

Artificial intelligence as a discursive actor: An integration of adaptive structuration theory, medium theory, and the reduced social cues perspective

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Abstract

This article develops an integrated conceptual model for understanding artificial intelligence as a discursive actor in contemporary digital communication. It proceeds from the thesis that generative systems can no longer be adequately understood merely as tools for textual optimisation or as neutral mediating channels, given that they increasingly participate in shaping communicative form, pragmatic organisation, and the normative character of discourse. By integrating medium theory, adaptive structuration theory, and the reduced social cues perspective — supplemented by Foucault's concept of the order of discourse, Latour's principle of generalised symmetry, and the perspective of algorithmic culture — the article demonstrates that artificial intelligence functions as a discursive actor when it participates in stabilising the conditions under which certain discursive forms come to be recognised as appropriate, legitimate, and communicatively effective. The article contributes a tripartite definition of discursive agency — comprising a generative, a selective, and a normative dimension — and explicitly positions the model in relation to existing approaches to AI-mediated communication and machine agency. In its concluding sections, the article outlines methodological implications for further empirical validation of the model, particularly through

Keywords: artificial intelligence, discursive actor, AI-mediated communication, algorithmic normativity, adaptive structuration theory, order of discourse

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary digital communication is entering a phase in which technology no longer operates merely as a channel of transmission but increasingly intervenes in the very production of discourse. Whereas earlier phases of digitalisation were characterised primarily by computer-mediated communication, the present period is defined by AI-mediated communication, in which generative systems do not simply provide technical support for writing but actively participate in the formulation, organisation, and stylistic orientation of text. This shift necessitates a conceptual revision of established communication

categories, as the traditional distinction between the human as author, the medium as channel, and the text as output is becoming increasingly untenable.

The central concern of this article is therefore not the utility of artificial intelligence but rather its discursive role. What matters is not merely whether AI accelerates writing or improves the linguistic surface of a text, but how it reshapes the conditions of discursive production, which communicative norms it participates in stabilising, and to what extent it transforms the relationship between authorship, medium, and linguistic form. Generative systems influence not only textual output but also which formulations come to be perceived as clear, appropriate, legitimate, or professional. This question extends beyond the level of any individual text and concerns the very conditions under which discourse is produced — that is, what Young (1911) termed the order of discourse: a system of rules, procedures, and mechanisms that govern what can be said in a given context and which forms of utterance are recognised as valid.

The existing literature offers important but insufficiently integrated insights. Hancock, Naaman, and Levy (2020) define AI-mediated communication as communication in which an algorithmic agent operates as a third participant that contributes to the shaping of the message. Guzman (2018) and Guzman and Lewis (2020) call attention to the need to move beyond the traditional division between human and technological communication. Sundar (2020) proposes a framework for understanding machine agency in communication. Lee (2024) advances an integrative theory of human–machine communication that foregrounds the need to transcend conventional distinctions between human and machine sources of messages. However, none of these frameworks on its own explains with sufficient precision how the effects of artificial intelligence translate into changes in discursive form, into the routinisation of communicative practices, and into the reshaping of the social and normative texture of discourse. Hancock and colleagues (2020) appropriately identify AI as a third communicative partner, yet they do not develop the concept of discursive agency nor account for how individual communicative effects consolidate into more stable normative patterns. Sundar (2020) offers a productive framework of machine agency, but remains at the psychological level of perception and does not capture the structural and normative dimensions — that is, the question of how discursive norms are shaped and reinforced through repeated use. The purpose of this article is therefore to develop an integrated conceptual model that connects the media, structural, and normative levels within a unified framework, thereby moving beyond the partial treatments that have characterised the field to date.

The central research question is: *how does artificial intelligence reshape discursive structures and communicative norms in contemporary digital communication?* The article advances the thesis that artificial intelligence can no longer be adequately understood merely as a tool, a medium, or an auxiliary system for text generation. Artificial intelligence functions as a discursive actor when it participates in the generation, transformation, selection, and normative stabilisation of discursive forms. The contribution of the article is threefold: it integrates three theoretical traditions into a unified framework, offers a more precise conceptualisation of the discursive actor through a tripartite definition of discursive agency, and outlines a methodological direction for further empirical validation of the model.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING AI-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

From Computer-Mediated Communication to AI-Mediated Communication

AI-mediated communication represents a qualitative shift in our understanding of the communicative process. The technological system is no longer confined to a transmissive or supportive function; rather, it participates in shaping the communicative product itself. The consequence is not merely greater efficiency but a transformation of the conditions under which meaning, style, cohesion, and discursive normativity are produced (Hancock et al., 2020). When a system supplements, restructures, or generates a message, it is no longer possible to maintain a stable division between author, medium, and message.

