

Scholarly Reflections on AI and Communication Research in Nigeria: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication is essential in all human endeavours, and the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the field. However, scholarly research on the intersection of AI and communication, particularly from Nigerian scholars, appears to have gained limited attention in international journals, especially over the past nine months (January – September 2024). Considering this, the present study, titled "Scholarly Reflections on AI and Communication Research in Nigeria: A Systematic Approach," investigates research trends in communication over this period. The study systematically reviews and analyses 500 articles published on Google Scholar to determine which areas of communication received the most focus and the dominant research methodologies employed. Findings reveal that only 17 (3.4%) of the articles focused on communication, with journalism emerging as the most frequently researched area. Quantitative research was the preferred methodology among the reviewed studies. The paper concludes by recommending increased scholarly attention on other communication subfields, especially within high-impact databases like Google Scholar, which remains a significant repository for research in Nigeria.

Keywords: Communication, AI, Research, Methodology, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The world is steadily evolving into a global village, a concept introduced by Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan. Over 50 years later, the world has realized that the people truly live in a "global village," a global living room where technology makes everything possible. McLuhan believed that the spread of electronic communication technology was shrinking the world, allowing people from different parts of the globe to interact more easily and fostering a sense of shared community like a village. However, McLuhan might not have anticipated that knowledge and intelligence would become so pervasive that people would refer to certain concepts or technologies as Artificial Intelligence (AI). No sector of society is untouched by the influence of this pervasive technology known as Artificial Intelligence. Artificial intelligence, otherwise known as AI, has become a destructive force transforming every aspect of human endeavour from industry to communication practice and scholarship. It is reshaping our lives and significantly impacting businesses, institutions and societies. Given the transformative impact of AI and its implication for both society in general and the educational sector in particular. Verhoef et al (2021) believe that AI has great implications for organizations and society. Its transformative impact cannot be underestimated.

Communication practice and scholarship in Nigeria is no longer a new concept. However, what may be new is the fact that the introduction of AI into communication practice may have changed the way communication scholars and practitioners view the concept. Citing Asema et al, Boluwatife and Emmanuel (2023) assert that, Communication may function as a systemic process in which individuals engage with and via symbols to produce

and interpret meanings (Asemah, Nwammuo, and Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017). Communication as a scholarly academic concept is a broad concept which encompasses different disciplines. One aspect of Communication that is given attention to for many years in tertiary institution is the Mass communication, however, as years roll by, Academic, professional, local and global environments have made mass communication dated as a discipline and area of study. Cultures, systems and processes now acknowledge the nomenclature of Communication and Media as the appropriate rubric for the rapidly evolving and revolving logics of what was popularly referred to as mass communication. The subject matter of Communication and Media Studies is the communicative behaviour and institution in society. It involves the study of individual and collective human communicative behaviour, institutions, environments, and their interrelationships. Its knowledge and approach are crucial for improving the quality of human life. The various disciplines in Communication and Media Studies study communicative behaviour from their special standpoint. However, being a dynamic area of study, there are different perspectives which constitute the various disciplines in Communication and Media Studies. The question then, with the introduction of AI into communication, to what extent are communication scholars going into research in this new area of study?

BACKGROUND

The Global Emergence of AI in Communication

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has profoundly transformed communication fields, from media and journalism to digital marketing and public relations. AI-driven tools enable new forms of engagement, personalization, and data analysis that were previously unattainable. For instance, AI applications such as machine learning, natural language processing (NLP), and predictive analytics are streamlining processes like content creation, sentiment analysis, and audience targeting, helping communication professionals reach and resonate with audiences more effectively. In the journalism sector, AI algorithms can filter news stories, identify emerging trends, and even generate initial reports, improving the speed and accuracy of news dissemination (Graefe, 2016; Dörr, 2016). Additionally, AI technologies enable social media platforms to personalize content feeds, influence public opinion, and monitor engagement, ultimately transforming the way people interact with information and each other.

In digital marketing, AI is extensively used to predict consumer behavior, tailor advertisements, and optimize user experiences on websites and social media. With data-driven insights from AI algorithms, marketers can develop content strategies that are not only efficient but also align closely with audience interests (Jarek & Mazurek, 2019). AI's integration into communication fields is so significant that researchers argue AI is no longer merely a tool but an embedded agent reshaping the essence of communication itself (Schwab, 2017). This transformation has led to a surge in academic interest globally, with scholars exploring both AI's possibilities and its ethical, societal, and practical implications (Fosso Wamba et al., 2021).

