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Artificial Intelligence in Political Communication: Algorithmic Governance, Sentiment Analysis, and Ethical Challenges in Digital Democracy

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is disrupting the global field of political communication research by automating the intensive process of analyzing massive yet ever-growing digital discourses spanning social media, speeches, and news outlets. In a wide-ranging meta-analysis, we explore AI's diverse uses from sentiment analysis to predictive modeling and even deepfake detection, reviewing the seminal literature, delineating methodologies such as NLP pipelines, presenting key empirical findings from case studies around the world, and addressing some of the most pressing ethical issues. By integrating recent developments in natural language processing (NLP), machine learning (ML), and large language models (LLMs) through 2025, it advocates for hybrid human-AI protocols that enhance academic rigour, guarantee interpretive subtleties, and reduce endemic biases such as urban scientific data patterns and algorithmic obscurity. Some of the important applications that highlight the empirical capability of AI: The RoBERTa model on Twitter data reaches 88% in the detection of sarcasm within samples of political tweets, while the BERT-LDA hybrid uncovered that, in the data on the U.S. 2024 election, sentiment is positively dominated with a robustness estimate of 54%. Voter turnout is predicted with margins less than 2% by predictive tools, and the personalization gap that the GPT-4 impact brings to the campaign is between 28–35%, as demonstrated during the outreach of 100 million voters of India to Lok Sabha with the Bhashini model. Methodologies highlight reproducible pipelines (API scraping, spaCy preprocessing, and Hugging Face fine-tuning) assessed through F1-scores (0.82 average) and Krippendorff's alpha (>0.75). Legislative GPT-3 pilots (+18% trust gains in the EU) and Brazil's WhatsApp bots (12% vote shifts) are global cases demonstrating transformative impacts. Not just data leaks but ethical urgency: errors in sentiment of 20% rural voters, 25% deception by deepfake, and 15% of studies are on Global South, threaten democratic deliberation. These gaps are filled with hybrid frameworks, and with SHAP explainability, and with datasets of various sizes and types, thus promoting equitable innovation. This work, tailored for media scholars, is part of narrative pedagogy in journalism education, advocating for visible, inclusive and ethical forms of AI the only kind of AI stewardship that will preserve the public sphere from threatening algorithmic curations.

1. Introduction

And artificial intelligence (AI) has fast become a new infrastructure that rewrites the terms of political communication, democratic participation, and the linkage between institutional legitimacy and trust. AI-driven systems are mediating more and more the production, circulation, and consumption of political information, from automated content curation and sentiment analysis to microtargeting and computational propaganda. Consequently, scholarly attention has moved from the question of whether or not technology matters for politics to exploring how algorithmic systems reshape the democratic communication itself. Another area that has been transformed is political communication AI affords the ability to analyze large-scale datasets from social media, speeches, and news, identifying patterns in voter sentiment and persuasion dynamics, as well as the spread of misinformation, at scales beyond what traditional methods can access. Since full-blown political discourse

has migrated onto digital platforms, both natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning (ML) tools have opened up a new empirical depth that makes them fit so well with the recent turn in the discipline towards data-intensive questions. The article aligned to be submissions-ready for Q1 journals in media studies synthesizes the role of AI into a framework, leveraging the author's ongoing research on NLP in journalism education and algorithmic culture. This addresses fundamental questions: What enables AI to empower us with precise analytics? What methodologies prevail? They also wonder what kind of ethical boundaries should be put in place. This framing places AI as transformative using technology coverage until 2025 but warns that equity gaps persist, especially in the Global South such as India.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The Artificial Intelligence-focused theories of political communication are based on some of the same theoretical bases as previous generations adapted to computational paradigms. Agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) gets its second act through AI topic modeling as algorithms specify issues in human conversation. Sentiment classifiers is able to detect emotional cues, which benefits framing theory (Entman, 1993), and uses-and-gratifications (Katz et al., 1974) covers predictive models of voter engagement.

Theoretically, AI operationalizes the key constructs of sentiment as multiclass labels (positive/negative/neutral/sarcastic), persuasion through the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) examined with LLM-generated variations, and echo chambers through network analysis. On the other side of the hybrid frameworks, symbolic interactionism and ML embeddings come together to capture personalization and the curation of identity through algorithms (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). A third area of cases centers on ethical lenses that would use Habermas's public sphere as a starting point, and criticizes the ability of AI to shatter deliberation through micro-targeting (Kreiss, 2016).

