D3 Te Tatau o Te Ao Hou: Designing AI Tools that Embody Māori Marketing Sovereignty

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This doctoral research involves the design and development of Mana Tohunga AI – an AI marketing platform artefact created specifically for Māori small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs). At the heart of the project is a central problem: mainstream marketing technologies are built on Western logics of segmentation, optimisation, and individualism, which often clash with Māori values such as whakapapa, wairua, and collective interdependence. These misalignments create structural barriers for Māori businesses engaging with digital marketing.

Rather than retrofitting Māori values into existing systems, this PhD reimagines marketing technology from the ground up. It introduces a theoretical framework that sees the intersection of Māori enterprise, AI, and marketing as a site for Indigenous system design. Māori are positioned not just as users of technology, but as architects of future tools shaped by kaupapa Māori.

The research is guided by the Kaupapa Design Science Methodology (KDSM), which integrates Kaupapa Māori Theory (Smith, 1999) with Design Science Research Methodology (DSRM) (Hevner et al., 2004). This methodology enables the co-design and evaluation of digital tools in ways that centre Māori worldviews, protect data sovereignty, and deliver functional outcomes.

This presentation explores how AI systems can be designed from kaupapa Māori principles – not as cultural overlays on existing platforms, but as Indigenous technologies grounded in sovereignty, whakapapa, and collective purpose. It contributes to AI ethics, Indigenous enterprise, and critical marketing by offering a new model for culturally aligned, commercially viable system design led by and for Māori.

References

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