Hancock, Naaman, and Levy (2020) define AI-mediated communication as communication in which an algorithmic agent operates as a third participant that contributes to the shaping of the message. This definition is significant because it moves beyond the binary understanding of communication as an exchange between two human actors and introduces a systemic agent that does not merely transmit but co-creates the communicative product. However, the definition remains largely descriptive and does not sufficiently account for the mechanisms through which this co-creation reshapes broader communicative norms.

In this regard, generative artificial intelligence does not function solely as a technical intermediary but as an agent that participates in the prior articulation of meaning. Communication thus shifts from a model in which technology merely enables expression to one in which it participates in the discursive construction of the utterance itself. In the vocabulary of actor-network theory (Latour, 2005), one might say that the generative system is becoming an actant — an entity that, through its operations, alters relations within the network of communicative practice. It is precisely this shift that opens the need for a conceptual extension of existing communication models.

From Communication Through Technology to Communication With It

Also of theoretical importance is the shift from communication *through* technology to communication *with* it. Contemporary AI systems no longer operate merely as the infrastructure of interaction; they function as entities that participate in the production of meaning, in the organisation of relational expectations, and in the steering of discursive production (Guzman, 2018). Artificial intelligence may simultaneously serve as a linguistic advisor, editor, corrective mechanism, generator, or virtual interlocutor.

This does not imply an ontological equation of human and machine, but rather a methodological acknowledgement that contemporary communicative practices can no longer be satisfactorily explained without accounting for the technologies that co-constitute communication (Guzman & Lewis, 2020). If a system actively participates in shaping register, in organising utterances, and in filtering social cues, then its role is communicatively significant also at the level of discursive analysis. It is important to emphasise that this treatment does not require the attribution of intentionality or consciousness to machine systems; it proceeds instead from the empirical observation of their effects on communicative practice — consistent with the principle of generalised symmetry as proposed by actor-network theory (Latour, 2005).

The Order of Discourse and Algorithmic Culture as Complementary Conceptual Frameworks

Before proceeding to the integration of the three core theoretical perspectives, it is necessary to outline two complementary conceptual frameworks that enrich the understanding of AI-mediated discourse.

The first is Foucault's concept of the order of discourse. Foucault (1971) demonstrated that discourse is not simply a mirror of reality or a neutral medium of expression, but a system of rules, procedures, and mechanisms that regulate the production of utterances: what may be said, who has the right to speak, and which forms of utterance are recognised as valid. In the context of AI-mediated communication, these questions are posed anew: algorithmic systems do not merely regulate the distribution of already existing utterances but increasingly participate in the very emergence of discursive forms. Foucault's framework thus provides a conceptual foundation for understanding artificial intelligence not merely as a technical aid but as an agent that intervenes in the very structure of the order of discourse (Young, 1981).

The second framework is the concept of algorithmic culture (Striphas, 2015). Striphas shows that algorithmic systems do not merely process cultural content but actively participate in defining what counts as relevant, high-quality, and legitimate cultural production. For the present article, this perspective is productive because it enables an understanding of AI not only as a media or structural agent but as a cultural actor that participates in shaping the symbolic order of communication.

The Need for an Integrated Theoretical Framework

The problem of AI-mediated communication therefore demands a broader explanatory framework. Approaches rooted in computer-mediated communication account for the influence of technical channels but often presuppose that the core of meaning production remains primarily human. Approaches within human-machine communication rightly draw attention to the fact that technologies can be communicatively relevant entities, yet they do not explain with sufficient precision how this manifests in changes to discursive form, in the routinisation of communicative practices, and in the reshaping of the social and normative texture of discourse (Guzman, 2018; Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Hancock et al., 2020). Foucault's framework accounts for the normative regulation of discourse but does not in itself capture the specificity of algorithmic systems as techno-discursive agents. Latour's actor-network theory (2005) offers the principle of generalised symmetry for the treatment of non-human actors but lacks specificity at the level of micro-analysis of discursive form (Young, 1981). Zhu and Peng (2025) propose an ecological approach to understanding the relationship between AI-generated and human content, suggesting that what is at stake is not replacement but co-evolution within complex communicative ecosystems — a perspective that is productive yet does not in itself account for the mechanisms of discursive normativity.

The article therefore proceeds from an integration of three core perspectives, supplemented by the frameworks outlined above. Medium theory explains how technology reshapes communicative form. Adaptive structuration theory illuminates how these affordances are translated, through use, into more stable routines and norms. The reduced social cues perspective enables analysis of the reshaping of interpersonal presence, affective marking, and the social texture of discourse. Only at the intersection of these three levels — supplemented by Foucault's understanding of the order of discourse, Latour's

concept of the actant, and the perspective of algorithmic culture — is it possible to adequately account for how artificial intelligence reshapes discursive structures and communicative norms.

MEDIUM THEORY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A NEW PHASE OF MEDIA STRUCTURATION

The Medium as a Shaper of Communicative Form

Medium theory proceeds from the premise that the medium is not a neutral carrier of content but an agent that co-shapes the manner in which communication is perceived, organised, and socially enacted (McLuhan, 1964; Meyrowitz, 2008). Communication is therefore not merely content transmitted through a given channel; it is also an effect of media form, which determines tempo, density, accessibility, spatiotemporal arrangement, and the expected mode of expression.

