

Chapter 9 : Time and Artificial Intelligence: the construction of the future by newsmagazines

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Abstract: This chapter studies the role of newsmagazine covers in constructing visions of the future. It focuses on a study of four covers published in 2023 in *L'Espresso*, *TIME*, and *Visão* following a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis approach, showing that those function as spaces of temporalization, weaving complex discourses on Artificial Intelligence (AI), and its anticipated impacts. Drawing on Future and Media Studies, the chapter contends that magazine covers are more than static, time-bound images. Instead, they actively participate in constructing cultural narratives about AI and the future, with an impact on how people envisage the future and form expectations about that. Additionally, the chapter argues that media hold the potential to challenge linear and mainstream ideas about the societal impacts of AI, highlighting the media's responsibility to encourage critical thinking about the uses and pervasiveness of AI.

Keywords: Newsmagazines, Magazine Cover, Future, Time, Multimodality

Introduction

This chapter aims to explore more about what the media communicates about the future with AI. Then, it becomes crucial to better understand how the future is overall being futurised, gaining a performative role in social terms (Oomen et al., 2022).

The research question that guides this chapter is: How do newsmagazine covers multimodally play in constructing visions about the future of AI, particularly GenAI? It is hypothesized that newsmagazine covers contribute to build future perspectives on AI through using different meaning modes (e.g., colour, words, person representations), under different contexts (e.g., media, editorial), and involving different social actors, which produce discourses on future (e.g., negative predictability; multiple futures) impacting on the way people and governments understand their agency upon the future.

Indeed, media plays a pivotal role in shaping cultural narratives, influencing the development of representations about the future, as media not only reflect but also construct ‘visions’ (Jasanoff & Kim, 2013; 2015) and ‘images’ (Adam, 2011; Adam & Goves, 2007; 2011) of the future.

These imaginaries support various anticipatory narratives about the future. Some depict an open future filled with opportunities enabled by science and technology, while others portray a closed future, fraught with collapse and a looming tragedy resulting from human creation (Ramos Torre, 2018). Following the hypothesis that media play a fundamental role in contemporary societies, shaping attitudes and social practices, this chapter’s authors contend that media serve both as an information source, creating sociocultural knowledge along with their readers and guiding them, and as an important research field. This raises critical questions about the potential impacts of AI on democracy and governance, reflecting broader social and economic interests, while subtly shaping societal perceptions of AI technological processes.

Methodologically, the chapter focuses on the analysis of newsmagazine covers with an interpretative and critical approach. It is considered that analysing covers from offers a broader view of magazine production.

The chapter is organised into two main sections. First, it introduces the theoretical background, discussing key concepts related to AI, time, and media, with understandings from cybernetics and Luhmann's theories on technology, communication, and future as a temporal modality. The second part provides a detailed analysis of four newsmagazine covers from 2023, showing how these multimodal texts project specific visions of AI and Generative AI (GenAI) within various contexts future and their broader implications for society.

Theoretical framework

The links between time, media, AI, and the future are complex and demand great exercise of conceptual anatomy to produce an accurate understanding of the practical interest in understanding the broad implications. Formerly, it is necessary to better understand what AI means and to what extent so intrinsically related to time and the future.

From Automatons to AI: From Past to Present

The term AI was coined in 1956 (Markoff, 2015, as cited in Hansen, 2022), despite its developments having its roots in the establishment of cybernetics during the decade of 1940s. Automatism and its relationship with humans have close and long-lasting ties with cybernetics. Engaging knowledge beyond Mathematics, Norbert Wiener states that 'the many automata (...) contain sense organs, effectors, and the equivalent of a nervous

system to integrate the transfer of information from the one to the other' (1948/1985, p. 43). Cybernetics relates significantly to systems and how they function, whether they are smaller or bigger in dimension, scale, socially wider or narrower, and able to evolve themselves into other settings to some degree due to their capacity of producing and reproducing communication through sending and receiving feedback. Any system is made of properties, variations, and transformations. One of Wiener's remarks on this topic is as follows: in what concerns to 'systems with a large number of particles and states within the limits of practical discrimination', if taken 'a state of other than maximum entropy and observe what happens to it, the entropy almost always increases' (p. 56). This leads to Luhmann's (2005) communication's centrality. As a system, communication is above the social and any others.

Those developments have evolved into AI. Relating it to other components, Frankish and Ramsey (2014) define AI as 'a cross-disciplinary approach to understanding, modelling, and replicating intelligence and cognitive processes by invoking various computational, mathematical, logical, mechanical, and even biological principles and devices' (p. 1). AI has been increasingly applied to machinery in order to improve organisations' work efficiency and results, as well as investment in innovative technology (Jiang et al., 2022). Those machines can be of many natures, such as chatbots, robots incorporated in computers on the Internet that help via chat.

AI relates to the notion of the Internet of Things, accounting for the increased integration of the Internet in the mediation of day-to-day actions, along with the digitalisation of technology and its development (Jiang et al., 2022; Vicente, 2023). Essential to social digital changes is the understanding of 'the integration of the virtual world with the physical world through the Internet of Things (IoT)' (Jiang et al., 2022, p. 15). Indeed, Costa and colleagues (2022) mention that the Coronavirus pandemic has

highly favoured virtualisation, interfering at levels such as the organisational or personal, acknowledging the crucial and constitutive role of communication.

GenAI, OpenAI, and related software

The development of language models throughout time has led to the emergence of GenAI. According to Feng et al. (2024), ‘GenAI chatbots transcend the capabilities of their predecessors, offering more dynamic, responsive, and intelligent interactions’ (p. 538). ChatGPT is among these. GenAI applications function ‘[t]hrough complex neural-network architectures, advanced natural-language processing (NLP) techniques, and deep machine-learning algorithms’ (p. 538). ChatGPT has become widely mediatised and used across the world since its public availability in 2023. Roumeliotis & Tselikas (2023) describe it as a ‘model’ that ‘is trained on vast amounts of text data, enabling it to capture human language patterns, nuances, and complexities’ (p. 2).

AI is always driven by algorithms, which does not mean exactly the opposite: ‘(...) while the developments around AI always involve algorithms, neither all the algorithms need AI’ (Vicente, 2023, p. 25). Algorithms are programmed sequences that were and are applied to digital devices to organise the activity within these devices, with different levels of organisation and functionality, changeable from time to time. Its social adherence suggests it is widely common.

Having reported limitations such as information bias or inaccuracy, the developing organisation behind it is OpenAI, founded by the entrepreneur and former Senior Advisor to the President of the United States of America (USA), Elon Musk and Sam Altman, the current CEO. On the one hand, ‘ChatGPT can enhance productivity and efficiency’ or ‘assist with educational and programming endeavours’, but, on the other

hand, ‘ethical concerns and uncertainties surrounding potential job displacement are among the negative consequences that arise from this technology’ (p. 19). OpenAI has also developed software such as the image creator DALL-E. Calling for the need for its ‘further scrutiny’, Westberg and Kvåle (2024) have found DALL-E imagery fosters ‘Authenticating Contextualization, Conformist Diversity, Innovative Surrealization and Promotional Positivity’ (p. 22).

