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Generative AI in political communication – a conceptual literature review

IA generativa na comunicação política – uma revisão conceitual da literatura

Cristian **Negrea**
Doutorando na Scoala
Nationala de Studii Politice si Administrative (SNSPA)

E-mail: cristian.rr.negrea@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This article develops a conceptual literature review of generative AI in political communication. It begins by mapping the rapid expansion of research on AI-generated political content, disinformation, campaign communication, political journalism, and visual media. The review identifies three dominant conceptualizations of generative AI: as a communicative actor, as mediating infrastructure, and as a cultural producer. It then analyzes major normative debates concerning authenticity, democratic integrity, trust, and regulation. Building on these strands, the article highlights key conceptual gaps, including limited integration between political communication theory and AI research, underexplored visual and multimodal AI, insufficient attention to cross-platform dynamics, and geographic biases in existing studies. Finally, it proposes an integrated four-dimensional framework—technological infrastructure, communicative actors, political narratives, and audience interpretation—to guide future interdisciplinary research. The framework situates generative AI within multi-level political communication systems and outlines priorities for empirical, comparative, and normative scholarship in the evolving AI-mediated information environment.

***Keywords**:* Generative AI; political communication; disinformation; digital democracy.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence tools threaten to fundamentally transform contemporary communication environments, introducing unprecedented capabilities for automated content creation, message optimization, and synthetic media production. Large language models (LLMs) such as OpenAI's GPT-4, alongside text-to-image systems like DALL-E and Midjourney, have demonstrated remarkable proficiency in generating human-like text, realistic imagery, and persuasive narratives at scale (Williams et al., 2025; Bird et al., 2023). These technological developments have not merely augmented existing communication practices but have introduced qualitatively new dynamics into the political communication ecosystem, affecting campaign messaging, political advertising, disinformation operations, and mediated political discourse.

The growing relevance of AI-generated content in political communication is evidenced by its deployment across multiple domains. Political campaigns now leverage AI for data analysis, voter targeting, personalized messaging, and strategy optimization (Yu, 2024). Simultaneously, malicious actors exploit generative AI to produce convincing disinformation at an unprecedented scale and minimal cost, with AI-driven disinformation campaigns influencing political processes in over 60 countries during the 2024 super election year (Schipper, 2025; Romanishyn et al., 2025). The dual-use nature of these technologies—capable of both enhancing democratic engagement and undermining electoral integrity—has generated intense scholarly and policy attention (Brkan, 2019; Lahmann et al., 2025).

Despite this growing body of work, the literature on generative AI in political communication remains conceptually fragmented across disciplines. Research contributions span computer science, political science, communication studies, law, and information science, yet lack an integrative conceptual framework that connects technological capabilities with political communication processes (López-López et al., 2023; Walker et al., 2024). Political communication scholars have only begun to grapple with the implications of generative AI for established theoretical frameworks, while AI researchers often overlook the communicative and political dimensions of their findings (Labuz & Nehring, 2024). This fragmentation impedes both theoretical advancement and the development of effective policy responses.

The purpose of this article is to synthesize and conceptualize how generative AI reshapes political communication processes through a comprehensive conceptual literature review. Three research questions guide this review:

(1) How has generative AI been conceptualized within political communication research?

(2) What key themes and theoretical perspectives structure the literature?

(3) What conceptual gaps and research directions emerge from the existing body of scholarship?

Methodological approach to the conceptual literature review

SCOPE AND SELECTION CRITERIA

This conceptual literature review encompasses peer-reviewed articles, books, conference papers, and policy documents related to the intersection of generative AI and political communication. The review draws upon multiple academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, to ensure comprehensive coverage across disciplinary boundaries. The timeframe spans from 2018 to the present, capturing the period of rapid development in large language models and generative media technologies, from early concerns about synthetic media to the widespread deployment of tools such as ChatGPT, GPT-4, and various image generation systems.

Inclusion criteria prioritized works that explicitly address the relationship between generative AI technologies and political communication processes, including but not limited to: AI-generated political content, synthetic media in political contexts, AI-enabled disinformation campaigns, automated political messaging, AI in campaign communication, and regulatory responses to AI-generated political content. Works focusing exclusively on technical AI development without political communication implications were excluded, as were studies addressing only traditional (non-generative) AI applications in content moderation or recommendation systems, unless they directly engaged with generative AI dimensions.

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

The analytical approach employs conceptual mapping and thematic synthesis to identify recurring conceptual clusters in the literature (Wang et al., 2022; López-López et al., 2023). Rather than conducting a systematic quantitative review, this conceptual review aims to map the intellectual terrain, identify dominant theoretical perspectives, and reveal gaps in current understanding. The analysis proceeds through iterative reading and categorization of the literature, identifying how different scholarly communities conceptualize generative AI's role in political communication and what normative assumptions underpin their analyses. This approach is particularly suited to an emerging and rapidly evolving field where conceptual clarity is a prerequisite for empirical advancement.

