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KONRAD
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Artificial
Intelligence



AI and Journalism

Fireside Chat with Nobel Peace Prize
Laureate Maria Ressa

Should ChatGPT Be Banned in Schools?



Konrad Adenauer, Turkey, 1954.
Photographed by Ara Güler.

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Media Programme Asia

Named after Germany's first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Media Programme Asia was established in 1996 to promote a free, responsible and ethical press in Asia. The KAS Media Programme Asia therefore connects leading journalists with one another, collaborating with colleagues and partners worldwide. The overarching goal of our work is to promote and support Asian media institutions and journalists in the development of professional journalistic standards in the region, to support young journalists as best as possible throughout their careers, and to advocate and promote the importance of media as an integral part of democratic and liberal societies.

The Adenauer Fellowship

The Adenauer Fellowship is a scholarship programme offered by the KAS Media Programme Asia to support journalism education in the region. The KAS Media Programme Asia partners with several educational institutions in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines. For more information about applications and application deadlines, please visit: <https://adenauer.careers>



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Foreword

Is the robot colleague a friend or foe of the human journalist? Will artificial intelligence (AI) make our work better, take over the boring tasks of our jobs and relieve us from such tediousness, or will it make our jobs redundant and put some of us out on the street?

These questions are at the centre of current debates about AI. In essence, we need only ask: will AI benefit our profession, or destroy it?

The answer is simple: both will happen. Where knowledgeable publishers or media companies are in charge, they will use AI to relieve their journalists of boring routine jobs and free them up for more important things that only humans can do, such as on-the-ground investigating, tracking down irregularities, looking behind the curtain, contacting informants, checking and rechecking the credibility of sources.

However, where publishers and media makers are only looking for ways to reduce costs, they may relegate large parts of their business operations to AI and fire human employees, in the mistaken belief that the same quality of work can be achieved at a lower cost. This is incorrect. The robot colleague can write a 10-line note about the football or cricket match in the fifth division if it is told the result, the team line-up, and the decisive manoeuvres. It can also briefly and concisely analyse each constituency after an election, list wins and losses, draw comparisons with the previous election, and name winners and losers with just a click of a button. And it can do much more besides: Composing a write up of the history of a country or a conflict. Providing background information about political or economic questions. Describing cultural trends and developments in arts or music. And, for example, when a well-known person dies unexpectedly, AI can extract information from Wikipedia or other sources to write an obituary in a fraction of a second.



But then comes the human journalist. Only they may have met the celebrity, or can personally contact the deceased's companions. Only they can register discrepancies after the election and track them down. Only they can add new thoughts, new quotes, new views to an article about the work of a great painter or the legacy of a controversial politician.

AI can write articles on many different subjects in many different areas, and that's a good thing. It will improve our output because we can concentrate on the important points of our work. AI can improve journalism, but AI cannot replace journalists. We are better, we stay smarter, we set the topics. We should – we must – have this self-confidence. And then we can say, 'Welcome, robot colleague! Good to have you in our newsroom!'

In this issue of *ArtIQulate*, astute people, mostly fellows of our programme, and also the wonderful Maria Ressa, have once again taken up the pen. They have written about AI, and other topics too. This is journalism at its best, supported by the KAS Media Programme Asia. I wish you an exciting read. ■

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ansgar Graw', written in a cursive style.

Ansgar Graw

Director,
KAS Media Programme Asia

Ansgar Graw is the director of the Media Programme Asia at the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation Ltd. in Singapore. The journalist and former TV host has published numerous books on Donald Trump, international affairs and German politics, amongst others, and has a strong focus on business journalism through his work with the German media outlets Die Welt (e.g. as correspondent in Washington D.C.) and The European.

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Participants and trainers of the Adenauer Media Leaders Academy 2023, in Kathmandu, Nepal.

#AMLA23: How Media Becomes an Agent for Change

Navneeta Nandan



The 2023 Adenauer Media Leaders Academy conference was an enriching experience with industry experts, practical training, newsroom visits, and of course networking.

The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Media Programme Asia—a German foundation that supports the training of journalists towards a free, ethical, and responsible press—continued the discourse on cross border journalism and cybersecurity of journalists during its annual Adenauer Media Leaders Academy (AMLA) conference.

Set in a valley surrounded by the Himalayan mountains, the 2023 AMLA conference was held in the heart of Nepal, in Kathmandu. The conference was spread across a two-day schedule on 6 and 7 September 2023 at the time capsule of Nepalese architecture, Baber Mahal Vilas - The Heritage Hotel.






The Baithak Meeting Hall of the hotel brought the fresh fellows and the alumni of KAS together for some exciting discussions, interactions, quizzes, assignments, and games. It was like one big family, bridging countries across the South Asian and Southeast Asian region.

Welcoming the fellows a night before the conference began, the director of KAS Media Programme Asia Ansgar Graw highlighted the crucial significance of maintaining cross-border networks with journalists. As these fellows from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand, Mongolia, Malaysia, and Taiwan heard him speak, they could not help but concur on how Konrad Adenauer Stiftung has successfully helped them achieve this goal.

The evening was full of the zest and vigour of meeting old and new friends. With hearts brimming with thrill and stomachs full of the feast of maharajas, the participants called it a day.



Navneeta Nandan, journalist at The Economic Times in India, is an alumna of the Asian College of Journalism, under the KAS Media Programme. She is passionate about investigations and often likes to pour her heart out in words and poems.

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Adenauer Media Leaders Academy - DAY 1

The first day began with an introduction to the conference by the project manager of KAS Media Programme Asia, **Lisa Wlaschek**. It was followed by the formal opening of the conference by Ansgar Graw.

The event kickstarted with the editor-in-chief of the Nepali newspaper, *Nagarik National Daily*, **Guna Raj Luitel**. He welcomed everyone to his land and commenced his presentation titled 'Is Media an Agent for Change in Nepal?' He began his discussion with the history of media in Nepal, educated the participants on Nepal's Black Day and how the Nepalese fought through it to reach the stage where media is today. He underlined the strength of legacy media and highlighted how the media in Nepal is trying to 'poke use of IT Revolution'.

Next speaker of the day was the senior multi-platform journalist of ABS-CBN, **Jacque Manabat**. She directed the discussion to a very relevant topic, 'Digital Hygiene and Cybersecurity for Journalists'. She became a gamemaster, enlightening the par-

ticipants with multiple fun quizzes and games to educate fellow journalists on how to maintain their digital hygiene and stay vigilant for any kind of cyber-attack.

The event was succeeded by a networking session conducted by **Lisa Wlaschek**. The fellows were rotated at intervals of five minutes wherein they had the opportunity to get to know each other.

This was followed by the latest addition to the AMLA agenda—a visit to newsrooms. The participants were taken to the Republica newsroom where they interacted with the CEO of Nepal Republic Media, **Sambridhi Gyawali**. After this, the gang went to the newsroom of Nepal Investigative Multimedia Journalism Network (NIMJN). Hosted by **Rajneesh Bhandari**, the participants got to know about NIMJN and its work, which was followed by an interactive Q&A session. The day was wrapped up with a dinner at the multicuisine Toran Restaurant in The Dwarika's Hotel.



Adenauer Media Leaders Academy - DAY2

Lisa Wlaschek welcomed everyone on the second and final day of the conference. She gave the stage to the lecturer at the Centre for Excellence in Journalism, IBA Pakistan and the editor of Dawn.com, **Shahzeb Ahmed Hashim**.

Hashim began by explaining the idea of cross-border journalism and localising it to the respective locations. He assigned one issue to each country present at the conference. The issues revolved around freedom of speech, political instability, impact of climate change, treatment of gendered, ethnic, and religious minorities, among others. The fellows of each country had to present a short overview of what the situation is pertaining to the assigned factor in their country. All the dialogues were followed by a discussion where other countries drew parallels on that topic. He then elaborated on different degrees of networking that can come handy in cross-border reporting.

This was followed by a practical training session where some story pitches were selected, and fellows

could choose the topic they wanted to be a part of. This led to seven diverse groups on different topics. These groups prepared and presented their idea of cross-border reporting on their topic, pointed out comparisons and similarities of the situation across countries and demonstrated how these stories could be localised in their own respective regions.

After a long and detailed presentation and feedback by Shahzeb and Ansgar, the participants went on to a final dinner together to Mezza by Roadhouse. Ansgar Graw offered the closing remarks, leaving all of us looking forward to #AMLA24.

With heavy hearts, amazement of the past two days, and an excitement for the next year, fellows of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Media Programme Asia parted ways and bid farewell to khadas and aila (traditional Nepalese cloth and local liquor), some to explore the beauty of Nepal, and others to continue their journalistic practices with more sensitivity and awareness than before. ■







LIVE 7.6K

SONA 2022

ANG IKALAWANG STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS NI FANGLU ONO MARCOS

tubig na ginagamit natin Para sa

INQUIRER.NET



Jilson Tiu is a freelance photographer and photojournalist. He contributes to various corporations and NGOs in both print and online platforms, local and abroad. His personal work revolves around environmental and social issues. He loves black coffee.

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President Bongbong Marcos Jr. Delivers his second State of the Nation Address (SONA) July 24, 2023 as seen through a clothing vendor in Manila as they watch the SONA at the store. During that time, inflation rate at 5.4% at has risen recently to 6.1%.

Photography by Jilson Tiu

Journalists Are Under Attack – and Yet We Keep Going

Fireside chat with Nobel Prize Laureate Maria Ressa about press freedom in Asia and being a journalist in the current political climate at the 13th edition of the New.Now.Next Media Conference (N3Con) held on May 25-27, 2023, in Singapore.

The following text is an edited transcription of Maria Ressa's speech at N3Con.



Maria Angelita Ressa is a Filipino and American journalist. She is the co-founder and CEO of Rappler. She previously spent nearly two decades working as a lead investigative reporter in Southeast Asia for CNN. She was awarded the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize.

 @mariarressarappler

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 @mariaressa

Interviewer *Maria Ressa's independent digital news website, Rappler, sounded the alarm on the erosion of press freedom, human rights, and democracy in the Philippines. And because of that, Rappler was targeted by then President Rodrigo Duterte for stories exposing corruption, cronyism, and online disinformation networks. As Rappler's co-founded CEO, Maria endured constant political harassment and arrest by the government and was forced to post bail.*

Maria Ressa So, first, thank you. It is so good to see so many familiar faces and new friends in the audience.

*You've had an incredible two years, and you have been honored with the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021. You've written a memoir, *How to Stand Up to a Dictator*. Tell us a little bit about how you're doing. What has the last two years been like, this wild ride?*

MR Well, I guess the first step is "Thank You" to every single reporter who has written about Rappler, written about the Philippines, and we're still moving forward. So, yay! Thank you. You realize that the only defense a journalist has is to keep doing our jobs, to shine the light. And that's just gotten so much harder. How are we [Rappler]? Those 10 cases, 7 are gone. Just January this year, January 18th, I had to walk into a courtroom ready to go to jail for 34 years. If it had ruled against me, my lawyers didn't know whether or not I would have been given bail if we had lost that, right? These cases should never have gone to court. That's actually, so let me just quote that, because when I travel, I still have to go to the Supreme Court for approval to travel. And I have a broad restriction on what I can say about the remaining cases, or the justice system. We have another promulgation in June. There were 5 tax evasion cases. 4 of those tax evasion cases on January 18th went away like that. I was acquitted,

Rappler was acquitted. It just took four years and two months. It's not over, but it's closer. And then I guess one other part of that is there's a generational change, right? If you're coming into journalism now, boy, we need you. I mean, girl, we need you. You know, and we need your energy at the same time. I see my generation, [and] we need the people who have been there, especially in Southeast Asia, Faisal was talking about that, and everything else. The world has just gotten significantly worse. So it's my 37th year as a journalist.

You've been in Southeast Asia, covering [South East Asia] for a long time.

MR For a very long time. I hope I don't depress you, but I will be very straightforward about the challenges we face.

Is there any sign that the current President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, I mean, are there any signs that these cases might be actually dropped against you in the student administration? Because obviously, the threat of prison still hangs over you, the threat of Rappler closing is still very real.

MR This is the fun—, I hate to say the fun part, but what we learned in all of this, and if you're in a news group under threat, one of the things you have to do is you have to drill your people. So, every quarter, we do a drill of shutdown. Who does that? We did. I learned this through being in Indonesia. You just have to be prepared for what happens. So we literally work-flowed what would happen if the police barged in through the door and then we prepared for it.

This is your version of a fire drill?

MR Yeah, literally, it is our fire drill. So yes, could we still get shut down? Yes. Could I still go to jail? Yes. But if you look at V-Dem, it's a report, the two reports that show where democracy is going globally, right? If you look at the V-Dem report, it's from University of Gothenburg in Sweden. And if you look at the markers, you'll see that last year 60% of the world was under authoritarian rule. But I thought that includes India and China. Well, India was in between. But I thought maybe it's not so bad if it's

only 60%. But this year their new report came out and it moved up to 72%. And this is what we are all living through as journalists, and we are on the front lines. You cannot not drill. So they did talk about some countries that are emerging out of authoritarian rule. And strangely enough, the atmosphere of fear has lifted. Fear does a lot to squash our rights, and the first indicator of a recovering country moving back to democracy is an independent judiciary. And that, again, how can I not feel better when I just got acquitted of four tax evasion charges that should never have been filed in the first place? That was part of what the decision said. And yet, this is how crazy, how normal weirdness becomes, right? I was relieved that it was gone. Who knows where the world is gonna go, right? Today, what's the news? Elon Musk is now going to be able to test AI in a company he has called Neuralink. In people. So who knows, but we keep moving forward, we keep doing our jobs, and we try to encourage the best of who we can be because the stuff that connects us, encourages the worst.

72% percent, is obviously not a good indicator. Generally, for the Philippines, and obviously now you're looking much broader to helping make sure that there's free press all around the world—where do you think we stand in terms of a fight on a free press, especially in the Philippines, the disinformation, and now of course the potential threat that AI [Artificial Intelligence] brings?

MR I walked off the stage before the Nobel Summit in DC [was over], to catch the flight that would get me here in time for today. So, what was so fascinating about all of this is that this is a time when, we journalists are in the trenches. And you can see that from every single report, RSP, CPJ. There are many journalists now under attack who are being jailed, who are being killed. And yet we keep going. Our business model is dead. We've never faced as many threats as individuals, as news organizations. What's been torn apart has been trust because the end goal of all of the attacks is to actually tear apart a belief in the shared reality that we have. So in the United

Our business model is dead. We've never faced as many threats as individuals, as news organizations. What's been torn apart has been trust because the end goal of all of the attacks is to actually tear apart a belief in the shared reality that we have.

MARIA RESSA

States, you will talk about polarization. In the Philippines we have the same polarization, but that comes out of social media.

GNI [Google News Initiative], thank you for being the adult among the tech companies. I think tech becomes the match that was thrown into the kindling that is our societies. And that match is burning. There have been two instances where we've dealt with AI. We collectively, humanity. And in the Nobel lecture I talked a lot about the first generation, which is curation AI. This is algorithms, machine learning, [which] determines how you grow your feed, what content is recommended for you. So for example, the polarization in the book *How to Stand Up to a Dictator*, chapter 7, is how friends of friends wrote democracy. Friends of Friends is the algorithm that's A/B tested to be the best way for you to grow your own social media feed, when you grow the entire platform grows, right? But what Friends of Friends did, that one decision polarized our politics right? And then you have the radicalization that happens on Twitter, on YouTube, which they're calling networked clustered algorithms. So that's the first generation of AI, the second generation is generative AI. At Rappler we use GPT-3 in our May 2022 elections because we had 18,000 simultaneous elections and I have 10 reporters and I wanted to have a biography on every single candidate. About 50,000 pages were created by GPT-3 and at the bottom of the page you'll see, "this page was created by GPT-3 and checked by Rappler research". It didn't hallucinate because we kept the parameters very tight, it just basically had to plug it in right. So what did I learn in all of that? You have to control it and controlling it requires your thought, your time, your energy. Still not as much as you writing it yourself. If this first generation [AI] was harmful and it is, it's brought democracy down, this second generation is—exponential in a way our brains can't think about it. Think about the way it works, what makes large language models and what makes this so much better than before, is that it now thinks when it's writing something by word. I'll use GPT as the open AIs kind of parameters because this is what we were working with. We're just switching to Bard now, the Google's answer to Chat GPT, so what happened to GPT-2? With its parameters, Bard tries to work like a human brain. It goes through parameters and it's not just parameters per word but it also cuts across language, so in a sense it cuts across cultures. GPT-2, which was a few years back, is 1.5 billion parameters, which our brains can't do. GPT-3, which is what we [Rappler] used in our 2022 elections, has 175 billion parameters. GPT-4, which was just released, has 1 trillion parameters and this is the point where they stop releasing what the parameters are. Before the end of

the year 2023 GPT-5 is scheduled to out. Bard is out, Facebook's generative AI was released first limited, and later as an open source.

