

Rethinking Media Users in the Age of AI and Algorithmic Mediation

Jaemin Jung ¹  and Jeong-Nam Kim ^{1,2} 

¹ Moon Soul Graduate School of Future Strategy, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, Republic of Korea

² Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Oklahoma, USA

Correspondence: Jaemin Jung (nettong@kaist.ac.kr)

Submitted: 7 July 2025 **Published:** 30 July 2025

Issue: This editorial is part of the issue “AI, Media, and People: The Changing Landscape of User Experiences and Behaviors” edited by Jeong-Nam Kim (University of Oklahoma) and Jaemin Jung (Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.i475>

Abstract

We have collected 16 research essays on how artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping media, communication, and public life. The authors describe and prescribe how people respond to AI in real settings, such as journalists transitioning to algorithmic newsrooms, students utilizing ChatGPT, and policymakers searching for fairness and transparency. Across all articles, trust, ethics, and context should and could surpass AI's technical power. We classify the essays into four groups: AI adoption and professional integration; AI governance, ethics, and societal risk; pseudo-information detection and correction; and data-science methods for opinion and behavior analysis. These essays witness emerging media transformations, hinting at how AI can coevolve with, not replace, human intelligence in everyday mediated and connected life.

Keywords

AI; AI ethics; AI governance; AI trust; algorithm; collective intelligence; media; publics

1. Introduction

AI has evolved from an innovation to a shared habitat, reshaping how we learn, trade, legislate, communicate, and reason with one another. Given this growing influence, we called for original research and critical reflections on how AI benefits its users and how it could and should change the ways in which people and media coevolve.

The 16 essays selected for this thematic issue show that computing power and efficiency alone are not the whole story: Every gain in an AI model's speed or scale is matched by fresh questions of power, trust, and

authenticity. The authors follow journalists navigating “algorithmic newsrooms,” students who treat ChatGPT as both coach and crutch, regulators wrestling with spam and bias, and policymakers struggling to anchor the ideal of “transparency” to something measurable. They also expose new chasms: US-centric biases in large language models, rhetorical markers that trafficked Covid-19 lies across French X (previously Twitter), and the imbalance of AI safety regulations in low-income nations. These articles forgo the simplistic tech-utopia or tech-doom forecasts which often surround discussions of AI in media, and instead analyze and propose ways in which people, institutions, and AI can contribute to collective intelligence in ways that create opportunity without sacrificing human values.

We have arranged the collection of articles by subject into four groups, beginning with AI adoption and professional integration. Five articles describe how newsrooms, businesses, universities, and governments adapt and utilize AI tools in everyday work, demonstrating that trust, long-term relationships, and “centaur” skill sets decide who wins and who loses. The second group explores the subjects of governance, ethics, and societal risk. Here, five articles report on policy battles such as global transparency gaps, copyright issues for prompt engineers, AI filtering and moderation of opinion spamming in governmental rulemaking, and safeguards for data-driven persuasion in the Global South. These articles highlight the need for context-sensitive, rights-preserving governance strategies for AI adoption and practice. In the third group, on pseudo-information (J.-N. Kim & Gil de Zúñiga, 2021) detection and correction, three articles examine human–AI collective efforts that could guard against conspiracy theories, false rumors, and pandemic dis—and misinformation. They present and demonstrate the power of real-time information surveillance dashboards, linguistic markers of fake news, and signals of human oversight. The last group covers data-science methods for opinion and behavior analysis of digital publics. Three articles present theory-based development to understand AI-immersed digital publics’ new information environments and methodological toolkits in comment mining, synthetic polling, and tensor decomposition. These new theory-method advancements enable researchers and practitioners to map the emotions expressed and embedded in public narratives.

All of these 16 articles and the four subject groups they address articulate a single challenge: the need to construct media systems in which AI or machines amplify rather than undercut human intelligence in everyday democratic life. Below, we highlight the articles’ key thoughts, including their prescriptions and proscriptions for the emerging and evolving interactions between AI, media, and people.

2. AI Adoption and Professional Integration

The articles in this section track ways in which journalists, public-sector communicators, businesses, educators, and consumers incorporate AI into their routine work and learning. The studies find widespread optimism concerning efficiency and personalization, but also heightened anxiety over skills gaps, employment security, and ethical drift. Trust, whether in organizations, technologies, or long-term relationships, emerges as the critical currency that turns curiosity into sustained AI use. Hybrid or “centaur” skill sets, transparent design, and two-way engagement are identified as keys to the successful integration of human and machine contributions in these sectors.

