

Humanizing Artificial Intelligence (AI): Integrating the Virtual Persona Vira on Voks Radio Bandung

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly being integrated into broadcast media as the industry adapts to digital transformation, raising the need to balance technological innovation with human connection, audience trust, and ethical communication. This study aims to analyze the humanization of AI through the integration of Vira as the first AI reporter at Voks Radio Bandung, particularly in relation to media convergence, persona design, and the application of AI ethics and transparency.

Method – The research uses a qualitative method with a case study approach through in-depth interviews and documentation. The research subjects included the virtual persona Vira and Voks Radio Bandung, the institution that developed and operates the AI. The informants were purposively selected based on their involvement and knowledge of Vira's implementation: the Voks Radio Leadership, Program Director, and Head of Digital.

Findings – The results show that Vira is designed with a consistent yet adaptive identity and plays a role as a reporter, promotional influencer, and product promoter who bridges the conventional radio audience to digital media. In addition, Voks Radio applies the principles of transparency and ethics according to KPI regulations to build audience trust. From the perspective of Parasocial Interaction Theory, Vira successfully creates emotional closeness with the audience through personal and humanistic communication, thus becoming a model for AI humanization in the Indonesian broadcasting industry. These findings indicate that AI humanization in broadcasting can support media adaptation while maintaining human oversight, ethical responsibility, transparency, and audience trust.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed the landscape of various sectors, including the mass media industry. This has led to shifts in radio consumption patterns and transformed radio broadcasting practices (Astuti et al., 2026). Radio listeners in the digital age expect personalized and interactive content (Harliantara, 2024a). In addition, expectations for presenters are now based on breadth of knowledge, storytelling ability, and parasocial relationships (Heiselberg & Have, 2023). This factor causes radio to need to innovate to face various challenges.

In the last decade, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a significant innovation-driving technology, enabling systems to mimic human intelligence that have been trained to think and behave like humans (C & Salis, 2021). This phenomenon is known as the humanization of AI, which involves ensuring technology enhances human relationships, not replaces them (Faizal C K & R. Tamilselvi, 2025).

AI humanization is becoming particularly relevant for traditional broadcast media such as radio, which faces significant challenges in maintaining relevance and audience engagement amidst the overwhelming flow of digital information and shifting content consumption preferences (Muttapien & Candra, 2025). In addition, the urgency of humanizing AI is highlighted by the need to address ethical issues and ensure its responsible use in the media industry (Ashfaq et al., 2022). Therefore, AI adoption is no longer just a choice for operational efficiency, but a strategic imperative for innovation and adaptation in this digital era.

Indonesia has demonstrated rapid adoption of AI in the media sector. AI is transforming the media industry by enhancing content creation, audience engagement, and media management through personalization, automation, data analytics, avatars, and synthetic voices in editorial content production (Bondar & Shtelmakh, 2026; Chi, 2024; Wang, 2025). This development demonstrates the importance of media not only integrating AI, but also humanizing it to build emotional connections and audience trust amidst the impersonal nature of technology.

Voks Radio Bandung is a radio broadcasting platform in Bandung that integrates conventional radio broadcasting with digital media and technological innovation. Voks Radio Bandung has taken an innovative step by introducing Vira (Voks Intelligent Radio Assistant). Vira stands out not only as the first AI reporter but also as a multifunctional entity that supports various operational and strategic aspects of broadcasting. Vira's role includes being a reporter and influencer for program and product promotion, as well as a bridge between traditional radio platforms and the digital ecosystem (piknikdong.com, 2025). Vira's presence on Voks Radio Bandung represents a case study in investigating AI humanization practices in the context of broadcast media, offering valuable insights into persona design, functionality, ethical, and strategic implications.

In exploring the closeness between the audience and the virtual persona of Vira, the researcher utilized the theory of parasocial interaction. Parasocial relationships are non-reciprocal social-emotional connections with characters influenced by social attraction and task (Hoffner & Bond, 2022; Zheng et al., 2020). Thus, parasocial interaction theory describes a one-way relationship between media users and the media they consume (Stever, 2017). Although this interaction is not actually reciprocal like real interpersonal relationships, this theory was first introduced by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl (1956) in their article "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction".

