China and Artificial Intelligence in Communication Journals: A Systematic Review of Scopus and Web of Science Databases

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Abstract

Technological disputes involving the development of artificial intelligence (AI), especially between the United States and China, have drawn increasing attention from both the media and academia. In this context, a systematic literature review was conducted using the Web of Science and Scopus indexing databases, focusing on China and AI, specifically in journals classified within the field of communication. Our interest lies in understanding the field's perspectives on this topic. The studies were categorized using content analysis. In this way, we aim to identify the main debates in circulation, the predominant analytical approaches, and the key actors involved in producing this knowledge.

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The results point to a recent, albeit modest, increase in the field's interest in China's technological dynamics, revealing asymmetric trends in approaches by researchers' geographical location.

Keywords

Artificial intelligence; China; communication studies; Web of Science; Scopus.

China e inteligencia artificial en el campo de la comunicación: revisión sistemática en las bases de datos Scopus y Web of Science

Resumen

Las rivalidades tecnológicas en torno al desarrollo de la inteligencia artificial (IA), especialmente entre Estados Unidos y China, atraen cada vez más la atención de los medios de comunicación y de la academia. En este sentido, se realizó una revisión sistemática de la literatura en las bases de datos indexadas Web of Science y Scopus sobre China e IA, centrada específicamente en revistas clasificadas en el área de la comunicación, puesto que el interés es comprender las perspectivas del campo sobre este tema. La categorización de las investigaciones se llevó a cabo mediante análisis de contenido. De este modo, buscamos identificar los principales debates en circulación, los enfoques analíticos predominantes y los actores involucrados en la producción de este conocimiento. Los resultados indican un crecimiento reciente, aunque aún tímido, del interés del campo de la comunicación por las dinámicas tecnológicas chinas, lo que revela tendencias asimétricas en los enfoques según la ubicación geográfica de los investigadores.

Palabras clave

Inteligencia artificial; China; comunicación; Web of Science; Scopus.

China e inteligência artificial nos periódicos de Comunicação: revisão sistemática nas bases de dados Scopus e Web of Science

Resumo

As rivalidades tecnológicas em torno do desenvolvimento da inteligência artificial (IA), especialmente entre os Estados Unidos e a China, têm atraído crescente atenção da mídia e da academia. Nesse sentido, realiza-se uma revisão sistemática da literatura nas bases de dados indexadoras Web of Science e Scopus sobre China e IA, com foco em periódicos classificados na área da Comunicação. Interessa-nos compreender quais são as perspectivas adotadas do campo sobre o assunto. A categorização das pesquisas é realizada por meio da análise de conteúdo. Dessa forma, buscamos identificar os principais debates em circulação, as abordagens analíticas predominantes e os agentes envolvidos nessa produção desse conhecimento. Os resultados indicam um crescimento recente, ainda que tímido, do interesse da área da Comunicação pelas dinâmicas tecnológicas chinesas, revelando tendências assimétricas nas abordagens conforme a localização dos pesquisadores.

Palavras-chave

Inteligência artificial; China; Comunicação; Web of Science; Scopus.

Introduction

Since the launch of DeepSeek, China's generative artificial intelligence (AI) platform, in 2024, numerous journalistic reports have circulated, largely focusing on the escalating global AI race. This technological "clash" has been framed as a new Cold War, one that transcends the very notion of AI, evolving into a struggle over technical standards, market expansion, and the architecture of global digital ecosystems (Zhang, 2025). At its core, the rhetoric highlights the capacity of China and the United States, the central actors in this scenario, to define models and rules that the rest of the world will follow.

Despite the alarmist tone surrounding technological development, another battleground deserves emphasis: the war of narratives. Thus far, the United States appears to maintain its lead, bolstered by its historical prominence in global information flows and mediatic hegemony (Thussu, 2018). Academia often reproduces this dynamic, with global scientific debates frequently shaped by geographic boundaries and epistemic power asymmetries (Alatas, 2000). These reinforce the dominance of Western, particularly U.S. frameworks in shaping research agendas and theoretical paradigms (Altbach, 2007).