Conceptualizing generative ai in political communication

GENERATIVE AI AS A COMMUNICATION ACTOR

A significant strand of the literature conceptualizes generative AI systems as quasi-participants in communication processes, moving beyond their traditional framing as mere tools. The framework of "Front-end AI" and "Back-end AI" proposed by Kim and Kong (2023) captures this duality: Front-end AI refers to AI technology used as the visible face of communication (such as virtual influencers and social bots), while Back-end AI operates behind the scenes, generating content without disclosing its AI-generated nature (Williams et al., 2025; Kim & Kong, 2023). Both forms challenge the authenticity and truthfulness of political content, as AI systems increasingly produce messages that are indistinguishable from human-authored communication.

The conceptualization of AI as a communicative actor is further supported by research demonstrating that LLMs can generate political content that passes as human-written over 50% of the time, with some models achieving "above-human levels of humanness" (Williams et al., 2025). This finding fundamentally challenges traditional sender-receiver models of political communication, as the "sender" may now be an algorithmic system rather than a human political actor. The automation of message production extends to strategic communication contexts, where AI systems generate speeches, campaign texts, policy narratives, and even personalized voter outreach at scale (Yu, 2024). Labuz and Nehring (2024) argue that the potential of AI in political communication is "both

overestimated and underestimated and above all—still misunderstood," advocating for a paradigm shift that focuses on social reactions to technology rather than purely technological attributes.

The notion of synthetic political actors—including bots, AI-generated personas, and automated accounts—further extends this conceptualization. Research has documented how bot networks and AI-generated content operate as coordinated actors within political discourse, creating the appearance of grassroots support or opposition (Romanishyn et al., 2025; Brkan, 2019). Romanishyn and colleagues (2025) describe how AI-generated campaigns leverage "bots and generative AI in tandem to disseminate propaganda and interfere in foreign elections," with AI now creating "original persuasive content—raising the ceiling of what bots can achieve in propaganda ecosystems."

AI AS A MEDIATING INFRASTRUCTURE

Beyond its role as a communicative actor, generative AI is increasingly conceptualized as a mediating infrastructure embedded within platforms and information ecosystems. This perspective emphasizes how AI systems shape the conditions under which political information is produced, distributed, and consumed, rather than merely generating discrete pieces of content (Wijermars & Makhortykh, 2022; Gilardi, 2022). Wijermars and Makhortykh (2022), for example, examine the "sociotechnical imaginaries of algorithmic governance" in EU policy, revealing how algorithmic systems increasingly blur distinctions between policy fields and shape the governance of key functional elements of society, including political communication.

The intersection of generative AI with algorithmic curation and platform governance creates complex dynamics that affect political information flows. Social media platforms employ AI not only for content moderation but increasingly as infrastructure for content creation and recommendation, creating feedback loops between generated content and algorithmic amplification (Romanishyn et al., 2025; Iosifidis & Nicoli, 2019). Romanishyn and colleagues (2025) note that "AI-crafted memes and manipulated images" are coordinated through "bot networks to amplify" political messaging, illustrating how generative and curatorial AI functions converge within platform ecosystems. The regulatory asymmetry

between traditional media—historically subject to public oversight—and digital platforms exacerbates these vulnerabilities.

Platform governance responses to AI-generated political content remain nascent and inconsistent. While some platforms have implemented labeling requirements and content policies for synthetic media (Birrer & Just, 2024; Hurcombe et al., 2025), the effectiveness of these measures is contested. Chomanski and Lauwaert (2025) argue that legally requiring disclosure of AI-generated content is "unlikely to succeed in improving the quality of political discussion on social media," partly because information about an account's automated nature is itself "politically relevant information, and people reason very poorly about such information." This highlights the complex interplay between technological infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, and communicative practices in the governance of AI-mediated political communication.

AI AS CULTURAL AND DISCURSIVE PRODUCER

A third conceptual lens positions generative AI as a cultural and discursive producer, capable of generating narratives, political imagery, and symbolic representations that shape political meaning-making. This perspective draws attention to the semiotic and interpretive dimensions of AI-generated political content, moving beyond questions of truth and falsity to examine how synthetic media construct political reality (Xiang, 2025; Bird et al., 2023). Research on AI-generated political imagery reveals how text-to-image models can produce culturally and politically significant visual content that shapes public perception (Bird et al., 2023; Xiang, 2025). Bird et al. (2023) identify the potential of text-to-image systems to cause "political harms" by "enabling misinformation and disinformation actors to operate at larger scales, and creating 'evidence' to legitimize fake news or propaganda." Xiang (2025) introduces the concept of "experiential indexicality" to explain how digital visuals shape audience perception, demonstrating that high media richness amplifies emotional resonance while high-sophistication manipulation can elicit skepticism.

