

Artificial Intelligence as a Medium: Ethical and Discursive Implications

Irina Filipović¹², Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Abstract

This paper analyzes artificial intelligence as a medium from the perspective of pragmatic media philosophy, focusing on its ethical and discursive implications in contemporary communication processes. Moving beyond instrumental views of technology, the study conceptualizes AI as a communication infrastructure that actively shapes meaning production, the distribution of visibility, and power relations within media environments. The study adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach based on conceptual analysis of interdisciplinary literature from media philosophy, platform studies, and empirical research on artificial intelligence in communication. Within this framework, the paper examines transformations of communicative practices, particularly in relation to authorship, responsibility, and persuasion, as well as key ethical dimensions such as power, surveillance, and transparency. Special attention is given to the discursive implications of AI, analyzed through the interconnected concepts of transparency, truth, and trust. The analysis shows that algorithmic and generative systems influence not only the content of communication, but also the ways in which credibility is assessed and trust is formed.

The findings suggest that ethical and discursive challenges cannot be reduced to isolated cases of misuse or technical limitations, but should be understood as structural effects of algorithmically mediated communication systems. The paper concludes that conceptualizing AI as a medium enables a deeper understanding of contemporary communication processes and highlights the need to integrate ethical reflection into everyday communicative practices, with particular emphasis on transparency, accountability, and the protection of user autonomy.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, ethics, media philosophy, algorithmic governance, digital marketing

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Introduction

Digital communication has undergone a significant transformation over the past decade, with artificial intelligence (AI) becoming an integral part of the media and

¹ Corresponding author: irina.filipovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

² ORCID: 0009-0007-2433-1794

communication environment. AI can no longer be understood merely as an external addition to communication processes. Instead, it functions as a framework that shapes how communication is organized, how content becomes visible, and how different actors interact within contemporary media environments (Pierson et al., 2023).

Recent research further supports this view by describing AI as a structural actor within the digital media ecosystem, shaping not only content production and distribution, but also the processes through which information is legitimized in the public sphere (Oktarina et al., 2025).

Previous research has highlighted both the benefits and ethical challenges of artificial intelligence in media, particularly in relation to personalization, automation, and audience engagement (Filipović, 2024). Building on these insights, this paper shifts the focus from viewing AI as a technological tool to understanding it as a medium that structures communication processes and redistributes communicative power. This shift also requires a change in theoretical perspective.

Rather than treating artificial intelligence as a neutral technology that simply improves existing communication practices, this paper draws on media philosophy to understand AI as a structure that shapes the production of meaning. In this approach, media are not seen as passive channels, but as systems that influence how reality is perceived and interpreted (Schmidt, 2013). This perspective is further developed through pragmatic media philosophy, which focuses on how media function in practice – that is, how they are used, what effects they produce, and how they shape social behavior (Stepanov, 2013).

In contemporary media industries, generative AI is already widely used in journalism, advertising, and public relations, which makes it necessary to examine its broader social and ethical implications (Guzman & Lewis, 2024). At the same time, these systems are often presented as objective and neutral, which can obscure the fact that they are shaped by specific values, interests, and power relations (Todorović, 2011). This creates a gap between how AI is described and how it actually functions in communication.

A key issue in today's communication environment concerns uncertainty about the origin, intent, and authorship of content. Audiences increasingly find it difficult to distinguish between human-produced and AI-generated messages, as well as to determine who is responsible for their effects. This is especially visible in online and marketing environments, where personalization and audience targeting have become standard practices, while the processes behind them remain largely invisible (Gao et al., 2023).

At the core of these processes are algorithmic systems, particularly recommendation algorithms that select, rank, and deliver content based on user data, previous behavior, and predicted preferences. These systems determine which information users are more likely to see, thereby shaping attention, relevance, and visibility in communication. However, users often have limited insight into how these systems function, which raises important questions about transparency and control. Research shows that the acceptability of such practices depends on how users understand data use and the boundaries of targeting (Boerman et al., 2021).

This issue is closely connected to the concepts of algorithmic literacy and the algorithmic divide. Differences in users' understanding of how AI systems influence content selection may become a new form of communicative inequality, particularly in contexts such as information dissemination and political communication (Eder & Sjøvaag, 2024). In addition, the emergence of synthetic media, including deepfakes and generative models, further complicates the situation by introducing uncertainty about the reliability of information and contributing to a decline in trust in media sources (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020).

