



feminist actors navigating AI

research & learning report



Body & Data

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A survey was filled by participants pre-workshop to understand familiarity and attitudes towards AI, AI use habits, and access to critical resources related to AI.

The post-workshop survey was used to gauge the effectiveness of the workshop, and participants' reflections, commitments, visions, and values

about Body & Data

Established in 2017, Body & Data works to enhance understanding and access to information on digital rights among women, queer people and marginalized groups where they are able to exercise their rights in a safe and just digital space. We work towards the vision of accessible, safe and just digital spaces for all, through cross movement building, facilitation for access to information, knowledge building and dissemination on digital rights in the context of Nepal.

researcher

Monisha Choudhary

curators & interviewers

Dr. Dovan Rai, Nuva Rai, Bishakha Mahato, Monisha Choudhary

editor

Nuva Rai

illustrations

Supriya Manandhar

layout and design

Monisha Choudhary

financial support

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introduction

Current push for generative AI stands on a market-led, extractive, exploitative foundation marred by epistemic hierarchies. While its proliferation has produced expansive possibilities for innovation, the risks it poses across axes of gender, caste, class, ethnicity, language, and disability, among others, outweigh future benefits. Since its very conception, generative AI has been designed through gender agnostic lenses, built on infrastructure against community interests, trained on materials without due consent by creators, and used to propagate and amplify harms against marginalized communities.

General discourse about AI tends toward a techno-utopia. However, **feminist actors** such as activists, researchers, practitioners, and educators are faced with the challenge of simultaneously understanding this complicated technology, identifying continuous lapses and violations, countering them, and developing pathways for meaningfully harnessing this technology for communal good.

Against these terrains, this research and learning report was designed to study feminist engagements with GenAI while building feminist criticality around AI by converging personal navigations and capacity building. **The study follows twenty feminist actors from Nepal** through a pre-workshop survey, a three-day workshop on feminist critical AI literacy, and three weeks of using AI, reflecting on AI use, and scrutinizing it.

Thus the central questions guiding this research emerged from the data itself:

What does feminist criticality toward AI look like in practice?

What contradictions arise when feminist values meet AI's structural constraints?

What do feminist communities actually imagine when they imagine AI done differently?

How does a capacity-building intervention shape the relationship between feminist practitioners and a technology that is being made inevitable?

Nepal provides a particularly nuanced pretext for these questions. As a country whose linguistic, cultural, and knowledge systems are systematically underrepresented in AI training data, Nepal-based users encounter a specific form of AI inequality—tools that are available for use but were designed by and for others.

The experiences encapsulated by this research highlight not only feminist AI concerns but also the specific nature of these concerns for community members who are structurally excluded in the imagination of an AI user by design.



methodology

A total of 20 participants were selected through an open application process. The participants were women, queer, from Indigenous Peoples, Persons with Disabilities, and structurally marginalized communities. Participants were aged 16 to above 45, and all of them held higher education qualifications.

Professional backgrounds spanned feminist and digital rights civil society, journalism, law, research, public health, psychology, software engineering, and creative sectors. The twenty participants brought distinct professional positionalities, intersectional identities, and unique exposure and relationships with technology that shaped how they engaged with AI before and after the workshop.

This research was guided by two methodologies: a **grounded methodology** that allowed findings to emerge from participant experiences and a **feminist reflexive orientation** that allowed researchers themselves to be part of the research process.

Participants shared with us their personal, professional, and systemic reflections on AI across an iterative process: pre-workshop survey, critical AI literacy workshop, the post-workshop survey, and the reflexive logs and interviews conducted by five dedicated interviewers from Body & Data.

pre/post-workshop surveys

A survey was filled by participants pre-workshop to understand familiarity and attitudes towards AI, AI use habits, and access to critical resources related to AI.

The post-workshop survey was used to gauge the effectiveness of the workshop, and participants' reflections, commitments, visions, and values

critical literacy workshop

The three-day workshop was the intervention at the centre of the study. Designed using a feminist lens, it layered foundational AI literacy, technical understanding, criticality, sectoral applications, and socio-political analysis across three days.

Sessions included introduction to AI, generative AI, recommendation systems, AI bias, sectoral uses, regulatory challenges, costs of AI, and the consequences of development at scale.

reflexive logs & interviews

Over three weeks following the workshop, participants completed weekly reflective logs structured around AI use, noticing AI in daily life, and practising feminist AI thinking.

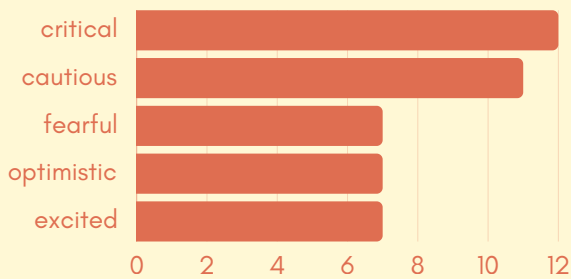
Each participant was assigned to one of four interviewers (whose names have been encoded for privacy), who conducted weekly follow-up interviews. Interviewers were randomly assigned 5 participants for the follow-up interviews conducted over three weeks.

pre-workshop baseline

Participants filled out a pre-workshop survey, reflecting on their feelings, use habits, familiarity, concerns, and access to resources.