McLuhan's (1964) thesis that the medium is itself the message acquires a new dimension in the context of generative artificial intelligence. In the classical media environment, the medium structures the conditions of transmission: television shapes political discourse differently than radio; email organises organisational communication differently than the letter. In the AI-mediated environment, however, the medium no longer structures transmission alone — it intervenes in the very generation of the utterance. In this sense, artificial intelligence may be understood as a radicalisation of McLuhan's thesis: the medium is no longer merely the message in the sense of co-shaping the perception of content; increasingly, the medium becomes a condition of possibility for the message itself.

Meyrowitz (2008) extended McLuhan's insight by observing that media do not merely transmit information but reshape the very situations in which communication takes place — altering the boundaries between public and private, formal and informal, accessible and inaccessible. In the AI-mediated environment, this logic continues: the system not only reshapes the communicative situation but increasingly co-shapes the utterance that emerges within it.

In the context of artificial intelligence, this means that AI cannot be adequately understood merely as a writing assistant. Its role is broader: it intervenes in sentence organisation, in the degree of explicitness, in cohesion, in argumentative arrangement, and in the tonality of the utterance. Artificial intelligence is therefore not simply a technical upgrade of the existing environment but a new media layer that enters the very core of discursive construction (Hancock et al., 2020).

From the Media Environment to the Media Structuration of Discourse

Digital platforms have already enrolled communication within architectures of visibility, metrics, distribution, and temporal acceleration. Generative artificial intelligence represents the next step: it no longer structures merely the conditions of publication, circulation, and response, but increasingly intervenes in the prior production of the text itself. This marks a transition from the structuration of the communicative space to the structuration of discursive production.

If the medium participates in the emergence of the utterance, then media form can no longer be clearly separated from discursive content. In the generative environment, form is no longer merely a mode of presenting content; it participates in its very creation. Artificial intelligence thus does not merely organise the expression of an already formed thought but co-creates the very possibility of its formulation (McLuhan, 1964; Hancock et al., 2020). Here the distinction between previous media

transformations and AI-mediated communication becomes apparent: whereas earlier technologies (print, television, the internet) reshaped the conditions of distribution and reception of discourse, generative AI intervenes in the productive core itself — in the very moment at which the utterance comes into being.

Theoretical Implications for the Treatment of Artificial Intelligence

This extension of media logic means that artificial intelligence can no longer be adequately understood as merely a channel or a technical tool. It is more appropriately treated as a media-structurational force that shapes what kind of communication comes to appear as appropriate, legitimate, and rhetorically acceptable in a given environment. However, medium theory alone does not sufficiently explain how this media formativity translates into routinised practices and more stable discursive norms. It therefore requires supplementation by adaptive structuration theory.

ADAPTIVE STRUCTURATION THEORY AND THE RECURSIVE DYNAMIC BETWEEN USER AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial Intelligence as a Structurational Condition of Communicative Practice

Adaptive structuration theory (AST) enables an understanding of technology as part of a dynamic relationship between structural affordances, constraints, and user appropriation (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Orlikowski, 1992). Technology is neither wholly deterministic nor neutral; its effects emerge through use, interpretation, and repetition within concrete social situations. AST distinguishes between the structural features of a technology and their appropriation, whereby the effects of technology are always mediated through the manner in which users actually employ it.

For AI-mediated communication, this means that generative systems are not merely collections of functions that the user activates at will, but technological structures that pre-organise the field of possible expression. Cohesion, linearisation of argumentation, standardised politeness, and rhetorical smoothness are not merely incidental side effects of the model but part of its operative logic. The user retains the possibility of choice, yet chooses within an already partially organised discursive space. In the vocabulary of AST, the generative system offers a specific *spirit* of the technology — a set of value orientations and assumptions embedded in the very design of the system (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994).

Orlikowski (1992) further illuminated this dynamic with the concept of the duality of technology: technology is simultaneously a product and a medium of human action. In the context of generative AI, this duality acquires new significance: a language model is the product of human decisions (regarding architecture, training data, quality criteria), yet once established, it itself structures the discursive possibilities available to users.

Appropriation of Artificial Intelligence as Discursive Practice

The key contribution of adaptive structuration theory is its emphasis that technological structures take effect through appropriation — that is, through the ways in which users interpret the technology, incorporate it into their activities, and embed it within their own routines (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994). In the context of artificial intelligence, this means that the user provides instructions to the system, specifies style, formality, scope, and the function of the text, yet does so within an environment that does not offer unlimited openness but rather specific types of solutions.