This paper adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach based on conceptual analysis. It draws on interdisciplinary literature from media philosophy, platform studies, and empirical research in order to develop a framework for understanding artificial intelligence as a medium. Within this framework, ethical and discursive implications are examined as interconnected aspects of contemporary communication.

The main contribution of this paper lies in the conceptual reframing of artificial intelligence as a medium and communication infrastructure, as well as in connecting ethical and discursive perspectives within a pragmatic approach. By moving beyond instrumental views of technology, the analysis shows how AI reshapes meaning production, the distribution of visibility, and the boundaries of authorship and responsibility.

The aim of this paper is therefore to analyze artificial intelligence as a medium, with a focus on the ethical and discursive implications of algorithmic content production and mediation. In particular, it examines how AI transforms communicative practices, how it reshapes relations of power and responsibility, and how it affects transparency, truth, and trust in contemporary media environments. This also provides a basis for a broader discussion on responsible uses of artificial intelligence, in line with ethical frameworks that emphasize human autonomy, transparency, and accountability (UNESCO, 2021).

Artificial Intelligence as a Medium: Structural Foundations and Transformations of Communicative Practices

Understanding artificial intelligence as a medium requires a theoretical framework that moves beyond the instrumental view of technology as a neutral tool for information transmission. In contemporary media philosophy, media are understood as systems that determine what becomes visible, relevant, and socially significant, thereby shaping social practices and power relations (Schmidt, 2013). From this perspective, media do not merely reflect reality, but actively participate in its construction through processes of selection, encoding, and stabilization of meaning. Communication is therefore not conceived as a linear transmission of messages, but as a dynamic social practice in which media play a constitutive role in shaping what appears as social reality.

Pragmatic media philosophy further shifts the analytical focus toward the concrete social effects of media technologies. As Stepanov (2013) argues, the meaning

and value of media cannot be understood outside the practices of their use. Rather than offering abstract normative evaluations, this approach examines how media function in everyday communication, what patterns of behavior they encourage, and which forms of interaction they normalize. Within this framework, artificial intelligence can be understood not simply as a tool for processing information, but as a system that shapes how information is produced, organized, and interpreted in practice.

Insights from local media philosophy further illuminate this perspective. Todorović (2011) points out that new technologies are often presented through narratives of efficiency, progress, and neutrality, which can obscure their social and ethical implications. In the case of artificial intelligence, such narratives are reinforced through ideas of algorithmic objectivity and technological inevitability, despite empirical findings that AI systems reflect the values and assumptions of those who design and implement them (Gao et al., 2023).

Within this theoretical framework, it becomes possible to connect the analysis of artificial intelligence with ethical questions in a more concrete way. Instead of relying solely on abstract principles, ethical issues are examined through the practical consequences of AI use in communication, such as changes in user autonomy, the transparency of information sources, and the distribution of communicative power. This approach aligns with the understanding of media as spaces in which social values are shaped and contested (Stojanović Prelević, 2020), as well as with contemporary ethical frameworks emphasizing human rights, transparency, and accountability (UNESCO, 2021).

Building on these insights, artificial intelligence can also be understood as a communication infrastructure. This means that AI does not only process or transmit content, but actively organizes how communication flows. In practice, AI systems operate through mechanisms of selection, ranking, and prioritization, shaping which information becomes visible and how it is interpreted (Pierson et al., 2023).

This infrastructural role becomes particularly evident in platform-based communication environments, where the production and distribution of content take place within algorithmically structured systems that direct flows of attention and establish hierarchies of relevance. Recommendation algorithms—understood as systems that select and rank content based on user data and predicted preferences—play a central role in this process. They influence not only which topics become dominant, but also how users encounter and interpret information. As a result, AI systems increasingly assume functions traditionally associated with editorial decision-making (Pierson et al., 2023).

Insights from platform and infrastructure studies further deepen this understanding. Gillespie (2014) argues that algorithms function as largely invisible mechanisms that organize attention and shape what becomes socially significant in the public sphere. Similarly, Plantin et al. (2018) show that digital platforms act as communication infrastructures that not only enable communication, but also structure its conditions, determining what is technically, socially, and symbolically possible. From this perspective, artificial intelligence should not be understood only

as a medium of individual messages, but as part of a broader system that stabilizes patterns of interaction and meaning-making.

