiently explains the complexity of communication within Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled and digitally networked environments. Classical theories continue to illuminate important dimensions of communication including message transmission, media influence, audience behaviour, innovation adoption, and democratic participation but each was developed within

communication environments in which human actors and institutional media organisations occupied central communicative roles. Contemporary communication ecosystems increasingly involve intelligent technologies, algorithmic infrastructures, digital platforms, and participatory publics that continuously influence communication processes. These developments necessitate an integrative conceptual perspective capable of explaining communication as a dynamic interaction between human and technological actors.

In response to this theoretical need, this paper proposes the Artificial Intelligence-Augmented Participatory Communication Framework (AI-APCF). Rather than replacing established communication theories, the framework integrates their complementary insights into a unified model that reflects the realities of AI-mediated communication. The framework conceptualises communication as an adaptive socio-technical ecosystem in which communication outcomes emerge through continuous interactions among human communicators, Artificial Intelligence systems, digital platforms, participatory publics, adaptive feedback mechanisms, and ethical governance structures.

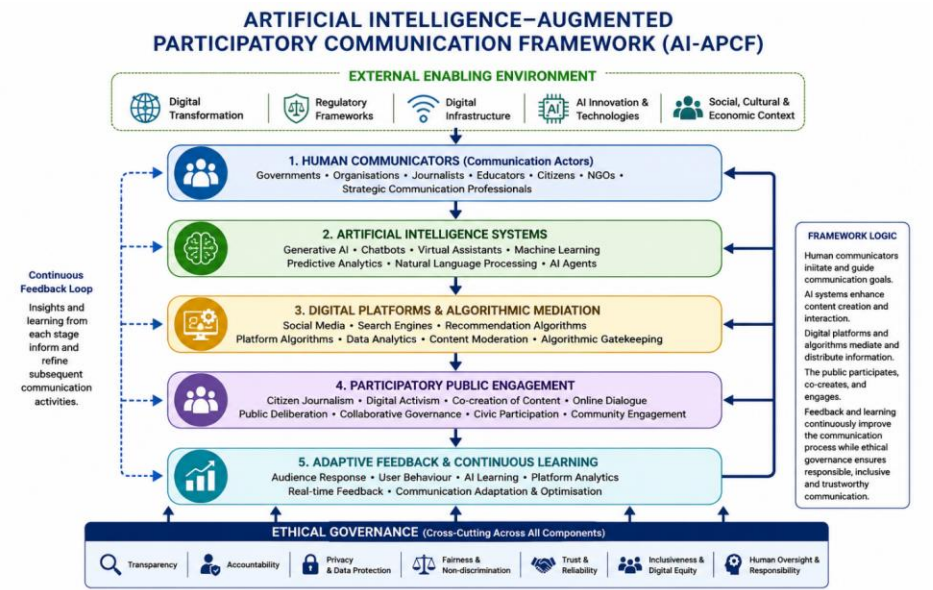
Components of the AI-APCF

The framework consists of six interrelated components.

Human Communicators remain the primary initiators of communication objectives, strategic intent, interpretation, and decision-making. Governments, organisations, journalists, educators, civil society organisations, and citizens continue to define communication goals, establish meanings, and evaluate communication outcomes. Human agency therefore remains central to communication despite increasing technological mediation. Artificial Intelligence Systems constitute the second component. Generative AI, conversational agents, predictive analytics, recommendation systems, and intelligent decision-support technologies increasingly generate content, personalise communication, analyse behavioural data, and facilitate interaction. Unlike conventional communication technologies, AI systems actively participate in communication processes by influencing message creation, distribution, and interpretation (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Russell & Norvig, 2021).

