



AUT RESEARCH CENTRE FOR
JOURNALISM, MEDIA & DEMOCRACY

AOTEAROA

AI, Big Tech & Journalism

JMAD Conference
2026

Thursday, September 3 & Friday, September 4

AUT Research Centre for Journalism, Media & Democracy

School of Communication Studies | Te Kura Whakapāho

Auckland University of Technology | Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makarau

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WF710 / WF711 / WG404 The Case Room
The Sir Paul Reeves Building (WG)
City Campus, Auckland University of Technology
Corner of Mayoral Drive & Wakefield St,
Auckland CBD



What is JMAD?

The AUT Research Centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy (JMAD) was founded by Martin Hirst and Wayne Hope in May 2010. Wayne remains a co-director and, since 2012, Verica Rupar, Merja Myllylahti and Greg Treadwell, successively, have joined him as co-directors. In 2011, JMAD inaugurated its annual Aotearoa-New Zealand Media Ownership report. Each year from 2020, JMAD has published its national Trust in News in Aotearoa New Zealand reports. JMAD academic conferences held previously were entitled *Media, Democracy and the Public Sphere* (2010), *Political Economy of Communication* (2011), *Media Histories: New Zealand, Australia & the South Pacific* (2012), *Media, War and Memory* (2014), *Journalism, Media and Surveillance* (2018), and *Political Economy of Journalism* (2024). Now, in 2026 we welcome participants and attendees to JMAD's seventh conference – *AI, Big Tech and Journalism*.

On behalf of all JMAD members and the School of Communication Studies research communities, we welcome you to AUT and trust you enjoy the conference!

Co-directors

Professor Wayne Hope wayne.hope@aut.ac.nz

Dr Greg Treadwell gregory.treadwell@aut.ac.nz

NOTE: Please see the campus map on the back page for the location of the two buildings, known as WG and WF, in which the conference will take place.

Sessions – Themes, Speakers & Times

Thursday, September 3

Plenary 9am-11am (WG404 The Case Room)

- Mihi
- Opening remarks
 - Professor Damon Salesa, Vice Chancellor, Auckland University of Technology
 - Professor Suzanne Wilkinson, Dean of the Faculty of Design & Technologies
 - Professor Dan Laufer, Head of School, School of Communication Studies
- Welcome – Professor Wayne Hope & Dr Greg Treadwell, JMAD co-directors
- Keynote introduction – Professor Wayne Hope
- Keynote: Niles Christopher, Nieman Fellow, Harvard University, technology journalist, Los Angeles Times. *The liar's dividend: AI, epistemic crisis, and what's left of journalism*
- Discussant: Professor Wayne Hope

Morning Tea 11am-11.30am WF Level 7

Parallel Morning Sessions 11.30am-12.45pm

AI and Right Extremism

(WF710)

Chair: Sarah Baker

Paul Mountfort. *The West under siege: The Tolkeinian myth, the techno-libertarian far right and the struggle over media and democracy*

Rashad Seeden. *Organic intellectuals and accidental beneficiaries: How the far right gains from AI slop*

Brett Nicholls. *Structural asymmetry: Immediacy, late fascism and Pauline Hanson's grip on Australia's political imagination.*

Brief questions to speakers

AI and Audio-visual Representation

(WF711)

Chair: Justin Matthews

Christina Milligan & Elizabeth Hoyle. *Ethical issues around the use of AI in documentary making*

Rachel Daniels. *Slow policy in a fast-platform era: SVOD regulation in Aotearoa New Zealand*

Marco Staines. *Le Cose Che Non Esistono (The Things That Don't Exist): Utilising human and artificial intelligence in the visualisation of an actualising self*

Brief questions to speakers

Lunch 12.45pm-1.45pm WF Level 7

Plenary 1.45pm-3pm (WG404 The Case Room)

- Keynote introduction: Professor Wayne Hope
- Keynote: Timothy Ström, Arena Publishing Cooperative. *Artificial intelligence in cybernetic capitalism*

Discussant: Associate Professor Brett Nicholls, University of Otago	
<i>Afternoon Tea 3pm-3.15pm WG Level 4</i>	
Single Afternoon Session 3.15pm-4.45pm (WG404 The Case Room) AI technologies: Sovereignty, power, ideology Chair: Wayne Hope - Annalise Higgins. <i>AI, big tech and the future of technological sovereignty.</i> - Nicole Wegner. <i>AI militarisation and changes in contemporary warfare.</i> - Amanda Rutherford. <i>Solutionism for whom? Elon Musk, Pegasus and the unequal politics of AI surveillance</i> - Marek Winkel. <i>Of Big Others and Objets Petits a: The ambivalent ideological constitution of artificial intelligence</i> Brief questions to speakers	
<i>Parallel afternoon sessions 4.45pm-6pm</i>	
AI Impacts on universities Chair: Vijay Devadas Leon Salter. <i>AI and the limits of new public management in universities: A case study of the University of Auckland, New Zealand</i> Chien Ju Ting. <i>Unequal academics: AI as a threat to the voice and agency of Asian women in academia.</i> Welby Ings. <i>Intellectual independence: Cognitive offloading, substitution and the nature of signature</i> Brief questions to speakers	Disinformation, distrust and democracy Chair: Merja Myllylahti Georgia Lala. <i>Beyond false information: Deep fakes and the loss of epistemic security</i> Phoebe Fletcher. <i>Trusting your government: How affective polarization impacts social-bot knowledge and mis-knowledge</i> Justin Matthews. <i>Information order and the safe stranger: AI platform fragmentation and the trust conditions of civil society</i> Brief questions to speakers
Refreshments, nourishments and reflections Galbraith's Ale House, 2 Mt Eden Rd, 6.30pm-10pm <i>(5min Uber, 20min walk)</i>	

Sessions – Themes, Speakers & Times

Friday, September 4

Plenary 9.30am-10.45am (WG404 The Case Room)

- Keynote introduction: Associate Professor Merja Myllylahti
- Keynote: Dr Silvia Montaña-Niño, University of Melbourne. *Advancing plural artificial intelligence(s): Creative resistance and the future of journalism*
- Discussant: Associate Professor Helen Sissons

Morning tea 10.45-11am (WG Level 4)

Media Panel (WG404 The Case Room)

Chair: Greg Treadwell

Industry insiders: AI & the Newsroom

In this session, media professionals from Aotearoa New Zealand discuss the impacts of AI on journalism.

