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INTRODUCTION

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AI Hype in Journalism: Visibility, Power, and the Politics of Media Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Hype is a phenomenon that emerges from a set of practices rooted in the norms and narratives not only of journalism but of digital media and its algorithmic infrastructure more broadly, in the sociopolitical and cultural capital of technical expertise, and in the ambiguous and uncertain promises of a brighter future made by the world's techno-elite. In this special issue, we explore media hype around AI functions as a pervasive system that is "sunk into and inside of other structures, social arrangements, and technologies" (Star, 1999, 381). We pay particular attention to how AI hype is embedded within journalism's norms and narratives, labor politics, and the rhetoric of the tech industry. As the different articles in this special issue show, understanding AI hype as a systemic phenomenon conveys its power to shape narratives, practices, and regulations across layered systems of actors and networks, as well as its malleability by different stakeholders.

KEYWORDS

Artificial intelligence; AI hype; AI narratives; hype; hype cycles; community of practice

The hype around artificial intelligence mobilizes more than just expectations. AI hype operates as a powerful structuring force that impacts individuals, societies, and the environment (Markelius et al. 2024). Current literature across media studies, STS, and communication science examines AI hype as a sociotechnical imaginary, a discursive resource, and a political mechanism that configures how societies understand technological change (Bohner & Vertesi, 2026; Markelius et al. 2024). And yet, work tends to deal with AI hype either as an abstract cultural narrative or as a policy instrument, often overlooking how it is enacted, adapted, and contested within journalism as a professional field. In this special issue, we explore how media hype around AI functions as a pervasive system that is "sunk into and inside of other structures, social arrangements, and technologies" (Star, 1999, 381). We pay particular attention to how AI hype is embedded within journalism's norms and narratives, labor politics, and the rhetoric of the tech industry. By doing so, we define AI hype as *a set of exaggerated promises, anticipatory narratives, and/or inflated expectations that are strategically produced and circulated by institutions, experts, media organizations, or individual actors, and which function not merely as discourse but as a structuring force that shapes decisions,*

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redistributes resources, legitimizes actors, and configures sociotechnical futures before those futures materially exist.

The scholars featured in this special issue agree with each other, and with us, that we should neither underestimate the complexity of hype as a societal force, nor its impact. Hype is a phenomenon that emerges from a set of practices rooted in the norms and narratives not only of journalism but, of digital media and its algorithmic infrastructure more broadly, in the sociopolitical and cultural capital of technical expertise, and in the ambiguous and uncertain promises of a brighter future made by the world's techno-elite (Bourne, 2024). While the authors in this special issue define hype in different ways, they converge in their attitudes toward AI hype as an object of inquiry in its own right. Through this lens, the question that matters for this special issue is not so much whether or not the hype around AI is justified or a bubble that will soon burst, but rather how hype functions as a force that mobilizes resources, refactors newsroom labor practices, and shapes AI discourse and implementation.

Hype in the Community of Practice

To be a journalist is to be a member of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Journalists learn how to "do journalism" from their interactions with colleagues and mentors, their sources and topics, and the organization's workflows (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). What unites journalism as a profession is, among other things, the importance of professional ethics as a defining feature of what it means to be a journalist, even though concrete norms and practices can differ across newsrooms (de-Lima-Santos et al. 2024). These practices are passed vertically and laterally around journalism communities, and consequently, AI hype-driven reconfigurations of how legitimate expertise is defined, and what it means to ethically incorporate technologies into workflows, become socialized into journalism praxis.

In many organizational settings in the journalism profession, recurrent hype cycles centered around new technologies give rise to dialectical experiences of new technologies (van Lente et al. 2013). In their commentary for this special issue, Nik Usher eloquently describes these cycles as "the fear of the new and what it means for seemingly settled flows of power; utopian hopes of a new dawn; and a more mixed effort to adopt and to incorporate, without knowing exactly what that might mean" (Usher, 2025, 8). Part of being a journalist is fearing for the future of the profession when faced with new technologies, while hoping that these new technologies might actually make things better (van der Woude et al. 2025). Then, often at management's behest, journalists adopt these new technologies to "stay current" and avoid being pushed aside (Dodds et al. 2024), even if these technologies come with their own norms or challenge existing professional journalistic norms. This professional anxiety and subsequent incorporation of new norms, as Usher points out, often happens without a complete understanding of the risks and affordances of the technologies journalists adopt (see Dodds, Vandendaele, et al. 2025).

