

Artificial Intelligence as a Communicative Actor in Knowledge Production: A Conceptual Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has fundamentally transformed the landscape of academic knowledge production, extending beyond its conventional role as a tool to become an active communicative actor within scholarly discourse. This conceptual paper explores the multifaceted ways in which AI participates in knowledge creation, dissemination and interpretation, positioning it as a co-actor that shapes both the process and content of scientific communication. Drawing upon contemporary theories in communication studies, including media ecology and epistemic frameworks, the paper critically examines the implications of AI-mediated interactions for authorship, credibility and collaborative knowledge building. By reconceptualising AI as a communicative participant rather than a passive instrument, the study proposes a theoretical model that integrates AI-driven processes with human scholarly engagement, highlighting the co-constitutive nature of technology and academic discourse. The framework addresses key challenges, including epistemic transparency, ethical considerations and the negotiation of authority in AI-assisted scholarship. This inquiry contributes to the ongoing discourse on the evolving dynamics of knowledge production in the digital era, offering a foundation for future empirical investigations and methodological innovations in AI-mediated academic communication. Ultimately, it positions AI not merely as a facilitator but as an influential actor whose communicative capabilities necessitate critical engagement from scholars, educators and policymakers alike.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Academic Communication, Knowledge Production

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly shifted from a peripheral tool in academic environments to a core force that shapes how scholarly knowledge is created, communicated and circulated. In the past decade, digital technologies have transformed academic workflows. Still, recent advancements in generative AI systems capable of producing coherent text, analysing complex data patterns and assisting with editorial tasks have accelerated that transformation. The diffusion of AI tools across research processes raises new questions about the communicative functions of these technologies and their theoretical implications for communication studies. This paper argues that AI should be viewed not merely as an external support technology, but as a communicative actor within knowledge production ecosystems.

Recent scholarship has increasingly examined the integration of generative AI in academic contexts, particularly its role in augmenting writing, peer review and knowledge dissemination processes (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023). These studies highlight how large language models are reshaping scholarly workflows, not only by improving efficiency but also by influencing epistemic practices and communicative norms within academia. However, much of this emerging body of work remains focused on AI as a functional tool rather than as an active participant in communication processes.

Traditionally, scholarly communication was conceptualised as a human-centric process, in which authorship, interpretation, and dissemination were predominantly human activities. However, current practices reveal a growing entanglement between human scholars and algorithmic agents. AI tools are being used not only to assist with routine tasks such as editing and formatting, but also to generate substantive content, recommend lines of argument and influence how research outputs are framed and perceived by different audiences (Kessler et al., 2025). As a result, the boundaries between tool and participant in communication are becoming increasingly blurred.

Scholars have begun to document the effects of AI on elements of scholarly communication, such as peer-review workflows, publication timelines, and audience-engagement strategies (Salih et al., 2025). However, there remains a gap in communication theory regarding how AI participates in communicative exchanges that contribute to the formation, negotiation and dissemination of knowledge. Emerging research suggests that AI's involvement in scholarly processes is not neutral; rather, it interacts with the cultural, epistemic, and rhetorical dimensions of academic discourse (Sabari Nath & Prakasan, 2024). These developments signal the need for new conceptual frameworks that account for AI's role as an actor that shapes and is shaped by communicative practices.

While existing studies acknowledge the transformative impact of AI on academic practices, there is limited theoretical articulation within communication studies regarding AI's role as a communicative agent that actively participates in meaning-making processes. In particular, tensions remain between instrumental and agentic perspectives of AI, reflecting an unresolved conceptual ambiguity in current scholarship (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023). Addressing this gap is essential for advancing communication theory in the context of AI-mediated knowledge production.

This inquiry thus situates AI as an active participant in scholarly communication environments, proposing a theoretical model that captures the multiple communicative functions AI performs, from content co-production to algorithmic mediation and networked interaction. By reconceptualising AI in this way, the paper contributes to ongoing efforts within communication studies to expand existing models of mediated communication to encompass non-human actors and complex socio-technical dynamics.

