

Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture  
Volume 13 Number 3

© 2022 Intellect Ltd Editorial. English language. [https://doi.org/10.1386/iscc\\_00061\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1386/iscc_00061_2)  
Published Online xx xxxx

## EDITORIAL

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# The Human and the Machine: AI Hopes and Fears in Media and Society

### ABSTRACT

*This Special Issue, 'The Human and the Machine: AI Hopes and Fears in Media & Society', navigates the complex landscape of artificial intelligence (AI), presenting a spectrum of perspectives on its transformative impact. The editorial introduces key articles that explore AI's dual nature: its potential to drive innovation and efficiency in areas like criminal justice and journalism and the significant ethical, societal and environmental concerns it raises. Topics include the implications of AI in carceral communication, the influence of search engine algorithms on journalism, the portrayal of AI in science fiction and the ethical considerations of AI-generated content in children's stories. Through a comprehensive examination of these themes, this issue underscores the importance of a balanced discourse on AI, advocating for ongoing dialogue, ethical vigilance and interdisciplinary collaboration to ensure that AI's development aligns with societal values and human rights.*

### KEYWORDS

artificial intelligence  
journalism  
criminal justice  
media representations  
human rights  
ethics  
technological  
advancements

## INTRODUCTION

One might be excused for confusing the 'A' in AI (artificial intelligence) for ambivalence. AI's discourse is wildly varied, with positions ranging from perceiving AI as humanity's saviour (Mahmud 2015), to a force destined to go rogue and destroy humanity as we know it (Russell and Bohannon 2015). This spectrum is perhaps best summarized by Cave and Dihal (2019) through their dichotomies, each comprising a hope and a parallel fear of AI. These are: the hope for longer lives (immortality) vs. the fear of losing identity (inhumanity); the hope for a work-free life (ease) vs. the fear of redundancy (obsolescence); the hope that AI fulfils desires (gratification) vs. the fear of human redundancy (alienation) and the hope for power (dominance) vs. the fear of AI turning against us (uprising). As the editors of this Special Issue on AI, we are excited to present a collection of insightful articles that reflect these various hopes and fears of AI, while underscoring the technological advancements brought by AI and provoking critical reflections on its broader implications.

## HOPES AND FEARS

The articles herein cite many benefits of AI. AI's integration into criminal justice promises operational efficiency and improved rehabilitation, with AI tools aiding in surveillance and decision-making processes, potentially leading to better outcomes in carceral communication (Gebru and Torres 2024). In journalism, AI can streamline information gathering and enhance the accuracy and speed of news production, providing journalists with powerful tools to analyse and report on social issues effectively (Phong and Son 2017). Lastly, AI's capacity to process and analyse large datasets offers significant advancements in qualitative research, improving the depth and efficiency of data analysis (Dai et al. 2023). These articles collectively underscore AI's potential to enhance creativity, efficiency and strategic insights across various industries.

Despite the benefits, the articles in this Special Issue also raise significant concerns regarding AI. Large language models (LLMs) can perpetuate biases in training data, leading to inaccurate insights and significant privacy concerns (Phong and Son 2017). Existential risks posed by AI, including the potential for AI to surpass human intelligence and lead to catastrophic outcomes, are major concerns (Bostrom 2014; Tegmark 2017). AI's role in surveillance and profiling presents significant human rights issues, including privacy invasion and biased decision-making (Gebru and Torres 2024). The environmental impact of AI technologies is another pressing issue, as AI data centres contribute significantly to global greenhouse gas emissions, exacerbating climate change (Cho 2024). Additionally, the ethical implications of AI-generated content in media, particularly concerning disability representation, highlight the risk of perpetuating stereotypes and biases (Cave and Dihal 2019). The rapid deployment of AI technologies in government and public sectors also raises privacy concerns and challenges for accountability and regulation, making it difficult to ensure the right to equal protection and non-discrimination (Donahoe and Metzger 2019). These articles collectively emphasize the need for ongoing dialogue and careful consideration of AI's ethical, societal and environmental impacts.

## THE CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

'AGI apocalyptic narrative and state of exception' delves into the dominant apocalyptic narratives surrounding artificial general intelligence (AGI).

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1. By drawing parallels between AGI and Christian apocalypticism, the article  
 2. explores how such narratives confer an intangible form of power to AI, rais-  
 3. ing profound ethical questions about human rights and the potential for a  
 4. state of exception. This exploration of AGI narratives highlights the rhetorical  
 5. strategies that shape public perception and policy-making, emphasizing the  
 6. need for a balanced discourse that addresses both the potentials and perils  
 7. of advanced AI. The article provides a philosophical and sociopolitical lens to  
 8. understand how AGI narratives can influence public policy and societal atti-  
 9. tudes towards AI development and governance.

10. Building on this, 'Smartification of punishment: AI, criminal justice and  
 11. the future of carceral communication' addresses the contentious issue of AI  
 12. in the criminal justice system. While AI promises operational efficiency and  
 13. improved rehabilitation, it also exacerbates surveillance, privacy invasion and  
 14. biased profiling. This article calls for a balanced approach, emphasizing the  
 15. need to safeguard human rights in the era of smart prisons. The integration of  
 16. AI in carceral settings presents a microcosm of the broader ethical dilemmas  
 17. associated with AI, where the benefits of technological innovation must be  
 18. weighed against the potential for systemic abuses and violations of individual  
 19. rights. The study highlights the double-edged nature of AI in criminal justice,  
 20. advocating for policies that protect civil liberties while leveraging AI for posi-  
 21. tive reforms in the justice system.