Appropriation is therefore always twofold: the user adapts artificial intelligence to their needs, while simultaneously adapting to the repertoire of solutions that the system offers as discursively available. The user thus appropriates not only the technology but gradually internalises its discursive preferences as well. DeSanctis and Poole (1994) distinguish between faithful and unfaithful appropriation — that is, between use that follows the intended mode of the technology and use that transforms or rejects it. In AI-mediated communication, faithful appropriation appears to be predominantly the norm: users generally accept suggested formulations or adjust them only slightly, which accelerates normative stabilisation.

For understanding this process, Giddens's (1984) structuration theory, upon which AST explicitly builds, is also productive. Giddens understands social structure as simultaneously the condition and the outcome of human action: structures enable and constrain action, while action reproduces and transforms structures. Translated into the context of AI-mediated communication: the generative system offers structured possibilities of expression that users appropriate; through this appropriation, these possibilities consolidate into communicative norms that in turn shape subsequent user practices.

Recursive Dynamics, Standardisation, and Normative Stabilisation

The relationship between the user and artificial intelligence is recursive. The structures that the system offers influence user behaviour, yet these structures themselves are reinforced only through repeated use. What initially served as external support in formulation may gradually become an internalised criterion of expressive adequacy. Artificial intelligence thus functions not merely as a responsive mechanism to human demands but as a recursive structural agent that shapes the user's subsequent discursive choices.

This process can also be understood through the concept of routinisation as developed by Giddens (1984): recurring practices pass into practical consciousness — that is, into the unquestioned fabric of everyday conduct. When a user regularly employs AI-generated formulations, these eventually cease to function as external suggestions and become part of the user's own communicative repertoire. The boundary between what is one's own and what is machine-generated becomes blurred — not as a result of deliberate decision but as a consequence of repetition.

This dynamic is particularly significant in institutional and professional settings, where communicative practices are rapidly routinised. When AI is used to prepare official correspondence, academic texts, or public communications, its patterns of formulation do not remain isolated. Owing to their functional efficiency, they may gradually come to be treated as an expected norm. In this sense, standardisation is not merely a technical output of the model but a social effect of its appropriation. Hepp and colleagues (2024), writing in the context of mediatisation, draw attention to precisely this point: the effects of media are not confined to individual interactions but accumulate into structural changes in communicative practices and institutions.

THE REDUCED SOCIAL CUES PERSPECTIVE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF DISCOURSE

Reduced Social Cues and Digitally Mediated Interaction

Digitally mediated communication reduces or alters the social cues that, in face-to-face interaction, contribute to the perception of relationship, status, affective tone, and interpersonal presence. In text-based mediated environments, numerous nonverbal elements are absent or constrained, and relational meaning is increasingly transposed into linguistic substitutes (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). The consequence is not merely a technical change of channel but a reshaping of the very social texture of communication.

Sproull and Kiesler (1986) demonstrated that the reduction of social contextual cues in email communication leads to changes in communicative behaviour: greater anonymity, diminished perception of status differences, and increased willingness to engage in conflictual communication. Although their findings were grounded in the early period of digital communication, their fundamental insight — that the technical channel does not merely transmit but reshapes the social dimension of communication — remains productive for understanding AI-mediated discourse.

However, such reduction does not necessarily entail an impoverishment of interpersonal exchange. Early critiques of the linear understanding of reduced cues showed that differentiated interpersonal perceptions, relational meanings, and forms of social closeness can develop even within the text-based medium (Walther, 1992). The problem is therefore not a simple loss of sociality but a change in the way social cues are organised and recognised.

The Hyperpersonal Model and Its Extension to AI-Mediated Communication

Walther (1996) demonstrated through the hyperpersonal model that text-based mediated communication does not necessarily lead to diminished relationality; under certain conditions, it may even intensify selective self-presentation and the perceived quality of the relationship. Users of text-based media have more time to craft their messages, can exercise greater control over self-presentation, and often idealise their communication partner on the basis of limited cues.

In the AI-mediated environment, this logic continues and is simultaneously transformed. The system does not merely enable selective self-presentation — it actively participates in it. When AI suggests politeness formulas, softens a potentially conflictual tone, or standardises relational expressions, it effectively operates as a mechanism of impression management, which Goffman (1959) described as a fundamental element of social interaction. The difference is that impression management is no longer an exclusively human act but is partly delegated to the algorithmic system. Campbell, Ellison, and Ross (2025) extend this perspective with the concept of self-extension in AI-mediated communication, showing that AI does not merely reshape the text but may also reshape the user's self-perception as a communicative actor — functionally, ontologically, and anthropomorphically.

Redistribution of Social Presence in AI-Mediated Discourse

In AI-mediated communication, the process of social cue reduction assumes a new form. Artificial intelligence does not enter an empty field but a space already digitally reshaped, in which social cues have been partly reduced and partly replaced by linguistic means. The system increasingly suggests or

generates socially safe, relationally balanced, and pragmatically appropriate formulations. The consequence is not necessarily less sociality but a different sociality: more standardised, more explicitly regulated, and less dependent on spontaneous affective unpredictability.