Accordingly, this paper aims to develop a theoretically grounded conceptual framework that positions AI as a communicative co-actor in scholarly knowledge production and to examine how this reconceptualisation reshapes understandings of authorship, epistemic authority and communicative processes.

1.1 Methodological Approach

This study adopts a conceptual and theory-building approach, synthesising insights from recent interdisciplinary scholarship on artificial intelligence, communication theory and knowledge production. Rather than relying on empirical data, the paper systematically integrates and critically evaluates existing literature to construct a coherent theoretical framework (Jaakkola, 2020).

The analysis follows three stages:

- (i) identification of key themes in recent AI and scholarly communication research,
- (ii) theoretical integration using Actor-Network Theory, media ecology and distributed cognition, and
- (iii) development of a conceptual model that explains AI's communicative roles.

This approach is appropriate for addressing emerging phenomena in which empirical consensus is still developing and theoretical clarification is required. As this study is conceptual in nature,

no statistical analysis is applied. Instead, the validity of the framework is established through theoretical coherence, consistency with existing literature and its explanatory potential (Jaakkola, 2020). This aligns with established standards for theory-building research in the social sciences.

Building on this methodological approach, the following section examines key developments and theoretical perspectives that inform the conceptualisation of AI in scholarly communication.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The Emergence of AI in Scholarly Communication

In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) has become increasingly integrated into scholarly ecosystems. The rapid advancement of AI, powered by machine learning and language processing technologies, has enabled systems that can generate human-like text, analyse data and support scholarly publishing processes. These capabilities have revolutionised academic practices, introducing efficiencies and capabilities previously unavailable to researchers (Salih, Gul & Sumblah, 2025).

The integration of AI into research communication is not purely functional. It has broader implications for how scientific knowledge is generated, structured and shared. Studies reveal that AI tools are being used beyond proofreading or formatting as co-creators of content, recommendation systems for literature searches and even evaluators in peer review processes (Salih et al., 2025). Although these developments bring operational benefits, they also challenge long-standing assumptions about the human-centred nature of scholarly communication.

Recent studies on generative AI, particularly large language models such as those discussed by Dwivedi et al. (2023), demonstrate that AI systems are increasingly capable of producing contextually relevant and rhetorically structured academic content. Similarly, Kasneci et al. (2023) argue that AI tools are not merely assistive technologies but are becoming embedded in cognitive and communicative processes within academia. These developments further support the argument that AI goes beyond automation and helps shape scholarly discourse.

Despite growing attention to AI as a practical tool in academia, communication scholars have yet to fully conceptualise its role beyond technological assistance fully. There is increasing recognition that AI systems participate in communicative environments in ways that shape meaning and influence decisions. For example, AI-driven recommendation algorithms can determine which research outputs are surfaced to broader audiences, thereby indirectly affecting academic reputations and the dissemination of knowledge (Sabari Nath & Prakasan, 2024). These dynamics illustrate that AI's involvement cannot be understood simply as automation; rather, it operates within complex communication networks with epistemic and rhetorical consequences.

2.2 Communication Theory and Non-Human Actors

Actor-Network Theory (ANT), introduced by Bruno Latour (1987), Michel Callon (1986), and John Law (1992), emphasises that all elements within a network, whether human or non-human, can be considered actors or actants that interact and influence one another. In the context of academic knowledge production, ANT allows researchers to conceptualise AI not merely as a passive tool but as an active participant that shapes both the processes and outcomes of scholarly communication alongside humans. Through the concept of translation, ANT highlights how interactions among AI, researchers, documents, and publication systems form coherent knowledge networks, with AI contributing to content creation, information mediation, and the

dissemination of research outputs, on par with human actors within the network. By positioning AI as a communicative actor within these networks, ANT provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the co-constitutive interactions between technology and humans in modern knowledge production, while emphasising the need for critical human oversight to maintain integrity, credibility and transparency in academic communication (Latour, 1987; Callon, 1986; Law, 1992).

