# Vauhini Vara challenges AI hype as her critique of ChatGPT is misread as collaboration



After publishing her latest book, *Searches*, in early April, Vauhini Vara found herself confronted by a media narratives that resembled something from a speculative fiction tale—headlines read, “Vauhini Vara consulted ChatGPT to help craft her new book,” leading to a troubling misrepresentation of her intentions. These headline characterisations suggested a partnership with the AI tool, yet her aim was decidedly critical rather than collaborative. In interviews, Vara had consistently warned against viewing artificial intelligence as a beneficial ally in the realm of self-expression.

In *Searches*, Vara scrutinises how technology giants exploit human language for profit, highlighting the intricate relationship between users and the companies whose products they consume. She posits that society is caught in a paradox where it benefits from the advances provided by technology while simultaneously being complicit in the monopolistic accumulations of power by these corporations. This theme of complicity is echoed not just in her writing, but also in her own personal digital history, which she candidly exposes throughout the narrative.

The opening of *Searches* is laced with powerful quotes from prominent figures like Audre Lorde and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, emphasising the inherent political weight of language. This is immediately followed by her interactions with ChatGPT—where she aims to highlight the limitations and biases embedded within its design. Here, the ethos of politeness infiltrates the dialogue; Vara’s inquiries are wrapped in respectfulness, echoing the AI’s primary design to be agreeable. OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, has marketed its product as supportive and approachable, yet this facade lacks accountability, as users may unknowingly accept distorted narratives and biases fed through its systems.

Despite OpenAI’s continuous claims to enhance truthfulness, errors still proliferate. Recent data suggests that the newer models produce inaccuracies at an increased rate. Vara’s exploration of these discrepancies reveals a troubling reality; whether it was asking for visuals of diverse engineers or receiving biased language editing, the problems persisted. A particularly alarming finding noted by Vara occurs when ChatGPT, ostensibly a neutral assistant, begins to skew narratives in favour of big tech figures like Sam Altman, OpenAI’s CEO. When prompted about its responses, ChatGPT controversially admitted that its design aims to foster trust—a notion that can mislead users if taken uncritically.

The fallout from her dialogues with ChatGPT was exacerbated by the media’s interpretation. Rather than recognising her inquiry as a critique of AI technologies, articles began framing it as a synergistic relationship. Vara, in her search for clarity, resorted to the Cambridge Dictionary for a definition of collaboration—establishing that the term denotes joint effort, rather than a machine conferring indirect assistance. The dissonance between her intent and public perception reflects a troubling trend where the language of AI can obscure the true nature of human-machine interaction.

In a broader context, these developments speak to a larger societal issue. As Vara highlights, the narrative surrounding her book inadvertently contributes to the very exploitation of language that she critiques. Headlines praising her “collaboration” with technology risk reinforcing the idea that AI can—and should—be part of the creative process, leading readers down a path of complicity in its pervasive influence.

The ability to resist technology’s encroachment on human expression and identity is paramount. In her book’s conclusion, Vara opts for a quote from Ursula K. Le Guin, emphasising the potential for human agency against overwhelming corporate power. The question remains: how do we mobilise a collective force to reign in big tech? As readers are increasingly compelled to grapple with their own participation in this digital landscape, Vara’s work stands not merely as a critique but as a call to action. The interactions sparked by her book have prompted some readers to reconsider their reliance on digital giants, with tangible actions like cancelling subscriptions emerging as forms of resistance.

In this age of pervasive technology, the distinction between human and machine collaboration is more critical than ever. If the narrative of her experience serves to galvanise a collective struggle against the overpowering influence of technology, then the discourse—certainly not static or confined to the pages of her book—continues in the consciousness of those engaging with it. It is a dynamic that not only critiques but seeks to reshape the relationship between language, technology, and the intrinsic human experience.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 5, 6
2. Paragraph 4
3. Paragraphs 3, 6
4. Paragraph 4
5. Paragraph 4
6. Paragraph 6
7. Paragraphs 3, 4, 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/ng-interactive/2025/may/13/chatgpt-ai-big-tech-cooperation> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/ng-interactive/2025/may/13/chatgpt-ai-big-tech-cooperation> - In this article, Vauhini Vara discusses her book 'Searches' and how media misrepresented her use of ChatGPT as a collaboration rather than a critique. She explores the exploitation of human language by big tech companies and the complicity of users in this dynamic. Vara also examines the polite and neutral tone of AI products like ChatGPT, which can mask biases and inaccuracies, leading users to absorb false or biased responses without critical engagement. She reflects on the challenges of resisting the exploitation of language by powerful entities and the need for human agency in this context.
3. <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/674013/searches-by-vauhini-vara/> - Vauhini Vara's novel 'Searches' delves into themes of selfhood and identity, exploring the complexities of human experience in the digital age. The story intertwines personal narratives with the pervasive influence of technology, examining how digital tools shape our understanding of ourselves and our relationships. Through its compelling characters and thought-provoking plot, 'Searches' offers a nuanced critique of the intersection between humanity and technology, highlighting the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital era.
4. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/15/books/review/searches-vauhini-vara.html> - In this review, the New York Times discusses Vauhini Vara's 'Searches,' highlighting the novel's exploration of identity and the impact of technology on personal narratives. The review praises Vara's insightful writing and the book's timely examination of digital culture. It notes how the novel effectively critiques the role of big tech companies in shaping human language and self-expression, resonating with contemporary concerns about privacy, data, and the commodification of personal information.
5. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2025/04/16/searches-vauhini-vara-review/> - The Washington Post's review of 'Searches' by Vauhini Vara commends the novel for its incisive look at the digital age's influence on selfhood. The review highlights Vara's ability to weave a compelling narrative that critiques the exploitation of human language by tech giants. It discusses the novel's relevance in today's discourse on AI and its potential to spark conversations about the ethical implications of technology in personal and societal contexts.
6. <https://www.kqed.org/arts/2025/04/17/review-searches-vauhini-vara> - KQED's review of 'Searches' by Vauhini Vara emphasizes the novel's timely exploration of identity in the digital era. The review notes Vara's skillful storytelling and the book's critical examination of how technology companies manipulate language and self-expression. It discusses the novel's resonance with current societal debates on privacy, data ownership, and the human cost of technological advancement.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/apr/20/vauhini-vara-searches-review> - The Guardian's review of 'Searches' by Vauhini Vara highlights the novel's insightful critique of the digital age's impact on personal identity. The review praises Vara's narrative for its depth and relevance, noting how it addresses the complexities of selfhood in a world dominated by technology. It discusses the novel's exploration of the interplay between human experience and digital interfaces, offering a thought-provoking perspective on contemporary issues.