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Narrative patterns in the coverage of AI technologies in contemporary online science journalism

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This study explores the range of discursive patterns used to present artificial intelligence as a revolutionary but controversial technology in online science journalism. It uses a triangulated dataset of over a hundred recent mini-narratives sourced from New Scientist, Nature daily briefings, and Scientific American to identify the salient thematic scopes and narrative trajectories. The data-guided qualitative analysis uses the categories of agency, sentiment, point of view, and news value to reconstruct each outlet's specific contribution to the evolving sociotechnical imaginary of AI technologies. While acknowledging some limitations and risks of AI technologies, science journalism celebrates revolutionary advancements produced through embracing AI for science. Yet, online science communicators do so in a strategic way to keep up the interest, often by projecting diverse storylines with oscillating sentiments, meshing fact with evaluation, and priming users to accept the inevitable uses of algorithms as increasingly independent research-performing agents.

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