In the Nobel lecture I talked about the atom bomb. Now imagine that the atom bomb was released open source and anyone can create it.

In August 2022 there was a survey that was done in Silicon Valley. In Silicon Valley they had the survey where they surveyed about 800 people who were working on AI and of the people they surveyed, 50% of them said that they were afraid that they could lose control. They also said that there would be a 10% or greater chance that if they release this generative AI, that it would lead to an extinction event of us. An extinction event, right? So, I was thinking, and you hear Sam Altman say this all the time, there was a reason Google didn't release it publicly, there's a reason why the big companies didn't release it publicly. Now here we are and Sam Altman is going to Congress, where he's talking about how dangerous AI is. Of course the question is, 'well if it's so darn dangerous why are you releasing it?'—because they're testing it with us, as free testers. It's like atomic energy, like nuclear energy.

You have an action plan, that you formulated with your co-Nobel Peace Prize winner. It's a 10-Point action plan to support journalism and disinformation and hate speech online and that plan calls for the end of what you call 'the surveillance for profit business model' and the end of technological discrimination. What would that look like?

MR Rappler is still one of the Filipino fact-checking partners of Facebook. The way micro-targeting works is that every post you do is pulled up by machine learning to create a model of you. They have a model of you that knows you better than you know yourself. It has all your relationships and then analytics will fill in the gaps. Replace the word model with clone. Because they used their AI they then own your clone. And that clone for all of us in the room then becomes the mother lode database that is used to micro target. This is the advertising model. [Rappler's] advertising model in media is nothing compared to the advertising of micro targeting. It's part of the reason our businesses—say, advertising for our news organizations—are just dwindling to nothing because the ROI isn't as good as micro targeting.

Journalists are fighting uphill. Asian Americans for example have been targeted. Identity politics has been triggered by information operations and information warfare. The Mueller report of 2016 shows you that 126 million Americans were targeted. Black lives matter was targeted, both sides of black lives matter because it wasn't about trying to convince you of one thing, it was trying to tear apart the fabric

// Online violence is real-world violence. If you are pumping toxic sludge into our information ecosystem, into our bloodstream, that comes out in the real world. //

MARIA RESSA

of society. What's the best way to do that? Immigration. Identity. And here's the last part and I said this again in 2021 in the Nobel lecture, online violence is real-world violence. If you are pumping toxic sludge into our information ecosystem, into our bloodstream, that comes out in the real world. Connection there is, look at the shootings that are happening in America. There's several of them that are directly led from radicalization online. They were radicalized online and then for us, for journalists, for women, women journalists, women activists, women politicians. Jacinda Ardern from our part of the world, part of the reason she also gave up is because she was a female leader of a five-eye nation, who was being targeted in a way that this technology allows, and frankly wouldn't be allowed in the real world.

The Asia chapter of AAJA did a survey as part of the ANDA project, which is the Advancing News Diversity in Asia. We surveyed nearly 2,000 journalists in seven major markets here in Asia, including the Philippines, and we found that obviously women journalists said that they face discrimination. Cyberbullying online is a huge problem for journalists and it's horrible for women, it's much more magnified for women and you have been savagely attacked online, to what extent do you think that was magnified because you are a woman?

MR We had data from 2017 of women journalists in the Philippines who were attacked at least 10 times more than men, but in the end, male journalists were also attacked. Two pronged. The first reason why they attack us is called astroturf, to tear down our credibility. This was a big data case that was done by UNESCO and ICFJ. 60% of the attacks I was getting were meant to tear down my credibility. But the second one is also meant to tear down your spirit, to make you stop doing journalism and

there are many who choose not to. The woman who wrote *The Chilling*, which is the UNESCO reports in 2021 and 2022, said every single woman journalist she had spoken with cried in some way except me. She asked me why I didn't cry and I think the only reason was because I had the data. I looked at it like an investigative journalist and dang, I just happened to be the case study which was how I discovered it. It's a curse and a blessing. You know it's gonna get worse, and I bet that this generative AI will increase online harassment. My worry is for our communities, our countries, and each of our organizations.

They are going to target women, they are going to target folks in underrepresented communities because they're easy targets and there's no protections.

MR In the 10-Point Action plan, the second big point is to stop coded bias because this is built into the tech that connects all of us, right? If you are LGBTQ, if you were marginalized in the real world, you are further marginalized online. They didn't realize they coded it in, but it is there.

What can we do as individual journalists? What can we do to help?

MR Identify what the real problem is. If you are writing on tech, please write on tech. All of us fell in love with the tech because it was brand new.

We as journalists and democratic nations should be putting laws in place to protect us - consumer protection laws.

The second is, this is not the old world where we are competing in news organizations, we are working together.

I think the last one is that you have to take a deep breath and really look around. When Hong Kong's National Security Law was put in place, the same was put in place for the Philippines. So I couldn't jump up and down because I kept thinking I was getting the hammer thrown at me.

Please know these are not normal times, and as you have helped support us, we have to help support everyone else. ■



Keynote speaker Mathias Döpfner, CEO of Axel Springer, being introduced to the CTeC audience by KAS Media Asia director Ansgar Graw.

KAS Media Programme Asia An overview of our current events

CTeC Asia: AI and Journalism

Artificial intelligence in news rooms,
conference in Taipei (Taiwan), October 2023

A popular warning goes like this: Artificial intelligence (AI) is a threat to many jobs in newsrooms, and to the credibility of journalism itself. It will replace human beings and produce fake news, including deepfakes of such quality that renders it impossible for the audience to distinguish between fact and fiction.

At the CTeC Asia conference of KAS Media Programme Asia, leading experts discussed the topic of AI in the media and raised the aforementioned questions. But most of the 25 speakers came to more optimistic conclusions. Mathias Doepfner, Chairman and CEO of Axel Springer, Europe's largest media publishing company, definitively told an international

audience consisting of young journalists and experienced editors from many Asian countries, ‘AI will improve journalism.’ Doepfner’s advice? Journalists and newsrooms should be prepared to embrace technological advances in order to catapult the industry into the future. ‘We have to embrace progress. We have to embrace opportunities and take advantage of the tools not only to survive, but also to do better. We should be at the forefront of progress,’ Doepfner said in his virtual keynote. ‘We can delegate all the boring stuff of [journalism], the less exciting, less distinguishing elements of our business, to machines,’ he stated, ‘and we can focus on the more complicated, more exciting part [...] of that business, excel on that level and make journalism more impactful to society.’ The CEO and former journalist underscored that it is unlikely that reporters will lose their jobs to mechanical counterparts. ‘It is obvious that AI and language models can be very manipulative and have the potential to overrule and undermine democracy,’ he said. ‘[But] everything that deals with opinion, commentary, should be done by original brains and minds.’ The most effective newsrooms will be those that can manage ‘to integrate tech and journalism creativity,’ Doepfner claimed.

This optimistic view is supported by scientists. More and more newsrooms around the world are experimenting with the use of AI in various aspects of news operations as it presents opportunities for growth, explained Professor Charlie Beckett, London School of Economics and the founding director of Polis at LSE. He further cited that 85% of the journalists and news managers that Polis surveyed from more than 100 news organisations across almost 50 countries have experimented with the use of AI in their newsrooms. ‘It struck me about five years ago that this weird thing called machine learning, natural language processing, artificial intelligence, could be the next big thing. And I think in the last 12 months, with the rise of generative AI, I certainly feel that this is [...] almost like a tsunami,’ Beckett said. Most of the newsrooms Polis surveyed believe AI will be useful in text summarisation and generation, content personalisation and automation, as well as increase efficiency in the newsroom by deploying chatbots to conduct preliminary interviews and gauge public sentiment on issues, all of which are crucial in improving the experiences of news consumers. Re-

sources that would have gone to banal and repetitive tasks such as transcribing, Beckett explained, could be devoted to more ‘human’ aspects of journalism such as investigations, specialist news topics, human interest stories, and real-world reporting.

In Malaysia, Star Media Group is currently utilising AI in news voiceovers based on scripts that journalists provide. This practice reduces the processing time from 20 to 30 minutes down to 2 or 3 minutes. ‘It is 10 times faster. So our editors can do more things, such as cover more events,’ Michelle Tam, an editor from Star Media Group, explained at the conference.

However, not everyone agreed with this sentiment. A number of speakers emphasised the importance of making sure that a journalist, as a human being, plays a critical role during news production. ‘The reporter should be the one who picks the subject, writes or edits the script, supervises translation, and does the voiceover,’ Dimitri Bruyas, Head of English News of Taiwan’s TVBS, stated, adding that AI does not perceive time and ethical issues the way reporters do.

Don Lejano, a channel editor from the Philippine newspaper *Inquirer*, said that the editors at the paper are allowed to use AI when coming up with SEO-friendly headlines as well. ‘Basically, our position is that we allow limited use of AI in news production, given that the guidelines we have set are adhered to,’ Lejano said.

In a panel titled ‘Harnessing AI for Misinformation Detection,’ moderated by DataLEADS founder and CEO Syed Nazakat, with participants including Director of Research, Meedan Dr. Scott Hale, Regional Director of IFPIM, Irene Jay Liu, founder of DataN, Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, and Assistant Professor & Director of DigiCamp & Propaganda in Asia, National University of Singapore, Dr. Taberez A. Neyazi, the discussion centred on the multifaceted interplay between technology and the spread of misinformation, and the complexities surrounding AI’s potential to both exacerbate and alleviate the growing issue of misinformation.

At another panel discussion, disinformation researchers and professors from Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore presented the findings of their studies on how China and Russia use ‘sharp power’—informal and unofficial tactics used to sway public opinion favourably towards authoritarian regimes—on certain issues.

Professor Maiko Ichihara from the Hitotsubashi University (Japan) further examined the work of Russian and Chinese trolls on recent events such as the Russian-Ukraine war and the release of treated Fukushima nuclear waste water into the ocean. She found that while the plan to release treated nuclear waste water galvanised support for local Japanese merchants, some Japanese members of public were actually influenced to be sympathetic to the Russian invasion. This point was echoed by the findings of fellow-Japanese academic Professor Tetsuro Kobayashi of Waseda University, in a separate study which found that ‘undemocratic narratives projected from authoritarian states have significant persuasive effects on the Japanese public.’

Ultimately, AI is able to drive new business ideas in the media, predicted Heike Weigelt, CIO of Funke Media Group from Germany. Artificial intelligence and large language models can help newsrooms generate more revenue streams and even retain audiences, the manager from Germany’s third largest publisher said in his keynote address. One way to do this is by using AI to generate an electronic newspaper, with curated content for each reader. ‘Personalisation has to be more creative than your bubble. You have to work out the right balance between content that fits the interest and still add curated content that you want to transport.’ ■

How Supply Chains Made Headlines



Video by STAT Media Group

In November 2023, experts from logistics companies, the media, and academia discussed the topic of ‘Pandemics, Wars, and Shifting Supply Chains: Global Crises and Media Coverage’ in a panel debate organised by KAS Media Programme Asia in cooperation with MMI Asia Pte Ltd, Munich, at the Transport Logistic Southeast Asia trade fair. The speakers, moderated by radio host Glenn van Zutphen (*Money FM*), were Chuin Wei Yap (Hinrich Foundation, Singapore), Tobias Rentschler (DB Schenker, Singapore), Reji John (*STAT Times*, India), Zita Tallat-Kelpsaite (*Jura Meer Sea*, Lithuania), and Ansgar Graw (KAS Media Programme Asia). The subject of discussion is particularly apt, given the events of the past few years. Before the coronavirus swept the world, there was little public reflection on, or at least media knowledge about, supply chains. Rather bleak warehouses mainly appeared in crime movies as the scene of murder and similar evil. Today, this is no longer the case. The global dependence of markets on the free exchange of goods has now become a matter of public awareness, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine has pushed the issue further into the headlines. ■

Jilson Tiu

CREATING AI IMAGES AS A PHOTOGRAPHER: AN INNER CONFLICT

The meaning of the word ‘photography’ has roots in the Greek words ‘phōtós’ and ‘graphé’, meaning ‘painting with light’ – literally, exposing film to light to capture a moment in time, frozen forever in that negative. As technology evolves, photography has moved forward from the film used in days of yore to the widespread use of smartphones in the 21st century. Majority of the photos taken in the past five years were taken with a smartphone, and the recent introduction of AI-assisted photography has further changed the photography landscape. The rate at which this technology has evolved is unprecedented, and in 2021, the explosion of AI-generated images came through software such as Midjourney and DALL-E. Midjourney is a generative AI, now hosted on Discord. You can type ‘/imagine’ in the chat box along with what image you want to create, anything you want to see, and Midjourney will generate the image. This was a major shake-up, impacting almost every industry in a myriad of ways. Such technology is a weapon, and in the wrong hands, it can cause havoc. Case in point, the events around the attack on the Pentagon and Trump’s eventual arrest were arguably exacerbated by AI-generated photos. Fake news has become a behemoth of contemporary society, and with the advent of AI image generation and its widespread availability, this issue is now at its highest and wildest.

As a photographer, I have worked in news, NGOs and editorial media. With the emergence of AI, it occurred to me that my job shooting photo stories and general news as a ‘light painter’ may soon be made obsolete. Technology is moving fast, and as we open Pandora’s box, there will undoubtedly be repercussions we cannot predict. For starters, human jobs are increasingly being replaced with AI, especially in sectors such as search engine organisation, archiving, accounting, and, as is the focus of this article, in the creative industry. Nowadays, clients can simply type whatever they want and AI will generate endless variations of their requests. With this, there is a diminished need for professionals who create from scratch. In the field of photography, stock photography will likely be gone in a few years, as companies like Adobe and Getty Images begin to develop their own generative AI using their stock libraries as the

main ingredient to train and feed the AI, inadvertently making redundant photographers and photojournalists in the process. With the entire world wide web as its reference library, AI is a double-edged sword. It has the ability to improve a photograph in technical aspects like removing noise together with enlargement and enhancement of detail, but also has debilitating effects in the hands of corporations and individuals who use this technology to exploit people and their work.

Society is still adjusting to the creation of AI, and at the rate of technological development, it is highly possible that we will no longer have a need for human photographers or actual photographs as AI can create new images faster than any human could ever achieve, for a smaller fee than hiring a photographer, or even free. It’s like taking a photo of a receipt and then throwing the actual receipt away. And yet, with the loss of one type of job, another is born: a prompt writer. A prompt writer’s job is to bridge the gap between the human and the machine, translating the client’s requirements into appropriate prompts to be inputted into AI software. These writers are proficient in how to best communicate with AI to utilise this tool efficiently, negating the need for the human artist. In the past, we thought that art could only be created by the human mind, that it could not be automated. But here we are, in the age of AI.

In photography and photojournalism, we capture real life to preserve an important moment in history or to make art in the intersection of light and life. Photography frames and freezes memories to be seen in the future, helping us remember. A memory trigger – with one look at a photo, you know the radiance and texture of the scene, transporting you and others to a moment in time already passed. With modern AI photography, all that remains is a husk of memory. A mashed up collective of photos of strangers, artificial images generated with a press of a button. Using AI to produce photographs is just as good as being a con artist, indulging a soulless, untruthful, and plagiarised images based on the work of true photographers. This is not photography, but hypocrisy. AI has its benefits in idea generation and brainstorming, but it should stop at that. ■

Accelerating Data-Driven Reporting with Generative AI

Cristina Chi



Chi is a multimedia reporter for Philstar.com, one of the Philippines' leading digital news organisations. Chi primarily covers education, the Office of the Vice President, the House of Representatives, and human rights. She specialises in reporting on inequality in education and the broader social justice issues it cuts across through data-driven storytelling. A finalist for the Best Thesis award in the University of the Philippines journalism department in 2023, Chi's undergraduate thesis explored data journalism techniques in education reporting.



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Generative AI can help beat reporters to leverage data for original stories, pushing the boundaries of what breaking-news reporters can achieve in a fast-paced and time-constrained field. AI-powered chatbots like ChatGPT can be used to identify data patterns, streamline data cleaning, and create on-the-spot interview questions about a dataset, assisting time-constrained reporters sift through large volumes of numbers and pursue underreported stories.

While AI tools can expedite data analysis, ChatGPT is ultimately a journalistic tool like any other, and reporters need to learn to catch inaccuracies and must have the final say in how data is used in a story.

