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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Smart Media, Smart Politics: How AI is Reshaping Political Communication and Public Policy

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines citizens' perceptions of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in political communication through a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews with 40 purposively selected participants. Responses were gathered through semi-structured interviews and then processed within a framework utilizing Python where various filters were applied including token frequency counts; co-occurrence mapping and sentiment polarity scores to analyze the data. A number of common themes emerged from the data; most significantly the most discussed theme was Awareness, with 37 of the 40 individuals referring to this. All 40 individuals referred to the themes of Trust, Ethics, and Behaviour; however, the theme of ethics was the most highly coded with 234 occurrences. Respondents reported that they tended to have a trust that was cautious of the AI generated political information, and provided examples of how there was a lack of transparency, presence of bias, manipulation of information and the potential for misinformation. While it was determined within the analysis that AI will not have a large impact on changing opinions about political stakeholders, it was also noted that the information produced by AI impacts visibility, prioritization and engagement with political information. Overall, the results suggest a duality of intent seen amongst respondents; they see AI as a potential Information Tool but also as an Ethical and Credibility Challenge. The need for citizen center governance of AI is stressed in the conclusions provided.

***Keywords:*** AI- political communication; citizen perceptions; trust and transparency; algorithmic gatekeeping; ethical concerns; qualitative analysis

## 1. Introduction

With the increasing integration of artificial intelligence into digital environments, political communication has entered a new stage.[1]. As digital platforms continue to use algorithmic systems to curate, prioritize and personalize the information available to the citizenry, this is fundamentally changing the way people experience political discourse and participate in politics [2]. Increasingly, as traditional gatekeepers are becoming less important, AI-powered algorithmic processes are now mediating most of the ways in which citizens interact with political actors. As the use of algorithmic communication grows, it will have wide-ranging implications for how we engage in democratic processes and create political narratives[3]. This includes how people perceive political messages and develop their perspectives regarding public

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institutions[4].

There are many underlying reasons (such as the explosive growth of user-generated content and machine learning) for the way that AI (artificial intelligence) has transformed political communication. More than ever, political organisations, media companies and social networking sites are now using these tools to help them categorise and reach their target audience, to help them refine their advertising and messaging, and to predict how their audience will interact with their message [5]. At the same time, wide public concerns about misinformation, lack of understanding of algorithms, the potential for discrimination in audience targeting, and overall trust in the media and government have grown[6]. These concerns underscore the complexity of how advanced technology interacts with the vulnerability of society and demonstrate the importance of establishing robust academic research [7] to paint a picture of how AI-mediated political content affects a citizens' perspective and the creation of their democratic experience [8].

The current technology for communicating about politics includes many different types of AI-enabled technology [9]. Examples include recommendation engines that help increase the visibility of political content; natural language processing models that analyse a person's emotional state so they can send out more persuasive messages; automated bots that help spread political messages and narratives at very large volumes [10]; and generative AI tools that allow people to produce videos, still images, and text that look very much like they were produced by people themselves. While these technologies allow people to communicate with others more effectively, and allow them to communicate with larger numbers of people at once, these technologies also raise many questions about authenticity, transparency [11], and the potential manipulation of public opinion. Many authors are beginning to point to the issues of echo chambers, micro-targeted persuasion, and less exposure to a wide variety of ideas as being issues. These topics require further empirical research to develop an understanding of their implications on a broad scale [12].

This research proposes a comprehensive qualitative framework for examining the influence of AI-derived political content on citizen perceptions, trust, engagement, and ethical reasoning as a result of increasingly dynamic technological and social developments. Using a combination of thematic/categorical, analyses on a wide variety of interviewee data, this research will clarify how people make sense of algorithmically curated political messages and how those understandings influence their overall views of how public policy is communicated. Furthermore, this research will provide a foundation for academic discussion through the provision of evidence-based knowledge about the human experiences related to AI-mediated political environments, thereby leading to the creation of more transparent, accountable, and citizen-focused AI systems for the communication of policies and other related issues.

## 1.1. Research objectives

The major aim of the current research is to understand how citizens perceive, interpret, and judge AI-generated or AI-curated political information in the context of the modern digital communication setting. To be exact, this study will set out to:

1. Monitor the degree of awareness and knowledge of political communication driven by AI on the Internet among citizens.
2. Evaluate the level of trust and credibility that the citizens have in the AI-mediated information about politics, including issues of bias, transparency, and accuracy.
3. Examine the effects of AI-curated material on citizen behaviour, such as views on engagement, exposure and participation in political debate.

4. Determine the ethical issues (manipulation, misinformation, and algorithmic obscurity) that citizens have about the application of AI in political communication.
5. Investigate the expectations of the citizens towards the future, what they want AI to be like, whether this is governance or regulation or betterment to facilitate transparent and democratic communication.

### 1.2. Research questions

⇒ **RQ1:** How do citizens perceive AI-driven political content?
⇒ **RQ2:** How does AI influence citizen engagement and trust in public policy?
⇒ **RQ3:** What ethical concerns do citizens have regarding AI in political communication?

### 1.3. Research organization

The report comprises six sections. Section 1 introduces the background information, research objectives, and Research Questions. Section 2 provides a literature review and identifies the Research Gap in the Literature. Section 3 provides the Theoretical Framework of the Study. Section 4 describes the Qualitative Methodology of the Study including how data were collected and analysed using Python programming language. Section 5 provides the Findings and discusses the Themes. Finally, Section 6 concludes the Study by summarising the key insights from this research study and provides Limitation and Direction for Future Research..Despite the growing literature on AI-driven political communication, limited attention has been paid to citizens' everyday perceptions, ethical evaluations, and trust-related experiences, which this study seeks to address.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The Evolution of Artificial Intelligence in Contemporary Political Communication Ecosystems

Battista and Mangone [13] define this as a transition from traditional forms of communication to a more technology-centric political culture where technology mediates citizens' interactions with government and political officials. They note that developments in technology, like automated content generation, predictive analytics, and personalized machine learning, are emerging as new means through which citizens engage with politics.

According to López-López et al. [14], AI has transformed the way political candidates' campaign by allowing them to deliver highly targeted advertisements, create computational propaganda, and analyze large amounts of data in real time to determine the best ways to connect with their audiences. The growth of algorithm-driven platforms has led to an increasing reliance by political organizations on AI to create compelling emotional messages directed toward individual segments of the electorate during elections.

As Gil de Zúñiga et al. [15] point out, AI is more than just another method of technological analysis; it has become an analytical framework that affects our understanding of influence, persuasion, and the behaviour of different types of audiences. They contend that AI re-conceptualises traditional models of communication by introducing automation, prediction, and generation into a model which prior to AI did not exist in media systems.

Savaget et al. [16] have demonstrated that (AI) enhances an individual's ability to participate in politics by providing them with more personalised information, such as customisable information, interactive resources, and accessible online platforms. Furthermore, it demonstrates how potentially unequal access to information via digital technologies and bias within the algorithms used for creating these personalised

products could negatively impact the quality of civic engagement for many individuals. This work demonstrates that AI is redefining how people interact with political systems as citizens.

As discussed by Shahid and Fatima [17] artificial intelligence influences modern political campaigns in a multitude of ways such as targeted advertisement based upon analysed sentiments, as well as through the use of predictive modelling of voters. Shahid and Fatima's research indicates that using AI to personalise your message has a major effect on how people vote, as well as how individuals view their political beliefs. There are also concerns associated with misuse and a lack of transparency. This study illustrates how much AI will impact on political choice.