Lunch 12.15pm-1.15pm WF Level 7

Parallel afternoon sessions 1.15pm-3pm

Journalism, news work & AI technologies

(WF710)

Chair: Christina Milligan

Helen Sissons and Philippa Smith. *'AI junk': Journalists' discourses about uncertainty about technological change*

Merja Myllylahti. *An empirical investigation of how AI search and search assistants affect news visibility and audience behaviour*

Sarah Baker. *AI singularities and human autonomy: Journalism and the limits of technological futures*

Conan Young. *AI and journalism practice*

Yang Guo. *The impact of AI technology on journalism practices and news narratives: Ethical challenges in a local media outlet in Auckland*

Abhishek Kumar. *Artificial intelligence in journalism education: Educators as interpreters and facilitators of technological innovation*

AI, journalistic practices and media organisations: International case studies

(WF711)

Chair: Rachel Daniels

Claire Tao. *From public value to algorithmic distribution: Public service media diversity on algorithmic platforms*

Richard Adonu. *Digital stratification in African journalism: How economic barriers create tiered access to AI tools among Ghanaian media workers*

Ernest Munhzedzi and Tendai Chari. *Appropriation of generative AI in global south under-resourced newsrooms: The case of a South African campus radio station*

Barek Hossain. *Navigating AI disinformation in resource-constrained Bangladeshi newsrooms*

Ikfina Chairani. *Datafying inequality: The depoliticisation of poverty in Indonesian digital journalism*

Final afternoon session 3pm-4.15pm WG404 The Case Room

Global warning: AI the new frontier in climate activism

Norway-based Ketan Joshi has been writing about the intersection of energy and climate for the past decade. In this final session, he talks to AUT's Matt Halliday.

Close of conference

Concluding remarks: Wayne Hope and Greg Treadwell

Farewells

Reflections & complimentary drinks

Galbraith's Ale House, 2 Mt Eden Rd, 5pm

(5min Uber, 20min walk)

Keynote Addresses



The liar's dividend: AI, epistemic crisis, and what's left of journalism

Niles Christopher, Nieman Lab, Harvard University

Since 2019, I've watched deepfakes and videos generated from artificial intelligence evolve from a fringe curiosity to a political weapon. I first reported on this as a journalist in India and the Global South before the U.S. and other Western countries began grappling with the repercussions. Today, a third of Americans believe Joe Biden's 2020 election victory was illegitimate. Trust in expert institutions from news media to public schools is at an all-time low. Share an AI-generated video of a bomb blast in a war zone and even experts can no longer reliably determine its inauthenticity. This loss of visual truth contributes to an epistemic crisis – a breakdown in shared and verifiable reality among people. This did not happen overnight. Years of denial, failure to invest in defences, and Big Tech apathy have led us here: no institution has the tools to arbitrate what's real. As traditional media loses audience trust, social feeds are polarising audiences and driving people into filter bubbles. Meanwhile AI is disrupting journalism as search traffic to publishers collapses. Young readers actively avoid news and form parasocial relationships with chatbots rather than with reporters. From my on-ground reporting, I will contextualise the incentives that produced the AI-driven epistemic crisis, the harms it has caused democratic societies, and consider the future of news.

Niles Christopher is an award-winning technology reporter for the Los Angeles Times. He was formerly the South Asia correspondent for Rest of World, reporting from India on issues ranging from Apple's manufacturing shift out of China to investigations into the use of deepfakes in elections. In 2024, he became a Nieman fellow at Harvard University, researching AI-generated content's impact on society. His reporting has also appeared in Wired, the Atlantic and on the BBC.



Artificial intelligence in cybernetic capitalism

Timothy Erik Ström, Arena Publishing Cooperative

With AI at its cutting-edge, the material abstractions of cybernetic capitalism are actively remaking our world in ways that are increasingly crisis ridden. I propose a historical material arch which examines how cybernetics has overlaid and augmented older forms of capitalist-modernity, with contradictions emerging from various continuities and discontinuities. A social theoretical approach—grounded in empirical cases and examples—informs a wide-ranging discussion touching on current affairs in the tech world, financial structures, infrastructural imperialism and geopolitical power struggles. Across all of this, the question of ecology will be considered. We exist within a natural world thrust into an accelerating extinction event. A key aim of the presentation is to disrupt the pervasive and problematic assumption that technologies are neutral. Moving beyond this instrumentalist dead-end is essential if we are to deepen our ability to interpret the current conjuncture; to communicate it clearly and—especially—if we are to create meaningful alternatives.

*Timothy Erik Ström is a Melbourne-based independent writer and editor at the Arena Publishing Cooperative. He is concluding a postdoctoral research fellowship through Western Sydney University concerning social meanings of the global extinction crisis. He wrote *Globalization and Surveillance* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020). His next book, *Cybernetic Capitalism*, commissioned by Verso, will be published in early 2027.*



Advancing plural artificial intelligence(s): Creative resistance and the future of journalism

Silvia Montaña-Niño, University of Melbourne

Today, multiple AI technologies, imposed on us from the techno-utopian domains of Silicon Valley, reflect the logics of capitalist extractivism. Yet, there are emerging counter-initiatives and possibilities. With these observations in mind, I explore the domain of journalism. Recent studies of AI technology in newsrooms provide a snapshot of transition. Newsrooms initially rejected AI hype. Subsequently, though, technology companies and publishers embedded AI into core media infrastructures in response to competitive pressures. Major news media entities now have the capacity and the licensing agreements to train LLMs on massive volumes of news items, news stories and investigations. As the AI appetite for journalistic content grows, small companies and individual journalists are prone to exploitation. However, AI technologies also have democratic potentials—from large document investigations to the use of augmented devices to scrutinise disinformation and bad actors. Here, debate must extend beyond the Silicon Valley motto of “creative destruction” to embrace the principles of “creative resistance” set within a journalistic sensorium of new epistemologies open to triangulation and verification methodologies. On this basis, journalism’s capacity to monitor unaccountable power and strengthen democratic principles will be enhanced.