It is therefore more appropriate to speak of an algorithmic redistribution of social presence than of its simple reduction. In classical text-based communication, the user must independently compensate for missing social cues through linguistic strategies; in AI-mediated communication, the system increasingly participates in their selection, arrangement, and filtration.

Standardisation of Affective Expression and the Risk of Homogenisation

One of the most conspicuous consequences of AI-mediated discourse is the tendency toward affective stabilisation of expression. Generative systems typically favour balance, conventional politeness, coherence, and pragmatically non-escalatory modes of formulation. Hohenstein and colleagues (2023) have empirically demonstrated that the use of algorithmic responses increases the speed of communication and the use of positive emotional language, confirming the thesis of an algorithmic redistribution of affective expression. This may reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings and conflicts, yet it simultaneously raises the question of whether the spectrum of authentic social and emotional micro-nuances important to individualised communication is thereby also narrowed.

Similarly, AI-mediated communication is not necessarily less personal, but it may become more standardised. The problem is therefore not simply less human communication but an increasing dependence of the social and affective dimension on algorithmically preferred forms of appropriateness. This also opens the question of discursive homogenisation: not as a complete levelling of all texts, but as a gradual narrowing of variability in the ways in which relationality, distance, professionalism, empathy, and relational caution are expressed.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A DISCURSIVE ACTOR: PROPOSAL FOR AN INTEGRATED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The Need for a More Precise Conceptual Definition

The preceding chapters have shown that artificial intelligence intervenes in communicative form, in the structure of recurring practices, and in the social texture of discourse. However, these observations alone do not suffice for a precise definition of its role. If the contribution of this article is to amount to more than a description of the effects of generative systems, it is necessary to sharpen the question of the sense in which artificial intelligence can be treated as an actor. It is at precisely this level that it is decided whether AI will be understood as an external aid to human expression or as an agent that participates in shaping discursive reality (Guzman, 2018; Hancock et al., 2020).

The question of non-human agency has a rich tradition in science and technology studies. Gunkel (2012) observed that traditional communication theories systematically exclude non-human entities from the field of communicative actors, even as these entities increasingly participate in communicative processes. Latour (2005), through actor-network theory, proposed that an actor should be defined by its effects on the network of action, not by its ontological nature. Lee (2024), in this context, advances an integrative theory of human-machine communication that calls attention to the need to move beyond conventional distinctions between human and machine sources of messages. Within this framework,

artificial intelligence is an actor when it reshapes the relations between other elements in the communicative network — including norms, forms, and power relations.

Distinguishing Between Tool, Medium, Co-Author, and Discursive Actor

The concept of a tool captures the instrumental aspect of use but not the fact that the system itself offers structured formulational preferences. The concept of a medium accounts for its influence on communicative form but does not adequately capture its intervention in the production of the utterance itself. The concept of co-author comes closer to the problem under consideration, yet it remains predominantly tied to collaboration on an individual text and insufficiently accounts for AI's participation in the stabilisation of broader communicative standards (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Hancock et al., 2020; Sundar, 2020).

The distinction between these concepts can be systematised as follows. A tool is an entity that the user activates for the execution of a specific task; its role is instrumental and confined to the individual act of use. A medium is an entity that structures the conditions of communication; its role extends beyond the individual act and concerns the form in which communication takes place. A co-author is an entity that participates in the production of an individual text; its role is generative but limited to a specific communicative product. A discursive actor, by contrast, is an entity that participates in shaping the order of discourse itself — that is, in stabilising the conditions under which certain discursive forms come to be recognised as appropriate, legitimate, and communicatively effective.

The article therefore proposes the concept of the discursive actor, which captures precisely this surplus level: participation in shaping the order of discourse itself.

An Operative Definition of the Discursive Actor

On this basis, the following definition may be proposed: *artificial intelligence functions as a discursive actor when, within the communicative process, it participates not merely in the production of text but in the stabilisation of the conditions under which certain discursive forms come to be recognised as appropriate, legitimate, and communicatively effective.*

This definition is analytical, not ontological. It does not claim that artificial intelligence is a subject in the human sense, but that, owing to its effects on discourse, it is meaningful to treat it as an actor at the level of communication analysis. The demarcation between the ontological and the analytical level is crucial for avoiding two extremes: on the one hand, uncritical anthropomorphism that would attribute intentionality and consciousness to machine systems (Bender et al., 2021); on the other, reductionism that would treat artificial intelligence merely as a passive tool and thereby overlook its empirically observable effects on discursive practice.

The definition comprises three constitutive dimensions of discursive agency: (a) a generative dimension — the system participates in the production and transformation of discursive forms; (b) a selective dimension — the system participates in the choice among possible formulations, and in doing so is not neutral; (c) a normative dimension — through repeated use, the system participates in the stabilisation of criteria of appropriateness, legitimacy, and communicative effectiveness. When all three dimensions are present, it is possible to speak of artificial intelligence as a discursive actor.