S. Oh and Jung (2025) show that journalists now view AI as both a help and a hazard. Worrying that algorithm-based decisions could bleed into editorial judgment and plant bias into coverage, many journalists

are pushing to learn how generative models work and to keep the final story in human hands. They answer with a practical blueprint: Pair coders and journalists working side-by-side at every design step to bake transparency, fairness, and truth-seeking into a “journalistic algorithm” and spread both its cost and knowledge across the industry. By adapting from passive users to active co-creators, the authors argue, journalists and newsrooms can expand the gains offered by AI without surrendering the craft’s core values.

Next, H. Lee et al. (2025) map how everyday people approach AI and find that attitudes split into distinct camps: enthusiasts and confident users race to try new tools; balanced and cautious groups weigh gains against missteps; the uninterested tune out. The team tracks how service-specific trust mediates problem recognition and general AI trust, converting curiosity into concrete intent. The study urges firms to ditch one-size-fits-all pitches and instead match messages to each audience segment, as well as to invest in transparent, two-way communication and treat trust as the real engine of uptake, especially in new or foreign markets where proof and reassurance must go hand-in-hand for both businesses and policymakers.

S. K. Lee et al. (2025) show in their article that college students use ChatGPT as both a shortcut and a crutch. Five motivations—novelty, entertainment, guidance, interaction, and peer influence—are linked to actual use, with novelty and entertainment leading but often yielding superficial engagement, while guidance drives deeper tasks. Students rely on ChatGPT most for simplifying complex ideas and less for contentious topics where misinformation persists. Trust in the service, rather than technical skill, best predicts adoption, underscoring the risk of critical dependency. The authors urge instructors to bring structured AI literacy into courses and challenge developers to close reliability gaps, especially for multilingual users, so that ChatGPT augments rather than erodes the process of study.

Tam et al. (2025) trace how people judge companies that roll out AI tools and find that what matters most is not faith in the code but faith in the firm. Trust in the organization magnifies perceived benefits and softens misgivings; without that trust, even a clear payoff cannot calm anxiety. The authors urge companies to spell out why they use AI, what data they touch, and how the system works, and then to back those claims with ethical safeguards. By meeting curiosity with candor, firms can convert hesitant observers into loyal users and keep support alive as algorithms spread across storefronts and apps.

Lastly, Lovari and De Rosa (2025) examine how European government communicators see generative AI as both an opportunity and a minefield. New rules, volatile media cycles, and restless constituents push them to reinvent themselves as “centaur communicators,” blending analog judgment with digital precision. This shift demands that they are able to explain what the tools do, flag risks in plain language, and build guardrails that keep transparency and accountability intact. The authors argue that these officials now anchor democratic discourse; by guiding AI rather than trailing it, they can shield citizens from pseudo-information while freeing up time for deeper engagement. Done right, generative AI could allow governments to move faster without surrendering integrity.

3. AI Governance, Ethics, and Societal Risk

Here, AI is treated as a policy object. The included research ranges from Korea’s risk amplification around generative AI to cross-regional audits of transparency, from US e-rulemaking experiments to a tiered copyright proposal for AI prompts, and finally to ethical safeguards for AI-powered social media campaigns

in low-income nations. Together, they argue that effective governance must be adaptive, culturally attuned, and explicitly protective of autonomy, equity, and a vibrant public domain.

S. Kim and Jung (2025) track how the discussion of generative AI in Korea has evolved between early 2023 and the middle of 2024. Mining 56,000 news stories and 68,000 user comments and applying the Social Amplification of Risk Framework, they show the two spheres pulled in different directions. Reporters, echoing experts, framed AI as a big-ticket industrial gamble and warned about misinformation, ethics, and sector-wide upheaval in robotics, chips, and smartphones. As pragmatic worries about labor and social misuse outpaced moral panic, the central question of the debate shifted from “what if AI misbehaves?” to “how will AI reshape work?” The study alarms regulators to ditch one-size-fits-all messages and craft policy alongside publics who judge AI through the lenses of their own stakes.