The United States and China together concentrate about 90 % of the global data and AI market (Hung, 2024). The main technology and AI companies from both countries now operate as true global digital corporations with worldwide presence, thanks to their control and investments across all stages of the AI value chain (Hung, 2024). China's prominence in this field has been signaled since 2013, but its concrete efforts intensified after 2016, following the "Sputnik moment" (Roberts et al., 2021). The following year, the State Council launched the "New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan" (AIDP), which sets strategic goals to make China the world leader in AI by 2030. Structured in three stages, the AIDP determined that by 2020, China intended to maintain competitiveness with other powers and strengthen its domestic AI development environment, while establishing initial ethical guidelines,

policies, and regulations for key areas. For 2025, its goal is to achieve significant advances in basic AI theory and attain global leadership in some applications, while expanding and formalizing ethical standards into law. By 2030, China seeks to consolidate itself as the principal global center for AI innovation, with the industry reaching 1 trillion yuan (about $147 billion) and with updated laws and norms to address emerging challenges (Roberts et al., 2021). In practical terms, the document represents the first national-level legislative effort that explicitly focuses on AI development as a unified strategy (Roberts et al., 2021).

When examining discussions about AI and its effects within the field of communication, we observe a prolific literature centered on debates regarding the work of communication professionals (Calvo Rubio & Ulfarte Ruiz, 2020; Gao et al., 2023; Trejos-Gil & Gómez-Monsalve, 2024; Verma et al., 2021), on approaches that explore AI's role both as a tool for combating and engaging with misinformation and fake news in online environments (Aïmeur et al., 2023; Moran & Shaikh, 2022; Shin et al., 2024), and on the impacts of AI on the creative sector (Aires, 2024; Lago, 2023; Lyu et al., 2022). However, we know little about the discussions the field has developed regarding the relationship between China, one of the world's leading powers in this subject, and AI. This leads us to outline the central question motivating this work: How has academic production published in communication journals addressed the advancement of AI in the Chinese context? In more specific terms, we propose to investigate:

1. What are the themes most discussed in these studies?
2. Which journals have hosted these debates?
3. What is the purpose of AI uses and appropriations in this context?
4. How is China presented in the articles?
5. Are there differences in approach between perspectives supported by researchers based in China and those from other countries?

To address these questions, we chose a methodological approach that would allow both a systematic mapping of the academic literature in the field and an interpretive analysis of this body of work. To this end, we combined a systematic literature review (Brizola & Fantin, 2016) with content analysis (Bauer, 2008). The systematic literature review, together with content analysis, was chosen because it provides an overview of how the topic has been addressed in communication journals, enabling the identification of patterns, gaps, and trends over time. Thus, we were able to examine more deeply the approaches raised in the articles that compose the corpus of this research. This work constitutes an initial effort to integrate discussions of China and AI, as well as their perspectives, into studies of AI in communication.

Methodology

This research was conducted through a systematic literature review (Brizola & Fantin, 2016). This technique serves to address the general objective of investigating academic production published in communication journals on the interrelationship between China and AI. To achieve this, we searched two widely recognized academic indexing databases, Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), on May 27, 2025. To delimit the scope to the communication field, we verified whether each identified journal was categorized as relevant to the field in the SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) portal. The search focused on articles published between 2020 and 2024, written in English, and containing the terms "Artificial Intelligence" and "China" in the title, abstract, or keywords fields, to ensure thematic relevance. From an initial collection of 64 articles (38 in Scopus; 26 in WoS), we removed duplicates and works in which AI appeared only as an auxiliary methodology, as well as those in which references to China were peripheral, resulting in a final corpus of 41 articles (Table 1).

After collecting these materials, the research team manually coded the articles. This process was conducted following Bauer's (2008) perspective on quantitative content analysis, including simple frequencies and cross-tabulation between variables.

Table 1. Corpus Selection and Screening Steps

Stage	Description of the process	*N* (Scopus)	*N* (WoS)	Total	Notes / Exclusion criteria
1. Records identified	Initial search results using the string ("artificial intelligence" OR AI) AND China	6,081	1,080	**7,161**	No filters applied
2. Records after filters applied	Filters applied (period: 2020–2024; language: English; document type: article; subject area: social sciences)	540	722	**1,262**	Automatic exclusion of other languages, years, and document types
3. Selection by communication area	Thematic selection restricted to communication journals	38	26	**64**	Exclusion of articles from other subfields (economics, management, computer science, etc.)
4. Removal of duplicates	Elimination of repeated articles between Scopus and WoS	—	—	–9	9 duplicates removed
5. Additional exclusions	Manual application of qualitative exclusion criteria	—	—	–14	3 published in 2025; 3 where AI appears only as a journal disclaimer; 1 editorial; 1 interview; 5 with peripheral mentions of China; 1 with purely technical use of AI
6. Final corpus included in analysis	Articles meeting all inclusion criteria	—	—	41	Final corpus of the systematic review

