

What happens next? Science communicators and the future tense

Invited Talk

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Abstract. There are relatively few scientific or technology breakthroughs whose significance is immediately and widely apparent. Without context, most scientific or technological developments run the risk of seeming trivial or irrelevant in the eyes of the general public. Historical context helps explain the nature of a discovery or innovation; but explaining its significance frequently requires a degree of extrapolation, notably descriptions of potential consequences and ramifications. Science communicators thus almost always need to include an element of forecasting in their presentations of research findings -- typically based on researchers' own thinking about where their work may lead. This talk will illustrate the various ways in which reporting is done in the future tense; present some examples of how it works (and where it fails); outline the constraints on this approach; and suggest some similarities with the SF prototyping process.

Keywords. Interfaces, intelligent environments, embodiment, immersion, personal and social space, security, encryption

Brief Biography

Before becoming editor of newscientist.com, Sumit worked as a financial journalist for Risk magazine, the Economist Intelligence Unit and ERisk. His writing has appeared in publications ranging from the Daily Telegraph to Marvel Comics and the New Musical Express, and he has advised a wide variety of organisations on communications and online strategy. Sumit has a first class degree in physics from Imperial College London and a master's degree in mathematics. He enjoys music, travel and ideas.

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