Increasing levels of 'hype' language in grant applications and publications

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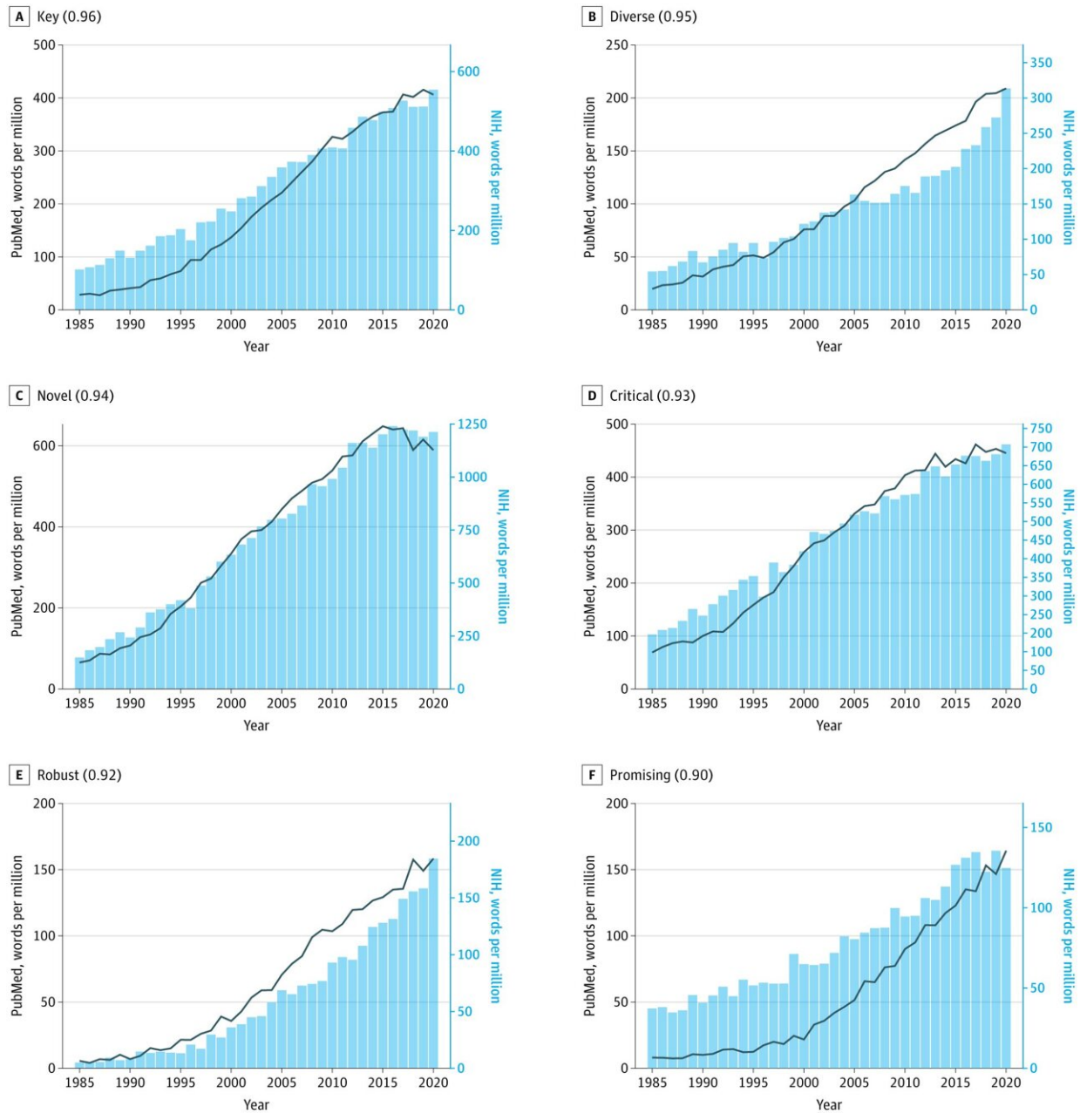

Frequency of each word's use in PubMed abstracts and NIH funding application abstracts is shown. In the panel label in parentheses the correlation coefficient between word frequency in the 2 data sets is given. Credit: *JAMA Network Open* (2023). DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.48706

The success of scientific endeavors often depends on support from public research grants. Successful applicants increasingly describe their proposed research using promotional language ("hype"); however, it remains unclear whether they use hype in their subsequent research publications.

A research team led by the University of Tsukuba analyzed all published research abstracts of projects funded by the U.S. National Institute of Health (NIH) from 1985 to 2020. The analysis covered 139 hype adjectives emphasizing significance (e.g., imperative, paramount), novelty (e.g., revolutionary, ground-breaking), scale (e.g., massive, vast), rigor (e.g., careful, sophisticated), utility (e.g., impactful, seamless), attitudes (e.g., incredible, exciting), and the gravity of problems (e.g., dire, devastating).

A dramatic growth in almost all hype terms was found over the 36-year period. Furthermore, the usage trends of hype adjectives were closely correlated with the usage trends in NIH funding applications during the same period. This finding suggests that the language choices of investigators at the grant application stage affect the subsequent presentation of research findings.

The study, published in *JAMA Network Open*, indicates the role of funding mechanisms in shaping the tone of research communication. Recognizing the concerns surrounding increasing levels of hype, funding

bodies are urged to not nudge investigators towards salesmanship.

More information: Neil Millar et al, Promotional Language (Hype) in Abstracts of Publications of National Institutes of Health–Funded Research, 1985-2020, *JAMA Network Open* (2023). DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.48706

Provided by University of Tsukuba

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