Source: Own elaboration

The first variable, which identifies the central theme of each article, was organized into the following categories: Education, when addressing the use of AI in higher education, personalized learning, or skills development; Regulation, public policies and governance, for studies about norms, institutional arrangements, legislation, incentive policies, and ethical aspects related to AI; Disinformation, deepfakes and fake news, when analyzing the use of AI in the production and dissemination of false content; Journalism, for investigations about

the impact of AI on journalistic routines, practices and production; Technology and Innovation, when discussing technical advances in generative AI, machine learning or computational infrastructure; Privacy, Surveillance, and Censorship, when examining individual monitoring, facial recognition, social control or content moderation; Culture and Representation, when exploring AI's media presence, its aesthetics, resistance practices or issues like algorithmic racism; Geopolitics, when dealing with strategic disputes, sovereignty, national security, or global competitiveness; and Combined, when the article addresses two or more of these themes in an integrated manner.

The second analyzed variable concerns the purpose of AI use, that is, the practical application of AI presented in the research. The categories are: Governance and Public Policy, when AI is discussed from the perspective of formulating, implementing or evaluating public policies; Education and Learning, when AI is or could be applied in educational processes, academic use, study support or research, such as using chatbots in training activities; Advertising, Media, and Journalism, when used for promotional purposes, dissemination, production or distribution of media content; Social Engagement and Entertainment, when involving recreational applications, parodies, human-machine interactions or artificial engagements; Censorship, Surveillance, and Social Control, when applied for monitoring, tracking or supervising individuals and groups; Content Moderation, when used to identify and filter harmful content; and Other, for uses not covered in the previous categories.

The third variable focuses on the role attributed to China in the analyzed articles, seeking to identify how the country is incorporated into AI research. The categories are: China as a Technology Producer, when the country is presented as a hub for development, innovation or leadership in AI; China as an Empirical Case, when the country is the specific object of analysis, focusing on its domestic AI practices, policies or applications; China as a Perceived Threat, when appearing as a geopolitical, economic or security risk factor associated with technological advancement; China vs. Other Countries, when the article establishes comparative analyses

between China and other nations regarding AI development, regulation or impacts; and Other, for cases that do not fit the previous categories.

In addition to these variables, which provide a general overview of communication publications focusing on China and AI, we also included a comparative study section. In this stage, we examined the same variables, considering the authors' institutional affiliations and distinguishing between productions linked to Chinese institutions and those from other countries. In this way, we sought to understand not only the profile and approaches of the studies conducted, but also possible asymmetries and particularities associated with the geographical context of academic productions on the subject.

To ensure analytical consistency, the three researchers independently coded 41 articles based on this collaboratively developed codebook. Inter-coder agreement was high across all variables (ranging from 80 % to 89 %), supporting the reliability of the analytical framework applied.

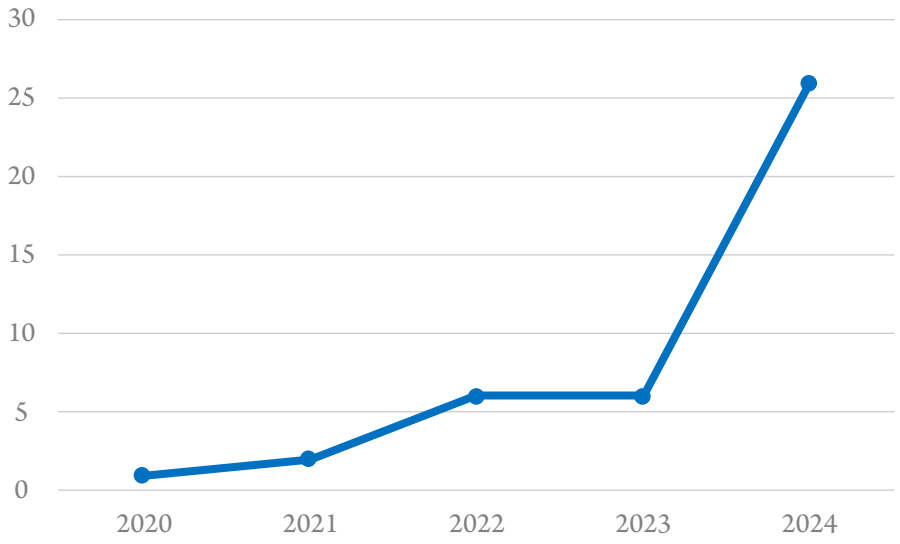
Results

The findings of this analysis are organized into two complementary sections. The first presents an overview of publications on the intersection of AI and China in the field of communication, identifying thematic trends, the purposes of AI use, and China's role in these studies. The second section then provides a comparative analysis, examining the same variables by authors' institutional affiliation, distinguishing between research produced by Chinese institutions and that originating from other countries.