AI in Communication Research in Nigeria

AI's influence on communication in Nigeria has garnered attention as scholars and practitioners recognize its potential to address challenges unique to the Nigerian context. With a population of over 200 million and significant linguistic and cultural diversity, Nigeria presents a complex communication landscape where AI can play a transformative role in tailoring content, monitoring social trends, and facilitating access to information (Ndukwe, 2020). The Nigerian media industry, for example, has begun exploring AI applications for real-time content analysis and digital engagement, particularly through social media, which has grown rapidly as a primary information source for Nigerians (Okoro & Ekwueme, 2013; Igudia & Udoh, 2021).

Studies have demonstrated that AI can enhance media transparency, allowing for automated fact-checking to combat misinformation—an issue of increasing concern in Nigerian media (Bello, 2019). AI technologies can help analyze online discourse, which is essential for understanding public opinion on critical issues, ranging from elections to public health (Adedoyin et al., 2021). In digital marketing and advertising, Nigerian companies are beginning to employ AI-powered tools to better understand consumer behavior, enabling them to develop strategies that resonate more deeply with local audiences (Ibezim, 2020).

However, the application of AI in Nigerian communication research is still in its infancy, with limited empirical studies and a strong need for more systematic, context-specific research (Ogunyemi & Naeem, 2020). This background highlights the importance of synthesizing existing studies to understand AI's current role, benefits, challenges, and the gaps that future research could address in the Nigerian communication context.

Key Areas of AI-Driven Communication Research in Nigeria

1. **Journalism and Media Studies:** Nigerian journalism faces a range of challenges, from resource constraints to misinformation. AI tools offer solutions for enhancing journalistic workflows, such as automated news summarization and sentiment analysis, which can improve content accuracy and relevance (Olufemi, 2021). Research shows that AI-powered fact-checking tools could mitigate misinformation, a prevalent issue in Nigerian media, particularly around elections (Akpojivi, 2019). However, ethical concerns around AI-based journalism persist, including issues of bias and lack of accountability in automated news generation (Ajiboye & Adekunle, 2020).
2. **Digital Marketing and Advertising:** Nigerian businesses are increasingly adopting AI to personalize marketing and optimize consumer outreach. AI enables marketers to analyze large volumes of data, offering insights that can shape digital advertising strategies more precisely (Eze et al., 2019). For instance, AI algorithms allow for targeted advertisements that align with consumer preferences, a practice that is becoming central to competitive marketing strategies in Nigeria. Nevertheless, while AI in marketing holds promise, issues like data privacy and ethical considerations in consumer data usage remain relevant concerns (Onyebuchi & Akintunde, 2021).
3. **Public Relations and Crisis Management:** AI's role in public relations (PR) is expanding as organizations use sentiment analysis to gauge public opinion and monitor their brand image on social media. For instance, AI tools can quickly analyze social media posts to assess public reaction to corporate announcements or crises, offering a real-time understanding of brand reputation (Fawole, 2018). This capability is especially valuable in Nigeria, where social media plays a significant role in shaping public perception, enabling organizations to respond more promptly and strategically (Okpara, 2020). However, the application of AI in Nigerian PR practices is still nascent, with limited research specifically focused on AI-driven reputation management and crisis response (Ogundele, 2019).

The Need for Systematic Review

Despite the growing interest in AI and its applications in Nigerian communication, existing studies remain fragmented across diverse subfields, and there is a scarcity of systematic reviews that consolidate research in this area. A systematic review of AI and communication research in Nigeria can provide a clearer understanding of the dominant research trends, methodologies, and gaps, thus guiding future scholarship and practice. Studies by Okorie et al. (2021) and Musa (2020) suggest that a consolidated review would be invaluable for identifying priority areas and fostering a research agenda that aligns with Nigeria's communication needs and societal goals.

In summary, AI is reshaping communication practices worldwide, and Nigeria stands at the threshold of this transformation. While Nigerian researchers and practitioners are beginning to explore AI's potential, significant opportunities and challenges remain. By systematically analyzing the current literature, this study aims to offer a comprehensive view of AI's role in Nigerian communication research, highlighting critical insights and identifying areas for further exploration.

Statement of Problem

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping communication practices across fields like journalism, media, digital marketing, and public relations, offering tools for real-time data analysis, content creation, audience engagement, and sentiment analysis (Jarek & Mazurek, 2019; Graefe, 2016). Globally, academic interest in AI-driven communication research has grown as scholars explore AI's potential and ethical implications (Fosso Wamba et al., 2021). However, in Nigeria, despite the nation's growing digital engagement and evolving communication landscape, there is a lack of synthesized understanding of how AI research aligns with or addresses the specific communication needs of Nigerian society (Adedoyin et al., 2021; Eze et al., 2019).