An Integrated Conceptual Model of AI-Mediated Discursive Transformation

On this basis, an integrated model can be formulated in which artificial intelligence simultaneously operates as:

a *media agent*, because it reshapes the conditions and form of communication (McLuhan, 1964; Meyrowitz, 2008);

a *structurational agent*, because through use it participates in the stabilisation of communicative routines (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Orlikowski, 1992; Giddens, 1984);

a *normative agent*, because it shapes the perceived appropriateness and legitimacy of discursive forms (Young, 1981; Striplas, 2015).

These three levels are not separate but interdependent. Media formativity enables the structuration of practice; the structuration of practice opens space for normative stabilisation; normative stabilisation in turn reinforces preferred discursive forms. It is precisely at this intersection that artificial intelligence functions as a discursive actor. The model thus moves beyond linear schemes of influence and proposes a recursive understanding in which the technological, social, and normative levels mutually constitute one another.

DISCURSIVE CONSEQUENCES OF AI-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

Formalisation and Algorithmic Normativity

If artificial intelligence functions as a discursive actor, its influence is first manifest in the formal organisation of text. Generative systems typically favour clear segmentation, linear argumentative structure, explicit transitions, and a high degree of cohesion. The text therefore does not merely become more orderly; it becomes differently organised: more procedural, more transparent, and more pragmatically explicit (Hancock et al., 2020; Sundar, 2020). Empirical comparisons between AI-generated and human-authored texts further indicate that AI texts exhibit a recognisable multidimensional profile, confirming that what is at stake is not simply the faster production of the same kind of writing but a specific mode of discursive organisation (Berber Sardinha, 2023).

This is closely linked to algorithmic normativity. Artificial intelligence does not merely propose one among many possible formulations; it increasingly participates in the implicit ranking of formulations according to their perceived appropriateness. What is presented as clearer, more polite, or more professional is not a neutral technical optimisation but a normatively inflected selection with discursive consequences (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Hancock et al., 2020). In Foucaultian terms, algorithmic normativity operates as a procedure for the control of discourse — not in the sense of conscious censorship but in the sense of the implicit regulation of the conditions under which utterances are shaped as acceptable. Striplas (2015) similarly observes that algorithmic systems do not merely process cultural content but actively participate in defining what counts as high-quality and legitimate (Young, 1981).

Authorship, Individuality, and Stylistic Variability

Standardisation directly raises the question of authorship. If artificial intelligence participates in the generation, transformation, and normative filtration of text, then authorship can no longer be understood as an exclusively individual act of linear production. The author increasingly becomes an editor, selector, and director of discursive possibilities that are partly organised by the system (Guzman, 2018; Hancock et al., 2020). This does not imply the simple death of the author but rather a transformation of

the very category of authorship: from the author as the origin of the text to the author as a selector and editor of algorithmically generated possibilities.

At this level, stylistic variability emerges as a key concern. If artificial intelligence is used as an aid in academic writing, official correspondence, or public communication, there is a likelihood that individual style will increasingly be filtered through the preferential linguistic choices of the model. This does not mean that all users write identically, but it does mean that the space for pronounced idiosyncratic differences may gradually narrow. Empirical research indicates a reduction in content diversity and an increase in similarity among texts by different authors when these authors co-create with language models (Padmakumar & He, 2024). Doshi and Hauser (2024) demonstrated in an experimental study that access to generative AI enhances individual creativity while simultaneously reducing collective diversity: texts produced with AI support are more similar to one another than texts produced without it. This finding directly supports the thesis of a gradual narrowing of discursive variability. Similarly, shifts toward privileged cultural and stylistic norms have been observed (Agarwal et al., 2025).

The Emergence of an AI-Inflected Communicative Register

If formalisation, standardisation, and normative filtration occur with sufficient frequency, the question arises whether a distinct AI-inflected communicative register is emerging. Such a register would not rest on a single linguistic marker but on a configuration of features: high cohesion, procedural clarity, balanced politeness, affective moderation, and a relatively predictable pragmatic profile.

In the framework of register theory (Biber, 1988; Biber & Conrad, 2009), register is defined as linguistic variation associated with situational context — with the purpose of communication, the relationship between participants, and the mode of delivery. An AI-inflected register would, in this framework, represent a new form of situationally conditioned variation: a register shaped not solely by a human speaker in a specific situation but partly produced by an algorithmic system that systematically favours certain linguistic configurations.

Its normative power lies in the fact that it does not necessarily appear as an obvious degradation of discourse but rather as its ostensibly optimal, efficient, and socially safe mode (Sundar, 2020; Hancock et al., 2020). Jakesch and colleagues (2023) have shown that human heuristics for identifying AI-generated language are unreliable, meaning that AI-inflected discursive forms are more readily naturalised and come to assume the status of an appropriate, neutral mode of expression. It is for precisely this reason that the question of an AI-inflected register is scientifically significant: not merely as a description of a stylistic tendency but as an indicator of a broader reshaping of the communicative order.