Sebastião and Dias (2025) probe how policymakers frame transparency in AI rules across regions. Their examination of leading ethical charters and draft laws finds near-universal praise for “transparency” but little agreement on its day-to-day meaning. Empty slogans, they warn, widen accountability gaps when coders, vendors, and regulators all share the workload. The authors call for a single yardstick that respects cultural differences but lays out non-negotiable duties: to disclose data inputs, to audit models, and to pin down who takes responsibility when systems fail. The study argues that real AI governance will depend not on rhetoric but on hard, testable standards and the people willing to put them to work.

Next, Perez et al. (2025) put two e-rulemaking prototypes in front of US citizens and measured how different publics react when AI flags and filters opinion spam. The results cut through the hype: AI, by itself, neither raised nor harmed overall approval, but its impact split sharply along problem-solving lines. People who already felt able and motivated to weigh in welcomed the tool; those who sensed constraints or low stakes read the same system as technocratic overreach. The study shows that legitimacy in digital rulemaking rests less on smarter code than on visible, two-way design that treats citizens as partners, not data points.

In the next article, Jon (2025) tackles the copyright gray area around AI-generated works. He classifies prompts by the depth of human creativity (Tier 1—minimal human input; Tier 2—moderate human creativity in prompt design; Tier 3—substantial human creative contribution) and links each tier to a matching level of protection. Jon also flags real-world knots, such as prompt trolling, cross-border enforcement, and the rise of professional prompt engineers, and sketches practical fixes, from simple prompt-registration forms to international cooperation. His model reconciles protecting creativity and fostering innovation, helping lawmakers to adapt old laws to new technologies.

Penh (2025) spotlights the double edge of AI-driven social media in low- and middle-income countries: targeted feeds can spur healthier habits, widen financial access, and stimulate civic action, yet the same algorithms often amplify bias, manipulate opinion, and spread falsehoods where watchdogs are weak. She argues that “do no harm” must shift from slogan to standard and that firms and aid agencies need to audit persuasion tools, invite local voices into rule-setting, invest in AI safety and literacy, and adapt safeguards to each community’s politics and culture. Without that groundwork in place, global AI rules risk echoing donor priorities rather than local needs, and vulnerable users may trade autonomy for convenience. With it, however, AI can advance sustainable development goals without losing trust.

4. Pseudo-Information Detection and Correction

Focusing on conspiracy narratives, crisis rumors, and pandemic falsehoods, these articles test the comparative merits of AI and human fact-checkers, introduce a real-time visual analytics platform (SMART 2.0), and isolate linguistic markers of deception on French X. The evidence favors mixed AI and human workflows, human-in-the-loop model refinement, and language-specific heuristics as the most robust shields against information disorder.

First, Lan et al. (2025) tested whether conspiracy-minded readers trust fact checks more when they come from a person or from an algorithm. In a 2×2 experiment, human verifications increased and sparked the strongest intent to share corrections, while fully automated stories fared worst. Yet, readers steeped in conspiracies showed higher baseline trust in an AI checker, perhaps because the automated tool seemed less partisan. Positive machine heuristics—shortcuts that label software as objective—fueled this bump but faded once the same readers realized the story itself was machine-written. The pattern suggests that mixed teams, with humans at the front and transparent AI tools in support, can diminish misinformation better than either one alone. To win over skeptics, organizations should tailor this human-machine blend to specific audience traits and give clear signals about who or what wrote each piece.

Hamad et al. (2025) introduce SMART 2.0, a real-time dashboard that pairs social media streams with traffic, weather, and emergency feeds to spot rumors as they form. During the 2024 UK riots, the tool plotted posts on a map, detected sudden bursts of false claims, and traced how rumors jumped from one district to another. Users could tag content on the fly, and the system instantly incorporated those judgments back into its classifier, sharpening accuracy where local slang or context confused automated filters. By cross-checking each claim with official bulletins, SMART 2.0 let reporters, first responders, and researchers separate fact from noise while events unfolded. The team is currently working to implement stronger language models, multi-platform search, network maps of super-spreaders, and multilingual support, steps meant to turn the system from a crisis tracker into an early-warning system for pseudo-information.