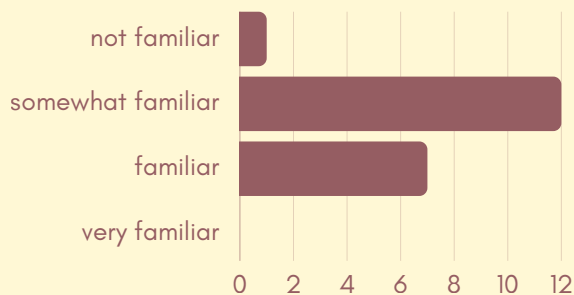
orientations towards AI

multiple selections permitted



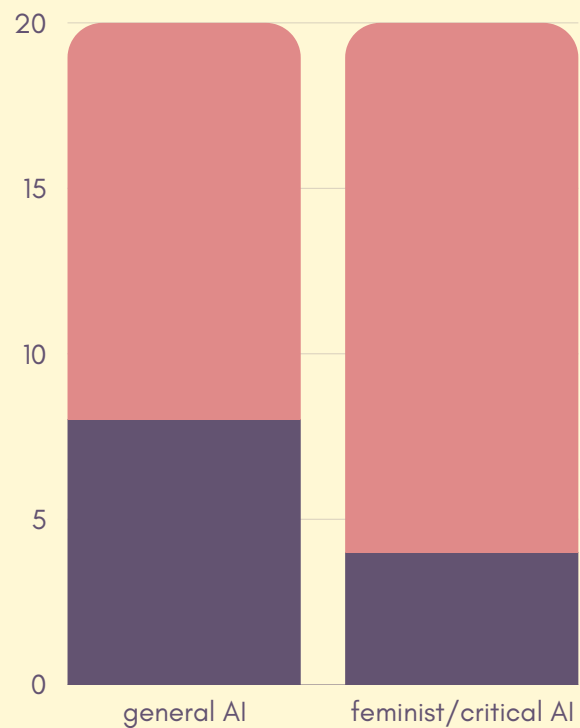
Participants demonstrated complex perceptions towards AI- caution and criticality were most prominent, with more than a third of the participants harbouring fear along with criticality.

familiarity with GenAI



Most participants under the age of 34 reported being somewhat familiar with generative AI, while none reported being "very familiar" with it.

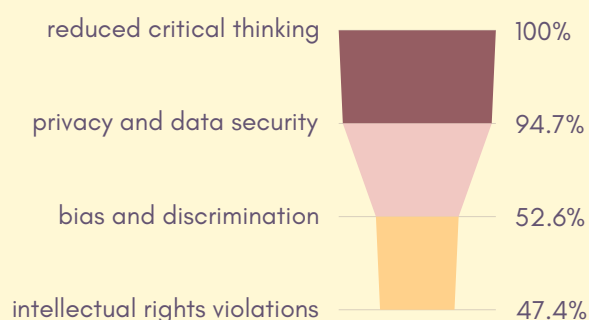
access to learning resources, communities, and support systems



The near-absence of feminist AI learning resources represents a significant structural gap that the workshop was designed to address. Even among the four participants who answered yes to having feminist AI resources, access was possible through personal initiative rather than consolidated by institutions.

primary concerns about AI

multiple selections permitted



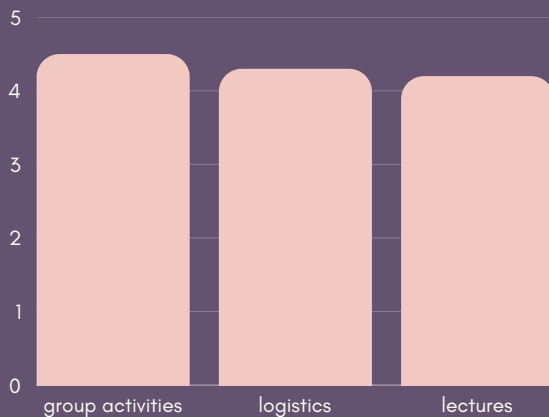
Reduced critical thinking, privacy, and data security were the most frequent concerns. The prominence of these concerns, rather than accuracy or reliability, suggests participants entered with a relatively political and moral orientation to AI risks and not a technical one.

post-workshop shifts

After the critical AI workshop, participants were asked to fill a survey to share their feedback on the workshop itself and reflect on what challenged them most.

workshop satisfaction

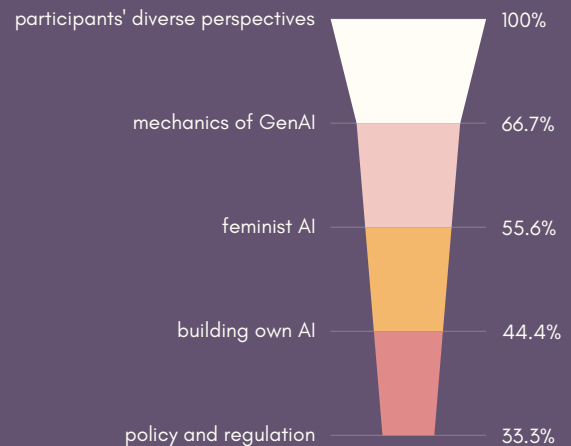
rating out of 5



Across all participants, post-workshop satisfaction was high. Participants ranked group activities the highest, consistent with their qualitative reflections that the interactive and collaborative sessions were most meaningful.