Despite the frequent social approach towards ChatGPT and other chatbots, such as Gemini or DeepSeek, due to its closeness to smartphone users (e.g., Amado & Reuters, 2025), there are other domains where AI takes an increasingly relevant place. According to Vicente (2023), the investment on AI and algorithm optimisation is directed at several fields: “(...) mobility and transport industries (self-driving cars), healthcare, development of medicines and biotechnology, IT infrastructures, Web hosting, business processes and supporting services, and on media, social platforms, and marketing” (p. 88). When his book was released, the author wrote that China, the USA, and European Union were the top investors. Thus, it becomes clear that AI is expanding its influence across the world.

Emerging Challenges: Governance, Ethics, and Transparency

In times of easiness of access to devices (e.g., Cordeiro, 2024), the Internet, and social media (Kemp, 2024), some challenges arise. The review of Jiang and colleagues concludes that ‘several troughs may once again take place if the technologies/applications cannot be grounded swiftly according to the expectations from the dominant stakeholders (inventors rather than the general public)’ (2022, p. 15). Those transformations are, therefore, highly dependent on several parts, with distinctive interests. Studies linking journalism to AI are emerging, which are motivating the consolidation ‘a priority research

area in the coming years to study these two scopes, especially in what comes to ‘detect deep fake’ and ‘AI-generated’ activity (p. 4).

Widen the scope, there are some other negatively critical issues associated with AI. O’Halloran (2023) underlines the study of behaviour, the interference of algorithms with the meaning production and, therefore, the social (semiotic) systems, or the lack of digital literacy. The author calls for the need for more transparency by companies behind online platforms, digital and data literacy, and recommends assisting ‘with the development of Explainable AI algorithms (with clarity about the results) to understand the distribution and filtering of information, together with its inherent biases and possibilities for social change’ (p. 196).

In addition, some literature points to the domination of ideologies linked to the feminisation of AI and the reproduction of gender inequality. Some examples are the voice assistants, such as Alexa or Siri, or the powered robots, such as Sophia. As it happens with Similarly to advertising female models, Borau (2025) contends that female AI agents may represent ‘a significant source of deception, gender stereotyping, and objectification’ on potentially boosting ‘harm to women’ (p. 14). Apropos, in Portugal, a beta version of the chatbot named Amália, in honour of the female fado singer Amália Rodrigues, is going to be launched in 2025 (Marcela, 2025). Other studies have proposed similar effects of GenAI in control and surveillance, the spread of fake news, and political influence.

Positive Potentials and New Regulations

Current literature has emphasised a more positive face of GenAI (e.g., Jiang et al., 2022). Within the media field, even accounting for the risks, the study of Welter and

Canavilhas (2023) exemplifies it through the successful action of fact-checking mechanisms and media professionals in detecting manipulated information. Building on software and hardware for computer games and calling out for the need to ensure safe spaces, Bory (2019) goes further, though, by writing that AI needs to be characterised by shared belief in its positive impact, as in its intrinsic goodness (p. 638). Despite there is need for more debate and to regulate domains such as work rights, justice, or environmental sustainability, Vicente (2023) argues that national and European governance towards AI is improving. The effort to build up 'AI Ethics' exemplifies so (p. 100). Apropos, approved in December 2023, the Artificial Intelligence Act was recently implemented by the European Parliament (Yakimova & Ojamo, 2024). This law endorses EU States to ensure safety, limit law enforcement on biometry, tackle manipulation or exploitation of users, and exercise transparency towards users.

Media, future, and AI

Media technologies shape one's perceptions and representations of time, affecting work, communication, and cultural memory (Fordyce, 2020; Ribeiro, 2024). While digital media are often associated with speed and instantaneity, their temporal implications are diverse and not uniform (Fordyce, 2020; Keightley et al., 2021). Researchers have explored how media reconfigure relationships between past, present, and future, examining anticipatory visions and the future-making capacity of networked services (Pentzold et al., 2020). The field has evolved from a marginal topic to a well-recognised study field, addressing issues such as liveness, simultaneous presence, and infrastructures for temporal mediation (Kaun et al., 2016).

Scholars emphasise the need to consider historical continuities and the coexistence of old and new media when analysing mediated time in contemporary society (Keightley et al., 2021).

Mediated Futures: Influencing Present Actions

Indeed, media play a central role in constructing representations of the future, which in turn have a determining function in guiding human actions in the present. As extensively documented in the literature, future representations directly influence attitudes and behaviours, potentially motivating action and enhancing performance, or, conversely, leading to discouragement and frustration, particularly when they are associated with technology and the promises and evils it conveys. This phenomenon, examined across various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and economics, reveals the strong dependence between future visions and the organisation of everyday life.

The literature suggests that future representations are fundamental in modulating present actions. Zimbardo and Boyd (2008), in their studies on "temporal perspective," emphasise that individual perceptions of the future directly affect well-being and motivation. In sociology, Adam and Groves (2011) develop the thesis that the future is largely constructed in the present, with future images influencing current actions in complex and sometimes paradoxical ways. In economics, Akerlof and Shiller (2009) discuss how narratives about the economic future shape expectations and economic decisions, highlighting the direct relationship between optimism/pessimism and market confidence.

Media are powerful agents in disseminating future visions, employing a broad range of sources, including scientists and experts, to corroborate and amplify specific perspectives. In the context of environmental risks, Ulrich Beck (1992) explores how global risks and environmental uncertainties are communicated to the public, shaping both collective actions and public policies.

Moreover, the media play a critical role in promoting technological and scientific innovations, often presented as inevitable solutions to future challenges. However, this representation tends to be unilateral, focusing on the potential benefits of innovation without a critical analysis of its possible adverse impacts. For instance, AI is frequently highlighted as a transformative technology with the potential to profoundly shape the future. Yet, authors such as Bostrom (2014) and Tegmark (2017) warn against the ethical and social implications of AI development, calling for adequate critical evaluation or public participation.

Sociotechnical Imaginaries: Constructing Collective Futures

The concept of sociotechnical imaginaries, developed by Jasanoff and Kim (2015), offers a framework for understanding how future visions are constructed and disseminated by the media. These imaginaries refer to collective visions of desirable futures that emerge from the interaction between science, technology, and society. In the media context, these imaginaries often reflect hegemonic narratives that promote certain technological innovations as inevitable solutions to future challenges while marginalising alternative perspectives.

