

Payal Arora, PhD

Professor of Inclusive AI Cultures, Utrecht University

Co-Founder, [FemLab.Co](https://femlab.co) a Feminist Future of Work initiative

Bio

Payal Arora is a Professor of Inclusive AI Cultures at Utrecht University and Co-Founder of FemLab, a feminist future of work initiative. She is a digital anthropologist, TEDx speaker, and award-winning author of several books, including 'The Next Billion Users' with Harvard Press. Engadget stated that her Harvard book is one of "the most interesting, thought-provoking books on science and technology we can find." Her upcoming book, 'From Pessimism to Promise: Lessons from the Global South on Designing Inclusive Tech,' will be published by MIT Press and Harper Collins India. She comes with two decades of user experience looking at everyday media practices of young people in the Global South, with expertise in digital cultures, cross-cultural AI ethics, and inclusive design. About 150 international media outlets have covered her work including the BBC, Financial Times, 99% Invisible, The Economist, Quartz, Tech Crunch, The Boston Globe, F.A.Z, The Nation and CBC. Forbes named her the "next billion champion" and the "right kind of person to reform tech." She has consulted for numerous organizations including IDEO, Adobe, UNHCR, GE, HP, Interpol, UNDP, and Spotify. She has given more than 350+ talks on inclusive design and innovation alongside prominent thought leaders like Jimmy Wales and Steve Wozniak. She sits on several boards such as Columbia University Earth Institute and World Women Global Council in New York and is a Rockefeller Bellagio Residency Alumni. She did her MA at Harvard University and PhD at Columbia University in Language, Literacy and Technology studies. She currently lives in Amsterdam.

Contact

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Employment History

Jan 2024- Current: Professor of Inclusive AI Cultures, Department of Media and Culture Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Utrecht University

Sept 2019-Dec 2023: Professor and Chair in Tech, Values and Global Media Cultures, Erasmus Univ.

Jan 2020-Dec 2023: Academic Director in UX & Inclusive Design, Erasmus Centre for Data Analytics

Jan 2015-Sept 2019: Associate Professor, Dept. of Media & Communication, Erasmus Univ.

Sept 2009- Dec 2014: Assistant Professor, Dept. of Media & Communication, Erasmus Univ.

Education

2005-2009 Columbia University in New York City PhD (International and Transcultural Studies: Language, Literacy and Technology program: Kellogg funded Doctorate)

2003-2004 Harvard University, Cambridge MA (International Policy: Deans List)

1996-1999 Mount Carmel College Bangalore BA (English Literature)

Fellowships

2022-2023: Rockefeller Bellagio Residency Fellow

2022: Distinguished Professor-in-Residence at MICA, The School of Ideas, Gujarat

2018: ZEMKI Visiting Research Fellow, University of Bremen

2015-2016: NYU Steinhardt Visiting Fellow, Media, Culture, & Communication dept.
2015: The Institute of Technology and Society (ITS) Global Fellow, Rio, Brazil
2014-2015: GE Fellow on the Industrial Internet Project, NY

Grants (5/20)

2022-2023: Research Partner on Horizon European Grant on Fairness and Intersectional Non-Discrimination in Human Recommendation (FINDHR): (EUR budget: 358,338€)
2022: PI on Digital Creativity project in India: Adobe funded (135,000\$)
2021-2022: Co-PI, UNHCR grant for Digital leisure and Displaced populations in Brazil (50,000\$)
2020-2022 Co-PI, IDRC grant for Organizing digitally in South Asia (250,000€)
2014: PI: General Electric Grant-Industrial Internet Project (20,000€)

Publications

Books (7/7)

- (due 2024). **Arora, P.** *From Pessimism to Promise: Lessons from the Global South on Designing Inclusive Tech*. MIT Press/Harper Collins India.
- (due 2025). Tereza Hendl, Bianca Jansky, **Arora, P.**, Verina Wild (eds.). *mHealth: Transformation, Power, and Ethics*. University College London Press (open access).
- (March 2023). **Arora, P.**, Raman, U., and König, R. *Feminist Futures of Work: Reimagining labor in the digital economy*. Amsterdam University Press (open access)
- **Arora, P.** (2019). *The next billion users: Digital Life beyond the West*. Harvard University Press. (Winner of PROSE ASA Award 2019)
- Been, W., **Arora, P.**, & Hildebrandt, M. (2015). *Crossroads in New Media, Identity & Law: The Shape of Diversity to Come*. Palgrave.
- **Arora, P.** (2014). *The Leisure Commons: A Spatial History of Web 2.0*. Studies in Science, Technology & Society Series. Routledge/ Taylor & Francis (Winner of the EUR Fellowship Award)
- **Arora, P.** (2010). *Dot com mantra: Social computing in the Central Himalayas*. Ashgate.