Journalists mediate information and public knowledge, but they are also caught between providing value to their employers and upholding the values of their profession. Through numerous cycles of collective concern for the future of journalism,

newsrooms and journalists have developed idiosyncratic and often contradictory relationships with emerging technologies that are simultaneously threats and opportunities, which they must experience at work or cover for work (Dodds, 2019). The meeting of familiar conventions and adaptations to novel technologies in newsrooms engenders new norms that redefine what it is to be a journalist. Nestled within these norms are frameworks for using, discussing, and describing new technologies within newsrooms and for the public. AI hype becomes deeply embedded in AI culture within newsrooms, allowing technological determinism (Shorey & Rodriguez, 2025) to take root and spread (Lewis et al. 2025).

However, sometimes journalists can also use these technologies to their advantage by leveraging their hype. In their article for this special issue, Schaetz and Schjøtt (2025), for example, describe how participants in the Associated Press' AI initiatives were able to reframe automation-related projects as "AI projects" to secure funding that would have been difficult to secure in an environment with less enthusiasm for AI. For these actors, AI hype served an utilitarian function by rhetorically legitimizing their work, thereby ensuring their continued inclusion in their community of practice. This persuasive function parallels the broader mechanism that sustains the AI startup ecosystem, in which labeling activities as "AI" amplifies perceived value and promise. Such leveraging of hype has been at the heart of AI research and development funding since the term "artificial intelligence" and the "conjecture that every aspect of learning or any other feature of intelligence" can be simulated within a machine were first proposed to earn funding for the Dartmouth summer workshop (McCarthy et al. 1955, 2). Thus, the hype surrounding GenAI in journalism is part of a larger cultural, scientific, and economic discourse extending back more than half a century.

Also published in this issue, Ananny and Karr (2025) describe media unions' responses to the professional risks posed by GenAI, seeking to protect their community's members from creative theft, displacement, and coercion. In this case, the unions secured contracts that appeared to benefit their employees. Still, the vague language common in AI hype rhetoric rendered the protections patchy at best. The unions' protection efforts also served to draw boundaries around those perceived to be legitimate media workers (and therefore worthy of protection) and the "invisible" media laborers who make AI products appear intelligent. As Ananny and Karr's (2025) research shows, AI hype shapes and conditions members' practices alongside shifting norms and reifies union membership as something bound to GenAI.

Internally, hype triggers fears and activism to protect established practices and professions, while externally, the media have a double role as hype makers and hype watchers. On the one hand, the media contribute to the hype through their reporting and the choice of topics and perspectives they report on. On the other hand, society also relies on the media to see through the hype, or question the hype. These two functions can be in tension, as hype drives eyeballs, but potentially conflict with norms of responsible reporting. For many journalists, membership in professional newsrooms adopting AI clashes with the obligations associated with membership in the journalistic profession (de Koning et al. 2025; Simon, 2022). As Schaetz and Schjøtt put it in their article featured in this special issue:

> Journalists, in their watchdog role, need to provide adequate scrutiny of new technological developments to ensure that the public remains well-informed and can make a critical

> assessment of the impacts of technologies on society. At the same time, news organizations are expected to respond to technological change and economic challenges by innovating, which, specifically in the context of AI, has made them increasingly dependent on the tech corporations that they are reporting on. (2025, 4)

