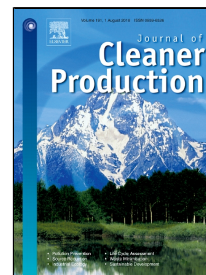


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Contested smart and low-carbon energy futures: Media discourses of smart meters in the United Kingdom

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**Contested smart and low-carbon energy futures: Media discourses of smart meters in  
the United Kingdom**

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**Abstract:** The Smart Meter Implementation Programme (SMIP) is arguably the most expansive and complex smart meter programmes globally. The UK government regards smart meters to be enablers of a low-carbon energy grid and has set out ambitious consumer-orientated aims within their programme across England, Scotland, and Wales. Despite considerable amount of research on how consumers will (or not) engage with smart meters, media discourses, where some public debates about smart meters are created and reproduced, have received little attention. This paper presents a content analysis of how smart meters are discussed within 11 years of popular print media coverage. A collection of nine discourses are identified: Four of these – “empowered consumers”, “energy conscious world”, “low-carbon grid”, and “future smart innovation” – depict smart meters as a harbinger of positive social change. Five of these – “hacked and vulnerable grid”, “big brother”, “costly disaster”, “astronomical bills”, and “families in turmoil” – represent smart meters as negative forces on society. The results show that discourses and associated storylines mainly represent continuous struggles over specific issues concerning particular socio-technical promises linked to smart meters. Somewhat missing are attempts to open up the smart energy debate to broader issues of democracy and energy justice within the print media coverage.

**Keywords:** smart grid, media discourses, futures, energy infrastructure

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