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Human-Machine Narration. A Paradigm for Understanding GenAI Storytelling

Work on the intersection of GenAI and narrative has mostly been focused on describing the textual outputs of human-machine interactions (Fletcher 2021; Hayles 2023; Phelan 2024) or on probing the biased underpinnings of the algorithms that power AI models (Gillespie 2024). Less attention has been paid to how and why people engage in narrative interactions with machines that are designed to communicate. In this paper, we suggest a paradigm for understanding what we will refer to as *Human-Machine Narration* (HMN). Drawing on the frameworks of Narratives-as-practices (Bamberg 2012; Giaxoglou and Georgakopoulou 2021) and Human-Machine Communication (Guzman and Lewis 2020; Hepp et al. 2024), we offer two arguments. First, even if GenAI does not tell stories on its own, an increasing number of stories are untellable without GenAI. Second, to grasp these new narrative practices, we should approach them as entanglements of human intention, algorithmic automation, and textual structures. We demonstrate the potential of the paradigm by examining HMN in two cases: a public tweet by OpenAI’s CEO Sam Altman and a series of personal interactions between a user and a social chatbot.

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