Recent Peer reviewed International Journal articles and book chapters (10/100+)

- **Arora, P.**, & Raman, U. (2024). The case for Femwork: Feminist design principles in tech and tech-enabled work. *IEEE/Computer–Humanity and Computing*
- Baumgartner, R., **Arora, P.**, Bath, C., et a. (2023). Fair and equitable AI in biomedical research and healthcare: Social science perspectives. *Artificial Intelligence in Medicine*
- Bhatia, K.V., Pathak-Shelat, M. & **Arora, P.** (2023). DIY education in the digital era: youth-driven learning strategies and curricula for the future of work opportunities. *Education and Information Technology*
- Mehta, C., **Arora, P.**, & Raman, U. (2023). A Feminist Human–Machine Communication Framework: Collectivizing by Design for Inclusive Work Futures. *The SAGE Handbook of Human–Machine Communication*.
- **Arora, P.**, & Raman, U. (2022). Chapter on ‘Fair Work, Feminist Design and Women’s Labour Collectives’ in Graham, M & Ferrari, F. *“Digital Work in the Planetary Market,”* MIT Press [open access].
- Komarraju, S. A., **Arora, P.**; & Raman, U. (2021). Agency and servitude in platform labour, Special Issue ‘Reclaiming the human in machine cultures’ *Media Culture & Society*
- **Arora, P.**, & Chowdhury, R. (2021). Cross-cultural feminist technologies, *Global Perspectives*

- Rusch, N., & **Arora, P.** (2021). Chapter on 'AI-based Strategies to Combat Wildlife Trafficking and Wet Markets in Asia' in 'The Next Digital Decade – Policy Approaches from Asia,' *Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung*
- Fox, J., Pearce, K. E., Massanari,...**Arora, P.** (2021). Open science, closed doors? Countering marginalization through an agenda for ethical, inclusive research in communication. *Journal of Communication*, 71(5), 764-784.

Reports (1/7)

- (due 2024). UN Expert Committee on *Synthetic Datasets in the Global South*.
- **Arora** et al. (2022). UNHCR Innovation Services Joint Report on *The Digital Leisure Divide and the Forcibly Displaced*.
- Arora, P. (2016). UNESCO report on *Prize-based incentives to foster innovation in the area of ICT's in education*.

Speaking Engagements

Keynotes and Invited lectures (25/350+)

- Jan 2024. *Keynote* on '40 years on: Women at Corpus' annual public lecture at Cambridge University, Corpus Annual Lecture Series.
- June 2023. *Keynote* on Feminist design for the future of work. ACM FaCCT, Chicago
- May 2023. *Keynote* on Creative AI beyond the West, MyData conference, Helsinki
- March 2023. *Keynote* on Decolonizing Creativity in the Age of Generative AI, The ACM Web Conference, Austin Texas.
- Oct 2022: *Keynote* for Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Community (EPIC), Amsterdam
- June 2022: *Keynote* for ABUDigital on the 'next billion journalists?'
- June 2022: *Keynote* for RNW Media on 'Aligning tech with humanity'
- May 2022. *Keynote* on 'Inclusive design and the next billion,' CHI International Conference
- Mar 2022: Creativity+ Emergent Cities: World Economic Forum and IDEO
- Mar 2022: Tedx Bengaluru talk 'Do we need more innovation?'
- Dec 2021: Adobe Design Mix: AI and Creativity: How to build inclusive design
- Nov 2021: *Keynote*: Green design for the next billion. COP26: Design for Planet Festival
- Nov 2021: *Keynote*: FemTech and the Future of work in the Global South. Nethope
- Nov 2021: Designing for Work and Workers. New School Parsons, New York.
- Nov 2021: Diversity by Design for public security. EUROPOL.
- Sept 2021: *Keynote*: Digitalisation and forced displacement. Danish Refugee Council Global
- Oct 2021. *Keynote*: Digital inclusion and the rise of the next billion. In the Pocket Ghent
- April 2021, Leuven. *Keynote* on Aligning technology with Humanity, And&Festival Leuven
- Nov 2020, Tokyo. *Keynote*: Global Digital Well-being, MashingUP Summit.
- Nov 2020, Stockholm. *Keynote*: 'Tech design for the NBU,' The Swedish Internet Foundation.
- Oct 2020, The Hague). *Keynote*: Digital Civic Power, Partos Innovation Festival 2020Sept 2019, Hamburg. *Keynote*: The next billion users, NEXT19, Hamburg.
- Sept 2019, Copenhagen. *Keynote* at Copenhagen Tech festival with Jimmy Wales (founder of Wikipedia) and Chris Messina (founder of the hashtag) (Sept 5-7), Copenhagen Municipality.
- Jan 2019, Hong Kong. *Keynote*: Privacy amid the global data order, Fairness, Accountability, Transparency (FAT)/Asia – Hong Kong, Digital Asia Hub. The Ethics and Governance of AI Initiative and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