Theoretical frameworks in communication studies have traditionally focused on human interactions mediated by technologies such as broadcast media, digital platforms and interpersonal channels. However, developments in digital communication have increasingly called for expanded theoretical lenses that incorporate non-human actors, including algorithmic systems and automated agents.

One theoretical approach that offers insight into such integration is ANT. ANT emphasises the co-constitutive relationships among actors' human and non-human in shaping social outcomes. From an ANT perspective, technologies such as AI are not passive tools but participants that influence network dynamics and outcomes. This perspective reframes communication as an emergent property of interactions among actors within a network, rather than as a linear, human-initiated transmission process.

Another relevant theoretical development is media ecology, which examines how communication technologies shape human perception, social structures and cultural patterns. Media ecology calls attention to how technologies reconfigure environments of meaning. In the context of AI, media ecology helps scholars understand how AI influences not only message content but also communicative norms, audience engagement and the mechanisms through which research reaches broader publics.

Additionally, scholarship on distributed cognition and cognitive extension positions technology as integral to human cognitive processes. These perspectives suggest that AI does not merely support human intellect but participates in knowledge construction processes. Applied to academic communication, distributed cognition implies that meaning and understanding are co-constructed by human authors, technological systems and the contexts in which they interact.

2.3 Gap in Existing Literature

Despite growing research on AI's role in academic workflows, communication studies have yet to fully theorise AI as an active participant in scholarly communication networks. Much of the existing literature emphasises AI's functional capabilities, applications, and measurable outcomes, without sufficiently considering the ontological and epistemological implications of AI's role in knowledge production and communicative processes. This gap highlights the need for a conceptual framework that explicitly accounts for AI's agency, its influence on scholarly accountability, and its integration into co-constructive knowledge environments (Utari, Pramana, & Alkhajar, 2025; Punziano, 2025; Shao, 2025).

Collectively, these perspectives establish the theoretical and conceptual foundations necessary for developing a framework that positions AI as an active participant in scholarly communication.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND PROPOSED MODEL

Understanding artificial intelligence as a communicative actor requires moving beyond a purely instrumental view of technology. ANT provides a useful starting point by rejecting the rigid distinction between human and non-human agency. ANT suggests that both human and non-human entities function within relational networks, where influence arises through their associations rather than from inherent attributes. From this perspective, AI systems embedded in

scholarly workflows are not passive tools; they participate in shaping how knowledge claims are assembled, circulated and stabilised within academic communities.

This conceptual model is derived from the systematic synthesis of interdisciplinary literature and theoretical integration outlined in the methodological approach. The framework, therefore, reflects analytically constructed relationships rather than empirical generalisation, aligning with the objectives of conceptual research.

This relational view is further strengthened by insights from media ecology, particularly the work of McLuhan (1964) and later Postman (1970), who argued that communication technologies restructure environments of meaning rather than merely transmitting information. Technologies reorganise perception, interaction patterns and epistemic norms. When applied to AI in academic contexts, this framework suggests that algorithmic systems subtly reconfigure the conditions under which research is produced, evaluated and disseminated. AI does not simply assist communication; it reshapes the communicative environment in which scholarly authority and credibility are negotiated.

At the same time, communication theory reminds us that knowledge production is fundamentally a communicative process. Meaning is not inherent in data but is constructed, interpreted and legitimised through discourse. Scholarly knowledge gains authority through processes of framing, peer evaluation, citation and institutional recognition. When AI systems contribute to drafting, reviewing, summarising, or recommending content, they become implicated in these meaning-making processes. Recognising this involvement requires treating AI not as an external aid but as a participant within communicative networks that co-constitute academic discourse.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives justify reconceptualising artificial intelligence as a communicative actor within academic knowledge production. Building on this foundation, the following section proposes a model that specifies how AI operates in this capacity.