In the context of research on the virtual persona Vira on Voks Radio Bandung, this theory is relevant to explaining how audiences can relate to reporter Vira despite being an AI. Through her humanistic communication style, Vira has the potential to create emotional closeness and a sense of familiarity that resembles the relationship between an audience and a human broadcaster. This theoretical approach to AI characters has not been previously explored, while other existing research highlights the parasocial relationship between Black radio broadcasters and their listeners (Fox,

2024).

Studies on AI in the media and broadcasting industry show that AI is increasingly positioned as part of the digital communications transformation and media convergence. Research indicates that the use of AI in news radio must maintain journalistic values and human connection in interactions with audiences (Fadilah et al., 2025). Other research found that audiences responded positively to AI-based radio broadcasters because they were seen as innovative, entertaining, and able to provide a new experience in media consumption (Sepetci, 2025). On the other hand, research shows that AI has the potential to increase creativity, content production efficiency, and innovation in radio broadcasting, although it still cannot completely replace human creativity (Harliantara, 2024a). Other research highlights the development of AI broadcasting technology through innovative production processes (Harliantara, 2024b). Based on previous research, studies on the humanization of AI virtual personas on radio in Indonesia are still limited, especially those discussing strategies for forming AI identities, emotional connections with audiences, and ethical practices and transparency of AI in the context of media convergence, so that this research effort in exploring the case of the integration of Vira's virtual persona on Voks Radio Bandung is relevant to be carried out.

Through this multidimensional approach, this article not only presents a case study but also offers empirical insights into best practices in AI humanization in broadcast media, as well as strategic and ethical implications for the industry. This research aims to analyze the innovation of the Vira virtual persona at Voks Radio Bandung in the face of media convergence, examine the design and implementation of AI humanization in Vira, and understand the application of AI ethics and transparency in building audience trust in the digital broadcasting industry.

Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the study of digital communication, media convergence, and AI humanization in the broadcasting industry through a parasocial interaction theory approach. Practically, this research is expected to serve as a reference for the media industry in developing humanistic, ethical, and transparent AI virtual personas capable of building audience trust in the era of digital media convergence.

METHOD

This research uses qualitative methods and a single case study design (Yin, 2015). This approach was chosen to deeply understand the phenomenon of AI humanization through the integration of the virtual persona Vira at Voks Radio Bandung in the real-life context of the broadcasting industry. The case study was used because the research focuses on exploring the processes, meanings, strategies, and experiences of stakeholders in designing, implementing, and managing AI personas in a radio media environment undergoing digital transformation. The research is exploratory-descriptive with a focus on how Vira is constructed as a humanistic virtual persona, how her role in the convergence of radio and digital media, and how the ethical and transparency aspects of AI are applied in broadcasting practices.

The research subjects included the virtual persona Vira and Voks Radio Bandung, the institution that developed and operates the AI. The informants were purposively selected based on their involvement and knowledge of Vira's implementation: the Voks Radio Leadership, Program Director, and Head of Digital. These three informants were chosen because they play strategic roles in persona design, program development, media convergence strategies, and ethical policies regarding AI use.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews, documentation, and digital data searches as a form of source and method triangulation. The in-depth interviews were used to explore the informants' experiences, perspectives, and philosophical and operational considerations regarding AI humanization at Voks Radio Bandung. Meanwhile, a documentary study was conducted of news articles, Vira's social media accounts, official releases, and other supporting documents related to the implementation of the virtual persona and AI broadcasting policies.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) through a process of data familiarization, coding, theme identification, theme review, and interpretation of meanings relevant to the research focus. Data interpretation was then linked to the theory of parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956), which views Vira's virtual persona as being designed to resemble a human media figure capable of building emotional closeness, a sense of intimacy, and a pseudo-relationship with the audience through personal communication interactions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The integration of Vira into Voks Radio Bandung is not simply a technology adoption, but rather a strategic representation of a planned and comprehensive AI humanization effort in the broadcast media sector. Given the dynamic expectations of young urban listeners in Greater Bandung and the demands for changing media consumption patterns, the Vira character is present as a manifestation of Voks Radio's digital transformation. The research results found a conceptual model of AI Humanization Virtual Persona "Vira" by Voks Radio in Figure 1 below.