Emerging technologies, including recent AI developments, shape representations of futures that often oscillate between utopian and dystopian visions, with significant

implications for public policy and economic development. The construction of futures is not a neutral process; on the contrary, it is inherently politicised. Appadurai (2013) discusses the concept of the 'future as a cultural fact', highlighting how future representations are often contested, reflecting diverse ideologies and interests. Similarly, Gabrys (2017) analyses how digital technologies and datafication transform how the future is imagined and planned, emphasising the need for a more critical and inclusive approach. It is a process of politicisation directly linked to the idea that future visions are objects of debate and controversy, shaped by divergent values and interests, involving economic interests in the present and the future. That is to say that the construction of futures should, therefore, be understood as an ideological battleground where different imaginaries compete for hegemony, and the media is a central player in the process (Ceriani, 2017).

Toward a Democratic Construction of Futures

Research has underscored the growing importance of scientific and technological advancements in shaping future imaginaries, i.e., sociotechnical futures. This body of work reveals how the 'economy of the future' increasingly relies on the valorisation of sociotechnical imaginaries and expectations. Barbara Adam (1996, 2023) advocates for a more democratic approach to future construction, emphasising the necessity of public participation and the long-term consideration of technological impacts. Concept of 'temporalised democracy' (Hassan, 2007) suggests that decisions about the future should account for the understanding of the interactions between plans and ideals. The visions about the future and the negotiation of temporal rights and conflicts urge us to build on an ethics of care and shared responsibility (Adam & Groves, 2011). More recently,

Collins (2021) analyses the scenarios of the future reduced to being controlled by increasingly intelligent AI systems, warning against the growing trend of populism in science, which risks undermining the authority of science and its ability to demystify and critically assess a future that responds to society's needs and wellbeing.

The next section is dedicated to explaining how even newsmagazine covers act as important agents in the building up of certain types of representations, their communication, and therefore visions on the future and/in AI.

Newsmagazine covers, affordances, and current relevance

According to recent literature, newsmagazines, along with other magazine genres, play an important role in representing AI (e.g., Dumitrica & Jones, 2020; Hansen, 2022; Vicente & Dias-Trindade, 2021). Overall, it relates to a notion of human replacement by machines. Despite the threat to ‘magazine business’ by ‘contemporary developments’ such as ‘artificial intelligence’, David Abrahamson stresses ‘the sweet spot that magazines occupy between newspapers and books’ and the ‘very engaging and/or supportive role that magazines play in the life of their readers’ (2024, p. 16). In addition, many printed editions are still being released, while digital native’s have also been launched or printed ones are being digitalised (Holmes, 2020), or engaging in an intertextuality between print and digital (e.g., Ribeiro, 2023a; Ribeiro & Cabecinhas, 2023).

Produced by journalists and other media professionals (e.g., photographers) alongside a magazine’s identity, so ideologically compromised, newsmagazine covers are necessarily connected to the social world and its construction. Ideologies may be more or less revealed and their discursive strategies, necessarily related to the recontextualization

process inherent in any text (e.g., Ribeiro, 2024; van Dijk, 2017; van Leeuwen, 2008). A given ideology implies ‘general opinions and values that are represented through speaker models and indirectly inferred through expressed opinions or those remarked on discourse’ (van Dijk, 2017, p. 133). Moved by ideology, any semiotic material (e.g., press edition of a magazine) carries and develops several ‘affordances’ throughout time, ‘ideas and assumptions’ that “shape social communication and social behaviour” (Ledin & Machin, 2018, pp. 29-30). A given media outlet produces discourse through journalists’ and media professionals’ cognition under contexts (e.g., sociocultural, historical, and media).

Those socio-cognitive strategies enable the empowerment of semiotic products akin to texts (e.g., magazine covers), communicative events, gifted with textuality, coherence, cohesion, and intertextuality (Ledin & Machin, 2018; Pinto-Coelho, 2010; Ribeiro, 2024; van Leeuwen, 2022). They relate to other existent and/or previous texts, so they become a text, meaning they are meaningful wholes, gifted with meaning and able to replicate meaning. Thus, since texts develop in certain contexts, also made of resources, they reinforce or recreate other discourses, which repeat or innovate our ideas. These discourses assemble whole complexes of communicative events, leading to text (re)production. They convey ideologies that may be more or less unveiled through discourse analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2023; van Dijk, 2017).

Like any magazine cover, newsmagazines comprise several semiotic resources that function as modes, which are multimodal texts (Ribeiro, 2023a; 2024; Ribeiro & Cabecinhas, 2023; Tseronis, 2021). Authors such as Cardoso (2009) elaborate on their main elements, here understood as modes: ‘visibility lines (for instance, images), enunciation (titles), strength (main title and image), and fracture (themes’ separation mechanisms, when they are multiple)’, whose interrelationship turns covers into ‘a

multiplicity territory' (p. 164). While comprising various 'elements', each cover 'follows a specific arrangement strategy for the elements of the device, giving it a homogeneous and totalising reading' (p. 163). Cover headlines also matter, as they refer to the inside of the magazine and its stories (Dor, 2003). Systematically, they reproduce time and, simultaneously, experiences and representations of what is lived through that time or those times (e.g., Kitch, 2018; Luhmann, 2005). Similarly to newspapers, they assume an important role in constructing media cultural memory (e.g., Fordyce, 2020; Ribeiro, 2024).

Several literature resources point to their affordances (e.g., Cardoso, 2009; Cardoso & Figueiras, 2024; Dumitrica & Jones, 2020; Holmes, 2020; Ledin & Machin 2018, Ribeiro, 2023a; 2023b; Tseronis, 2021; Westberg, 2021). Some of them include: a) highlighting themes/topics that need to be socially thought and discussed as more relevant than others; b) engaging social more or less mediatised personalities aimed at enticing viewers/readers' attention and boosting social media activity and/or press and digital; c) attracting advertisement and other financing forms; d) developing affect with those and strengthen communities, with an eye on the magazine brand's identity and reputation; and e) fostering visions of pasts, presents, and futures, as well as media and collective and cultural memory construction.

Sample: media and editorial texts and contexts

Due to the explanatory nature of this research work, we relied on a sample of criteria type (Coutinho, 2011); moreover, the magazine covers under analysis consist of four cases, temporally situated between January and June 2023. All these cases employ a multimodal approach to AI explicitly.

Among the most read newsmagazines in the world (Majid, 2023), we chose the April 2, 2023's cover of *L'Espresso*. According to Padovani et al. (2021), a member of the European Investigative Collaboration, this newsmagazine assumes a particular role in 'investigative journalism and (...) watchdog function' as focusing 'on investigations and in-depth' (p. 372). It tends to adopt and express progressive values, such as standing against 'harassment and gender discrimination to the person' (p. 345). Currently belonging to L'Espresso Media S.p.A., based in Milano, Italy, founded in 1955, it has recently celebrated its 70th anniversary.