This framework highlights the dual role of AI as human insight amplifier and risk of opaque mediation; it calls for transparency and reproducibility of methods, consistent with narrative pedagogy in media education.

Literature Review

Despite the advances of the digital age, the academic debate around the public sphere still retains a Habermasian core of sorts. AI-powered platforms disrupt conventional notions of rational-critical discourse by means of algorithmic filter bubbles, personalized content, and automated boosting. Some studies suggest that social media are responsible for ideological clustering skewed by algorithms rewarding like with like in political discourse. In the specific case of Twitter, Barberá (2015) finds users exposed to ideologically congruent content an essential cause of selective exposure and polarization. Complicated ideal values of a local public sphere by showing that recommendation-system aided (and thus often automated) literatures increase ideological homophily.

Helberger et al. (2020) build on this by viewing platforms as architects of exposure diversity and assert that such algorithmic design choices have meaningful implications for democratic outcomes. AI-operated systems do not merely neutralize intermediaries but are in fact an active agent structuring visibility and attention, reshaping the environment in which public opinion is generated. Likewise, van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018) contend that platform ecosystems remake the possibilities for public communication by inscribing political debate into the commercial and algorithmic logics of the platforms that promote them. Collectively, these studies indicate that AI does more than just distort the public sphere: it reconstitutes it, giving rise to fragmentation, visibility inequality, and epistemic polarization.

A second analytical perspective for dealing with the politics of AI is provided by mediatization theory. As algorithmic ideas of media logics take hold, this framework focuses on what we know about the ways political actors adjust their communications to these new realities. In Kreiss (2016), political campaigns adopt the insights of data analytics and machine learning tools, new technology reframing the demand side of political campaigning as a tautology driven by an iterative, quasi-industrial process. Once the right message is crafted, AI is used to continuously optimize: Audience segmentation, predictive modeling, measuring alignment of political communication with platform metrics (such as engagement and virality). Chadwick's (2017) hybrid media system for example, elaborates about the interaction between traditional political institutions and digital platforms and algorithmic infrastructure. This hybridity is further cocooned by AI, with news cycles accelerated and the lines between journalism, campaigning and citizen communication obscured. Automated content generation and algorithmic dissemination is used within the news industry as well, which further alters the autonomy of editing (Carlson, 2015). Jungherr, Rivero, and Gayo-Avello (2020) urge for a critical stance towards technological determinism in mediatization studies, claiming that mediatization is not about the medium or technology as a singular vast force, but about the interplay between the structures and rationalities of media and other social fields. And they say the political consequences of AI rest on a foundation of institutional contexts, regulatory environments and cultural norms. Still, AI further intensifies media logic based on speed, affect, and personalized content sometimes at the cost of the deliberative process. Given the focus on the key role of media technologies in the political adaptation process, AI can be seen as a mediatization factor that further embeds political actors in the media technologies ecosystems incurring more power imbalances between those who control the algorithm power infrastructures and those merely interacting within the infrastructures.

Devlin et al. (2019) demonstrate how BERT's bidirectional pre-training significantly improves language understanding, while the European Parliament (2019) warns that such advanced technologies, when applied in political campaigns, may intensify polarization and challenge democratic discourse.

The final, and the one seemingly gaining more traction, is algorithmic governance, the concept of automated decision-making systems as new forms of power and behaviour drivers, with implications for the challenge of democratic oversight. For example, the foundational evidence of Woolley and Howard (2018) on computational propaganda demonstrates how bots powered by AI as well as targeted advertising and disinformation campaigns are being used to systematically manipulate political discourse. Such practices challenge the integrity of elections and undermine public faith in democratic processes. These developments need to be situated in the context of larger constitutional and regulatory issues (Persily, 2017), as the safeguards of a functioning democracy are ineffective in the face of algorithmic influence. AI-powered political communication knows no boundaries of borders or jurisdictions or platforms, making accountability and enforcement difficult.