The third component comprises Digital Platforms and Algorithmic Mediation. Social media platforms, search engines, recommendation algorithms, and content moderation systems determine information visibility, prioritise communication, facilitate interaction, and influence

public discourse. These algorithmic infrastructures increasingly function as computational gatekeepers, extending traditional understandings of media influence and agenda formation (Napoli, 2024; van Dijck et al., 2018).The fourth component is Participatory Public Engagement. Contemporary communication is characterised by active public participation through citizen journalism, collaborative knowledge



production, online deliberation, digital activism, and stakeholder co-creation. Rather than functioning solely as message recipients, audiences increasingly influence communication outcomes through continuous interaction with both human communicators and AI-enabled platforms (Carpentier, 2016; Jenkins, 2006).The fifth component, Adaptive Feedback and Continuous Learning, distinguishes the framework from many classical communication models. Feedback is no longer a discrete stage occurring after communication but an ongoing process driven by audience interaction, behavioural analytics, platform metrics, and AI learning systems. Communication therefore evolves continuously as intelligent technologies and human communicators adapt to changing contexts and user responses.Finally, Ethical Governance operates as a cross-cutting dimension influencing every component of the framework. Transparency, accountability, fairness, privacy, explainability, human oversight, and digital inclusion are not peripheral considerations but foundational principles that shape trust, legitimacy, and responsible communication within AI-mediated environments (UNESCO, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2025).

Dynamic Relationships within the Framework

The AI-APCF conceptualises communication as a recursive rather than linear process. Communication begins with human communicators establishing objectives and creating strategic intent. AI systems subsequently augment these activities by generating, analysing, or personalising communication. Digital platforms and algorithmic infrastructures mediate the dissemination and visibility of communication, while participatory publics actively interpret, modify, redistribute, and respond to communicated content. These responses generate continuous feedback that informs both human decision-making and AI learning processes.

The originality of the AI-APCF lies not in rejecting classical communication theories but in integrating them within a broader conceptual architecture capable of explaining communication in intelligent digital ecosystems. Existing communication models typically examine individual dimensions of communication such as transmission, media influence, audience behaviour, or innovation diffusion—in relative isolation. The AI-APCF instead conceptualises these dimensions as interconnected components of a single adaptive communication ecosystem.

The framework contributes to communication scholarship in four principal ways. First, it redefines communication as a collaborative process involving both human and intelligent computational actors. Second, it explicitly incorporates algorithmic mediation as a core component of communication rather than treating technology as a neutral channel. Third, it recognises participatory publics as co-creators of communication outcomes rather than passive audiences. Finally, it embeds ethical governance within the communication process itself, acknowledging that responsible communication in AI-enabled environments depends upon transparency, accountability, fairness, and human oversight.

Accordingly, the AI-APCF provides a contemporary conceptual foundation for analysing communication across diverse contexts, including journalism, public relations, political communication, development communication, crisis communication, organisational communication, health communication, and digital governance. It also establishes a platform for future empirical research examining how human communicators, AI systems, digital platforms, and participatory

publics interact to shape communication outcomes in increasingly intelligent societies.

Theoretical Contribution of the Study

The principal contribution of this paper lies in its re-conceptualisation of communication as an adaptive socio-technical ecosystem shaped by the continuous interaction of human communicators, Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital platforms, algorithmic mediation, participatory publics, and ethical governance. While classical communication theories remain foundational to communication scholarship, they generally explain discrete dimensions of communication—such as message transmission, media influence, audience behaviour, innovation adoption, or public deliberation. The present study demonstrates that these dimensions increasingly operate simultaneously within AI-enabled communication environments, thereby requiring a more integrated theoretical perspective.

The proposed Artificial Intelligence-Augmented Participatory Communication Framework (AI-APCF) extends existing communication scholarship in four important ways. First, it expands the conceptualisation of communicative agency by recognising AI systems as active participants in communication processes rather than passive technological channels. This shift reflects the growing role of generative AI, conversational agents, predictive analytics, and intelligent decision-support systems in shaping communication outcomes. Second, the framework integrates algorithmic mediation into mainstream communication theory. Whereas traditional communication models primarily conceptualise media as channels of transmission, the AI-APCF recognises algorithms as influential mechanisms that prioritise, personalise, filter, and amplify information. This extension enhances theoretical explanations of agenda formation, gatekeeping, audience exposure, and digital visibility.

Third, the framework reconceptualises audiences as participatory publics engaged in collaborative communication. Rather than viewing audiences principally as receivers or consumers of messages, the framework positions them as co-creators who influence communication through interaction, content creation, civic participation, and networked collaboration.