Then, the North American robust magazine industry is represented here by focusing on two covers of *TIME* editions from February 27 and March 6 and July 3. These are two due to their explicit mention of AI. Having celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2023, this magazine has also inspired standards formats of newsmagazines throughout the world with its successful 'formula'. This encompasses 'logically arranging news, in short sections', 'evaluating and interpreting news', 'writing in a clear, concise, and complete style', and 'emphasising personalities that starred the news' (Johnson & Prijatel, cited by Cardoso, 2009, p. 163). Originally designed to condense the week's news into a brief, accessible format for busy readers, *TIME* has consolidated the newsmagazine as a media genre. It remains one of the magazines with the highest circulation worldwide (Majid, 2023). Directed at 'provide trusted guidance about the ideas and people who shape and improve the world' (TIME, n.d.a, para. 2), it can be classified as a 'lean left', i.e., 'moderately align with liberal, progressive, or left-wing thought and/or policy agendas' (AllSides, 2023).

Finally, one from Portugal, reflecting the authors' country of origin, *Visão* newsmagazine (February 9), one of the most read in the country, both in print and digital circulations (APCT, n.d.). In what comes to its editorial views, it is oriented by 'pluralist

and solidary democracy values' (Visão, n.d., para. 3). It is also one of the oldest under circulation, founded in 1993, modelled after international publications like *TIME* and *Der Spiegel*. Acquired in 2018 by Trust in News, this conglomerate has been facing financial issues and laying off several of its journalists and media professionals (Santos, 2023).

Research design

The research question that guides this study is how newsmagazine covers multimodal constructions view the future about AI, particularly GenAI? To interpret those texts and provide a critical view towards them, we use Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) (Machin & Mayr, 2023). Such 'approach to communication is about describing the available choices of signs [referents], with a sense of what is available for achieving specific communicative aims' (p. 23). To stand for a critical view 'means 'denaturalising' language to reveal ideologies, absences, and taken-for-granted assumptions in texts, helping one to reveal the kinds of power interests buried in these texts' (p. 317). That said, it is relevant to come up with a framework analysis that allows such presuppositions to take shape in an empirical study.

Given that this work is of an exploratory nature, it is aimed at detail richness to discuss meanings and discourses they produce, following a deductive interpretative approach (e.g., Engbreetsen, 2023). Indeed, some studies have been conducted throughout the years towards newsmagazines within Multimodality, Social Semiotics, and/or Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (e.g., Ribeiro, 2023a; 2023b; Ribeiro & Cabecinhas, 2023; Tseronis, 2021). Additionally, recent literature has been adopting MCDA to comprehend AI uses and representations (e.g., Westberg & Kvåle, 2024). Based on several other

references, this chapter draws on a previously conceived framework by Ribeiro (2024) (cf. the appendix table).

Each resource points to different resources. Starting from the multimodal ones, the first one points to the participants involved, acknowledging identity forms such as gender, celebrity status, or age. Background and objects surround or engage them in a certain visual composition. Modality and colour point to the several indicators (e.g., contextualisation, detail, brightness) that express a certain degree of closeness to reality, either low (closer) or high (further), and the colours chosen and their customisation, helping the texts to come out and affirm themselves. Moving to actions and indexical links, these comprise several processes: emotional, what is emotionally expressed by oneself; mental, perceived through senses; verbal, what is suggested to be said and expressed; and material, what is reproduced by the text as an action indexed to social reality. Different angles may be depicted: horizontal, vertical, or oblique, promoting a closer or an open-wide approach, as well as a certain registered eye within what and who is represented (gaze). Information value consists of how information is arranged across each cover and, therefore, what value is given to it (e.g., the relations centre-margin, left-right, ideal-real, given-new, and top-bottom). Then, different material resources and people may be more or less highlighted on the page, so salience matters. Delimitation refers to the higher or lower degree of separation of different parts within the page, which impacts their salience too.

Some other multimodal resources are under analysis. Vocabulary is linked to an eye on verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and writing style, and grammar is linked to an eye on syntax. They can be directly depicted on the headlines, as well as their word articulation, allowing an identification of certain notions. To recall the past or to project the future may especially assume a crucial importance for this work. Word and sentence

construction permit one to describe a representation of the actors. The rhetorical potential of stylistic devices (e.g., metaphor, image) also deserves some attention. Resources also expose a certain cover story and their employment constructs subjects. Finally, discursive strategies are more or less strategically worked and applied to express certain ideologies about aspects of the media outlet involved and social reality, helping to unveil hidden ways of doing it. For example, a text that points to one defending women's rights in society and belonging to a feminist given movement may help to unveil a feminist ideology (e.g., van Dijk, 2017).

Regarding contextual resources, this relates to the resources to interpret social reality and its various contexts, meaning knowledge from different domains is involved, constructed from other texts. Texts within contexts produce discourse. Firstly, the intertextual ones; these link to the comparison of other texts, both produced by the analysed media and others that are relevant in some way. Media context points to the intertextual ones, but also to editorial practices. For example, *The Economist* commonly adopts a posture of contesting political and economic powers through certain rhetorical figures, which suggest certain positionings (e.g., Pérez, 2016; Tseronis, 2021). Sociocultural context and historical contexts provide a better understanding of social and cultural factors and phenomena. Finally, time is considered here due to inherent evolutionary dynamics related to each text and its relation to other texts and historical and political issues. The work of Ribeiro (2023b) has explored these issues in relation to time and its dynamics during the Coronavirus pandemic lockdowns in Portugal by using a Critical Discourse Analysis approach on newsmagazine covers and headlines.

Newsmagazine cover analysis

Cover	Magazine	Country	AI category	Key semiotic elements	Imaginary projected
<i>L'Espresso</i> (Apr 2023)	<i>L'Espresso</i>	Italy	AI (narrow)	Janus symbolism, colour tension	Cautionary, sovereignty-conscious future
<i>TIME</i> (Feb 2023)	<i>TIME</i>	USA	GenAI	ChatGPT simulation, colour contrast	Tech optimism + ethical caution
<i>TIME</i> (July 2023)	<i>TIME</i>	USA	AI + Platform Capitalism	Celebrity embodiment, pink/black tension	Entrepreneurial, capitalist future Attractive seductive
<i>Visão</i> (Feb 2023)	<i>Visão</i>	Portugal	AI + Climate	Abstract graphics, environment motifs	Sustainability-conscious, cautious engagement

***L'Espresso*: a cautionary vision of the future with AI**

(<https://bit.ly/3Zro5Vk>)

L'Espresso's cover implies an ambivalent discourse on the “Two-Faced Nature of Intelligence,” drawing a direct parallel to Janus, the Roman-Italian mythological figure known for his two faces—one gazing towards the past and the other towards the future (Birx, 2009). This imagery is central to the cover's exploration of human and artificial intelligence. Different lines may suggest diversity and complexity linked to cognitive processes and, thus, attitude, behaviour, and practice, emphasising a sense of delimitation within the page, but also meaningfully (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). On one hand, human intelligence represents a repository of historical knowledge, cultural wisdom, and cautious discernment. In contrast, artificial intelligence means forward-thinking innovation and the quest on new horizons. The visually graphic representation of a brain split in two contrasting halves serves as a potent symbol of this duality.

