

Quote by Devroop Dhar, India CEO & Co-Founder, Primus Partners

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AI and Digital Transformation: Demetris Skourides, Devroop Dhar, Avinash Mudaliar, with Pavan R Chawla in Fearless Future podcast | Report

This report explores a special episode from HT Labs' Fearless Future Podcast series, where global experts delve into how AI is revolutionizing telecom, urban systems, and media—offering insights on governance, sustainability, and human-centric innovation.



Read on: <https://mediabrief.com/ai-digital-transformation-ht-labs-fearless-future-podcast-pavan-r-chawla/>

Article Content:

Artificial Intelligence is no longer a buzzword — it's the new energy powering digital transformation across industries, cities, and platforms. Presented by **HT Labs**, the **Fearless Future Podcast Series**, this episode features **Pavan R. Chawla**, acclaimed media professional and Founder of MediaBrief.com (and host of its own award-winning podcast, MVP – The Master's Voice Podcast), along with three visionary leaders — **Demetris Skourides**, Chief Scientist for the Republic of Cyprus; **Devroop Dhar**, Co-founder and CEO of Primus Partners; and **Avinash Mudaliar**, Co-founder and CEO of HT Labs — the driving force behind innovations like OTTplay, Slurrp, HT School, and Mint Genie.

The distinguished panel explored how AI is reshaping the future of telcos, smart cities, and content ecosystems — through diverse lenses ranging from global governance and digital infrastructure to media-tech and personalization, bridging science, strategy, and storytelling in one compelling conversation.

AI as the ‘New Energy’ — Transforming Systems, Cities, and Citizens

As host and moderator, **Pavan R Chawla** steered the global dialogue on AI and digital transformation, focusing on how these technologies can shape smarter, human-centric systems and serve people.

Opening the discussion, **Demetris Skourides** described AI as “the new energy” — an evolution from data being “the new oil.” Drawing from his experience in science and policy, he explained that AI’s real potential lies in transforming societies at scale, from how cities manage resources to how citizens experience governance.

He spoke of the **EU AI Act and Cyprus’ national regulatory sandbox** that allows responsible experimentation, ensuring transparency, accountability, and data protection. “Europe’s frameworks,” he noted, “are now being complemented by cross-country collaborations — and the India–Cyprus partnership is a wonderful example of that.”

Skourides also outlined the broader innovation frontier: **the convergence of AI, IoT, edge computing, and 5G** — a shift that could define how nations manage digital ecosystems responsibly.

“This is how we can create sustainable and resilient cities,” he explained, “reducing carbon emissions and driving smarter, data-led infrastructure.”

On the future of work, he stressed that AI is not a threat but a catalyst. “Don’t fear AI — embrace it. Roles will evolve, and tasks will be redefined. AI empowers people to focus on value-added work while automation handles repetition. Governments must create pathways for reskilling and digital enablement.”

India’s Role and the Future of Work

Devroop Dhar, an expert in governance and digital transformation, contextualized AI’s role in India’s ecosystem. He described the India–Cyprus partnership as a crucial bridge for global cooperation — particularly as the EU presidency approaches.

According to him, the next wave of breakthroughs in public infrastructure will be powered by **hyper-personalization and inclusivity**, where data will make services more relevant, affordable, and accessible. He pointed out that AI won’t cause net job loss; instead, it will shift the nature of work, giving rise to entirely new categories such as model management, data operations, and AI ethics.

Dhar called on governments to invest in **reskilling and compute infrastructure**, enabling innovators to thrive while ensuring that AI's evolution remains people-first and purpose-led.

Avinash Mudaliar: Using AI to Make Media More Human

Bringing the conversation to the media-tech space, Avinash Mudaliar showcased how AI is already transforming India's content landscape through OTTplay, India's leading OTT aggregator.

He began with a simple analogy: "AI is like a dragon — powerful, but only effective if trained right." Linking it to **Darwin's theory of evolution**, Mudaliar emphasized that AI isn't replacing humans — it's making them more relevant. "Those who adapt and evolve with AI will thrive," he said.

OTTplay's journey began by solving three fundamental user problems: what to watch, where to watch, and how much to pay. With over 25 OTT partners and hundreds of thousands of shows, the abundance of choice had become the real challenge. "Our AI engine learns from user behavior — from geography and language to mood and viewing context — to deliver highly personalized recommendations," he explained.

Mudaliar described how OTTplay's AI layer goes beyond surface-level metadata: it analyses **mood, sentiment, and emotion**. "In India, we consume content by mood," he said. "Our AI understands that — it's trained to recognize tone and emotion, and to recommend thematically aligned experiences across languages and platforms."

He illustrated how the system connects dots that humans may not — if a viewer watches Hercule Poirot on SonyLIV, OTTplay might recommend Charlie Chopra on Sony, Gumnaam on Shemaroo, or a Tamil mystery inspired by Agatha Christie. "That's the power of AI turning data into discovery," Mudaliar said.

Beyond recommendations, OTTplay's AI also drives **real-time pricing and retention intelligence** — predicting user engagement and renewal behavior. "Our business isn't acquisition," he explained. "It's retention. AI helps us understand when and why users come back — and how to make that experience seamless."

Avinash Mudaliar: Digitizing a Century: AI in Archival Preservation

Mudaliar also revealed how AI helped HT digitize its 100-year-old newspaper archives, transforming millions of pages and images into a unified, searchable database. "When I joined HT, the archives were scattered across the world — from the University of Minnesota to the Nehru Memorial," he shared. "Using OCR and AI-driven cataloguing, we brought everything together into one unified Data asset management system."

The digitized archives are now accessed by researchers, institutions, and content creators. HT has even built a consumer-facing business around it, allowing users to order personalized memorabilia — like curated front pages from their birthdays to the present

day. “AI made our heritage accessible and turned it into a living, breathing product,” he said.

Responsible AI: The Common Thread

As the discussion came to a close, all three leaders circled back to the core theme — **responsible AI**.

Mudaliar summed it up powerfully: “AI is like your child; it learns what you teach it. Train it with the right values, and it will stay aligned to human needs.”

Dhar reinforced the need for **sandbox environments** that allow startups and innovators to experiment safely.

Skourides added that governments must establish **cross-regional frameworks for AI governance** — ensuring that as we train models and scale technologies, they empower people, protect privacy, and serve society.

The Fearless Future Ahead

The podcast concluded on a hopeful note — that AI, when guided by human purpose, can unlock trapped value across industries. From building resilient cities and transforming telcos to creating intelligent content experiences, the future lies in making technology serve humanity — not the other way around.

As **Demetris Skourides** put it in his final message: “Cyprus can be your gateway — for collaboration, for innovation, and for building a responsible AI-powered future together.”

A fearless future, indeed — powered by intelligence that’s both artificial and deeply human.