Dr Silvia Montaña-Niño, lecturer in journalism at the Centre for Advancing Journalism, University of Melbourne, is also an Associate Investigator with the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society (ADM+S) at the University of Melbourne node. Before serving as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the ADM+S at the Queensland University of Technology, she worked for more than 15 years as a journalist for newspapers and digital media organisations in Colombia. Her research examines how artificial intelligence, datafication, automation, and digital platforms reshape journalism, news production, and democratic communication.

Papers

Abhishek Kumar abhishek.mlex@gmail.com	Artificial intelligence in journalism education: Educators as interpreters and facilitators of technological innovation Artificial Intelligence and automation have become pervasive in news media, increasingly assisting humans in journalistic work. While AI tools enhance efficiency, they also have the potential to blur the boundaries of editorial autonomy in news workflows. It is therefore pertinent to examine how AI tools and literacy are being introduced to journalism students in classroom settings. Here, the role of educators in preparing students to navigate AI-embedded newsrooms effectively in their transition from academia to practice is especially important. Drawing on the diffusion of innovations theory and in-depth interviews with 15 journalism educators in European and North American universities, this study maps out how AI tools and AI literacy are being integrated into media and journalism education. In so doing, I examine how educators serve as interpreters and facilitators of technology by transcending the traditional role of teaching and operating as normative actors and catalysts for change. The study finds that most educators are early adopters and are at the persuasion stage in the five-stage process of the adoption and diffusion of innovation proposed by Rogers.
Amanda Rutherford Auckland University of Technology amanda.rutherford@aut.ac.nz	Solutionism for whom? Elon Musk, Pegasus and the unequal politics of AI surveillance Technological solutionism presents artificial intelligence as an inevitable means of addressing insecurity, inefficiency and social disorder. However, technological solutions are developed and distributed within unequal structures of ownership and power. Elon Musk's interconnected interests in AI, digital platforms and communication infrastructure provide a contemporary example of how technological elites position privately controlled systems as serving humanity while accumulating significant economic and informational power. The paper considers Pegasus spyware, an established case of privately developed surveillance technology promoted as a solution to terrorism and serious crime but used against journalists, activists and political opponents. Although Pegasus is not itself an AI system, it reveals the risks that may intensify as artificial intelligence expands the capacity to identify, classify and monitor individuals at scale. Bringing Musk's technological vision into conversation with the Pegasus case raises the following questions. Who defines the problems technology is expected to solve? Who profits from those solutions? Who becomes vulnerable to them? I conclude that journalism must interrogate the ownership and ideology of AI rather than reproduce elite narratives of innovation, inevitability and universal progress.

Annalise Higgins Koi Tū Centre for Informed Futures annalise.higgins@informedfutures.org	AI, big-tech, and the future of technological sovereignty Technological dependence and its implications for sovereignty have long drawn attention. So too have complex processes of forming international norms and governing a globalised world. These issues are even more closely intertwined with the rise of AI. AI and data will transform both the scale and nature of technological dependence. Non-state actors are particularly important. Major technology corporations (big-tech) are increasingly shaping the global information environment through privately governed digital infrastructures. The scale of infrastructure and data required in an AI world, along with access to computing power and the energy to power it, is shaping the consolidation of power and influence. AI and data are neither ideologically nor epistemologically benign. The new playing field and the positions adopted by big tech corporations have implications for the degree of technological, digital, and informational sovereignty that is possible. The impact these processes have on the information environment in turn has profound implications for nations' citizens and for democracy. This presentation considers the implications of these global processes for smaller nations like Aotearoa New Zealand. It evaluates the implications for sovereignty stemming from big-tech's increasing role in concentrating power, shaping global norms, and influencing the information environment.
Barek Hossain University of Development Alternative, Bangladesh barek.kaiser@gmail.com	Navigating AI disinformation in resource-constrained Bangladeshi newsrooms As generative AI accelerates the spread of sophisticated disinformation, newsrooms in the Global South face an unequal battle. This paper explores how AI-driven disinformation intersects with journalism in Bangladesh, where synthetic media and deepfakes manipulate public perception. Through qualitative interviews with Bangladeshi journalists and fact-checkers, the study examines how resource constrained newsrooms struggle to verify AI-generated content. Big Tech platforms use algorithmic moderation tools, but these often fail to detect localised Bengali disinformation, leaving local journalists overwhelmed. I also analyse how state regulations meant to fight digital falsehoods can instead worsen reporters' vulnerability, without holding Big Tech accountable. Ultimately, this research shows that rapid AI weaponisation disproportionately burdens Bangladeshi journalists and widens the global technological divide. Highlighting these challenges, it contributes to the discourse on how Big Tech algorithms and AI-driven disinformation affect journalistic integrity and democracy in developing nations.