Boards/Committees (public & private sector)

(2023-2025): UNICEF-UNESCO Gateway project on Edtech
(2023-2024): UN Expert committee on Synthetic Datasets in the Global South (Macao/China lead)
(2023-2025): UNICEF-UNESCO Gateway project on Edtech
(2021-2023): ICRIER/Prosus Centre for the Internet & Digital Economy (IPCIDE). Indian government
(2021-2023): Media Futures project: European Union's Horizon 2020
(2021-2023): Framing Big Data for the German Research Foundation
(2022-2023): DARIAH is a pan European infrastructure for the arts and humanities
(2016-Current): Soteryx, a New York based company on data security
(2015-Current): Makeosity Inc, an education innovation company in New York City

Media Presence (30/150)

Oct 15, 2023. *Deep Dive* podcast on Feminist futures of work.
June 1, 2023. Interview with *Development + Cooperation* magazine on women and digital empowerment.
June 20, 2023. Interview for *Rathenau Institute* Report on 'Health technology specifically for women: FemTech and the health gap.'
May 31, 2022. Podcast with *Future Processing*: Human-centrism & the cultural context of tech
Apr 6, 2022. Interview with *MIT Technology Review* for article Deception, exploited workers, and cash handouts: How Worldcoin recruited its first half a million test users
Mar 31, 2022. Interview with *The Swaddle*: Social Media Is Shaping Our Memory of Wars, Pandemic. What Will That Mean for History?
Nov 30, 2021. *Fragile Futures* podcast interview with Bianca Wylie. Dark Matters Lab and Future of Good
Nov 20, 2021. *Times of India* Article: Girls online have hacks against patriarchal wall.
Oct 24, 2021. *D+C Development + Cooperation* article: The vast majority does not get any kind of sex education.
July 27, 2021. *Recliner Designer* podcast with Adobe UX team Lance Shields and Laura Herman.
June 25, 2021. *Aawaz Next Billion Innovations* podcast: Demystifying the NBU segment.
Mar 11, 2021. *Mashable* Interview: What to expect when you're expecting 8 billion internet users
Mar 5, 2021. *Rest of World* Op Ed: AI isn't going to save us:
Nov 5, 2020. *Financieele Dagblad* (Financial Times, The Netherlands) on How do you reach a billion new customers? 'By Listening To Them'
Oct 23, 2020. *99% Invisible* Podcast, Radiotopia interview with Google on The next billion
Mar 13, 2020. Quartz India interview on Inside the Chinese dating apps exploiting the loneliness of India's men
Aug 26, 2019. *Forbes* named Payal Arora the "Next Billion champion" in their article 10,000 People In Copenhagen Are About To Determine A Better Future For You
Aug 1, 2019). *Creative Next* podcast on How AI and Automation will change the world
July 29, 2019. We the People *NDTV* Indian Television Talk Show: How is technology impacting Culture?
July 27, 2019. *Engaget*: Hitting the Books: Modern surveillance and 'the science of happiness'
July 24, 2019. *Strategy + Business*: A new view of the fortune at the bottom of the digital pyramid
July 7, 2019. *El Confidential* (Spanish) Interview on book: Why do they use the internet in poor countries? Same reasons as we do.
June 8, 2019. *The Economist*: How the pursuit of leisure drives internet use

May 14, 2019. *The Nation*: The Race for Global Internet Access Is Not a Zero-Sum Game: Payal Arora's The Next Billion Users turns a critical eye to the humanitarian push to connect the globe.