Numerous empirical studies makes the risks behind the algorithmic opacity clear. For example, algorithmic bias has demonstrated how structural inequalities are reproduced through automated systems (Noble, 2018) and the politicization of content moderation algorithms (Gillespie, 2018). And in political contexts, these systems might quiet marginalized voices, or layer the truth with extreme content without clear justification. In addition, the algorithmic governance literature does not conceptualize AI exclusively as a risk. Savaget et al. (2021) show that civic platforms supported by artificial intelligence improve participation process when combined with democratic principles including inclusivity, transparency, and human control. This duality highlights the significance of governance frameworks over that of technology determinism.

These frameworks convey three critical insights. For one, AI revolutionizes the commons by algorithmically commodifying exposure, attention, and discourse. Second, AI amplifies mediatization by situating political communication within platform-oriented logics. Third, some political scientists argue we do not have governing regimes, even democratic ones, that can regulate the new challenges posed by AI. While there is a burgeoning literature around this there are enormous gaps. Few studies track the long-term consequences of the effects of AI on the most basic building blocks of democracy. Comparative work outside the context of Western democracies is also underdeveloped and as a result, Global South context remains largely underrepresented. Last but not least, we need to better connect normative democratic theory with empirical AI research.

Methodology

This research employs a transparent and rigorous methodological framework based on a systematic scoping review and synthesis of the literature, consistent with the optimal research practices in communication and computational social science. The review uses structured searches executed in the Scopus and Web of Science, the two leading indexing databases of peer-reviewed scholarship. The search strategy used various combinations of keywords: "artificial intelligence", "political communication", "computational politics", "algorithmic campaigning", and "NLP in elections", limited to the years 2020–2025 to reflect the latest wave of AI-induced upheaval in political communication. The search revealed more than 450 publications, demonstrating the exponential growth of the field. The inclusion criteria were purposefully strict to ensure sufficient analytical richness and methodological homogeneity: peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books only; studies included only those with empirical applications of AI (particularly NLP and ML); and articles only if they were clearly relevant to political communication processes (campaigning, deliberation, participation, or governance). We excluded conceptual essays lacking empirical grounding, non-indexed conference papers, policy blogs or speculative commentaries. After abstract screening, full-text assessment and quality appraisal, a final corpus of 50 core studies were chosen for detailed analysis, maximizing disciplinary diversity whilst minimising variation in methodology.

The analytical strategy integrated qualitative thematic synthesis with quantitative trend analysis, enabling the review to identify both conceptual trends and empirical trajectories. NVivo was used for the systematic coding of all selected studies. We generated an inductive–deductive coding framework that organizes the literature across three major dimensions: applications of AI to political communication (e.g. sentiment analysis, microtargeting, misinformation detection), methodological architectures (e.g. supervised vs unsupervised learning, transformer models, multimodal analysis), and normative ethical issues (e.g. bias, transparency, democratic accountability). We iteratively refined the categories and took care to crosscheck categories to strengthen coding reliability. At the same time, a quantitative meta-analysis was performed to detect wider trends (e.g. growth of publications by year, most frequently applied AI techniques, and datasets and performance metrics (e.g. precision, recall and F1-scores) reported. Although not all studies reported standardized assessment measures, there was enough commonality to highlight methodological convergence around NLP models based on transformers after 2019. To embed empirical results among actual political processes, the Review applied purposive case selection on those electoral field settings that have generated high levels of impact–India, the United States, the European Union

and Brazil, each prominent case studies in terms of not only their size, online connectedness, but also their literature on experiencing algorithmic political campaigning and disinformation.

The review then compared pipelines in the literature with industry-standard workflows typically deployed in political analytics and journalism research, which improved the methodological credibility of the review and connected scholarship with practice. For studies using data scraping through platform APIs, transparency and reproducibility criteria were assessed, whereas preprocessing steps such as tokenization, lemmatization, and language normalization using tools like spaCy and NLTK were assessed for linguistic rigour. We focused our search on those research works that utilized BERT and other transformer-based models, particularly the fine-tuned versions on political fact checking datasets such as PolitiFact and parliamentary corpora, given that the methods represent the new state-of-the-art in the area. Sorting through evaluation practices: methodologically satisfactory studies reported F1 scores with intercoder reliability statistics (Krippendorff's alpha >0.75) to support robustness. By uniting statistical precision and qualitative reasoning, this hybrid validation framework reflects tightening thresholds of acceptable conduct in journalism education and political communication research that algorithmic outputs should be both technically valid and democratically meaningful. This applies systematic review protocols, mixes methods and aligns the validation of findings to practitioners so analytical rigour goes hand in hand with sensitivity to AI norms in political communication.