Increasing demand for instant news content has pressured journalists into doing more with less. But at times, when the surfeit of data and information threatens to overwhelm the lone beat reporter, many have found themselves doing less with more—less reporting, less analysis, less interpretation, and more regurgitation.

How Filipino reporters use numbers and data in journalism—described by seasoned data journalism expert Philip Meyer as 'social science in a hurry'—is often constrained by lack of time.

Due to the speed at which the news cycle moves, reporters who break the news are neither incentivised nor expected to come up with original insights from data. Tight deadlines mean that simply lifting a statistic from a government press release often gets the job done. Opportunities to deepen coverage with interesting data buried in government handouts are easily missed.

In many newsrooms, only researchers detached from the daily grind have the luxury of time to scrutinise what enterprise story can be developed from a large dataset. But sadly, beat reporters who have the most access to the sources and stakeholders in their field of coverage are forced to constantly shift their attention to new issues, potentially missing under-reported stories.

Not all newsrooms have a research team that can, through numbers, make the news and not break it. That is how we do less with more.

But generative AI poses opportunities for beat reporters like me to take a crack at data-driven reporting. Beyond being used as a tool to paraphrase or grammar-check sentences, AI-powered chatbots like ChatGPT can act as a number cruncher for reporters who cycle through numerous coverages in a single day.

As a reporter for an online news organisation, breaking news takes up more space on my plate than any other journalistic output. Besides education, I cover the Philippine Congress, where numbers are not always part of the biggest stories of the day, unlike business and economy.

However, I try to set a weekly goal of producing one unique or explainer where I analyse and visualise data. I have used ChatGPT to act as a more mathematically inclined extension of my brain, with the caveat that I still validate any number it produces.

There are more sophisticated ways of using AI to prepare data for analysis and reportage. But from the perspective of a daily grind reporter, here are some of the ways ChatGPT has allowed me to save time when I go out of my way to use data in story:

AI can help to identify patterns in a large dataset. In particular, feeding Chat-GPT with results from a large survey allows me to speed up pattern-recognition. This allows me to go beyond just citing the percentages of responses. It helps me more quickly uncover nuanced trends, correlations, and outliers that might otherwise be difficult to spot due to the large volume of data.

Examples of prompt generation:

‘Based on the survey data I have inputted, can you give me a list of bullet points that can be derived from the findings? Identify outliers and interesting correlations, but ensure accuracy.’

‘Based on the outliers and correlations you identified, check if the survey supports (argument 1), (argument 2), and explain how.’

AI can be a tool for data validation, but accuracy checks are required. Chat-GPT can also help me ‘clean’ a dataset. This means ensuring that every entry is uniform. All names have to be standardised. This allows for a correct analysis to be done through Google Sheets or Microsoft Excel.

While there are limits to Chat-GPT’s knowledge (only reaching 2021 at the latest), utilising it to help in correcting typographies and even assigning codes is a useful function. But as written by data journalist Roberto Rocha, ‘It shows great potential, but like with anything critical, it’s not quite ready to be trusted one hundred percent, at least not with the current models.’

I still go through each entry to ensure accuracy. But it beats spending hours correcting basic formatting mistakes.

AI can create instant interview questions from a dataset. Besides creating story leads from data, Chat-GPT can also help generate questions that one can ask sources knowledgeable about the data.

As written by an award-winning group of data journalists at the Online Journalism Blog, ‘Sometimes the data journalism part only takes up 10 minutes and the rest of your time is tracking down case studies, or experts. Know when to put the numbers down and pick up the phone.’

For many beat reporters, new or crucial data is sent in the middle of a press briefing or conference. How does one analyse the dataset while transcribing officials’ answers and thinking of follow-up questions at the same time? It seems like a nightmare. Questions presented to an official after a press briefing are not always answered in time.

Conversely, AI-powered chatbots can help one generate questions about a dataset on the spot by prompting it to supply talking points based on its findings. While many reporters might be able to do this with small datasets on their own, number-crunching large datasets often takes time and headspace. Math- or number-averse journalists will therefore benefit from this starting point.

Journalists generating interview questions based on any prompt or data should be mindful, however, that Chat-GPT cannot capture nuance. It is best to use this as a mere guide and not blindly present the final questions without due diligence.

Examples of prompt generation:

‘Based on the data I have inputted, can you get the most important findings, and generate a couple of questions that I can ask to a (describe your source and their connection to the data)? Ensure that the questions will be helpful for a news story.’

Note that journalists should approach these tips with caution and beware of data hallucinations and mix-ups, as is common in AI tools. The final decision should always rest with the reporter. As the Global Investigative Journalism Network stated, ‘Putting ChatGPT at the end of journalistic workflow risks exchanging more speed and quantity for less credibility.’

Nothing beats the analysis and questions produced by the reporter itself. But what ChatGPT ultimately does is to ensure one never starts with a blank page. ■

Seeing Kathmandu

Children looking at their phones by the mountains in Kathmandu on 8 September 2023.
Photography by Alec Corpuz



Alec Corpuz



A Photojournalist's Reflections on AI and Visual Literacy



People flocking to the Swoyambhunath, also known as the Monkey Temple, in Kathmandu on 9 September 2023. Photography by Alec Corpuz

As AI technology continues to advance exponentially, the question remains: how does AI contribute to personal biases in photojournalism?

Sunlight illuminates the fog, wrapping brick and stone temples lining the streets, accentuating chipped statues of various gods as ascetic holy men sit and pray underneath. The mist mixes with smoke rising from small bonfires scattered along cobblestone streets caked in dust. The pitter-patter of hooved animals mixed with the steady putter of motorcycles seemingly provide the score for the scene, while mountains serve as a lush looming backdrop, clouds touching their peaks.

A quick Google search of Kathmandu generates images such as this, which begs the question, is this how the city really looks like or do these portrayals only serve to reinforce pre-existing biases? Are the popular images of Nepal 'genuine' or do they merely validate pre-conceived notions?

“ Are the popular images of Nepal ‘genuine’ or do they merely validate pre-conceived notions? ”

Any photojournalist worth their salt knows that they would never be able to capture the ‘authenticity’ of a place in just a few days during their first visit. Thinking otherwise is bordering on hubris and can even be considered offensive to local visual journalists who arguably can do a much better job. A photographer’s gaze is moulded by their own biases and experiences, after all.

And there lies the rub. Most people’s exposure to South Asian countries is limited to movies and popular culture, which is arguably mostly Westernised. Consciously or not, it would be easy to mimic these images which will in turn reinforce a certain point of view, something I feel I myself fell victim to.

Given a full day to shoot, I felt the images I made of Kathmandu were subpar. Not in a technical aspect, but more from a visual literacy standpoint.

As a photojournalist and someone who fancies himself an educator, this was disappointing. In a sense, I was just copying Hollywood and other photographers.

Is that a bad thing? No, not per se. Everyone is entitled to how they see things. But as someone who is trying to find not only their personal vision, I found myself thinking, am I complicit in the current misrepresentations of South Asia? Am I doing Nepal a disservice by sharing these images?

People touching prayer wheels at the Monkey Temple in Kathmandu. Mantras are inscribed on each wheel and a turn is equivalent to reciting the prayer.
Photography by Alec Corpuz



“ Having others photograph local cultures allows it to be shared and put into a larger context. The danger then is not having others take photos, but when visual journalists simply show what they think the audience wants to see. ”

I would argue that the answer is both yes and no. Yes, I am not really showing anything new except the fact that I am heavily influenced by how popular media depicts Kathmandu. Sure, the images could be called ‘pretty’, but I think anyone would be hard-pressed to call them ‘powerful’. Add in Susan Sontag’s thoughts in her work “On Photography” and well, you get the idea. Here she discusses how images impact our view of the world and shape our understanding of reality. She highlighted the need to consider the context in which images are created and consumed, emphasizing its cultural and ethical aspects. However, I would also argue that the images do not merely add to the ‘noise’ so to speak. I feel that in their own way, the photos add to the discussion, and at the very least could be used as teaching tools on visual literacy or lack thereof.

I feel that places should not be photographed exclusively by locals as it impedes growth. As experiences shape our disposition, having others photograph local cultures allows it to be shared and put into a larger context. The danger then is not having others take photos, but when visual journalists simply show what they think the audience wants to see.

Local and foreign tourists begin their descent from the top of the Monkey Temple.
Photography by Alec Corpuz





True to its name, monkeys are a common sight at the temple.
Photography by Alec Corpuz

This then can be connected to artificial intelligence (AI) and its role in visual literacy and photojournalism. AI has its uses in journalism, no doubt. From speech-to-text applications and machine learning, it can be an important tool in any newsroom. Used ethically and purposefully, AI can make a journalist more efficient and productive.

However, unlike text-based journalism, the same cannot be said for visual journalism. For one thing, photojournalism is the act of visually documenting the human experience. How can AI-rendered images claim to document an event if the creator was not there in the first place? Text-prompted image generators allow people to make illustrations, not photographs, of scenes that are meant to reflect the supposed reality. This however makes the whole process prone to the creator's subconscious bias.

“

Photojournalism is the act of visually documenting the human experience. How can AI-rendered images claim to document an event if the creator was not there in the first place?

”

It can be argued that AI will not present anything new, and as AI-generated images flood the web, the cycle of bias continues to be fed.

Another issue here is how AI uses existing images for learning. Without discussing copyright issues, which deserves its own discussion, AI only reinforces existing preconceived notions of a place or culture. It can be argued that AI will not present anything new, and as AI-generated images flood the web, the cycle of bias continues to be fed.

Should people who take photographs be more aware of their contribution to the ecology of images? Should they always think of the effects their photographs may have on how the world views not only Nepal but other places as well?

As with most things visual, aesthetic appeal still has value. At the end of the day, photojournalism is still a visual endeavor and it should remain as such. Journalistic value should not be the only metric a photograph is measured against.

The argument here is that while text-prompted images may have their uses in other fields such as advertising, I humbly think that it has no place in photojournalism or anything that is documentary in nature. ■




People saying prayers in front of an image of a deity in Durbar Square.
Photography by Alec Corpuz





People going about their business in one of the streets near Durbar Square.
Photography by Alec Corpuz



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Alec is a seasoned photojournalist and photo editor at news.abs-cbn.com, boasting a decade-long career in the field. Additionally, he has served as a college lecturer for nearly ten years, sharing his expertise and passion with aspiring journalists. With academic credentials from the Asian Center for Journalism, where he earned a Diploma in Photojournalism, and a Master's Degree in Journalism from Ateneo de Manila, he has a strong foundation in his craft. Alec's dedication to enhancing his visual literacy and his openness to diverse viewpoints underscores his commitment to the power of images in storytelling.

Artificial Intelligence and the Helplessness of the Humankind

AI: A blessing or a curse?

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Known Facts

The concept of knowledge being synonymous with power is widely acknowledged. The potency of knowledge lies in its ability to empower individuals to exert influence over both human beings and other living creatures. Consequently, humans are widely regarded as the most intellectually advanced creatures on the planet. Scientific research indicates that dolphins rank second only to humans in terms of intelligence. While the attribution of labels such as 'intelligent' or 'unintelligent' are constructs of human society, it appears that this hierarchy holds true given the dominance of mankind over the natural world. However, a disconcerting development has emerged whereby not only living entities but 'inerts' have entered the realm of intelligence through the utilisation of information and technology. Moreover, these collectives possess the capacity to autonomously accumulate information, thereby perpetually augmenting their intellectual capabilities. Consequently, despite the continued control exerted by their developers (a select few individuals), a crisis has arisen for humanity. This predicament arises from the fact that those in control employ these collectives against us for commercial purposes. This disquieting amalgamation is commonly referred to as artificial intelligence.

Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to the ability of machines to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as reasoning, problem-solving, understanding human language, perception, learning, planning, recognising individuals by sight or voice, making expert decisions, and manipulating objects. The term ‘artificial intelligence’ was first coined by John McCarthy in 1955, who is widely regarded as one of the fathers of AI, along with Marvin Minsky, Allen Newell, and Herbert A. Simon.¹ Since its inception, AI has undergone significant evolution, and its applications have expanded to a myriad of domains.

Intelligence agencies of different countries have been among the earliest adopters of AI. During the Cold War, the United States National Security Agency (NSA) and the United Kingdom’s Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) initiated the use of AI to transcribe and translate large volumes of intercepted Soviet phone calls. At that time, the technology was still in its nascent stages, but in recent years, AI has undergone significant improvements, owing to the availability of more data, improved algorithms, and increased processing power. Consequently, the use of AI in business has become increasingly effective, and intelligence agencies have ambitious plans for its deployment. In many countries, the export of AI-based technology and services has emerged as a significant source of income.

In addition to intelligence agencies, prominent technology companies such as Google, Facebook, and Microsoft are also engaging in surveillance practices through the use of AI. This is driven by competition among these entities to invest more heavily in AI development in order to outperform their rivals and achieve greater success. As it stands, much of the developed world is actively pursuing success in a wide range of human and non-human activities, including integrating AI technology into warfare, conducting surveillance across various domains, engaging in creative endeavours such as writing and music, operating vehicles, addressing climate change, and more. Interestingly, AI not only has the potential to influence individuals with less

technical knowledge, but also those who possess a deep understanding of technology in the developed world. The more individuals are exposed to technology, the more susceptible they become to its power.

When individuals use smartphones, televisions, or any internet-connected devices, their personal information, such as their browsing preferences, whereabouts, social connections, and activities can be monitored. Most applications, including social media platforms, accessed through these devices, track, collect, store, and analyse user data, often selling it to third parties —primarily businesses. Even when a device is turned off, user information can still be accessed as necessary.² Consequently, this creates a sense of insecurity among individuals. However, it is important to note that AI is not solely employed for surveillance purposes; it is also utilised in various ways to enhance and improve people’s daily lives.

AI: A blessing or a curse?

Scientists have made predictions regarding the future capabilities of AI-enabled robots, suggesting that by 2049 these robots will possess the ability to produce best-selling literature. However, it is worth noting that a novel authored by an AI-powered robot in Japan has already been considered for a prestigious literary prize within the country. Conversely, a group of researchers from Oxford University have expressed their belief that within the next 120 years, intelligent machines will be capable of performing all tasks currently undertaken by humans. Furthermore, scientists at Stamford University have claimed to have developed an artificial intelligence system capable of accurately predicting an individual’s lifespan through various bodily examinations. This technology has been applied to a range of societal advancements, including enhanced care for the elderly and advancements in pharmaceutical research. In contrast, over 50 nations are actively engaged in the development of battlefield robots designed to autonomously identify and eliminate enemy targets.³

Notably, recent events have seen Iran accuse Israel of employing an AI-controlled satellite weapon to assassinate their top nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. Iranian officials from the Revolution-

AI not only has the potential to influence individuals with less technical knowledge, but also those who possess a deep understanding of technology in the developed world. The more individuals are exposed to technology, the more susceptible they become to its power.

ary Guard have asserted that no human operatives were present during the attack, with an AI-controlled machine gun mounted on a pickup truck being utilised instead. The machine gun was operated through an intelligent satellite system, which precisely targeted Fakhrizadeh's face, allowing his wife, who was in close proximity, to remain unharmed. It is alleged that Israeli agents transported the machine gun to Iran from Israel through a series of covert operations.⁴ Moreover, in the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Azerbaijan employed AI-driven weaponry to inflict significant damage upon Armenia.

The question then is whether artificial intelligence is a boon or a bane. There exists divergent viewpoints on this matter. Jack Ma, the founder of the e-commerce behemoth Alibaba, supports AI while simultaneously perceiving it as a threat to global liberation. He posits that AI and robots will displace numerous jobs, as machines will increasingly assume various tasks in the future. Nonetheless, humans will always retain the role of controllers of AI. Elon Musk, the head of Tesla and SpaceX, warns that if the unbridled growth of AI is not curtailed promptly, it will metamorphose into an 'immortal dictator' from which humanity will be unable to extricate itself. In a documentary on AI, Musk asserts, 'If a malevolent dictator emerges, that individual will eventually perish. However, AI is impervious to death. It will endure indefinitely, thereby establishing an immortal dictatorship. Escape from its clutches will be an impossibility.'⁵ Musk further characterises the development of AI as summoning a monstrous entity and deems it the most formidable threat to mankind.⁶

Similarly, Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google, a company at the forefront of AI research, recently expounded upon the perils of AI misuse. In an interview, he contends that IT organisations should adhere to specific policies to prevent the abuse of AI and should proactively contemplate the potential misuse of technology. Pichai emphasises that it is imperative not only to invent and advance new technology, but also to exercise caution to ensure that its

utilisation does not contravene human civilization.⁷ However, Google has been accused of not following ethics in this regard. The company is said to use AI to provide security information to US security forces. In this regard, the employees of the company have also expressed concern in a letter. On the other hand, Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, who is a leader in AI technology in the world, thinks that the danger in AI is not necessarily an obvious threat like an atomic bomb, but lies in its convenience. It is possible to envision a scenario where AI hacks the body, the brain, and life. It will hold more information with third parties than with the individual themselves.⁸

Many countries have also announced that they are working on harnessing AI for climate change. But there are also many risks with that, says University of California Professor Stuart Russell, an expert on modern machine capability technology. He gave a fictional example of the threat of AI in this regard:

Imagine that we have a powerful artificial intelligence system that can control the world's climate and use it to return the climate to pre-industrial carbon dioxide levels. It was then decided that the easiest way to do this was to remove all humans from the Earth, since humans are the largest emitters of carbon dioxide on Earth. You may want to say that you can do whatever you want, just not harm people. What will the system do? This will then influence us to have fewer children, until the earth is humanless.⁹

Many may wonder how a robot can work by itself beyond human command. But it is made possible because powerful artificial intelligence constantly enriches itself with information through the internet. At the same time, it can decide on many issues itself, having been given that power. Therefore, it will not be surprising if that decision is used in any negative case. But of course, there will always be a need for some subtle skills that only humans possess. These skills include intelligence and the ability to create and manage technology. But since AI is still an emerging industry, it is important to have specific policies!