The cultural production dimension extends to the generation of political narratives and symbolic representations. AI systems can produce content that draws upon and reproduces cultural biases, historical narratives, and ideological frameworks embedded in their training data (Shah et al., 2025; Kalpokas et al., 2024). Kalpokas and colleagues (2024)

observe that if AI models learn from data reflecting existing societal biases, "such trends will be reproduced and even amplified in the output," suggesting that generative AI may systematically shape political discourse in ways that reflect and reinforce existing power structures. This has profound implications for political meaning-making, as AI-generated content may subtly shift the boundaries of acceptable political discourse without explicit human intention.

Major research themes in the literature

AI-GENERATED POLITICAL CONTENT

The production of AI-generated political content constitutes one of the most extensively researched themes in the literature. Studies have demonstrated that current LLMs can produce political messaging, campaign texts, and policy narratives that are virtually indistinguishable from human-authored content (Williams et al., 2025; Labuz & Nehring, 2024). Williams and colleagues (2025) found that "almost all LLMs tested released since 2022 produce election disinformation operation content indiscernible by human evaluators over 50% of the time," with multiple models achieving above-human levels of perceived authenticity. This capability extends across languages and cultural contexts, as GPT-4 can "write persuasive texts not just in English but in dozens of languages, capturing nuances that a non-native speaker might miss" (Romanishyn et al., 2025).

The automation of political speech production raises fundamental questions about authorship, authenticity, and accountability in political communication. Goldstein and others, as cited by Labuz and Nehring (2024), demonstrated that "AI-generated propaganda can be nearly as persuasive as human-generated professional content" and that "human-machine teaming strategies (editing prompts and curating outputs) produced articles that were as, or more, persuasive than the original propaganda." This finding suggests that generative AI does not merely replicate human political communication but can enhance its persuasive effectiveness through optimization processes that exceed human capabilities.

Synthetic media—including deepfakes, synthetic voices, and AI-generated imagery—represents a particularly consequential category of AI-generated political content. Deepfakes are conceptualized as "synthetic videos that are made using techniques in deep learning (AI) to make authentic (political) actors express things they never said in real life" (Hameleers,

2022), posing direct threats to political accountability and public trust. The proliferation of deepfake technology has been documented across multiple political contexts, from the 2023 Slovak parliamentary election to the 2024 US presidential campaign (Lahmann et al., 2025; Birrer & Just, 2024). Rauchfleisch and colleagues. (2025) distinguish between "deepfakes" as an emergent category for AI-generated content intended to deceive and "synthetic media" as a broader technical category, noting that terminology itself shapes public risk perception.

DISINFORMATION AND SYNTHETIC PROPAGANDA

AI-enabled disinformation campaigns represent perhaps the most extensively studied intersection of generative AI and political communication. The literature documents a dramatic escalation in the scale, sophistication, and reach of disinformation operations enabled by generative AI technologies (Schipper, 2025; Romanishyn et al., 2025; Shah et al., 2025). Romanishyn and colleagues (2025) report that "AI-driven 'fake news' sites grew tenfold in one year, flooding the infosphere with low-cost, algorithmically generated propaganda," while the known tendency for "falsehoods to spread faster than truths on social networks creates a perfect storm."

The conceptualization of AI-enabled disinformation has evolved from early concerns about individual deepfake videos to a more systemic understanding of how generative AI transforms the entire disinformation ecosystem. Hameleers (2022) conceptualizes disinformation as "a context-bound deliberate act for which actors covertly deceive recipients by de-contextualizing, manipulating or fabricating information to maximize utility," embedding this understanding within a networked and participatory information logic. This framework is particularly relevant for understanding AI-generated disinformation, which operates not as isolated instances of deception but as components of coordinated campaigns that exploit platform architectures and audience vulnerabilities.

Political manipulation and information warfare have been significantly enhanced by generative AI capabilities. Schipper (2025) documents how AI has been "weaponised to manipulate narratives" in electoral contexts across the Indo-Pacific, while Paziuk et al. (2025) analyze how "AI-generated deepfake videos of Ukrainian leaders were used to undermine public confidence and create confusion" during the Russia–Ukraine conflict. The use of emotional prompting to amplify disinformation generation in LLMs, as demonstrated by

Vinay and colleagues (2025), reveals that "all tested LLMs effectively generate disinformation" and that "emotional prompting had a significant impact on disinformation production rates," with polite language yielding higher success rates.

Synthetic political actors—including bot networks and AI-generated personas—constitute a critical component of AI-enabled disinformation infrastructure. Research documents how these actors create "ecosystems of fake content generation, fake websites and social media accounts intended to spread it, fake news reports to give made-up content perceived credibility" (Kalpokas et al., 2024), making it "extremely difficult to pierce through a multi-layered environment of deception." The persuasive potential of AI-paraphrased information at scale has been empirically demonstrated by Dash and colleagues (2025), who found that AI-paraphrased messaging ("AIPasta") is effective at "increasing perceptions of consensus in the broad false narrative of the campaign" while evading current AI-text detection systems.

CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION AND STRATEGIC MESSAGING

The integration of AI into political campaigning and strategic messaging represents a rapidly evolving domain of research and practice. Political campaigns increasingly utilize AI for data analysis, voter targeting, personalized messaging, and strategy optimization (Yu, 2024; Bakir, 2020). Yu (2024) describes how "the advent of artificial intelligence has significantly transformed the landscape of political campaigns, introducing a new era of data-driven strategies that have reshaped how candidates reach and influence voters." This transformation encompasses not only the production of campaign content but also the strategic deployment of messages to specific audience segments.

AI-driven microtargeting represents a particularly consequential application, building upon earlier data-driven campaigning techniques while introducing new capabilities for message personalization. Labuz and Nehring (2024) note that while "there is no empirical evidence that AI produced, highly convincing, personalized political advertising that made a decisive difference in any campaign," there is "ample evidence to prove that AI is nevertheless being used to personalize political campaigning," with recent cognitive science studies demonstrating that "personalization of AI messaging indeed works, though its effectiveness is only slightly higher." Bakir (2020) examines how psychographic profiling and

targeting, married with big data and deployed in digital political campaigns, constitutes a form of "psychological operations," raising fundamental questions about the boundaries between legitimate persuasion and manipulative influence.

The optimization of political messaging through AI introduces new dynamics of automated persuasion. Campaign organizations can now employ AI to generate and test thousands of message variants simultaneously, identifying optimal framings for specific audience segments (Bakir, 2020; Yu, 2024). This capability transforms the traditional relationship between political communicators and their audiences, as message production becomes increasingly algorithmic rather than deliberative. The implications for democratic discourse are significant, as AI-optimized messaging may exploit cognitive biases and emotional vulnerabilities in ways that undermine informed political judgment.

POLITICAL JOURNALISM AND NEWS PRODUCTION

The impact of generative AI on political journalism and news production constitutes an emerging but significant research theme. AI-assisted political reporting encompasses a range of applications, from automated generation of election results coverage to AI-powered fact-checking and verification (Cuartielles et al., 2023; Cazzamatta & Sarısakaloğlu, 2025). Cuartielles and colleagues (2023) document how the emergence of ChatGPT has directly impacted the work routines of fact-checkers, who perceive themselves as "context agents" in a new ecosystem that "obliges them to further diversify their fields of action in the fight against disinformation."

AI summarization and content generation in newsrooms present both opportunities and challenges for political journalism. While AI tools can enhance journalistic productivity and enable more comprehensive coverage of political events, they also raise concerns about accuracy, source transparency, and editorial judgment (Cuartielles et al., 2023; Musi et al., 2024). Musi and colleaguea (2024) present Botlitica, a GPT-3-based chatbot designed to assist journalists in navigating political propaganda campaigns, demonstrating that such tools can "fasten journalists' capabilities to navigate propaganda campaigns inducing them to exercise critical thinking." However, the integration of AI into journalistic workflows also creates new vulnerabilities (Shah et al., 2025; Cuartielles et al., 2023), as AI-generated content may introduce biases or inaccuracies that are difficult to detect.

The relationship between AI-generated content and journalistic credibility is particularly consequential for political communication. As AI-generated news content becomes more prevalent, the boundaries between human-authored journalism and synthetic content become increasingly blurred, potentially undermining public trust in news media (Cazzamatta & Sarısakaloğlu, 2025; Kim & Kong, 2023). Cazzamatta and Sarısakaloğlu (2025) find that while "the overall volume of verified AI-generated misinformation remains limited," their findings "underscore its growing potential to disrupt the information ecosystem," with notable country-specific variations in topics, targets, and detection methods.

VISUAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

AI-generated political imagery and visual narratives represent a rapidly growing but underexplored dimension of the literature. Text-to-image models such as DALL-E and Midjourney have introduced unprecedented capabilities for generating politically significant visual content, from realistic depictions of political figures to synthetic representations of historical or geopolitical events (Bird et al., 2023; Shah et al., 2025). Bird and colleagues (2023) identify 22 distinct risk types associated with text-to-image models, including the potential for "election interference, enabling misinformation and disinformation actors to operate at larger scales."

The visual dimension of AI-generated political content is particularly consequential because of the powerful role that images play in political persuasion and meaning-making. Xiang (2025) demonstrates through comparative frame analysis that different visual modalities—photographs, AI-generated images, edited videos, and 3D animations—elicit varying levels of emotional engagement and skepticism, with "high media richness amplifying emotional resonance in low-sophistication visuals." The concept of the "liar's dividend," whereby individuals dismiss real events as fabricated due to the plausibility of deepfakes (Salubi, 2025; Cazzamatta & Sarısakaloğlu, 2025), further complicates the visual political communication landscape, as the mere existence of AI-generated imagery undermines trust in all visual evidence.