Jungherr's [18] research offers a framework for understanding the impact of AI on the way information about democratic processes is disseminated. According to the author, the way that algorithms curate the content available to the public can shape public perception, drive certain narratives to the forefront, and create new sources of power divergence between citizens. The study identifies major concerns related to propaganda, falsehoods, and decreased access to information or transparency. Therefore, this work provides the basis for comprehending how communication methods driven by AI effectuate trust as well as a citizens' ability to participate in a democratic manner.However, existing studies primarily focus on institutional or technological perspectives, leaving citizens' lived experiences and ethical reflections underexplored.

## 2.2. Citizen Perceptions, Trust Dynamics, and Behavioural Shifts in AI-Mediated Political Environments

Jinghua He [19] associates describe how Intelligent Governance entails using AI to produce some of the fastest adaptive decisions using data. This research indicates that AI can improve transparency and responsiveness in government communications but may also induce uncertainty for citizens when the process used by AI systems is not thoroughly explained. Trust in public institutions and their fairness is contingent upon how well political and policymaking content is communicated by AI systems. This research informs the current research by revealing how AI Governance Systems shape citizens' views on credibility and institutional trust directly.

Pi et al. [20] explored how interactive AI systems influence human behavior and humans' processing of information, particularly in digital communication environments. They contend that the way an algorithm curates content drives user engagement through the invisible filtering of political information, backing up their already-held beliefs and ultimately modifying citizens' ways of deliberating. Additionally, they point to the concern for users regarding behavioural patterns with regard to personalized AI and limiting the range of exposure to different points of view. In this regard, their research aligns closely with the present study as a means of demonstrating how an individual citizens' political engagement alters with the use of an algorithmic environment.

Feher et al. [21] point to some of the critical elements impacting the Public's Trust in AI over time. Digital literacy, media culture, and the perceived level of transparency will all significantly affect the Public's Trust in AI Systems, with the most important consideration being how clearly AI Systems are able to explain their rationale and decision-making processes. This study provides insight into how Trust Develops and Changes for Citizens within the context of AI-supported Political Activity.

Shahzad and Sunawar [22] examined how communication strategies driven by AI can mitigate negative perceptions of the public in politically sensitive contexts. They discovered that through transparency of AI communications and increased community engagement, citizens are more likely to trust and are less affected by misinformation. These researchers also discussed that by communicating responsibly through the use of

AI, we can build trust in government initiatives related to policy. This study will be beneficial as it provides evidence that ethical and transparent communications using AI can positively influence how citizens view government policy initiatives and be more politically engaged with them.However, existing studies primarily focus on institutional or technological perspectives, leaving citizens' lived experiences and ethical reflections underexplored.

## 2.3. Ethical, Social, and Governance Implications of AI-Driven Political Messaging and Public Policy Communication

Hermann's [23] analysis of the ethics of AI-powered mass personalisation in communications. He concludes that hyper-targeting communications has the potential to fracture public discourse, and subsequently weaken democratic deliberation. Concerns about user literacy, transparency and informed consent are highlighted in this analysis of how personal data is utilized to determine the information presented to citizens as political messaging. He also cautions that the ability to target or tailor messaging based on personal characteristics may lead to an increased reinforcement of an ideological bubble, limiting citizens' exposure to multiple perspectives. The findings of this research support the findings of this study by highlighting ethical issues that arise from the use of algorithmically based political content.

Newman and Mintrom [24] look at where AI, evidence-based policy development, and ethical political evaluation intersect and how this area needs new governance structures to provide clear communication of AI-mediated policy proposals. The authors found that lack of transparency in an AI's process for making decisions can erode public trust and make it difficult to hold leaders accountable. They also discuss the potential for bias in algorithms as well as the concern of technocratic dominance and using digital data for political purposes. The findings from their research are relevant to the current research because they provide an implication of the need for transparency and ethical considerations when communicating policies that rely heavily upon AI.

Ijaz and Mahmood [25] study the impact of artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled social media on university student political behaviours. The authors found that students' political identities, opinions, and access to political information are influenced by AI algorithms used to curate their social media feeds and present them with automated recommendations. Their research indicates that users are generally unaware of how much the AI-based algorithms influence the political information they receive and are therefore at risk for being manipulated and subjected to ideologically polarised content. Therefore, Ijaz and Mahmood's study provides additional insights into the current study of the changing patterns of behaviours and perceptual changes occurring in AI-assisted political environments.However, existing studies primarily focus on institutional or technological perspectives, leaving citizens' lived experiences and ethical reflections underexplored.

## 2.4. Research gap

The existing literature on AI's capacity for political communication focuses primarily on technological capabilities algorithmic targeting, personalised messaging, behavioural influence and implications of governance but has not provided a broad understanding of how ordinary citizens experience[26], interpret and personally perceive AI-mediated political content in their everyday digital environments. Most of the current publications concentrate on platform mechanisms, policy frameworks or political actors' strategic use of AI [27]; only a small number explicitly investigate qualitative insight into citizens' perceptions, trust, transparency, bias and ethical issues related to AI. Likewise, political engagement studies usually treat citizens' trust, engagement and ethical concerns as separate items, thus limiting the understanding of the interconnected nature of these items and how they play a role in the way citizens develop their political

reasoning[28]. This study seeks to fill this research gap by examining how AI-curated political messages impact citizens' perceptions, trust dynamics, engagement behaviours and reflections concerning ethical issues through a comprehensive, qualitative interview-based investigation of contemporary digital environments.However, existing studies primarily focus on institutional or technological perspectives, leaving citizens' lived experiences and ethical reflections underexplored.

## 3. Materials and methods

**Figure 1** depicts the workflow for the end-to-end qualitative research process used to explore how citizens perceive AI-mediated political communication. The study is based on a qualitative research design informed by three theoretical frameworks: Media Ecology Theory, Algorithmic Gatekeeping Theory, and Public Sphere Theory. Data collection involved purposive sampling, whereby 40 citizens were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews consisting of 20 open-ended questions, which were administered via Google Forms. The responses were grouped into five thematic sections (Awareness & Perception, Trust & Credibility, Engagement & Behaviour, Ethical Concerns, and Future Expectations) to provide complete coverage of the research questions. Before analysis, all textual responses were pre-processed in a structured manner to ensure clarity and consistency; specifically, incomplete or incorrect entries were identified and eliminated, and then the responses were organised and prepared for coding to produce a qualitative dataset. This qualitative dataset was further analysed using two complementary approaches. Thematic Analysis was used to identify common themes and meaning within the data. The results from analytical method were produce an overall interpretation of the effects of AI-created political content on citizen awareness, trust, behaviour and ethics.

