



The Most Magical AI on Earth? How Magical Discourses Normalize and Legitimate AI Systems

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Abstract: AI-driven systems promise to make our lives easier and make businesses more efficient and profitable. Yet, the quest to realize these promises often obscures concerns about their potential to violate privacy, exacerbate inequities, impinge on human rights and freedoms, and wreak environmental havoc. Moreover, slippage between the possibilities of what such systems *could* do and what they actually *can* do help propel cultural and economic investments in AI in spite of these concerns. Visions of technologies as magical, in particular, shift attention away from their potential harmful impacts to the bright future they might bring. The purpose of this project is to explore how discourses about the “magical” qualities of AI-driven systems can obscure—and even legitimize—the exploitative nature of such technologies. We pursue this aim through a multi-phase case study of Disney’s MyMagic+ system, one that mirrors the goals and operational logics of Big Tech platforms like Facebook and Google, but has not faced the same level of scrutiny. The questions guiding this pilot study are: How does Disney use the language of magic to describe the MyMagic+ system? In what ways does Disney’s use of magical discourses address, detract, and/or obscure the potential concerns posed by the MyMagic+ system?