Recurring Narratives

Hype cycles, which are not confined to AI, can impact policies and coffers – often without taking material and social realities into consideration. One example is the way the media covered the "Hyperloop," Elon Musk's repackaging of perennially novel visions of vacuum-based mass transport that preceded even the first steam railway systems (Smil, 2025). "You can thank brainy billionaire Elon Musk's Hyperloop proposal for bringing electro-magnetic-powered transportation and the linear induction motor back into the public consciousness," (Hu, 2013) said an NPR reporter during the early coverage. Despite the technology's fundamental incompatibility with existing railway infrastructure (Harris, 2017), the multi-tiered regulatory frameworks that extend across the continental U.S., and the system's vulnerabilities to challenges like terrorist attacks, the Hyperloop became temporarily rooted in the public imagination and infrastructural politics (Smil, 2025). It also served a discursive function as food for conservative think tanks already dedicated to panning the "backwardness" of California's (expensive) high-speed rail (Joffe, 2017) – which Musk has since implied was the original purpose underlying his "proposal" (Marx, 2022). Beyond rhetoric, hyperloop projects aimed at developing and deploying the never-extant technology were deemed eligible for federal funding in provisions of the 2021 landmark infrastructure bill passed with bipartisan support under President Biden (Shah, 2023). Cities and states across the country approved proposals by companies with various degrees of Musk involvement, only to have the projects unceremoniously dropped as companies dissolved (Mann & Bykowicz, 2022). Some hyperloop-adjacent projects continue to languish, sustained by the promise of tomorrow.

Despite excitement from pockets of the tech world and some media hype, the hyperloop did not get far enough past bureaucracy for public sentiment to affect its lure; the fate of the "metaverse," on the other hand, rested upon the (dis)interest of its consumers. Conceptually, the metaverse is simply an extension of the marriage between VR/AR technologies (headsets, integrations with iOS devices) and multiplayer virtual worlds (e.g., Second Life), but Big Tech companies saw potential for expanding social realities into commercial ones (Jacobides et al. 2024). Beginning in the early 2020s and peaking in 2021, a chain reaction kicked into gear as companies (e.g., Facebook, Apple, Microsoft) invested in technologies (e.g., VR/AR headsets, cryptocurrencies, NFTs), passionate consumers extolled the virtues of their Web3-based projects, and venture capitalists showered billions into Web3 metaverse startups. Capital pouring into metaverse infrastructure and products prompted more money to flow; Citigroup forecasted a $13 trillion metaverse industry by 2030. The (newly reanointed) Meta invested $36 billion in its metaverse division, before the hype cycle's key players noticed that customers were overwhelmingly lukewarm toward their products – glitchy simulacra reliant upon active user participation. As with the hyperloop projects, a core incompatibility emerged

between high-tech's visions for A New Reality and the reality their much-needed user base preferred to occupy. Also akin to hyperloop projects, the metaverse lies dormant but not quite dead, ready to be revivified (perhaps by hyping) generative AI (Gil, 2025).

Recent studies on the way that media outlets covered the metaverse show indeed the largely uncritical nature of this coverage. Maddocks et al. (2024) argue that U.S. news media predominantly framed the metaverse as a corporate and investment-oriented space, centering technology firms, investors, and experts while marginalizing ordinary users and rarely addressing issues of exclusion or inequality. Most importantly, after analyzing over 500 news articles, the authors conclude that most coverage remained descriptive rather than critical, with media discourse functioning less as public deliberation than as an amplifier of elite expectations, sustaining hype without fostering the broad-based engagement required for long-term adoption. Indeed, only 11% of the articles they analyzed "employed a critical framing and raised ethical questions" (p. 78).

Schaetz and Schjøtt (2025) point out that AI hype in journalism is built upon recurring narratives of an industry on the brink of extinction. Utopian visions of salvation through advanced technology are frequently intertwined with journalists' fears that their labor will be devalued and eventually replaced by automation. These familiar narratives form the foundational context into which the contemporary AI hype phenomenon nestles, and from which it proliferates well beyond newsrooms and into the public sphere. Journalists are, again, in the unenviable position of having to understand AI in the context of their professional identities and labor while also portraying these technologies to the public, following journalism ethics that center around objectivity and neutrality.