Brett Nicholls University of Otago brett.nicholls@otago.ac.nz	Structural asymmetry: Immediacy, late fascism, and Pauline Hanson's grip on Australia's political imagination This paper considers why reactionary politics flourishes in the context of what Anna Kornbluh calls immediacy. Within the collapse of mediating forms of representation, left, classed-based politics struggles to gain traction while reactionary political voices are amplified. Drawing on Alberto Toscano's account of late fascism as a recurring displacement of capitalist crisis into racialised and nationalist antagonism, I argue that the right's prominence is structural rather than incidental: where left politics must work to build an unrealised future through mass organisation, theory, and narrative, the reactionary right can seem coherent by activating already existing inequalities and identifications that require no mediating apparatus. Pauline Hanson's current resurgence in Australia illustrates this structural asymmetry concretely. Her 1990s career relied on talkback radio and tabloid press to perform unmediated "plain speech". Her most recent electoral gains in South Australia, preferred Prime Minister opinion poll win, and resultant fawning news media coverage show that Hanson benefits from the condition of immediacy. Her party's rise is aided and abetted by platform-informed content engineered for algorithmic circulation and the reinforcement of already ingrained colonial common sense. This convergence of reactionary politics and technologies of immediacy can be linked to late fascism. Hanson's fascism is immediacy's most native political form.
Chien Ju Ting Auckland University of Technology chien.ting@aut.ac.nz	Unequal academics: AI as a threat to the voice and agency of Asian women in academia Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping higher education, including how academic knowledge is produced, circulated, evaluated and made visible. While AI is often framed as a productivity-enhancing tool, this paper argues that AI-mediated systems are also discursive technologies embedded in existing structures of institutional, gendered and racialised power. This highlights AI's effects on professional practice, academic labour, ideology and governance. Utilising a Foucauldian analytical lens, my conceptual approach uses voice, agency and epistemic justice as integrated analytical tools to examine how AI-mediated systems constrain the voice and agency of Asian women academics in Western higher education institutions. In this respect, AI is not a neutral tool; through standardising academic expression, mediating visibility and shaping evaluative norms, AI can reproduce existing inequalities while appearing objective or efficient. Presenting Asian women academics as a critical case in the debate about scaling up AI use in universities, reveals a conceptual diagnosis of deeper systemic issues with AI. What is lost when marginalised academic voices are flattened, filtered or rendered less visible? How does this loss affect academic discourse and knowledge diversity? I call for institutions to create strong academic leadership and AI governance protocols. Our future should be primarily shaped by governance and leadership, not ideology.

Christina Milligan & Elizabeth Hoyle Auckland University of Technology christina.milligan@aut.ac.nz	Ethical issues around the use of AI in documentary filmmaking Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly used in documentary-making by enthusiasts as a set of tools that augments existing practice. AI can indeed improve efficiencies in documentary-making. It can help organise, analyse and archive large amounts of material, both digital and analogue, reducing hours or days of manual work in these processes to minutes or even seconds. As a result, AI is becoming embedded in a range of filmmaking processes, from the planning to the finishing. However, beyond categories of creative practice and creative labour lies a more complex issue: how AI affects the ethics of documentary making. Unlike journalists, documentary makers have no set of agreed-upon ethical standards by which they must operate for industry or professional recognition. Already, then, the world of documentary is an ethically complex domain, where potentially intrusive cameras often record the most private and vulnerable sides to human life. As reflexive research, the paper uses the authors' own documentary work as sites of inquiry, isolating times and places in their production when the use of AI would have raised questions around the production's credibility, and the impacts on the final product if it had been used. The authors discuss industry and academic assumptions about the value of AI in documentary films, given it has the potential to undermine the very trust, from participants, subjects and audiences, that gives documentary its celebrated authenticity.
Claire Tao RMIT & ADM+S s4147935@student.rmit.edu.au	From public value to algorithmic distribution: Public service media diversity on algorithmic platforms Public-service media derive democratic legitimacy from their mandate to serve the public interest through pluralistic, inclusive and socially responsive journalism. However, the platformisation and algorithmic mediation of news distribution have complicated how this mandate is enacted beyond editorial production. As public service media increasingly depend on commercial algorithmic platforms, media diversity is shaped not only by institutional and representational practices but also by platform infrastructures, recommender systems and the distributional conditions through which journalism reaches audiences. Using the Australian Broadcasting Corporation as a case study, this research examines how diversity as public value is translated across institutional, editorial, platform and audience contexts. It investigates how diversity is articulated as a public service mandate, how public-interest journalism is adapted across ABC News, YouTube and TikTok, and how algorithmic distribution reconfigures editorial gatekeeping, platform circulation and audience exposure. Methodologically, the study combines policy analysis, critical technocultural discourse analysis, interviews and data donation. It contributes to public service media and journalism studies by conceptualising media diversity as a distributional and experiential problem, rather than solely one of content provision or representation. I argue public value in algorithmic platform environments must be examined through the conditions under which journalism is circulated, prioritised and encountered by diverse publics.

Conan Young University of Canterbury conan.young@canterbury.ac.nz	AI and journalism practice New Zealand newsrooms incorporating AI tools in the creation and distribution of their journalism may be ceding an unacceptable level of editorial control to the platform companies that own and control these tools. AI is discussed by Simon as changing these media companies “in ways that bring them yet closer to the logics of the technology sector”. My research will ask whether or to what extent this is true in New Zealand and why this matters. I will also look at whether these tools are achieving the efficiencies touted by newsroom managers as one of the primary reasons for their adoption. Two sets of interviews will be done at two yearly intervals with journalists and newsroom managers, to capture changes over time in the way AI tools are being used and talked about. The way interviewees frame AI will be compared to how this is done by the platforms themselves in marketing materials and blogs, adopting Berg's digital technography approach, which positions technologies such as this as “sociocultural products marinated with the assumptions and worldviews of their makers.”
Georgia Lala Koi Tū: Centre for Informed Futures georgia.lala@informedfutures.org	Beyond false information: Deepfakes and the loss of epistemic security The growing realism of deepfakes, combined with their suitability for algorithmic amplification, has increased their ability to spread false information and generate uncertainty. These effects can be particularly felt during moments of crisis, when an already anxious audience rapidly searches out information (regardless of whether it is true or false). I will argue that the significance of deepfakes extends beyond the dissemination of isolated falsehoods and one-off instances of confusion. Deepfakes contribute to a broader erosion of epistemic security. This reflects a shift from temporary episodes of confusion following a crisis to a more enduring condition in which any information is treated with heightened suspicion. A loss of epistemic security jeopardises collective action, social trust and deliberative democracy. This paper employs a comparative case study methodology to examine the circulation of deepfakes after moments of crisis, including the 2026 Bondi Beach terrorist attack. I argue that repeated exposure to deepfakes after a crisis undermines trust, weakens verification and challenges information integrity. In this way, deepfakes can be situated within a wider debate about the protection of epistemic security and democratic norms in online spaces.