The headline “Nothing artificial replaces the brain” serves as a critical assertion of the role of human cognition in this transitional phase into the “AI era.” Here, the brain symbolises a cognitive duality—a mediation point between the organic (almost brown tone) and the synthetic (almost blue tone) (Heller, 2000/2014). Evoking Janus, the text positions AI as a transformative portal demanding both past and future insights, alongside the need to be cautious concerning the latter. Such a metaphor underscores a fundamental temporal transition, challenging us to think about the potentials and risks of AI with a blend of caution and optimism. Following authors such as Machin and Mayr (2023) or Tseronis (2021), visual and verbal resources altogether suggest that AI's purpose would not mean to replace human intelligence, but to augment it, even though stressing the need for humans to be cautious and attentive for that future to be avoided.

A firm positional stance (Carvalho, 2008) is comprehended by the following cover line: ‘Italo Calvino’s imaginary literary automaton challenges the author, but not the oeuvre’. This evokes Italo Calvino’s (1980/2009) essay, *Cybernetics and Ghosts*. His work defends that such oeuvre is itself gifted by the ability to prompt a unique experience of interaction, while one is reading or just facing it, regardless of whoever the author is. Indeed, Calvino mentions there is a human component strongly present and active in literature. Finally, another utterance within the *L’Espresso* cover: “Since technology remains human”. It is underlined what is expressed on the previous utterance, as well as the human side related to technological development, plus the need for cognition, reason, and action. A legitimisation through overlexicalisation (Machin & Mayr, 2023). In other words, the engagement of similar words, synonyms, or other multimodal resources within a certain (necessarily multimodal) text.

A discursive strategy dominates *L’Espresso*’s views on these matters, since the cover also enhances their promotion and identity construction: delegitimation. Following

van Leeuwen (2008), this relates to functionalization and passivation. Seen as not able to replace human activity, AI appears here as downsized through sharing a misbelief and sticking to past elements to justify its relevance and refuse an AI-dominated society. Contextually, this portrays cultural trends and law legitimation in Italy, such as the temporary inhibition of ChatGPT in the country (Ramalho, 2023), and following international trends, such as some universities in some countries, like the French SciencesPo (2023).

In any case, AI appears to be linked with the future and the dual capacity of humans to innovate and provide humankind's wellbeing. Acknowledging institutional developments in Italy, AI has been in the eye of media entities in the country. In light of Padovani and colleagues (2021), one of the more recent measures within that context 'is the establishment of PA Social, an Italian public communicators association that through the Osservatorio Nazionale sulla Comunicazione Digitale [National Observatory on Digital Communication] (...) fosters innovation in the field of public authorities' communication' (p. 353). Indeed, on a reminder note, the Government did impede its usage in the country, having reversed such decision a month later (McCallum, 2023), which conveys a desire to take control over the AI mechanisms and its societal impacts in the country, despite the sociocultural context influence due to the national and EU's regulatory agencies.

Chatbot-user interaction simulation

(<https://bit.ly/3COElqG>)

The February 27 *TIME* magazine cover features a simulated conversation with ChatGPT and employs semiotic and discursive strategies to articulate the complex duality

of AI as both a hopeful and potentially alarming force. Set against a minimalist grey background within a computerised arrangement (low modality) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021), the chatbot's artificial design uses contrasting colour tones. Green symbolises optimism and red represents risk (Heller, 2000/2014). The goal is to encapsulate AI's ambiguous role in contemporary society. The juxtaposition of *TIME*'s branding alongside ChatGPT's green icon emphasises the human-machine dynamic while suggesting ChatGPT's goal of mimicking human-like interaction.

The construction of a conversation between two parts, one of them a person from *TIME*, suggests it is two by the headline on the right side of the cover, and highlighting the importance of the human in conversation and knowledge production. The capability to aspire as akin to humans, the chat box conveys, deserves to be accounted for, which is represented by the approaches and the chosen parts of the chat. Actors are then the "humans", allowing one to comprehend a discursive strategy of impersonalisation (any human) (van Leeuwen, 2008). Chat GPT is portrayed as an entity that is embodied by a set of people belonging to Open AI as active actors, even though some degree of passivity of Chat GPT seems to be suggested by the newsmagazine editorial board with the choices for the cover. Passivation here means that people are understood as passive actors, the potential users, and, suggestively the society (Carvalho, 2008; van Leeuwen, 2008). Taking from Carvalho (2008), the writing style is conversational. The careful Chat GPT's approach diverges from the informal *TIME*'s "humans" one. The usage of present tense forms and looking at future possibilities through modality (Machin & Mayr, 2023): "can", "could", or "may not". The highlight of "attention-grabbing" and "thought-provoking" dimensions also points to the dependence on those by the media global landscape (e.g., Abrahamson, 2024; Cardoso, 2009; Holmes, 2020).

One can identify some more resources due to the semiotic richness of this cover and its verbal and necessarily multimodal resources. The chat box is challenged by the ‘humans’ with the following question: ‘What do you think (...)?’ It suggests a seek for contradictions, simultaneously reporting an alterity, human versus machine. Within the same interrogation, the use of the metaphor “Arms Race”. Taking from Carvalho (2008) and van Leeuwen (2008), delegitimation represents a discursive strategy in an explicit way. Compared to *L’Espresso*, it goes in line with it. Moreover, the allegory and image “AI Arms Race” along with the utterance comprehending the gerund mood (Machin & Mayr, 2023) “Changing Everything” evoke the expansive, rapid, and continuous influence of AI on societal structures. The notion of the future as already manifesting is further emphasised in *TIME*’s June 2023 cover, depicting a competitive “RACE” in AI, where the chatbot not only poses critical questions but also anticipates human tendencies to relinquish responsibility. Through ChatGPT’s responses, the cover self-reflexively critiques media sensationalism, aligning with *TIME*’s broader commentary on AI’s societal impact.

In comparison to other covers of the same magazine, the approach to the metaverse by a 2022 edition is very similar to this one, rehearsing on the cover “INTO THE METAVERSE/ THE NEXT DIGITAL ERA WILL CHANGE EVERYTHING” (Ball, 2022). A coincidental approach to the future as changeable and challenging. For example, related to digital technologies, a previous cover has announced 2006 as “the year of the YouTube generation” (TIME, n.d.b), which reinforces *TIME*’s ability to create very clear representations of different time frames and temporalities.