The authors in this issue take on different perspectives about whether this "new new" is more of the same or something different altogether. Whether AI hype is new or not, its resemblance to something familiar informs its discursive and affective trajectory. However, whether and what aspects of this hype cycle are new has more undeniably tangible impacts beyond the newsroom, because AI hype and the anxieties it induces have structural origins outside journalism (Johnson & Verdicchio, 2017) that are, in turn, shaped by news coverage (Brennen et al. 2022). Some of the foundational consequences addressed by the authors in this special issue include AI's dependence on energy infrastructure and natural resources, as well as the vast labor operations that sustain the illusion of intelligence.

Journalists rely on existing mechanisms for reporting and sourcing, mechanisms that have become transparent through repeated use, and may not see the hype's hidden elements embedded within these familiar practices. As Lewis et al. (2025) observe in their commentary for this special issue, "journalists sustain hype themselves through the signals they send in their work—not because they report favorably on the technology but because they repeatedly fail to cover it critically and expand their sourcing networks" (p. 7). The established routines of journalistic practice—sourcing, technology reporting conventions, and the pressures of deadline-driven production—make specific patterns of AI coverage feel natural and inevitable while obscuring alternatives. At the same time, there can be very real economic incentives to further feed the hype cycle to drive views and advertisement income.

The selection of sources represents a critical site where AI hype's structuring power operates (Brennen et al. 2022). For example, for her article published in this issue, Kuai's (2025) interviewees "reflected on the selection of sources for AI-related reporting, echoing concerns about the growing number of self-proclaimed AI experts," and "stressed the need for caution when identifying appropriate sources to ensure informed and balanced reporting" (p. 12). Yet, despite these expressed concerns, journalists continue to rely on repetitive sourcing patterns. In the same line, Lewis et al. (2025) also note in their commentary that "journalists, especially those at market-driven media, are central in driving this hype through reliance on repetitive sourcing patterns that primarily involve technology companies and executives" (p. 7). Although this reliance on perceived experts represents a longstanding journalistic norm, it masks a significant problem when those experts have ulterior motives. It also demonstrates that hype is shaped not only by how the media reports on AI, but also by whom they decide to interview and give a forum to, either further fueling the hype or debunking it.

The consequences of these sourcing practices become apparent in comparative analysis. In their article featured in this special issue, Shorey and Rodriguez (2025) document a striking shift in news coverage of recycling sorting technologies. In earlier coverage, when "automation" was the primary descriptor for technology solutions, journalists "primarily quoted local government officials and recycling sorting administrators" (p. 13). However, once AI became the solution *du jour*, tech executives became the dominant sources, while the producers of automation technologies had never been used as sources in prior coverage. This shift reveals how the structuring dynamics of AI hype redirect journalistic attention toward particular actors while rendering others invisible. In addition to rendering some actors invisible, this shift in journalists' sourcing practices also implicitly shifts who "counts" as an expert from government representatives to industry leaders when AI is implemented in sites of civic technology use.

The taken-for-granted quality of AI hype perpetuates multiple forms of invisibility. Journalists often fail to make visible the labor that props up AI's illusion of autonomy—the data annotators, content moderators, and countless other workers whose repetitive tasks enable systems to appear intelligent. Chen et al.'s (2025) analysis, included in this special issue, reveals that "market-driven media are the primary contributors, and often rely on a narrow range of identical sources and adopt various strategies to increase visibility and audience engagement" (p. 1). The climate impact of AI systems similarly remains hidden from public view, as tech sources often avoid addressing environmental costs, and journalists more often than not fail to pursue these lines of inquiry.

This recursive dynamic creates a compounding effect: as journalists become more familiar with hype rhetoric, which systematically discourages or circumvents critical questions, either because they do not surface or do not sell, their adeptness with the mechanisms and language of AI hype increasingly normalizes these rhetorics. Correspondingly, it becomes less likely that journalists will notice it or call it out: a significant problem given their obligations to the public. Journalists accustomed to technology hype cycles may not fully "see" this particular cycle as it unfolds through the transparent mechanisms of their professional practice (see Dodds, Zamith, et al. 2025).