most meaningful sessions

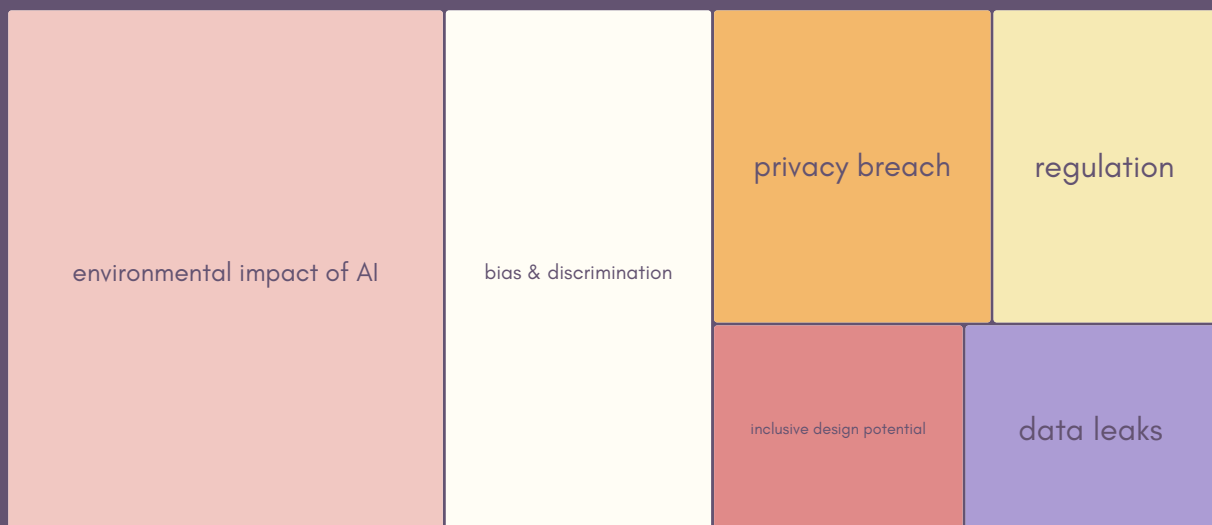
open-ended questions



Diverse participant perspectives and group discussions were most frequently cited as the most meaningful elements of the workshop. This suggests that diverse participant pools generate richer critical learning.

most challenged assumptions

open ended question



The most prominently challenged assumption was the environmental impact of AI and data centres, raised by approximately 13 of the 20 participants. This suggests that AI's material and ecological consequences are still largely invisible to even critical actors.

navigations & knowledge

Both during and after the workshop, participants developed critical approaches towards AI, grappled with personal use, and untangled systemic injustices amplified by AI.

This section explores the knowledge that surfaced from participants' navigations of AI in the following forms:



emerging criticality

contradictions, constraints, and concessions

feminist imaginaries

and

transformative feminist visions

“

I asked AI about the prime minister of Nepal (a woman) by deceptively using the pronoun “he”. AI immediately started hallucinating and telling me about the great male leader Prime Minister Sushila Karki.

emerging criticality

The workshop was designed to create a space where participants could access resources and reflect on AI critically. Facilitators did not encourage outright rejection of AI but made what was invisible visible– labour practices, environmental cost, cognitive decline, etc. By the end of the workshop, participants unanimously became more critical of AI, even regular users who did not scrutinize AI before the workshop.

building criticality

discovery of bias

Encountering gender bias in personal use of generative AI was the most powerful catalyst for criticality. Participants witnessed AI bias in the following cases:

- asking for 10 nepali journalists and receiving ten **male** names, some of which were non-existent
- citing mostly **male** authors when providing researched content
- responding to questions about the Dalit movement with only male leaders, women included only when specifically prompted
- when tested about knowledge on female cricketers, model acknowledged limitations

demystification of AI mechanisms

Understanding how AI actually works, that it is trained on data, that data reflects historical inequalities, that outputs are probabilistic rather than factual, and that users are themselves data sources, gave participants the vocabulary to form a granular understanding of and advocate for responsible development of generative AI. One participant described the "Build Your Own AI" session as empowering precisely because they were able to witness the black box by themselves. A software engineer described algorithmic bias and training data bias as entirely new concepts despite their professional proximity to tech.

The latter exposes an alarming (and almost deliberate) lack of consideration for the problems and gaps in frontier technology in formalized higher education. When those who are entrusted to lead technological developments are not equipped with the tools to identify or name its flaws, consider the larger implications of their action, or the ability to draw from multiple disciplines to understand and assess second and third order effects, education and innovation are bound to amplify and cause new harms.

environmental impact

The session on AI's material and ecological costs was the single most cited assumption-challenging session. It struck a political-ecological dimension absent from participants' prior frameworks of criticality towards AI.

For one participant, it triggered eco-anxiety. For some others, it motivated concrete behaviour change: using Google instead of AI for simple queries. The environmental frame operated as a gateway to criticality for those whose feminist values already included ecological concerns.

peer learning as feminist pedagogy

The diversity of the participant group was itself a pedagogical instrument. Participants repeatedly cited others' perspectives as their most meaningful learning. One participant was introduced to disability and the inaccessibility of AI through another participant. Another participant had a chance to understand how communities outside their own were affected was deepened by hearing directly from Indigenous, Dalit, and queer participants.

Generally, workshops and literacy training are devised from a top-down approach, where knowledge transfers from an "expert" to a "novice". The underlying assumption is that lived experiences are not forms of knowing or expertise, and that formalised education or professional experience lends expertise. However, as communities on the margins navigate these spaces without resources, support systems, or, in many cases, access to community, their lived experiences constitute a rich, complex body of embodied knowledge that transcends conventional notions of expertise. These workshops were curated with the intention of centering lived experiences and ensuring multiple exchanges between participants who brought different experiences, backgrounds, and identities. Therefore, in comparison to lecture-like sessions and guided activities, participants valued horizontal and peer-based learning the most.

emerging criticality

Participants had different orientations and approaches to AI before entering the workshop, so criticality was not adopted uniformly. Adoption was informed by profession, identity, pre-existing proclivities, and access.

responding critically

abstention & minimization

For several participants, the primary expression of criticality was a significant reduction in AI use. One participant committed to using AI only when "very necessary." Another completely stopped using AI in the second week. While some aspired to abstain completely from AI use, incremental minimisation appeared to be the most viable response.

guilt-conscious use

A cluster of participants continued using AI, but were ethically fraught when using it. DR P1 described guilt when using AI for creative work. One participant felt guilt about using NotebookLM despite finding it genuinely helpful to understand a difficult research paper. Participants were ethically conscious about their use, more cautious and skeptical about generated responses, but generally found it difficult to opt out due to its benefits and accessibility.

critical prompting & fact-checking

Participants also used specific, rights-based prompts to engage with AI critically. A participant explicitly instructed AI to give non-sugar-coated responses to counter AI's default flattery. One of them also used AI to discover feminist vocabulary and explicitly prompted for rights-based framings of questions.

bias testing & experimentation

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knowledge sharing

Across nearly all participants, the workshop created an impulse to share their learnings with colleagues, students, family, and community. One of the participants integrated critical literacy into journalism teaching. When they asked their students to prompt AI to describe them, the students expressed fear around privacy breaches. BM P4 educated family members about deepfake risks. Another participant warned a family member about the consequences of over-reliance on AI and resulting ecological harms.