Helen Sissons & Philippa Smith Auckland University of Technology helen.sissons@aut.ac.nz	“AI Junk”: Journalists’ discourses of uncertainty about technological change This paper examines how journalists are responding to the growing use of artificial intelligence in news production as journalism faces serious economic and organisational pressure. Drawing on interviews conducted in 2024–2025 with journalists in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, the paper explores how journalists understand, negotiate and talk about AI within unstable digital news environments. I situate AI within broader industry changes linked to platform dominance, shrinking newsrooms, misinformation and declining public trust in legacy journalism. Using a qualitative methodology informed by Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), the study discursively analyses journalists’ narratives and the language they use when talking about AI technologies and its impact. Particular attention is paid to professional identity, newsroom pressures, audience relationships and the future of journalism in an AI-driven media environment. The findings show that AI is already embedded across newsroom workflows, from content production and optimisation to audience distribution. The journalists interviewed acknowledged the practical efficiencies AI can offer, particularly in speeding up routine tasks. However, they also revealed widespread concern about AI-generated misinformation, deepfakes, de-skilling, editorial autonomy and the growing difficulty of verification in AI-assisted news environments. Many participants indicated a discourse of uncertainty through the use of metaphors about how to identify or verify AI-generated material, highlighting a gap between the rapid adoption of AI technologies and journalists’ understanding of how these systems operate.
Ikfina Chairani University of Waikato ic138@students.waikato.ac.nz	Datafying inequality: The depoliticisation of poverty in Indonesian digital journalism This study critiques the rise of technological solutionism within the platform-constrained environments of Big Tech, examining how digital journalism flattens structural socio-political crises into datafied and techno-managerial problems. Focusing on Indonesia’s digital media ecosystem, I analyse how poverty is framed within the structural architecture of Facebook—a space governed by algorithmic optimization pressures that reward condensed formats and immediate authoritative metrics. Methodologically, I demonstrate the value of AI as a critical investigative tool. A supervised machine learning model to analyse a dataset of 3,134 news captions from major Indonesian outlets spanning a ten-year period (2014–2024). The computational analysis reveals a highly uniform reliance on official state statistics and administrative metrics over time, regardless of media ownership structures. Ultimately, I argue this data-driven framing acts as a powerful depoliticising ideology. By reducing the structural and political realities of inequality to technical tracking indices, platform-dependent journalism shifts public discourse away from contestation. This process effectively shields institutional power from genuine democratic critique, exposing how Big Tech’s datafied logics reshape the ideological baseline of journalism in the Global South.

Justin Matthews Auckland University of Technology justin.matthews@aut.ac.nz	Informational order and the safe stranger: AI, platform fragmentation, and the trust conditions of civil society This presentation explores AI-driven informational destabilisation not only as a problem of truth, disinformation, or journalism, but as a pressure on the trust conditions of civil coexistence. Research on AI, platform power, and journalism has often focused on labour, bias, misinformation, institutional trust, and the erosion of traditional news authority. Less attention has been paid to the background conditions that allow strangers to remain broadly legible, tolerable, and non-threatening within large-scale modern societies. Civil life depends on three interdependent forms of order: material order, behavioural order, and informational order. Material order includes institutions, infrastructure, and regulatory systems. Behavioural order includes norms of restraint, civil inattention, and everyday non-escalation. Informational order refers to the minimum shared reference points, credibility structures, and interpretive overlap that allow people to treat one another as inhabiting a sufficiently common social world. The central question is: are contemporary media environments, shaped by participatory culture, fragmented news consumption, misinformation, disinformation, and AI-enabled synthetic media placing strain on this third (informational) order? Four exploratory mechanisms are proposed through which this may occur: reduced stranger legibility, norm fracture, weakened institutional mediation, and ambient suspicion. The core claim is not that fragmentation itself is new, nor that social media or AI alone explain declining trust. Rather, it is that the current configuration and scale of increasingly synthetic informational environments may be historically distinctive in ways that deserve closer attention. The value of this intervention is conceptual. It reframes journalism as part of the infrastructure of public intelligibility and raises a broader question: if informational order weakens, what happens to the underlying sense that strangers inhabit a recognisable-enough world which allows for civil coexistence to hold?
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Leon Salter University of Auckland leon.salter@auckland.ac.nz	AI and the limits of new public management in universities: A case study of the University of Auckland, New Zealand From 2024, universities began to embrace AI through the implementation of strategies, policies and action plans, which often stressed the potential for improving productivity and innovation in teaching and research. Often, these policies championing the expansion of AI have furthered pre-existing relationships with Ed Tech providers from Silicon Valley. Universities sensed a competitive advantage from the announcement of strategic partnerships. A backlash from academics, particularly in Arts and Humanities, highlights dangers to the critical thinking of students, research integrity, academic autonomy, job security, and the university's position in society. The leadership of this author's employer, Waipapa Taumata Rau/University of Auckland, have prominently advocated generative AI. In May 2025 the "AI in Education Action Plan" was announced by the Vice Chancellor at an All-Staff Forum. In a techno-optimistic tone, this document outlines "risks" and "guiding principles" in its first two pages. However, the remaining ten are practical recommendations for embedding generative AI into teaching, without further reference to the risks and guiding principles. The document was prepared by the AI Education Advisory Group. Members were appointed by the VC and they did not consult with the union or the wider academic community. In response, an alternative working group formed through the Tertiary Education Union (TEU) designed a survey of academic and Professional union members and received 144 responses. A mix of both frequent and infrequent AI users concurred that the university leadership's messaging was confusing, contradictory and dismissive of employee concerns. Overall, the findings highlight a fundamental deficit in contemporary university governance and policy-making. New Public Management (NPM), dominant since the 1990s in New Zealand and in most other Western countries, emphasises centralized management control, which views academic autonomy with suspicion (academics are framed as motivated by self-preservation and change aversion). Consequently, less emphasis is placed on collegial decision-making, and more on "results", or delivering more VFM (value for money). Within this context, generative AI's promises of efficiency, scientific measurement and centralized control prove alluring. However, the NPM governance model concerning AI cannot garner the range of expertise necessary to consider the very future of tertiary education.
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Marco Staines Auckland University of Technology marco.staines@aut.ac.nz	Le cose che non esistono (The things that don't exist): Utilising human and artificial intelligence in the visualisation of an actualising self I discuss the ongoing production of <i>Le Cose Che Non Esistono</i> (The Things That Don't Exist), a practice-based PhD project that uses allegorical animation to explore identity loss and self-discovery through encounters with Artificial Intelligence. The project combines human-created and machine-generated imagery to construct a fictional environment in which human and artificial intelligence coexist. The research operates as an artistic provocation, questioning how the adoption of AI reshapes authorship and agency in human creativity. This tension is intensified by the cultural humanisation of GenAI, whereby generative systems are increasingly framed as processes of creative synthesis. As production progresses, the work examines hybrid analogue–digital 2D/3D and generative AI workflows as sites of negotiated authorship, where visual language emerges among artist, software, and AI systems. Within these workflows, the study identifies a metacognitive paradox: technological tools designed to increase creativity and efficiency may reduce the artistic signature, as agency is redistributed into automated processes. The project frames these dynamics through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, positioning creativity as a pathway to self-actualisation.
Marek Winkel University of Fribourg marek.winkel@unifr.ch	Of Big Others and Objet Petit a: The ambivalent ideological constitution of artificial intelligence Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly shaping everyday life. Some perspectives highlight its potential for progressive social development, while others caution against the risks it poses to users, societies, and political systems. This presentation argues that the future development of the AI-society relationship must be addressed through an integrated debate that considers both societal structures and individual use of AI. Individual actions are shaped by societal norms, and vice versa. The article explores how the social role of AI can be understood through Slavoj Žižek's theory of ideology and the subject. His analysis of the relationship between capitalist ideology and the subject's psyche offers a framework for connecting micro and macro levels in the AI debate. However, as the analysis shows, the phenomenon of AI exceeds Žižek's concept of ideology and society. It simultaneously serves as an ideological imperative – the Big Other – and as a phantasmagoric object of enjoyment and satisfaction – the object petit a. Doing so, AI might connect but also compete with capitalism on being the leading ideology of society. Finally, by blurring the role of the Other and offering extended ways of enjoyment, AI can lead to a variety of psychological symptoms and severe societal disruptions.