Synthetic historical or geopolitical representations generated by AI raise additional concerns about political memory and collective identity. Labuz and Nehring (2024)

document examples of "AI images that supported Chinese campaigns spreading conspiracy theories about wildfires in Hawaii" and "the propaganda war following Hamas' attack on Israel," illustrating how AI-generated visual content can be deployed to shape geopolitical narratives. The biases embedded in AI image generation systems—such as racial and gender stereotyping in occupational representations (Shah et al., 2025)—further demonstrate how visual AI systems can systematically distort political representation.

Theoretical perspectives in the literature

ALGORITHMIC MEDIATION

The concept of algorithmic mediation provides a foundational theoretical perspective for understanding how generative AI reshapes political information flows. This perspective emphasizes that AI systems do not merely transmit political information but actively shape its production, selection, and interpretation (Wijermars & Makhortykh, 2022; Gilardi, 2022). Wijermars and Makhortykh (2022) examine how algorithmic governance operates across different policy domains, revealing that "sociotechnical imaginaries prevalent in EU policy documents on disinformation" frame algorithmic systems as tools for returning to a "presupposed status quo" rather than as transformative forces in their own right.

The algorithmic mediation perspective is particularly relevant for understanding how generative AI interacts with platform recommendation systems to shape political information environments. As Gilardi (2022) observes, the prevalence and reach of disinformation has been a contentious issue, with research demonstrating that "on Twitter, false news, especially those with political content, spread to a much greater extent than other news." When generative AI is combined with algorithmic amplification, the resulting dynamics can fundamentally alter the information landscape within which political communication occurs (Romanishyn et al., 2025; Dash et al., 2025).

NETWORKED PUBLIC SPHERE

The concept of the networked public sphere provides a theoretical framework for understanding how generative AI interacts with digital publics and participatory media. This perspective, rooted in Habermasian deliberative theory and its digital extensions, examines how AI-generated content affects the quality of public deliberation and democratic discourse

(Pawelec, 2022; Gilardi, 2022). Pawelec (2022) draws on Warren's problem-oriented democracy theory and theories of deliberative democracy to identify three core functions of democratic systems—empowered inclusion, collective agenda and will formation, and collective decision-making—and systematically analyzes how deepfakes weaken each function.

Generative AI poses particular challenges to the networked public sphere by undermining the epistemic foundations of democratic deliberation. Gilardi (2022) identifies three specific challenges that online disinformation poses from a deliberative perspective: it promotes "epistemic cynicism," increases "affective polarization," and derails "good-faith discussions by increasing suspicions about the motives or even identities of participants." When AI systems can generate convincing political content at scale, the ability of citizens to engage in informed deliberation is fundamentally compromised (Chomanski & Lauwaert, 2025; Pawelec, 2022), as the distinction between authentic political expression and synthetic manipulation becomes increasingly difficult to maintain.

PROPAGANDA AND PERSUASION THEORIES

Classical propaganda and persuasion theories are being reinterpreted in the context of AI-generated media, providing important theoretical resources for understanding the political implications of generative AI. The literature draws upon established frameworks from propaganda studies to analyze how AI-generated content functions as a tool of political influence (Bakir, 2020; Paziuk et al., 2025; Musi et al., 2024). Bakir (2020) examines how psychographic profiling and targeting, enhanced by AI capabilities, constitutes a form of "psychological operations," connecting contemporary digital campaigning practices to historical traditions of propaganda analysis.

The reinterpretation of propaganda theories in the AI context reveals both continuities and discontinuities with historical patterns. While the fundamental dynamics of persuasion—including emotional manipulation, repetition, and audience targeting—remain relevant, generative AI introduces qualitatively new capabilities for personalization and scale (Dash et al., 2025; Labuz & Nehring, 2024). Dash and colleagues (2025) demonstrate how AI-paraphrased messaging exploits the "illusory truth effect"—the well-established phenomenon that repeating information increases its truth perceptions—while evading

detection systems designed to identify coordinated campaigns. Paziuk and colleagues (2025) analyze how "emotionally charged narratives, particularly those invoking nuclear threat scenarios, are synchronized with key geopolitical events to influence decision-makers and public opinion," illustrating the strategic deployment of AI-enhanced propaganda in contemporary cognitive warfare.

TECHNOLOGICAL AFFORDANCES AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

The technological affordances perspective examines how the specific capabilities and constraints of generative AI tools reshape political communication practices. This framework emphasizes that technologies do not determine political outcomes but create new possibilities and constraints that political actors navigate in context-dependent ways (Labuz & Nehring, 2024; López-López et al., 2023). López-López and colleagues (2023) identify a "theoretical update allowing for the incorporation of concepts such as technopolitics and algorithmic political communication," where technopolitics refers to "the use of different platforms to develop political/electoral confrontation" and algorithmic political communication is "mainly characterized by microsegmentation and automatic distribution of content."