Again, the cover personifies “humans” as agents and, simultaneously, underscores the significance of human agency in an AI-dominated landscape, given the delimited space on the page (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). In a broader socio-cultural context,

TIME positions itself as an authoritative voice forecasting global trends (e.g., Cardoso, 2009), drawing parallels between the current AI discourse and past technological shifts. This intertextuality situates AI within an ongoing narrative of technological and ethical evolution, spotlighting the pressing need for human responsibility in steering AI's future. Thus, *TIME*'s cover communicates a dual message: it illuminates AI's capabilities while simultaneously interrogating its ethical implications, somehow settling out the apparent unharmed nature of AI, through the friendly chatbot. An illustrative example of this is the AI software Dall-E and its promotion of positivity and refusal of negative representations (Westberg & Kvåle, 2024).

AI and celebrity embodiment

(<https://bit.ly/49gGxna>)

The July 3 *TIME* magazine cover featuring Kim Kardashian serves as a rich semiotic text intertwining influence, femininity, and evolving leadership, particularly in relation to AI and the economy of the future. Kardashian epitomises a contemporary shift in leadership paradigms, challenging traditional gender norms. North American businesswoman, digital influencer, model, and socialite, followed by more than 346 million followers on Instagram in 2023, she became famous after featuring in a reality show called *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*. On this cover, she wears a black dress that highlights her body curves. Her thighs get especially noticeable, but also her lips. Throughout the years, she has inspired many people, women and girls to look for those body parts (Olya, 2015), raising awareness by Governments on butt-lift-surgeries among professionals in the UK (Spary, 2019), or more recently by US states' regulators (Chang & News, 2023). All of that enabled her to become a worldwide-known celebrity. As so,

she comprises several features that have turned her into a media pseudo-event's prompter and relevant reader attention grabber (e.g., Klecker, 2020; Ribeiro, 2024).

Benefiting from her worldwide online influence, SKIMS is a digitally based lingerie company that the celebrity owns. Her representation encapsulates not just celebrity status but also broader societal trends toward female empowerment. The cover employs multimodal resources (e.g., colour, imagery, and typography) to weave a narrative connecting Kardashian's persona with the influence of digital technologies and AI. The pink background juxtaposed with Kardashian's black attire creates a visual tension resonant with current discourses on beauty and power. This colour scheme suggests both sensuality and strength (Heller, 2000/2014), highlighting her evolution as a cultural icon. At the same time, this may contribute to fostering Kardashian's and other women's objectifying appropriation through their physical body parts, as previously noticed from AI female agents, disregarding their aspirations, voices, or emphasising stereotypes (e.g., Borau, 2025; Ribeiro, 2023a; Ribeiro & Cabecinhas, 2023).

Looking at the material and emotional processes implied in this multimodal composition (Ledin & Machin, 2018), Kardashian's confident pose conveys authority. Such is aligned with the concept of "choice feminism" (Cabas-Mijares & Jenkins, 2022). This expression "represents an understanding of choice that embraces the display of a woman's sexuality as a symbol of personal freedom" (p. 12). A woman who can be a leader. Her sexualized image is reframed as a form of empowerment, also here implying both popular and neoliberal expressions of feminism, regarding her ideal promotion of gender equality through body capitalisation and commodification (Banet-Weiser et al., 2022; Gill, 2021). Such is promoted by her lingerie brand, which is indeed mentioned on the cover page. In 2023, due to her business, she was rated as a close-to-be

businesswoman on the top 400 billionaires in the USA by *Forbes* magazine (Zamora, 2023).

By centring her in the cover design, *TIME* affirms her as a leading voice in business and entertainment culture, while engaging with these two domains, highly important for the media and economic models (e.g., Abrahamson, 2024; Cardoso, 2009; Holmes, 2020). The abstract background joining red and black tones further amplifies the dominance of AI-digital related companies across the globe, while the image of the celebrity reinforces the immediacy of the future open to the feminine power. Similarly to other magazine covers featuring women and in a multimodally manoeuvred sexualization, this can promote sexualization and lead to her objectification and self-objectification (e.g., Ribeiro, 2023a; Ribeiro & Cabecinhas, 2023).

She is pointed as being a ‘leader’ along with “89 more leaders”, this woman holds an ‘influential company’, able to influence other international and global trends, due to her influence power in many domains, such as technology (e.g., van Dijck et al., 2018), entertainment, or politics. Explicitly mentioned on the cover, sided by “SKIMS”, Kardashian’s company, there are “OPENAI”, “TIKTOK” or “DISNEY”. These appear underlined as some of the superlative adjective “MOST INFLUENTIAL COMPANIES”, while emphasising their path to reach what they represent today, risking brand promotion, and their identity in a positive, favourable way. “OPENAI” comes here related to other brands that have been digitalised themselves, such as “DISNEY”. The attention may end up on her body and celebrity past texts, instead of raising awareness related to AI and its organisational landscape.

Visão: Human agency in an AI-driven future

(<https://bit.ly/3OzvE6h>)

Visão's cover emphasises critical themes about artificial intelligence (AI) and its implications for the future. The striking image of a woman's partially visible face symbolises change, women's empowerment, and their involvement with the responsibility for the future. However, in a similar way to July 3's *TIME* magazine cover, such face blurriness also alludes to the physical appropriation of female facial traces, enhancing the visible side of women and less their human agency (Borau, 2025). The cover's abstract background points to a distance from concrete reality, as well as the whole digital illustration (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021), as filled with shapes and colours like origami triangles. It evokes a sense of uncertainty while hinting at potential growth. Animal species such as butterflies and birds symbolise freedom and transformation, promoting a hopeful message amid potential chaos and their simultaneous threat, considering the surrounding buildings, world activity, and a cover line within the page "THE NUMBERS OF POLLUTION IN THE CITIES".

The colour palette plays a significant role. The different tones of green symbolise balance and hope for the future, while contrasting colours like orange suggest hazard and energy and hot temperatures and, considering the brown colour, ugliness and industrialisation (e.g., Heller, 2000/2014; van Leeuwen, 2022), possibly portraying the climate change threat. One can unveil here a future of possibilities. Red develops a sense of intervention and war, highlighted by the cover line "WARS ARE ALSO WON WITH WORDS". Black works as a mystery, a convincing colour, functional, but also of negativity, war (Heller, 2000/2014). Noting on the "GREEN DOSSIER" cover line, this points to environmental issues, which appears to follow the notion of an AI's invasive effects, discussing "POLLUTION NUMBERS IN CITIES", while conveying an image of an appearance of political discussion and possible solutions. This follows an emergent

discussion both by the media and social media users about climate change in Portugal (e.g., Capoano et al., 2023). There is an abstract representation that mirrors the unpredictable nature of technological advancements.