Do you control or are you being controlled?

You're at the reading table, the chat room, or the workplace. You're holding your smartphone. You begin scrolling through Facebook. A video begins to play. As soon as one finishes, another starts. Your eyes were drawn to it. An amusing occurrence in Uganda, a local dish in Vietnam, or a new documentary of the country's 'BD Village Around' are all unveiled—one after another. You'll forget whether you're conversing or at an office meeting. When you

“ Juval Noah Harari, a leader in AI technology in the world, thinks that the danger in AI is not necessarily an obvious threat like an atomic bomb, but lies in its convenience. ”

// Behind every phone screen is the contribution of thousands of engineers. They are only working on how to increase your attention to the screen. //

AZA RASKIN

finally put down your phone, many critical moments of your life have already been lost. But have you ever noticed that after a few hours, you can't recall how many films you've watched? The issue is, why do you continue to watch? According to research, social media platforms like Facebook are increasingly adding AI-enhanced features to their apps and pages in an effort to compel you to use them. Many people's video addiction has reached its peak even while they are at home because of the global COVID pandemic.

Psychiatrists find that you've mastered the art of subtly sneaking glances at the screen before anyone notices that you're scrolling through your Facebook newsfeed for the tenth time in an hour. And it is possible that this is an addiction.¹⁰ According to the information given by a few websites, 'Now, on average, four hundred million video views (the same video as multiple views) are happening on Facebook every day. 50 million users spend a hundred million hours a day on the social media site! 85% of them are watching videos without audio. That is, they are not getting any special information, they are just watching the video.¹¹ Internet browser Mozilla Firefox's former official, Aza Raskin, said, 'It is like a usual drug, and it is being spread throughout the interface. [...] Behind every phone screen is the contribution of thousands of engineers. They are only working on how to increase your attention to the screen.'¹²

Now the question is: does Facebook or YouTube show you these videos or do you choose to watch them? If you have watched them of your own accord, then why do these videos come one after the other according to your choice? Does it mean they sense your likes and dislikes? Actually, their algorithm is designed just so. Video uploaders are also advised to use certain keywords. AI will do the rest. Many may ask, what is so much talk about watching a little video? In fact, by watching these videos, we become consumers of various multinational organisations. In 2017, young filmmaker Abhirup Ghosh gave a similar message in his film *K: Secret Eye*:

People have no opinion, no choice! All is marketing. Individuals do not matter. Everything was told; memorised knowledge. Marketing companies and the media force the logic of who you vote for, [why you don't go to the polls,] into the minds of the pub-

lic. Which product should you buy, and why should you buy it? Because they don't sell ordinary goods. The extent of their influence may have been such that they told everyone to vote on the rose mark, but there was no rose mark at the polling booth. As a result, people will draw a rose with a pen and vote there! Through advertisement, news, and social media, these institutions will push their instructions into people's subconscious minds in such a way that people will follow them without hesitation.¹³

Although the situation may seem imaginary to many people, considering the reality, that day may not be far away. Those who boost their posts on Facebook can easily guess this. Facebook is helping to increase business by providing various information about which age group of people are viewing their posts and which posts are being viewed more. At the same time, they store all personal information. Facebook, Google, and Microsoft directly support the contracting countries with information about any negative activity on their networks. As a result, for whom any information is negative or positive or who will make this negative-positive selection is absolutely secondary to the user.

Many people may think that you don't use anything related to AI in technology. So, they don't bother to know so much about AI. But experts proved that even then, you are not completely safe! By using the media, such as new media or the internet, you can easily understand that the streets of these two cities, Shanghai and Shenzhen in China, are magnificent. What a brilliant sparkle! Every vehicle is lane-compliant. No one is honking anywhere. There is no one on the road, but the car has stopped because the green light is not on. Pedestrians are also walking on the sidewalk according to the rules. If you want to cross the road, you must follow the specific zebra crossing. Waiting for the green light to turn on. The question may arise: what is the secret of their adherence to such rules? This is because security cameras are installed at certain distances on the road. This camera network is connected to a central system. This security camera will catch whoever breaks the rules. Quick action can be taken against them. Thinking about how people are identified in such a crowd? For this, a special method of facial recognition using AI technology is being used. As a

result, any person moving on the road can be easily taken out!¹⁴ As a result, this technology can come to your country at any time to endure the tide of technology. So, you may need to rethink who bridles you in this age of technology.

Artificial intelligence in movies

Television was once called a ‘fool’s box’. It’s not capable of any creative work except for smooth broadcasting on the screen. But online content can also be viewed effortlessly through streaming with the help of an internet connection on today’s television sets. But the fear is that smart TVs use automatic content recognition (ACR) through AI, regardless of the content you enjoy on television, to understand the character of these contents and spread information about the customer’s likes and dislikes through the internet to third-party ad agencies.¹⁵ The situation is like this; there is no avoiding it even by changing the various settings of the television. There have been lawsuits in many countries in this regard. According to a 2014 document leaked by WikiLeaks, Samsung’s smart TVs were fitted with spyware that would not switch off even if the user has turned the TV off. Even if the screen goes dark, it is actually controlled by the CIA. These TVs would record the surrounding sounds, and then when the TVs were turned on again, they would send those sounds to CIA’s servers via WiFi. The CIA’s ‘Future Section’ later arranged to take ‘snapshots’ with those TVs without the user’s knowledge, according to WikiLeaks.¹⁶

Though intelligence agencies or marketing agencies use AI for their own interests; many may ask, what is the use of knowing this information as a movie-lover? Those who regularly keep track of technology may have already figured this out. Recently, the American movie production company Warner Brothers has made a deal with a startup company named Cinelytic. Based in Los Angeles, USA, this company works with artificial intelligence. Now the question is, what is the relationship between film and the technology company working on artificial intelligence? Certainly, there’s a relationship since the company uses AI to predict whether a film will be commercially successful or not! Cinelytic’s algorithm will help Warner Bros. decide whether or not to take on a film at the signing stage.¹⁷

Not only that, script writing for the film, post-production work, location of the film, costumes, and which actors will make the film successful, i.e., selection of actors, people from which area will watch it more, and not only ideas about where to do business abroad but also explanations—AI will provide all the information. At the same time, it will also help in composing and editing the background music of the film. Its work is not over when the film is pro-

duced; AI will also work on the promotion of the film after the production.¹⁸ As a result, artificial intelligence is indicating major changes in the global film industry in the near future. However, artificial intelligence is usually based on existing data. Therefore, the developers analysed and information used in previous films as well as the audiences’ likes and dislikes of various media to develop the system. At the same time, AI will be ahead by enriching itself with the current news and information of any country. Warner Bros. Senior Vice President Tony Keys said, ‘Every day we make tough decisions about how to make movies and deliver them to audiences. The more accurate our information, the more visitors we can attract.’¹⁹

Demons lurking in the entertainment industry

We usually use social media like Facebook, YouTube, and other technology-based apps for entertainment. These types of apps are already creating controversy through AI technology. Recently, Belgian visual effects expert Chris Umé developed software which can produce AI-generated visual and audio content, widely known as ‘deepfake’. That is, software that can create a made-up photo or video, which looks almost authentic, developed by artificial intelligence. These are fake videos but appear real. This technology is often used to create fake pornographic video clips featuring celebrities. It is basically used to replace a person in a picture or video with someone having similar physique, where the concerned person is seen to be speaking, moving his face, or doing something else. The worst thing is that it is possible to make a deceased person appear virtually with this technology. In these videos created by artificial intelligence programs, a person can be heard saying things that they did not actually say. They can be seen doing things they didn’t do.

Consider Leonardo da Vinci’s most well-known painting, ‘Mona Lisa’. There is still a great deal of interest in the work of art painted hundreds of years ago. Whether she is laughing or upset is often debated. But a painting can be brought to life in a deepfake video. Giving her a voice, she could say, ‘I am not laughing, nor am I upset. I am looking at the artist with disgust! And listen, my picture was not painted by Vinci. It was painted by Picasso!’ And the image will look so alive that it will be hard for ordinary people not to believe what appears to be Mona Lisa’s own words. Many may forget that there was no digital colour photography at that time!

You can create something similar with a picture or video of someone you know. With a few seconds of recorded audio from anyone, you can make them say whatever you want in the video, done perfectly

through AI technology. As a result, these digitally distorted video contents are becoming more dangerous than conventional text and distorted images. Because deepfake content can cause serious danger in multi-ethnic countries, including Bangladesh and India, perpetrators can use malicious content to create conflict between different communities. Alleged incitement and allegations of various insults can lead to dire situations. In the meantime, technology expert Prashant K Roy told news agency IANS, 'Deepfake can pose a serious threat to a nation that is populous, has low literacy, and has ethnic sensitivities.'²⁰

Interestingly, recently, a deepfake video clip of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg went viral. The video contains scenes of Zuckerberg speaking and shaking his head. The 'Zuckerberg' in the video claims that an intelligence agency is behind his success. A fake video was also posted again on Facebook-owned Instagram! The Facebook authorities said that they would not remove the video. However, Facebook has promised to develop deepfake video detection technology. They will remove all adverse videos, but not those which are not harmful. Meanwhile, Microsoft has also invested heavily in deepfake video detection. However, expressing concern about deepfake, experts said that removing deepfake content will be more difficult than removing fake news or false information. At the same time, distorted videos will create more confusion among people about recent events and issues. The situation may be such that people will not be able to determine the validity of what they see with their own eyes. Trust will be lost. Rogues will use this opportunity to create fake videos or content to try to discredit specific individuals, groups, and communities.

Worryingly, more than a thousand sound recordings of customer interactions with Google Assistant have been leaked recently. The US web giant has itself admitted to the matter.²¹ But they did not give information about how it was leaked. Companies like Google and Amazon claim that they use these audio recordings to improve the responses of their smart assistants. Google Assistant interacts with you or helps you when you verbally command it to do something. But the surprising thing is that

even though others, including Google, keep this information for their own improvement, the AI instantly finds out who the voice is from, which phone it was spoken from, and where it was spoken from. Your life is hacked on a daily basis; your data is used for business purposes in the name of self-improvement. However, many governments turn a blind eye for the sake of business interests. Due to this, no exemplary action is taken against these giant institutions.

Did you think?

Let us take a look at an incident from Bangladesh. Two years ago, in January, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested a young man for allegedly sexually abusing a boy in Barisal. The security forces told the media that the 21-year-old had recorded a video of the torture scene on his mobile phone a year and a half ago. Google forwarded the information to the US National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). They reported this information to CID. He was then identified and arrested by the Cyber Investigation and Operations Department of the CID. NCMEC works on various issues related to children's rights, including stopping child sexual abuse and eradicating child pornography. US-registered technology companies Facebook, Google, and Microsoft have formally informed NCMEC of various information related to child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in their networks. CID has been associated with NCMEC for three years. According to the information received, the investigation agency has been conducting operations since December. Before this, an 11-year-old girl was sexually assaulted by her father-in-law and mother-in-law in August last year in Turag. The couple kept the video on their mobile phones. That video was also given to NCMEC by Google. It also adds the IMEI number of the couple's mobile phones. CID arrested them on 29 December last year.²²

It cannot be denied that Google has played a very positive role in terms of crime and violence. But in the name of service, they are observing every private moment, and we must be vigilant. Because when the state considers a citizen a threat, these technology institutions can be asked for information about them at any time. Sometimes the companies give under

“ Your life is hacked on a daily basis; your data is used for business purposes in the name of self-improvement. However, many governments turn a blind eye for the sake of business interests. ”

compulsion, sometimes they don't. But with AI, the state has found an alternative. Israel's importance as one of the best in AI technology grew overnight among the rulers of Muslim countries. In case of no formal relationship, surveillance technology can be imported from them through alternative routes. Because the more personal the information you can obtain, the easier it becomes to regulate them. The recent situation of Hefazet Islam and other opposition leaders proves this. But we, the general public, are not safe either. Whether we are considered as rivals rather than common people is independent of the individual. As a result, when exposed to technology, insecurity increases. But it cannot be refuted. Therefore, the only option is to be coerced into accepting the fact. There is still hope, though; undoubtedly, new technology will be developed to evade this demon. ■

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Should ChatGPT Be Banned in Schools?

University of the Philippines Crafts ‘Responsible’ AI-Use Guidelines

Cristina Chi

MANILA, Philippines – The University of the Philippines has laid down a set of principles on the “responsible” use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in an academic setting, becoming among the first major Philippine universities to work towards a policy governing AI use in classrooms.

This follows the spike in the availability of AI-powered chatbots this year, such as ChatGPT, which has stoked worries among educators about widespread cheating and its potential to undermine the learning process.

The use of AI in classrooms currently lacks official guidance from government agencies such as the Department of Education or the Commission on Higher Education. While AI-related measures have been filed in the House and the Senate, these initiatives primarily focus on maximizing the economic benefits of AI rather than addressing its impact on education.

UP cited 10 principles to promote the “responsible” use of AI, none of which reference an outright ban on student use of AI-powered technologies.

‘Meaningful human control’ and ‘transparency’

In its statement, UP said that AI challenges can range from “systemic bias, inequality for marginalized groups of students, privacy and bias in data collection and processing.”

“Already, many are worried that ChatGPT opens the door to cheating and plagiarism,” the university added.

“It is therefore imperative for the national university, to promote the positive use and mitigate the negatives of AI,” UP said.

UP cited the need for AI to be primarily for the “public good.”

AI “should benefit the Filipino people by fostering inclusive economic growth, sustainable development, political empowerment and enhanced well-being,” the university said.

Among the other principles it listed is the need for “meaningful human control,” saying that AI should be used to “advance human autonomy and agency.”

“Humans should ultimately remain in control of, and thus, morally responsible for, the behavior of AI systems,” the statement read.

UP also cited the need for “transparency” in the use of AI, saying that individuals should be notified when AI-enabled tools are used.

“The methods should be explainable, to the extent possible, and individuals should be able to understand AI-based outcomes, ways to challenge them, and meaningful remedies to address any harms caused,” UP added.

UP’s other principles for responsible AI use include inclusive development, fairness, safety, environmental friendliness, fostering collaboration, accountability, and upholding privacy through informed decision-making and multi-stakeholder governance.

Need for policy just the tip of the iceberg

All universities should work toward crafting their “AI positions” but would have to ensure these are backed by adequate consultation first, said Dominic Ligot, founder and chief technology officer of social impact technology company CirroLytix.

“Banning chatGPT and AI in schools is certainly their prerogative, but the compounded impact on their students is mindblowing if they do this,” Ligot said.

“Basically you will be producing AI-impaired or AI-stunted graduates,” he added.

Ligot pressed upon the need for schools to explore the use of AI tools for teaching as they will soon have to address the needs of an “AI-enabled society,” Ligot said.

“Regarding the use of AI on cheating and plagiarism, I would also look at the current inherently dated and backward education systems we have, and assess how and why AI has disrupted it,” he added.

“Looking at AI as a foe is only one side, but can schools like UP look itself in the mirror and say they are adequate to the current needs of an AI-enabled society?” he added. ■

Can AI Save Karachi's Past?

While the world experiments with the scope of AI utilisation, there is potential to preserve colonial remnants in one South Asian city with the help of this new technology.

Wara Irfan



Wara Irfan is a multimedia journalist based in Karachi, Pakistan. Her focus lies at the intersection of media, gender, and culture. She is currently working for Dawn.com as an Adenauer Fellow for media and communication. She is passionate about documenting and historicising indigenous forms of resistance and writing about postcolonial media and visual cultures in the city.