Yet hype's systemic character also affords actors leverage when AI fails to meet expectations. GenAI mishaps, for instance, allow journalists to demonstrate their worth and superiority over automated systems. In their commentary, Lewis et al. (2025) describe how, for some journalists, GenAI provides an "epistemic opportunity" to convey their superiority over AI systems (p. 9). In Schaetz and Schjøtt's (2025) study, an employee involved in the AP AI initiative noted the inadequacy of the AI technologies as they were portrayed, prompting a response from a technical expert that the technology is not yet at its end state, when it will be useful. In this exchange, hype both made space for one employee's critique and gave the responding employee a counterargument: that criticism in this moment is irrelevant because AI is inevitably going to get better.

The challenge, then, is to render visible what has become transparent through routine use. This is where journalism's foundational norms become useful resources for resistance. Usher (2025) reminds us that:

> One of journalism's fundamental roles is 'orientation'—enabling people to move through daily lives in the real world more safely, more effectively, and able to meet the physical world with the requisite knowledge needed to give it order. While the news could be less 'depressing as hell,' much of what makes news is the power that the external, natural world retains over both humanity and digital technology. We have lost sight of that physical dimension of orientation in our work. (p. 7)

Going further, Usher issues "a reminder to our field to query what the intersection of generative AI and journalism means for the natural world—this is my call for digital journalists to literally go outside the newsroom" (p. 7). Such orientation demands that journalists seek additional perspectives, including those of people whose labor and environments are rendered invisible by AI hype's normalized operations.

Reach and Scope

The articles included in this special issue also show how AI hype demonstrates considerable geospatial and temporal scope, shaping narratives about both present conditions and imagined futures across different national contexts. This reach gives AI hype a form of technological determinism that may have substantial bite, particularly given that tech executives control vast portions of the world's capital and resources, as well as AI (hype) narratives.

The temporal dimension of AI hype's reach manifests prominently in narratives about AI's ambiguous yet inevitable impact on the future. In this special issue, Magalhães and Smit (2025) identify a language of "open-ended technological inevitability" in coverage of AI across American, Dutch, and Brazilian outlets, which establishes AI as a definitive component of our future. The open-endedness seemingly allows choice over "how society arrives at these futures" while simultaneously foreclosing debate about whether such futures should arrive at all. As Magalhães and Smit (2025) observe, "the inevitability of generative AI is likely to have been seen by journalists as a fait accompli that could only be reported on, not realistically questioned" (p. 14), a framing that makes its inevitability all the more likely to materialize.

These temporal narratives become embedded in institutional initiatives. Schaetz and Schjøtt (2025) note that "the core idea of the AP's AI initiative for small

newsrooms is rooted in a specific narrative of the future: AI is going to dramatically change journalism as an industry. As one of the program managers put it: 'news is going to look different, function differently, and manifest in different ways'" (p. 8). Such pronouncements position AI not as one possible trajectory among many, but as an unavoidable transformation that organizations must prepare for or risk obsolescence.

The temporal dimension of AI hype's reach cannot be separated from its spatial dimension. AI is depicted in ways that align with national narratives, embedding technological futures within geopolitical frameworks. In her article included in this issue, Kuai (2025) explains that "in 2017, the Chinese State Council outlined a special comprehensive strategy for AI development, positioning AI as essential to national development and global competitiveness" (p. 2). This positioning shapes how Chinese journalists understand their role in covering AI. Kuai identifies "one prominent role that emerged was that of the loyal-facilitator, with interviewees positioning themselves as active contributors to shaping public opinion in alignment with national strategies" (2024, 13).

German media coverage similarly embeds AI within geopolitically-rooted narratives, though with different emphases. According to Lammar et al. (2025), included in this special issue, "AI-in-general consistently positions Germany and Europe in stark economic competition with two other global players, the US and China. The narrative level at which the discourse operates is thus rooted in references to competing national economies and competing political-economic systems" (p. 8). This framing produces distinctive narratives about how German and European AI should diverge from competitors. One such narrative centers on "European values" as a distinguishing feature. Lammar et al. (2025) explain:

> The storyline further highlights that to uphold European sovereignty in the domain of AI, we need to build value-based domestic AI systems while ensuring consumers trust these systems and thus willingly share their data with them. In an article in the Welt, we read that a prerequisite for Europeans to 'prevail against the US and China […] is that we can anchor our European values of human-centered AI in the systems, where technology serves humans and not vice-versa.' However, what is human-centered AI, and what are democratic or European values that would make AI systems trustworthy? The discourse around AI-in-general never specifically elucidates what these signifiers mean but uses them as a way of distancing a European AI approach from its hyper-capitalist and authoritarian competitors. (2025, 10)

Yet even as AI hype takes on nationally-specific characteristics, global patterns of influence persist (Natale et al. 2025). Featured in this special issue, Nkoala et al. (2025) document the dominance of Western authors in news coverage of AI, while Chen et al. (2025) identify significant international influence on Chinese ChatGPT news. These patterns reveal how AI hype operates simultaneously at multiple scales—national narratives coexist with transnational flows of information, expertise, and influence. At the same time, rhetorics position AI as a tool with a predetermined pivotal role in global dominance for the foreseeable future, propelling transnational urgency. The reach and scope of AI hype thus extends across borders and epochs while remaining deeply embedded in particular geopolitical contexts, creating a complex system that shapes expectations and actions across diverse

communities while maintaining underlying patterns of power and influence. More than that, hype can also shape and further reinforce geopolitical dynamics of influence and power.

Breakdown and Repair

Systems become most visible when they break down. Our examination of AI hype as a systemic phenomenon constitutes an attempt to break it down—to render it visible—in order to better understand its relational nature. This breakdown is accomplished through infrastructural inversion, foregrounding hype as an object of inquiry rather than a given.

As many of the articles included in this special issue point out, "debunking" hype is not enough, nor is outright dismissal. Schaetz and Schjøtt (2025) argue that "beyond debunking "hype" the onus should thus be on journalism's "projective" capacity to imagine alternative futures and the ability of news organizations to avoid lock-in effects that constrain them in recognizing and responding to inflated expectations (14)." Lewis et al. (2025) similarly caution against dismissing hype as trivial: "Hype can seem like such an unserious thing. As a concept, hype conjures images of bubbles—here today, popped tomorrow. It denotes frenzy and fanfare, but simultaneously a kind of emptiness: puffery and promotion that serve as a placeholder for the "next big thing." Seen that way, hype can be easily dismissed" (p. 1). Instead, the authors featured in this special issue examine hype's origins, its impacts, the strategies it encourages or hinders, how it articulates with human actors, political and social systems, and the planet.

This careful attention to hype's mechanisms reveals contradictions that would otherwise remain hidden. Shorey and Rodriguez (2025), by poring over news coverage of AI recycling sorters, noticed a disconnect between statements about AI eliminating the need to expose people to hazardous work while simultaneously referring to "human supervisors" of sorting technologies (p. 15). They ask, "How accurate is it to call a system "fully automated" when it cannot function independently from humans?" Similarly, Schaetz and Schjøtt document how AP newsroom projects confronted the gap between hype and reality:

> While expectations to mobilize resources put the onus on the disruption of previous practices to free up resources through automation, realizing those expectations required a reinterpretation of aims that were aligned with journalistic integrity. That is, the role of human labor in AI was not reduced but highlighted: 'There is human intervention at every step.' Accordingly, AI was not constructed as a magical tool (as when expectations were being built up) but was deconstructed as a fallible technology that requires human oversight, where editorial control, transparency and accessibility of the technology were considered critical…Over the course of the projects, the teams had to reckon with the contradiction inherent in building tools that were expected to reduce human labor but required constant monitoring to be used responsibly. (2025, 11)

AI hype relies on perpetuating certain narratives about what AI is and can be. More closely scrutinizing hype as more than a mere description and reliable narration can be instrumental to breaking down—rendering visible—the many hidden actors and processes that sustain AI systems and the hype around AI. By exploring AI hype as

a pervasive structuring force, we avoid apocalyptic questions about whether AI will become Skynet. While this has arguably reduced our collective blood pressure, we must consider the very real possibility that hype is helping to erect an AI dragnet that answers to a small cadre of human actors. As Schaetz and Schjøtt (2025) point out, whether the bubble pops is not the only salient question; we also have to consider how deeply AI systems will be embedded in our cultures, institutions, and planet when—or if—we finally realize it was just hot air.