March 6, 2019. *De Standaard (Dutch)* Interview: That the poor use the internet primarily for entertainment? So what?

March 8, 2019. *Tech Crunch* interview: Who are the next billion users and what do they want?

March 17, 2019. Podcast by the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* –Spark Despite limited access, online habits in the developing world aren't that different from ours

March 27, 2019. *FAZ* Edition: Now the next billion users are online (German)

March 22, 2019. *Engineering & Technology Magazine (E&T)*: An uncomfortable challenge to the West's collective superiority complex that questions the way we see technology in the connected world.

Jan 2019. *The Boston Globe*: The global poor go online for the same reasons you do by

Teaching Nominations/ Awards

2022: Nominated for Best PhD Supervisor, Erasmus Graduate School for Social Sciences and Humanities

2017-2018 Nominated for the ISO (Interurban Student Consultation) 'Teacher of the Year' in higher education across the Netherlands. [ISO is the largest national student organization in the Netherlands and represents over half a million students of universities and universities of applied sciences.]

2017-2018: Awarded the 'University Education/ Teaching Prize' for best teaching at the university-wide level

2012-2013: Nominated for the 'Best Lecturer' in the International Bachelors Program in Media and Communication (IBCoM) at Erasmus University Rotterdam

2011-2012: Nominated for the 'Best Female Teacher' for the International Bachelors Program in Media and Communication (IBCoM) at Erasmus University Rotterdam

2010-2011: Winner of the 'Best Female Teacher' for the International Bachelors Program in Media and Communication (IBCoM) at Erasmus University Rotterdam

Endorsements

Media

"Arora shows that many of the world's poor don't seek out the Internet as a tool to become more productive, but as a welcome outlet for economically 'unproductive' play... That the Internet fails as a magical cure-all for historical circumstance may be unwelcome news to techno-utopians and overzealous development practitioners, but there is hope in its capacity to augment and expand human leisure beyond the realm of material advancement." - The Nation

"The most interesting, thought provoking books on science and technology we can find" - Engadget (Top 5 in the "Technorati top 100" and reported by Time for being one of the "best blogs" on tech)

"This powerful book explores actual online lives in China, India and Brazil and asks why many of us in the West are surprised and sometimes offended by the fact that the impoverished are just as committed as we are to the search for "moments of pleasure and joy". - Times Higher Education

“Superb... uncomfortable, myth-busting and compelling, *The Next Billion Users*’ challenges our collective superiority complexes and questions the way we see technology in the connected world.” - Engineering and Technology magazine

“The conventional storyline around the transformative effect of technology on people’s lives often doesn’t ring true... Any leader whose company sees the global poor as a key market will find its reality-based view of the intended customers bracing and useful.” - Theodore Kinni, Strategy + Business

Academic

“*The Next Billion Users* is a feat – insightful, poignant, riveting. Through detailed case studies and interviews, Payal Arora rewrites the story of our relationship to digital technology from a truly global perspective. Her conclusions are as surprising as they are revealing about the future of social media, gaming, mobile phones, and online commerce and education.” - Marwan Kraidy, Author of The Naked Blogger of Cairo

“This is a brilliant navigation of worlds that are not usually brought in conversation: digital space and thick situated struggles engaged in claim-making in the urban sphere. Payal Arora has deep knowledge and experience of both these worlds. Out of this encounter comes a concept the author deploys in diverse ways to mark digital space: the leisure commons.” - Saskia Sassen, Columbia University and author of Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy

“Few efforts to do so are more successful than that of this book. Payal Arora takes on a research task that few have sufficiently valued and far fewer have accomplished: becoming one with a community and its people, gaining their trust, examining how they make use of technology according to their own context and needs, and revealing that to the world in all its nuance, biased by neither sentimentality nor judgment.” - Mark Warschauer, Professor of Education and Informatics, University of California, Irvine.