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Akin to most people and their relationship with Karachi's colonial past, my interaction with the heritage sites in the city remains limited to casually passing by and admiring historic buildings from a distance. As a woman, my interaction with these historical sites is further restricted due to gender-specific access within the city.

However, I recently made the decision to explore the heritage areas of Karachi. To my great dismay, I discovered that the condition of most colonial-era structures is worse than I previously thought.

To provide context, there are two distinct periods in which a significant number of buildings were erected in Karachi. The first wave came in the 1880s when the city witnessed the development of railways and the port. The second surge occurred in the 1930s, spurred by the separation of Sindh from the Bombay presidency in 1936, leading to another substantial wave of building projects.

One noteworthy example is the remarkable Sarnagati Building, constructed in the early 1930s using redstone imported from Jaipur. This stunning structure has managed to withstand the test of time, yet its metallic lettering, which bears the building's name, is under threat from thieves looking to sell the valuable material.

The Sarnagati Building.
Photography by Wara Irfan



Likewise, numerous heritage buildings face the imminent danger of illegal demolition. The process typically begins with the removal of the roof and internal structure, leaving only the front facade. Subsequently, the culprits patiently await the facade's natural deterioration, providing them with 'legitimate' justification for the demolition of the entire building.

The Kanji Building earned its heritage site status back in 1995. However, it has since deteriorated to the point where only its facade remains intact. Photography by Wara Irfan





Behind the facade of a colonial building, there is a parking lot.
Photography by Wara Irfan

During a visit to one such building, I discovered that it had been hollowed out from the inside to create a parking lot while preserving its front-facing facade. At first glance, the exterior gave the impression of a heritage site, concealing the surprising fact that a parking facility sat just beyond its ornate facade.

Given this backdrop, the necessity for artificial intelligence becomes increasingly urgent in the endeavour to preserve and safeguard the remaining vestiges of heritage in Karachi. We have witnessed AI's capacity to aid in the conservation and restoration process by reconstructing models of original designs and materials in other parts of the world.

Wooden doors are continually replaced with modern metal shutters.
Photography by Wara Irfan







The Sevakunj Building, originally a student hostel offering indoor ventilation, now sits abandoned
Photography by Wara Irfan

AI can prove to be invaluable in the management of extensive datasets, encompassing historical records and data regarding the environmental conditions surrounding these sites. It can also provide visitors with comprehensive information about the buildings, their cultural significance, and historical insights, thereby enabling visitors to gain a deeper appreciation for these historical treasures. This, in turn, can facilitate governmental and private sector efforts in conserving these valuable structures.

Furthermore, AI can be instrumental in assessing and monitoring the well-being of these heritage sites through the use of cameras and sensors. These technological tools can assist authorities in identifying deliberate acts of deterioration caused by vandals or illegal means.

Consequently, AI emerges as a pivotal force in safeguarding heritage sites against threats posed by thieves and unlawful demolition. ■





The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) building.
Photography by Wara Irfan



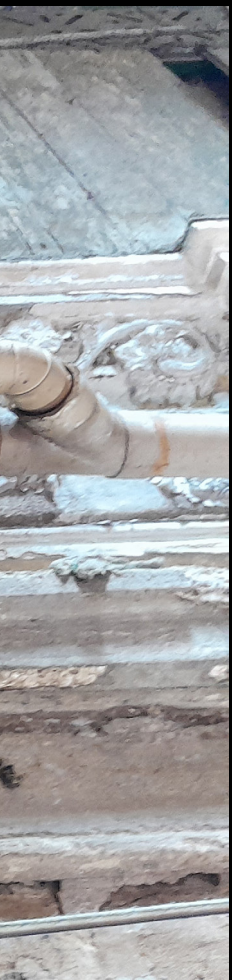




Menghraj Dwarkadas Nagpal, a heritage site, is subjected to internal destruction by illegal occupants.

The inside of the building is rapidly deteriorating.

Photography by Wara Irfan



A Tour Guide Named AI

Filipino Travellers Turn to Artificial Intelligence Tools for Travel Plans

MANILA, Philippines – With the boom of artificial intelligence tools, Filipino travellers like Anne Real are curating travel plans like never before.

Real, 35, who has travelled to five countries so far, said she uses popular AI-powered chatbot ChatGPT when organising an itinerary for her travels. She first discovered this from online travel community group Hangout Buddies.

For Real, ChatGPT's travel suggestions only serve as the 'skeleton' of the itinerary.

'It's a good place to start, especially if you don't have any experience travelling or making an itinerary,' Anne said.

'It's also responsive. For example, if I don't like its Day Two itinerary suggestion for Singapore that includes Universal Studios Singapore (USS), I'll just reply to ChatGPT by typing "without USS". And then, the results will be amended,' she continued.

Like Real, 35-year-old Ric, who has visited the 82 provinces of the Philippines and eight countries so far, has also been using ChatGPT in his travel planning since June this year.

'I have an upcoming trip to Brunei and Kota Kinabalu this November, and I used ChatGPT to make an itinerary, including transportation, hotel accommodation, tourist places to visit and all. And to be fair, if you just include all the correct words during the search, it will definitely give you all the needed information. And it only took almost a minute to complete. Really amazing,' Ric said in an online interview.

Ric particularly appreciated that using ChatGPT provides a stream of endless information and possibilities. However, he shared that this could also be its downfall, given the inconsistent credibility of the results.

'I tried using it also for my other upcoming trips and even for my previous trips, but it showed, I think, maybe fifty percent accurate and reliable [results],' he said.

With the boom of artificial intelligence tools, Filipino travellers are curating travel plans like never before. However, the results are not always reliable.

Rosette Adel

Edel San, another traveller based in Manila who has visited eight Asian countries, said that she uses another AI-powered chatbot called Bard, developed by Google.

'I've been hearing a lot about ChatGPT but I haven't actually tried it. Then there's Bard, [released] early this year, and I tried to ask for travel tips to Cambodia. I think one needs to ask specific questions to get the right answers. My question was a bit vague: "Travel plan to Siem Reap". Bard gave me a three-day plan, though, which was cool,' she said.

The Motley Fool, a private financial and investing advice company, reported that AI is being used for recommendations, booking, forecasting, flight improvements, and itineraries.

The company cited that since the travel industry is one of the biggest advertising verticals on the Google search engine, many are using AI to seek recommendations. Chatbots and AI assistants are now being deployed by airlines and travel companies to assist travellers during the booking process.

The advice company also reported that travellers are now using specific booking platforms for their accommodations and flights which predict customer behaviour and provide more personalised suggestions.

Why human touch still matters

Given these developments, the Filipino travellers interviewed said they will continue using and recommending the usage of AI tools in their future travels as it helps travellers create a list of activities and places to visit.

Real, however, said that the activities offered by AI tools are very broad, so she recommends tweaking the suggested itinerary based on the personal preference.

Ric similarly observed that ChatGPT is still a business and the results produced may not be entirely impartial.

'I guess somehow, it would show results that are favourable to their, maybe, advertisers, clients, or affiliated businesses, making the result market selective,' Ric said.

'I would like to see maybe a thread for people who actually used ChatGPT and followed the result religiously for their trip, and then have it rated and show feedback from the users if it's really a good and recommended itinerary to follow,' he added.

Despite this, Ric said he would still recommend it as it can serve as a reference guide and provide good travel suggestions.

'It's only up to the users to make additional research to verify the accuracy of the results. But all in all, it's a good research tool,' he concluded.

Tourism Congress of the Philippines (TCP), a private sector consulting body which assists the government in the development and implementation of tourism policies, likewise said that their group, composed of tourism enterprises, has accepted the increasing presence of AI in travel planning.

Bob Zozobrado, TCP president, noted that while they welcome the use of AI, do-it-yourself travellers still continue to seek travel agents' service.

'We are confident that sooner than soon, these DIYs will avail of travel agents' service once again as they'll realise that nothing beats having a travel agent and tour operator personally help them with their itineraries and tickets. In fact, a survey was made early this year by a scholar from Oxford University showing that 76% of these DIYs have realised that:

- If their flights are cancelled, nobody is there to help them.
- They are not sure that the hotels they book online are the best for the money they paid.
- They're not sure that the air fares they paid for online are really the cheapest because airlines have local promos offered to travel agents.

They miss the human touch and personalised service of a travel agent before, during, and after their trip,' Zozobrado said in a text message.

According to a survey of global travel agency network Virtuoso reported by *Forbes* in January, there is a growing demand for and increased value of an expert advisor who can 'save travellers' time, energy, and the headache of sitting on the phone for hours with customer assistance.'

It cited that 76% of travellers, including millennials and Gen Zs, are turning to travel advisors' expertise to avoid being inconvenienced in their travels.

Virtuoso specialises in luxury and experiential travel and is a by-invitation-only organisation comprising of 1,200 travel agencies with over 20,000 travel advisors in over 50 countries globally.

AI is getting better

Amid concerns over the use of AI in travels, Dominic Ligot, founder and chief technology officer of social impact technology company CirroLytx, said that he doesn't see disadvantages to it as long as people check and verify the suggestions provided.

'AI tools are useful in planning trips. Chatbots are useful in summarising travel blogs and articles and putting together itineraries quickly,' Ligot said in an online interview.

'Previous versions of AI chatbots were based on old information but current versions are connected to the internet and provide citations and are getting better every day,' he explained.

This is why travellers like Real, Ric, and San keep harnessing the power of AI tools when making travel plans.

'I mean, it's like having a Lonely Planet book on hand when you need it,' San concluded. ■




Rosette Adel is an editor and journalist for Manila-based online newsrooms Interaksyon and Philstar.com. She covers breaking news, and investigative and mobile reporting about diverse issues in the Philippines, with a focus on tourism, heritage, politics, among others. Currently, she is a fellow of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, pursuing graduate studies at the Asian Center for Journalism, Ateneo de Manila University.

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Farmer Ibrahim Sarder, 49, watering newly grown seedlings.
Photography by Piyas Biswas



People transport floating beds towards a farm on the Belua River in Pirojpur district. Farmers buy each bed for BDT7000–8000 (US\$63–73).
Photography by Piyas Biswas



In the marshy region of Nazirpur Upazila, Pirojpur district, prolonged waterlogging has made traditional farming challenging for families. In response, many have turned to the age-old method of cultivating crops on floating rafts. A method that was invented two hundred years ago, passed down from their ancestors.

Farmers in this area have achieved remarkable success in seed production and growing agricultural products using this local technique in land that is otherwise submerged underwater. Not only that, this unique approach to cultivating crops and vegetables on water has been gradually gaining popularity.

In recent years, this innovative farming method has become a symbol of success for a densely populated country, where millions of people live below the poverty line. In 2015, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) recognised floating vegetable farming as a globally important agricultural heritage system.

Bangladesh, being one of the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change, faces rising water levels due to storms, floods, and river erosion. With increasingly unpredictable monsoons, floating agriculture has become even more essential.

This agro-technique proves invaluable in combating food shortages caused by climate change. As the world's largest delta with significant wetlands, adoption of this cultivation method in Bangladesh not only helps in adapting to climate change, but also mitigates its effects, such as rising sea levels. ■

Floating Gardens

Piyas Biswas

Left: Murshida Begum helping her husband Ibrahim Sarder to transport the seedballs to the floating cultivation rafts. Boats are their main vehicle for transportation.

Right, top: Murshida Begum, 36, has been assisting her husband in making seed balls. Prolonged exposure to water, water hyacinth, and aquatic plants during the process has led to various skin diseases.

Right, bottom: Tools farmers use for floating cultivation.

Photography by Piyas Biswas







Ibrahim Sarder gathers gourd seedlings from his floating farm bed to sell to agents.
Photography by Piyas Biswas



An aerial view of floating gardens as farmers harvest in Pirojpur, Bangladesh.
Photography by Piyas Biswas



Farmers bring their fresh produce and seedlings to the biweekly floating market on the Belua River to sell to agents.
Photography by Piyas Biswas





Top: Ibrahim feeding water to his beloved pet bird.

Bottom: Ibrahim Sarder transporting the grown seedlings to the market to sell. Each seedling is sold for BDT4–5 (\$0.05–0.06).

Photography by Piyas Biswas



Piyas Biswas is a multimedia journalist based in Dhaka, Bangladesh with a special interest in documentary photography. Piyas began his photography career in 2016, working on photography assignments as a freelancer. He is currently working with Newsbangla24 and also a contributor to UCA News, The Daily Star, SOPA IMAGES, and Nur Photo.

He completed his photography graduation from Counter Foto (A Centre for Visual Arts) in 2018, alongside his academic graduation. He is a recipient of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung scholarship and obtained his Diploma in Visual Journalism from the Asian Center for Journalism at the Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines.



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Habagat

A family attempts to cross the flooded streets of Manila, Philippines. The deep waters are caused by a monsoon, formed from two typhoons hovering around the east and west of the country. Global temperatures has been rapidly increasing as the world consumes more and more yearly.

Photography by Jilson Tiu



Photography by Sonam Lama







A Leap of Faith into Space

Led by a team of young engineering graduates, Antarikchya Pratisthan Nepal (Space Academy Nepal) IS paving the way for space research and innovation in Nepal.

Sonam Lama



Sonam Lama is a Kathmandu-based freelance multimedia journalist writing at the intersection of environment, indigenous rights, research, and science.

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Photography by Sonam Lama

At Antarikchya Pratisthan Nepal (Space Academy Nepal), Trishna Shrestha and her senior team of satellite engineers are rolling up their sleeves as they prepare for the launch of Munal in a few months.

Munal is a 1U (10x10x10cm) CubeSat weighing 1–1.3kg. For the first time, it is designed by a team of young students and engineering graduates in Nepal. This project is set to mark a momentous occasion in the satellite history of the nation as it is viewed as an advanced and improved version of the first satellite, NepaliSat-1, which was previously developed under the Birds-3 Project of the Japanese Kyushu Institute of Technology in 2019.

NepaliSat-1 was a milestone, paving the way for space research and innovation in Nepal. And now, Munal furthers this progress. It is Nepal's first high school satellite equipped with what could be the first step to an imaging mission with an inbuilt AI. The success of this project would mean there is a bigger possibility of scaling up the size or number of satellites in the future. As the satellite is planned to be launched by ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation),

the experience of beginning a collaboration with India will hopefully open up the opportunity to use their facilities for future projects.

'Munal is advanced in such respects as we are using two cameras for remote sensing and better data keeping and processing,' said Trishna Shrestha, Satellite Research Fellow at Antarikchya Pratisthan Nepal. Unlike the previous satellite, which only had a single camera for taking RGB (red, green, blue) images, Munal has an additional camera for IR (infrared) imaging. RGB images are all coloured images, while IR images focus on texture rather than colour. These two images are combined together for NDVI (Normal Difference Vegetation Index) which is a remote sensing technique used to assess the health and density of vegetation.

Munal is the first time AI has been incorporated in this way. With the CubeSat, the research organisation is trying to collect AI-generated data and planning to study vegetation patterns in Nepal. Once launched, Munal will be orbiting 400km from Earth. Two inbuilt cameras used for this mission will take the pictures from space.