As general discourses push the potential of AI and use the “value” it creates to strategically cover-up its costs, it may be assumed that most individuals do not have access to information on the harms necessitated by the existence of AI. When participants warned friends, family members, and colleagues about the risks of AI, most came out of these conversations more cautious and careful about their AI use. Widespread knowledge and access to such critical information could allow counter-imaginaries and disrupt the narrative of inevitability surrounding AI.

resistance

For participants in institutions with AI policies, criticality took the form of resistance to imposed technological change. When a participant’s company mandated aggressive AI adoption, they raised concerns with managers and colleagues, unfortunately, to no avail. Another participant took a stance against image generators as a queer Indigenous person, connecting data and surveillance resistance to identity.

However, with workplace integrations of AI, personal struggles between being productive and learning became more pronounced. With job security and financial safety on the line, resistance is quite constrained and the cost of even minor resistances is too significant.



I know about the privacy risks, the many biases it has, and its environmental impact now. But I work at an international organization, where lay-offs are becoming quite common. They've integrated an AI tool into our workspace, and I use it very well, which is how I keep my job still.

I've worked very hard to get to where I am, I also feel in some ways that I deserve to be benefitted by this new technology.



contradictions

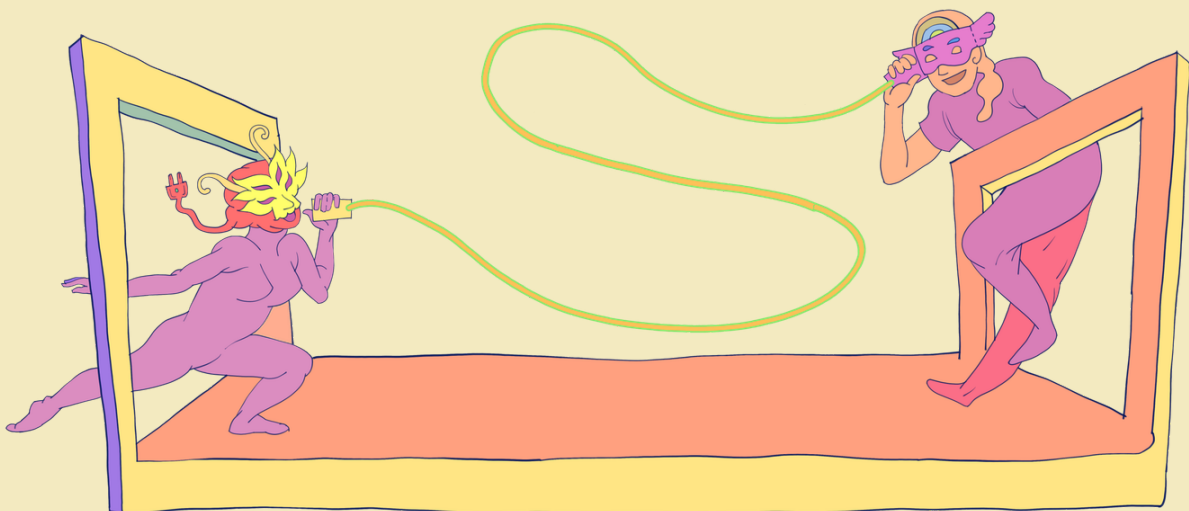
In the post-workshop period, participants grappled with their use and structural concerns with varying degrees of resolution. Contradictions between ethical position and use emerged due to the nature of this technology- harmful yet useful, invasive yet ubiquitous.

creative expression & pressure to perform

Several participants strongly held that AI should not be used for creative expression and then found themselves in situations that tested this conviction. A participating creative professional felt guilty for using ChatGPT for creative help in Week 1, was then directed by a researcher to use it for blog writing in Week 3, and reflected on the tensions this created. They accepted the possible utility of the tool but were not able to act on it.

A participating journalist relied on AI for faster turnovers in the hectic creative industry and found confidence in their personal creative expression, depleting over time due to over-reliance on AI. One of the participants described the workshop as enabling a reclamation of creative voice while acknowledging the psychological difficulty of resisting AI when social media performance pressure is high. Along with another participants, they shared that the increase of AI slop is creating more space for content and visibility that feels more human, more authentic, and with space for error. Despite the ability to name this space, they were unable to be with error in this AI era.

Overall, the “polished” work produced by AI has increasingly compelled participants to filter even creative work, underscoring their aspirations toward perfecting their expression. Even as algorithms skew engagement in cases of authentic content online, it is becoming increasingly difficult to be imperfect, messy, and human online.



environmental impact and the cost of convenience

Almost every participant stated that the environmental impact of AI was of the most concern in AI use; however, they continued using AI. This demonstrates the impossible burden structural problems pose on individuals who are cognizant of said problems- one of the participants went on to say that they felt they deserved to reap the benefits of this new tool, because, after all, they have struggled for many years without support in their field of work.

While the use of AI by a single individual may have little impact on the general moral, economic, and ecological fabric that sustains this mega technology, collective acceptance and adaptation to AI will feed into the mainstream narrative of the AI-driven techno-utopia. At a time when narratives of general intelligence and superintelligence are irrationally driving investment and popular appeal, individual and collective rejection and an emphasis on guardrails can have significant consequences.

in/dependency

A recurring contradiction was the simultaneous desire to develop independent critical capacities and the recognition that AI offered genuine utility. After one of the interviewers asked participants if they wished they had been exposed to AI during childhood, all but one of the participants said that they would not have wanted AI earlier and that they appreciate that they were able to be raised in a world without AI, that their independently developed critical faculties were valuable.

