Public Abstract

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This research analyzes coverage of major artificial intelligence events representing the thematic concept of “man versus machine.” Rooted in grounded theory and rhetorical criticism, this research applies symbolic convergence theory and fantasy theme analysis to reporting from the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post immediately surrounding three cultural and scientific milestones in the development of artificial intelligence technology: IBM Deep Blue's 1997 defeat of chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov; IBM Watson's 2011 defeat of Jeopardy! champions Ken Jennings and Brad Rutter; and Google DeepMind AlphaGo's 2016 defeat of Go 9 dan Lee Sedol. This research analyzes how symbolic realities are dramatized in the context of these events such that the competitions themselves represent ideological battles between humanism or technological superiority. This research also demonstrates subtle variations in how fantasy themes and rhetorical visions manifest in coverage from each outlet, amounting to what is effectively a competition for shared consciousness between these two competing ideological constructs.