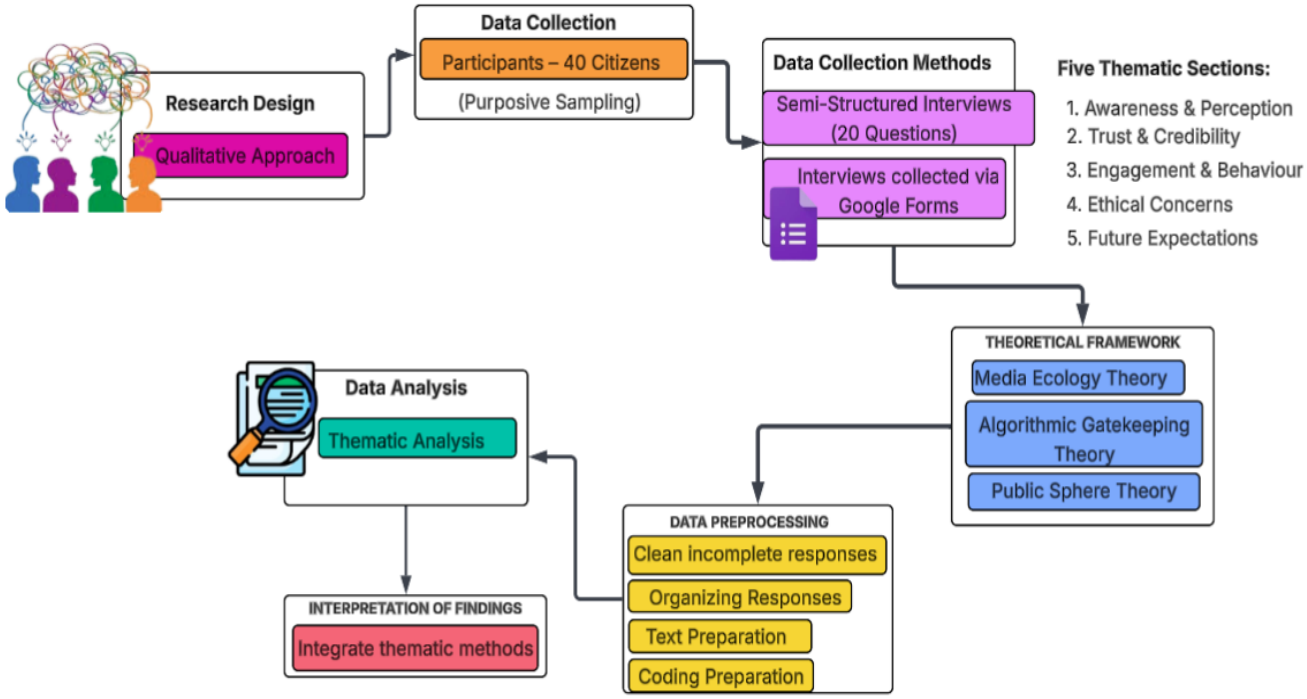


**Figure 1.** Overall Qualitative Research Workflow for Examining AI-Mediated Political Communication

### 3.1. Theoretical framework

Three interrelated theories: Media Ecology Theory, Algorithmic Gatekeeping Theory, and Public Sphere Theory inform this research to investigate … theories: Media Ecology Theory, Algorithmic

Gatekeeping Theory, and Public Sphere Theory inform this research to investigate⋯ theories: Media Ecology Theory, Algorithmic Gatekeeping Theory, and Public Sphere Theory inform this research to investigate⋯ theories - Media Ecology Theory, Algorithmic Gatekeeping Theory, and Public Sphere Theory inform this research to investigate how political communication via artificial intelligence (AI) impacts the perception, engagement, trust, and ethical concerns of citizens. These theoretical frameworks provide the foundation for the analysis and interpretation of qualitative interview data based on lived experiences of individuals interacting with AI within modern political contexts.

## 3.2. Media ecology theory

### Overview

According to Media Ecology Theory, the media technologies are the very basic ways in which individuals process the political information and interpretation of the social realities. Political behaviour, attention patterns and civic understanding are also reformed not only by the content itself, but also by the medium itself.

### Application to This Study

When considering the AI-driven political communication, AI systems are viewed as new media environments that personalise and organise political content. In this study, Media Ecology comes to the rescue of explaining:

- how the citizens are introduced to AI-created or AI-suggested political messages;
- how individualised content affects their perception, faith, and feelings;
- how AI is changing the traditional political communication channels into interactive and automated ecosystems.

### Contribution to the Framework

The theory can be used to analyse interview information concerning the experience, perception and response of the participants to the AI-mediated political content. It puts AI in a position as an environmental force that transforms the meaning-making of politics.

## 3.3. Theory of algorithmic gatekeeping

### Overview

The Algorithmic Gatekeeping Theory describes the current situation in which algorithms, as opposed to human editors, are now used to filter, prioritize, and amplify political content. Such systems define what citizens see or not.

### Application to This Study

The theory is specifically applicable in the area of trust, engagement, and ethical issues to the study. It explains that AI influences political communication in the following ways:

- ✓ Regulating the exposure of politics in social media feeds;
- ✓ Strengthening political discourses through recommendation systems;
- ✓ Shaping the perception of citizens on fairness, transparency, and bias;
- ✓ bringing up the issues of manipulation, false information, or persuasion.

**This contribution to the Framework is presented below:**

The interpretation of the themes which rise after interviews on the issue of trust in the AI-generated political content, perceptions of bias in the digital political space, and worries on how the AI shapes political views and behaviours are reinforced through the Algorithmic Gatekeeping.

## 3.4. Public Sphere Theory (Habermas)

Public Sphere Theory is an idea of creating a democratic arena in which citizens discuss politics in a free and rational manner. The standard of this sphere influences the formation of the opinion of society and the involvement in democracy.

**Application to the Study**

The political communication based on AI presents new challenges to the public arena. Based on this theory, the research can make sense of the participants regarding:

1. the disaggregation of the mass discourse by AI-sourced echo chambers;
2. how AI can undermine or reinforce political discourse;
3. fears related to fake news or deepfakes or manipulation;
4. the issue of the influence of AI technologies on the transparency and trust of citizens in the communication of public policy.

**Contribution to the Framework.**

This theory gives a more socio-political perspective on how AI affects the capacity to shape a democratic process, citizen-engagement, and legitimacy of political communication.