This absence of a comprehensive review creates multiple challenges. First, without a structured analysis, it remains unclear which specific areas of communication—such as journalism, public relations, or social media—are receiving the most research attention from Nigerian scholars, making it difficult to identify trends, priority areas, and emerging themes (Olufemi, 2021; Ndukwe, 2020). Furthermore, the methodologies employed in AI and communication studies in Nigeria have not been systematically examined, leaving a gap in understanding of how data is collected, analyzed, and interpreted within the Nigerian context (Ogunyemi & Naeem, 2020; Okorie et al., 2021).

This fragmentation limits both the advancement of AI research in Nigerian communication studies and the potential for practical applications of AI in media, public relations, and digital marketing. Additionally, this lack of clarity restricts the development of policies and frameworks that address unique Nigerian communication challenges, such as combating misinformation and ensuring ethical AI practices (Akpojivi, 2019; Ogundele, 2019). For Nigeria to fully benefit from AI's transformative potential in communication, it is essential to understand which areas have been extensively studied and which methodologies dominate the field, thereby guiding future research efforts.

This study, therefore, seeks to bridge these gaps by systematically reviewing and analyzing 500 articles published on Google Scholar. By examining focal areas and research methodologies in AI and communication studies in Nigeria, this review aims to provide a synthesized overview that can inform policy, academic pursuits, and industry practices. The findings will serve as a foundation for developing a coherent, targeted research agenda that aligns with Nigeria's communication needs in an AI-driven world.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the fields of study with the highest volume of AI-related research in Nigeria.
2. To examine which communication subfields have received the most focus in AI-related research in Nigeria.
3. To determine the most commonly employed research methodologies in AI and communication studies in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. Which fields of study have the highest volume of AI-related research in Nigeria?
2. Among communication subfields, which areas have received the most attention in AI-related research in Nigeria?
3. What are the most commonly used research methodologies in AI and communication studies in Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework: Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Overview of Diffusion of Innovations Theory: The Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory, developed by Everett Rogers, explores how new ideas, technologies, or practices spread within a society or social system. According to this theory, innovations are adopted in stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. This framework is widely used to study how technological advancements are communicated, adopted, or resisted across different communities and professional fields (Rogers, 2003).

Understanding AI Adoption in Communication: DOI can help explain why certain fields (e.g., journalism, public relations) might adopt AI technologies more rapidly than others in Nigeria. DOI's focus on innovation characteristics—like relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability—can help interpret trends in AI research and adoption across different communication areas. In addition, DOI also provides insights into methodological preferences within AI research. For example, fields that view AI as advantageous or compatible with existing practices might be more likely to adopt experimental or quantitative methodologies.

By analyzing which research methods dominate Nigerian AI communication studies, your study can identify potential patterns and barriers to innovation adoption within academic and professional communication fields. Furthermore, DOI emphasizes the roles of social systems, communication channels, and individual adopters in influencing how innovations spread. In the Nigerian context, unique factors—such as local infrastructure, funding for research, regulatory environment, and educational resources—impact AI's adoption in communication fields. DOI can provide a lens to examine how these contextual factors influence the focus and methodology in Nigerian AI communication research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to AI and Communication Research

The rapid growth of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is fundamentally transforming communication practices globally, with applications ranging from automated journalism and sentiment analysis to data-driven marketing and personalized content delivery (Zhang et al., 2021; Van Es & Broersma, 2022). In recent years, scholars have increasingly focused on how AI can enhance communication fields, particularly in under-researched regions such as Nigeria, where the field is still developing yet holds significant potential (Oluwaseun & Abiola, 2022).

In the Nigerian context, the interaction between AI and communication research reflects both the opportunities AI presents and the specific challenges facing scholars and professionals, such as limited infrastructure, access to data, and the ethical considerations surrounding AI applications. This literature review explores existing scholarly work on AI in Nigerian communication, identifies emerging research themes, examines dominant research methodologies, and highlights areas requiring further investigation.

AI in Journalism and Media

One of the most prominent applications of AI in Nigerian communication research is in the field of journalism and media studies. Scholars have examined how AI can automate news production, personalize content delivery, and even detect misinformation (Eze et al., 2020; Akpojivi, 2019). Nigerian journalists have begun to recognize AI's potential to streamline news reporting and gather real-time data, though concerns remain regarding job security, ethical practices, and the accuracy of AI-generated content (Ndukwe, 2020).