To close this section, Chiu et al. (2025) dissect French-language tweets regarding Covid-19 and reveal how word choice telegraphs deception. They flag three tell-tale tactics: hedging phrases that soften claims, pseudo-scientific jargon that dresses them up, and modal verbs that nudge readers without committing the author. This pattern suggests that peddlers of fake news lower the stakes of their assertions, invoke urgency, and lean on French linguistic hierarchies of obligation to slip past suspicion. By tying specific linguistic cues to veracity, the study supplies a filter that works even when ground truths are murky, offering a useful tool for both newsroom monitors and automated detectors. It also equips educators with concrete examples to demonstrate to students how rhetoric, not just facts, shapes what passes for truth online.

5. Data-Science Methods for Opinion and Behavior Analysis

The final group of articles addresses methodological innovation: how large-scale comment mining updates the theory of communicative actions in problem solving's public typologies, LLM-generated synthetic polling reveals both promise and bias, and tensor decomposition makes high-dimensional text patterns interpretable. Each study illustrates how advanced analytics can reveal hidden structures in digital publics, but only if transparency, validation, and cultural calibration keep pace with technical sophistication.

Yeo et al. (2025) push the communicative action in problem solving model into the comment threads of a high-profile entertainment dispute and show it still holds. Analyzing thousands of posts with a theory-guided data science approach, they identify three familiar publics—aware, active, and activist—but upend old assumptions about passivity: When the barrier to entry drops to a click, even aware users argue, curate links, and fend off pseudo-information. Engagement also shifts with time; active publics drive the early burst, then aware users and hard-core activists keep the issue alive. Because these roles blur and evolve, the authors recommend that communicators replace static surveys with real-time analytics and build big-data strategies to tag, track, and talk with publics as they change.

In their article, K. Lee et al. (2025) tested whether large language models can stand in for real polls on South Korea's labor debate. They worked in two ways: one prompted the model to run regressions on actual survey data, while the other asked it to fabricate a full, hypothetical data set. Both identified the broad left-right shape of opinion, yet both also distorted the view. The team argues that careful prompts, local fine-tuning, and full disclosure of AI's role are the price of using these shortcuts. LLMs can speed exploratory work when polls are scarce, but only humans can prevent built-in biases from turning into false headline "findings" that distort public debate.

Finally, Y. Oh and Park (2025) bring tensor decomposition to communication research, turning a black-box task into an accessible one. They feed LIWC features from thousands of online reviews into the PARAFAC2 algorithm and cleanly separate genuine posts from fakes—for instance, heavy use of first-person pronouns often denotes deception attempting to fake intimacy. Unlike standard models, PARAFAC2 handles records of uneven length and still exposes the weights that drive each decision, so scholars can trace how language, emotion, and context interact at scale. They suggest that the same recipe can upgrade social media monitoring, crisis dashboards, and audience research.

6. Conclusion

AI now sits at the core of how news spreads, schools run, governing rules are introduced, and power is contested among people equipped with ICTs and networked broadcasting media. These 16 articles describe the drastic shift that is underway across newsrooms, classrooms, civic forums, and policy institutions. Each proclaims that the speed, scale, and personalization of the evolving interactions between AI, media, and people can lead to benefits only when the people stay in the loop to check facts, question products, and create the tools themselves. Journalists must refine "journalistic algorithms" to protect autonomy; students may tap LLMs for ideas, yet must still reason and know their limits; regulators who utilize AI filters must ensure human co-moderation to secure legitimacy; people can operate dashboards to track rumor cascades in real time. In every case, trust and transparency determine whether AI strengthens or strains digital spheres of public communicative actions, while cultural contexts shape the resulting dynamics, as shown in the K-pop fan communities, stakeholder politicking in US rulemaking, or fake news trafficking in French tweets.

Therefore, in the shifting landscape of experiences and user behaviors, humans are what matter. AI integration must keep humans, not algorithms, in charge of making meaning. We need stronger trust mechanisms: clear disclosure, stricter audits, hybrid professionals (e.g., "centaurs") who both create and critique emerging intelligent systems, and accountable analytics that track bias, tune models to local cues, and allow public correction at every phase.