Matt Halliday Auckland University of Technology matt.halliday@aut.ac.nz	Global warning: AI the new frontier in climate activism Ketan Joshi has been writing about the intersection of energy and climate for the past decade. AI and its insatiable hunger for fossil-derived fuel consumes more of his time, evidenced by the prolific output of freelance research and writing, media commentary and video blogs. While Ketan doesn't identify as a journalist, his work can be described as advocacy journalism. As well as his role as a Senior Research Associate at the Australia Institute, he has authored several NGO reports on the climate impacts of AI including <i>Energy Vampires: The AI data centres draining Australia</i> with Greenpeace Australia and <i>The AI Climate Hoax: Behind the Curtain of How Big Tech Greenwashes Impacts</i> with six globally recognised NGOs. This afternoon session will be early morning in Oslo as Ketan joins AUT researcher, Matt Halliday, in an online conversation about the idea of the journalist, and how he ended up being an AI specialist, learning Norwegian to challenge the petro-state's sustainability myth.
Merja Myllylahti Auckland University of Technology merja.myllylahti@aut.ac.nz	An empirical exploration of how AI search and search assistants affect news visibility and audience behaviour This empirical paper uses a mixed method to examine how AI search functions and answer assistants affect news media traffic and news visibility. Longitudinal data of major New Zealand news sites' traffic and referrals are used to investigate news visibility. The number of mentions news sites gain from AI assistants such as ChatGPT, AI Overview, AI Mode and Gemini are also analysed. I evaluate epistemic risks to news media and journalism by assessing the extent to which audiences consume news via AI search engines and assistants, and the degree to which such news is trusted. Data about traffic and mentions collected from SimilarWeb (a digital data company) and Semrush (a digital marketing platform), is drawn upon. Data about audience consumption and trust patterns is gathered from a nationally representative survey of New Zealanders. As AI systems become global, they create asymmetric risk and maldistributions of wealth, which potentially threaten the financial viability of some news organisations. Based on empirical data, the paper considers how manufactured risks created by AI companies threatens the integrity of news and journalism and democratic deliberations.

Nicole Wegner University of Auckland nicole.wegner@auckland.ac.nz	AI, militarisation, and changes in contemporary warfare While recent AI technological innovations have been driven by the private sector, AI industries have long been implicated in defence and military development programs. Looking closely at recent discourse surrounding US-based Palantir's Maven Smart Systems, this paper considers how AI technologies are escalating existing moral grey areas theorized by war and conflict studies. Using feminist discourse analysis, I explore how emerging concepts such as "human-in-the-kill-loop", "compressing the kill chain", and "maximum lethality doctrine" play out in recent global conflicts, specifically the 2026 Iran War. I consider feminist scholarship that has examined similar categorizations of "military aged men" and "precision strikes" to theorize how language used to describe and promote Maven Smart Systems (and other AI-military integrated programs) perpetuates existing military practices that dehumanize and sanitize war casualties, rendering them the consequence of quantified technical calculations rather than moral or ethical concerns. Elke Schwarz describes this as the "codification of life into computable data". I situate these developments against decades of feminist International Relations scholarship to caution that while not new, this manifestation of militarization is novel and requires careful unpacking to understand the political mechanisms at play behind recent revolutions in military affairs (RMAs).
Paul Mountfort Auckland University of Technology paul.mountfort@aut.ac.nz	'The West under siege': Tolkienian myth, the techno-libertarian far right, and the struggle over media and democracy This paper examines why parcelled elements of J. R. R. Tolkien's mythology circulate so readily within the cultural-political economy of AI and Big Tech. I argue that the Tolkienian legendarium (names, symbols, and racialised types) is marshalled within techno-libertarian, platform-capitalist, and security-technology circles as a flexible repertoire for in-house signalling, branding, and ideological inscription. There are antecedents in earlier mobilisations in the Italian New Right and neofascist cultural milieu, where Tolkien's work helped furnish a mythic language of social hierarchy, national belonging, and civilisational maintenance. In the contemporary U.S. context, Tolkien functions more as a bank of portable references infusing corporate identity and circulating across platforms, meme culture, and wider communications media. Focusing on Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, Alex Karp, and Curtis Yarvin, the paper charts how selected motifs from Middle-earth are weaponised to aestheticise elite stewardship, class warfare and civilisational struggle in veiled form. Particular attention is given to Yarvin's 'Cathedral' framework, which explicitly targets journalism, academia, and allied knowledge institutions as a hegemonic order to be displaced. Read in this light, Tolkienian references function as symbolic code for the material struggle over media legitimacy, public truth, and democratic survivance.