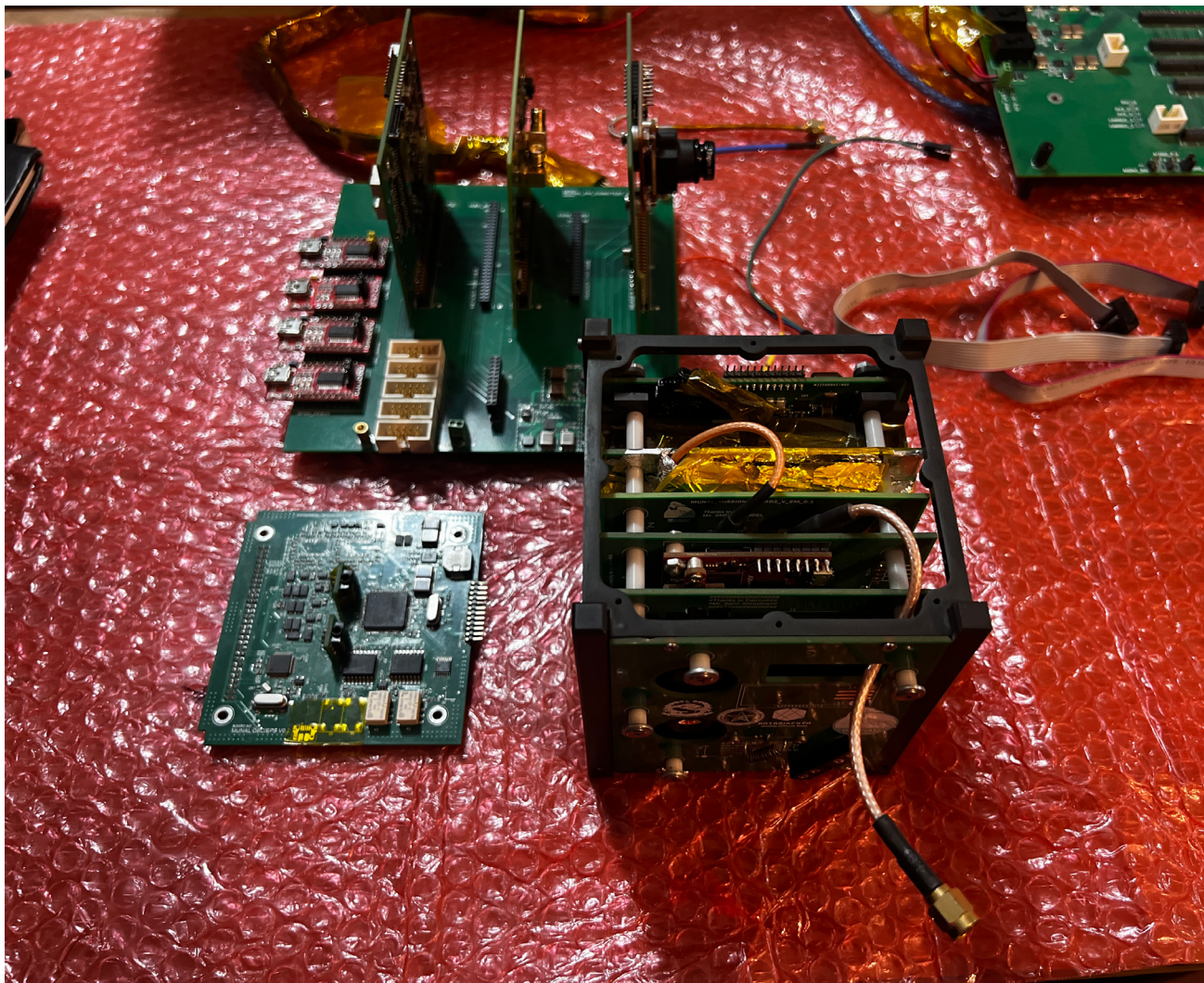
Photography by Sonam Lama

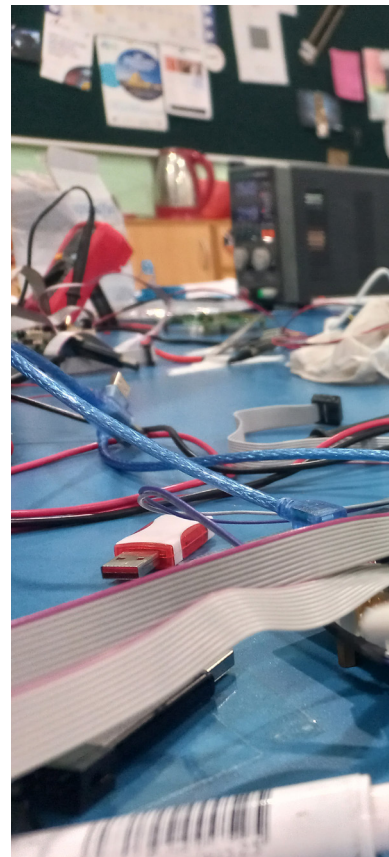
“Munal also reflects the symbol of historical and cultural representation of Nepal through audio-visual elements incorporated in the CubeSat (...) This is like a Voyager spin on Nepal,”

Rishav Adhikari

To improve remote sensing, an AI algorithm has been set in the camera, which conducts an image segmentation test to make the collected images and data more accurate. The AI model is installed in the controller of these two cameras. It is used to classify images into either good or bad, cloudy or non-cloudy, earth, space, sunlight, or moon. After the image is classified, the image segmentation process is used to determine what portion of the image occupies which part. ‘This way we will have better information on the image before we download it [...] which will save us time,’ Shrestha said.

‘Munal also reflects the symbol of historical and cultural representation of Nepal through audio-visual elements incorporated in the CubeSat,’ said Rishav Adhikari, a Satellite Research fellow at APN. ‘This is like a Voyager spin on Nepal,’ he quipped.





CubeSats generally have a lifetime of two years, and the data shall be collected until it de-orbits. For the operation, APN has to build a ground station to communicate with Munal so that they can download all the data collected in space. For this, they will need to design a specific antenna, and once it is set, the team can send a command from the ground station to the satellite in space and can download the required data or image.

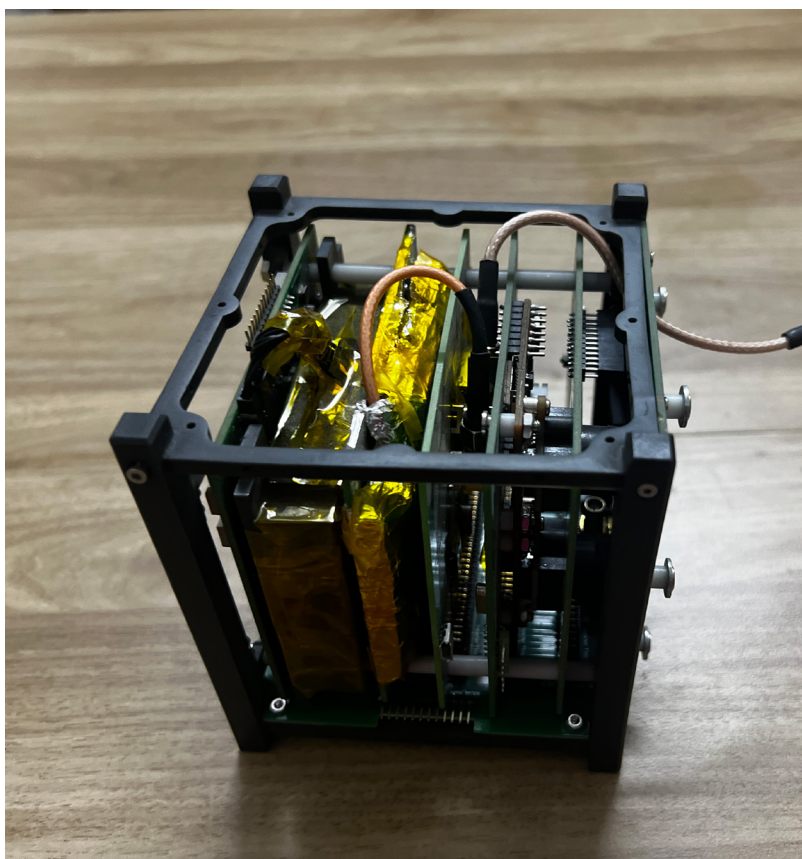
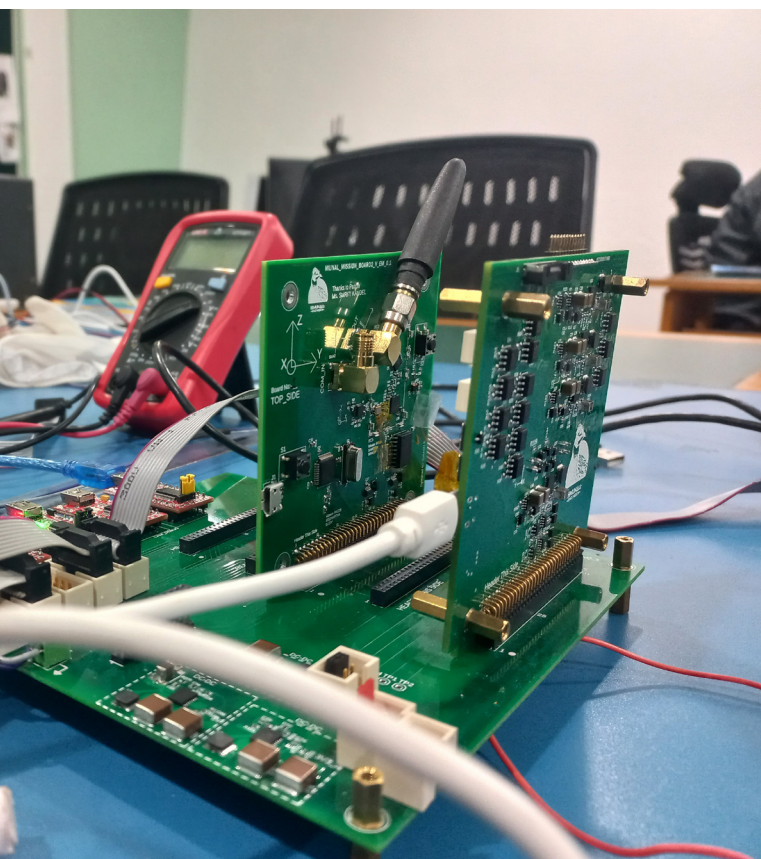
'For now, we are only trying to collect the data to analyse what portion of Nepal has a healthy vegetation pattern. Through this, we can collect information on barren lands. If this mission is successful, we can modify and update [the satellite] further to get details on disaster-prone regions and make an early warning system in the future,' Shrestha added.

'The innovation journey since the inception of APN has been daunting but we have just landed at the beginning of our long-term vision,' said Abhas Maskey, founder of Antarikhya Pratishthan Nepal. 'At APN, we are trying to break the glass ceiling by challenging our horizons and paving the way for bigger innovation. Munal is special in that respect because it marks the beginning of making a Nepali satellite constellation in space. For our long-term goal, we are in the process of building a system to collect real-time data,' Maskey explained.

Lack of space policy, component procurement, and fund delays are the existing challenges that have impacted the timeline of project completion. However, Maskey feels a sense of support sprouting at the government level.

Despite existing gaps, APN has been conducting tinkering training programs on satellite space systems and has so far trained over 1,500 school students across the country. Maskey says the major aim of the tinkering programs is to fuel the curious minds of school students at the local level so that they can mitigate the human resource gap in future projects. 'The learning space and mentoring that APN has provided has aided my growth as a fresh engineering graduate,' said Anjali Dhimi, a member of staff training at APN who is currently working on a different project in collaboration with Kathmandu Metropolitan City.

With an aim to put a Nepali astronaut in space by 2050, APN is trying to push its boundaries more than ever. 'We are working with international space organisations like MBRSC (Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre) located in Dubai and making a payload for their satellite. The next plan is to collaborate with bigger space organisations so that we can grow better and live up to our word, spirit, and objective,' Shrestha remarked. ■





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A massive traffic is seen at Metro Manila's main thoroughfare EDSA as Christmas season nears.

Photography by Jilson Tiu

Reclaiming Manila's Roads

Why Filipina Cyclists Pedal Past Stigma and Traffic

Jhesset O. Enano



When using her bicycle as her primary mode of transport, Jaramia Amarnani, 41, braves unfriendly drivers and near-absent bike lanes in Metro Manila, Philippines. Photo by Jhesset O. Enano

Despite an almost total lack of protective infrastructure and the persistence of patriarchal and social stigma, more and more Filipino women are choosing to ride their bicycles for their daily commute along Manila's perilous roads. For these Filipinas, choosing to hop on the saddle is liberation and representation, and part of the fight for safer and inclusive roads for all.

Each weekday morning, Filipino mother Jaramia Amarnani puts on her bright pink bicycle helmet, pops the rest of her essentials in a bag, and hops onto her rose-gold electric bicycle to leave for work.

In a sea of motorcycles, open-air Jeepney buses, and the many private cars that ply the bustling streets of the Philippines' capital, the 41-year-old executive assistant knows she stands out as a cycling commuter, and even more so as a woman.

On any given morning, she will often be the only woman pedalling—and occasionally freewheeling—along the narrow lane marked out and designated for cyclists on the 24-kilometre Edsa Highway, Metro Manila's main artery and also its longest and most congested road.

But despite multiple signs indicating that motorcyclists are not allowed in the lane, they swerve in and out, narrowly missing her. Evening is no better.

'It's always like a war in the streets, just to get home,' Amarnani said later, after riding six kilometres along pothole-riddled roads to reach her husband and two young sons at home.

Come rain or shine, she's determined to pedal her way through Metro Manila's unsafe streets. A yellow reflector hanging off the back of her bike reads, 'Working Mom, Pass With Care.'

But Amarnani is far from the only woman on two wheels braving the chaotic roads in Philippine capital region. Despite an almost total lack of protective infrastructure and the persistence of patriarchal and social stigma, more Filipino women are choosing to hop on the saddle, pedalling towards greater representation, and safer and more inclusive roads for all.

Pandemic bike boom

When Covid-19 shut public transit systems worldwide, megacities around the world, from New York to Jakarta, experienced a bicycle boom. The amount of money US consumers spent on bikes and bike accessories rose by 620% from March 2020 to 2023, according to the US Department of Transportation, reaching about US\$8 billion per month nationally.

Interest in cycling—for both commuting and recreation—spiked. Bike production and supply chains struggled to keep up with the sudden demand.



Jaramia Amarnani has been bike commuting in Metro Manila for nine years. She said it is the most efficient way to get home and spend more time with her family after work, rather than sit idly in traffic.

Photo by Jheset O. Enano

Metro Manila, home to 14 million people, was no exception. With fewer cars on the road and virtually no public transport options, many commuters ventured out on a bicycle for the first time.

Pop-up bike lanes were created along major thoroughfares. Transport advocates pushed for infrastructure and policy changes, with the hope that the metropolis would not return to its pre-pandemic traffic jams.

Traffic congestion costs the country as much as PHP 3.5 billion (US\$62 million) daily, according to a 2018 CNN report.

Petrol-guzzling vehicles also contribute to carbon emissions, making cycling—whether on an e-bike

or a regular bicycle—a three-in-one environmental solution: offering less congestion, better air quality and a concrete response to climate change.

As pandemic restrictions have eased, though, vehicles have been pouring back into the city streets and bike commuters like Amarnani are finding themselves once again pushed towards the gutter, literally and figuratively.

Still, the bike boom proved that there was potential for a major cycling culture in the country. National surveys conducted between May 2020 and April 2022 found there were four bicycle owners to every car owner.

The Philippine government's first bicycle count from January to December 2022 logged as many as 1.7 million bike trips along three of Metro Manila's main highways, adding up to some 41,000 trips per month on average.

While seeing more Filipinos on bikes is already a major leap in the right direction, mobility advocates still observe a gender gap among commuter cyclists. This is a trend that is also evident in many other nations, according to studies by the US-based Institute for Transportation and Development Policy.

Keisha Mayuga, a sustainable transport advocate and researcher, said it is still common to find many Filipino women who do not know how to ride a bike as they were not allowed to do so as children. While attitudes are starting to shift, many families retain a fear of letting their daughters learn how to cycle.

'It's seen as dangerous and unladylike for a lot of households, and this thinking gets passed on to the next generation,' she said, adding that concern for safety is 'always the number one barrier for women.'

Without protected bicycle lanes, crashes have become common. In 2021, government data showed that nearly 2,400 cyclists were involved in road traffic accidents in the capital region, 33 of them fatal.

Despite a national law passed in 2019 against gender-based sexual harassment in public spaces, many women still report incidences of verbal and sexual abuse. Woman cyclists are not exempt from this, finding



After biking six kilometers from her home to her office, Jaramia Amarnani changes into her office clothes and stiletto shoes. Her co-workers are often surprised when they learn that she bikes to work every day.

Photo by Jhesset O. Enano



Jaramia Amarnani, a 41-year-old working Filipino mother, leads the 'Pinay Bike Commuter Community', a 6,500-strong online community of women taking back the streets through bike commuting in the Philippines' car-choked roads. Photo by Jhesset O. Enano

themselves catcalled or followed by men while riding their bikes, and even groped by motorcycle riders.

Creating a community

Amarnani never used to think about cycling. But in 2014, after countless hours spent stuck in traffic and contending with long queues while pregnant, she decided to give bicycle commuting a try.

'I took the leap of courage because I needed to get home to my children,' she said. 'The need to get home to them was bigger than my fear.'

After taking maternity leave for her second child, she bought her first bike—a mamachari ('mum's bike' in Japanese), renowned for its practicality.

It used to take her an hour and a half to complete her short commute to work by car or public transport, but with a bike, this was reduced to just 15 minutes.

As a working mother still nursing a baby, she was able to quickly bring her expressed breast milk home and spend more time with her family—hours that she previously lost to boredom and irritation in traffic.

In 2020, at the start of the pandemic, Amarnani noticed a surge of interest in bicycle commuting among women, particularly young professionals and students.