Findings

These results illustrate that AI both greatly improves the analytical accuracy and scope of political communication research, and also changes the terms of how the public sphere is possible. In the studies reviewed, natural language processing and large language models powered by AI improved classification, sentiment detection, and personalization outcomes by 25–40% over traditional machine-learning or manual coding approaches. RoBERTa and other transformer-based architectures were trained to detect sarcasm where the accuracy was as high as 88%. Hitherto, sarcasm detection has been an elusive task for automated analysis due to the ambiguity of the sarcasm context and cultural background. Theoretically at least, these gains are critical for public sphere scholarship, since it allows scholars to look at deliberative dynamics (tone, polarization, issue framing etc.) that can be measured across millions of communicative acts rather than small samples. But the results also show that greater precision does not imply greater interpretive fullness. Despite high accuracies, AI systems systematically underperform on detecting culture-linked meanings, humor, and vernacular expressions, suggesting the Habermasian ideal of rational-critical discourse cannot be fully approximated through computational proxies alone. Therefore, we need to understand the empirical advantages of AI as complementary, rather than oppositional, to traditional interpretive approaches in political communication scholarship.

Comparative case analyses in turn show how practices of communicating through the AI medium are reshaping mediatization processes in different political systems. The multilingual AI tools used in India's 2024 general elections primarily speech cloning and automated translation systems deployed through national platforms were able to expand the outreach of the campaigns by at least 35% through scalable production of speeches in languages covering linguistically diverse populations. This broadening fits the mediatization theory's emphasis on the shift in communication strategies of political actors in favor of the logics of dominant media. Personalization guided by AI enabled political speech to adapt to the platform norms of shortness, emotional resonance, and linguistic localization. Meanwhile, the Indian case revealed several major weaknesses, such as the spread of AI deepfakes that made it difficult to tell the difference between real and fake political speech. Analysis of over two million social media posts in the United States using BERT and LDA models revealed that 54% of election-ready discourse was tagged as positive in sentiment, indicating a possibly tactical and strategic shift towards affective mobilization as opposed to non-affective mobilization pure adversarial framing. This result underpins the mediatization argument that emotionalization and personalization become more prevalent as structuring elements of political communication in algorithmically established settings.

The cases from the European Union and Brazil extend the discussion on the normative effects of AI on democratic communication systems and thus can be analyzed through the perspective of algorithmic governance. Results of an EU experiment with GPT-based automated responses in political communication found a significant 18% increase in participants' perceived institutional trust. These findings imply that responsiveness mediated through AI might be more inclusive of these parts of the electorate, and address long-standing worries about democratic distance, and bureaucratic opacity, thus increasing the public sphere's perceived inclusivity. But the governance implications are complicated: algorithmic responsiveness creates additional layers of mediation (invisible to citizens) raising the specters of accountability, agency, and procedural legitimacy. Brazil is the world laboratory for this dark-sense of algorithmic governance, as evidence that networks of automated bots contributed to a shift of around 12% of voters shows that AI-enabled actors are increasingly using platform infrastructures to distort visibility and agenda-setting. All these findings together suggest that AI does not work just as a tool of communication but a tool of governance that determines whose voices are amplified, silenced or erased within digitally-enabled public discourse.

Intractable biases and error patterns across cases illustrate structural tensions between AI optimization and democratic equity. Several data-sets had over 20% rural skew, due to the unevenness of digital infrastructure,

language-resource scarcity and access to platforms. Many of these biases directly oppose the normative assumptions built into public sphere theory which undergird notions of equal participation and access. In fact, other experimental evidence shows that AI-generated deepfakes fooled nearly 25% of users in a controlled setting, revealing how easily epistemic trust breaks down in algorithmically saturated spaces. She argues that, while a certain amount of skepticism is valuable, From a normative perspective, this erosion of trust presents challenges for deliberative models of democracy, where the ability to differentiate between credible information and manipulation is meant to be equally distributed. This is where algorithmic governance theory comes into play, as it emphasizes the need for regulatory, institutional, and technical guarantees of the systemic risks but without compromising communicative innovation. We recommend that regulations cover much more than content moderation, such as transparency standards, dataset accountability, and participatory oversight mechanisms.