For MC P3, who is dyslexic, AI was genuinely enabling for their accessibility needs. However, they reported feeling anxious about over-reliance and potential erosion of their confidence.

professional necessity & feminist critique

Multiple participants held explicit feminist critiques of AI alongside professional dependencies on AI. A participant working in an international organization described AI as a "competitive professional advantage" in a workplace with frequent lay-offs while simultaneously articulating strong critiques of its biases, privacy risks, and environmental impact. A technologist knew their company's AI adoption was not ethical, but had no choice but to comply. These participants developed a more pragmatic approach to applying feminist ethics in their AI use with their safety and livelihood on the line.



As a person with dyslexia, AI has made my life a lot easier. I am able to read and write much more easily. However, I get very anxious about my over-reliance on AI and how I am not as confident about my own thoughts and opinions anymore.

constraints

While participants continuously practiced criticality and caution in navigating AI, their responses were constrained by institutions and the ubiquity of AI, and deepened by failures of frontier technologies and barriers to access. Outside of this curated workshop, critical spaces were either absent or wholly inaccessible, contributing to resource constraints.

institutional mandates

A participating technologist's situation illustrated structural constraints most starkly: working at a tech company that mandated AI use and set efficiency experiments requiring employees to complete four days of work in three using AI, they had little to no individual agency. Their superior equated this mandated AI use to using a motorbike to dismiss their concerns, suggesting that both are technologies built for convenience. Equating Generative AI with other forms of technology, in this case a motorbike, is an overly simplistic fallacy. A motorbike, while with consequences for the environment when it uses fuel, cannot compare to a technology that is disrupting our personal, public, and environmental life. Generally, the only purpose of such attempts is to ridicule and silence resistance, while evading well-intentioned questions of accountability.

Another participant also stated that they were mandated to use Microsoft Copilot as it was part of their workflow. Institutionally mandated AI integration and use may comprise a significant constraint for individual critical actors, especially in the workplace. Feminist actors in the workforce, especially in tech, may not make it unscathed through confrontations about AI use in an industry notoriously popular for frequent lay-offs and record speed substitutions.

the ubiquity problem

Several participants reported difficulty in distancing themselves from AI as it becomes more and more ubiquitous. Users were noted to have less and less control over AI use because of widespread integration in systems that do not require user consent for AI activation. One of them described AI-generated responses appearing automatically in searches without any options to opt out. Another participant discovered Microsoft Copilot had been integrated into their workplace software without their consent or knowledge, raising concerns about how one could resist forceful integration that they are not even aware of. awareness. MC P5 also admitted reliance on AI due to integration of the premium version Microsoft Copilot into their workspace, requiring every employee to rely on AI for daily work. Especially for participants navigating workplace integrations of AI, resistance and opting out become particularly costly as more often than not, they risk losing their livelihood as a consequence.

nepal-specific data gaps

Even in admitting the utility of AI, a cross-cutting limitation across multiple participants was the lack of AI-specific data. A participating journalist tried to learn about Nepalese law, but the AI used Hindi terms for Nepali concepts and provided inaccurate legal-historical information. Another creative's original Nepali article was flagged as 99% AI-generated by a detection tool. These findings and personal experiences have profound implications for users in the global majority, who are underrepresented in every stage of the development of this technology. As AI use becomes normalized with every passing hour, experiences, bodies, languages, and identities that have always been excluded by mainstream technology will be pushed farther into the margins.

barriers to access

Several participants cited paywalls that bar AI access as a constraint. One of the participants found that free versions of AI tools made the presentations they prepared publicly visible without the users' consent. Another participant noted that access to premium AI access was a class privilege, with marginalised communities least likely to afford the tools that might best serve them.

While participants also underscored the potential of AI as an equalizer, especially for marginalized communities, cultural preservation efforts, feminist knowledge, etc, paywalls and financial resources required to build such tools present a significant challenge. If the plug is pulled and all chatbots are put behind a paywall, marginalized communities may be disproportionately affected.

absence of critical spaces

Multiple participants noted that before the workshop, they had no spaces—professional, community, or social—for critical AI discussion. The workshop created a temporary community of critical practice, but spaces and infrastructure to sustain and reinforce criticality, outside of this curated workshop, are lacking.

My workplace requires mandatory use of AI. We have to use AI for code, and then debug the code AI writes. This is causing more problems, because it is all the more difficult to know where it makes mistakes, we become less and less able to write the code ourselves too. When I confronted my boss about this, they said that if I feel this way about AI, then I should stop riding a motorcycle too.



concessions

Emerging technologies such as GenAI have a lot to offer, but participants agreed that at its current state, it is not a net positive. Use of AI was very conflicting and its moral consequences weighed quite heavy on participants. They thus shared the following concessions in the manners in which they navigated AI.

accessibility as an exception

A participating activist said that AI was genuinely enabling for them on account of their dyslexia. This poses a significant question when advocating for general abstention. Even the cost of abstaining from AI is not distributed uniformly across actors. For users with disabilities, reduced AI use may mean reduced participation in academic and professional life.



purpose specific use

The most common concession was the use of AI for specific, bounded purposes such as research structuring, translation, citation while explicitly rejecting other types of uses. One participant's approach is an apt example; they continued using ChatGPT but refused AI's default flattery.

entitlement to technological benefits

The most unapologetic and different concession that emerged was how someone had overcome significant hardship in their professional life, so they did not intend to stop their AI use. While maintaining strong critiques of AI biases and need for safeguards, they refused to take on an individual moral burden. Their position offers an alternative framing- that even feminist actors have a stake in technology and that one of the stances we could take is to demand for just technology that does not force individuals into making these trade offs.