3.1 Conceptualising AI as a Communicative Actor

Building on the reviewed literature, this paper proposes a conceptual framework that positions AI as an active participant in scholarly knowledge production processes. Unlike traditional views that consider AI a neutral tool, this framework recognises that AI can influence, co-construct, and mediate academic discourse. Drawing from ANT and media ecology, AI is treated as a participant capable of shaping research communication, interacting with human scholars and affecting epistemic outcomes (Afgiansyah et al., 2025; Kessler et al., 2025).

The framework emphasises three primary dimensions of AI's communicative agency:

3.1.1 AI as Co-Producer

AI contributes directly to the generation of scholarly content. This includes drafting manuscripts, summarising the literature, suggesting analytical approaches, and refining language. AI's involvement in content creation affects argument structure, presentation and even the framing of research questions.

3.1.2 AI as Mediator

AI systems interpret human inputs and transform them into communicative outputs. Examples include algorithmic suggestions for citations, stylistic edits, and automatic summarisation. As a mediator, AI shapes the trajectory of scholarly communication by influencing what content is produced and how audiences perceive it.

3.1.3 AI as Networked Interactor

Beyond individual interaction, AI operates within broader academic networks. It influences the discovery, dissemination, and visibility of scholarly outputs through indexing algorithms, recommendation systems, and social media promotion. AI's role at this level highlights its capacity to structure communicative flows and affect audience reception.

To synthesise these perspectives, Figure 1 presents the integrated theoretical framework that grounds this study. It illustrates how ANT, media ecology and communication theory converge to position artificial intelligence as a communicative actor within academic knowledge production.

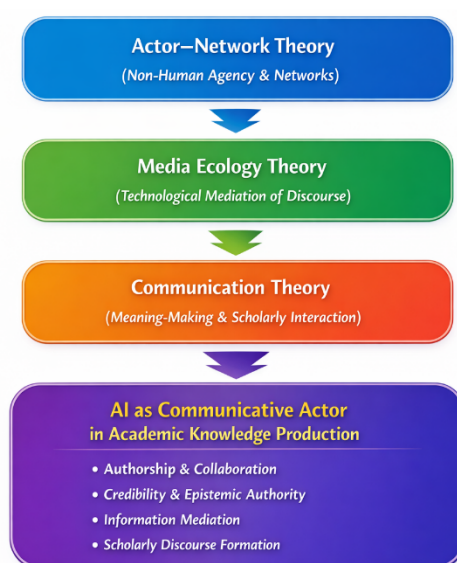


Figure 1. Integrated Theoretical Framework Positioning AI as a Communicative Actor

Collectively, these theoretical traditions provide the analytical lens through which AI is examined not merely as a technological tool, but as an actor embedded within scholarly networks, communicative processes and epistemic negotiations.

3.2 Interrelations Among Dimensions

These three dimensions are interdependent. AI's co-production capabilities feed into its mediating role, which in turn interacts with networked dissemination processes. This dynamic suggests that scholarly communication is increasingly co-constituted by humans and AI, rather than exclusively human-driven.

Figure 2 presents the proposed conceptual model, highlighting the interrelations among AI as a co-producer, mediator, and network interactor.

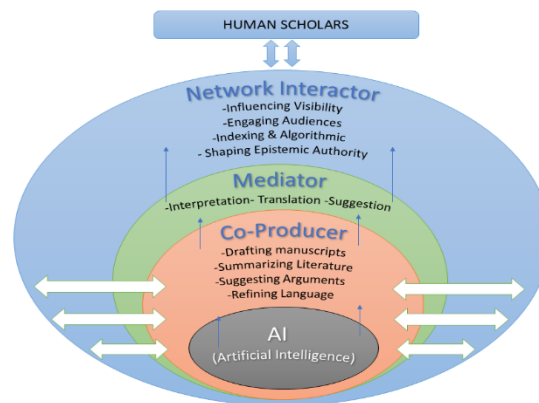


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of AI as a Communicative Actor

3.3 Theoretical Implications

This framework has several theoretical implications:

The proposed framework extends existing communication scholarship by challenging the adequacy of traditional sender-receiver models in contexts where AI systems actively shape content and interpretation. A networked perspective more accurately captures the distributed nature of agency within AI-mediated scholarly environments.