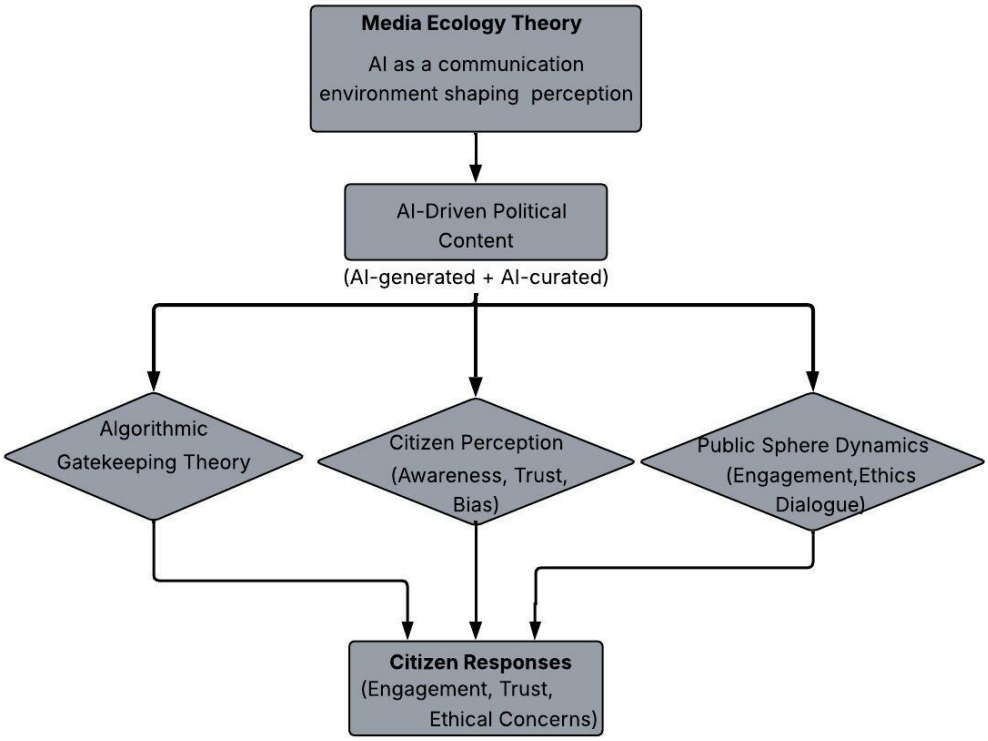


**Figure 2.** Conceptual Model of AI-Mediated Political Communication and Citizen Response

A framework of **Figure 2** illustrates the interconnected pathways that AI-driven political messaging can have on citizens. Three primary communication theories serve as the basis for this model. First, Media Ecology Theory helps explain changes in political communication and informed the development of the analytical framework used in this study.positions artificial intelligence as a transformative communication landscape that fundamentally alters how we make sense of political information. Second, the different types of algorithmically-generated (curated) content are passed through different Algorithmic Gatekeeping processes, whereby algorithmic systems determine what political content is visible, how much priority is given to various types of content, and how quickly it is communicated, thus influencing potential awareness, trust, and perceived bias among citizens. Finally, Public Sphere Theory illuminates the extent to which AI places limitations on the ability of Members of Congress and other democratic agents to interact in a productive manner in a digital public sphere and influences ethical engagement patterns, engagement opportunities, and the structure of public deliberation. Collectively, all three theoretical constructs lend themselves to understanding the way that individuals ultimately respond to, engage with, trust, and become engaged with political content as the result of a complex interaction of technological mediation, algorithmic filters, and the evolving nature of the digital public sphere.

## 3.5. Research design

### Qualitative Approach

A qualitative research design has been adopted for this study on citizens' perceptions and experiences of AI-driven political communication. A qualitative approach allows to explore the deeper meanings and interpretations associated with AI-generated/curated political content as well as the nuanced reactions to such content by individuals that would not be captured using a quantitative analysis.

Through semi-structured interviews, participants were able to express their perceptions of trust, bias, transparency, ethical concerns, and engagement in politics. In addition, the qualitative research design allows participants' unexpected themes and new patterns/connections to be identified, leading to a more complete understanding of the role AI has in the shaping of citizens' awareness of political issues and communication about public policy.

## 3.6. Data collection

The research explores, using a qualitative research design, how people perceive AI-driven political communication; with regards to trust, levels of engagement and ethical considerations. Capturing the data qualitatively is important as it illustrates people's feelings, experiences, and way of interpreting the information - things that cannot be measured numerically. This study used specific methods to ensure breadth and diversity of data, as well as to meet ethical standards for data collection.

***Data collection Link:*** https://forms.gle/PUk4js1X8EQNDQjS9

**Table 1.** Participant Characteristics and Sampling Rationale

| Sampling Component | Description |
|---|---|
| Sampling Method | Purposive Sampling |
| Total Participants | 40 Citizens |
| Purpose of Sampling | To select individuals with relevant experiences and perceptions of AI-driven political content |
| Diversity Criteria Used for Selection | • Age • Gender • Educational Background • Political Awareness • Social Media Usage Patterns |
| Rationale for Diversity | Ensures varied viewpoints, enhances thematic richness, and strengthens the depth of insights regarding citizens' experiences with AI-mediated political content |

In this research study, purposive sampling was used to recruit 40 citizens who were knowledgeable about and could provide valuable input on the use of (AI) to assist political communication shown by **Table 1**. The sampling method was designed to ensure that the sample was diverse with respect to many different demographic characteristics and experiences. These included Age, Gender, Education, Political Awareness and Social Media Use patterns. By using this diversity to enhance the quality of the qualitative data that were analyzed, the researchers were able to capture the opinions and experiences of a large number of different types of people. This helped them to create more detailed, thematic findings and gain a better grasp of how a variety of individuals interpret and analyse AI-enhanced political content.

**1. Participants (n = 40 Citizens -Purposive Sampling)**

Purposive sampling was used in selecting 40 participants, and it is suitable in the qualitative research on particular perceptions or experiences. The selection of the participants was to provide diversity in:

- age
- gender
- educational background
- political awareness
- social media usage patterns

It is this diversity that enhances the quality of insights on AI driven political contents and allows more ambitious thematic patterns.

**2. Data Gathering: Semi-Structured Interviews**

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews administered via Google Forms. This will enable the researcher to investigate major issues and participants will have the liberty to elaborate on their experiences.

The interview guide was a 20-question guide split into five parts:

⇒ Cognizance and knowledge of AI in politics.

⇒ Attitude and belief about AI-generated political information.

⇒ Artificial Intelligence engagement and behavior.

⇒ Moral issues on AI in political communication.

⇒ Future expectations/suggestions.

This is a framework that guarantees that each and every research question is covered and at the same time flexibility to dig deeper where it is required.

**• Key Interview Questions**

1. **Awareness and Usage**

*"How aware are you of AI-generated or AI-recommended political content in your online platforms?"*

2. **Perception of AI in Politics**

*"What are your thoughts or feelings when you come across political content created or curated by AI systems?"*

3. **Trust and Credibility**

*"To what extent do you trust AI-driven political information compared to human-generated content? Why?"*

4. **Impact on Engagement**

*"Has AI-curated political content influenced your interest, participation, or discussions related to political issues?"*

5. **Ethical and Social Concerns**

*"What ethical concerns such as bias, manipulation, or misinformation do you associate with AI in political communication?"*

**3. Data Type: Qualitative Response of the form of text**

Transcription of all the interview sessions was done into qualitative data in the form of text and constituted the dataset to be analyzed. This writing type can be used in:

- Thematic Analysis

By applying text responses, the coding process becomes systematic, a theme is developed, and the description of how people explain their experiences with political AI can be interpreted.

## 3.7. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was given before data collection and ethical procedures were stringently adhered to in the study.

**a. Informed Consent**

The respondents were made aware of the objective of the study, the conduct of the interview by the use of Google Forms, and their freedom to withdraw whenever they wish. The form was used to get the consent digitally.

**b. Anonymity and Confidentiality.**

None of the information provided was linked to an individual. To maintain participant anonymity, each participant was given a code (P1, P2) when their information was transcribed and analyzed as well as in the report to protect their identity.

**c. Voluntary Participation**

The involvement was entirely voluntary. There was no pressure or incentives on the respondents to give any answers and they could leave the Google Forms at any point.

**d. Secure Data Storage**

All data in Google Forms were stored in encrypted password-protected files that were only accessible by the researcher, and would give privacy and integrity to data.

## 3.8. Data preprocessing

The qualitative data obtained via Google Forms were well-prepared to make them understandable and accurate, and then analysed.

**a. Data Cleaning**

The reviews of responses were done to eliminate cases of unfinished entries or off-topic content. As the personal identifiers were not gathered on Google Forms, anonymity was ensured by default.

**b. Organizing Responses**

All the data were exported to Excel and organized by the participant codes (P1, P2, P3 etc.) and question. This formed an ordered database that was applicable in qualitative coding.

**c. Text Preparation**

Minor typing mistakes and format errors were avoided and the original meaning was retained. This enhanced ease in analysis.