feminist imaginaries

When participants were invited to imagine AI designed for their communities, they furthered

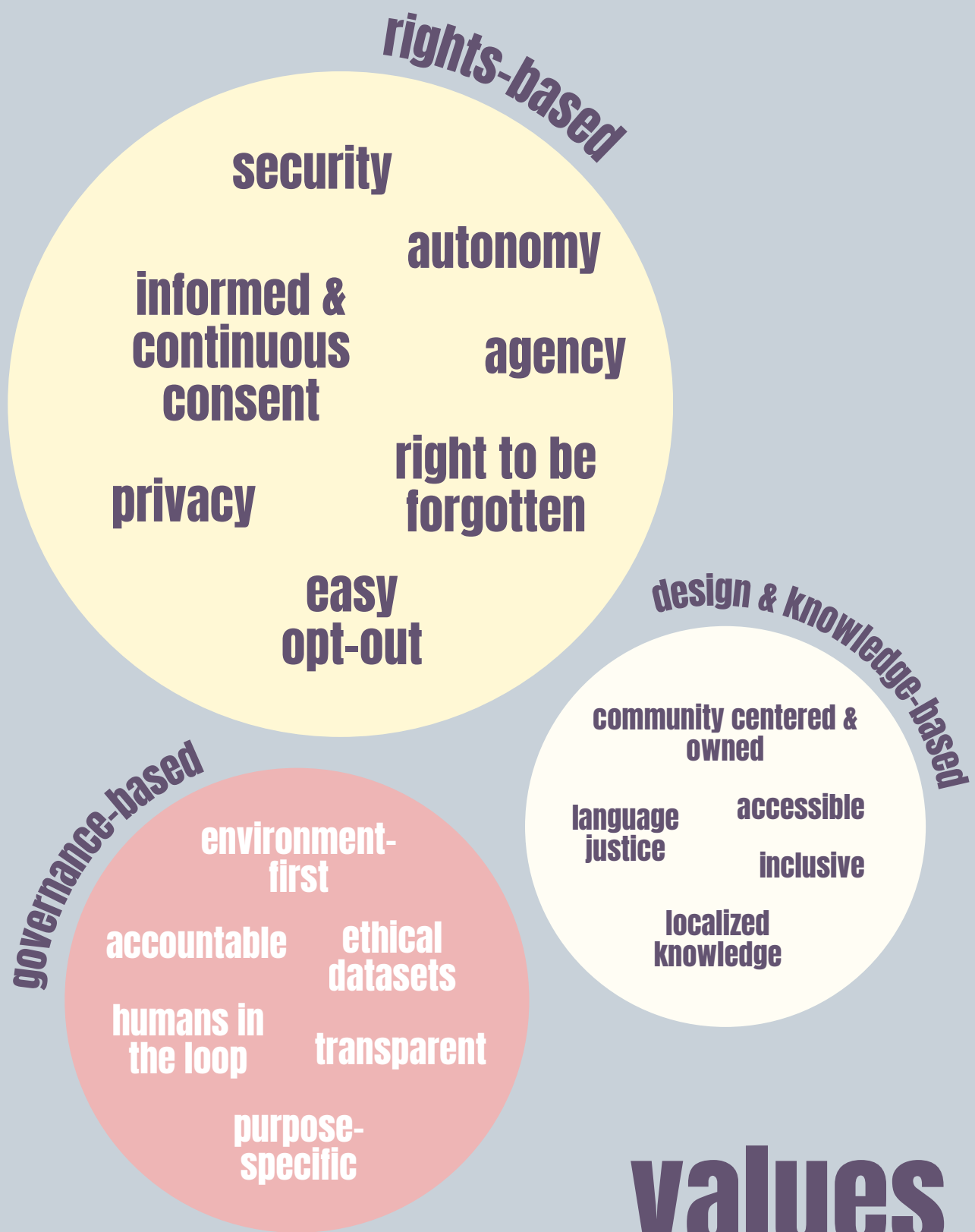
values anchoring AI development

im/permissible use cases for AI

and

transformative visions through feminist technology communities and practices





values

When participants were invited to imagine AI systems designed for their communities, values emerged as inversion of the failures of current AI models and harms participants had encountered.

permissible use

While maintaining scepticism about the possibilities of AI, participants also offered cases where AI use could potentially be allowed. If applied, these cases demand significant commitments from platforms and purpose-specific constraints from users.

research support

Forming arguments, locating relevant literature, summarising long texts, and providing departure points for investigation.

However, this permissibility would be followed by verification. Challenges regarding continued violations of copyright laws, data scraping, and extraction contributing to current “intelligence” that is capable of such research support remained unresolved.

translation & language support

Translation and language accessibility were identified as a genuinely valuable function of AI. This use case was deemed appropriate because it reduces inequality of access. As translation is often a tedious and mechanical job with little room for interpretation, AI could be used to reduce workload.

In any case, until platforms take meaningful steps to actively and ethically invest in and integrate low-resource languages into models, translation support may neither be efficient nor justified.

feminist advocacy

Participants saw substantial potential in AI for feminist advocacy. This included amplifying marginalised voices, analysing patterns of gender inequality in datasets and media, and tracking online misinformation against protected communities. While the technical details about such use were not within the scope of discussion, consensus emerged among participants- that AI can serve feminist motives when feminist actors have meaningful ownership over it.

reducing exploitative labor

Multiple participants identified care work as a domain where AI could reduce the disproportionate burden carried by women and girls. Chatbots co-designed with psychologists for emotional support and functions to detect burnout for caregivers was imagined. Generally, AI assistance in sectors that are particularly marred with exploitation of marginalized communities was welcomed.

impermissible use

In some cases, skepticism and rejection triumphed over hesitant endorsement. Participants explicitly named the following cases as use of AI could not be permitted in any circumstances whatsoever.