22. The discussion on ethical and societal implications is further enriched by  
 23. 'Googling it: While news search results can affect newsrooms' perception of  
 24. social issues, journalists mainly rely on it for complementary information'.  
 25. This article investigates the reliance of journalists on search engine algorithms  
 26. and its implications for news production. It reveals the significant influence  
 27. of Google on journalistic newsgathering, raising questions about the objec-  
 28. tivity and independence of the press in the digital age. The reliance on algo-  
 29. rithmically curated information poses challenges to journalistic integrity and  
 30. the role of the media in fostering an informed public, necessitating a critical  
 31. examination of the interplay between technology and journalism. The study  
 32. underscores the importance of transparency in search algorithms and calls  
 33. for journalists to maintain critical thinking and diverse sources to uphold the  
 34. integrity of news reporting.

35. 'Exploring brain-computer interface representations in science fiction'  
 36. offers a literary perspective on AI. By analysing science fiction narratives, the  
 37. article examines how brain-computer interfaces challenge traditional notions  
 38. of identity and agency. These stories prompt us to reconsider the boundaries  
 39. between human and machine, highlighting the transformative potential of AI  
 40. technologies and setting the stage for discussions on AI's representation in  
 41. media. The speculative exploration of BCI in science fiction serves as a valu-  
 42. able lens for understanding the societal and ethical implications of emergent  
 43. AI technologies, encouraging a deeper reflection on the future of human-  
 44. machine interactions. The article draws connections between literary depic-  
 45. tions and real-world technological advancements, offering insights into how  
 46. fiction can inform and influence societal attitudes towards AI.

47. 'AI the storyteller: Content analysis of disability representation in stories  
 48. created for children' critically examines how AI-generated stories portray disa-  
 49. bilities. The study uncovers prevalent stereotypes and emphasizes the need for  
 50. more nuanced and inclusive representations in AI-created content. By analys-  
 51. ing stories generated by AI, this article highlights the challenges and opportu-  
 52. nities of using AI in creative storytelling, particularly in ensuring that diverse

and accurate representations are maintained. The findings suggest that while AI can generate a vast array of stories, there is a risk of perpetuating existing biases if not carefully monitored and guided. This calls for a collaborative approach where human oversight ensures that AI-generated content aligns with ethical standards and promotes positive representation.

We conclude the Special Issue by returning to Cave and Dihal's (2019) hopes and fears with 'Uncertainties and ambivalence surrounding AI: Popular filmic representations as real-world threat or saviour', which employs this dichotomy as a critical lens to examine the historical representation of AI in popular culture. By analysing films, books and video games, the article highlights recurring themes of threat and salvation associated with AI. This historical perspective provides a backdrop for understanding contemporary concerns about AI, bridging the gap between science fiction and reality. The ambivalence surrounding AI in popular culture reflects broader societal anxieties and hopes, offering a mirror to our collective psyche and prompting critical reflections on the future trajectory of AI development. The article argues that popular culture not only shapes public perception of AI but also reflects deeper existential questions about technology, agency and humanity's place in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

### CONCLUSION

The discourse surrounding AI, as presented in this Special Issue, vividly captures the multifaceted impact of AI on various aspects of media and society. AI's potential is dichotomous, with its capacity to revolutionize while simultaneously posing significant ethical, societal and environmental challenges, demanding a nuanced and balanced approach to its development and integration.

The integration of AI into critical sectors like criminal justice and journalism brings to the fore significant human rights and ethical considerations. The potential for enhanced operational efficiency and improved outcomes in these fields must be weighed against the risks of surveillance, biased decision-making and the erosion of journalistic integrity. Furthermore, the representation of AI in media and literature offers valuable insights into public perceptions and the cultural impact of AI technologies.

Ultimately, the future trajectory of AI will depend on our collective ability to harness its benefits while mitigating its risks, balancing our hopes and fears. This requires ongoing dialogue, interdisciplinary collaboration and a commitment to ethical principles that prioritize human dignity and societal well-being. As AI continues to evolve, the future looks bright; however, it is imperative that we remain vigilant, ensuring that its development aligns with our broader aspirations for a just, equitable and sustainable future.

Shaping this Special Issue has been a privilege and we extend our heartfelt gratitude to the contributors for their rigorous research and thoughtful analyses. We received many quality submissions, so many that we needed a second issue to house them all. If you enjoyed this Special Issue, consider reading the companion issue, titled 'The Human and the Machine: AI in Creative Industries'. We also thank the peer reviewers for their diligent work and feedback, which have significantly improved the quality of this issue. Finally, we express our appreciation to the editorial team of *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture* for giving us the opportunity to be guest editors on this trail-blazing issue. We hope this issue stimulates further discussion and

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1. research, contributing to a more informed and reflective approach to AI inte-  
 2. gration in our world.

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