Suwani Gunasekara (She/Her)

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OVERVIEW

I am a final-year PhD candidate in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) at the University of Melbourne, with research interests in understanding how technology design, content presentation, and human factors shape how people perceive, trust, and interact with emerging technologies. My doctoral research examines these questions through misinformation on short-form video platforms, investigating how interface and content characteristics influence credibility, trust, decision-making, and responses to corrective information. My research has also expanded into AI-mediated communication, including AI transparency cues, AI-generated influencers, virtual personas, and multi-agent AI systems. Across these projects, I have developed interdisciplinary expertise in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research, with a focus on understanding users' perspectives and technology-mediated decision-making.

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Human Computer Interaction, *University of Melbourne, Australia* *May 2023 - Present*
Thesis title: Impact of Rich Media on the Spread of Online Misinformation
Supervisors: A/Prof Jorge Goncalves, A/Prof Ryan M. Kelly and Prof Vassilis Kostakos
Skills: *Mixed Methods Research, Data Analysis, User Studies, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Large Language Models*

Bachelor of Business Science (Hons) specialized in Business Analytics, *University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka* *Jan 2018 - May 2022*
Overall GPA: **4.00/4.20** First Class Honours
Dean's List in all 8 semesters
Skills: *Machine Learning, Data Mining, Data Structures and Algorithms, Multivariate Methods in Business, Database Management, Financial Econometric, Stochastic Processes and Distributional Theory, Operations Research, Principle of Management & Organisational Behaviour, Operations Management, Research Methods*

PUBLICATIONS

Suwani Gunasekara, Cherie Sew, Saumya Pareek, Ryan M. Kelly, Vassilis Kostakos, and Jorge Goncalves. 2026. Timing Matters: Designing Effective Corrections for Short-Form Video Misinformation. In Proceedings of the 2026 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '26), April 13-17, 2026, Barcelona, Spain. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 17 pages. `https://doi.org/10.1145/3772318.3790560`

Suwani Gunasekara, Cherie Sew, Saumya Pareek, Ryan M. Kelly, Vassilis Kostakos, and Jorge Goncalves. 2026. The Role of Presentation Styles in Countering Misinformation on Short Video Platforms. Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact. 10, 2, Article CSCW039 (April 2026), 27 pages. `https://doi.org/10.1145/3788075`

Suwani Gunasekara, Saumya Pareek, Ryan M. Kelly, and Jorge Goncalves. 2026. Auditing TikTok's recommendations: Understanding the prevalence of misinformation on the platform. International Journal of Human-Computer Studies (2026): 103929. `https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2026.103929`

Suwani Gunasekara, Saumya Pareek, Ryan M. Kelly, and Jorge Goncalves. 2025. The Influence of Content Modality on Perceptions of Online Misinformation. In CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '25), April 26-May 1, 2025, Yokohama, Japan. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 10 pages. `https://doi.org/10.1145/3706598.3713098`

WORKING EXPERIENCE

Head Tutor *Semester 2 2025*
INFO20004: Usability Evaluation Method
Managed student email queries and coordinated with other tutors; evaluated student assignments and projects.

Academic Tutor
COMP10003: Media Computation *Semester 1 2025, 2026*
INFO20005: User Interface Development *Semester 1 2025*
Optimisation and Decision Making - Melbourne Business School *Semester 1 2024*
Delivered workshops; managed student email queries; evaluated student assignments and projects.

Business Analyst (Millennium Analytics Team) *November 2021 - March 2023*
London Stock Exchange Group (LSEG) Technology, Sri Lanka
- Developed machine learning models to evaluate tools and concepts for the Millennium Analytics product.
- Assisted in requirements gathering and refinement, compiling epics, user stories, and acceptance criteria for the exchange and surveillance system built for Qatar Stock Exchange.
***Tools**: PySpark, Apache Zeppelin, Jupyter Notebooks, Plotly-Dash, Pandas, NumPy, TensorFlow, Keras*

Job Market Trend Analysis from Newspaper Advertisements *January 2021 - June 2021*
- Analysed labour market trends in Sri Lanka from 3,000+ job advertisements by converting image-based ads to text and fine-tuning a

custom BERT-based NLP model for named entity extraction.
***Tools**: Python, Google Vision API, Regex, spaCy Matcher, BERT, NLP, Power BI*

Intern - Data Scientist *July 2019 - December 2019*
Acuity Knowledge Partners, Sri Lanka
- Developed a predictive model for Colombo Stock Exchange prices using sentiment analysis of financial news.
***Tools**: Python, Beautiful Soup, Selenium, NLP, TextBlob, VADER*

HONORS AND AWARDS

Engineering and IT Conference Travel Grant, University of Melbourne (2025, 2026) - This award funds conference travel for Graduate Researchers in the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology. It supported attendance and presentation at the CHI 2025 in Yokohoma Japan and CHI 2026 Barcelona, Spain.

Melbourne Research Scholarship, University of Melbourne (May 2023 - November 2026) - This scholarship is offered to high-achieving domestic and international students who are enrolling in a graduate research degree.

People's Choice Award - Three Minute Thesis (2025) - Audience-voted award at the Three Minute Thesis competition organised by the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology, University of Melbourne.

Third Place - Three Minute Thesis (2025) - Awarded third place at the School of Computing and Information Systems Three Minute Thesis competition, University of Melbourne.

People's Choice Award - Best Poster (2024) - Audience-voted award for best research poster at the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology research showcase, University of Melbourne.

Malik Jann Award (2018) - This is awarded to the Coloursman with the highest 1st year GPA at the University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka.

TOOLS AND LANGUAGES

Programming: Python, R, JavaScript, HTML, CSS

AI/ML and Data Science: PyTorch, pandas, NumPy, scikit-learn, Jupyter, Matplotlib, Seaborn, NLTK, spaCy, Hugging Face, BERT

CERTIFICATES

Professional Development Program for Small-Class Teachers: Training in inclusive teaching, student engagement strategies, and effective feedback practices.

SERVICE

Student Mentoring
Valynn Lobo - University of Melbourne *March 2025 - November 2025*
Thesis: Trust and Credibility in AI Generated News Anchors

Conference Program Committee
Responsible Web at The Web Conference, CHI Poster Track

External Reviewer
CHI Paper Track, CSCW Paper Track, OzCHI Paper Track

Student Volunteering
CHI 2025, OzCHI 2024

LEADERSHIP AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

University Colours (Chess) - The University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka *2018, 2019*

Senior Prefect - Visakha Vidyalaya, Sri Lanka *2013, 2014*

School Colours (Chess) - Visakha Vidyalaya, Sri Lanka *2004, 2011, 2013, 2014*

Western Province Colours (Chess), Sri Lanka *2011, 2013*

REFEREES

A/Prof. Jorge Goncalves
School of Engineering and IT,
The University of Melbourne, Australia.
Email: *jorge.goncalves@unimelb.edu.au*

A/Prof. Ryan M. Kelly
School of Computing Technologies,
RMIT University, Australia.
Email: *ryan.kelly@rmit.edu.au*

Prof. Vassilis Kostakos
School of Engineering and IT,
The University of Melbourne, Australia.
Email: *vassilis.kostakos@unimelb.edu.au*