These moves turn AI from an intimidating, dictating force into a collective intelligence and reduce the risk of runaway polarization, hidden persuasion, and creative lock-in. The path ahead calls for collaboration between engineers, social scientists, journalists, teachers, and lawmakers, and the results will be worth the effort: Media ecosystems will evolve faster and more fairly and offer deeper user experiences without losing their humanity. Three actors—AI, media, and people—will continue to generate complex, hard-to-define interactions. Yet one consensus emerges from the 16 articles: Whatever the process, we must center agency, ethics, and democratic values to ensure that AI enriches, rather than impoverishes, everyday public life.

Acknowledgments

Kim is now affiliated with the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), though most of the work was completed while he was at the University of Oklahoma.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

LLMs Disclosure

The authors used ChatGPT to outline 16 articles and to ensure grammatical accuracy and proper language usage in the early stages of drafting this guest editorial essay.

References

- Chiu, M. M., Morakhovski, A., Wang, Z., & Kim, J. (2025). Detecting Covid-19 fake news on Twitter/X in French: Deceptive writing strategies. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9483. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9483>
- Hamad, M. M., Danala, G., Jentner, W., & Ebert, D. (2025). SMART 2.0: Social media analytics and reporting tool applied to misinformation tracking. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9543. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9543>
- Jon, W. (2025). Prompting creativity: Tiered approach to copyright protection for AI-generated content in the digital age. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9420. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9420>
- Kim, J.-N., & Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2021). Pseudo-information, media, publics, and the failing marketplace of ideas: Theory. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 65(2), 163–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000276422095060>
- Kim, S., & Jung, J. (2025). How generative AI went from innovation to risk: Discussions in the Korean public sphere. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9523. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9523>
- Lan, D., Zhu, Y., Liu, M., & He, C. (2025). AI agency in fact-checking: Role-based machine heuristics and publics' conspiratorial orientation. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9516. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9516>
- Lee, H., Jung, C., Koo, N., Seo, S., Yoo, S., Hong, H., & Jang, Y. (2025). Who wants to try AI? Profiling AI adopters and AI-trusting publics in South Korea. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9639. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9639>
- Lee, K., Park, J., Choi, S., & Lee, C. (2025). Ideology and policy preferences in synthetic data: The potential of LLMs for public opinion analysis. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9677. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9677>
- Lee, S. K., Ryu, J., Jie, Y., & Ma, D. H. (2025). Motivations and affordances of ChatGPT usage for college students' learning. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9508. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9508>
- Lovari, A., & De Rosa, F. (2025). Exploring the challenges of generative AI on public sector communication in Europe. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9644. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9644>

- Oh, S., & Jung, J. (2025). Harmonizing traditional journalistic values with emerging AI technologies: A systematic review of journalists' perception. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9495. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9495>
- Oh, Y., & Park, C. (2025). Unmasking machine learning with tensor decomposition: An illustrative example for media and communication researchers. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9623. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9623>
- Penh, B. (2025). AI-powered social media for development in low- and middle-income countries. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9577. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9577>
- Perez, L. A., Jensen, M. L., Bessarabova, E., Talbert, N., Li, Y., & Zhu, R. (2025). Public segmentation and the impact of AI use in e-rulemaking. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9550. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9550>
- Sebastião, S. P., & Dias, D. F.-M. (2025). AI transparency: A conceptual, normative, and practical frame analysis. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9419. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9419>
- Tam, L., Kim, S., & Gong, Y. (2025). Support for businesses' use of artificial intelligence: Dynamics of trust, distrust, and perceived benefits. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9534. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9534>
- Yeo, S., Kim, J., Kim, J., & Ko, S. (2025). Investigating publics' communicative action in problem solving (CAPS) through data science. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9552. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9552>

About the Authors



Jaemin Jung (PhD, University of Florida) is dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Convergence Science and a professor at the Moon Soul Graduate School of Future Strategy at the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST). His research focuses on media management, media economics, and the impact of AI on journalism and media industries, with a keen interest in exploring how AI technologies are reshaping the landscape of news production and media consumption.



Jeong-Nam Kim (PhD, University of Maryland College Park) is a communication theorist known for the situational theory of problem solving (STOPS) and for his work on cognitive arrest and epistemic inertia. He directs the DaLI (Debiasing & Lay Informatics) Lab, which addresses challenges such as pseudo-information, public bias, and dysfunctional information markets. Currently a KAIST chair professor, he previously held the Gaylord Family Endowed chair at the University of Oklahoma and is a fellow at several international research centers.