Unlike the promises of AI itself, lasting structural change cannot arise spontaneously. Our contributors offer concrete suggestions that researchers can tackle piece by piece. First, it is vital for journalists and journalism scholars to complicate their ideas about who the relevant experts are when covering AI topics. As Ananny and Karr note in their analysis of media unions addressing generative AI, "workers are 'the experts on their jobs and workplaces'. They are 'uniquely positioned to help identify beneficial uses of generative AI in our industry and flag potential problems'. 'It should be workers, not employers, who determine what is and is not assistive and augmentative'" (2025, 11). Journalists' near-universal use of a limited set of sources with financial stakes in generating hype over AI represents an enormous problem addressed by this issue's authors. We mustn't ignore the relationship between the sparse landscape of AI "experts" in the news and the broader picture of journalists' discomfort with science and technology. Researchers and journalists should be talking to people on the ground and not just management.

Second, reflexivity must become a more active and critical practice. Lewis et al. observe that "hype forces reflexivity by making more extreme possibilities salient, and therefore necessitating reflection from the individual to the metajournalistic discourse levels" (2025, 9). However, this forced reflexivity should be supplemented by journalists actively and critically engaging with hype through their work. Journalism scholars must also reflect on their own positions in relation to the journalists they work with and represent, and to their research communities. As Usher warns,

> The adage from journalists that they became journalists so they could avoid math does not inspire faith in their resilience against mythologizing GPTs. As scholars studying journalism and its adaptation to AI, we need to be aware that many of our research participants do not have a clear definition of what constitutes artificial intelligence, automation, generative AI, or general AI. If journalists are reflecting on generative AI in ways full of wonder, confusion and imprecision, our scholarship also needs to provide context to buttress against the confusion of our research participants. We need to be on guard that their general sense of confusion does not turn our work into mush. (2025, 4)

Third, we need more critical scholarship and news coverage of AI and AI hype, especially regarding environmental impacts, narratives of tech determinism, and why innovation must trump fundamental rights and public values, the labor behind large language models, and AI's societal impacts. Usher challenges the field: "While I do not have a set of ready-to-go research questions about this connection between the natural and the cultural for generative AI and Journalism Studies, I do know that generative AI has larger environmental consequences and that our discipline, like many others, could do more to center the global climate crisis" (2025, 7). Ananny and Karr similarly note gaps in current responses: "while media guilds have quickly

developed sophisticated ways to talk about and correct GenAI's power over their news work, they have not yet prioritized GenAI's impact on the climate crisis or dataset workers, and they leave the emotional aspects of work largely unaddressed" (2025, 16). Also included in this special issue, Valderrama et al. identify "a notable absence of mass reporting on AI's harms to society' in the Chilean newspapers" (Valderrama Barragán et al. 2025). Lammar et al. (2025) raise a fundamental question:

> Our point is not to judge journalists for writing specific stories in specific ways. Instead, we want to raise a broader question that journalists—and science communicators—face when covering a development like AI: How can we tell stories—not just—about AI that raise visions of the future and engage people's curiosity and excitement in ways that open up, rather than close off, public discussions and collective reflections on the potentials and limits of emerging technologies in society? (p. 16)

Our ability to control and shape the impact of AI on society and journalism begins with being able to recognize and deconstruct AI hype. The work of breakdown and repair requires recognizing AI hype as a structuring and driving force—as something built, maintained, and changeable through collective action. While it is true that such efforts are constrained by psychological and systemic factors, including attention dynamics, self-censorship, and the broader cultural capture that make critique and dissent difficult to sustain, this special issue demonstrates that making hype visible is the first step toward reconfiguring it, opening space for alternative narratives, expanded expert networks, and fuller accounting of AI's material consequences. This special issue represents not an ending but an invitation to ongoing work: to question, to resist, to repair, and to imagine different technological futures.

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