**d. Coding Preparation**

Repetition and key concepts, patterns were determined to come up with a first codebook. They were preliminary codes that were the foundation of thematic and content analysis.

## 4. Qualitative data analysis methods

Three methods were employed to analyse the qualitative data: thematic analysis these methods form a coherent basis from which to understand citizens' perceptions and meanings of political communications that have been mediated by AI.

**Thematic Analysis**

The thematic analysis was used as the main analysis technique, which allowed identifying the patterns of recurrence associated with trust, engagement, perception, transparency, and ethical issues in a systematic way. With the help of open and axial coding, the responses of the participants were structured into significant themes, which are representative of common experiences and interpretations. This is an especially appropriate method to investigate how people process AI-created or AI-filtered political information.

**Word Cloud**


**Figure 3.** Prominent Keywords Reflecting Citizen Perceptions of AI-Driven Political Communication

By reviewing the word cloud visualisation regarding responses from the participants, it is possible to understand some of the major issues and perceptions around the use of AI in political communication illustrated by **Figure 3**. Terms that are prominently displayed, such as political, AI, influence, content and transparent; indicate that respondents are very aware of AI-generated and AI-curated content and that

transparency greatly affects their level of trust. Additionally, the presence of terms such as trust, concerns, manipulation, misinformation and lack; indicates mixed or reserved feelings toward the use of AI in political communication, including many people's concerns about the potential for bias, credibility and the opaqueness of algorithmic processes. Finally, the use of the terms citizen policy, engagement and posts, highlights how AI can be applied to everyday political contexts, affecting behaviour, participatory behaviours and opinions. The word cloud is an initial indication of how both positive and negative perceptions of AI apply within the context of political communication and emphasises the importance of developing ethical, transparent and accountable systems of political communication through the application of AI.

**Example Interview Question:**

How do you feel or think when you are exposed to political content created or suggested by AI?

**Illustrative Participant Response:**

I find it useful to present updates, but I can feel disoriented sometimes since I cannot understand why some political posts are suggested to me.

# 5. Results and discussion

The Python was used to support the qualitative analysis through keyword frequency analysis and co-occurrence mapping.used.The Python-based analysis served as a supplementary tool to validate themes identified through manual thematic coding. to perform qualitative analyses in response to the ten qualitative questions that asked about AI's ability to curate content and answer participants' questions. Participants' answers were processed using the following preprocessing steps: tokenisation, stop word removal, frequency computations, and thematic clustering parameters. Python included libraries such as Pandas, NLTK, and matplotlib that produced outputs such as theme frequencies, keyword distributions, and sentiment polarity scores which provide a basis for systematic analysis. The major theme identified through the analysis was Awareness, which is best demonstrated through the number of responses from participants acknowledging the curation of content by AI. In addition to Awareness, Trust and Ethics received the highest number of coded references. The participants indicated a significant level of concern regarding Transparency, Bias, and Manipulation of AI-generated content. Moderate levels of influence over Behavioural patterns were observed, indicating that while AI does influence the visibility and emphasis of Political messages, it does not necessarily alter the basic views of participants. Ethical issues related to Misinformation, Fairness and Accountability were among the top keywords in all the Python-based outputs generated from the analysis. Overall, although the results suggest that AI will improve access to Political Information, they indicate serious Trust and Ethical Issues regarding AI-enabled Political Communication.

⇒ ***Theme Frequency Bar Chart***

**Table 2.** Co-Occurrence Matrix of Themes Based on Participant Coverage

| Themes | Awareness | Trust | Behavior | Ethics | Future |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Awareness | 37 | 37 | 37 | 37 | 37 |
| Trust | 37 | 40 | 40 | 40 | 40 |
| Behavior | 37 | 40 | 40 | 40 | 40 |
| Ethics | 37 | 40 | 40 | 40 | 40 |
| Future | 37 | 40 | 40 | 40 | 40 |

**Table 2** illustrates the frequency of occurrence of the five primary theme areas among respondents. The presence of the themes of Trust, Behavior, Ethics, and Future in each of the participant's (40 total) responses suggests that each of these topics is common among all respondents studying AI-Influenced Political Communication. The prevalence of the Awareness theme across 37 participants in all pairings indicates that there were some participants who were aware of AI-Influenced Political Communication but had not discussed the subject using the term Awareness. The results of the frequency of co-occurrence additionally suggest that participants tended to associate multiple themes within their responses, especially the themes of Awareness, Trust, and Behavior. These results support the conclusion that how a citizen evaluates AI-Generated Content is tied directly to their level of Awareness regarding such content, and that one of the major influences on the evaluation of AI-Generated Content by a citizen is the degree to which that citizen perceives Trust, ethical risks, and behavioural influence associations with the content. Therefore, the overall structure of the matrix supports the premise that themes of Trust, Ethics, Behavior, and Future are highly interconnected.

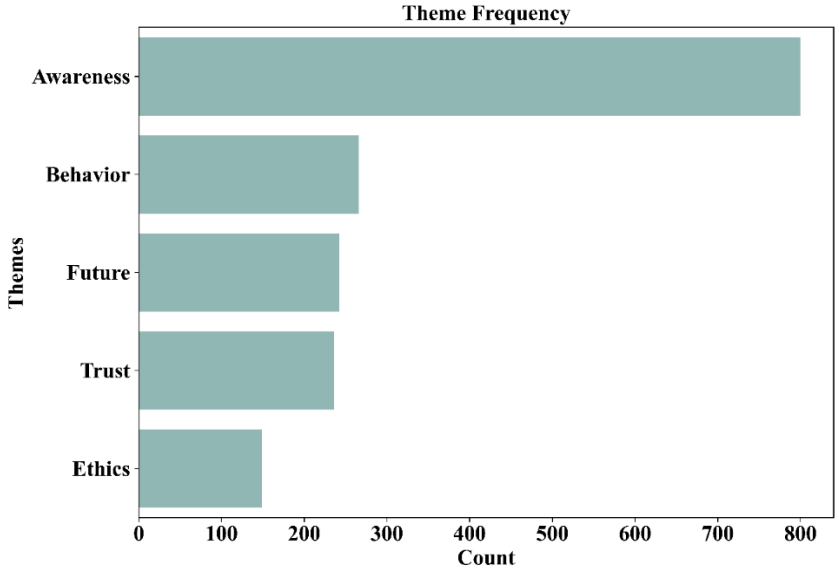


**Figure 4.** Frequency Distribution of Major Themes

The bar chart provides a numerical representation of the relative degree of each of the five identified themes appearing throughout the data set. The largest number of coded references (in excess of 800) was attributed to "Awareness," indicating that awareness is the primary means by which individuals are interacting with AI-based political content. Of moderate frequency is the theme of "Behavior," "Future," and "Trust," reflecting frequent conversations around how AI impacts people's behaviours, future expectations, and evaluations of the credibility of political information received from AI sources. The theme of ethics has the least number of coded references but remains important, indicating that while ethical considerations may exist, they are not always readily articulated by participants unless prompted indirectly through a question about ethical considerations. This **Figure 4** supports the findings of the hierarchy established in the qualitative portion of the study.