Finally, the framework embeds ethical governance within communication theory itself. Transparency, accountability, fairness, privacy, explainability, and human oversight are conceptualised not as external regulatory concerns but as integral dimensions of responsible communication within AI-enabled societies. This represents a significant extension of communication theory by integrating technological capability with normative communication principles.

Collectively, these contributions provide a conceptual foundation for extending communication scholarship beyond traditional media systems towards intelligent, adaptive, and participatory communication environments.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this paper suggest that communication scholarship is entering a new stage of theoretical development in which established theories require conceptual expansion rather than replacement. The AI-APCF demonstrates that classical communication theories continue to provide valuable explanatory insights but should increasingly be understood as complementary components within broader theoretical systems capable of explaining AI-mediated communication. The framework also encourages greater interdisciplinary engagement between communication studies, Artificial Intelligence, media studies, information science, sociology, political communication, and digital governance. Such integration is increasingly necessary because communication technologies now influence not only information exchange but also decision-making, civic participation, organisational behaviour, and democratic governance.

Practical Implications

The framework has important implications for communication practice.

For governments and public institutions, it provides a conceptual guide for integrating AI into public communication while maintaining transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. AI-enabled communication strategies should therefore complement rather than replace meaningful public engagement. For media organisations and journalists, the framework highlights the growing influence of

algorithmic systems in shaping information visibility and public discourse. Editorial decision-making should therefore incorporate greater transparency regarding AI-assisted content creation, recommendation systems, and automated journalism.

For public relations and strategic communication professionals, the framework illustrates how AI can strengthen stakeholder engagement through audience analytics, personalised communication, predictive modelling, and automated communication support. However, these technological capabilities should always remain subject to ethical oversight and professional judgement. Educational institutions should also revise communication curricula to include AI literacy, computational communication, digital ethics, algorithmic governance, and human–AI interaction. Preparing future communication professionals requires competencies that extend beyond traditional media practice to encompass intelligent communication systems and responsible technology use. Finally, policymakers and technology developers should recognise that communication technologies influence democratic participation, social trust, and public discourse.

Future Research Agenda

The AI-APCF establishes several promising directions for future communication research. First, empirical studies should examine the explanatory validity of the framework across different communication contexts, including journalism, public relations, political communication, organisational communication, development communication, health communication, and crisis communication. Second, future research should investigate how varying levels of AI autonomy influence communication effectiveness, public trust, stakeholder relationships, and organisational legitimacy. Comparative studies across different cultural and regulatory environments would further enhance understanding of AI-mediated communication.

Third, scholars should examine the implications of emerging technologies—including multimodal AI, autonomous agents, immersive communication environments, and intelligent virtual assistants for communication theory. These technologies are likely to further reshape communicative agency, audience participation, and digital governance. Finally, interdisciplinary collaboration should continue to strengthen communication scholarship by integrating perspectives from computer science, ethics, law, behavioural science, political science, and

information studies. Such collaboration will be essential for developing communication theories capable of explaining increasingly intelligent and interconnected communication ecosystems.

Review Approach

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual review design appropriate for theory development and philosophical inquiry. Rather than generating primary empirical data, the paper critically synthesises interdisciplinary literature to examine the continuing relevance of communication theories within the context of Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital media, and participatory public engagement. The review draws upon peer-reviewed publications from communication studies, media studies, artificial intelligence, information science, sociology, public relations, and strategic communication, complemented by reports from recognised international organisations, including UNESCO, the OECD, and the World Economic Forum. To ensure contemporary relevance, emphasis was placed on literature published between 2020 and 2025, while seminal theoretical works were retained because of their enduring contribution to communication scholarship. The reviewed literature was analysed thematically around six broad areas: (i) the evolution of communication theory, (ii) philosophical foundations of communication scholarship, (iii) AI-enabled communication, (iv) digital media transformation, (v) participatory public engagement, and (vi) limitations of classical communication theories. The synthesis of these themes informed the development of the Artificial Intelligence-Augmented Participatory Communication Framework (AI-APCF), which constitutes the principal conceptual contribution of this paper.