The multimodal resources woven through this cover highlight the complexities of human interaction with AI, including lexical and grammatical items. Examples of stylistic features such as metaphors and images (Cunha & Cintra, 1997) through lexical ones like “SHOCK,” “CONFRONTATION,” and “JOBS SHOOK” further underscore the chaotic implications of AI on employment, education, and social dynamics (“What is the impact on economy, labor relations, teaching, art creation, and inclusively on how we communicate and think?”). This narrative positions magazines as both informative and reflexive agents, revealing societal anxieties surrounding the capabilities and implications of AI. This interplay reflects the dual (and tragic) nature of scientific and technological development and the environmental challenges emerging from human intervention. Despite such negative emotional processes (Ledin & Machin, 2018), particularly regarding the workforce in Portugal’s organisations, a recent study by the recognised entity for many national-reach studies Francisco Manuel dos Santos Foundation, has contradicted those.

Conveying someone who is sleeping and distracted, as emotional and material processes (Ledin & Machin, 2018), from the world’s “new era” imagery of closed eyes suggests a need for awakening to the changes AI brings, and the clock’s presence reinforces the temporal urgency tied to the question written on the cover: “How is it going to change our life?”. This personalisation aims at the viewer/reader more likely through a form of a “demand image” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021), here through a rhetorical question (Carvalho, 2008; Cunha & Cintra, 1997). At its centre, even though more open to the future than *L’Espresso*’s, the human figure represents humanity’s essential role in

shaping and responding to AI advancements (e.g., Vicente, 2023). The relatively chaotic organisation of visual resources conveys impending change, reinforcing the idea that the relation of human and artificial intelligences is fraught with complexity.

Salience is ensured by the centralised computer-edited illustration, but also through black and yellow bars, of which one is highlighted with the utterance: “ARAÚJO AND ZAMBUJO/ STORIES AND SECRETS BETWEEN FRIENDS”. This cover line is followed by the faces of Miguel Araújo and António Zambujo, who are two well-known musicians in Portugal linked to music. The inclusion of personal narratives further connects celebrity culture with themes of influence, more precisely by identifying and personalising their names (van Leeuwen, 2008). And that is “FRIENDS”, linking the cover to an informal writing style and environment between them, helping to foster curiosity from viewers and readers (e.g., Cardoso, 2009). It appears to show that *Visão* has something else to talk about, rather than AI and hard news. Regarding its overall design, it appears to contradict the typical *TIME* and *The Economist* magazines’ covers. These tend to be more visually and verbally uniform and coherent (e.g., Tseronis, 2021). As previously said, one may relate such mixture of resources to a social chaos that the cover seems to portray, showing citizens as passive actors in a world where they should pay increasing attention and be more civically active along with the development of more data literacy (e.g., O’Halloran, 2023; van Leeuwen, 2008).

Discussion

Four covers, four constructions of visions of the future concerning AI. Starting from the Italian *L’Espresso*, the magazine puts the brain at the centre, i.e., the human thinking. This centralisation is specially made with resources such as a computerised representation

of a brain, many lines alluding to synapses, colours, or lexical and grammatical items. These relate to Italian literature, appealing to the Italian sense of belonging, while conveying a clear humanist ideology towards AI. One can also identify a glocalised vision, in a way that it reflects on a globalised phenomenon with a local/ national view (Robertson, 1995). In this case, the future allegorically belongs to the human brain.

Not differently, the Portuguese *Visão* highly invests in low-modality representational and iconographic arrangements. Such low modality suggests the change to a new ‘era’, in line with the written text at the bottom of the page, but also to overloaded societies. A dichotomisation becomes clear: humans versus environment and digital technology. A clear human face is female, which may reproduce not new ‘ideas and assumptions’ (Ledin & Machin, 2018) about women’s gender social roles and how they are being engaged in AI through their physical body parts (e.g., Borau, 2025). Its verbal resources project the social impact across several contexts within the Portuguese society. Circumstantialisation linked to activation is a powerful discursive strategy implied in this media text (van Leeuwen, 2008). These are strongly realised by prepositions such as ‘how’, ‘on’ or ‘even’. These endorse an argumentation sustaining the main thesis introduced by the headline ‘ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE/ HOW IT IS GOING TO CHANGE OUR LIVES’. The future is technology-based, it is needed to get ready for how it will impacts in daily lives.

Moving to *TIME*, starting from the February 27/ March 6 cover, the lexical and grammatical items dominate the page alongside the visual multimodal composition of the chat surface. These attempt to portray a conversation between ‘humans’, who author the cover article, and OpenAI’s chatbot. On the one hand, it embodies the social practice of the usage of these chatbots. On the other hand, such embodiment warns about the need for critical thinking while using them and interacting with media journalism texts,

following the platform's answer to a question put by those 'humans' about a *TIME* cover. Low modality dominates through writing (cf. Machin & Mayr, 2023): the use of modal verbs 'can' or 'could' contributes to a high level of abstraction, simultaneously engaging in an overlexicalisation, which reinforces such idea of unclearness, of future projection. The shadow at the bottom also conveys such blurred vision: 'What is coming after?'. This portrays less certainty compared to the previous covers. However, this study confirms what others have said about *TIME* covers on its 'hegemonic status of technological determinism in the representation of ICTs [Information and Communication Technologies]' (Dumitrica & Jones, 2020, p. 2538).

Indeed, the July 3's cover aligns with such 'determinism'. The celebrity under the spotlight emerged from TV and got empowered by digital platforms, such as Instagram or Snapchat, constructing a worldwide recognition and leading her to become a billionaire entrepreneur. This goes along with the other organisations named, including the celebrity's company, SKIMS, and OpenAI. In an extension of the multimodality view upon this text, one should note on colour, such as black and different tonalities of pink, clothing, which highlights the woman's body silhouette and curves and suggests a sexualised femininity and body objectification, or even clothing crocodile leather or scenario's textures (e.g., Iqani, 2012). As previously mentioned, the celebrity is usually noticeable by her physical appearance and fashion trends. To this magazine, the future encompasses her and the named organisations, submersed in economic liberalism (organisations) and neoliberalism (individual embodiment of liberalism) while linking feminist ideals to these economically based views.

As is evident, across all covers, a shared reliance on metaphors (gods, humans, machines) to articulate AI stands out, framing it as simultaneously promising and risky, innovative yet uncertain. Through their multimodal resources, such as colour schemes,

metaphoric language, typography, and strategic visual-verbal compositions, these covers weave narratives that attract, guide, and anchor readers within specific visions of technological futures. At the same time, these leave important messages about how AI is perceived as a powerful change that is going to affect countries differently. Meanings attached to some elements that were referred to above are only discernible if the spatial and temporal boundaries of each country where magazines are located are considered.