⇒ ***Most Frequent 20 Keywords Bar Chart***

**Table 3.** Keyword-Level Content Analysis Across Themes

| Theme | Keyword | Participant_Count | Total_Occurrences |
|---|---|---|---|
| Awareness | AI tools | 26 | 39 |
| Trust | trust | 40 | 112 |
| Behavior | engagement | 29 | 46 |
| Ethics | manipulation | 28 | 44 |
| Future | education | 27 | 36 |

The analysis of keywords used to categorize participants was completed for the different themes discussed within the paper, as shown in **Table 3**. The theme with the most coverage and occurrence count came from Trust, which had the greatest number of participants (40) and total occurrence (112). It indicates that respondents are most concerned about trusting in the credibility and reliability of AI-generated political content. On the other hand, Participant Awareness (26 participants and 39 occurrences) and Participant Behaviour (29 participants and 46 occurrences) had relatively moderate coverage and number of occurrences. The Awareness theme reflects the differing levels of awareness of AI tools among respondents as well as different ways in which respondents are engaging with those tools. With respect to Ethics, the Ethical theme had significant representation in the dataset (28 participants and 44 occurrences) and revealed that many respondents continue to express concerns around issues of manipulation and fairness in AI-based communication. Finally, the Future theme (27 participants and 36 occurrences), indicates that many respondents are also concerned about making significant improvements in AI literacy and education for the public over the long term. Overall, the keyword analysis confirms many of the overarching themes identified by the research, and illustrates how specific concepts such as Trust, Manipulation, Engagement, Tools, and Education, may influence how respondents interpret the use of AI for Political Communication.

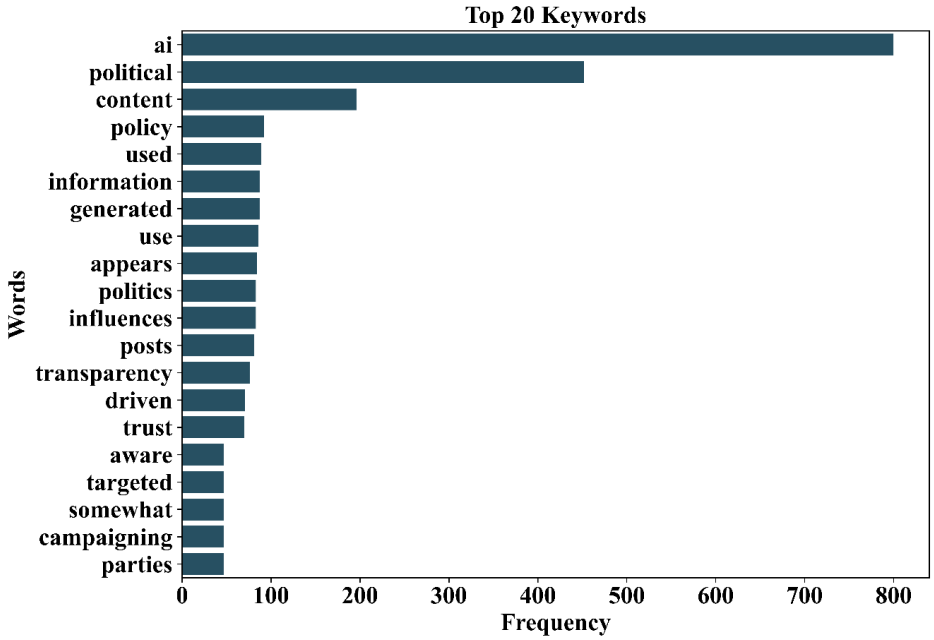


**Figure 5.** Most Frequent Keywords in Participant Responses

The keyword analysis chart of **Figure 5** shows us the 20 most frequent keywords based on their frequency of use in participant responses. The most frequently used keywords (i.e., "AI," "political," "content" and "policy") clearly indicate that the central issue for the participants in this analysis was how AI (artificial intelligence) impacts the way information flows in politics. In addition, the high occurrence of the keywords "trust," "transparency," "targeted," and "influence" denotes the concern that participants had about fairness within algorithmic systems, as well as their concerns regarding the authenticity of content generated by these algorithms and their persuasive abilities. The current lexical analysis also reveals that campaigning, parties and posts are strong indications that citizens have direct interactions with political material that was created via AI. From the analysis of the participants' lexical patterns, we can determine that there are patterns present that can provide some insight into how the participants viewed these types of political content.

⇒ **Participant × Themes Heatmap**

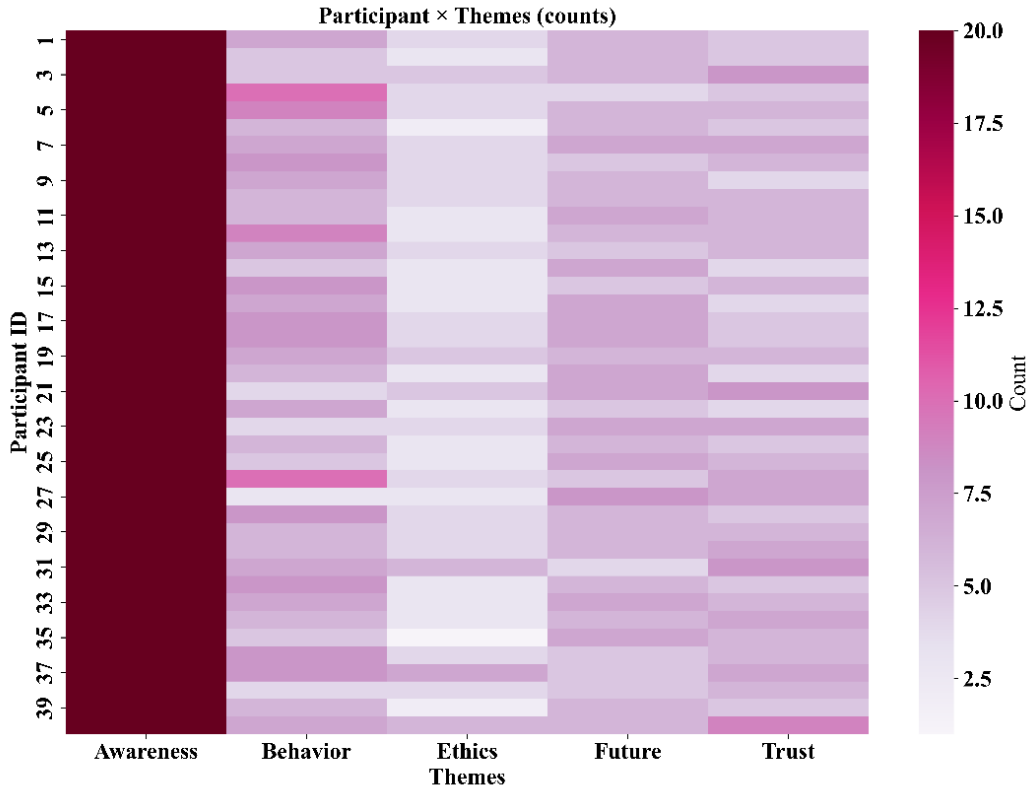


**Figure 6.** Heatmap of Theme Occurrences Across Participants

The density of occurrences for various themes (Awareness, Behavior, Ethics, Future, and Trust) among 40 people can be seen through the use of this heat map shown by **Figure 6**. Dark colours correlate to where there has been more frequent coded reference per participant (more coded references per theme) while lighter colours represent fewer coded reference occurrences. There were more consistent counts associated with Awareness than any of the other themes demonstrating a clear dominance. The remaining themes (Ethics, Trust & Future) all produced a greater variability thus revealing there were differences between participants on their level of interest and/or concern for those particular issue areas. Therefore, this visual pattern augments the qualitative finding that citizens are generally concerned and aware of AI-generated political information and that citizens understanding or perception(s) on the themes around Ethics, Trust and Future varies based on the individual's own experiences and digital skills.