Discussion and Synthesis of Findings

The review demonstrates that communication theory has historically evolved in response to major technological and societal transformations. From print media to broadcasting and from the internet to social media, theoretical development has consistently reflected changing communication environments. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence represents the latest phase in this evolution, fundamentally altering assumptions about communicative agency, information production, media influence, and audience participation. A key finding of this review is that classical communication theories remain theoretically relevant but are individually insufficient for explaining contemporary communication ecosystems. Linear models continue to explain message transmission,

media influence theories illuminate agenda formation and information visibility, audience-centred theories clarify user motivations and participation, innovation theories explain technology adoption, and democratic communication theories remain indispensable for understanding civic engagement. However, none of these perspectives independently accounts for communication environments in which AI systems generate content, algorithms shape information exposure, digital platforms mediate interaction, and participatory publics simultaneously consume, create, and redistribute information.

The review further reveals that contemporary communication has shifted from linear information exchange to recursive, adaptive, and networked interaction. Human communicators no longer operate independently of technological systems; instead, communication outcomes increasingly emerge through continuous interaction among AI applications, algorithmic infrastructures, digital platforms, organisational actors, and participatory publics. Ethical considerations including transparency, accountability, fairness, explainability, privacy, and digital inclusion have also become integral to communication practice rather than peripheral regulatory concerns. These findings support the central argument advanced in this paper: communication theory should not be abandoned because of technological change, but it must be reimagined to reflect intelligent and digitally mediated communication environments. The Artificial Intelligence-Augmented Participatory Communication Framework (AI-APCF) responds to this challenge by integrating enduring insights from classical communication theories with contemporary perspectives on AI, platform governance, and participatory communication. In doing so, the framework offers a more comprehensive explanation of communication processes within adaptive socio-technical ecosystems and provides a conceptual foundation for future theoretical and empirical inquiry.

Recommendations

Based on the conceptual analysis presented in this paper, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Reconceptualise communication theory through interdisciplinary integration.** Communication scholars should extend, rather than replace, classical theories by incorporating insights from artificial intelligence, platform studies, digital sociology, information science, and media governance.

2. **Modernise communication education.** Universities and professional training institutions should revise communication curricula to include AI literacy, computational communication, algorithmic governance, digital ethics, human–AI interaction, and data-informed communication practice.
3. **Strengthen ethical AI governance.** Governments, regulatory agencies, and technology organisations should develop governance frameworks that promote transparency, accountability, fairness, explainability, privacy protection, and human oversight in AI-enabled communication systems.
4. **Promote responsible AI adoption in professional communication.** Media organisations, public relations practitioners, journalists, and strategic communication professionals should integrate AI into communication practice while maintaining editorial responsibility, ethical standards, and meaningful stakeholder engagement.
5. **Empirically validate the AI-APCF.** Future research should operationalise and test the proposed framework across different communication contexts, cultures, and institutional environments to evaluate its explanatory capacity and practical applicability.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence, digital media, and participatory public engagement are fundamentally reshaping the communication landscape. These developments challenge assumptions that have traditionally underpinned communication theory, particularly those relating to communicative agency, media mediation, audience participation, and organisational control. Nevertheless, the enduring value of classical communication theories lies in their capacity to explain core communication processes that continue to underpin contemporary communication. This paper has argued that the future of communication scholarship depends not on abandoning these foundational theories but on extending and integrating them within broader conceptual frameworks capable of explaining intelligent communication ecosystems. Through a critical synthesis of interdisciplinary literature, the study proposed the Artificial Intelligence-Augmented Participatory Communication Framework (AI-APCF) as a contemporary model that conceptualises communication as a dynamic interaction among human communicators, AI systems, digital platforms, participatory publics, adaptive feedback mechanisms, and ethical governance.

The AI-APCF contributes to communication scholarship by providing an integrative theoretical perspective that accommodates both the enduring principles of classical communication and the emerging realities of AI-enabled communication. It also establishes a foundation for future empirical research and interdisciplinary collaboration aimed at understanding communication within increasingly intelligent, networked, and participatory societies. Ultimately, communication theory has always evolved alongside technological change. As AI becomes more deeply embedded in communication processes, the continued relevance of communication scholarship will depend upon its ability to critically engage with technological innovation while preserving its enduring commitment to human meaning, ethical responsibility, democratic participation, and socially beneficial communication.

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