These structural changes are directly reflected in transformations of communicative practices. One of the most visible shifts concerns authorship. In AI-mediated environments, authorship can no longer be clearly attributed to a single human actor or institution. Instead, it emerges through interactions between users, algorithmic systems, and platforms, making it more difficult to determine intention, responsibility, and credibility in communication.

At the same time, artificial intelligence reshapes the ways in which communication exerts influence, particularly in contexts such as marketing and personalized communication. By analyzing user data and predicting behavior, AI systems adapt messages to individual preferences and habits. This form of influence does not rely on direct persuasion, but operates through the normalization of certain communicative patterns and expectations. As a result, persuasion becomes embedded in the structure of communication itself, rather than being limited to individual messages.

These transformations also reflect broader dynamics of platform-based communication, where algorithmic systems and economic logics interact to shape participation and the circulation of content (van Dijk, Poell & de Waal, 2018). In this context, AI not only mediates communication, but actively structures the conditions under which communication takes place, influencing visibility, relevance, and the distribution of attention.

Viewed in this way, artificial intelligence represents a foundational element of the contemporary communication environment. Taken together, these transformations suggest that AI does not simply mediate communication, but actively reconfigures the roles, expectations, and power relations that define how communication operates. This perspective shifts the analysis from what AI does to how it structures the conditions under which communication becomes possible, meaningful, and socially relevant.

Ethical Implications of AI-Mediated Communication: Power, Responsibility, and Surveillance

The growing use of artificial intelligence in the production and distribution of media content highlights the need for a systematic ethical analysis of its social consequences. As discussed earlier, AI systems do not function only as technical tools, but actively shape communication processes. For this reason, ethical issues cannot be understood solely at the level of individual responsibility. Instead, they need to be examined through the broader power relations embedded in algorithmic systems and communication infrastructures (Pierson et al., 2023). This perspective is reinforced by recent studies that identify AI as a structural factor in the transformation of media integrity, particularly through its role in reinforcing attention-driven communication and amplifying disinformation dynamics (Oktarina et al., 2025).

In contemporary media environments, power is less often exercised through direct control, such as censorship, and more through subtle forms of influence. One

key mechanism is algorithmic control of visibility and attention. Recommendation systems, which automatically select and rank content based on user data and predicted preferences, determine which topics and messages become more visible, while others remain marginal. In this way, they shape what is seen as relevant in the public sphere, often without users being aware of these processes (Eder & Sjøvaag, 2024).

Research shows that this type of communication structure can lead to audience segmentation and a narrowing of the range of content users are exposed to. By directing attention toward certain types of content, algorithms help shape the overall structure of the communication environment (Pierson et al., 2023). From an ethical perspective, the issue is therefore not limited to individual misleading messages, but concerns how communication itself is organized and how this organization affects public debate. This also raises the question of responsibility.

In traditional media systems, responsibility for content could usually be attributed to a specific author or institution. In AI-mediated environments, however, responsibility is distributed across multiple actors, including developers, technology companies, platforms, and users. This makes it more difficult to determine who is accountable for the effects of communication, since outcomes result from the interaction of many different elements. Studies on AI governance show that this complexity complicates responses to issues such as disinformation, discrimination, and manipulation (Pierson et al., 2023).

International ethical frameworks attempt to address these challenges by emphasizing accountability, transparency, and human oversight. For example, the UNESCO Recommendation states that responsibility for AI systems cannot be assigned to the systems themselves, but must remain with the human actors and institutions involved in their development and use (UNESCO, 2021).

The question of responsibility is closely connected to the issue of surveillance. AI systems rely on large amounts of user data, which are collected and processed to enable personalization and content optimization. These practices often become part of everyday communication and are presented as necessary for improving user experience.

This process can be better understood through the concept of datafication, which refers to the transformation of social activities into data that can be tracked, analyzed, and used for decision-making. As Couldry and Mejias (2019) argue, datafication is not just a technical process, but a key feature of contemporary power relations. Within this system, users' behaviors and interactions are continuously monitored and translated into data, which then shapes future communication.

Empirical research shows that such forms of surveillance are often not perceived as problematic, mainly because they are gradual and not easily visible (Eder & Sjøvaag, 2024). However, from an ethical perspective, this normalization has important consequences. It can affect user autonomy, limit privacy, and influence how people express themselves, as they adjust their behavior to the conditions of algorithmically structured environments.

These processes can also be interpreted through Foucault's concept of power as something that operates through internalized norms rather than direct coercion

(Foucault, 1997). In this sense, AI-mediated communication does not only shape external conditions, but also influences how individuals think, behave, and understand their role within communication systems.