⇒ ***Sentiment Distribution of Responses***

**Table 4.** Representative Quotes Illustrating Theme Occurrences and Participant Coverage

| Theme | Participant_Count | Total_Occurrences | Representative_Quote | Participant_ID |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Awareness | 37 | 203 | I am somewhat aware that political parties use AI for targeted campaigning and message personalization | 1 |
| Trust | 40 | 230 | Sometimes I trust AI content if it appears factual, but I am cautious about hidden bias | 1 |

| Theme | Participant_Count | Total_Occurrences | Representative_Quote | Participant_ID |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Behavior | 40 | 160 | My political engagement hasn' changed much, but AI definitely influences what appears first | 1 |
| Ethics | 40 | 234 | AI influencing politics raises concerns about manipulation and lack of transparency | 1 |
| Future | 40 | 210 | In the future, AI should support citizen education rather than influence voting behavior | 1 |

**Table 4.** (*Continued*)

In **Table 4**, list participant quotes for each major theme and how Citizens communicate about their experiences with Political Communication that Uses AI. Awareness (37 Participants - 203 Occurrences) indicates citizen awareness of AI-based tools being utilized in targeted Political Messaging. Trust (40 Participants 230 Occurrences) reflects a very large number of Participants expressing a level of trust in the use of AI generated content with a degree of caution about possible bias. The theme of Behavior (40 Participants, 160 Occurrences) indicates that there may be no noteworthy change to how Engagement will occur after using political communication tools, but the use of AI will impact how visible and important Political Information will be from now on. The Ethics theme (234 Occurrences) contains the greatest number of occurrences, demonstrating citizens' concerns regarding manipulation and Transparency. The Future theme (40 Participants, 210 Occurrences) shows most respondents anticipate AI will have a Positive impact on their Civic Knowledge as opposed to their Voting Behavior. Each of the quotes helps establish Thematic Patterning and gives Citizens a way to contextualize and interpret AI Created Political Communication.

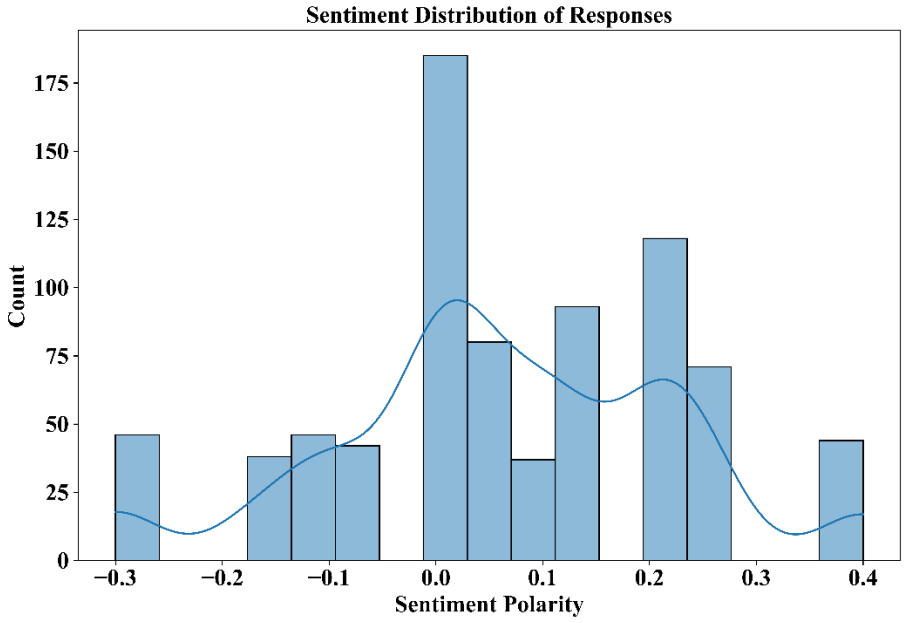


**Figure 7.** Distribution of Sentiment Polarity Scores in Participant Responses

The **Figure 7** below summarizes the average polarity of the respondents' text-based responses and shows that they were predominantly neutral, but shown as slightly more positive according to the average polarity of responses. Approximately 50% of the total responses were determined to be neutral and reflected a variety of balanced or mixed feelings about the use of AI in political communication; they felt equally

divided between being very much in favour of AI use in political communication and very much not in favour of it. Smaller groupings of responses expressing positive and negative sentiments were identified as expressing clear optimism or concerns about the potential benefits (for example, increased targeting and accessibility) and possible negative outcomes (for example, manipulation and misinformation). Collectively, the responses reflect the findings of the thematic analysis, which also illustrated the existence of both curiosity and caution in citizens' thoughts about AI in political communication and the need for citizens to engage critically with their environment and with government policies concerning AI technology and its application.

