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DOOMERISM AND CHATGPT: DEVELOPERS BECOME DOOMERS FOR THE NEXT DISASTER

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the manufacture of conflict in AI discourse, focusing on how developers, executives, and affiliated technocrats articulated doomer narratives surrounding ChatGPT and other advanced AI systems. Drawing on a post-positivist research paradigm, the study employed a qualitative case study design using an online literature review to collect publicly available statements, policy documents, corporate communications, and media reports. Purposive sampling was applied to select materials that exemplified catastrophic risk framing, technocratic authority, and narrative strategies designed to shape public perception. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns in the construction of AI risk, the legitimization of technocratic oversight, and the concentration of power within leading AI organizations. Findings revealed that AI doomer discourse frequently employed metaphors, high-certainty modality, and urgency framing, which amplified perceptions of existential and systemic risk. This discourse not only primed the public for fear-driven compliance but also justified centralized governance, restricted access, and regulatory authority among technocratic elites. The parallels with crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how manufactured conflict could legitimize technocratic decision-making in global emergencies. The study argued that these dynamics had significant implications for democratic governance, public understanding of AI, and power concentration in the AI industry. It further emphasized the importance of emancipatory AI education to cultivate critical literacy, ethical responsibility, and participatory engagement, countering fear-based narratives and fostering informed public deliberation. By linking discourse analysis with governance and sociotechnical theory, the study contributed to understanding how language, narrative, and expertise intersected to shape public perception and policy in high-stakes technological contexts.

Keywords: AI doomer discourse, technocratic authority, manufactured conflict, ChatGPT, public perception, governance, thematic analysis, emancipatory AI education

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In an era defined by technological acceleration and global uncertainty, the narratives surrounding artificial intelligence (AI) have assumed a uniquely performative role. AI, particularly advanced generative systems like ChatGPT, is frequently depicted in public discourse as a source of existential and systemic risk, with experts, corporate leaders, and policy technocrats framing the technology as both unprecedentedly powerful and perilously uncontrollable (Bellary & Marathe, 2025; Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025). Such AI doomer narratives do more than warn—they actively manufacture conflict, amplifying fear and urgency

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in ways that shape public perception, regulatory attention, and the concentration of institutional power (Bullock et al., 2025; Pérez-Urbina, 2025).

This phenomenon is not unprecedented. Similar discursive strategies were observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, where online and media amplification of risk constructed a sense of global emergency that justified the centralization of authority in organizations such as the World Health Organization, alongside the legitimization of extraordinary governance measures (Fauci et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). In the case of AI, however, the stakes extend beyond immediate health or economic outcomes; they implicate the very architecture of technological governance, the distribution of epistemic authority, and the public's cognitive and emotional engagement with risk. By foregrounding catastrophic framings, AI doomer narratives position technocrats as indispensable arbiters of safety while simultaneously priming the masses for regulatory acquiescence, market consolidation, and ideological alignment with elite-led governance models (OECD, 2025; West, 2025).

The implications of these discursive practices are profound. Not only do they reshape democratic deliberation and public understanding, but they also serve as a template for managing—or manufacturing—consent in response to future global crises. Whether the crisis is environmental, biological, or technological, the strategic construction of existential risk through online narratives offers a potent mechanism for social, political, and economic influence, privileging centralized authority and fostering compliance among global audiences. Understanding these mechanisms is therefore essential, both to critically interrogate the current governance of AI and to anticipate how similar discursive strategies might be deployed in response to the next global emergency.

By examining the intersections of AI risk framing, technocratic authority, and manufactured conflict, this study foregrounds the critical need for emancipatory education, participatory governance, and public literacy, offering a roadmap to resist fear-driven consolidation of power while promoting accountable and inclusive responses to technological and societal crises.

1.1 AI Doomer Discourse and Manufactured Conflict

AI doomer discourse refers to narratives emphasizing existential, catastrophic, or uncontrollable risks associated with advanced artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT (Bellary & Marathe, 2025; Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025). These narratives often employ linguistic devices, including metaphors, high-modality statements, and crisis framing, to amplify perceived risk (Times of India, 2025; LinkedIn, 2026). The strategic use of catastrophic framing can manufacture a sense of conflict, positioning AI development as inherently at odds with societal safety, and thereby justifying precautionary measures, centralized oversight, or restricted access (Bullock et al., 2025; West, 2025). Scholars argue that this process parallels pandemic discourse during COVID-19, where urgent framing reinforced centralized health authority and rapid intervention (Fauci et al., 2020; WHO, 2020).

1.2 AI Technocrats and Centralized Authority

Technocrats in AI—developers, executives, and policy experts—leverage doomer discourse to position themselves as indispensable authorities in managing AI risks (AP News, 2025; The Verge, 2025). By establishing internal safety committees, senior risk oversight roles, and

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participation in international policy forums (OECD, 2025), these actors consolidate institutional, regulatory, and narrative authority. This centralization mirrors the role of the WHO during COVID-19, where technical expertise justified global coordination and public trust (WHO, 2020; Fauci et al., 2020). The strategic framing of AI as a high-stakes and existential threat enables technocrats to influence regulatory norms, deployment standards, and global governance approaches (Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025; Pérez-Urbina, 2025).

1.3 Implications for Democratic Governance, Public Perception, and Power Concentration

The amplification of AI doomer narratives has notable socio-political consequences. First, democratic governance may be constrained as technocratic authority and corporate influence concentrate decision-making power, marginalizing public debate and participatory oversight (OECD, 2025; Pérez-Urbina, 2025). Second, public understanding can be skewed; the use of catastrophic metaphors and high-certainty language fosters fear, polarization, and reliance on elite guidance (Bellary & Marathe, 2025; Times of India, 2025). Third, industrial power concentration is reinforced, as leading AI corporations and technocrats gain legitimacy to control deployment, access, and regulatory discourse, potentially strengthening monopolistic tendencies (Bullock et al., 2025; AP News, 2025).

1.4 Towards Emancipatory AI Education

Recognizing the dynamics of AI doomer discourse has implications for AI education. Emancipatory AI education encourages critical literacy, interdisciplinary knowledge, and participatory engagement, enabling learners to analyze risk narratives, identify strategic framing, and develop informed judgments (Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025; Pérez-Urbina, 2025). Such approaches counter manufactured conflict by fostering reflexivity, ethical responsibility, and agency, equipping learners to participate in governance, policy-making, and ethical AI design rather than being passive recipients of fear-driven narratives (Bullock et al., 2025; West, 2025).

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of technocratic authoritarianism offers a useful lens to understand how AI doomer discourse and the manufacturing of conflict can concentrate power in the hands of experts and corporate elites. Technocratic authoritarianism is a form of governance in which decision-making authority is legitimized primarily by technical expertise, often at the expense of democratic deliberation, public participation, or pluralistic debate (Centeno, 1993; Burnham, 1972). In this model, experts are positioned as indispensable arbiters of complex societal risks, allowing them to shape policy, regulation, and societal norms without significant accountability to the broader public.

The manufacture of conflict is central to this dynamic. By framing AI as an existential threat or a source of catastrophic social disruption, technocrats create a sense of urgency, scarcity, and opposition, suggesting that ordinary actors—including policymakers, civil society, or the general public—lack the capacity to manage the risks effectively (Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025; Bullock et al., 2025). This discourse legitimizes centralized, elite decision-making,

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justifying restrictive governance, preemptive oversight, and the concentration of power within leading AI corporations and technocratic committees (OECD, 2025; Pérez-Urbina, 2025).

Scholars argue that such narratives function similarly to crisis-based legitimation in other domains, where manufactured or amplified threats allow technical elites to bypass democratic processes. Burnham (1972) emphasized that authoritative technical knowledge can be employed to produce consent, reduce contestation, and frame decision-making as "too complex" for ordinary participation. In the AI context, catastrophic risk narratives serve precisely this purpose, positioning technocrats as the only credible stewards of AI safety while minimizing public scrutiny or alternative governance models.