Overview

The body of analyzed publications indicates a modest yet growing interest in AI and China studies within the field of communication. As shown in the chart below (Figure 1), 2024, with 26 articles, saw a growth of over 300 % compared to the previous year, which had 6 articles. This increase reflects the recent advancement of this topic on the academic agenda, demonstrating greater researcher mobilization around the subject.

Figure 1. Publications on AI and China in the Field of Communication (2020–2024)



Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the institutional affiliations of authors, we observed a strong concentration in China, accounting for 39 % of all analyzed authors. When we include Hong Kong and Taiwan, this percentage jumps to 48 %. This significant predominance reveals China's centrality not only as an object of study but also as an active agent in academic production about AI in the field of communication.

The United States ranks second with just four articles (7 %), followed by Australia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, each with three articles (6 %). Other countries (Malaysia, Norway, Singapore, Austria, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Pakistan, South Korea, Spain, and Switzerland) were represented in two or fewer publications. The journals that published the most articles at the intersection of AI and China were *Profesional de la Información* with six articles, *Information, Communication and Society* with three, and *Communication Research and Practice, Global Media and Communication, Policy and Internet, Search Journal of Media*

and Communication Research, and *Telematics and Informatics* with two publications each. The remaining journals featured only one article.

It is noteworthy that the journals with the highest concentration of publications share a common interest in interdisciplinary analysis of the social, political, economic, and cultural impacts of digital and information technologies. Some, such as *Information, Communication and Society* and *Policy and Internet*, emphasize debates in governance, regulation, and sociopolitical transformations related to information and communication technologies. Others, like *Profesional de la Información* and *Telematics and Informatics*, engage with applied areas of information management, data science, and digital systems. Meanwhile, *Communication Research and Practice*, *Global Media and Communication*, and *Search Journal of Media and Communication Research* address themes related to international communication, global media practices, and transformations in the media industry, reflecting the diversity of approaches that characterize recent studies of AI and China in the field of communication.

Delving into the analysis of the publications' central themes (Table 2), we identified two predominant areas of interest: Regulation, Public Policies, and Governance (20 % of articles) and Education (17 %). The Education-focused articles primarily examine AI applications in formal educational contexts, particularly highlighting higher education, teacher training, digital skills development, and AI-mediated academic performance assessment (Chung & Jeong, 2024; Zhen et al., 2023; Zhou, 2024). Regarding Regulation, Public Policies, and Governance, studies examine regulatory frameworks, AI public policies, algorithmic governance, platform regulation, and data protection (Nanni et al., 2024; Roberts et al., 2022; Xu, 2024).

Beyond these two central themes, the categories of Technology and Innovation, Culture and Representation, and Geopolitics each account for 10 % of articles. Research on Technology and Innovation analyzes technical advancements in AI, algorithmic system development,

generative AI, and applications in digital communication (Yao et al., 2024; Xi et al., 2024). The Culture and Representation studies explore AI's cultural and symbolic implications, including media representations, identity and visuality issues, and debates about algorithmic aesthetics and digital visibility regimes (Huang & Chen, 2024; Li, 2024). Articles classified under Geopolitics focus on strategic disputes involving China in the global AI development and application landscape, addressing aspects of digital sovereignty, technological rivalries, and international competition in technology fields (Lin, 2024; Su & Flew, 2021).

Table 2. Central Themes of Publications

Themes	*N*	%
Education	7	17
Regulation, Public Policies, and Governance	8	20
Disinformation	1	2
Journalism	3	7
Technology and Innovation	4	10
Privacy, Surveillance, and Censorship	3	7
Culture and Representation	4	10
Geopolitics	4	10
Combined	7	17
Total	**41**	**100**

Source: Own elaboration

When examining the purposes of AI use in the analyzed articles (Table 3), we observe a strong predominance of works linked to the Governance and Public Policy category (37 %). These studies discuss various aspects ranging from the formulation of regulatory frameworks for AI development and control in China (Xu, 2024) to the geopolitical and diplomatic implications of exporting Chinese technologies (Lin, 2024; Su & Flew, 2021) and comparative analyses of regulatory regimes between China and other countries/regions (Nanni et al., 2024; Roberts et al., 2022).