⇒ **Thematic Network Map**

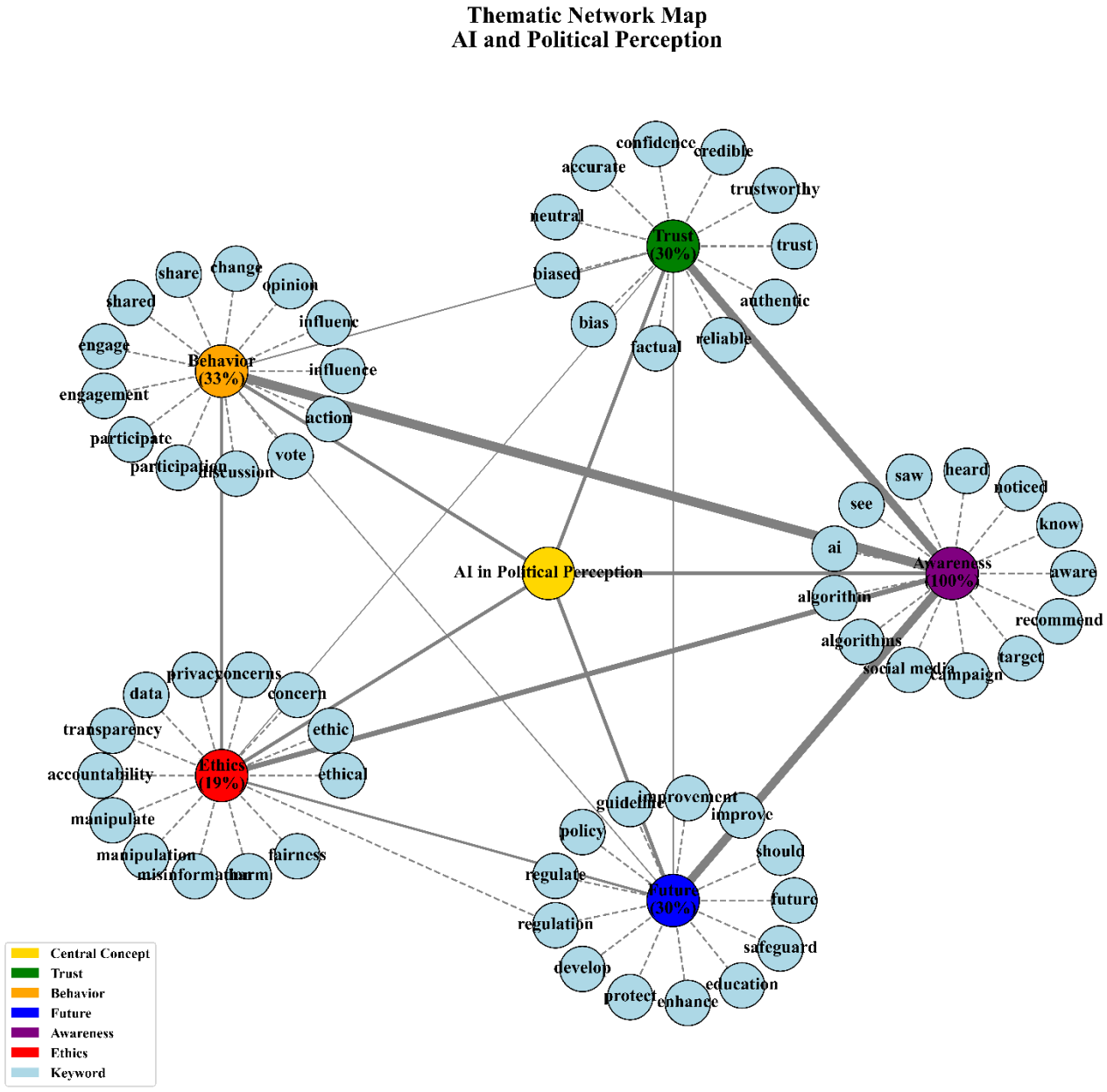


**Figure 8.** Thematic Network Map of AI-Driven Political Perception

The thematic network of **Figure 8** depicts the interconnectedness of five main themes (Awareness, Behavior, Ethics, Trust, and Future) in relation to AI-based political perception. The most prominent and

interconnected nodes in the theme network contain information about both the role of Awareness and Behaviour in shaping how individuals make sense of AI. Keywords profiled in the sub-nodes also illustrate how participants view AI from a standpoint of its degree of visibility, its persuasive capacity, its degree of transparency, the level of engagement it creates with the public, and the level of accountability that it holds. The map depicts that much of today's AI discourse is informed primarily by people's Awareness and Behaviour toward AI. Whereas Ethical or Trust-related issues emerge as a secondary, but very powerful, source of influence in this process, Awareness and Behaviour are clearly dominant themes in shaping how citizens think about and experience AI in a political context. Therefore, this figure is a representation of how AI affects the understanding people have of their politics through developing a range of cognitive and emotional pathways.

⇒ **Thematic Saturation Curve**

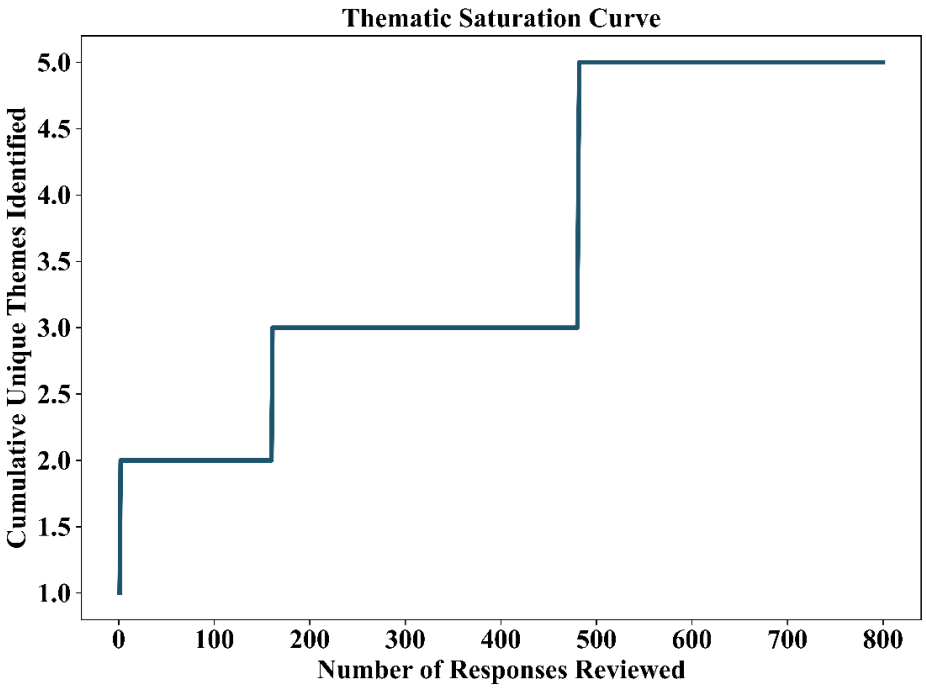


**Figure 9.** Saturation Curve Showing Emergence of Unique Themes

The thematic saturation model describes how many distinct themes can be identified from a growing number of qualitative responses shown by **Figure 9**. The thematic saturation curve indicates a peak or tapering off in themes after the fifth theme, meaning that additional themes have not been identified, and there has been no significant shift in other areas. A plateau with an expected sample size of between 500-600 responses indicates that the results from the interviews are an accurate representation of a complete data set that accurately captures all of the different ways citizens perceive AI Mediated Political Communication, which lends to the validity of the methodology.

# 6. Conclusion and future scope

Our research findings show that there are some clear patterns in how citizens see their interactions with AI technology in terms of political messaging. The awareness of political content being influenced by AI tools via the Internet was a dominant theme among our participant group, with 37 out of the 40 participants making explicit statements about this. As far as trust is concerned, trust issues represent the largest amount of

concern expressed by our participants, with a total of 230 coded instances. All participants expressed some form of concern regarding credibility, hidden bias, or fairness, making it clear that trust issues were important to our sample population. Ethical concerns represented the next largest collection of coded instances, with a total of 234. In this case, ethical issues included manipulation, misinformation, and the perception that things on the Internet may not be transparent. Behavioural influences were evident, as the group of participants acknowledged that AI can impact which political content is presented to them first or given higher priority, even if it did not directly affect their political beliefs. In summary, the quantitative patterns presented in this report provide further evidence that although people use AI technology to curate the political sphere, they have reservations about some aspects of its legitimacy, and that there is a fine line between the usefulness of such a system, the distrust that may exist toward it, and the ethical implications of its use.

**Limitations**

- **A Small and Unrepresentative Sample**

The study consisted of only 40 participants chosen using a purposive sampling method, which means it has many limitations when compared to a larger representative sample.

- **One Type of Qualitative Data**

The researcher primarily relied on self-reported data collected through in-depth interviews; therefore, there is a possibility of bias. Additionally, because only one coder conducted the thematic analysis, it may not be produced evenly across themes.

In summarizing, the report identifies multiple avenues for future research and policies; By working with larger and/or more diverse samples, future researchers may be able to study how different demographic variables affect people's levels of awareness, trust, and patterns of engagement with various platforms or technology. This type of research might also include the use of mixed methods that include quantitative surveys or tracking as part of an overarching framework that integrates both types of data and provides an assessment of how they interact with one another. Future researchers should also research specific algorithmic effects associated with a given platform and develop ethical governance structures that support citizen-based AI design, reduce opaque algorithmic influences, and strengthen citizen trust in systems supplying or supporting political communication.Practically, the findings highlight the importance of enhancing algorithmic transparency, improving citizens' AI literacy, and developing citizen-centered governance frameworks.

# Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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