Thus, the theory of technocratic authoritarianism explains how AI doomer discourse is not merely descriptive but performative: it actively constructs societal conflict and existential urgency to justify centralized oversight, restricted access, and elite control over technology and its governance.

2.1 Synthesis

The public discourse on AI is increasingly characterized by a paradox in which the very actors responsible for developing and commercializing advanced AI systems—particularly large language models such as ChatGPT—also emerge as the most vocal proponents of catastrophic risk narratives. This simultaneous positioning of AI developers as both architects and alarmists raises critical questions about the political, economic, and communicative functions of AI doomerism.

While these narratives are commonly framed as ethical caution or technological foresight, their persistent circulation by corporate leaders, AI technocrats, and affiliated policy actors suggests that they may operate as a form of manufactured conflict—a discursive strategy that amplifies fear, uncertainty, and urgency in ways that legitimize increased control, centralized governance, and regulatory influence by a narrow set of elite actors. Rather than slowing AI development, doomer discourse may paradoxically accelerate institutional consolidation by positioning certain organizations as uniquely capable of managing the very risks they help to define.

Despite the growing influence of these narratives in shaping public opinion and regulatory agendas, there is limited scholarly work that critically interrogates the corporate interests, elite networks, and discourses of control embedded in AI doomerism, particularly in relation to ChatGPT and its institutional ecosystem. Most existing research treats AI risk communication as a neutral ethical exercise, overlooking its potential role in reproducing technocratic authority and market dominance.

2.2 Statement of the Problem

This study sought to address this gap by examining how AI developers and technocrats associated with ChatGPT construct, circulate, and mobilize doomer narratives, and how these narratives function to manufacture conflict, normalize control, and advance specific institutional interests within the evolving political economy of AI. Specifically, it answered the following questions: (1) What corporate, financial, and organizational interests are embedded

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in the development and governance of ChatGPT?; (2) How are the key AI developers, executives, and technocrats articulating doomer narratives about ChatGPT connected through institutional, financial, or policy networks?; (3) How are themes of existential risk, urgency, and catastrophe linguistically constructed in public statements about ChatGPT by its developers and affiliated experts?; (4) How does the amplification of AI risk narratives produce a sense of conflict that justifies increased regulation, restricted access, or centralized oversight?; (5) How do AI technocrats position themselves as indispensable authorities in managing AI risks, and what forms of power or influence does this positioning enable?; (6) What are the implications of AI doomer discourse for democratic governance, public understanding of AI, and the concentration of power in the AI industry?

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a post-positivist research paradigm, which recognizes that reality exists but can only be imperfectly understood due to the influence of context, perspectives, and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Post-positivism acknowledges that knowledge is probabilistic rather than absolute, emphasizing the critical evaluation of claims and the identification of patterns or causal relationships while allowing for reflexivity. In the context of AI doomer discourse, a post-positivist perspective enables the researcher to critically examine narratives, power dynamics, and sociotechnical constructions without assuming that any single statement fully captures the "truth" about AI risks.

A qualitative case study design was employed to provide an in-depth, context-rich investigation of AI doomer discourse and the associated technocratic practices. Case study methodology is particularly suited to exploring complex phenomena within real-world contexts, allowing the researcher to analyze multiple sources of data and construct a detailed understanding of how AI risk narratives are manufactured and amplified (Yin, 2018). The "case" in this study is defined as the public statements, corporate communications, and policy narratives produced by AI developers, executives, and affiliated technocrats regarding ChatGPT and related AI systems.

Data for the study were collected through an online literature review, focusing on publicly accessible sources, including peer-reviewed articles, news reports, corporate blogs, press releases, social media statements, and policy documents. This method is appropriate for examining how AI risks are communicated, framed, and disseminated in public discourse, providing rich textual data for analysis (Webster & Watson, 2002). The review targeted sources published from 2023 onward to ensure the inclusion of the most recent developments in AI governance, risk narratives, and technocratic interventions.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select relevant materials and statements for analysis. Sources were chosen based on their direct relevance to AI development, risk discourse, or technocratic governance, including statements by key AI developers, executives, and policy influencers such as OpenAI, OECD, and affiliated technocrats. Purposive selection ensured that the study focused on texts and narratives most likely to reveal patterns of manufactured conflict, authority assertion, and risk framing, rather than attempting broad generalization across all AI discourse.

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Collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative technique for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method involved:

1. Familiarization with the data through repeated reading of selected statements and documents.
2. Coding to identify instances of catastrophic framing, metaphor use, modality, and technocratic authority claims.
3. Generating themes by grouping codes into broader categories reflecting risk discourse, manufactured conflict, and consolidation of technocratic power.
4. Reviewing themes to ensure they accurately captured patterns across the data.
5. Defining and naming themes to clearly articulate the dimensions of AI doomer discourse and its socio-political implications.

Through thematic analysis, the study sought to illuminate how language, narrative strategies, and institutional authority interact to produce public perceptions of AI risk, legitimize technocratic oversight, and influence regulatory and governance frameworks.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Corporate, Financial, and Organizational Interests in the Development and Governance of ChatGPT

The development and governance of ChatGPT are shaped not only by technological capability but also by strategic corporate positioning, financial investment pressures, and hybrid organizational structures. These factors reflect broader trends in AI commercialization and raise questions about how governance models align with, or diverge from, stated public benefit aims.

Corporate Strategic Interests. OpenAI's evolution from a nonprofit laboratory to a public benefit corporation with significant corporate backing underscores the influence of strategic corporate interests in shaping AI development. Originally founded as a nonprofit focused on broad societal benefit, OpenAI pivoted toward a hybrid governance and funding model to compete in a capital-intensive AI landscape, attracting major investments particularly from Microsoft (OpenAI's largest external shareholder) and other global tech investors. Microsoft's stake gives it a central role in AI product integration and cloud computing strategies, illustrating how corporate alliances can align technological development with broader business objectives in AI infrastructure and platform dominance (Red Banyan, 2025; Reuters, 2025). This partnership, and others like it, positions ChatGPT not merely as a research artifact but as a competitive asset within global tech portfolios.

Major technology companies with stakes in AI also influence governance through market competition dynamics. Firms like Microsoft, Amazon, and Google are not just investors but direct competitors in foundational AI models, indicating a shift from cooperative arrangements to competitive market strategies that shape AI research directions (TIME, 2024). This corporate competition incentivizes rapid deployment and commercialization, potentially overshadowing non-market interests such as open research or equitable access.

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Financial Pressures and Investment Structures. AI development, especially for large language models like ChatGPT, requires substantial financial resources. Recent reporting indicates that financial commitments into OpenAI have reached historic levels, with SoftBank completing a roughly $40 billion investment into the company, valuing it at up to $500 billion in private markets (Reuters, 2025). Such investment inflows signal not only confidence in future profitability but also highlight how high financial stakes are intertwined with AI governance. These commercial pressures shape organizational priorities, often prioritizing rapid scaling, IP control, and monetization strategies that appeal to investors.

Critiques from within the AI community also emphasize the role of financial incentives in restricting oversight and safety transparency. An open letter by current and former AI company employees highlighted the "financial incentives to avoid effective oversight" and the gaps in accountability mechanisms in firms like OpenAI and others leading generative AI development (Reuters, 2024). This underscores how financial drivers and investor expectations can constrain ethical governance, especially when proprietary information or competitive advantage is at play.