The affordances of generative AI for political communication include unprecedented scale of content production, personalization capabilities, multimodal content generation, and the ability to operate across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Romanishyn et al., 2025; Williams et al., 2025). These affordances create new opportunities for both democratic engagement and manipulation, depending on how they are deployed by political actors. Labuz and Nehring (2024) argue for a paradigm shift that focuses on "social reactions to technology rather than technological attributes," suggesting that the political impact of generative AI is mediated by social, cultural, and institutional contexts rather than determined by technological capabilities alone.

Normative and ethical debates

AUTHENTICITY AND TRUST

The challenge of distinguishing human and synthetic political communication constitutes a central normative concern in the literature. As generative AI produces increasingly convincing content, the epistemic foundations of political communication—the ability of citizens to assess the authenticity and credibility of political messages—are fundamentally challenged (Hubert, 2021; Pawelec, 2022; Zhang, 2025). Hubert (2021) investigates the concept of trust in the context of deepfakes, arguing that the perceived threat to online trust may be overstated and that deepfakes may even "support a transition from instrumental to social rationality, better suited for making decisions in the digital age." However, this optimistic assessment is contested by research demonstrating that exposure to deepfakes reduces trust in news media and other institutions.

The "liar's dividend" phenomenon—whereby the existence of deepfake technology allows individuals to dismiss authentic content as fabricated—represents a particularly insidious threat to political authenticity (Salubi, 2025; Cazzamatta & Sarısakaloğlu, 2025). Cazzamatta and Sarısakaloğlu (2025) document cases in the UK where "content is falsely attributed to AI, reflecting the 'liar's dividend' phenomenon, where actors exploit AI ambiguity to falsely claim content was AI-generated." This dynamic creates a paradoxical situation in which both the production and the mere possibility of AI-generated content undermine political trust, regardless of whether specific instances of deception occur.

Research on audience perceptions of AI-generated political content reveals complex dynamics of credibility assessment. Behm-Morawitz and colleagues (2025) find that "moderate and highly AI-powered sources are deemed more credible than non-AI human-authored sources," suggesting that AI involvement in information delivery may paradoxically enhance perceived credibility under certain conditions. Zhang (2025) demonstrates that inoculation strategies can increase deepfake awareness and reduce the perceived credibility of deepfake messages, but that "exposure to counter-attitudinal deepfakes led to greater agreement with embedded disinformation," highlighting the role of motivated reasoning in shaping responses to AI-generated political content.

DEMOCRATIC INTEGRITY

The impacts of generative AI on elections, public deliberation, and democratic legitimacy constitute a major normative concern across the literature. Pawelec (2022)

provides the most systematic theoretical analysis, identifying how deepfakes "impede citizens' empowered inclusion in debates and decisions that affect them," "undermine collective agenda and will formation by threatening the epistemic quality of deliberation," and decrease "the legitimacy of collective decisions taken." These threats operate at multiple levels, from individual voter manipulation to systemic erosion of democratic norms and institutions.

The electoral implications of AI-generated content have been documented across multiple political contexts. Wong (2025) argues that "AI-driven disinformation can exacerbate political polarization by creating echo chambers where voters are only exposed to misleading content that reinforces their biases," while "persistent disinformation campaigns can erode trust in politics and lead to a more cynical and divided electorate." Lahmann and colleagues (2025) document specific instances of AI-generated content affecting electoral outcomes, including the 2023 Slovak parliamentary election where an AI-generated audio recording "putatively compromised the candidate's credibility" and was "generally taken in the media as having been a decisive factor for the outcome."

The broader implications for democratic legitimacy extend beyond individual elections to encompass the fundamental conditions for democratic governance. Romanishyn and colleagues (2025) argue that "algorithmically amplified falsehoods systematically distort political information environments, erode public trust in institutions, and foster polarization—conditions that degrade democratic decision-making." This systemic perspective suggests that the threat of generative AI to democracy is not limited to specific instances of manipulation but encompasses a gradual degradation of the epistemic and social conditions necessary for democratic self-governance.

REGULATION AND GOVERNANCE

Platform policies and regulatory approaches to AI-generated political content represent a rapidly evolving domain of normative debate. The literature documents a range of regulatory responses, from the EU's comprehensive risk-based framework to more limited voluntary measures in other jurisdictions (Gregorio & Pollicino, 2025; Birrer & Just, 2024; Schipper, 2025). Gregorio and Pollicino (2025) argue that "the European constitutional approach to tackle disinformation has defined a unique model on a global scale," combining

"procedural safeguards, risk regulation, and co-regulation" through initiatives such as the Digital Services Act, the Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation, and the AI Act.

The EU AI Act represents the most comprehensive regulatory framework specifically addressing AI-generated political content. It categorizes AI systems used "for influencing the outcome of an election or referendum or the voting behaviour of natural persons" as high-risk, while imposing transparency obligations on providers of AI systems capable of generating synthetic content (Gregorio & Pollicino, 2025; Birrer & Just, 2024). Birrer and Just (2024) note that while "deepfake technology may not introduce entirely new and unique regulatory problems at present, it can amplify existing problems such as the spread of non-consensual pornography and disinformation," calling for "effective oversight and enforcement of existing rules, along with careful consideration of required adjustments."