Phoebe Fletcher, Diyako Rahmani, Alexandra Hess & Judith Holdershaw Massey University p.r.fletcher@massey.ac.nz	Trusting your government: How affective polarisation impacts social bot knowledge and mis-knowledge Disinformation - or the seeding of deliberately false information - is one of the key challenges facing democracies today. <i>Social bots</i> (automatic software programmes that are utilised to post on social media and comment forums, undermining trust in government) play a key role in disseminating this information at scale. One proposed strategy for reducing the influence of disinformation is improving users' knowledge of social bots. However, resilience to disinformation appears to vary across political contexts, with existing political polarisation playing a critical role. This research advances our knowledge of the mechanisms that influence resilience to disinformation through three key research questions: 1) How does trust in government influence user scrutiny of disinformation? 2) What are the mechanisms driving this effect? 3) How does existing misinformation shape user bot knowledge and engagement with disinformation? To answer these questions, we propose a novel Engagement Reallocation Model (ERM) to explain how bot knowledge can both increase and decrease user engagement with false posts. We propose two competing pathways: a <i>verification route</i>, where bot knowledge prompts diagnostic engagement such as fact checking, and a <i>dismissal route</i>, where users rely on heuristics – such as trust in government – to reject content without further scrutiny. We test the ERM using a survey and experimental stimulus featuring a disinformation post, administered to social media users in a high-trust country (New Zealand, n = 566) and a low-trust country (United States, n = 641). Using validated scales, participants were asked questions that assessed their knowledge of bots and trust in government. Mis-knowledge was measured by asking about respondents' perception of incorrect Covid-19 conspiracy knowledge. Treating country as a covariate, we find two distinct engagement pathways. In high-trust contexts, bot knowledge increases trust, which in turn reduces engagement by prompting users to dismiss the post quickly through heuristic reasoning. In low-trust contexts, bot knowledge increases scrutiny and fact-checking behaviour, consistent with systematic processing.
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Rachel Daniels Auckland University of Technology rachel.daniels@aut.ac.nz	Slow policy in a fast platform era: SVOD regulation in Aotearoa New Zealand This presentation will discuss the transformation of the screen industry as transnational subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) platforms expand their dominance, alongside the comparatively slow pace of government policy response. Drawing on analyses of interviews with industry practitioners and existing scholarship, it then turns to other countries, such as Australia, Canada, and the European Union, which have already established measures requiring platform contributions to local screen industries. Recent policy developments in New Zealand indicate government interventions have been cautious, fragmented, and often slow. For example, initiatives including the proposed Aotearoa New Zealand Public Media (ANZPM) merger, revisions to the New Zealand Screen Production Rebate (NZSPR), and the 2025 Media Reform Discussion Document demonstrate awareness of these difficulties but fall short of delivering regulat. The abolition of the Broadcasting Standards Authority further contributes to uncertainty about the future of media governance. As SVOD platforms operate largely outside national frameworks, they are not simply extensions of legacy media but represent a broader reconfiguration of value creation shaped by platform economics and global scale. They vary in revenue models, audience behaviour, globalised production, and the roles of public, commercial, and streaming media. Streamers' use of algorithms shapes viewers' content discovery, as recommendations are often based on previous viewing behaviour, which may restrict exposure to diverse programmes. Policy responses attuned to national conditions, infrastructure, and cultural objectives are required. This presentation will argue a more timely, platform-neutral regulation is needed to support cultural uniqueness and ensure long-term sustainability of Aotearoa New Zealand's screen sector.
Rashad Seedeen La Trobe University. r.seedeem@latrobe.edu.au	Inorganic intellectuals and accidental beneficiaries: How the far-right gains from AI slop Recently, Australian social media has been flooded with politically inclined 'AI slop' - low-quality, mass-produced AI-generated content. This should be easily identifiable as synthetic but is still being interpreted as real by less savvy users. The producers of the content are largely from Vietnam and Sri Lanka with no political affiliations. In Gramscian terms, these actors can be considered 'inorganic intellectuals': inauthentic contributors who produce synthetic content yet can still shape political perceptions. This paper will provide a Gramscian-framed analysis of a brief period where AI slop inundated Australian social media amplifying the far-right party One Nation and issues associated with it. Opportunistic transnational actors produced AI-generated content to exploit algorithms that rewarded emotionally charged far-right material. Such synthetic content used images of One Nation leader Pauline Hanson, commentator Peta Credlin, and fabricated personas to generate sympathy, rage, and political engagement with far-right issues. The tens of thousands of likes and comments on such manufactured media indicated sections of the Australian public could not reliably discriminate between fake and real content. Even more concerning, racist far-right messaging gained an outsized platform. Findings from this paper indicate such content from inorganic intellectuals have the prospect of being a regular feature in political discourse with worrying implications for future elections.