In addition to technical discussions, Nigerian scholars reflect critically on AI's implications for media ethics, particularly concerning the spread of misinformation and disinformation. AI-driven platforms have been instrumental in amplifying misinformation due to their ability to propagate messages quickly across large networks. Scholars such as Adeyinka (2021) argue that more robust frameworks are required to ensure AI technologies align with journalistic ethics, advocating for policies that prioritize transparency, accuracy, and accountability in AI-enabled media systems.

AI in Public Relations and Advertising

AI's role in Nigerian public relations (PR) and advertising is also receiving scholarly attention, as these fields increasingly adopt AI tools for audience analysis, content generation, and brand monitoring (Ogundele & Olufemi, 2021; Eze et al., 2019). AI-enabled sentiment analysis tools have become valuable assets for PR professionals in Nigeria, allowing them to understand public sentiment and respond to crises proactively. Studies by Ogunyemi and Naeem (2020) show that sentiment analysis enables Nigerian PR practitioners to engage more effectively with their audiences, though challenges such as language diversity and cultural nuances pose obstacles for accurate analysis.

Advertising scholars reflect on how AI can facilitate targeted advertising through data analysis and predictive algorithms (Obiora, 2022). Despite the benefits, there is growing concern regarding consumer privacy and data security, with researchers calling for guidelines to regulate the collection, storage, and utilization of personal data in AI-driven advertising (Okorie et al., 2021). The balance between personalization and privacy remains a

critical ethical consideration in AI applications within Nigerian PR and advertising.

Methodological Approaches in AI and Communication Research

In Nigerian AI and communication studies, research methodologies vary widely, reflecting both the exploratory nature of the field and the methodological challenges posed by limited data access and technological constraints. Surveys, content analysis, and case studies dominate the field, though recent studies are beginning to employ advanced methodologies such as machine learning for data analysis and natural language processing (NLP) for sentiment analysis (Akinyemi et al., 2023; Olufemi, 2021).

A key issue raised in the literature is the dominance of qualitative methodologies, which some scholars argue limits the ability to draw generalizable conclusions about AI applications in Nigerian communication (Ogunyemi, 2020). Quantitative methods are essential for scaling AI applications, yet they remain underutilised due to challenges such as limited computational resources and a lack of technical expertise in AI-driven research methodologies (Adedoyin et al., 2021). This gap highlights the need for investments in research infrastructure and training to enhance the methodological rigor of AI research in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-method approach, utilizing systematic review and quantitative content analysis to address its research objectives. The systematic review enabled the identification, collection, and analysis of relevant data, while the quantitative content analysis focused on examining patterns within media content related to AI and communication.

Data Collection

The study population comprised 16300 out of which a sample size of 500 purposively selected published articles on AI and communication research, retrieved from Google Scholar between January and September 2024. Articles were identified using the search term “AI and communication research in Nigeria.” The inclusion criteria required that articles be authored by Nigerian scholars and written in English. Studies not meeting these criteria—such as those authored by non-Nigerians or published in languages other than English—were excluded.

Sampling and Selection Process

The initial selection involved examining the article titles to ensure alignment with the study’s objectives. Articles that appeared relevant were then further screened by reviewing their abstracts and, where necessary, the main content to verify their focus on AI in communication or related fields within Nigeria. For studies specifically within communication, a closer review was conducted to categorize the articles by communication subfields and to determine the methodologies employed. Articles outside of communication were analyzed by title only, categorizing them broadly by field without further in-depth review.

Data Analysis

The relevant data from the 500 selected articles were systematically tabulated for analysis. Articles on communication research were analyzed in detail to identify the subfields within communication that have received the most attention in AI-related research in Nigeria, as well as the predominant research methodologies. For non-communication articles, a broad review of titles provided insight into the various academic fields in which AI-related research has been conducted.

This mixed-method approach allowed for a comprehensive overview of AI research trends across disciplines in Nigeria, with a focused examination of the communication field and research methodologies employed.

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings obtained from the study which aimed to address the research

questions posed.

Table 1 Source: Field work (2024)

Field of Study	Frequency	Percent
Education	89	17.8
Security	21	4.2
Economy	104	20.8
Health	48	9.6
Governance	19	3.8
Research and Technology	30	6.0
Communication research	17	3.4
only ICT related article without reference to AI	172	34.4
Total	500	100.0

Table 2 Communication subfield

Communication Area	Frequency	Percent
Journalism	7	41.2
Broadcasting	4	23.5
Educational communication	3	17.6
New Media	1	5.9
Advertising	1	5.9
Public relation	1	5.9
Total	17	100.0

Table 3 Source: Field work (2024)

Methodology Used	Frequency	Percent
Quantitative method	12	70.6
Qualitative method	3	17.6
Mixed method	2	11.8
Total	17	100.0

From table 1 above, the findings show that a significant portion of research in Nigeria remains broad, focusing on general ICT topics (172 articles, 34.4%) rather than artificial intelligence (AI) specifically. This trend mirrors findings from studies such as Adeoye et al. (2022) and Uche et al. (2023), which observed that in many developing regions, AI research is often embedded within broader ICT topics, potentially due to infrastructural limitations and the need for foundational digital technology advancements before specialization.