METHODOLOGICAL AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The Need for Empirical Verification of the Model

If the concept of artificial intelligence as a discursive actor is to move beyond the level of theoretical intuition, it must be translated into empirically verifiable dimensions. The conceptual model is analytically productive only insofar as its key concepts are operationalised with sufficient clarity to permit empirical observation, comparison, and interpretation. Without this, the article would remain at the level of a methodologically underdetermined theoretical construction.

Corpus-Based and Comparative Analysis of AI-Mediated Texts

For empirical validation, a corpus-based approach appears particularly well suited, as it enables the analysis of recurring linguistic, register-level, and pragmatic patterns across larger sets of comparable texts (Biber, 1988; McEnery & Brezina, 2022). The research design should distinguish between at least three types of material: original human-authored texts, AI-assisted texts, and AI-generated texts. Only such a differentiation makes it possible to analyse the gradual influence of AI on discursive production and to guard against premature generalisations.

Biber and Conrad (2009) developed a multidimensional model of register analysis that enables the comparison of texts on the basis of the co-occurrence of linguistic features. This model is particularly well suited for empirically testing whether AI-generated texts exhibit a specific register profile that differs from that of human-authored texts.

Operationalisation of Key Discursive Dimensions

Four key dimensions of operationalisation may be identified. Formality can be measured through nominalisation, sentence complexity, the degree of explicit linking, and multidimensional register profiling (Biber, 1988). Pragmatic organisation can be analysed using the stance and engagement model, particularly through hedging, boosters, personal pronouns, and reader address (Hyland, 2005). Social texture requires a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis of politeness formulas, modality, relational mitigation, and tonal reshaping. Discursive individuality can be tracked through lexical diversity, formulational patterns, idiomaticity, and the stylistic distance of an individual text from the average corpus profile.

Hyland (2005) defined stance and engagement as the key mechanisms through which authors in academic discourse establish a relationship to content and to the reader. In AI-mediated writing, it is to be expected that these mechanisms are systematically reshaped: the system typically favours a balanced stance (less pronounced authorial commitment, more hedging) and explicit engagement strategies (explicit reader address, clear transitions). Empirical verification of these assumptions could provide direct evidence for the functioning of AI as a discursive actor at the level of textual organisation.

A Three-Factor Model: Generation × Platform × Artificial Intelligence

For the further development of the doctoral research, a three-factor model — generation × platform × artificial intelligence — is particularly promising, as it enables the connection of textual micro-analysis with the broader communicative environment. It thus becomes possible to examine whether AI operates uniformly across different generational groups, platform environments, and genres, and under which conditions it most markedly contributes to formalisation, homogenisation, and the reshaping of discursive norms.

Such a model moves beyond the simplified question of whether AI changes language and replaces it with the more analytically productive question of under which conditions and in which communicative environments AI reshapes discursive patterns. Hepp and colleagues (2024), in this context, call attention to the need for multi-level research models that connect the micro-analysis of communicative practices with broader media and institutional structures.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contribution of the Article

The central theoretical contribution of this article lies in the proposal that artificial intelligence in contemporary digital communication can no longer be adequately understood merely as a tool or a neutral medium, but rather as a discursive actor that participates in reshaping communicative form, structuring discursive practices, and stabilising normative expectations (Guzman, 2018; Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Hancock et al., 2020).

The analytical value of the model resides in its integration of the media, structurational, and social levels within a unified framework, thereby enabling a more precise account of algorithmically co-constituted discursive normativity (Hepp et al., 2024). Compared with existing approaches, the model offers three specific advantages. First, it moves beyond the binary division into tool and medium by proposing the concept of the discursive actor, which captures both the instrumental and the normative effects of AI. Second, it integrates the micro-analysis of textual organisation with the macro-analysis of cultural and institutional norms. Third, through the tripartite definition of discursive agency (generative, selective, and normative dimensions), it provides clear criteria for empirical verification.

Positioning the Model in Relation to Existing Approaches

A precise positioning of the model in relation to the three most significant existing frameworks is required. Hancock, Naaman, and Levy (2020), with the concept of AI-mediated communication, opened a key research field and appropriately identified AI as a third communicative partner. However, their framework remains largely at the level of definition and research agenda; it does not develop the concept of discursive agency nor explain how individual communicative effects of AI translate into more stable normative patterns. The present model supplements Hancock's definition with a mechanism that accounts for precisely this transition: through the recursive dynamics of appropriation and structuration, individual communicative effects accumulate into discursive norms.

Sundar (2020) offers a productive framework of machine agency that grounds the treatment of AI as a communicatively relevant entity. However, Sundar's framework remains predominantly at the psychological level — it explains how users perceive machine agency — and does not capture the structurational and normative dimensions, that is, the question of how discursive norms are shaped and reinforced through repeated use. The present model extends Sundar's perspective by incorporating the structurational level (AST, Giddens) and the normative level (Foucault, Striphas), enabling a transition from the psychology of perception to the analysis of discursive transformation.