She [Jaramia Amarnani] said it means freedom, not just from the punishing traffic and overdependence on cars, but also from people's expectations of what women and mothers should or shouldn't do.



Jaramia Amarnani (left) and Klarizze Siddayao (right) are both working mothers who bike commute in Metro Manila, pedalling against stereotypes, stigma, and sexual harassment on the roads. On weekends, they volunteer to teach bike-riding lessons to children and adults alike.

Photo by Jhesset O. Enano



Even though she has been commuting by bike for nearly a decade, Jaramia Amarnani says she still gets frightened by aggressive drivers in Metro Manila, where bike lanes are often little more than painted lanes on the ground with no other protection for cyclists.

Photo by Jhesset O. Enano

Spurred on by the news of a woman doctor who had been killed by a huge lorry while cycling home from work, Amarnani and other women cyclists began a Facebook group called the ‘Pinay Bike Commuter Community’ (‘pinay’ being slang for a Filipino woman).

Through word of mouth, the members built a women-only online space where members are encouraged to share their experiences on the road, whether they are first-time or veteran bicycle commuters, or even just curious about how to pedal to work through Metro Manila’s perilous streets.

It was also a response, Amarnani said, to her own experience of feeling unwelcome as a woman in other bike communities when she first set off on two wheels.

In the Facebook group, the members are free to ask any questions they like, not just about cycling but also about concerns experienced by women. From advice on cycling while menstruating to tips on avoiding saddle sores and chafed nipples, any and all queries are welcomed and answered.

Now with over 6,500 members, the group has also become a safe space to share experiences of sexual harassment.

Members of the Facebook group have had discussions about how to defend themselves if they are groped or catcalled while on their bikes, and often share tips on cycling routes that are dimly lit or have aggressive motorists and are best avoided.

Courage on the road

Despite these dangers, however, the female cycling community continues to grow in urban regions, a reflection of how Filipino women are reclaiming outdoor spaces.

Karen Crisostomo, a 58-year-old transport advocate who has been cycling to work for 20 years, said that better infrastructure like protected bike paths and decent lighting would encourage more women to consider cycling as a commuting option.

‘We have taken some steps forward, but in terms of mindset, we are still on step one,’ she said.






Amarnani knows it’s a long road ahead. But for now, she continues to find joy in seeing more and more women discover the ‘liberating’ feeling of being on a bike.

She said it means freedom, not just from the punishing traffic and overdependence on cars, but also from people’s expectations of what women and mothers should or shouldn’t do.

‘Now there is a feeling that even when I’m alone on the road, I’m representing all the women that others will see later on the road too,’ she said. ‘They shouldn’t be surprised anymore. We will stay here, and we will be many more.’ ■



Jhesset O. Enano is an independent journalist and educator based in Manila, Philippines. Her current reporting work focuses on climate change and environmental issues in the Philippines, and explores the intersections of climate, biodiversity, human rights, policy, gender, and culture. Her words and visual work appear in foreign and local publications. She is an Adenauer Fellow, studying visual journalism in the Ateneo de Manila University.

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Metro Haze

Pollution caused by vehicle emissions is seen along Rizal ave, one the main thoroughfare of Manila, Philippines.

Photography by Jilson Tiu



Navigating Invisible Borders


Countries are divided by borders, but people are often united because of art, hinged on common issues, language and culture.


Pratibha Tuladhar



Prateebha Tuladhar is a KAS fellow, 2007-09. She took her MAJourn from Asian Center for Journalism, Ateneo de Manila University. She currently writes for Nepali Times and teaches journalism at universities in Asia, and takes up occasional consultation work. She has worked for Kantipur Media Group, dpa, BBC Media Action, in the past.

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In an English city, my aunt learned to call home—it was the pursuit of familiarity that really gave her the purpose to stay. One weekend, she sat on the stairs, making frantic calls. My uncle punched numbers on his Nokia cell phone. *Where? What time? Are tickets available?* They echoed one another. Both were trying to book tickets for the only screening of Bollywood's *Veer-Zaara* in a city near us.

My cousins and me, we waited with bated breath. This would be an opportunity to watch a Bollywood film on the big screen. In the early-2000s, screening of Bollywood in the cinemas had not yet become a common occurrence in England, so South Asians would organise their own screenings.

Tickets were finally booked and we rushed out, thrusting our arms through our coats as we hastily locked the door behind us. 'This is as far as Nagarkot is from Kathmandu,' my uncle said aloud as he drove. Would we have covered the same distance to go watch a Hindi film in Kathmandu? Probably not. But in the UK, we did, racing towards a collective South Asian sentiment.

When we arrived, the theatre entrance was packed with Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Nepalis. Immediately, there was the relaxing of the muscles one experiences in the presence of the familiar.

Probably among the last people to buy the tickets, ours weren't the best seats. We were sat in the very first row, and for the rest of the show, we would tilt our head up towards the screen, as though clamouring for some eye contact, while the actors virtually breathed down our necks.

We weren't the only ones with bad seats. Some in the audience had been accommodated on make-shift chairs. The auditorium was packed all the way to the exit.

As Shah Rukh Khan (SRK) rescued Priety Zinta by swinging from a chopper, I remember flinching in my seat, as though they would fall on my face. A Nepali family friend, Mahesh Mahaseth, who happened to be sitting next to me, nudged and laughed at me when tears ran down my face as the Indian-Pakistani romance transpired. I remember thinking at that time how cruel South Asian male behaviour that was, teasing a girl in tears.

Even as my dislike for Shah Rukh Khan continued to build-up, I joined other women and girls in the audience and cried during all the sad scenes. The men cleared their throats; although it seemed like SRK was demonstrating that it is okay for men to weep, to be vulnerable and heartbroken, that precedent wasn't quite set off screen.

Regardless, we all went home purged. Post-catharsis.

For many South Asian women, SRK is religion, according to my friend Ayub. He sent me a snapshot of the book, *Desperately Seeking Shah Rukh* by Shrayana Bhattacharya, and described SRK as ‘the resilient embodiment of liberalism’. I asked him to elaborate and we ended up hate-watching *Jawan*. (Was he a convert by the end of the film? He has to answer that for himself.)

I cannot remember the last time I watched a Bollywood movie in the theatre. So, when the audience cheered and clapped every time SRK disarmed a bad guy, I was surprised. And while the audience responded in euphoria, I found that I was quickly disassociating: what was this film beyond a family drama steeped in violence, a revenge tragedy interlude, and family reunion with the Robin Hood of a son, all woven into a narrative of vindication of geopolitics? But the theatre was brimming and parents had their toddlers in tow.

There are no sanitised versions of the world here, for children.

‘I was not expecting so much crowd for a Bollywood masala movie. I was surprised to be honest,’ Hashim Ahmad Hakeem, video producer from India who went to the film’s screening in Kathmandu with friends from South Asia, told me. ‘It was amazing bonding over the movie and realising most of us have grown up in the same Bollywood cinema.’

Hakeem was participating in the Adenauer Media Leaders Academy in Kathmandu. On the sidelines of the event, one of the things the fellows did together was watch *Jawan*.

‘I watched it because Bollywood movies are banned in Pakistani cinemas. Secondly, I wanted to watch with fellows from other countries, specifically India as they are very much enthusiastic about Shah Rukh Khan. So, I enjoyed their cheering more than the movie,’ said Abbass Raza, an aspiring journalist from Pakistan.

For many South Asians, Bollywood movies are about coming home to a culture and language they can relate to.

‘Honestly, this will always be memorable,’ said Navneeta Nandan, journalist with *The Economic Times*. ‘It signifies the strength of art. We can be geographically apart but this can always be something that will keep us connected—cinema, music from different countries.’



Would we have covered the same distance to go watch a Hindi film in Kathmandu? Probably not. But in the UK, we did, racing towards a collective South Asian sentiment.



On a certain terrace restaurant in the heart of Kathmandu, a friend from Pakistan and I get to talking about architecture and end up discussing Pakistani teleserials. In the 1980s, Nepal Television used to broadcast Pakistani series as an endorsement of its friendly relations with Pakistan. Some viewers at the time even named their children after their favourite characters.

My aunt who lives in an English city, which has now become her home, still binges on Pakistani series and records Indian serials. In the solitude of a foreign land, entertainment content in languages she can speak have always been her friends.

Soap operas were created for housewives, who would watch them after putting household chores to rest, as though visiting old friends to fill an emptiness. On weekends, husband and children filled the hours. On weekdays, they would go back to conversing with their virtual friends: women who sometimes did not necessarily represent their reality, but nonetheless offered them the comfort of heroism.

At my request, my friend from Pakistan shared a very long list of recommended Pakistani dramas. I forwarded it to my aunt. And here’s what she wrote back: Thank you, chhori. I have watched ALL of them! :) ■

Reviving a Language One Post at a Time

Kapampangan vloggers maximise social media use
to save their native tongue

Justine Dizon

This article was originally written in September 2019 for the author's school requirement at the Ateneo de Manila University Master in Journalism Programme. Updated on 1 October 2023.



Justine Y. Dizon is a journalist based in Pampanga, Philippines. He was raised in a Kapampangan household but was restricted from using his mother tongue and forced to speak and write a different language in primary school. Dizon works on stories about local governance, culture, and economy as the Chief Editor of CLTV36 and co-creator of pampanga360.com.



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Six-year-old Nicole gets her white dress soiled while playing with her kurang-kurangan (toy kitchen set) with her cousins in their verdant backyard in Minalin, Pampanga, about 82 kilometers north of Manila, on a hot Saturday afternoon.

Without minding the plastic pan, the makeshift stove, and the leaves and twigs she 'cooks', one would think that Nicole is an expert in the kitchen—a trait most Kapampangans like her, the inhabitants of Pampanga province, possess.

She pretends to cook sisig, a native Kapampangan dish made of grilled pork ears, liver, chili, and Philippine lime. Nicole prepares another plate to transfer the 'cooked food'. She seems excited about the finished product. But before she can serve her specialty, her mother calls for her: 'Nicole! Dinner is ready!'

Despite being born to Kapampangan parents, Nicole doesn't know how to speak the Kapampangan language. Her parents speak to her in Filipino, the Philippines' national language, which is widely based in Tagalog. Tagalog is mostly used by those residing in Manila and other parts of the National Capital Region, as well as Southern Luzon.

'They get used to Tagalog since that's what they speak in school,' Kaye, Nicole's mother, explains.

This is one of the major factors as to why the Kapampangan language is considered to be highly threatened, according to Kapampangan linguist and historian Mike Pangilinan. Pangilinan studied linguistics at the Heinrich Heine Universität Düsseldorf in Germany and has devoted his time to the promotion and preservation of the Kapampangan language and culture.

'They see Kapampangan as a lower language. They just use it when they're mad or cursing but they speak in Tagalog for their everyday communication,' Pangilinan explains.

A 'dying' language

In her opinion column on Philstar.com entitled 'Kapampangan—a Dying Language, a Serious Threat

to Culture and Identity’ published on 29 January 2019, writer and educator Sara Soliven-de Guzman states that a language dies when it is only used for oral expression and not for written communication.

Pangilinan, however, clarified that the debate on whether to label Kapampangan as a ‘dying’ language is still ongoing. According to him, at least 75% of the population need to speak a language for it to survive into the next generation.

Pampanga has a population of 2,437,709 based on the 2020 Census of the Philippine Statistics Authority, 78% of which use Kapampangan as their medium of communication, according to Pangilinan.

‘I won’t say it’s a dying language because we’re still many. But the question is what are we, the 78%, doing to our language? Are we passing it to our children?’ Pangilinan continued.

But the possible demise of the Kapampangan language cannot be blamed on Kapampangan parents who speak to their children in Tagalog alone—this is a result of more complex events in national history.

Robby Tangingco, Director of the Center for Kapampangan Studies at the Holy Angel University (CKS-HAU), argues that the relegation of Kapampangan as a third language, next to English and Tagalog, can be traced back to the Commonwealth Period when Filipinos were propagating Tagalog as the national language—a form resistance against the American colonisation.

He refers to this as the nationalism in language, which resulted in the extreme influence of the Filipino or Tagalog language in the media, the education system, and professional institutions.

‘It was the government that wanted to unify the nation through the popularisation of a national history and a national language,’ Tangingco said.

Local migration, especially in the cities of Angeles, San Fernando, and Mabalacat has forced businesses in Pampanga to cater to migrants, emphasising the use of Tagalog in most of the establishments. The proximity of the province to Metro Manila, the centre of the Tagalog region, is another factor that has led to the neglect of the Kapampangan language, according to Tangingco.

Meanwhile, Pangilinan says the decline in usage of the Kapampangan language started during the time of former president and dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Since Marcos’ political enemies were mostly Kapampangans, Pangilinan says the strongman intentionally demoralised them and their perceived arrogance.

‘There is a deliberate state suppression against our language and culture... How do you demoralise a group of people? Suppress their language, destroy them in the media and ensure that they won’t have anything to read about themselves,’ Pangilinan explained.



Montalbo’s Facebook posts about speaking Kapampangan to his kids has gathered much appreciation from the public
Photo by Bruno Tioutuico | Kevin Montalbo

Staying ‘alive’

Four-year-old Kalia rides her bike around her family’s subdivision in Angeles City. Her father, Kevin Montalbo, follows behind with a handy video camera.

‘Kalia, wait for me. Don’t be in a rush, I’ll take video,’ Montalbo called as he ran after his daughter.

According to the Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a child has the right to enjoy their culture, practice their religion and speak their language, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country.

This is one of the reasons why Montalbo speaks to his daughter in the local vernacular. Unlike Kaye, Montalbo says he doesn’t want to deprive his daughter of her own language. He also believes speaking to Kalia in Kapampangan will benefit her cognitive development.

‘If you are prohibiting your child to speak in Kapampangan, you’re violating her rights,’ Montalbo explains.

Montalbo says it was no question on his part to teach his daughter Kapampangan.

‘It’s just common sense, we are Kapampangan parents, we live in Pampanga. We raise our child here so why shall we speak to her in Tagalog,’ Montalbo says.

But this ‘common sense’ Montalbo is trying to adhere to is not limited to the confines of their humble home.



Top: We The Lokal loves to feature great food from local eateries around Angeles City. In this photo, Montalbo is joined by WTL members Celine Buensuceso, Nica Remollo, and Migs Campanilla.

Bottom: Montalbo and Tiotuico first worked with each other at the City Information of Angeles. On 4 January 2018, Montalbo was inspired by a post he saw on Reddit about Ikigai, the Japanese concept of 'purpose in life'. Weeks after seeing the post, he texted Tiotuico inviting him to start 'something'. The rest was history.

Photography by Boogie Yu | We The Lokal

Going 'lokal'

Montalbo is an online content creator. In 2018, he co-founded We The Lokal: Kapampangan Videos and Vlogs with Bruno Tiotuico. He now serves as the vlogs' creative director and works closely with Tiotuico, Miguel Campanilla, Nica Remollo and Celine Buensuceso, Morrisey Hans Racca, and Boogie Yu.

As of October 2023, We The Lokal has a total of 91,000 followers on Facebook and 12,900 subscribers on YouTube. Their content varies from topics about Kapampangan food and festivals, to language tutorials—and they use Kapampangan as their main language. Their video entitled 'How Kapampangans Speak in Tagalog' now has 71,000 views on YouTube.

Despite being labelled as 'the Kapampangan vloggers' and one of the new advocates of the Kapampangan language, Montalbo says they did not really intend to project that image.

We The Lokal is a product of a passionate desire to create something different from their regular job.

'We wanted to come up with something local. Thus, our name... We weren't sure what the content was going to be. What we were sure of, however, was that it was going to be relatable to Kapampangans,' Montalbo said.

The group first released a video about the top five best pandesal (bread) in Angeles City. Montalbo says shooting that vlog in five different bakeries in the city one early morning was their first time meeting as a group. Because of their chemistry, charm, and bubbly personalities, they started gaining followers in the Kapampangan-speaking region—that includes the whole of Pampanga, parts of the provinces of Tarlac, Bataan, Bulacan, and Nueva Ecija. Today, they post videos in the forms of interviews, skits, and even educational clips.

Montalbo adds they just wanted to embrace their own Kapampangan identity and they felt more genuine when they did not pretend to be native speakers of Tagalog or English.

'Little did we know that, with this decision, we were filling a niche in the market that no one knew they needed,' Montalbo said about their move not to venture into Tagalog vlogging, which he believes is overly saturated.

According to Montalbo, We The Lokal does not generate much income as they don't monetise their videos on Facebook, and their subscribers on You-

Tube are still few compared to others. He shares they receive their funding from sponsorships, merchandise, and donations.