L'Espresso foregrounds sovereignty, regulatory caution, and the preservation of national agency over AI, resonating with Italy's and the EU's cautious regulatory culture and public debates on data sovereignty and technological dependency. *Visão* ties AI explicitly to environmental sustainability and societal wellbeing, adopting a reflective, cautious perspective consistent with European commitments to ethical and sustainable technological transitions. In contrast, *TIME* projects techno-optimism, entrepreneurial acceleration, and platform capitalism, aligning with neoliberal imaginaries and market-centric visions of technological progress, spread across the world. While these editorial choices may not explicitly reflect the authors' intentions, they align with broader political cultures and geopolitical positions, demonstrating subtle but telling differences between, for instance, the USA and European (particularly Southern European) stances towards AI governance and imaginaries.

Applying Luhmann's systems theory, these covers operate as autopoietic communicative systems, producing and reproducing meaning in self-referential loops that connect past, present, and future. The predictive element (e.g., AI will change everything') is inextricably linked to these loops, as covers draw on past technological disruption discourses (e.g., automation, digital revolutions) to frame AI's impacts while anchoring them in present societal concerns around inequality, ethical dilemmas, and labour transformations. Semiotic strategies—such as the Janus duality on *L'Espresso* or

the ChatGPT simulation on *TIME*—demonstrate how these narratives are continuously recontextualized and renewed within the media system, often implicitly (e.g., Janus is symbolically present but unnamed), generating layered temporal narratives that shape how societies now imagine, accept, or contest AI's role in their futures concerning others and a globalized, dependent world.

Final remarks

This chapter delved into this agency of magazine covers in crafting future-oriented narratives, examining four covers published in 2023 by *L'Espresso*, *TIME*, and *Visão*. MCDA was developed here to explore how these covers function as agents of temporalization, weaving complex discourses about AI and its anticipated impacts. Drawing from Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, this work follows the idea that communication is viewed as an autopoietic process—a self-referential loop that perpetuates itself through successive and emergent meanings in which temporality becomes central: magazine covers are temporally evolving, they don't just reflect the present moment, but they also project futures that shape our current understanding of the world yet to come.

Approaching AI, *L'Espresso* uses the myth of Janus, namely through the Roman god with two faces now looking simultaneously forward and backward, as a way to embody the paradox of the future. This cover reveals that our visions of what lies ahead are inextricably linked to current anxieties and aspirations, somehow reminding the role of politics in that future. The *TIME* magazine cover from 27 February 2023 takes a normalising approach, using ChatGPT in order to show AI's transformative power, despite taking its future for granted. This cover highlights the potential for AI to generate meanings and mediate human interactions, suggesting a possible future where AI systems

are active agents in social and cultural life, emphasising also the ethical dilemmas of AI. In slight contrast, *Visão* reinforces the role of human agency amidst technological upheaval. This cover portrays humanity not as passive subjects but as active shapers of the future, emphasising adaptability and resistance. Socio-semiotically, it echoes the broader message that while AI may be transformative, the human capacity to respond critically remains important.

Such as information value, salience, or delimitation, compositional resources of magazine covers are not arbitrary. Instead, they construct specific temporal narratives that engage readers in a form of “time travel,” connecting their present to imagined futures. This analysis reveals that magazine covers are not only temporalised: they are active agents in constructing cultural narratives about AI and the future, also serving to warn about trends and new forms of worldwide leadership and power. One example is the *TIME* magazine cover featuring Kim Kardashian, affirming her role as a trailblazer in the digital age. This cover illustrates how celebrity culture, AI, and the evolving notion of leadership are converging to reshape societal norms and the global economy of the future, perhaps more prone to economic oligopolies and alluding to increasing challenges for attaining global risks.

Narratives presented on magazine covers underline a tendency to follow a ‘*dramaturgical time regime*’ (Oomen et al., 2022, p. 254). However, they also convey the rise of ‘*tragic time regimes*’ (Ramos Torre, 2018). This is reflected in the way AI is presented as a transformative force with disparate implications, in the face of which individuals are compelled to make their choices.

Being important in interpreting political stances as regards AI, development, and democracy, cover magazine texts provide a means of understanding how societies see themselves in relation to others, while encapsulating their fears and hopes. They operate

in different layers of time at the same moment, which means that several rhetorical resources entangled in AI discourse are difficult to be 'translatable' or 'travelling' across time and space boundaries', also representing cultural and political fences.

As these magazine covers remind their viewers/readers, the future is not a fixed outcome, but a constant and evolving construct, aligning with Luhmann's and other authors' views (Adam & Groves, 2011). Despite this “inevitability” of permanent change, we need to understand that these processes of generative AI development are not neutral; they are ideologically based, as they are moved by actors with interests to reproduce and maintain. Magazine covers are grounded in those soils of interests, criticism and creativity. Therefore, they do not allow discernment of a single and fixed pattern as regards the implications and development of AI. Therefore, assuming the controversial side of AI and media for analysing it, this study's findings highlight the need for critical digital media and AI and time literacy, as a crucial skill for participating and preparing citizens for the socio-technical livingspaces of the future. In this respect, one can put that media has a responsibility: not to present the future as an inevitable result of a linear inevitable trajectory, but to cultivate participatory contexts of discussion that encourage critical engagement in future-making with/ in AI.

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Appendix

Table 1: Framework analysis

Multimodal resources	Participants
	Background and objects
	Modality and colour
	Actions and indexical links

	Angles
	Proximity
	Information value
	Salience
	Delimitation
	Vocabulary items
	Grammar items
	Actors
	Stylistic devices
	Topic constructions
	Discursive strategies
Contextual resources	Intertextual
	Media
	Sociocultural
	Time

Table 1: A MCDA framework adapted from Ribeiro’s (2024), based on Carvalho (2008), Kress and van Leeuwen (2021), Ledin and Machin (2018), Machin and Mayr (2023), Ribeiro (2023a; 2023b), Ribeiro and Cabecinhas (2023), Tseronis (2021), van Dijk (2017), and van Leeuwen (2021).

Glossary

- **Autopoiesis:** Self-producing systems that sustain themselves through communication.
- **Cybernetics:** Study of information and communication in machines and living beings, and how they are controlled and managed.

- **Generative AI (GenAI):** AI systems that generate new content.
- **Newsmagazines:** usually weekly or monthly magazines directed to news that concerns hard news, i.e., in-depth topics in society about politics, economy, environment, and others, comprising short or medium-length news articles and investigative journalism reports alongside photographs and somehow impactful cover productions.
- **Sociotechnical Imaginaries:** Collective visions of desirable futures shaped by technology and society.