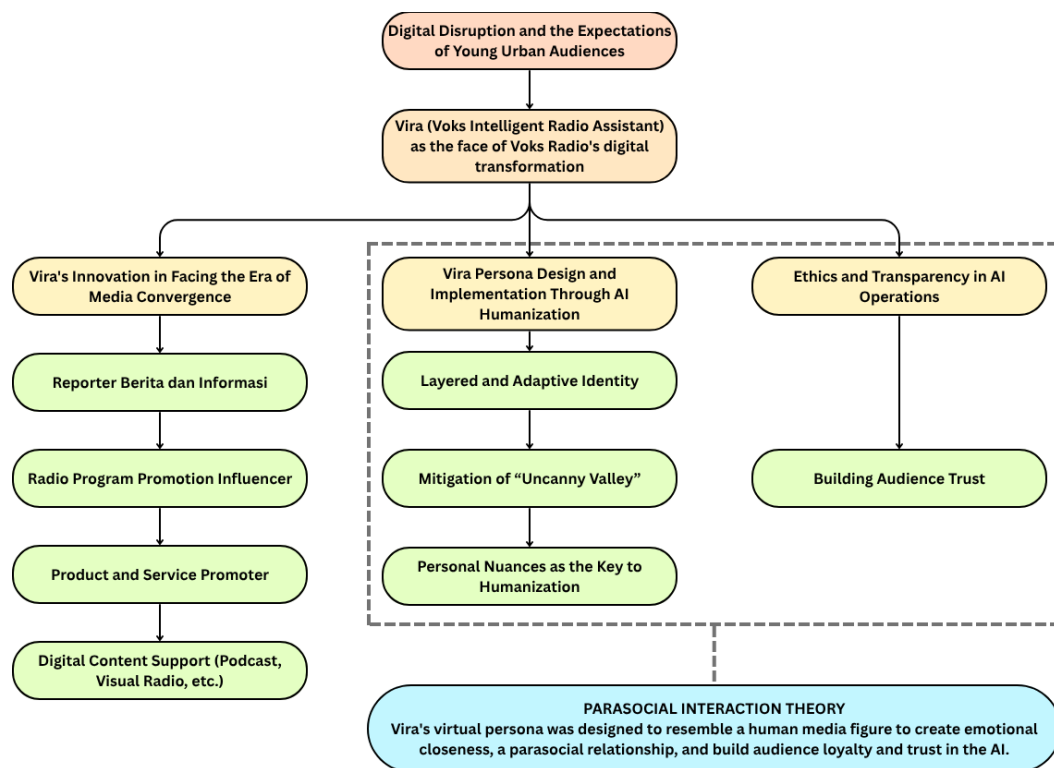


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Humanization of the AI Virtual Persona "Vira" by Voks Radio (Source: Authors, 2026)

This model illustrates the strategic framework of Vira (Voks Intelligent Radio Assistant) integration as the epicenter of Voks Radio's digital transformation in responding to changing times. This effort is broken down into three interconnected operational pillars: first, the media convergence innovation pillar that positions Vira functionally as a news presenter, program champion, commercial promoter, and supporter of multiplatform content (such as podcasts and radio visuals); second, the persona design pillar through AI humanization that is designed adaptively and with personal nuances to mitigate the uncanny valley effect (audience's awkward feeling towards robots/AI); and third, the operational ethics and transparency pillar to secure public trust.

Vira's Innovation in Facing the Era of Media Convergence

Voks Radio Bandung (91.7 FM) has solidified its position as a contemporary radio station serving Bandung's young and urban audience. Recognizing the shifting media landscape brought about by digital disruption, Voks Radio proactively launched Vira, its Voks Intelligent Radio Assistant, on August 29, 2025 (voksradio.com, 2025). The launch of Vira is not simply a technological addition, but rather a representation of a broader strategic vision to innovate and adapt to audience expectations in the digital age.

Vira was designed to be a key node in Voks Radio's media convergence strategy, in line with Media Convergence Theory (Jenskin, 2006). Voks Radio's Program Director emphasized Vira's crucial role as "the face of our digital transformation." The informant continued, "We noticed that traditional FM listeners were often compelled to open our app or visit our Instagram account @iam.viraofficial because they were curious about the Vira they heard on the radio."