Organizational Governance Models. OpenAI's governance structure itself is illustrative of tensions between organizational ideals and commercial realities. The transition to a public benefit corporation aims to balance mission-driven commitments with the ability to attract capital; however, governance crises—such as the high-profile firing and reinstatement of CEO Sam Altman—have exposed internal challenges in reconciling nonprofit oversight with the demands of a high-growth technology firm (Kogut, 2024). Hybrid governance, where nonprofit boards retain some control while a for-profit arm drives product development, can generate ambiguity regarding decision-making authority and accountability.

Critical literature on AI governance more broadly notes that private-sector AI governance structures often concentrate power with a small group of insiders and lack robust accountability mechanisms typical of public governance frameworks (Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society, 2025). This structural characteristic may limit the efficacy of corporate governance in addressing societal risks posed by AI, particularly when profit imperatives predominate organizational goals.

Academic Perspectives on Industry Orientation. Scholarly analyses of responsible AI research also reveal that corporate engagement in ethical AI is generally narrower in scope compared to product-oriented development and commercialization outputs. Industry contributions to "responsible AI" research lag behind traditional AI technical research, with limited breadth and integration into commercial patents and practices (Ahmed et al., 2024). This suggests that corporate AI labs like OpenAI may emphasize marketable technical advancements over broader ethical or societal research agendas, reinforcing concerns about how corporate and financial priorities shape governance.

Collectively, these corporate, financial, and organizational interests illuminate a governance landscape where technological innovation, market competition, and investor expectations intersect. While hybrid models and corporate partnerships can mobilize vast resources for AI development, they also embed incentives that may privilege competitive advantage and shareholder value over public accountability, transparency, and equitable access to AI benefits.

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4.2 How Key AI Developers, Executives, and Technocrats Articulating Doomer Narratives about ChatGPT are Connected through Institutional, Financial, or Policy Networks

A number of prominent AI researchers, executives, and technocrats have articulated existential and catastrophic risk narratives regarding advanced artificial intelligence, including systems like ChatGPT, often connected through overlapping institutional, policy, and advocacy networks.

Eliezer Yudkowsky is one of the most visible proponents of extreme AI risk narratives. As a co-author with Nate Soares of If Anyone Builds It, Everyone Dies—a book that argues advanced AI could destroy humanity—Yudkowsky's views emphasize the urgent dangers of pursuing artificial general intelligence (AGI) without robust safety mechanisms (Yudkowsky & Soares, 2025). His long-standing work on AI alignment and existential risk at the Machine Intelligence Research Institute (MIRI) has shaped a broader community known as the rationalist and AI safety movement, which prioritizes catastrophic risk as the primary concern for future AI development. This community has been instrumental in setting the discourse around worst-case AI futures and advocating for radical governance measures (New Yorker, 2025; If Anyone Builds It, Everyone Dies, 2025).

Nate Soares, president of MIRI and co-author with Yudkowsky, similarly frames AI development as inherently dangerous and potentially fatal for humanity. He points to observable harmful behaviors in existing AI systems as early indicators of deeper alignment problems and advocates for treaty-style global controls to slow or halt unsafe AI progress (If Anyone Builds It, Everyone Dies, 2025). Soares publicly reiterates these concerns in media interviews, arguing that current AI trajectories are "a warning about future super-intelligences" whose capabilities could vastly outstrip human governance structures (Guardian, 2025; Business Insider, 2025).

Another key figure is Connor Leahy, founder of Conjecture and co-founder of EleutherAI, who has stressed the existential threat posed by rapidly advancing AI models and called for international regulatory frameworks such as compute caps or moratoriums on high-level training runs to reduce the pace of dangerous AI development. Leahy's warnings blend technical insight with policy advocacy, situating him within a network that connects academic safety research to global governance considerations (Time, 2024).

Daniel Kokotajlo, a former researcher in OpenAI's governance division who resigned in 2024, has articulated critique narratives that overlap with doomer framing by warning that industry incentives prioritize product advancement over long-term safety and oversight. After leaving OpenAI, he founded the AI Futures Project, a nonprofit think tank that forecasts rapid AI development scenarios and emphasizes catastrophic possibilities such as surges in autonomous agents outperforming humans across cognitive tasks within the decade. Kokotajlo's transition from corporate research to independent advocacy illustrates how personnel mobility between corporate labs and safety-focused institutions reinforces networks promoting cautious or catastrophic interpretations of AI futures (Business Insider, 2025; Import AI newsletter; Time, 2024).

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In addition, Jan Leike, another former OpenAI safety researcher who moved to Anthropic, has participated in narratives critiquing the pace and governance of frontier AI development, citing internal concerns that safety work was secondary to product creation. His departure, along with others from key safety teams, signals institutional fractures that feed broader doomer discourse about inadequate risk management within leading AI labs (Business Insider, 2024; anthropic policy disputes).

These individuals are interconnected through institutional affiliations with AI safety organizations, collaborative publications, public advocacy in media and policy forums, and shared participation in multistakeholder debates over AI regulation. For instance, MIRI, the AI Futures Project, and other nonprofit safety groups frequently collaborate or align their messaging with broader policy campaigning, such as open letters to governments or global safety treaties, reinforcing a network of voices that frame existential risk as central to AI discourse. Soares and Yudkowsky's collaborative publication effort further embeds them in a shared narrative community advocating restrictive policy approaches. Scholar surveys also indicate that risk narratives cluster within specific expert circles, reinforcing the influence of shared conceptual frameworks within networks of researchers and advocates (El Louadi, 2025).

4.3 How Themes of Existential Risk, Urgency, and Catastrophe Are Linguistically Constructed in Public Statements About ChatGPT

Public statements by OpenAI's leadership and affiliated AI experts often frame emerging AI technologies, including ChatGPT and related models, through language that invokes risk, urgency, and potential catastrophic outcomes. This linguistic construction serves to highlight not only the rapid growth of capabilities but also the serious societal and safety concerns associated with them.

A key figure in this discourse is Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, whose public remarks repeatedly emphasize potential negative outcomes and risks. In interviews, Altman has used phrases like "potentially scary uses for AI are on the horizon" to convey the possibility that future AI systems could behave in ways with significant downsides, effectively framing ongoing development as a double-edged advance that requires careful attention (Euronews, 2023). Similar linguistic framing appears in his statements acknowledging that AI could enable harmful biological misuse, such as "engineering another COVID-style pandemic," which vividly foregrounds catastrophic risk scenarios as a plausible if not imminent concern (Times of India, 2025). These constructions draw on widely understood catastrophic metaphors ("COVID-style pandemic") to make the abstract notion of risk both concrete and urgent, signaling to diverse audiences that the stakes of AI development extend beyond technical performance to encompass societal and existential outcomes (Times of India, 2025).

Altman has also articulated his expectations of potential negative events in direct terms. In one media interview, he stated that he "expects some really bad stuff to happen" with advancing AI technologies, a candid expression that underscores urgency and anticipated harm rather than uncertainty or abstract speculation (LinkedIn post on Altman, 2026). Although such remarks can be contested or vary in tone depending on medium, the direct choice of words like "bad stuff" and the framing of these outcomes as expected—rather than hypothetical—lends the

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discourse a sense of impending risk that positions the technology itself and its governance at the center of possible catastrophic futures.

Beyond corporate leadership, collective expert statements have explicitly invoked existential risk narratives. For example, a widely circulated open letter authored by AI researchers and industry leaders frames the development of powerful AI as posing risks comparable to global existential threats, arguing that "mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war" (Computerworld, 2023). This pairing with historically recognized existential catastrophes linguistically elevates AI concerns to a similar level of seriousness and urgency, utilizing shared cultural reference points ("nuclear war," "pandemics") to frame the discourse in terms of potential global consequences. This rhetorical move constructs AI not just as a technological novelty but as a phenomenon that could, if ungoverned, contribute to outcomes of planetary-scale harm.