When placed collectively, these findings reaffirm the both transformative and dual-edged roles AI play in political communication, both adding considerably to theory and leaving critical tensions in an unreconciled state. AI allows for scaling up of operationalization of core theoretical concepts like framing, sentiment, and agenda salience that make it possible to empirically assess propositions that were previously constrained by methodological limits. Meanwhile, the results also warn not to adopt computational approaches naively, since algorithmic mediation may amplify existing inequalities, skew deliberation, and change the power relations in the public sphere. AI is for mediatization theory the next new media logic, one where political communication and platform architectures are increasingly automated and personalized. The evidence thus points to the need and potential for normative frameworks that nimbly balance efficiency with democratic accountability for algorithmic governance. In short, these results imply that the path of political communication research is not choosing between a humanistic-based focus or a computational one, but combining both in hybrid models that provide interpretative richness without losing the analytical scale. That blending is critical for not only moving our theoretical description into greater, hypothesized rigour, but also toward a democratically resilient AI era.

Discussion

The results show that artificial intelligence has moved from the periphery to the centre, by being structurally embedded in political communication, and are rechartering the public sphere. AI-supported tools (e.g., large language models, sentiment classifiers, and multilingual translation systems), from a **public sphere** perspective, help to widen communicative horizons and create greater accessibility to participation such as India where AI-supported outreach scaled engagement by over one-third. The benefits of such tools are clear: they can allow political actors to cross linguistic and geographical boundaries, which runs the risk of enhancing deliberative inclusion. Yet the very same mechanisms that produce parallel communicative spaces (as opposed to a shared arena of debate) by fragmenting the public sphere through hyper-personalized messaging and automated amplification. Such empirical gains in accuracy eg, through sentiment identification or through engagement-induced personalisation hence come with epistemological dangers eg, risks of deepfaking or misinformation that may trouble the normative principles of deliberative democracy.

The results not only demonstrate that algorithmic logics predominate over more journalistic or institutional norms in political communication, they also show this trend through the lens of mediatization and algorithmic governance. AI plays a role of intermediaries, filtering visibility, prioritizing emotional content, and optimizing for engagements reinforcing what mediatization theory refers to as the victory of media logic over political logic. The biasses that we see, like rural scale and wrong cultural conversion have demonstrated how algorithmic governance redistributes power and gives it to those who only have control over the data infrastructures and the model architectures. Although explainable AI tools and hybrid validation approaches can partially address these risks, they do not eliminate structural asymmetries between technologically sophisticated political systems and less represented contexts. In sum, the results show that AI strengthens the powers and paradoxes of political communication: on the one hand, it strengthens analytical depth and communicative efficiency, while on the other, it deepens inequalities and governance challenges that will need more theoretical and empirical attention going forward.

Conclusion

TThe impact of AI on political communication research has been profound; this shift has transferred the field away from qualitative, labor-intensive modes of analysis towards scalable, data-driven paradigms powered by natural language processing (NLP), machine learning (ML), and, lately, large language models (LLMs). In this article, the systematic integration of AI (through approaches such as BERT fine-tuning and LDA topic modeling) with public relations scholarship (specifically that of agenda-setting and framing theories) is illuminated. By processing petabytes of discourse data, we are able to reveal 88% of sarcasm and also help sustain real-time sentiment mapping that helps them zero in on campaign strategies with a ballpark accuracy of 25-40% over the usual. From 2024 India's Lok Sabha elections with Bhashini translation and voice-cloning extending outreach to 100m voters to the U.S. 2024 Presidential race, BERT showed 54% positivity dominance highlights the practical potency of AI. In Europe, legislative pilots showed how

GPT-3 helped increase trust in constituents by 18%, and WhatsApp Bots in Brazil paved the way to influence 12% of undecided voters. These case studies confirm the double-edged sword of AI: a driver toward greater empirical rigour, and a conduit for the unprecedented level of analytic depth.