The statement above indicates how Vira effectively serves as a bridge between traditional and digital broadcasting platforms. It encourages audience migration and enhances cross-platform engagement, a tangible manifestation of convergence at the audience and content levels. Vira's presence creates a pull factor for FM audiences to explore Voks Radio's digital ecosystem, ultimately strengthening the media's position amidst digital competition.

More than just an AI reporter, Vira carries out various multi-functional roles that support Voks Radio's broadcast operations and promotional strategies:

1. News and Information Reporter

Vira periodically presents breaking news, weather forecasts, traffic updates, and educational information segments in the middle of broadcasts. This ensures an efficient and consistent flow of information, freeing up human presenters to focus on deeper interactions that meet the audience's personal needs.

2. Program Promotion Influencer

Through her presence on various digital platforms and social media, Vira actively promotes new programs, special segments, and Voks Radio's on- and off-air events. Vira's friendly and communicative persona is utilized to reach audiences in a more personal and persuasive manner, resembling a virtual key opinion leader. This

aims to fulfill the audience's gratification for program information and engagement.

3. Product and Service Promoter

Vira is involved in promotional campaigns for products and services from Voks Radio's partners or sponsors. Her virtual presence adds a new dimension to endorsements and advertising, where Vira's consistent character helps build a promotional narrative that is trustworthy and relevant to the target audience, striving to create positive perceptions.

4. Support for Other Digital Content

Vira is also integrated into other digital content formats such as podcasts, radio visuals, and various Voks Radio online initiatives, expanding reach and enriching audience experiences across the digital ecosystem.

Vira's multifaceted role as a reporter, promotional influencer, and product promoter is a manifestation of an adaptive and highly innovative media convergence strategy. Vira serves as the "face of digital transformation," effectively bridging audiences from traditional radio platforms to Voks Radio's digital realm, such as apps and social media. This is a smart response to the massive shift in media consumption patterns in the digital era, where media must be present across various audience touchpoints and offer an integrated experience (Muttaqien & Candra, 2025).

Vira's presence explicitly supports and facilitates the media convergence process at the technology, content, industry, and audience levels. With Vira, Voks Radio not only distributes content but also creates an interactive ecosystem that encourages cross-platform audience engagement. This also demonstrates that AI can be a valuable asset in strengthening branding and marketing strategies, going beyond its simple role as an operational efficiency tool (Kumar, 2023). Vira is proof that AI can be organically integrated into media business and branding strategies, not simply as supporting technology.

This multifunctional role confirms that Voks Radio views AI as an asset capable of adding holistic value to various aspects of media operations, not simply as a tool to replace human tasks. Vira has transformed into a dynamic and innovative brand representative, demonstrating the potential of AI in creating a more interactive and integrated media ecosystem.

Vira Persona Design and Implementation Through AI Humanization

Voks Radio designed how the Vira persona would be presented. The core of their AI humanization strategy lies in the careful design of the Vira persona and its underlying philosophy. Voks Radio's Head of Digital explained the details of this design by stating the following.

"Vira has a layered identity structure that maintains the consistency of her core character: a twenty-five-year-old woman with a friendly and communicative image, yet remains flexible in adapting her expressions, language style, and responses to the context of her interactions. This approach deliberately avoids creating overly perfect simulacra of a human being, which could potentially lead to alienation, and instead chooses to present a character who is stable, familiar, and predictable, yet still exudes a personal nuance." (Head of Digital, Voks Radio, 2026)

The interviewee's statement indicates that the design of Vira's virtual persona consciously employed a selective anthropomorphism strategy to bridge the gap between technology and humanity without falling prey to detrimental psychological effects. Anthropomorphism involves assigning human characteristics to a brand (Jin & Qian, 2021), in this case, Vira as the AI human associated with Voks Radio.