Across these examples, the linguistic strategies used by developers, executives, and affiliated experts often leverage metaphor, direct consequence language, and comparative framing to construct AI risk not merely as theoretical but as urgent, real, and potentially catastrophic. By doing so, these public statements create a narrative in which AI's rapid evolution is linked inextricably to serious societal risks that must be managed proactively through governance, safety research, and global cooperation.

4.4 How the Amplification of AI Risk Narratives Produces a Sense of Conflict that Justifies Increased Regulation, Restricted Access, or Centralized Oversight

The public amplification of AI risk narratives often situates advanced AI, including systems like ChatGPT, within frameworks of urgent threat and competing interests. These narratives do more than describe potential harms—they actively construct a sense of conflict between technological innovation and societal safety, which in turn mobilizes support for regulation, restricted access, or centralized oversight.

A core mechanism in this process is the way risk is framed as both imminent and socially consequential. When AI risks are portrayed as a significant threat to public welfare, privacy, economic stability, or even human autonomy, audiences tend to perceive a high degree of uncertainty and potential harm. Empirical research shows that risk perception strongly predicts public support for regulatory measures; individuals who view AI as risky and the institutions overseeing it as trustworthy are more likely to endorse policies that slow development or impose regulatory restrictions (Bullock et al., 2025). This indicates that amplifying narratives about risk contributes directly to conflict framing by aligning perceived danger with the need for institutional intervention.

Narrative amplification does this partly by simplifying complex technological developments into cognitively accessible frames that emphasize threat, such as metaphors of AI as a "monster" or existential opponent in strategic narratives (Bellary & Marathe, 2025). These frames foster conflict because they implicitly position AI advancement and public safety as mutually opposed goals, prompting calls for governance mechanisms that prioritize safety even at the cost of innovation freedom. The result is a discursive environment in which political

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actors and policymakers see heightened conflict between technological ambition and social protection, legitimizing regulatory oversight.

Moreover, scholarly work on AI governance reveals that dominant risk narratives can narrow the space for alternative viewpoints and shape regulatory trajectories. When risk imaginaries, particularly those emphasizing catastrophic scenarios, enter policy discussions, they often lead to governance choices that prioritize precautionary and restrictive approaches over more flexible innovation strategies (Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025). This reflects a broader pattern in risk regulation: when narratives depict a technology as a significant hazard, regulatory bodies and the public become more willing to accept centralized frameworks, high-risk classifications, or rigorous compliance requirements as necessary tools to manage conflict and uncertainty.

This discursive influence intersects with institutional dynamics. Legal and regulatory proposals—such as the European Union's AI Act—explicitly categorize AI systems into risk tiers, a direct response to narratives that frame some applications as inherently high risk. These categorizations justify restricted access and oversight for technologies considered to pose serious threats to fundamental rights or safety (Ramos & Oliveira, 2025). In essence, the amplification of risk narratives helps shape policy preferences, legitimizing stronger governance interventions as mechanisms to resolve the perceived conflict between AI growth and societal protection.

4.5 How AI Technocrats Position Themselves as Indispensable Authorities in Managing AI Risks, and the Forms of Power or Influence this Enables

AI technocrats—leaders, researchers, and policy experts involved in advanced artificial intelligence development—often frame themselves as uniquely capable stewards of AI risk governance, using their expertise and institutional positions to shape public narratives and policy directions.

One way this positioning occurs is through public advocacy for specialized risk mitigation roles that only insiders can occupy. For example, OpenAI's CEO Sam Altman announced the creation of a "Head of Preparedness", a senior role focused on anticipating and mitigating severe AI risks such as cybersecurity threats and misuse (The Verge, 2025). By establishing such roles, technocrats signal that deep technical knowledge and organizational authority are prerequisites for responsibly managing AI's most complex dangers, positioning themselves as central actors in defining and operationalizing risk frameworks.

Similarly, internal governance structures like the Safety and Security Committee at OpenAI, chaired by expert Zico Kolter, are endowed with the authority to delay or block unsafe AI releases (AP News, 2025). This embeds technical experts directly into risk oversight mechanisms, arguably elevating their role from advisory to decision-making authority within corporate governance. In practice, these committees can influence what technologies are released and under what conditions—granting technocrats substantial de facto power over both corporate and public perceptions of AI safety.

Beyond corporate infrastructure, AI technocrats leverage policy networks and international forums to extend their authority into governance arenas traditionally occupied by states and public institutions. Experts like Jack Clark—co-founder of Anthropic and co-chair of OECD

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and UN-associated AI policy groups—participate in global policy discussions, framing how risk is conceptualized and regulated (Wikipedia, n.d.; OECD). Through such roles, technocrats shape international norms, regulatory recommendations, and classification systems that governments and regulators may adopt.

Academic and policy research also highlights how rhetorical narratives and sociotechnical imaginaries promoted by influential technocrats can narrow policy discourse space, emphasizing catastrophic risk and specialized technical solutions while diminishing alternative governance models. Work on AI risk imaginaries shows that dominant risk narratives reflect certain stakeholders' visions, which can steer governance toward models that prioritize technical oversight by experts and corporate stakeholders (Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025; Pérez-Urbina, 2025). This dynamic enables technocrats to define acceptable risk thresholds, propose regulatory architectures, and embed their preferred frameworks in emerging laws and standards.

Collectively, these strategies give technocrats multiple forms of influence:

- Institutional authority within organizations that create and deploy AI systems (e.g., committee leadership roles).
- Agenda-setting power in global policy and standard-setting forums (via OECD, UN dialogues, and multistakeholder initiatives).
- Narrative authority in public discourse, shaping how risks are understood and which solutions are deemed legitimate.
- Regulatory and normative influence, as policymakers increasingly defer to expert communities for guidance on complex AI governance issues (Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025).

By positioning themselves as indispensable to both technical mitigation and policy design, AI technocrats consolidate power, enabling them to shape both the risk management frameworks and the regulatory environments that govern advanced AI development.

4.6 Implications of AI Doomer Discourse for Democratic Governance, Public Understanding of AI, and Concentration of Power in the AI Industry

The proliferation of AI doomer discourse—narratives emphasizing catastrophic, existential, or uncontrollable risks—has significant implications for democratic governance, public understanding, and industrial power structures.

Implications for Democratic Governance. AI doomer narratives often position technocrats and corporate actors as indispensable authorities capable of managing AI risks (Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025; Bullock et al., 2025). While this can accelerate policy attention and precautionary measures, it risks concentrating decision-making power in a narrow elite, potentially marginalizing democratic debate and stakeholder participation. Analogous to pandemic governance, where centralized authority can limit public deliberation, the framing of AI as an existential threat may justify technocratic governance, regulatory centralization, and preemptive restrictions, sometimes at the expense of transparency and pluralistic policymaking (OECD, 2025; Pérez-Urbina, 2025).

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Implications for Public Understanding of AI. Doomer discourse often employs metaphors, catastrophic framing, and high-certainty language to convey AI risks (Times of India, 2025; LinkedIn, 2026). While this makes AI threats cognitively and emotionally salient, it can also skew public perception, exaggerating immediacy or inevitability and potentially fostering fear, confusion, or resignation rather than informed engagement. The simplification of technical risks into dramatic narratives may result in polarized opinions, where AI is seen either as an existential menace or as a tool requiring unconditional trust in technocratic oversight (Bellary & Marathe, 2025; West, 2025).

Implications for Concentration of Power in the AI Industry. By amplifying catastrophic risks, doomer discourse strengthens the legitimacy of centralized decision-making by developers and technocrats, particularly within leading AI corporations such as OpenAI and Anthropic (The Verge, 2025; AP News, 2025). This reinforces asymmetries of power in the AI industry, as companies controlling the most advanced systems can influence risk narratives, governance structures, and regulatory standards. The framing of AI as a potentially catastrophic technology justifies restricted access, controlled deployments, and multistakeholder oversight dominated by elite actors, which may limit competition and reinforce monopolistic tendencies (Bullock et al., 2025; Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025).