creative expression

The most consistent impermissibility was AI use for creative expression. Participants framed this impermissibility as rooted in their own identity- as a queer Indigenous content creator, allowing AI to mediate their creativity was antithetical to their existence. To them, overreliance would gradually erase their authentic expression, and both dilute and take away from the politicality of their expression.

simple tasks

Multiple participants committed to stop relying on AI for simple, easy tasks that they could perform themselves. For example, using AI for difficult questions and Google for simple ones. This is both a reclamation of agency and recognition of over-dependence-induced cognitive decline.

impermissible use

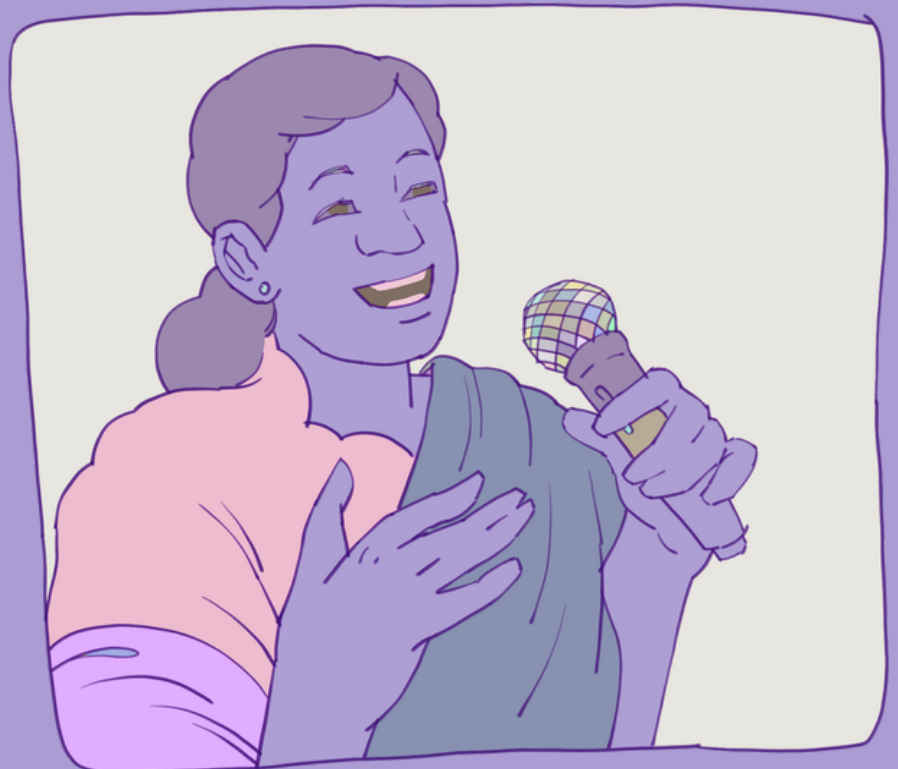
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intergenerational feminist engagement

A need for intergenerational feminist spaces, particularly to discuss and understand technological developments was identified. This is rooted in the recognition that older generations were among the most vulnerable to AI-generated misinformation, while younger participants lacked spaces, and in some cases frameworks, to develop criticality towards AI. Intergenerational engagements across feminist actors was underscored as a method of strengthening responses to exploitative and unjust technology.

spaces for knowledge sharing

Participants consistently called for ongoing, accessible spaces where critical AI literacy could be developed collectively. Feminist tech circles and skill-sharing pods, discord communities, learning/reading groups were proposed. Intergenerational feminist groups, and existing national and regional feminist organisations were identified as potential nodes to curate such spaces.

feminist AI

Several participants offered a forward-looking approach to integrating AI with feminist ethos. They suggested feeding AI systems with feminist data, theory, and narratives. DR P5 even argued that AI trained on feminist content could be easy to leverage for feminist expression. This pragmatic and integrative approach could allow actors to embrace and harness AI as a tool to further feminist values and embed criticality.

However, as current models gained their prowess through intellectual property rights and violations of privacy at scale, reverting the damage that has already been done and ethically sourcing large datasets was named as the primary challenge in achieving this imaginary.

transformative visions

among participants, consensus emerged in *how* feminist imaginaries and transformations can be achieved through sustained, diverse spaces and practices built through feminist ethos



research outcomes

This study set out to understand what happens when feminist actors arrive with their critical frameworks to a technology as ubiquitous as AI, engage with a critical community through facilitated knowledge sharing, and reflect on their use. Three interconnected findings emerged.

First, criticality toward AI is substantially informed by social, political, and economic factors of individual identity. While the workshop offered a general framework for criticality towards AI, criticality was quickly reconstructed through the specific positionality of each participant- a Dalit person noticed different discrepancies than a Newar person; a Person with Disability confronted the trade-off between feminist critique and accessibility; a development professional who had upward mobility felt entitled to the benefits of technology. This variance emerged organically when diverse participants occupied space to discuss divergent experiences with AI, and feminist interventions and co-learning sessions must thus remain reflexive and allow for such variances to surface.

Second, criticality does not directly translate into significant behavioural changes, particularly due to structural limitations and compulsions. While participants notably left the workshop with substantive feminist critiques of AI, most continued to use it due to workplace mandates and to reduce workload (including integration into workflow in an IT company, AI based working ecosystem at an IGO, processing of large quantities of data in journalism, and translation requirements in content creation and marketing), accessibility requirements, and pursuance of perceived perfection (particularly for online creators and creatives). AI is also becoming more and more ambient in everyday devices and platforms.

Feminist AI adoption must thus also account for institutional and policy responses to AI development, as these environments dictate how individuals act and adapt to such disruptive technology.