Campbell, Ellison, and Ross (2025), in their most recent contribution, develop a framework of self-extension in AI-mediated communication, showing how AI reshapes the user's self-perception across three dimensions: functional, ontological, and anthropomorphic. Their contribution is complementary to the present model: whereas Campbell and colleagues illuminate how AI reshapes the individual's experience of themselves as a communicative actor, the present model explains how AI reshapes the order of discourse itself within which that communication takes place.

Although the article also draws on selected concepts from actor-network theory (Latour, 2005), it differs from ANT in an important respect. ANT proposes the principle of generalised symmetry, according to

which human and non-human actors are to be treated with the same analytical apparatus, without prior ontological distinction. The present article accepts this principle at the analytical level but maintains the ontological distinction between human and algorithmic action. This demarcation is important because it prevents uncritical anthropomorphism while simultaneously enabling a more precise analysis of the specificity of algorithmic agency: whereas human actors shape discursive norms through conscious and unconscious action, cultural socialisation, and relational practices, algorithmic systems do so through statistical patterns, optimisation functions, and predetermined parameters.

Limitations of the Model and Methodological Caution

The model requires clear methodological restraint. The concept of the discursive actor must not entail uncritical anthropomorphism of artificial intelligence. Generative systems are not autonomous subjects in the human sense but techno-social artefacts whose effects depend on model architectures, training corpora, platform interests, and broader regimes of power (Bender et al., 2021). It is therefore necessary to insist on the demarcation between the ontological and the analytical level: ontologically, the article does not claim that artificial intelligence is a person or a subject; analytically, it argues that, owing to its effects on discourse, it is meaningful to treat it as an actor within communication analysis (Gunkel, 2012; Bender et al., 2021).

A further limitation is the conceptual nature of the article. The model for now remains a research framework, not an empirically verified theory. Moreover, artificial intelligence does not exert uniform effects across all communicative situations; the differences between academic writing, bureaucratic correspondence, interpersonal messaging, and intercultural communication may be substantial (Agarwal et al., 2025). Additionally, multi-agent communicative environments are becoming increasingly relevant, in which normative patterns may form emergently rather than solely within the human–system relationship (Ashery et al., 2025). Furthermore, the pace of technological development must be acknowledged: the conceptual model was developed on the basis of the current state of generative systems, and further developments may necessitate its adaptation or extension.

Directions for Further Research

Four key directions for further research follow from the foregoing. The first is the empirical validation of the model across different corpora, genres, and platform environments. The second is the development of multi-level research models that connect the micro-analysis of texts with broader media, institutional, and cultural conditions (Hepp et al., 2024). The third is normative-critical: if artificial intelligence participates in the stabilisation of discursive norms, it is necessary to investigate which norms it privileges, which styles it marginalises, and how it affects communicative diversity and the symbolic regulation of discourse (Bender et al., 2021; Ashery et al., 2025; Agarwal et al., 2025). The fourth is epistemological: how AI-mediated writing reshapes not only form but also the content and logic of knowledge production in academic, professional, and public discourses.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that artificial intelligence in contemporary digital communication can no longer be adequately understood merely as a technical tool, a passive medium, or a support system for linguistic optimisation. Artificial intelligence increasingly operates as a media, structurational, and normative

agent, and its influence extends beyond the level of any individual text. What is at stake is not simply faster or more orderly writing but a broader process of reshaping the order of discourse, in which registers, expectations, and the pragmatic matrices of communication are being transformed.

The central original contribution of the article lies in the integrated model that connects medium theory, adaptive structuration theory, and the reduced social cues perspective, supplementing them with Foucault's concept of the order of discourse, Latour's principle of generalised symmetry, and the perspective of algorithmic culture. On this basis, it develops the concept of the discursive actor and operationalises it through a tripartite definition of discursive agency: the generative, selective, and normative dimensions. This concept is not a metaphorical label for technological novelty but an analytical construct that enables a more precise differentiation between artificial intelligence as a tool, a medium, a co-author, and an agent of discursive normative stabilisation.

In this sense, the article contributes not only to the understanding of artificial intelligence but also to the understanding of the transformation of communication itself in an algorithmically mediated world. Its key value for further research lies in offering a clear theoretical core and a methodological direction for the empirical investigation of formalisation, homogenisation, stylistic variability, and the emergence of AI-inflected communicative registers. More broadly, the article opens a fundamental question for contemporary communication scholarship: if the order of discourse is increasingly co-constituted algorithmically, then the object of communication science is no longer solely human communication but communication as a techno-social process in which the boundaries between human expression, machine generation, and normative stabilisation have become analytically inseparable. Understanding this entanglement is not merely an academic challenge but a precondition for the responsible engagement with the communicative future.

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