Position Description

1. General Information

Name of the position	**Human and communication-centered AI**
Foreseen enrolment date	September 2025
Position is funded by	• COFUND, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), Horizon Europe, European Union • University of Vaasa • RMIT University
Research Host	University of Vaasa
PhD awarding institutions	University of Vaasa & RMIT University
Locations	Primary: Vaasa, Finland Secondary: Melbourne, Australia
Salary	30,605.12 EUR annual **gross** salary (2,448.41 EUR monthly gross salary)
Supervisors	• Tanja Sihvonen, Professor, University of Vaasa • Rebekah Rousi, Assoc. Professor, University of Vaasa • Fabio Zambetta, Professor, RMIT University • Timothy Wiley, Lecturer, RMIT University
Group of discipline	Artificial Intelligence, Sustainability

2. Research topics (only one of these projects will be funded)

Project 1: ***Explainable AI for user engagement in robotics – the communication and culture dimensions***
Over recent year explainable artificial intelligence (XAI) has been studied as a means of improving the ethical viability of artificial intelligence (AI) systems. The idea is that AI-related and driven processes should be able to be communicated and understood in a way that human counterparts (users, bystanders, co-workers) know what is happening and can predict the behaviour and consequences of future operations. In this PhD research the candidate will investigate how XAI may be developed in a way that not only supports ethical AI, but facilitates engagement in robotics on communicational and cultural levels. AI systems are changing not only the game but the rules in terms of cultural activities (i.e., the arts, sports, media production etc.), which can on the one hand be perceived as replacing human activities, or on the other hand, perceived as human activities (i.e., programming and engineering prowess) – an art in its own right. The challenge is to explore how XAI can support this form of art appreciation, i.e., facilitate, promote and mediate human engagement with AI systems (including robotics). The expected outcome of the process will be a series of human-centred, communication and technical studies that examine how different approaches to XAI influence various types of affective processes in humans encountering the systems. Applications are invited from across disciplines (e.g., Communications, art, design (interaction design, user experience, human-computer interaction), cognitive science, game studies, and computer science).

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement № 101179842

Supervisors: Tanja Sihvonen (UVA), Rebekah Rousi (UVA), Fabio Zambetta (RMIT), Timothy Wiley (RMIT)
Research Fields: Explainable Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, Communications, Cultural Studies

Project 2: ***Use of and co-existence with AI tools in communication and media work (How AI shapes media work and communication)***
This topic is about the evolving role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in media and communication work, focusing on how AI shapes production, consumption, and industry logic. The topic focuses on the intersection of human and AI labor in media and communication, questioning who has access to AI tools and how this access influences work dynamics. The researcher will critically examine the impact of AI on learning and professional practices, from creative processes to problem-solving, alongside factors such as human cognition (how is it and will it change?) and competencies in an AI-driven environment. Central to the research is the exploration of human versus AI roles, and how AI tools are integrated into the workplace—are they assistants, co-workers, or mere tools? The topic relates also to the language used to describe AI, reflecting on its implications for professional identity, work culture, collaboration and humanity. What tasks are offloaded to AI, and how can sustainable, human-AI collaboration be achieved in media industries? The research will consider the implications of these shifts on the future of work, examining how AI influences not only professional roles but also the broader economic and technological discourses surrounding media production. The role of policy and management in regulating AI within media industries may also be as perspective, as is the question of what should remain outside the digital domain. The research can also cover the social dimensions of AI adoption, exploring the balance between technological innovation and human interaction. Another perspective is that of various discourses—critical, capitalist, dystopian, and speculative—and how current AI practices shape the future of media work and tensions within the broader socio-economic landscape, while reflecting on the sustainability of this evolution.
Supervisors: Tanja Sihvonen (UVA), Rebekah Rousi (UVA), Fabio Zambetta (RMIT), Timothy Wiley (RMIT)
Research Fields: Artificial Intelligence, Communication and Media, Sustainability

Project 3: ***Communication design and re-imagining user experience in AI systems***
Artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the game for human-computer interaction (HCI). The paradigm has shifted from usability in HCI, to user experience (UX) in HCI (still strongly linked to questions of usability and broader experiential issues), and now communication and relations with computing systems. One issue that has been emphasised over the past decade is that of communication – how can humans and AI systems effectively communicate with one another in a way that eliminates uncertainty? That is, given the novel nature of these systems within human societies, there are expectations that communication 'breakdowns' and incidents resulting from unpredictable behaviour on both parts, will increase as the technology becomes more common amongst us. The issue of communication is paramount to understanding human-technological encounters (how communication design frames and facilitates human interactions with AI), and how it establishes particular relationships within human-technology and even human-human dynamics. In an era where communication (or language use) in human-technology interaction no longer means the ability to select the right icon for the right function, but rather serves as a vehicle through which not only relationships, but ecosystems are established, maintained and developed, there are numerous possibilities to reimagine communication systems within and through AI. This PhD topic is an imaginative one, where candidates are charged with the task of experimentally, yet critically examining how human experience with AI may be shaped through communication.

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Research Fields: Communication, Artificial Intelligence, User Experience

3. Employment Benefits and Conditions

The University of Vaasa offers maximum a 48-month full-time work contract. A probation period of maximum 6 months can be applied, and the annual workload for researchers is 1,612 hours / year.

The remuneration, in line with the European Commission rules for Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant holders, will consist of a **gross annual salary** of yearly 30,605.12 EUR (monthly 2,448.41 EUR gross). Of this amount, the estimated net salary to be perceived by the Researcher is 1,958.728 EUR per month. However, the definite amount to be received by the Researcher is subject to national tax legislation.

Benefits include

- Becoming a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow and be invited to join the Marie Curie Alumni Association
- Access to all the necessary facilities at University of Vaasa and RMIT University
- Tuition fees exemption at both PhD awarding institutions
- Travel allowance to cover flights and accommodation for participating in DREAM+PLAN events
- Up to 12 months in Australia
- 30 days paid holiday leave
- Social security coverage
- Sick leave
- Parental leave

4. PhD enrolment

Successful candidates for this position will be enrolled by the following institutions and must comply with their specific entry requirements, in addition to DREAM+PLAN's conditions.

University of Vaasa

To enrol in a Doctorate program you must meet the general conditions, which can be found through this link: Admissions to doctoral studies | University of Vaasa.

RMIT University

Visit the website: https://www.rmit.edu.au/research/research-degrees/how-to-apply

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