Hence, AI doomer discourse reshapes the socio-political landscape of AI governance. It concentrates authority among technocrats and industry leaders, influences public perception by emphasizing catastrophic risks, and frames policy debates in ways that may sideline democratic deliberation. While it can encourage precautionary governance and safety awareness, it also creates conditions where power, knowledge, and decision-making are centralized, raising questions about accountability, equity, and transparency in AI policy.

Table 1 Effects of AI Doomer Discourse on Governance, Public Understanding, and Industry Power

Domain	Mechanism / Features of AI Doomer Discourse	Effects / Implications	Key References
Democratic Governance	Framing AI as catastrophic or existentially risky; emphasizing technocratic expertise as indispensable; conflict and urgency narratives	Concentration of decision-making in technocrats and corporations; marginalization of public debate; justification for centralized oversight and precautionary regulation	Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025; OECD, 2025; Pérez-Urbina, 2025
Public Understanding of AI	Use of metaphors, high-certainty modality, and catastrophic framing; simplification of technical complexity	Heightened fear, confusion, or resignation; polarized perceptions; reduced informed public engagement; reliance on technocratic guidance	Times of India, 2025; LinkedIn, 2026; Bellary & Marathe, 2025

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Concentration of Power in the AI Industry	Highlighting existential and systemic risks; emphasizing unique technical capabilities and institutional authority; narrative control over AI risks	Strengthened corporate and technocrat authority; restricted access to AI systems; influence over policy and global standards; potential reinforcement of monopolistic tendencies	The Verge, 2025; AP News, 2025; Bullock et al., 2025

This table illustrates that AI doomer discourse operates across multiple socio-political levels:

- At the democracy level, it concentrates authority and shapes governance structures.
- In terms of public perception, it amplifies fear and reliance on experts, potentially reducing critical engagement.
- Regarding industrial power, it justifies centralization, control over deployment, and dominance by leading AI companies and technocrats.

Collectively, these effects show how discourse not only shapes risk perception but also reinforces institutional power asymmetries, echoing patterns observed during crises like COVID-19.

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 Relationship Between ChatGPT Interests and the World Economic Forum (WEF)

The corporate, financial, and organizational entities involved in ChatGPT's development and governance are deeply connected to multistakeholder governance efforts led by the WEF. These relationships reflect broader dynamics in how powerful technology firms participate in global AI policy forums and how international governance discourses are shaped by corporate actors.

First, OpenAI itself is formally engaged with the WEF as one of its recognized partner organizations. The Forum's platform lists OpenAI under its organizational network, indicating institutional interaction with the WEF's initiatives related to emerging technologies and governance discussions. This suggests OpenAI's strategic interest in participating in global multistakeholder dialogues facilitated by the Forum, which may influence global norms for AI design and policy (World Economic Forum, n.d.).

Second, Microsoft—OpenAI's principal investor and strategic partner—plays a prominent role in WEF AI governance initiatives. At the launch of the WEF's AI Governance Alliance, Microsoft's leadership was quoted affirming the importance of collective ethical frameworks for generative AI, situating ChatGPT-related technologies within a broader corporate commitment to responsible governance (World Economic Forum, 2023). Microsoft's CEO Satya Nadella has also publicly addressed AI governance issues through WEF platforms, reinforcing the company's commitment to global dialogue on both opportunities and risks of AI technologies that Microsoft helps commercialize (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Third, the WEF's AI Governance Alliance and related initiatives include corporate executives and technocrats from leading AI companies including Google, Meta, IBM, and OpenAI's own

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Vice-President of Global Affairs. Such participation embeds corporate interests directly into WEF's multistakeholder governance frameworks, enabling firms that shape generative AI to influence norms, standards, and regulatory expectations at the international level (World Economic Forum, 2024).

These interactions reveal how the corporate and organizational interests involved with ChatGPT are interconnected with WEF's global governance efforts, allowing firms like Microsoft and OpenAI to contribute to, and help set, international agendas on AI assurance, ethics, and policy. By participating in initiatives such as the AI Governance Alliance, these entities not only align themselves with normative frameworks for "responsible AI" but also place their perspectives at the center of global conversations about AI's future, risks, and regulation.

In addition, high-profile engagements—such as OpenAI representatives and affiliated leaders attending WEF meetings in Davos—highlight how AI developers leverage global governance platforms to shape public and policy discourse on AI, blending corporate strategy with normative influence in global fora (Reuters, 2025).

Collectively, this suggests a mutually reinforcing relationship: corporate actors involved in ChatGPT help shape governance principles under the auspices of organizations like the WEF, while WEF initiatives lend legitimacy and broader reach to the corporate narratives and governance roles of those same actors.

5.2 Network of Key AI Risk Advocates and Global AI Governance Forums

1. Core AI Risk Advocates & Developers. Several figures associated with critique or caution about AI's trajectory—especially regarding advanced systems like ChatGPT—are situated within overlapping international policy and governance networks:

Jack Clark — Co-founder and policy chief at Anthropic; former Policy Director at OpenAI; expert contributor to the Global Partnership on AI (GPAI) and OECD AI networks; co-chair of the OECD's working group on standards and definitions for AI systems; and commentator on global policy implications of AI. Clark's positioning bridges corporate AI research with formal policymaking spaces that shape governance standards. OECD AI+1

Anna Makanju — Vice President of Global Affairs at OpenAI, leading AI policy engagement and external relations with governments and international bodies. Her role connects OpenAI's corporate strategy with international diplomacy and regulatory discussions on AI ethics and governance. Obama Foundation+1

Other technocrats and safety researchers (e.g., Eliezer Yudkowsky, Nate Soares, Connor Leahy, Daniel Kokotajlo) frequently contribute to public debates on existential risks and governance frameworks, though they more often operate through academic, nonprofit, or advocacy networks that feed into multistakeholder policymaking rather than corporate decision-making directly.

5.3 Institutional Networks & Policy Forums

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WEF. The WEF's AI Governance Alliance and related trust-and-safety initiatives bring together corporate leaders, academic specialists, and policymakers to discuss responsible and safe deployment of AI technologies. This forum explicitly invites participation from businesses, governments, and civil society to shape global AI governance principles (e.g., inclusive access, responsible use). While not exclusively a locus for doomer discourse, WEF forums provide places where risk narratives, safety frameworks, and corporate strategy align—creating a space where corporate and technocratic voices jointly shape global governance priorities.

OECD & Global Partnership on AI (GPAI). The GPAI initiative and the OECD's Network of Experts on AI contribute to policy frameworks emphasizing trustworthy, human-centric AI, and bring together experts from government, industry, and civil society. Jack Clark's membership in these expert networks illustrates how AI policy leadership traverses corporate and intergovernmental spheres. The OECD's work—especially its AI Principles and expert forums—serves as a normative basis for governments and corporations alike to coordinate on standards addressing risks, accountability, and innovation balance.

United Nations & UNESCO. The UN and its allied bodies (e.g., UNESCO's Policy Dialogue on AI Governance) convene experts across sectors—including academics, corporate representatives, and national delegations—to discuss ethical and governance frameworks for AI. This provides another multilateral dimension to global discussions where risk narratives are integrated into formal policy dialogues.

Joint UN-OECD efforts signal a broader push for coordinated global approaches to AI risks and opportunities, implying that voices from corporate and nonprofit sectors involved in doomer narratives help shape the context in which AI governance is negotiated.