“In every age, innovative technology has been met with an awkward mixture of enthusiasm, indifference, skepticism and hostility. The advent in our time of cheap, mobile computing and cellular telephones has drawn a similar response, especially in the international development community. In *Dot.Com Mantra*, Payal Arora goes beyond the familiar juxtapositions to show how poor individuals and communities actively negotiate their engagement with twenty-first century technology, documenting the conditions under which they use, abuse and reject it in their everyday lives. The result is a book that is fascinating in its own right, but also highly instructive to a new generation of development policymakers, in rich and poor countries alike, caught between an imperative for easy answers and the reality of messy complexity.” - Michael Woolcock, Senior Social Scientist at the World Bank and Lecturer in Public Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.

Industry

“I invited Dr. Arora to serve as a member of the Soteryx Corp. Advisory Board. In this role, she serves as an advisor along with leaders from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Navy Seals and Department of Defense Advisory Board. I selected Dr. Arora as a member of the team because of her notoriety for using technology to drive data-informed innovation across governance, technology, and public policy. Dr. Arora serves as a catalyst to help the transition of

well-established, settled organizations to shift from creating policies derived from traditional “gut feelings” to relying more on the use of actionable insights derived from data-driven analytics.”
Shaun D. Wiggins, President & CEO, Soteryx Corp.

“Payal’s participation at our leadership summit was inspirational, impactful and insightful. She was able to distill complicated, in-depth research and deliver a presentation that was engaging and easy to follow. All of our participants from across the Caribbean and Latin America felt Payal’s presentation was right on the mark and exactly what we were looking for as our company strives to build momentum and reach the next billion users.” Michael Coakley, VP, Head of Communications, Liberty Latin America Telecom

“Payal is a great speaker, who gave stunning insight into a topic, our congress attendees - most of them senior IT-executives - normally are quite unaware: How is a large part of mankind using Internet and IT, what are the needs, wishes and hopes of the Next Billion Users? Many thanks for this inspiring look outside the western box.” Robert Gammel, Executive Producer Hamburger IT-Strategietage

“Payal presented to our audience of strategists and marketing professionals with unique insights into the lives of the "next billion users". Through her contributions, she gave listeners the opportunity to diversify their views on what users around the world are doing online and the impact the Internet and data are having on their lives. She has a very engaging appearance on stage and has a lively way of presenting figures and statistics.” - Juliane Hennig, Project & Event Manager, NEXT conference Hamburg

Humanitarian/non-profit

“Payal kindly agreed to give a talk at the India Science Festival and also join the discussion on the Keynote Panel. She is one of the few researchers who deeply understands technology and society. Her talk and thoughts illuminate how these two should interact to create the most benefit for all of us. The importance of this topic cannot be overstated and Payal's clarity of thought is the need of the hour.” - Varun Aggarwal, Co-founder, Aspiring Minds, India Science Festival

“Payal Arora’s Keynote for the FoME Symposium was inspiring and eye-opening. It was a convincing appeal to the Media Development Community to rethink their assumptions on how to work in the Global South. We really need to understand better the needs of the people we working for. We can’t just impose our beliefs on them. One key phrase for me was that she reminded us that people don’t make judgments based on just facts. That is a very rational perspective but decision-making doesn’t work that way.” - Steffen Leidel, Senior Consultant, Deutsche Welle (DW)

“Payal is one of these rare speakers that is both a great storyteller and comes with knowledge that is backed by comprehensive academic research” - Martin Thörnkvist, Curator, TechFestival Copenhagen

Design

“Time and again I find myself connecting with Payal to gain deeper insights into the complex relationships between consumers, cultures, and businesses in the Global South. Whether it is collaborating on a panel topic together for an event or digging into specific markets and challenges, Payal has that rare ability to connect the highly nuanced needs of people and their communities

with the potential impact of technology, business, and design. She continues to be a trusted partner and advisor.” - Charles Hayes, Partner & Executive Managing Director, Asia, IDEO

“Payal uniquely weaves academic rigor with first-hand stories from multiple lands - to bring compelling insights and a peek inside the minds of the next billion users. With Payal, you get a thoughtful, empathetic ringside to view to the hopes, dreams, and aspirations that powers billions across the planet.” Jay Dutta, Founder/curator, DesignUp