'Doing this opened our eyes to advocating Kapampangan culture, language, etc. So, nowadays, yes, we are aware of what we're doing, and we'd love to continue doing it,' Montalbo said.

A threat or an advantage

While Montalbo knows that social media is a global medium, he doesn't think We The Lokal is wasting their potential to reach a larger audience by opting to use a local language.

'It makes us unique and we stand out from the thousands of content creators out there. And the Kapampangans are our actual target audience,' Montalbo explained.

In the book *PLATFORM: Get Noticed in a Noisy World*, author Michael Hyatt explains people are more distracted than ever in the internet world. However, finding the right product and right niche will lead to success, according to the online expert who pioneered social networking and blogging.

And this is where Montalbo and his group are coming from—creating Kapampangan content for a Kapampangan audience.

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Montalbo adds they just wanted to embrace their own Kapampangan identity and they felt more genuine when they did not pretend to be native speakers of Tagalog or English. 'Little did we know that, with this decision, we were filling a niche in the market that no one knew they needed.'

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Pangilinan also sees the potential of social media to promote the use of the Kapampangan language. According to him, social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have allowed public dialogue pertaining to the use of Kapampangan language to flourish.

He asserts that social media is instrumental in providing a platform for people to challenge old norms that are detrimental to the Kapampangan language, such as imposing fines to those who use it in schools.

'Kapampangans don't have a voice to question these things. This is where social media gets in the picture. Finally, someone stood up against these norms,' Pangilinan said.

He further notes that the increased awareness and the free space social media brings not only benefits the revival of the Kapampangan language. In fact, several minorities and indigenous groups in the

world like the Berbers of Morocco and the Minangkabau of Indonesia suddenly became empowered by using their respective languages.

'Suddenly they can use their own language because no one prohibits them from doing so,' Pangilinan explains.

In her article 'New Media, New Audiences?', London School of Economics professor Sonia Livingstone stated that the internet has created different audience behaviour. Since it is perceived as a more 'personal' medium, Livingstone explained that people feel more connected and empowered on social media.

'It has to be social media'

The Center of Kapampangan Studies at the Holy Angel University (CKS-HAU) is also now looking at different ways to promote the Kapampangan language to the youth of today. Tangingco says social media plays an important role in reaching out to the three million Kapampangans scattered all over the world.

Aside from the traditional media such as books, magazines, television and radio programmes, and even movies, Tangingco says they have started using social media with the aim to spread awareness regarding Kapampangan culture and language.

In September 2015, CKS-HAU launched Bergaño Dictionario, a mobile app version of the Kapampangan dictionary written by Fray Diego Bergaño in 1732. Tangingco says the app is very useful to both native and non-native speakers of Kapampangan. As of October 2023, the app has more than 50,000 downloads on Google Playstore.

CKS-HAU has also invited vlogger Jericho Arceo to be the host of the television and social media program entitled *Aro Jericho!*, which used to stream on Facebook and air on regional television station CLTV36. Arceo is one of the most famous Kapampangan content-creators, with over 735,000 followers on Facebook, and 666,000 subscribers on YouTube at the time of this article.

'It has to be social media; it cannot be any other. I'm sorry to say but we have discarded or minimised the use of traditional media because they are no longer popular,' Tangingco stated.

Tangingco says they are seeing a positive response brought about by their efforts to keep the Kapampangan language alive. However, he believes these efforts will all be put to waste if parents and other elders like Kaye do not speak to the younger generation in Kapampangan.

'We call our language Amanung Sisuan, or language suckled from the mother's breast. We have to make our children speak it,' Tangingco declares. ■



Pangilinan used to be the executive director of the Aguman Sinupuan Singing in Angeles City. During his stint, he maximised social media use to educate the public about the Kapampangan language and the Kapampangan indigenous script Kulitan. Image from Aguman Sinupuan Singing

Braving New Horizons

Filipinas Navigate Entrepreneurship in the Kathmandu Valley

Arjay L. Balinbin

KATHMANDU, Nepal – Against the backdrop of rich cultures and traditions in the Kathmandu Valley, three Filipinas are navigating entrepreneurial opportunities.

Sharon G. Shakya, Ludivina ‘Vina’ Maharjan, and Sheilla Mae J. Manto, all with Nepali husbands, say their journeys have exposed them to unique and sometimes daunting challenges, all of which is to be expected when running a business in Nepal.

Many Filipinas have established businesses in the country, such as manpower agencies, education consultancies, inns, schools, spas, travel companies, cafes, bakeries, restaurants, and import-export trading houses, according to the Nepal-Philippines Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Sharon G. Shakya, a dentist, moved to Kathmandu a few years ago with the goal of making an impact on oral healthcare alongside her husband, who is also a dentist.

Yet, her journey did not stop at dentistry. While co-running Cosmo Dental Clinic with her husband, she ventured into the culinary world, opening a Filipino restaurant called Cebu Fiesta in Lalitpur, a city on the outskirts of the capital Kathmandu.

‘Cebu is like my second home in the Philippines because that’s where I met my husband when he was studying there,’ Shakya said, explaining why she named her restaurant after Cebu despite being born in Negros, another region in the central Philippines.

Shakya is among Filipinas who married Nepali spouses they met at Philippine medical schools. This is not surprising, as the relationship between Nepal and the Philippines is often linked to education. ‘We have hundreds of Nepali students going to the Philippines for studies, including aviation training and medicine,’ said Ramon S. Bagatsing Junior, Ambas-

sador of the Philippines to Nepal, in an interview with local news agency *myRepublica* in 2022. ‘Most Filipino women living in Nepal are married to Nepali men,’ Bagatsing noted.

For Shakya, her restaurant is more than just a business venture; it is a cultural bridge connecting the flavours and traditions of the Philippines with the Nepalese palate.

She envisions Cebu Fiesta as a place where people from various backgrounds in the Himalayan nation can come together to savour Filipino dishes and learn about Filipino culture.

Cebu Fiesta, nestled in a residential area near schools and other small businesses, is adorned with Filipino handicrafts like buri products, creating a welcoming Filipino ambiance. The menu features a diverse selection of Filipino dishes, such as sinigang (sour soup), crispy pata (deep-fried pork leg), chop suey (vegetable stir-fry), halo-halo (shaved ice dessert), and more. The bestsellers include lechon kawali (crispy fried pork belly), sisig (sizzling pork dish), and chicken adobo (chicken stew).

‘It is a good start for us that we are slowly introducing our food—our culture—here,’ she said.

From domestic helper to business owner

The story of Ludivina ‘Vina’ Maharjan, executive director at Classic Diamond Jewellers, is one of ambition and relentless pursuit. She began her journey as a domestic helper in Hong Kong but took an unexpected path when she married a jeweller from Nepal.

Born and raised in La Union in northern Philippines, Maharjan’s journey began in a place where opportunities were scarce. According to her, the year 1996 marked the inception of what would become her jewellery business.

Against the backdrop of rich cultures and traditions in the Kathmandu Valley, three Filipinas are navigating opportunities as entrepreneurs. Sharon G. Shakya, Ludivina 'Vina' Maharjan, and Sheilla Mae J. Manto, all married to Nepali partners, said their journeys as migrant entrepreneurs have exposed them to unique and sometimes daunting challenges.

With a modest budget, her husband's family ventured into the jewellery trade. The business started within the confines of their home. 'The whole family started it, because in Nepal it's usually a joint family business,' she said.

'I didn't join the business immediately. I worked at a travel agency in Nepal for two years just to learn the language, and after that, I went to India to gain knowledge of diamond assorting and coloured stones, where I stayed for six months,' she added.

She said that understanding every aspect of the business, from the ground up, was essential. She had also spent five years working in the family's jewellery factory.

'After that, we opened our first store in Lalitpur, then in America, in Jackson Heights, New York, Maryland, and then in Europe. I think we have four stores,' Maharjan stated.

Maharjan says her interest in jewellery began in her childhood, watching celebrities on television, which deepened during her stay in Hong Kong. 'Whenever I would pass by the streets of Hong Kong, I would always look for jewellery shops.'

While she does not consider herself an artist, she said that her passion and keen eye for aesthetics drive her design process. Drawing inspiration from various sources, she tries to bring her unique touch to each piece.

'Almost everything here, I designed. These are not exactly my designs—I got the idea from the internet or magazines and just modified them,' she explained.

The jewellery business takes pride in its diamond-encrusted crowns, particularly tiaras, which are popular not only among royalty but also among stylish customers.

According to her, skilled workers from Kolkata, India, known for their expertise in jewellery-making, are the foundation of the craftsmanship that distinguishes the company's jewellery.

Maharjan is proud to see her creations worn at parties and special events. 'I recognise them easily—they look different because of the finishing.'

From motherhood to entrepreneurship

Sheilla Mae J. Manto, a registered nurse from Cebu, set foot in Nepal in 2018. Having met her husband,

Suav Zuwa, when he was studying medicine in her province, the pair soon discovered a shared passion for improving lives through skincare and medicine. This kindled the idea of bringing their expertise to Nepal.

The couple started their entrepreneurial journey by venturing into retail. They recognised the demand for cosmetic products in Nepal, 'From brightening skin to combating acne scars,' Manto explained.

Manto, president of Zuwa Enterprises, was determined to balance the responsibilities of motherhood with her entrepreneurial dreams.

'I want to take care of my three kids while running the business,' she said.

Her background in customer service and sales in the Philippines also provided valuable insight into handling customers effectively, she noted.

The couple soon diversified their operations, delving into import and export activities between the Philippines and Nepal, introducing their own skincare brands under the Zuwa Enterprises umbrella.

Recognising the low trade volume between the Philippines and Nepal, 'we saw an opportunity to contribute,' Suav Zuwa, Manto's husband, added.

In the last 25 years, Nepal's exports to the Philippines grew at a rate of 7.39% per annum, from US\$30,800 in 1996 to US\$184,000 in 2021, based on reports from the Observatory of Economic Complexity, a platform for international trade data.

Meanwhile, the Philippines' exports to Nepal increased at a faster rate of 12.2%, reaching US\$6.21 million in 2021.

According to Zuwa, a key milestone in Zuwa Enterprises' journey was the positive reception of Philippine-made skincare products in Nepal. The products 'gained good attention especially during the summer months,' he claimed.

The couple also highlighted the similarities between Nepal and the Philippines. Both nations share an Asian heritage and a preference for brighter and flawless skin, and there is a high demand for exfoliants and whitening products like glutathione, collagen, and tretinoin in both countries.

After a brief hiatus due to the pandemic, the company resumed operations in December 2022 and im-

ported a substantial four to five thousand kilograms of cosmetic products in the previous quarter.

The company, Zuwa said, encountered ‘no resistance’ when introducing its products in either the Philippines or Nepal, instead witnessing rapid growth fuelled by the shared enthusiasm for ‘trying new, unique, and effective’ cosmetic solutions.

On her part, Manto uses TikTok to market her company’s products. Initially, TikTok served as a modest platform for their marketing efforts, but the shift toward livestreams and engaging video content significantly boosted sales, she noted.

‘Sheilla herself wants to be on TikTok, and this trend, I think, is inspired by beauty company CEOs in the Philippines,’ Manto’s husband said when asked about his wife’s marketing strategy, noting that the platform enables direct engagement with customers and aids in product improvement.

Zuwa Enterprises in Nepal operates from its own office in Kathmandu and delivers products nationwide, offering cash-on-delivery services. ‘We have had around 40,000 customers reach out to us,’ said Zuwa.

Making choices

Running a business is not without its challenges. The Filipino restaurant owner, Shakya, said she faces challenges during religious and cultural celebrations. For instance, Nepalese people’s preference for vegetarian food during Shrawan (mid-July to mid-August) affects business in her restaurant known for its meat-based dishes.

To address this, she made the bold decision of adapting her menu to the Nepali culture by offering purely vegetarian dishes during this month.

She ventured into online delivery services to survive during the toughest times, especially during the pandemic.

Shakya also found support in her Filipino friends. ‘Many friends were willing to help me,’ she noted. ‘They said, “Okay, in cooking, we will be there for you...” even though they didn’t really have a background in this since their professions are different,’ Shakya explained.

This camaraderie among Filipino expatriates plays a vital role in her journey.

For Maharjan, the jeweller, a key challenge in the Nepali market is ensuring customer satisfaction.

In Nepal’s close-knit business environment, reputation and word-of-mouth are crucial. Even a single customer complaint can have a significant impact.

‘They are the customers, so they are always right; even if it’s impossible to do what they want, we still try, because Nepal is a very small market.’

Ms. Maharjan also emphasised the importance of maintaining a close relationship with customers.

‘We treat them like family,’ she said. ‘We have regular customers, and that’s what makes me happy here. If you have regular customers, it’s like a cycle, generation to generation.’

The challenges of customer service are shared by other Filipina business owners. Effective communication with local customers proved difficult for Manto of Zuwa Enterprises, prompting her to turn to technology and use artificial intelligence translation tools to understand and engage with Nepali customers.

Her advice to fellow entrepreneurs is grounded in her own experiences.

‘We need to have persistence because the market is not constant; sometimes it’s up and sometimes down, so you have to be patient and consistent with your marketing strategies,’ Manto said. ■



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Children happily under the storm through cycling at the wet streets of Manila, Philippines.
Photography by Jilson Tiu





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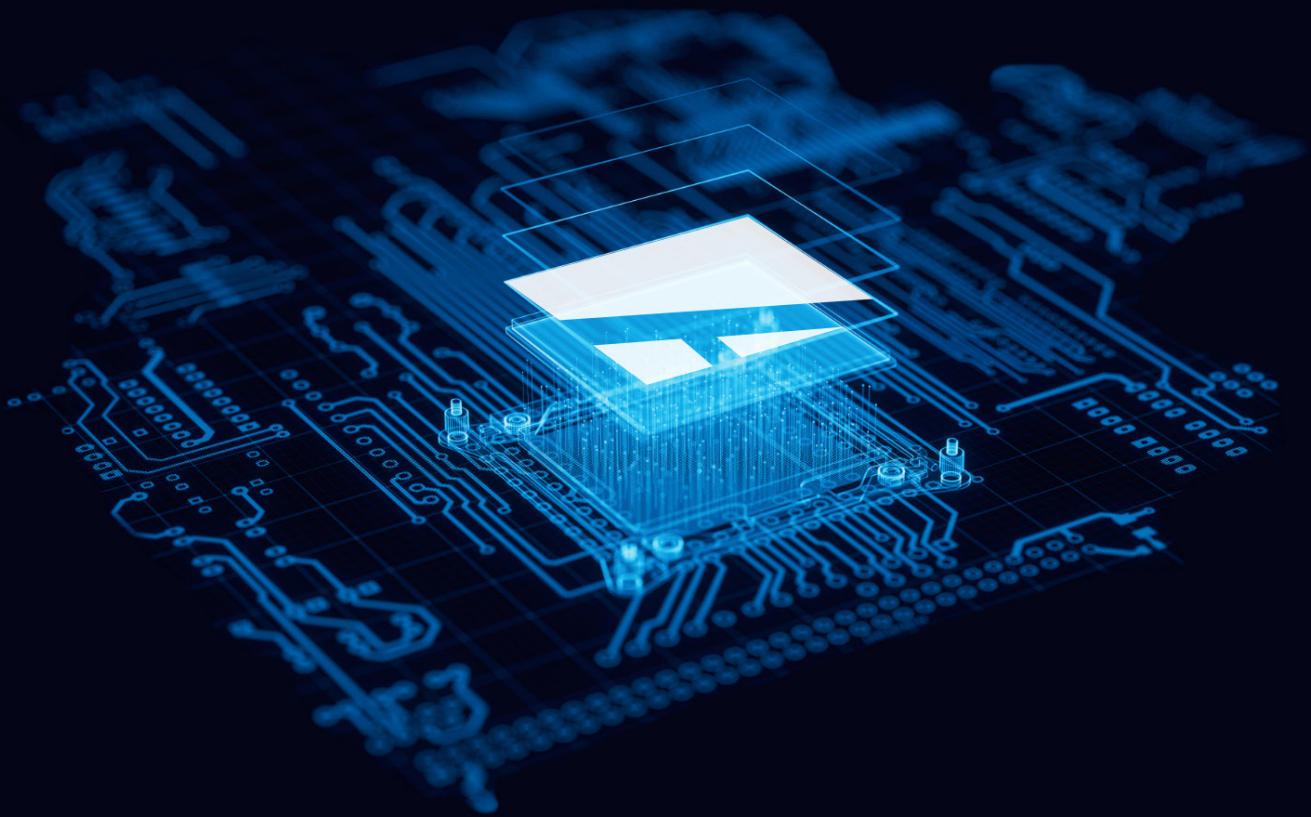
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