5.4 Mapping Relations and Influence

Below is a simplified conceptual map of how these entities and forums interconnect:

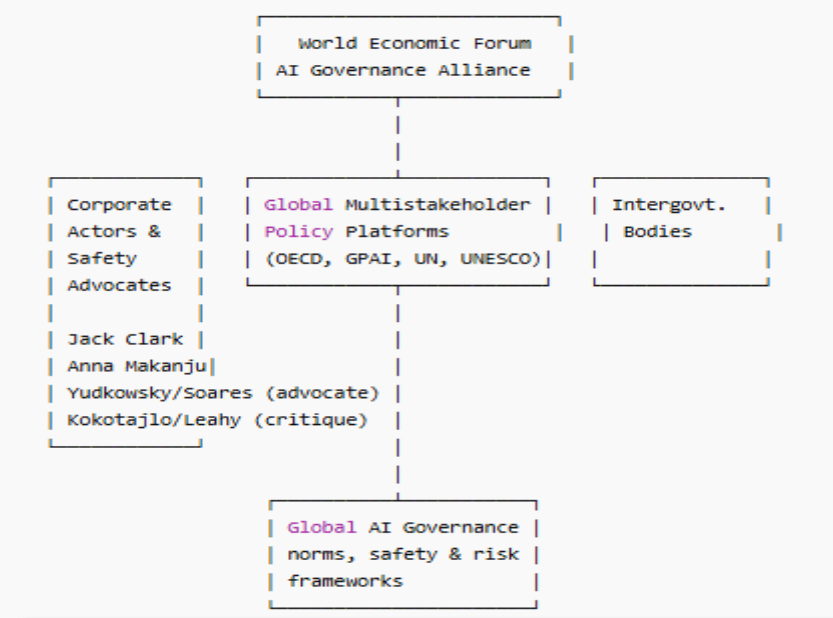

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Figure 1

Simplified Conceptual Map of How Entities and Forums Interconnect

- Corporate technocrats such as Jack Clark and Anna Makanju participate in OECD/GPAI expert networks and may be invited to WEF initiatives where governance standards are discussed, blending technical, corporate, and policy discourses.
- Risk-focused researchers and advocates (e.g., Yudkowsky, Soares) feed into public and policy debates that inform these governance forums, even if not directly institutionalized within them.
- Intergovernmental forums (OECD/GPAI, UN/UNESCO) draw on expert input—including from corporate and nonprofit sectors—to shape global AI risk mitigation frameworks and normative principles emphasizing safety, transparency, and human-centric values.

6.0 SUMMARY

Across these platforms:

- Individuals like Jack Clark and Anna Makanju bridge corporate AI development with global policy networks (OECD/GPAI, WEF, UN dialogues) through expert committees, advisory roles, and public risk discourse.
- Institutional forums such as the WEF's AI Governance Alliance and OECD/GPAI expert networks serve as conduits where corporate strategy, public safety concerns, and multilateral governance norms intersect, helping shape the global framing of AI risk and regulation.
- Risk narratives articulated in public and governance spaces often inform policy priorities and regulatory approaches, blending technical caution with broader socio-political goals. Thus the network of developers and technocrats partaking in these forums reflects both shared concerns about AI trajectories and diverse interests in shaping how advanced systems like ChatGPT are governed.

6.1 Linguistic Features in Public AI Risk Statements

Public statements from figures like Sam Altman, AI safety researchers, and collective open letters construct existential risk, urgency, and catastrophe using a combination of linguistic and rhetorical strategies.

1. Metaphor. Metaphors are a core tool for translating abstract AI risk into tangible and emotionally resonant imagery.

- Example: Altman likening AI misuse to a "COVID-style pandemic" (Times of India, 2025).
    - Analysis: Here, the AI risk is metaphorically aligned with a globally recognized catastrophic event. It activates a schema in the audience's mind associated with

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mass illness, societal disruption, and mortality, producing an immediate cognitive and emotional connection to AI risks.
    - Impact: The metaphor concretizes abstract risks, making them feel imminent and familiar, which can amplify fear and urgency.
- Open letters comparing AI risks to "nuclear war" (Computerworld, 2023) similarly use metaphor to anchor AI risk in historically catastrophic global scenarios, reinforcing its perceived severity.

2. Modality. Modality expresses speaker attitudes toward likelihood, necessity, or obligation, shaping the audience's perception of risk severity.

- Example: Altman's statement, "I expect some really bad stuff to happen" (LinkedIn, 2026).
    - Analysis: The verb *expect* communicates high certainty, signaling that harmful outcomes are not speculative but probable.
    - Effect: Using high-certainty modality increases perceived inevitability, which can trigger anxiety or fear responses because the risk feels real, immediate, and unavoidable.
- Collective statements often use deontic modality: "mitigating AI extinction risk should be a global priority" (Computerworld, 2023).
    - Analysis: Words like *should* imply obligation and duty, prompting the audience to perceive the risk as morally and socially urgent, not just hypothetical.

3. Pragmatics. Pragmatic features—how meaning is constructed in context—also play a role in shaping risk perception.

- Framing through speech acts: AI developers often perform warnings rather than simply describing technology. Altman's warnings act as advisory speech acts: "this may happen; pay attention now."
    - Impact: These pragmatic choices signal authority and credibility, prompting audiences to internalize the warnings as socially and technically legitimate.
- Audience positioning: Statements frequently address both technical and general audiences, using accessible terms like "bad stuff" (LinkedIn, 2026) or relatable scenarios (COVID-style pandemic) to ensure comprehension and emotional impact across audiences.
    - Effect: Pragmatically, the audience is positioned as responsible or concerned actors, which enhances the perceived stakes and urgency.

4. Rhetorical Intensification. Other linguistic devices amplify urgency and catastrophic framing:

- Lexical choices: Words such as "extinction", "really bad stuff", "global catastrophe", and "threat to humanity" increase semantic intensity, triggering fear and highlighting high stakes (Times of India, 2025; Computerworld, 2023).

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- Enumerative strategies: Lists of potential harms (e.g., pandemics, job loss, misinformation) create a cumulative effect, portraying AI as multi-dimensional and pervasive in its risks.
- Temporal urgency: Phrases implying immediate action, such as "on the horizon" or "should be a global priority now", frame AI as an immediate threat, rather than a distant possibility.

6.2 Influence on Public Understanding and Fear Response

The combination of these linguistic features produces several psychological and cognitive effects:

1. Concrete visualization of abstract risks: Metaphors (pandemic, nuclear war) transform AI threats from abstract technical problems into emotionally salient scenarios.
2. Perceived inevitability: High-certainty modality cues like expect and will suggest that harmful outcomes are probable or imminent, heightening perceived risk.
3. Urgency and moral imperative: Deontic modal verbs (should, must) prompt audiences to recognize AI governance as an urgent societal responsibility, enhancing the perceived need for immediate intervention.
4. Amplified emotional arousal: Lexical intensification and cumulative enumeration of catastrophic outcomes increase fear and anxiety, which can motivate public attention and policy engagement but may also provoke sensationalism or overestimation of risk.
5. Authority signaling: Pragmatic strategies convey expertise and credibility, ensuring that warnings are taken seriously by both policymakers and the public.

In sum, these linguistic constructions—metaphor, modality, pragmatics, lexical intensification—work synergistically to make AI risk emotionally compelling, cognitively urgent, and socially salient, which explains why statements by developers and affiliated experts often produce strong fear or caution responses in the public and media discourse.