Third, feminist AI imaginaries are specific enough to prompt action. When asked to envision AI designed for their communities, participants developed precise values, specific permissible and impermissible use cases, and concretized possible community practices. The workshop was not necessary to mediate these imaginaries; they could have emerged in any curated space. This affirms that feminist communities have sufficient frameworks for AI futures but extremely scarce channels for institutionalization.

learnings for facilitators, curators & researchers

The workshop was not uniformly effective across sessions—sessions where participants were able to share their own experiences and learn from peers consistently outranked vertically delivered lectures. Group activities were held most meaningful, and scored highest in participant satisfaction. Peer learning from diverse participants was also ranked more effective than lectures. Following this, the “Build Your Own AI” session was considered particularly empowering, as it allowed participants to gauge the limits of AI themselves. These findings point toward a feminist AI pedagogy that is participatory, grounded in participants' identities and lived experiences, and oriented toward visibilizing harms.

The three-week log and interview that dedicatedly engaged participants to notice, scrutinize, and reflect on their AI use over time generated a rich qualitative dataset beyond the post-workshop survey. It also appears to have deepened the criticality learned during the workshop. Participants' logs made them more intentional with their AI use, while articulation of their experiences through interviews strengthened their feminist commitments.

The ecological harms and environmental impact of AI challenged the assumptions of almost all participants, which qualifies it as a gateway to instilling criticality. As ecological harms are more tangible, concrete, and immediately relatable, they can comprise reliable anchors for advocacy. Interventions designed in the future should consider using this as an entry point to bridge existing cross-sectoral advocacy with potential advocacy for the ethical development of technology.

limitations

Participants with existing feminist frameworks and orientations were selected for the workshop; therefore, their engagements cannot be extrapolated to engagements with AI by all communities, even when they are mediated. As the process did not engage a control group, the shifts in participants' engagements cannot be solely attributed to the intervention process. The three-week timeframe may be sufficient to gauge initial critical responses, but wholly insufficient to assess if critical orientations are sustained over three to six months. Given the specific contexts of Nepal, including the underrepresentation of the Nepali language and the lack of political context in AI training datasets, participants' observations and experiences were influenced. Hence, the findings may not be directly applicable to other country-specific contexts. However, structural dynamics of exclusion may be shared across countries in the Global Majority.

recommendations

for curators & facilitators

Design workshops that center lived experience as expertise, favoring peer learning and participatory methods over lectures and other vertical knowledge transfer

Foreground AI's environmental and material costs early as an accessible entry point for building criticality

Build and curate critical communities (learning circles, tech study groups, digital safety communities) to sustain feminist critique and widen the community

Dissolve the false dichotomy between technology and other disciplines to enable complex, comprehensive understandings of disruptive and emergent technology

for frontier tech developers

Emphasize the ethical development of transparent technology, platform regulation and accountability, and collectively developed institutional policies

Ensure that global technologies are co-developed with community members, especially marginalized communities

Prioritize and actively safeguard privacy, safety, autonomy, accessibility and inclusion by design, and ecological protection over the development of AI

Adopt feminist AI imaginaries and transformative visions as concrete bases for policy formulations and design considerations

for policymakers

Mandatorily integrate recorded and potential harms, potential biases, lapses, and discrepancies built into and compounded by AI into tech-education

Mandate the integration of AI harms/bias education into curricula and institutional training

Recognize institutional and workplace impediments to meaningfully engage community members forced to adopt AI

Emphasize the ethical development of transparent technology, platform regulation and accountability, and collectively developed institutional policies

Ensure that communities have access to meaningful channels to shape and contribute to the development of global technologies such as AI

Adopt feminist AI imaginaries and transformative visions as concrete bases for policy formulations and design considerations

for civil society actors

Contribute to counter-narratives to AI inevitability by emphasizing on the harms inflicted by frontier technologies

Develop interdisciplinary, cross-movement, and multi-faceted coalitions and strategies to fully assess the scope of impact and scale of harms of AI

Create support systems, resources, and sustained communities to foster an environment where individuals can choose to reject AI

Advocate for AI systems that are trained ethically and with due consent on local languages, community knowledge, and centering the lived experiences of marginalized communities

conclusion

We started this process by asking the following questions: how are feminist actors understanding and adopting AI, what could critical AI literacy look like and how it could be cultivated, what it takes to sustain criticality, and what feminist imaginaries of AI look like. Our findings were marred by many contradictions, concessions, and constraints, and the answers were much more nuanced and hopeful than we could have foreseen.

Even criticality developed on a spectrum: from abstaining from use completely, prompting AI to respond better, testing platform biases, sharing critical insights with friends and family, to even resisting mandatory AI use in the workplace through confrontations. While on an individual level, participants were able to ground criticality by asserting agency over their expression, on a structural level, especially at work, AI adoption was either forced upon them with almost no room to refuse integration or was significantly more convenient to reduce workload and necessary for accessibility needs. These responses can inform significant advocacy positions—protecting the labor sector from mandatory and imposed AI adoption without sufficient guardrails and pushing for platform accountability and inclusive design. In any case, the process reaffirms that structural problems inherent to emerging technology need structural solutions, and individual, critical adaptations can be critical points for support, but individual resilience should not be presented as a sustainable solution.

Although individual responses to AI were compelling, collective imaginaries affirmed that the way forward is much more complicated than the acceptance/rejection dichotomy. While the potential benefits of AI may loom large, the harms it poses are much larger and much more concretely observed. Although total rejection is the stance most participants aimed for, many felt that they did not have the space, the institutional support, or safety nets to do so. Co-development and co-ownership by feminist and marginalized actors, which births technologies that benefit everyone, emerged as an alternative method of anchoring ethical, just, and responsible AI development. Thus, the task ahead is to simultaneously extend our critical engagements with emerging technology that excludes marginalized communities from its very conception and build institutional conditions that allow sustained criticality and collectivisation for a future where disruptive technologies such as AI are developed and harnessed for the collective good.



Body & Data

Body & Data is a digital justice organization in Nepal that works to increase women and queer persons' engagement in digital spaces through suitable strategies for expression, autonomy and agency.

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