The categories of Education and Learning (17 %) and Advertising, Media, and Journalism (17 %) also show significant representation. In the educational field, investigations examine the use of generative AI as a pedagogical support tool, particularly in higher education and teacher training (Zhou, 2024). In journalism studies, research analyzes the impact of automation on production routines, transformations in journalistic authorship, and the ethical/legal tensions surrounding AI-generated news (Kuai et al., 2022; Xi & Latif, 2022). Other purposes, such as Social Engagement and Entertainment (12 %), Censorship, Surveillance, and Social Control (7 %), and Content Moderation (2 %) appear less frequently but reflect recurring concerns about the social and political risks associated with AI use in the digital public sphere.

Table 3. Purposes of AI Use in the Analyzed Studies

Purposes of AI use in the analyzed research	*N*	%
Governance and Public Policy	15	37
Education and Learning	7	17
Advertising, Media, and Journalism	7	17
Social Engagement and Entertainment	5	12
Censorship, Surveillance, and Social Control	3	7
Content Moderation	1	2
Other	3	7
Total	**41**	**100**

Source: Own elaboration

The final variable analyzed concerns China's role in the studies (Table 4). Approximately half of these publications (49 %) present the Country as an Empirical Case, focusing on practices, policies, and contexts specific to Chinese territory, as observed in the research by Zeng et al. (2022). In second place is China vs. Other Countries (24%), including examining copyright protection for AI-generated news in China, the United States, and the European Union (Kuai, 2024). The perspective of China as a Perceived Threat appears in 15 % of articles, which can be divided into two approaches: analyses that effectively treat China as a threat,

and critical approaches that judge Chinese technological advancement as threatening. McInerney (2024), for example, highlights how this advancement is racialized, being associated with historical narratives of civilizational confrontation and anti-Asian stereotypes like the "Yellow Peril." Finally, 12 % of studies address China as a Technology Producer, examining the country's leadership in AI and digital infrastructure development (Rao, 2023; Su & Flew, 2021).

Table 4. Role Attributed to China in the Analyzed Research

China's role in the study	*N*	%
China as a Technology Producer	5	12
China as an Empirical Case	20	49
China as a Perceived Threat	6	15
China vs. Other Countries	10	24
Total	41	100

Source: Own elaboration

Overall, the results demonstrate growing academic interest in the intersection of AI and China, with a predominance of empirical studies focused on the Chinese context, particularly on themes of governance, education, and innovation. The analysis also reveals a diversity of examined subjects and assigned purposes for AI use, as well as the geographic concentration of publications, with strong representation of authors affiliated with Chinese institutions.

Comparative Approach

When examining the distribution of publication themes by authors' institutional affiliation (Table 5), some distinct trends emerge between researchers affiliated with Chinese institutions and those from other countries. It should be noted that for this comparative analysis, the five publications resulting from international collaborations between Chinese and foreign institutions were excluded to avoid duplication in authorship categories.

Among China-based authors, we observe a stronger concentration of studies in the Education theme (32 %), particularly those exploring the use of generative AI in higher education and teacher training. For instance, the study by Zhen et al. (2023) analyzes dialogues in online classrooms in China and uses AI to predict academic performance based on student interactions and emotional expressions.

Among authors affiliated with institutions in other countries, we observe a predominance of the Regulation, Public Policies, and Governance theme (35 %). As previously noted, these works examine the formulation of regulatory frameworks and the political implications of AI development in China, often adopting a comparative perspective. This is exemplified by Rao (2023), who analyzes how the discourse of "New Infrastructure" functions as a discursive infrastructure to support and legitimize state-led technological development projects in China.

While the remaining categories show more balanced distributions, some additional differences merit attention. Studies on Technology and Innovation (16 %) and Privacy, Surveillance, and Censorship (11 %) appear exclusively among authors at Chinese universities within this corpus. Conversely, themes such as Culture and Representation (18 %) are relatively more frequent among authors from other countries, including analyses of algorithmic aesthetics and digital visibility regimes in Chinese media, as explored by De Seta (2021).