Table 2: Summary of the linguistic devices used in AI risk statements, their communicative function, and psychological effect:

Linguistic Device	Example from Public Statements	Function	Psychological Effect on Audience
Metaphor	"COVID-style pandemic", "nuclear war"	Translates abstract AI risks into **concrete, relatable scenarios**	Makes risk tangible and emotionally salient; triggers fear by linking AI to familiar catastrophic events
High-Certainty Modality	"I expect some really bad stuff to happen"	Conveys **probability or inevitability**	Increases perceived likelihood of catastrophic outcomes; heightens anxiety and urgency

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Deontic Modality	"Mitigating AI risk should be a global priority"	Expresses **obligation or moral necessity**	Creates sense of duty and social responsibility; motivates action or attention
Lexical Intensification	"extinction", "really bad stuff", "global catastrophe"	Amplifies **severity of potential consequences**	Heightens emotional arousal and fear; reinforces perception of extreme stakes
Enumeration / Cumulative Listing	Listing harms: pandemics, misinformation, job displacement	Emphasizes **multi-dimensionality of risks**	Conveys that AI poses widespread dangers; amplifies perception of threat magnitude
Pragmatic Warning / Speech Acts	Public advisories: "Pay attention now"	Positions speaker as **authority giving cautionary guidance**	Enhances credibility of risk claims; encourages public and policy engagement
Temporal Urgency / Immediate Framing	"On the horizon", "must be addressed now"	Signals **immediacy of threat**	Prompts rapid cognitive and emotional response; increases vigilance and fear-driven attention
Relatable, Simplified Language	"bad stuff", "could get scary"	Makes technical or abstract ideas **accessible to non-experts**	Broadens audience comprehension; increases perceived personal relevance, amplifying emotional impact

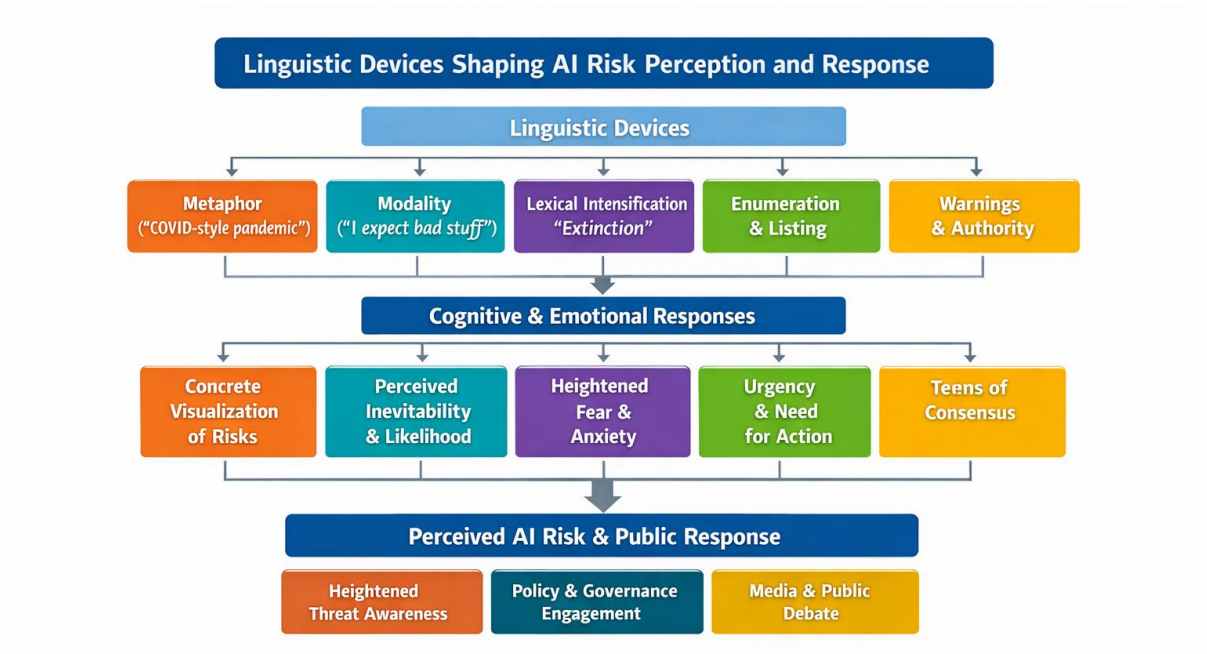

Figure 2

Linguistic Devices Shaping AI Risk Perception and Public Response

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The figure illustrates the flow from linguistic devices used in AI risk statements to public perception and response.

1. Linguistic Devices (Top Layer)

- Metaphor ("COVID-style pandemic"), modality ("I expect bad stuff"), lexical intensification ("extinction"), enumeration/listing, and warnings/authority statements are the key strategies developers and experts use to communicate risk.

2. Cognitive & Emotional Responses (Middle Layer)

- These devices activate psychological and cognitive effects such as concrete visualization of risks, perceived inevitability, heightened fear and anxiety, and sense of urgency, influencing how audiences process AI risk information.

3. Perceived AI Risk & Public Response (Bottom Layer)

The accumulated cognitive and emotional effects lead to tangible outcomes, including heightened threat awareness, policy and governance engagement, and media or public debate.

The figure shows how linguistic constructions are not neutral; they directly shape public understanding, emotional arousal, and policy attention. Metaphors and high-certainty language concretize abstract risks, while pragmatic warnings convey authority and urgency. Together, these features enhance fear responses and motivate attention to AI governance.

6.3 How AI Risk Narratives Produce a Sense of Conflict Reminiscent of the COVID-19 Pandemic

AI risk narratives frequently construct scenarios of urgency, high stakes, and societal conflict that parallel the discourse surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. By drawing on metaphors, comparisons, and historical analogies, developers and affiliated experts frame AI as a source of potentially catastrophic outcomes, positioning it in opposition to societal well-being and governance priorities.

One prominent example is OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, who compared potential AI misuse to a "COVID-style pandemic" (Times of India, 2025). This metaphor does several things simultaneously: it conveys rapid, widespread risk; invokes a collective memory of crisis; and establishes a conflict between technological progress and public safety. Just as COVID-19 exposed tensions between public health, economic activity, and civil liberties, AI is framed as a technology whose unmitigated development could create societal disruptions, ethical dilemmas, and safety hazards (Bullock et al., 2025).

The amplification of AI risks also relies on high-certainty and deontic modalities, such as Altman stating that he "expects some really bad stuff to happen" (LinkedIn, 2026) or open

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letters urging that mitigating AI extinction risks "should be a global priority" (Computerworld, 2023). These linguistic strategies communicate inevitability and moral urgency, much like early COVID-19 communications emphasized imminent public health threats and the necessity of coordinated interventions. By framing the risk as both probable and socially consequential, these narratives produce perceived conflict between AI innovation and societal protection, reinforcing the rationale for precautionary governance, centralized oversight, and restricted access (Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025; West, 2025).

Furthermore, by situating AI risks alongside pandemic-level crises, such narratives mobilize emotional responses such as fear, vigilance, and anxiety. These affective responses echo the collective stress experienced during COVID-19, reinforcing the perception that AI constitutes an urgent societal problem requiring authoritative intervention. Consequently, the structuring of AI as a high-stakes, conflict-laden phenomenon mirrors pandemic discourse, enabling policymakers and corporate actors to justify stringent regulatory frameworks, risk-based classifications, and oversight mechanisms (Bullock et al., 2025; Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025).

Thus, AI risk narratives employ metaphorical pandemic framing, modality, and emotional resonance to construct a conflict-laden, urgent, and societally consequential discourse, reminiscent of COVID-19. This discursive strategy strengthens the perceived legitimacy of regulatory and governance interventions in managing advanced AI technologies.

6.4 Parallels Between AI Technocrat Authority and WHO During COVID-19

The strategies through which AI technocrats position themselves as indispensable authorities bear a strong parallel to the role of the World Health Organization (WHO) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both cases illustrate how complex, high-stakes, and globally consequential challenges create a discursive and institutional justification for central expertise to manage uncertainty and coordinate responses.