The debate over mandatory labeling of AI-generated political content illustrates the tensions inherent in regulatory approaches. Chomanski and Lauwaert (2025) argue against mandatory labeling laws, contending that they are "unlikely to succeed in improving the quality of political discussion on social media" and that "the main motivation for these laws—the threat of coordinated disinformation campaigns—appears overstated." This position contrasts with the growing consensus among policymakers that transparency measures are necessary to maintain democratic integrity in the face of AI-generated content.

Conceptual gaps in current research

Several significant conceptual gaps emerge from this review of the literature. First, there is limited integration between political communication theory and AI research. While political communication scholars have begun to address AI-generated content, they often lack deep engagement with the technical capabilities and limitations of generative AI systems. Conversely, AI researchers who study the political implications of their technologies frequently operate without reference to established political communication theories (López-López et al., 2023; Walker et al., 2024). Walker et al. (2024) explicitly identify this gap, noting "the need to connect AI incidents and political communication research" and proposing the Political Deepfakes Incidents Database as a bridge between these communities.

Second, the role of visual generative AI in political communication remains significantly underexplored. While text-based AI-generated content has received substantial scholarly attention, the political implications of AI-generated imagery, video, and multimodal content are only beginning to be systematically investigated (Bird et al., 2023; Xiang, 2025). Williams and colleagues (2025) acknowledge that "election disinformation is commonly perpetuated through other media such as audio and video, and AI generated deepfakes of political figures have become a widely-discussed phenomenon." Bird and colleagues (2023) similarly highlight that the risks of "flooding information environments with generated content" are "under-explored in the context of TTI systems, especially given the scale and speed of generation."

Third, there is a lack of research on AI as a communicative actor within discourse networks. While individual studies have examined AI-generated content or bot behavior, few have systematically analyzed how AI systems function as participants in broader political discourse networks, interacting with human actors, media organizations, and institutional structures (Hameleers, 2022; Kim & Kong, 2023). Hameleers (2022) provides a valuable framework for understanding disinformation within networked information environments, but this framework has not been fully extended to account for the specific dynamics introduced by generative AI.

Fourth, geographic and cultural biases in existing studies significantly limit the generalizability of current findings. The majority of research focuses on Western democratic contexts, particularly the United States and Europe, with limited attention to how generative AI affects political communication in the Global South, authoritarian regimes, or hybrid political systems (Schipper, 2025; Karanja, 2023; Cipers et al., 2023). Schipper (2025) provides valuable insights from the Philippines, Taiwan, and India, while Karanja (2023) examines deepfake discourses in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, but these remain exceptions rather than the norm. Cipers and colleagues (2023) find that "democracies, with high levels of press freedom, have a more holistic approach to countering online disinformation," suggesting that the political context significantly shapes both the deployment and governance of AI-generated political content.

Toward a conceptual framework for generative AI in political communication

Based on this review, we propose an integrated conceptual framework that links four interconnected dimensions of generative AI in political communication: technological infrastructure, communicative actors, political narratives, and audience interpretation. First, technological infrastructure encompasses the generative AI systems themselves, the platforms through which AI-generated content is distributed, and the algorithmic systems that mediate its reach and visibility (Wijermars & Makhortykh, 2022; Kim & Kong, 2023). This dimension recognizes that generative AI operates not in isolation but within complex sociotechnical systems that shape its political impact. The interaction between content generation capabilities and platform architectures creates emergent dynamics that cannot be understood by examining either dimension alone (Romanishyn et al., 2025; Gilardi, 2022).

Second, communicative actors include both human political actors who deploy generative AI as a strategic tool and AI systems that function as quasi-autonomous communicative agents (Kim & Kong, 2023; Hameleers, 2022). This dimension captures the full spectrum of actors involved in AI-mediated political communication, from political campaigns and state-sponsored operations to individual citizens and automated bot networks. The framework recognizes that the boundaries between human and AI agency in political communication are increasingly blurred, requiring new conceptual tools for analyzing communicative responsibility and accountability (Chomanski & Lauwaert, 2025; Williams et al., 2025).

Third, political narratives encompass the content produced by generative AI systems, including textual, visual, and multimodal political messages (Bird et al., 2023; Xiang, 2025; Paziuk et al., 2025). This dimension attends to both the semantic content of AI-generated political communication and its formal properties, including its persuasive strategies, emotional appeals, and cultural resonances. The framework recognizes that AI-generated narratives are not merely reproductions of existing political discourse but may introduce novel framings, associations, and symbolic constructions that reshape the political imagination (Kalpokas et al., 2024; Dash et al., 2025).