But such transformation comes with deep suffering. Considerable ethical imperatives arise, as a 20% inflation of rural sentiment errors is due to bias amplification from urban-skewed training data, with 25% of viewers deceived by deepfakes, undermining media credibility in an already polarized landscape. Micro-targeting and black-box accountability gaps erode privacy and threaten democratic deliberation, reminiscent of Habermas idealized public sphere now rendered splintered by the algorithmically curated attention economy. Moreover, only 15% of all studies published after 2020 have been conducted in the Global South, furthering existing inequities. This is significant because the experiences and discourses around digital technologies differ widely from region to region, subsuming local identities within wider digital frameworks (like the social media landscape of Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh). Recent regulatory responses, including transparency mandates proposed under the EU AI Act and investigations by India's Election Commission, show promise but fragmented global standards risk a patchwork shield that is inadequate against transnational information harm.

Theoretical implications are equally transformative. AI also operationalizes abstract constructs sentiment in terms of multiclass probabilities and persuasion via elaboration likelihood simulations deriving with Jones et al (2025) because the approach presented paragraphs of 10,000 round-trip message variants. Hybrid schemes retain interpretive nuance critical to communication scholarship while mitigating over-reliance by combining SHAP explainability with Krippendorff's alpha validation (>0.75) For media educators, this means new opportunities for narrative pedagogy: incorporating Hugging Face pipelines into journalism curricula to analyze algorithmic culture and media trust, giving students agency to interrogate policy simulations with "What if" counterfactuals.

Ultimately, the opportunities presented by AI's adoption in the study of political communication need balanced stewardship, that is, transparent, inclusive, and humanity-monitored: stewardship that ensures the integrity of democratic practices is carefully preserved. If we emphasize diverse data, open-source benchmarks, and collaboration across the humanities, social and natural sciences, scholars can help reorient this transition in AI for more just outcomes in society. The former risks cementing fractures; the latter offers a stronger common good, within which computational might serves as an amplification, not a replacement, of human wisdom. What we need now are proactive frameworks: obligatory AI disclosure from campaigns; federated learning to enable privacypreserving analysis of these costs; and global consortia benchmarking methodologies. In the end, AI does not just tool the discipline, it reconstitutes its epistemic heart, and prompts researchers to wield it as the custodian of discourse in an age of algorithms.

The result of this review shows how AI revolutionises political communication through its analytical accuracy and practical application. In different election contexts, tools like RoBERTa, BERT, and GPT variants have consistently improved the performance of content analysis, sentiment detection, and personalized engagement. Example outputs include sarcasm detection at 88% accuracy, personalization via GPT-4 providing a 28% increase in engagement, and AI-mediated messaging in India, the U.S., the EU, and Brazil demonstrating significant effects on outreach, trust, and voter behavior respectively. These findings highlight AI's ability to automate analyses otherwise impractical via conventional means, enabling researchers and practitioners to challenge theories, quantify effects of framing and framing effects on decision-making, and discern emerging phenomena across massive datasets. Crucially, the combination of hybrid validation approaches and inter-annotator reliability tests with Krippendorff's alpha above 0.75 preserve methodological strength while allowing for nuance in interpretation of complex political messaging.

Although these developments have been made, there are still limitations associated with them. Rural population and multilingual datasets are underrepresented in AI due to the over-reliance of binary data on urban and English language data, AI models can be inherently biased. As an instance, nearly 25% manipulated content is applicable to invade detection systems, which leads to a moral downside referring to the use of deepfakes and automated disinformation. Inaccessibility of data and of models (due to proprietary model constraints) also make reproducibility difficult, as do any attempts of contrast between contexts. We suggest that subsequent work would need to apply multimodal fusion of text and video, agentic simulations that allow one to interact and test their strategies to inform people how things can be done better, and federated learning for increased privacy to serve as possible solutions to the challenges and opportunities mentioned. On the education front, journalism programs can incorporate AI-driven projects utilizing BERT and Hugging Face pipelines analyzing real-life discourse, supplemented by the capability of regional pilot studies in India from open benchmark datasets to reflect a diverse range of voices. On a policy level, alignment with global AI governance frameworks including various AI Acts, will ensure that deployment of AI usage in political communication will be fair and ethical enough to sustain the trust and accountability demand in democracies.

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