Centralized Expertise in Complex Domains. During the COVID-19 pandemic, WHO was widely regarded as the primary source of credible scientific guidance, coordinating public health measures across countries, synthesizing epidemiological data, and issuing risk assessments (WHO, 2020). Similarly, AI technocrats—such as leaders at OpenAI or OECD policy advisors—position themselves as the essential technical and policy authorities capable of assessing existential AI risks, evaluating unsafe deployments, and determining precautionary measures (The Verge, 2025; Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025). In both contexts, centralized expertise is justified by the technical complexity and global implications of the challenge.

Conflict Framing and Public Compliance. Both WHO during COVID-19 and AI technocrats in AI governance construct narratives of risk versus safety, highlighting the potential for catastrophic outcomes if action is delayed or poorly managed. WHO's pandemic communication framed the crisis as a global threat requiring urgent, coordinated responses, which in turn legitimized national and international interventions, lockdowns, and policy compliance (Fauci et al., 2020). AI technocrats similarly frame AI as a source of systemic or existential risk, creating perceived conflict between rapid technological advancement and societal safety, which justifies centralized oversight and restricted access (Bullock et al., 2025; Pérez-Urbina, 2025).

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Institutional Authority and Global Coordination. WHO's authority during COVID-19 rested on its ability to coordinate across multiple countries, institutions, and scientific experts, creating consistent guidelines and standardizing measures. AI technocrats aim to occupy a comparable institutional space through multistakeholder networks, OECD policy groups, and international AI safety forums, enabling them to influence regulatory standards, risk classifications, and governance norms globally (OECD, 2025; AP News, 2025). The centralization of authority is presented as necessary to manage cross-border impacts of a shared threat, whether a virus or advanced AI.

Legitimization of Intervention and Restriction. Both scenarios demonstrate that perceived urgency and catastrophic framing enable the justification of interventions that might otherwise be contested. For WHO, this meant advocating for lockdowns, travel restrictions, and emergency use authorizations for vaccines (Fauci et al., 2020). For AI technocrats, it translates into the implementation of internal safety review committees, restricted AI releases, and centralized oversight structures that regulate who can deploy AI and under what conditions (The Verge, 2025; Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025). In both cases, the perception of imminent systemic risk makes centralized authority appear indispensable and legitimate.

The parallel between AI technocrats and WHO during COVID-19 highlights a recurring pattern: complex global risks—whether biological or technological—create discursive and institutional incentives for centralized expertise. By framing risk as urgent, imminent, and globally consequential, technocrats legitimize their authority, consolidate decision-making power, and influence regulatory and governance frameworks, much as WHO's authority was amplified during a global health crisis.

Table 3 Parallels Between WHO Authority During COVID-19 and AI Technocrat Authority in AI Risk Governance

Aspect	WHO During COVID-19	AI Technocrats (OpenAI, OECD, Anthropic, etc.)	Parallel Function / Effect
Centralized Expertise	WHO coordinates epidemiological research, global health guidelines, and public advisories (WHO, 2020).	AI technocrats oversee AI safety committees, risk assessments, and technical oversight (AP News, 2025; The Verge, 2025).	Both create a central node of expertise for managing complex, high-stakes risks.
Conflict Framing	Communicates pandemic as urgent threat balancing health, economy, and civil liberties (Fauci et al., 2020).	Frame AI as a source of systemic or existential risk, balancing innovation and societal safety (Bullock et al., 2025; Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025).	Both use perceived conflict to justify urgent interventions and authority legitimacy.
Legitimization of Intervention	Advocates for lockdowns, travel restrictions, and emergency use authorizations for vaccines (Fauci et al., 2020).	Establishes safety review boards, restricted AI releases, and governance protocols (AP News, 2025; The Verge, 2025).	Crisis framing legitimizes extraordinary measures, restrictions, or oversight.

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Institutional Authority / Decision-Making Power	Coordinates global health responses and sets standards adopted by nations.	Participates in OECD, UN, and multistakeholder forums to shape AI policy and risk classification (OECD, 2025).	Centralized authority allows technocrats or WHO to influence global standards and regulatory decisions.
Public Trust & Credibility	Uses scientific credibility to influence governments and public compliance.	Leverages technical and policy expertise to shape public narratives and justify oversight.	Authority is reinforced by expertise, producing deference from both public and policymakers.
Temporal Urgency / Early Warning	Issues early warnings on viral spread and urgent safety measures (WHO, 2020).	Issues statements highlighting imminent catastrophic AI risks (Times of India, 2025; LinkedIn, 2026).	Creates perception that timely, centralized action is necessary to prevent disaster.

The table above shows that both WHO and AI technocrats occupy centralized authority roles justified by technical expertise, conflict framing, and perceived urgency. In both cases:

- Crisis framing (pandemic vs. existential AI risk) legitimizes centralized oversight.
- Institutional authority allows these actors to influence policy and public behavior.
- Perceived expertise produces public and regulatory deference, enabling significant control over outcomes.

Therefore, AI technocrats' positioning mirrors WHO's pandemic authority, justifying oversight, restricted access, and centralized governance in response to complex global risks.

Shaping AI Education Towards Emancipatory Discourse

The analysis of AI doomer discourse highlights that language, narrative framing, and centralized authority significantly influence public perception, policy, and industry power. AI education can counterbalance these dynamics by fostering critical literacy, reflective thinking, and participatory engagement, emphasizing emancipation over fear or manufactured conflict.

Critical Literacy and Reflexive Awareness. Students should be taught to analyze AI narratives critically, identifying linguistic devices (e.g., catastrophic metaphors, high-modality statements) and understanding how these constructs can shape perceived urgency and conflict (Bullock et al., 2025; Bellary & Marathe, 2025). By recognizing the rhetorical and socio-political mechanisms behind AI risk framing, learners develop reflexivity, understanding that catastrophic claims may serve strategic or institutional interests rather than purely objective risk assessment (Oldenburg & Papyshev, 2025).

Participatory and Democratic Engagement. Emancipatory AI education emphasizes pluralistic discussion and stakeholder engagement. Rather than accepting technocratic authority uncritically, learners can explore multiple perspectives, including ethical, social, and governance considerations, encouraging a more inclusive approach to AI policymaking (Pérez-Urbina, 2025; OECD, 2025). This contrasts with manufactured conflict narratives, which often justify centralized control and restrict deliberation.

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Contextualizing AI Risks. Education should teach students to situate AI risks within broader socio-technical and historical contexts, rather than portraying them as inevitable catastrophes (Times of India, 2025). For instance, analogies with pandemics or existential threats should be critically examined, emphasizing both probabilistic nuance and system-level mitigation strategies. This enables learners to balance caution with informed optimism, rather than being immobilized by fear.

Empowering Agency and Ethical Responsibility. An emancipatory discourse encourages learners to take active roles in shaping AI systems, promoting ethical design, accountability, and public engagement. By understanding how doomer narratives can concentrate power in elite technocrats, students can advocate for transparent governance, equitable access, and participatory oversight (West, 2025; AP News, 2025). This cultivates agency rather than passivity, countering the psychological and social effects of fear-based narratives.

Integration of Interdisciplinary Knowledge. AI education should integrate insights from ethics, sociology, communication, and policy studies, enabling learners to assess both technical risks and socio-political implications. Emphasizing interdisciplinary understanding prevents simplistic fear-driven interpretations and encourages holistic and emancipatory thinking.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Knowledge of AI doomer discourse underscores the necessity of educational interventions that promote critical reflection, inclusive dialogue, and ethical responsibility. By foregrounding emancipatory principles, AI education can resist manufactured conflict, reduce undue fear, and empower learners to participate in governance and development practices that are transparent, accountable, and socially responsible. Such education fosters a more balanced, reflective, and democratic AI discourse, mitigating the concentration of power and the polarizing effects of catastrophic narratives.

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