Richard Mensah Adonu School of Journalism & Media, UTK adonu@vols.utk.edu	Digital stratification in African journalism: How economic barriers create tiered access to AI tools among Ghanaian media workers Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping journalism globally, yet access to these tools is not equal. This research examines how economic constraints shape AI adoption among Ghanaian journalists. Using a cross-sectional survey design grounded in digital divide theory, which explains how unequal access to technology deepens existing social and economic inequalities, the study investigates three key hypotheses about income, skills, and collaborative strategies. Preliminary findings indicate that journalists earning above the median salary are significantly more likely to use premium AI tools. Economic constraints negatively correlate with AI skills development, meaning journalists with fewer financial resources report lower confidence and competence in using AI tools. Resource-constrained journalists also rely more heavily on collaborative strategies such as account sharing and peer learning to access AI. These emerging patterns suggest a tiered system of AI access in Ghanaian newsrooms, whereby income determines not just what tools journalists use, but how skilled they become in using them. Full data collection and analysis will be completed before September 2026. The study contributes to debates on AI, labor, and digital inequality in Global South media systems.
Sarah Baker Auckland University of Technology sarah.baker@aut.ac.nz	AI singularities and human autonomy: Journalism and the limits of technological futures This paper examines the tension between narratives of Artificial Intelligence (AI) singularity and the erosion of human autonomy through the framework of wicked problems. While singularity discourse imagines a future moment in which machine intelligence surpasses human cognition, this paper argues that such projections obscure the structural transformations already reshaping journalism under platform capitalism. Drawing on critical media theory, the paper positions the singularity as an ideological construct that reinforces technological solutionism and techno-determinism, legitimising the expansion of Big Tech power. It develops three arguments: first, that AI-driven disinformation destabilises journalistic authority through scalable automation rather than superintelligence; second, that journalistic labour is increasingly subordinated to algorithmic systems; and third, that human autonomy is incrementally constrained through everyday interactions with opaque computational infrastructures. Framing AI as a wicked problem shifts focus from speculative futures to present conditions, highlighting how autonomy is continuously negotiated within AI-mediated environments.

Tendai Chari & Ernest Munhzedzi University of Venda tendai.chari@univen.ac.za	Appropriation of generative artificial intelligence in Global South under-resourced newsrooms: The case of a South African campus radio The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in journalism is drastically transforming global news production. While much scholarly attention has been focused on AI use in commercial and well-resourced media organisations, less is known about its adoption and implications in community newsrooms in the Global South. Underpinned by Technological Appropriation Theory and employing a qualitative research approach, this study investigated how generative AI tools were being deployed at UNIVEN FM, a community radio station based at the rural-based University of Venda, in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Semi-structured interviews with purposively selected 8 reporters, editors and producers at UNIVEN FM were used to gather data. Data from semi-structured interviews was thematically coded and presented in narrative form. The study provides insights into the opportunities and challenges presented by AI in low-resourced community radio stations in the Global South, particularly in South African context. These context-specific findings fill a major gap in the literature regarding how grassroots media practitioners navigate the AI-driven revolution of journalism in a democratic but resource-constrained media landscape.
Welby Ings Auckland University of Technology welby.ings@aut.ac.nz	Intellectual independence: Cognitive offloading, substitution and the nature of signature This research considers the impact of AI on tertiary learning design where high levels of literary and artistic ‘signature’ are considered assets to professional competency. The presentation frames its discussion around the Section 268 of the New Zealand 2020 Education and Training Act, that requires universities to be “primarily concerned with more advanced learning, the principal aim being to develop intellectual independence.” Intellectual independence is a complex and sophisticated requirement that is acquired as a “consequence of students learning the skills and dispositions to think critically, as an independent guide to their own beliefs and actions.” In contemporary learning environments, such independence warrants a critique of how AI affects cognitive offloading, effort and cognitive atrophy. Also considered are the generation of low originality outputs (based on existing patterns) and potential limitations to the building of creativity and creative confidence. Illustrated with case studies of work undertaken in design and communication programmes at the Auckland University of Technology, the presentation unpacks how thinkers navigate, integrate and marginalise AI in the pursuit of increased levels of literary and artistic signature.

Yang Guo Auckland University of Technology xcm5255@autuni.ac.nz	The impact of artificial intelligence technology on journalistic practices, news narratives, and ethical challenges in a local media outlet in Auckland The increasing application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in newsrooms occurs against a backdrop of digitalization across the media landscape. It is widely agreed that journalism is traditionally positioned as a civic institution in service of the public, and that the profession should emphasize the principle of plurality within the bounds of generally accepted values. Local media play a crucial role in fostering media pluralism by serving specific geographic areas or communities, yet they are also the site of challenges from AI technologies. Despite this, there remains a lack of research addressing how AI specifically influences journalistic norms and professionalism within local media contexts. Therefore, this research investigates whether AI could facilitate the widening or narrowing of democratic participation by considering the participant ethnography of Channel 33, a television channel based in Auckland targeting the Chinese diaspora community. The analysis employs a political lens grounded in core liberal democratic norms—civility, tolerance, inclusion, mutual recognition, and reasoned exchange of differing perspectives—across various stages of news production. Doing so contributes to a more nuanced understanding of AI’s role in shaping the relationship between journalism and politics.
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- Business** – Level 1, WF building
- Communication Studies** – Level 12, WG building
- Engineering, Computer & Mathematical Sciences** – Level 3, WZ building
- Future Environments** – Level 11, WG building & level 3, WZ building
- Hospitality & Tourism Reception** – Level 3, WH building & level 3, WB building
- Language & Culture Reception** – Level 4, WB building
- Law** – Level 6, WY building
- Science** – Level 1, WS building
- Social Sciences & Public Policy** – Level 5, WQ building
- Te Ara Poutama Reception** – Level 3, WB building

STUDENT HUB

Level 2, WA building

SERVICES AND FACILITIES

- AUT International** – Level 16, WO building
- AUT Security** – Corner St Paul & Wakefield St, WO building
- AUT Shop/UBIQ** – WH102, WH building
- AUT Student Association (AUTSA)** – Level 2, WC building
- Learning Lab** – Level 3, WA building
- Library** – Level 4, WA building
- PinkLime** (print services) – Level 3, WA building
- Student Accommodation** – WR building
- Student Accommodation & Recreation Centre** – WQ building
- Student Counselling & Mental Health** – WB204, WB building
- Student Medical Centre** – WB219, WB building
- Tech Central** – Level 4, WA building

- Student Hub
- Student lounge & study space
- Café
- Library
- Gym
- Conference facility
- City Campus-South Campus shuttle bus stop
- Baby feeding rooms
- Mobility parks
- Defibrillator
- WA4** Hikuwai Plaza, outside library
- WB222** Health & Counselling Centre
- WF01** Lift lobby
- WG1** Help desk in the atrium
- WH209** Piko restaurant
- WO2** Security reception
- WS01** Lift lobby
- WY1** Mayoral Drive – lift lobby
- WQ3** Reception area

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