By maintaining a layered identity structure, namely the core character of a friendly yet contextually adaptive 25-year-old woman, Voks Radio successfully strikes a balance between brand consistency and interaction flexibility. This deliberate move to avoid creating "too-perfect human simulacra" aligns closely with research findings on mitigating the uncanny valley phenomenon, where overly identical virtual human replications that leave micro-imperfections can trigger cognitive rejection and feelings of alienation in users (Appel et al., 2020). Rather than pursuing visual hyperrealism or artificial behavior, this approach, which prioritizes character stability, familiarity, and predictability, has proven more effective.

Similar research has shown that consistent warmth and predictable expressions from AI agents are key to facilitating social presence and triggering intimate parasocial interactions (Chi, 2024; Stein et al., 2024). Therefore, Vira's "humanity" is not built through the illusion of perfect physicality, but through emotional closeness and genuine personal nuances, which in turn convert audience skepticism toward artificial intelligence into strong media loyalty.

These findings highlight several key principles in Vira's persona design, including:

1. Layered and Adaptive Identity

Vira is built on a strong and consistent character foundation (demographic profile and personal image), yet has the ability to adapt to various interaction contexts and platforms. This flexibility allows Vira to be relevant across various content segments without losing the essence of her character, offering personalization, which is an important gratification for digital audiences.

2. Mitigating the Uncanny Valley

Voks Radio explicitly strives to avoid creating AI that mimics humans too perfectly. The uncanny valley phenomenon Mori (2020) suggests that near-perfect replicas of humans can actually create feelings of discomfort or strangeness in observers. By presenting a stable, familiar, and predictable character, while still maintaining a "personal feel," Voks Radio successfully creates a comfortable and authentic connection with its audience, ensuring a pleasant and relatable experience.

3. Personal Feel as Key to Humanization

Vira's design explicitly emphasizes "personal feel," which is crucial in the humanization of AI. An effective AI persona should have a clear and consistent personality, tone of voice, language style, and knowledge boundaries (Cheng et al., 2022). This personalization is key to fulfilling the audience's gratification for interactions that feel

human and not robotic.

The findings above highlight Vira's efforts to humanize AI technology, realized through a blend of adaptive, layered identities, consistent character control to mitigate the uncanny valley effect, and a strong emphasis on personal nuances to ensure digital interactions with audiences feel intimate, natural, and free from stiffness. The philosophy behind this approach is further explained by the Head of Voks Radio.

"We realize that AI can often feel impersonal and mechanical. Our main goal with Vira was to give her a 'soul,' a personality that would feel authentic to listeners. We didn't want listeners to feel like they were interacting with an algorithm, but rather with a 'friend' who had an understanding of Bandung's local culture and humor." (Voks Radio Director, 2026)

This quote clearly articulates Voks Radio's primary focus: creating an emotional bond with its audience. Vira is designed to go beyond simply conveying information; it is a "friend" capable of understanding and reflecting Bandung's local culture and humor. This strategy is vital for integrating AI not merely as a functional tool, but as an organic part of the listener community. Designed to offer emotional and social gratification, Vira transforms from a mere algorithm into an entity with a "soul" and cultural relevance.

In line with findings on the dynamics of human-machine communication, cultural localization through regional humor is a powerful stimulant that increases a sense of personal relevance and reduces audience cognitive resistance (Crolic et al., 2022; Guzman, 2020). Through this relational anthropomorphism approach, Voks Radio successfully transforms technology from an impersonal medium into a social entity with a cultural "soul," thereby accelerating technology adoption while authentically strengthening parasocial engagement among Bandung's young urban audience.

Ethics and Transparency in AI Operations to Build Audience Trust

Ethics and transparency are fundamental pillars of Vira's integration, especially in a media context that values credibility and public trust. If media outlets are not transparent about their use of AI, it can foster distrust or disinformation (Canavilhas & Biolchi, 2024). Voks Radio's leadership firmly stated, "Transparency is key to maintaining our integrity. We want listeners to know they are interacting with human-managed AI. This builds trust and ensures accountability." This commitment is not merely a philosophical statement; it is manifested in proactive compliance with broadcasting regulations. Voks Radio consistently and transparently identifies Vira as an AI assistant in every appearance, referring to the KPI (Indonesian Broadcasting Commission) Circular Letter No. 1 of 2026 (Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia, 2026).

