

# Digital Realms and Digital Tourism?

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## What can new AI/tech paradigms offer NZ tourism?

James has just outlined one kind of answer: AI (& other tech)

- Can let tourists travel 'digitally', without moving physically. . .
- Can give tourists different, more immersive experiences of NZ places. . .
- Can give NZers more control over how they present themselves to tourists.

I'm an AI person who doesn't work in tourism—what can I add to that?

- I work in AI governance and regulation, in NZ and internationally.
- I'll try to develop some themes in that direction.
- I'll address a nagging concern: is digital tourism as good as the 'real thing'?

# One slide on AI governance and regulation!

AI technologies are improving rapidly. . . our ability to control them is not advancing nearly as fast.

For NZ, there are a few problems.

- We are *importers* of AI technologies. The more useful they are, the more of our national budget flows offshore.
- AI technologies are a strong new influence on the local 'information ecosystem'.
  - **Social media** has been an influence for some time. . .
  - **Generative AI** is a new and growing influence.
- The influence is hard to control, as the tech originates overseas.
- In fact, control lies with the CEOs of a few US companies, in an unsavoury new alliance with the US President.
- We need to 'regain control' somehow!

## How can we 'regain control' of AI and tech?

The big companies can be *regulated*. . . but NZ is too small a player to do this by itself. The main regulatory efforts are in the EU.

- The **AI Act**, for AI technologies of all kinds. . .
- The **Digital Services Act**, for social media, search, e-commerce (e.g. booking.com), geographical info sites (e.g. Google Maps).
- NZ can certainly join in these discussions: I'm active in both areas.

The other thing we can do is *build our own AI / tech systems* in NZ.

- By building our own, we may be able to retain AI spend onshore.
- We may be able to build things that are more *representative of us*, and that we can *govern*.

## Digital / AI 'sovereignty'

This project to 'build our own' is taking off internationally.

- Many countries have their own 'local' versions of ChatGPT.
- There are also calls to build 'local' social media platforms.
  - The call is for *interoperable* platforms (that don't lock users in).

A buzzword here is **sovereignty**.

- In the digital realm, countries like NZ have been 'colonised' by Silicon Valley.
- This should be remedied!

## Digital infrastructure, and digital states

AI and social media platforms can be usefully thought of as new **infrastructure** services for citizens.

- In the physical world, we have roads and bridges. . .
- In the digital world, we have software providers, social media platforms, AI services.
- People spend *a lot of time* in the digital world these days: it's real!

National governments supply *physical infrastructure*. Arguably, they are the natural providers of *digital infrastructure* too.

- 'Sovereign AI' projects are often reframed as '**public AI**' projects.
- In this framing, the digital infrastructure of a country should be provided by its government.
  - The government is then in a position to *oversee* this infrastructure, for the benefit of citizens.

## What picture emerges?

Say countries move away from reliance on Silicon Valley, and develop their own distinctive digital infrastructures.

- Their own (interoperable) social media platforms. . .
- Their own AI services, reflecting local knowledge, local citizens.

In that world, governments manage the physical space of their countries, and also, separately, the digital space.

- Maybe in that world, 'digital tourism' is more than just a stand-in for the real thing!

## A prospect for digital tourism

In a world where countries develop their own digital infrastructures, we can expect more *variety* than in the current situation, where we all consume the same US products.

It may become genuinely interesting for people from one country to experience the digital infrastructure of other countries.

- We spend a lot of time in 'our own' digital world. . . maybe sometimes we will want a holiday!