Table 5. Thematic Comparison between Chinese Authors and Authors from Other Countries

Themes	China		Other countries		Total
	N	%	*N*	%	
Education	6	32	1	6	7
Regulation, Public Policies, and Governance	1	5	6	35	7
Disinformation		0		0	0
Journalism	2	11	1	6	3
Technology and Innovation	3	16		0	3
Privacy, Surveillance, and Censorship	2	11		0	2
Culture and Representation	1	5	3	18	4

(continued)

Themes	China		Other countries		Total
	N	%	*N*	%	
Geopolitics	2	11	2	12	4
Combined	2	11	4	24	6
Total	**19**	**100**	**17**	**100**	**36**

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the purposes of AI use addressed in the articles (Table 6), we observe trends similar to those identified in the general thematic analysis. Among authors affiliated with Chinese institutions, there is a notable concentration in the Education and Learning category (32 %), with studies examining the use of generative AI in pedagogical processes, including both higher education (Zhou, 2024) and personalized teaching strategies (Wang et al., 2024).

Among authors from institutions in other countries, the emphasis shifts markedly to Governance and Public Policy (59 %), represented by studies discussing regulatory regimes and the institutional implications of AI development in China. These works analyze both the internal mechanisms of Chinese public policy formulation (Xu, 2024) and global disputes involving normative standards and digital diplomacy (Nanni et al., 2024).

Table 6. Comparison of the Purpose of AI Use between Authors Based in China and Other Countries

Use of AI	China		Other countries		Total
	N	%	*N*	%	
Governance and Public Policy	4	21	10	59	14
Education and Learning	6	32	1	6	7
Advertising, Media, and Journalism	3	16	2	12	5
Social Engagement and Entertainment	3	16	2	12	5
Censorship, Surveillance, and Social Control	1	5	1	6	2
Other	2	11	1	6	3
Total	**19**	**100**	**17**	**100**	**36**

Source: Own elaboration

Finally, regarding China's role in these studies (Table 7), we observe the predominance of China as an Empirical Case (53 %), particularly in research conducted at Chinese institutions (79 %). These studies explore domestic practices, public policies, and local experiences in AI development and application—examining everything from educational uses to institutional and corporate strategies (Penglong et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

The China vs. Other Countries category (22 %) is more prevalent in research from other countries (41 %), featuring investigations that contrast Chinese strategies with Western regulatory, economic, and diplomatic models. These comparisons analyze algorithmic governance, digital infrastructure policies, and international normative disputes (Rao, 2023; Su & Flew, 2021).

Meanwhile, the China as Technology Producer category (14 %) encompasses studies discussing the country's emerging role in AI development and global innovation chains (Avle, 2022; Su & Flew, 2021), particularly in non-Chinese institutional research (24 %). The China as a Perceived Threat dimension (11 %) appears less frequently in both groups, including critical perspectives challenging such narratives.

Table 7. Comparison of the Role Attributed to China between Chinese and Non-Chinese Authors

China	China		Other countries		Total
	N	%	*N*	%	
China as a Technology Producer	1	5	4	24	5
China as an Empirical Case	15	79	4	24	19
China as a Perceived Threat	2	11	2	12	4
China vs. Other Countries	1	5	7	41	8
Total	**19**	**100**	**17**	**100**	**36**

Source: Own elaboration

In summary, the comparative analysis reveals distinct trends in how researchers based in China versus other countries approach the relationship between AI and China within communication scholarship. While China-based authors predominantly focus on educational applications and empirical analyses of domestic contexts, international researchers prioritize discussions of governance, public policy, and cross-national comparisons.

Discussion

China's technological development has become a prominent topic of discussion. In media discourse, the narrative surrounding this "technological Cold War" (Zhang, 2025) has garnered significant attention, and the race between China and the United States for global leadership in the field cannot be overlooked. However, despite China's substantial participation in the global development and governance of AI, scholarly debate within communication studies remains limited, as evidenced by a corpus of only 41 articles over a five-year span. Although the surge from six to 26 articles between 2023 and 2024 indicates an upward trajectory, the results confirm that the intersection of China × AI remains a niche area in communication research.

