

Payal Arora

Digital Anthropologist | Inclusive AI Design Researcher | Professor | Board Member

Email: p.arora@uu.nl | [Professional Website](#) | [Inclusive AI Lab](#) | Amsterdam, Netherlands

Profile

Payal Arora is a Professor at Utrecht University and Founder of the Inclusive AI Lab, challenging one of the biggest blind spots in deep tech today: most innovation is being built for the few, while the next billion users are elsewhere. A digital anthropologist, she uncovers how majority of the world are already hacking, reshaping, and scaling technology in ways stakeholders routinely overlook. Award winning author of “The Next Billion Users” (Harvard) and “From Pessimism to Promise” (MIT), she reframes risk as missed opportunity—and inclusion as common sense and the only sustainable pathway in building our tech futures. Forbes named her the ‘next billion champion’ and the ‘right kind of person to reform tech.’ Named among the 100 Brilliant Women in AI Ethics (2025), awarded the 2025 Women in AI Benelux Award on Diversifying AI, and nominated for the prestigious ‘8 Women with a New Vision for the Earth’ 2026 by Global Landscapes Forum, her insights have shaped global institutions including UNHCR, Google, Adobe, and KPMG. Across 350+ talks in 85 countries including TEDx talks, she pushes leaders to rethink where value is created, and who gets to define the future of AI. 250+ international media outlets have covered her work including the NRC, Financial Times, Wired, and The Economist. She is a Harvard University, Columbia University, and Rockefeller Bellagio Resident Fellow alumni, and currently lives in Amsterdam.

Current Position

Professor & Chair of Inclusive AI Cultures

Jan 2024 – Present

Utrecht University, Department of Media and Culture Studies

- Founded the Inclusive AI Lab to advance research on culturally grounded AI design
- Leads projects on creative data justice, gender safety in AI, and scalable frameworks for inclusive technology design
- Google-funded research (2025): ‘GEN(der) AI Safety in the Global South’
- Adobe-funded research (2024–25): ‘Debiasing Data for Creative AI’
- Horizon EU funded research (2020-2025): ‘Fairness and Intersectional Non-Discrimination in Human Recommendations’

Design Research & Inclusive Design Practice

Design Consultant – Adobe (Equity Product Team)

2022 – 2025

- ‘Diversifying the Creative Commons’: Built diverse datasets on Women at Work across rural, urban and disabled communities in India; provided UX recommendations for scalable fair use frameworks
- ‘Digital Creativity in the Global South’: UX research in Brazil and India; collaborated with Adobe design teams on inclusive design interventions for creative AI tools

Design Consultant – IDEO

2022 – Present

- Long-standing collaboration on design strategy for the next billion users; recurring partner for IDEO’s Asia & Global practice (endorsed by Executive Managing Director Charles Hayes)

Academic Director, UX and Inclusive Design

2020 – 2023

Erasmus Centre for Data Analytics, Erasmus University Rotterdam

- Led UX and inclusive design research program; supervised projects integrating feminist design principles into platform labor, AI tools, and digital health

Key Design-Oriented Publications

- *The Next Billion Users: Digital Life beyond the West*, Harvard University Press, 2019 – PROSE Award Winner
- *Creative data justice: a decolonial and indigenous framework to assess creativity and AI*, Information, Communication & Society, 2024

- *The case for Femwork: Feminist design principles in tech and tech-enabled work*, IEEE/Computer, 2024
- *From Pessimism to Promise: Lessons from the Global South on Designing Inclusive Tech*, MIT Press, 2024 – Axiom Business Book Award (Silver, Emerging AI Trends)

Board & Governance Experience (Selected)

UN EGOV Advisory Committee United Nations Portugal Office – strategic advice on digital public infrastructure	2024 – 2030
Advisory Board, ICRIER Prosus Centre for Internet & Digital Economy	2021 – 2030
High Level Executive Committee, NETmundial+10 Brazilian Internet Steering Committee (CGI.br) – global internet governance	2024 – 2025
Board Member, UNICEF-UNESCO Gateway (Edtech)	2023 – 2025
AI and Education Task Force Columbia University Earth Institute	2024 – 2025
ITU Core Group, Future of Digital Public Infrastructures	2025 – 2026
Board Member, Media Futures (EU Horizon 2020)	2021 – 2023
Editorial Board, Big Data & Society	2021 – 2024
Advisory Board, DARIAH (pan-European arts infrastructure)	2022 – 2023

Keynotes for Diverse Stakeholders (Selected)

- Keynote, Investors Day, Katapult Festival, May 2026: 'Inclusive AI'
- Keynote, Athens World Beautiful Business Forum, May 2026: 'More than Human Design'
- Keynote, re:publica Berlin, May 2024: 'The Moral Imperative to Design with Hope'
- Keynote, DeepLab Dublin, March 2024: 'Feminist design principles for global digital work'
- Keynote, Minderoo Centre for Technology & Democracy, Cambridge University, March 2024: 'Building Inclusive Designs with the Global South'
- World Economic Forum / IDEO Panel: Creativity + Emergent Cities, March 2022
- Keynote, ACM FaCCT Chicago, June 2023: Feminist design for the future of work
- Keynote, EPIC (Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Community), Amsterdam, Oct 2022: 'Next billion users and the future of design'
- Keynote, Dutch Digital Day, July 2022: 'Digital creativity beyond the West'
- Keynote, CHI International Conference, May 2022: FemWork and Inclusive Labour Futures
- Ars Electronica, EU Digital, Oct 2024: AI and artistic practice

Academic Positions

Professor in Technology, Values & Global Media Cultures Erasmus University Rotterdam	2019 – 2023
Associate Professor, Media and Communication Erasmus University Rotterdam	2015 – 2019
Assistant Professor, Media and Communication Erasmus University Rotterdam	2009 – 2014

Education

Columbia University: PhD, Language, Literacy & Technology Kellogg Funded PhD Scholar	2009
Harvard University: Masters in International Development Policy Dean's Fellow	2004
San Francisco State University: BA in Art Deans List	1998
Mount Carmel College: BA in English Literature Bangalore India	1994

Recognition & Awards

- 100 Brilliant Women in AI Ethics, 2025
- Women in AI Benelux Award for Diversifying AI, 2025
- Nominee, '8 Women with a New Vision for the Earth', GLF Women Campaign, 2026
- Forbes: 'Next Billion Champion' and 'the right kind of person to reform tech'
- PROSE Award, Business Books category (The Next Billion Users), 2019
- Rockefeller Bellagio Residency Fellow, 2022–23