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The Potential for "Vibe Design" in Digital Media Andragogy

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Abstract

Generative Artificial Intelligence is being touted as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, holding the promise of democratising creativity and ultimately, creating a postwork future (Bastani, 2019). Generative artificial intelligence (genAI) will potentially have a significant impact on digital media degrees in the UK higher education sector at all levels, therefore. Digital media degrees – whether they are categorised in relation to either science or arts – tend to include some practical design elements in the creation of digital artefacts, combined with a deeper mastery of theoretical and methodological issues for the digital media field. The complexity of the digital media degree is enhanced by how wide the digital media field is – thus, individual modules on a degree cover a range of subfields, such as graphic design, animation, web & app design. The research question here reworks the authors doctoral dissertation research question to ask, "what is the potential for genAI for digital media design higher education?" (Hepburn, 2012). The potential for digital media andragogy (in terms of designing, learning, teaching and assessment) is fraught with various complex issues in relation to genAI, such as the "algorithmic experience" (Shin et al., 2020) which students are exposed to from student/ genAI collaborations. Students creating digital artefacts for assessment with genAI also gives rise to critical concerns; for example, how student/ genAI assessment submissions might all "look the same" (The Citizens, 2025).

These complex issues for digital media degrees become even more overwhelming due to the plethora of genAI tools to which students now have access to. Questions remain for students on *how* to create digital artefacts with GenAI, as well as *how to* ensure a critical lens within which to innovate with new genAI forms. Inroads into answering the above research question, show how using the term "Vibe Design" from industry could help gain clarity on themes arising for digital media andragogy and genAI. Vibe design is *(rather optimistically!)* defined as "leveraging AI to handle the detailed execution *of*

designing artefacts(sic) so that humans can focus on the creative and empathetic aspects" (Nielsen, 2025). Vibe Design can give a clear framework for understanding and exploring further the scenarios, challenges and opportunities for GenAI in digital media andragogy – see how the concept of vibe design has been applied in the construction industry – asserted as a democratising force (Ghosh, 2025, unpublished). Conceptual developments on vibe design show how it provides a useful lens with which to investigate the potential for genAI for digital media higher education. The research outcomes of investigating the potential "vibe design" in digital media andragogic practice are at this stage outlined through scenarios, challenges and opportunities – for example, the opportunity for students to hone prompt engineering as a skill in vibe design is as vital as it is to vibe coding (Neilsen, 2025). Future directions for this research highlight the importance of a critical practice- based approach in scaffolding students in the ethical use of genAI tools for vibe designing (Hepburn, 2025).

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Reflective Commentary

Initially, the presentation title was hyperbolically, "To Kill the Vibe or Not to Kill the Vibe", alluding very loosely to the famous Shakespeare quotation "to be or not to be"; the sentiment of the paraphrased quotation attached to some very real concerns on whether students who do not want to use genAI in their studies could potentially be at a disadvantage in terms of their grades – see the term "AI Vegans" in The Conversation article (Joyner, 2025). The conference title was shortened because of more important fundamental questions on teaching and learning with genAI. Presentation of the concept of vibe designing for digital media degrees provided valuable understanding of genAI across the different types of learning, which can be categorised as either pedagogy, andragogy or heutagogy.

Conference consultation with peers enabled discussions on how, for example, different scenarios arise for the application of vibe designing in the lectures and workshops at master's level compared with first year undergraduates. Thus, attendance at this conference allowed for the development of an original conceptual model for this new area (similar to Ghosh, 2025) and some ideas on how to apply this to scenarios, challenges and opportunities for teaching and learning (Hepburn, 2012). The concept of vibe design with genAI is so new as a professional practice, the conference presentation of this work also allowed for clearer conceptual structuring of different learning outcomes with vibe designing according to the different types of learning.

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Biographical note

Dr Marian Hepburn's current research interests are on somaesthetic interaction design, critical design research, emotional and aesthetic factors in learning environments, social media, HCI and multimodal interaction, methodologies for new media and new technologies research.

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AI declaration

Writing is such a joy (and privilege) – it has taken a number of years to feel confident in finding a voice, it wouldn't be something I would want to pass to genAI yet. Therefore, no AI was used in the content creation of this abstract, however, ChatGPT was used to quickly format the references found by myself through Google Scholar and other sources for my conference presentation. There are plans once this is published to introduce the original concepts to genAI. This is a critical and conscious decision to peer-review terms and scenarios first, and then to introduce the concept to various genAI - such as CoPilot and ChatGPT. These will be used later once a clearer definition and conceptual model has been published.

The author takes full responsibility for the final content of the publication.