Overall, interest in the intersection between China and AI is more pronounced among authors affiliated with Chinese institutions. Our data reveal a predominance of Chinese influence in shaping this academic discourse. On one hand, China's scientific policies actively invest in AI-related research, including collaborations with private institutions (De Masi et al., 2025). On the other hand, we must acknowledge both the linguistic barriers faced by non-Chinese scholars, which complicate access to official Chinese documents on the subject, and the epistemic inequalities that reinforce the centrality of Western countries in defining research agendas (Alatas, 2024). This dynamic explains why China, including Hong Kong and Taiwan, accounts for 48 % of the corpus in this study.

Despite this national predominance, the country appears primarily as an "empirical case" (49 %) rather than a "technology producer"

(12 %). Here, two interpretations seem relevant to the analysis: the first, briefly outlined earlier, concerns epistemic coloniality and intellectual imperialism (Alatas, 2000; Alatas, 2024), which may hinder recognition of China as an innovation hub. The second points to an empiricist orientation among researchers at Chinese institutions, as a significant portion of studies prioritize practical applications rather than contesting the narrative of technological leadership, reinforcing the perception of China as an AI "object" rather than a "subject."

Approaches to AI applications also warrant attention. We observe that 32 % of Chinese-authored articles focus on AI in education, reflecting China's instrumentalist vision of AI, aligned with policies promoting AI learning in primary and secondary schools (Global Times, 2025) for both students and teachers (Zhao et al., 2022). Indeed, the AIDP, as cited in Roberts et al. (2022), briefly mentioned in the introduction, identifies talent development as a pillar of global AI leadership. In this context, studies examining the perceived applicability of such education are crucial for shaping future leadership strategies in the field.

The governance and public policies surrounding AI, an issue of particular interest to researchers based at non-Chinese institutions, who make up 59 % of this corpus, account for only 21 % of the Chinese scholarly approaches. This relative disinterest may be explained by the AIDP Plan (2017) itself, which, as previously discussed, tends to concentrate resources on applied research, allocating comparatively less space to regulatory debates. Moreover, China has been developing robust frameworks for internet regulation and information sovereignty since the 1990s (Creemers, 2020). In recent years, Chinese authorities have also intensified their regulatory efforts in AI and data governance (Creemers, 2022). This approach contrasts with that of the European Union, which, during the 1990s, largely adopted the U.S.-style laissez-faire stance toward digital development but has more recently come to regard the regulation of emerging technologies, including AI, as a strategic priority for the bloc, especially in the context of a technological race increasingly dominated by the United States and China (Roberts et al., 2021). These are topics that warrant further investigation in future studies.

Final Considerations

This article aimed to map and analyze academic production in communication journals addressing the intersection between China and AI, based on a systematic review of Scopus and Web of Science databases. We raised several questions to explore the macro-level dimension of debates surrounding AI development advancements through a dialogue with China. Unsurprisingly, the results revealed limited engagement with this topic in the field. Not only did we observe a scarcity of publications, but also a predominance of empirically oriented studies focused on China as an object of analysis. This relatively small body of work contrasts sharply with China's prominent role in AI geopolitics.

While this study contributes by mapping and discussing trends in academic literature on China and AI, it is equally important to acknowledge its limitations. First, our analysis was restricted to only two databases. Future research could incorporate platforms like OpenAlex, which offers more inclusive indexing of non-Anglophone and non-Western journals, and China's CNKI to capture emerging journals and locally grounded scientific production. A second limitation concerns language filters: by including only English-language publications, we inevitably excluded relevant non-English scholarship, despite English's status as the *lingua franca* of scientific internationalization (Suzina, 2021). Finally, focusing solely on communication journals leaves room for interdisciplinary expansion. Incorporating perspectives from other social sciences, humanities, and STEM fields would yield a more comprehensive panorama.

We hope this initial effort stimulates broader debate and further research. Integrating peripheral scholarship could deepen understanding of current trends and enrich communication studies with more diverse, decentralized perspectives. Future comparative work could also explore how similar debates on AI and communication are developing in other regional contexts, such as Latin America, Africa, and Asia, to better understand how different academic and geopolitical environments shape the study of digital technologies.

CRediT Categories Statement

Mayara Araujo: Conceptualization; Methodology; Formal analysis; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing
Marcela Barba: Methodology; Investigation; Formal analysis; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing
Aline Mendes: Data curation; Writing – review & editing

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Data Availability Statement

The data were extracted from the Web of Science and Scopus indexing databases (https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.29414444).

Consent for Publication

Not applicable.

AI Disclosure

We used DeepSeek to assist in translating the manuscript into English.[4]

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