Taken together, the ethical implications of AI-mediated communication emerge through the interaction of power, responsibility, and surveillance. This perspective shows that ethical questions are not separate from communication processes, but are built into their very structure. It also supports the view of artificial intelligence as a medium with deep and far-reaching social consequences. As such, ethical questions cannot be treated as external constraints on technology, but must be understood as integral to the design and functioning of AI-mediated communication systems.

Discursive Implications of AI-Mediated Communication: Transparency, Truth, and Trust

Understanding artificial intelligence as a medium also requires examining its discursive implications, especially in relation to transparency, the concept of truth, and audience trust in media content. In contemporary communication environments, where AI systems take part in producing, selecting, and distributing information, it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify sources, authorship, and intent. This change affects not only individual messages, but also the broader stability of the public sphere – the conditions under which knowledge is produced, evaluated, and accepted (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020).

In this context, transparency is widely recognized as a key principle for maintaining trust in communication systems. In practice, this involves informing users when content is generated or selected by algorithms, making the basic logic of recommendation systems understandable, and clearly indicating responsibility for content (Gao et al., 2023). Recent empirical research further shows that transparency does not function only as a means of providing information, but also as a communicative signal that can reduce uncertainty and foster trust, even among users who are initially skeptical toward AI (Park & Yoon, 2025).

Conversely, when such transparency is lacking, users may become confused and less likely to trust media content. Studies on AI-generated news indicate that audiences expect clear signals about algorithmic involvement, and that the presence or absence of such signals directly influences how they assess credibility and reliability (Zier & Diakopoulos, 2024). This suggests that transparency is not only a technical or regulatory issue, but a central element in how communication is interpreted and evaluated.

At the same time, transparency is closely connected to changes in the concept of truth. Generative AI systems can produce content that appears coherent and convincing, but is not necessarily based on verifiable facts. This creates a new kind of challenge, as users increasingly find it difficult to distinguish between reliable information and artificially generated content (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020).

Importantly, research shows that synthetic media do not always mislead users directly. Instead, they often create a more general sense of uncertainty about what

can be trusted. As a result, the problem of truth is no longer limited to whether individual claims are accurate, but extends to how people decide what counts as credible information. This uncertainty directly affects trust.

In today's media environment, trust is often formed under conditions in which users do not fully understand how content is produced and distributed. In this context, transparency plays a key role, as it not only improves understanding, but also functions as a signal of accountability that shapes how users interpret the reliability of AI-mediated communication (Park & Yoon, 2025). At the same time, studies on algorithmic literacy show that users who better understand the role of AI are more capable of critically evaluating media content (Eder & Sjøvaag, 2024).

However, these individual capacities are shaped by broader structural conditions. AI-driven media environments influence not only what information becomes visible, but also how it is perceived and evaluated, thereby contributing to wider challenges of media integrity and trust (Oktarina et al., 2025). This interplay between user understanding, transparency, and algorithmic structuring suggests that trust in AI-mediated communication is not solely an individual cognitive outcome, but a relational effect shaped by both user capacities and the underlying architecture of communication systems.

In such conditions, trust may take two problematic forms. On the one hand, users may accept content uncritically, assuming it is objective or neutral. On the other hand, they may develop a general distrust toward the media as a whole. In both cases, trust becomes unstable because it is not based on a clear understanding of how communication systems work.

As discussed in earlier sections, these issues are especially visible in marketing. Personalized communication often relies on automated targeting, where persuasive strategies are embedded in algorithmic processes. Research shows that when users become aware of such targeting, it can negatively affect their attitudes toward advertising, particularly if they feel their privacy is threatened or that they are being manipulated (Boerman et al., 2021). This indicates that trust depends not only on the message itself, but also on how fair and transparent the communication process appears to be.

Taken together, transparency, truth, and trust can be understood as closely connected dimensions of contemporary communication. Their analysis requires attention to both technological systems and social contexts. From this perspective, the discursive implications of artificial intelligence cannot be separated from its ethical and structural effects. Instead, they form part of a broader transformation of the media environment, which sets the stage for the concluding discussion of this paper.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the role of artificial intelligence in contemporary communication cannot be adequately understood if it is reduced to a technological tool or a neutral instrument of automation. By applying insights from media

philosophy and a pragmatic approach, artificial intelligence has been conceptualized as a medium and communication infrastructure that actively shapes how meaning is produced, how visibility is distributed, and how power operates within digital environments.