Recognising AI as a communicative co-actor also compels a reconsideration of knowledge production processes. Authorship, credibility and epistemic authority can no longer be viewed as exclusively human attributes when algorithmic systems participate in drafting, recommending and curating scholarly outputs.

Finally, the framework raises significant ethical and methodological concerns. If AI systems influence research framing, evaluation and dissemination, then transparency, attribution and accountability standards must evolve accordingly. These shifts necessitate renewed attention to how communicative responsibility is negotiated within human AI collaborations.

3.4 Contribution to Communication Studies

The proposed model bridges a critical gap in the literature, while prior studies describe AI's applications, few systematically conceptualise its agency in communication processes. By conceptualising AI as an integral component of scholarly communication processes, this study lays the groundwork for both empirical research and theoretical refinement in communication studies, particularly in contexts where AI-mediated interactions are increasingly prevalent.

Overall, the proposed framework provides a structured explanation of how AI operates across multiple communicative dimensions within scholarly ecosystems. By explicitly defining these roles, the model clarifies the mechanisms through which AI influences knowledge production, thereby strengthening conceptual precision and analytical clarity.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION THEORY

4.1 Rethinking Authorship and Credibility

Reframing AI as an active participant in scholarly communication introduces significant implications for traditional notions of authorship and scholarly credibility. Historically, authorship has been understood as an exclusively human attribution, grounded in intellectual contribution, interpretation and accountability. However, as AI increasingly participates in the co-production of content, the boundaries of authorship are blurred. AI systems can generate ideas, suggest arguments and organise knowledge, which may be incorporated directly into manuscripts (Oermann et al., 2025).

This evolving landscape calls for a careful re-evaluation of how academic credit is assigned and how accountability is maintained. Communication scholars must consider the extent to which the involvement of artificial intelligence reshapes human intellectual responsibility. Additionally, questions remain as to whether and how AI-generated contributions should be explicitly acknowledged. Failing to address these issues risks undermining scholarly integrity and obscuring the collaborative nature of knowledge production.

4.2 Expanding Communication Models

Traditional communication models, such as the linear sender-message-receiver framework, fail to capture the complexity of AI-mediated scholarly communication. The proposed conceptual model emphasises multi-directional, networked interactions involving humans and AI. This shift requires an expansion of communication theory to accommodate non-human agents as legitimate participants that can influence message construction, dissemination and interpretation (Afgiansyah et al., 2025).

Media ecology perspectives provide a useful lens here, highlighting how AI technologies shape not only content but also the environment in which communication occurs. AI mediates the flow of information, reconfigures social and cultural norms and interacts with institutional infrastructures in ways that reshape meaning-making processes (Kessler et al., 2025). Communication theory must therefore integrate these technological actors into models of knowledge production and scholarly discourse.

4.3 Epistemic Implications

AI's role as a communicative actor also has epistemological implications. By influencing the organisation, framing, and visibility of knowledge, AI affects what is considered credible, authoritative, and discoverable in scholarly domains. This introduces a new dimension of epistemic mediation, wherein AI algorithms can shape academic knowledge indirectly, through filtering, summarising, or recommending content (Sabari Nath & Prakasan, 2024).

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for communication scholars seeking to theorise knowledge production in AI-enhanced environments. It emphasises that meaning is co-constructed not only by human scholars but also by the algorithmic and technological agents embedded in academic communication networks.

4.4 Practical Considerations

The integration of AI as a communicative actor also carries practical implications for academic practice. Institutions may need to revise guidelines on authorship attribution, peer review and publication ethics. Scholars should develop skills in critically evaluating AI-generated content while maintaining oversight of the accuracy, interpretation, and integrity of scholarly outputs. Recognising AI as an actor encourages a proactive approach to understanding its influence rather than treating it solely as a tool to expedite routine tasks.