Within AI-specific research, “Economics” led with 104 articles (20.8%), underscoring a trend noted in prior studies by Nwafor and Okeke (2021), who highlighted the growing interest in AI for economic modeling, predictive analytics, and financial forecasting. This focus aligns with the practical applications of AI in optimizing economic decision-making processes and supporting financial technology innovations. The “Education field (17.8%) also shows considerable engagement with AI, consistent with international trends identified by Kim & Reeves (2020), who noted the expansion of AI in educational technologies, from personalized learning platforms to AI-driven student assessments.

In contrast, “Communication research” received significantly less attention, with only 17 articles (3.4%), indicating a gap that prior literature, such as Okafor (2022) and Mbakwe (2023), has also highlighted. These authors suggest that despite AI’s potential to innovate media and enhance audience engagement, Nigerian researchers may not yet be fully capitalizing on AI’s potential in communication. This limited focus may be due to a lack of industry-driven research initiatives and insufficient funding dedicated to exploring AI’s applications in media and communication.

From table two above, within the communication field, the majority of AI-related research was found in “Journalism” (41.2%) and “Broadcasting” (23.5%). This concentration reflects similar findings by Eke and Ajayi (2023), who observed that AI’s applications in journalism, such as automated news writing and audience analytics, are emerging as focal areas of research. The use of AI in broadcasting aligns with the shift toward programmatic advertising, content recommendations, and audience behavior analysis, as seen in studies like Jenkins et al. (2023).

However, “New Media”, “Advertising”, and “Public Relations” received minimal AI-focused research attention, each with only 5.9%. Alabi (2022) noted that while these areas have the potential to leverage AI in innovative ways—such as through AI-driven consumer insights and dynamic content delivery—there remains a significant gap in dedicated research. This finding points to a need for a broader exploration of AI’s role in emerging digital communication domains, where AI has the potential to transform traditional media models through automation, personalization, and real-time audience engagement.

Table 3 above shows the preferred methodology used. The preference for “quantitative methods” (70.6%) in AI research aligns with findings from Al-Khateeb et al. (2023) and Babajide (2022), who reported that quantitative research designs are dominant in AI studies due to their suitability for empirical validation and statistical analysis of AI models. This preference reflects the scientific and technical nature of AI, where quantitative data is critical for testing hypotheses, validating algorithms, and optimizing performance.

On the other hand, “qualitative methods” (17.6%) and “mixed-method approaches” (11.8%) are less frequently used, indicating an underrepresentation of exploratory and interpretative research perspectives in AI studies. Scholars like Ekwe and Chikezie (2023) argue that qualitative approaches could provide valuable insights into the social, ethical, and cultural dimensions of AI, especially within communication studies, where understanding user perceptions, trust, and engagement is crucial. The limited use of qualitative and mixed-methods approaches in Nigerian AI research may restrict the depth of understanding in these areas, potentially overlooking the nuanced ways AI impacts human experiences and societal dynamics.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study highlights the dominant fields of AI-related research in Nigeria, with Economics, Education, and Health leading in publication volume. Communication research remains an underrepresented area, particularly in subfields like New Media, Advertising, and Public Relations. Quantitative methods dominate AI research methodologies, while qualitative and mixed-method approaches are limited, indicating an

emphasis on empirical validation over exploratory analysis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research, the following are recommended:

1. “Increase AI Research in Communication:” Given AI’s transformative potential in communication, researchers and institutions should invest more in exploring AI applications within under-researched communication subfields, including New Media, Advertising, and Public Relations. Increased funding and collaboration with media industries could stimulate research in these areas.
2. “Encourage Diverse Methodological Approaches:” There is a need for a balanced methodological approach in AI research. Encouraging the use of qualitative and mixed-method approaches could enrich the understanding of AI’s broader impacts, especially within human-centric fields like communication.
3. “Support AI Research Funding and Infrastructure:” Governments, private sector organizations, and academic institutions should prioritize funding and infrastructural support for AI research, particularly in emerging fields like digital media and communication. This support can accelerate the development of locally relevant AI applications and contribute to global AI discourse.

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