The analysis has shown that AI transforms key dimensions of communicative practices. First, it reconfigures authorship by distributing it across complex interactions between users, systems, and platforms, thereby complicating traditional notions of responsibility. Second, it reshapes persuasion, particularly in the context of personalized communication, where influence operates through algorithmic selection and the normalization of communicative patterns rather than through direct intervention.

Furthermore, the paper has demonstrated that the ethical implications of AI-mediated communication emerge from the interaction of power, responsibility, and surveillance. Rather than being limited to individual cases of misuse, these issues are embedded in the structural organization of communication systems, where algorithmic processes shape visibility, collect and process user data, and influence behavior in often non-transparent ways.

At the same time, the discursive implications of artificial intelligence were examined through the concepts of transparency, truth, and trust. The analysis has shown that AI systems not only affect the content of communication, but also the conditions under which information is interpreted and evaluated. In particular, the increasing difficulty of distinguishing between human and AI-generated content contributes to uncertainty and challenges the stability of trust in media systems.

The main contribution of this paper lies in integrating ethical and discursive perspectives within a conceptual framework that understands artificial intelligence as a medium. This approach makes it possible to move beyond fragmented analyses of individual problems and to examine AI as a structural component of contemporary communication environments. This contribution is particularly reflected in linking pragmatic media philosophy with contemporary empirical insights on AI, thereby offering an integrated framework for analyzing both structural and discursive dimensions of AI-mediated communication.

These findings also suggest that existing regulatory and technical responses, while necessary, are not sufficient on their own. A more comprehensive approach requires continuous critical reflection on the role of AI in shaping communication practices, as well as the development of greater algorithmic literacy among users.

Future research could build on this framework by empirically examining specific applications of AI in journalism, marketing, and political communication, as well as by exploring models of transparency and accountability that can strengthen user trust. In this way, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how artificial intelligence transforms communication and highlights the importance of integrating ethical considerations into both theoretical and practical analyses of media systems. Ultimately, understanding artificial intelligence as a medium means recognizing that the future of communication will not be shaped solely by what technologies can do, but by how they organize meaning, structure visibility, and redefine the conditions under which trust, knowledge, and social relations are formed.

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Veštačka inteligencija kao medijum: etičke i diskurzivne implikacije

Irina Filipović, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija

Apstrakt

Ovaj rad analizira veštačku inteligenciju kao medij iz perspektive pragmatičke filozofije medija, sa fokusom na njene etičke i diskurzivne implikacije u savremenim komunikacionim procesima. Polazeći od kritike instrumentalnog shvatanja tehnologije, rad konceptualizuje veštačku inteligenciju kao komunikacionu infrastrukturu koja aktivno učestvuje u oblikovanju značenja, distribuciji vidljivosti i preraspodeli moći u medijskom okruženju.

Istraživanje se zasniva na kvalitativnom i interpretativnom pristupu, odnosno konceptualnoj analizi relevantne literature iz oblasti filozofije medija, studija platformi i empirijskih istraživanja o veštačkoj inteligenciji u komunikaciji. U tom okviru ispituju se transformacije komunikacionih praksi, naročito u pogledu autorstva, odgovornosti i persuzije, kao i ključne etičke dimenzije poput moći, nadzora i transparentnosti.

Posebna pažnja posvećena je diskurzivnim implikacijama veštačke inteligencije, koje se razmatraju kroz međusobno povezane pojmove transparentnosti, istine i poverenja. Analiza pokazuje da generativni i algoritamski sistemi ne utiču samo na sadržaj komunikacije, već i na načine na koje se procenjuje verodostojnost informacija i formira poverenje publike.

Rezultati ukazuju na to da se etički i diskurzivni izazovi ne mogu svesti na pojedinačne zloupotrebe ili tehničke nedostatke, već predstavljaju strukturne efekte algoritamski posredovanih komunikacionih sistema. Rad zaključuje da razumevanje veštačke inteligencije kao medija omogućava dublju analizu savremenih komunikacionih procesa i naglašava potrebu za integracijom etičke refleksije u svakodnevne komunikacione prakse, uz poseban akcenat na transparentnost, odgovornost i zaštitu autonomije korisnika.

Ključne reči: veštačka inteligencija, etika, filozofija medija, algoritamsko upravljanje, digitalni marketing

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