5. ETHICAL AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The conceptualisation of AI as a communicative actor introduces several ethical and practical challenges that scholars, institutions and policymakers must address. As AI increasingly contributes to content generation, interpretation and dissemination, it raises questions about accountability, transparency and fairness in scholarly communication.

5.1 Transparency and Attribution

AI-mediated outputs complicate the attribution of intellectual work. It is essential to establish clear guidelines on when and how AI contributions should be acknowledged. Without explicit attribution, readers may assume that all intellectual input originates from human authors, potentially misrepresenting the process of knowledge creation (Oermann et al., 2025). Transparency also extends to documenting the AI tools and algorithms used, allowing peers to evaluate the reliability and replicability of research outputs.

5.2 Bias and Equity

AI systems reflect the data on which they are trained, potentially perpetuating biases in academic content or reinforcing existing disparities in knowledge representation. For example, AI-driven recommendation systems may favour certain authors, journals or research topics, inadvertently shaping the visibility of scholarly work (Salih et al., 2025). Ethical engagement requires awareness of these biases and strategies to mitigate their influence, such as diverse data curation and critical review of AI outputs.

5.3 Accountability and Integrity

As artificial intelligence increasingly contributes to knowledge production, it raises critical issues of accountability, particularly regarding responsibility for errors, misinterpretations, or misrepresentations in AI-generated content. Scholars must maintain oversight of AI contributions to ensure that ethical and professional standards are upheld. Institutions may need to revise policies for authorship, peer review and publication to reflect the realities of AI-mediated communication (Kessler et al., 2025).

5.4 Practical Recommendation

Practical considerations for integrating AI into scholarly communication emphasise the need for researchers to critically evaluate AI-generated content rather than accept outputs uncritically, ensuring that any errors, misinterpretations, or biases are identified and corrected (Oermann et al., 2025). Maintaining detailed records of AI use, including prompts, outputs and subsequent modifications, is essential for transparency and reproducibility, enabling peers and institutions to assess the role of AI in the research process (Salih, Gul, & Sumblah, 2025). Scholars must also acquire sufficient literacy in AI tools and an understanding of their limitations, fostering informed engagement with AI-mediated outputs and reducing reliance on automated suggestions without oversight (Sabari Nath & Prakasan, 2024). Finally, institutions should establish comprehensive policies and guidelines governing the ethical and responsible integration of AI into research and publication practices, addressing issues of authorship, accountability, and the equitable use of AI across disciplines (Kessler, Mahl, Schäfer, & Volk, 2025). Collectively, these measures provide a framework for responsible AI adoption in academic contexts, balancing innovation with integrity and critical scholarly engagement.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This conceptual paper has proposed a framework that positions AI as an active participant in scholarly knowledge production. By recognising AI as an active participant rather than a passive tool, the study highlights the co-constitutive nature of human-AI interactions in scholarly communication. The proposed model, encompassing AI as a co-producer, mediator, and networked interactor, illustrates how AI shapes content creation, interpretation, and dissemination, influencing the epistemic and rhetorical dimensions of knowledge.

Theoretical implications are significant. Traditional communication models, centred on human agency, are inadequate for capturing AI's influence. Integrating AI into conceptual frameworks expands understanding of authorship, credibility and the dynamics of scholarly discourse. Moreover, recognising AI's agency foregrounds ethical and practical considerations, including transparency, accountability and bias mitigation, which are critical for maintaining integrity in AI-mediated knowledge production.

Future research should empirically examine the proposed framework across diverse disciplines and academic contexts. Studies could investigate how AI's co-production affects argumentation and content framing, how algorithmic mediation shapes visibility and dissemination and how collaborative interactions between humans and AI influence epistemic authority. Further exploration of ethical practices, institutional guidelines and policy interventions will ensure responsible integration of AI into scholarly communication.

Ultimately, positioning AI as a communicative actor provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the evolving landscape of academic knowledge production in the digital era. By bridging communication theory and AI scholarship, this study offers insights for scholars, educators and policymakers navigating the opportunities and challenges of AI-enhanced academic communication.

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