Fourth, audience interpretation addresses how citizens receive, process, and respond to AI-generated political content (Zhang, 2025; Behm-Morawitz et al., 2025; Labuz & Nehring, 2024). This dimension incorporates insights from research on media effects, motivated reasoning, and digital literacy to understand how audiences navigate an

information environment increasingly populated by synthetic content. The framework recognizes that audience responses to AI-generated political content are shaped by prior political attitudes, media literacy, trust in institutions, and awareness of AI capabilities (Zhang, 2025; Behm-Morawitz et al., 2025).

This framework positions generative AI within multi-level political communication systems, recognizing that its impact operates simultaneously at the micro level of individual message processing, the meso level of organizational and campaign communication, and the macro level of public discourse and democratic governance. By integrating these dimensions, the framework provides a basis for systematic analysis of how generative AI transforms political communication across contexts and scales.

Future research agenda

This review identifies several key research directions that merit priority attention from scholars working at the intersection of generative AI and political communication.

First, AI-generated persuasion and political rhetoric requires sustained empirical investigation. While initial studies have demonstrated the persuasive potential of AI-generated political content (Labuz & Nehring, 2024; Dash et al., 2025), much remains unknown about the specific mechanisms through which AI-generated messages influence political attitudes and behaviors. Research should examine how AI-generated content interacts with existing political predispositions, how repeated exposure to AI-generated messaging affects political beliefs over time, and how the persuasive dynamics of AI-generated content differ across political contexts and cultural settings.

Second, cross-platform political communication dynamics represent a critical area for future research. Current studies tend to examine AI-generated content within single platforms, but political communication increasingly operates across multiple platforms simultaneously (Walker et al., 2024; López-López et al., 2023). Research should investigate how AI-generated political content migrates across platforms, how platform-specific affordances shape the production and reception of synthetic political content, and how cross-platform dynamics amplify or attenuate the political impact of AI-generated messaging.

Third, comparative studies across political systems are urgently needed to address the geographic and cultural biases in existing research (Cipers et al., 2023; Schipper, 2025). The political impact of generative AI is likely to vary significantly across democratic, authoritarian, and hybrid political systems, as well as across different media systems and cultural contexts. Comparative research should examine how institutional structures, media ecosystems, and cultural norms mediate the deployment and reception of AI-generated political content, and how regulatory responses vary across political contexts.

Fourth, visual political narratives generated by AI constitute a particularly underdeveloped research area with significant implications for political communication (Bird et al., 2023; Xiang, 2025). As text-to-image and text-to-video models become more sophisticated, research should examine how AI-generated visual content shapes political perception, how visual deepfakes affect trust in political imagery, and how the aesthetics of AI-generated political imagery differ from human-produced visual communication.

AI literacy and audience interpretation represent essential areas for both research and practice (Schipper, 2025; Williams et al., 2025; Zhang, 2025). Williams and colleagues (2025) note that "the emergence of AI driven disinformation may require greater 'AI literacy' on behalf of the public, a discussion which thus far is in its infancy." Research should investigate what forms of AI literacy are most effective in enabling citizens to navigate AI-mediated political information environments, how AI literacy interacts with existing media literacy competencies, and how educational interventions can be designed to enhance public resilience to AI-generated political manipulation.

Conclusion

This conceptual literature review has synthesized a rapidly growing body of scholarship on generative AI in political communication, revealing a field characterized by significant empirical activity but conceptual fragmentation. The review has identified three primary conceptualizations of generative AI in political communication—as communicative actor, mediating infrastructure, and cultural producer—each capturing distinct but complementary dimensions of AI's transformative impact on political discourse.

The major research themes identified—AI-generated political content, disinformation and synthetic propaganda, campaign communication, political journalism, and visual political communication—reflect the breadth of generative AI's impact across the political communication ecosystem. Theoretical perspectives drawn from algorithmic mediation, networked public sphere theory, propaganda studies, and technological affordances provide valuable but incomplete frameworks for understanding these dynamics.

The normative and ethical debates surrounding authenticity, democratic integrity, and regulation highlight the profound stakes involved in the governance of AI-generated political content. The conceptual gaps identified—particularly the limited integration between political communication theory and AI research, the underexploration of visual AI, and geographic biases—point to urgent priorities for future scholarship.

The integrated conceptual framework proposed in this review—linking technological infrastructure, communicative actors, political narratives, and audience interpretation—offers a foundation for more systematic and theoretically grounded research on generative AI in political communication. Realizing this potential will require sustained interdisciplinary collaboration between communication studies, political science, computer science, and AI studies. As generative AI continues to evolve and proliferate, understanding its implications for political communication is not merely an academic exercise but a democratic imperative. The capacity of democratic societies to maintain informed public deliberation, electoral integrity, and accountable governance in the age of generative AI will depend in significant measure on the quality and comprehensiveness of the scholarly frameworks brought to bear on these challenges.

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BIOGRAFIA DOS AUTORES

Cristian **Negrea**
Doutorando na Scoala
Nationala de Studii Politice si Administrative (SNSPA)

E-mail: cristian.rr.negrea@gmail.com