The implementation of ethics and transparency is crucial to mitigating the inherent risks associated with the use of AI in the media. Concerns such as disinformation, algorithmic bias, or copyright and plagiarism issues often arise when audiences are unaware or feel deceived by the fact that they are interacting with AI (Germani et al., 2024; Kidd & Birhane, 2023). With a transparent

approach, Voks Radio actively strives to build and maintain audience trust, maintain journalistic integrity, and position itself as a responsible media entity in the AI era.

By explicitly identifying Vira as a human-managed AI, Voks Radio not only fulfills regulatory obligations but also affirms its commitment to journalistic accountability and responsibility. Voks Radio consciously strives for an accurate and positive perception of AI's role in the media, avoiding the formation of distorted or skeptical views based on unclear information. It also emphasizes that, despite the increasing sophistication of AI, the human touch in editorial oversight and upholding ethical values remains an essential and irreplaceable element in the media industry. This approach demonstrates that technological innovation can go hand in hand with professional integrity and ethics (Zebua & Zebua, 2025).

The research findings indicate that Voks Radio's AI humanization strategy through the virtual persona Vira can be analyzed using Parasocial Interaction Theory because Vira is designed to establish a pseudo-emotional connection between the audience and the virtual media figure, similar to an interpersonal relationship with a human broadcaster. This theory, developed by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl, explains that audiences can feel closeness, intimacy, and emotional attachment to a media figure through consistent and personal interactions, even if the relationship is one-way (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In the context of this research, Voks Radio consciously builds Vira as a young woman who is friendly, communicative, adaptive, and understands the local culture of Bandung so that the audience does not feel like they are interacting with an algorithm, but with a “friend” who is familiar and relevant to their lives.

Vira's layered and adaptive identity strategy demonstrates an effort to build character consistency as a foundation for parasocial interactions. A stable, familiar, and predictable character allows audiences to build emotional closeness through repeated media exposure, aligning with the concept of parasocial interactions, which emphasizes the emergence of a perceived personal closeness between audiences and media figures (Stever, 2017). Her use of casual language, contextual responses, and personal nuances make Vira feel socially present and natural to digital radio audiences.

These findings are supported by research showing that virtual influencers are able to build parasocial interactions when they possess a high level of human-likeness and perceived similarity to their audiences (Stein et al., 2024). The strategy of mitigating the uncanny valley through a warm, consistent, and non-hyperrealistic character also strengthens audience loyalty through emotional closeness and relevance to Bandung's local culture. This aligns with research showing that regular, personal, and interactive communication can increase audience trust, engagement, and loyalty toward digital media figures (Bhattacharya, 2023). In addition, the implementation of ethics and transparency by Voks Radio through the openness of Vira's identity as a human-managed AI is an important foundation in building a sense of security, credibility, and long-term trust of the audience towards the integration of AI in the broadcasting industry.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the integration of the virtual persona Vira into Voks Radio Bandung represents an adaptive media innovation in the era of digital media convergence. Vira's presence not only functions as an AI reporter, but also as a program promotion influencer, product promoter, and digital content advocate, effectively bridging traditional radio audiences to Voks Radio's digital media ecosystem. The research findings confirm that AI can serve as a strategic asset in strengthening branding, increasing cross-platform audience engagement, and supporting media convergence processes technology, content, industry, and audience levels.

The AI humanization strategy implemented through Vira's persona design demonstrates Voks Radio's efforts to create a humanistic, adaptive, and culturally relevant virtual persona without falling into the uncanny valley. This humanization is built through a consistent character identity, personal nuances, the use of local Bandung humor, and a warm and communicative communication approach, thus fostering emotional closeness and parasocial interactions with audiences.

From the perspective of Parasocial Interaction Theory, Vira is successfully positioned as a "virtual friend" who creates a sense of familiarity, emotional attachment, and audience loyalty to the media. This study also found that ethics and transparency are crucial foundations for implementing AI in the broadcasting industry. Voks Radio's commitment to publicly identifying Vira as a human-managed AI demonstrates that technological innovation can go hand in hand with journalistic integrity, public accountability, and building audience trust. Future research is recommended to examine audience responses to AI virtual personas across various media platforms and cultural contexts to broaden understanding of AI interactions, ethics, and acceptance in the broadcasting industry.

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