MIS Quarterly

Call for Papers
MISQ Special Issue on

Digital Technologies and Social Justice

Special Issue Editors

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Motivation of the Special Issue

Social justice has been recognized as a global issue by the United Nations (United Nations 2006). It refers to a state of fairness, moderation, and equality in the distribution of rights and resources in society (United Nations 2006). The United Nations Millennium Declaration, Article I, states that freedom, equality, and tolerance are among "fundamental values" and that "Human beings must respect one other in all their diversity of belief, culture and language. Differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity."

Social injustice is unfortunately all too frequent in both the developed and developing world, with inequalities for many subpopulations over ethnic, political, demographic, religious attributes on myriad economic, social, health, technological, and environmental consequences. Injustice driven by discrimination, hate, and prejudice appears along a multitude of dimensions, not only by race and gender, but also by religion, ethnicity, caste, sexual orientation, or economic endowments. In many countries, most people might belong to one racial group (defined by phenotypic traits such as color in skin, eye, and hair) but with different ethnic backgrounds (along nationalities, tribal affiliations, religions, or languages), which can lead to discrimination by a dominant ethnic group against others in the minority. Discrimination can also occur by geographic origin; even in an ethnically homogenous society, those from a certain region are often marginalized by others. Prevailing, persistent social injustice leads to the formation of structural inequality that is systematically embedded into institutions and laws, which limits access to education, housing, and other rights (Sandel 2020, *The New York Times* 2020a). Therefore, social justice is a ubiquitous concern in any nation for a functioning and cooperative society (Tyler 2012).

Digital technologies have often been viewed as means to equalize access to opportunities for various subpopulations. At first glance, digital technologies have lived up to that promise by providing access to social, political and economic participation for various subpopulations that otherwise would have lacked it. However, closer reflection suggests a more complex picture. For instance, from a positive perspective, social media has enabled activists to spread their messaging, expose inequalities, and advance social justice movements on a grand scale. Technology and data are also helping to fuel an unprecedented movement for social justice all around the world. At the same time, however, social media are also being used to demonize already marginalized subpopulations, and data are being used to surveil and oppress subpopulations in a way that deepens inequities.

Examples of the ways in which digital technologies are employed in drawing attention to, or helping resolve, social justice issues span geographies. In parts of the Global South, advances in digital payments infrastructure and machine learning are circumventing discrimination in lending and enhancing access to credit for otherwise marginalized subpopulations (Tantri 2021). In the United States, the combination of mobile technology, live streaming, and social media shone a spotlight on stark inequities in the way law enforcement treats certain subpopulations, as exemplified in the tragic murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May 2020 (*The Washington Post* 2020, *The New York Times* 2020b). While the treatment itself was not new, digital technologies made this treatment visible at scale, making it difficult for society to feign ignorance and prompting many to act. Digital technologies have played a crucial part in movements toward social justice (e.g., "Black Lives Matter," #metoo, and the Arab Spring), as they enable people to raise their voice, engage in dialogues with each other for equality and human rights, and organize actions (Diaz Andrade and Doolin 2016, Miranda et al. 2016, Selander and Jarvenpaa 2018). For example, the #metoo has trended in 85 countries and brought global attention to the abuse experienced by women as well as efforts directed toward their empowerment.

Similarly, examples of the ways in which digital technologies are implicated in enabling, perpetuating, or amplifying social injustice span geographies. While social media has become an arena for movements and dialogues for social justice, it is also a place where hate, racism, and intolerance against certain groups has proliferated. A common critique is that such digital spaces have provided fruitful soil for disinformation and conspiracy theories, leading to a loss of trust in social institutions. For those who would not be able to find and interact with like-minded peers in the offline sphere, it is now possible to do so in the dark online space, reinforcing their harmful beliefs and spreading them across various platforms (Lowry et al. 2016, Shore et al. 2018). Recent IS research finds that bias and discrimination play a key role in shaping user behaviors on digital platforms (Chan et al. 2016, Chan and Wang 2018, Mejia and Parker 2020). The IT sector may represent novel work opportunities but also barriers and discrimination (Mbarika et al. 2007, Payton and Berki 2019). In blockchain technology, structuring mining activities around proof-of-work is argued to be localizing carbon emissions and associated externalities to nations in the Global South, due to the energy demands associated with such activity—giving rise to a new crypto-colonialism (Howson 2020). Emerging research observes that the distribution of data-related work for artificial intelligence—such that low value-add activities such as platform moderation and labeling are concentrated in the Global South and high value-add activities such as algorithm training, calibration, and application is concentrated in the Global North—is perpetuating longstanding inequities in realizing gains from such high value work (Chan et al. 2021).

In addition, authorities are utilizing surveillance technologies to oppress the voice and civil rights of the underprivileged and minorities in both overt and covert manners (Strittmatter 2020). There is a growing criticism against the use of algorithms and machine learning that deliberately or inadvertently discriminate against certain groups of people (Athey 2017, Gianfrancesco et al. 2018). For example, predictive policing in the U.S. is criticized to target predominantly minority neighborhoods as crime hotspots (Benjamin 2019, Brayne 2020). Consequently, local governments have banned the use of facial recognition by law enforcement agencies due to concerns that it is prone to misidentification among certain groups of people, endangering the innocent. Credit reporting and loan processing systems have been seen to charge higher loan rates for people of color (O'Neill 2016). Scholars argue that this is because AI algorithms and underlying data to train the algorithm incorporate and amplify implicit bias of creators and data collectors (Martin 2015, 2019).

There are other examples illustrating that the effects of digital technology on social justice are multi-faceted and often lead to unintended consequences. When social media and communication technologies such as messaging apps enable women from orthodox societies to freely express themselves (Barendregt 2008), the same technologies have been used by perpetrators for gender-based harassment and sexual abuse (*The Atlantic* 2014). While the powerful #metoo movement has allowed women to raise their voices against abuse, it has so far been restricted to only the privileged upper-class population (Moitra et al. 2020). The promise of financial inclusion through technologies such mobile payments and banking has also marginalized those who do not possess the basic infrastructure required (i.e., a smartphone with an Internet connection; Taylor and Silver 2019). Therefore, technologies that are intended to advance social justice often act against it by further widening the digital divide. Deliberate attention to the challenges of intersecting identities of e.g. race and gender is a prerequisite for sensitive design of digital technologies (Kvasny and Payton, 2018). Therefore, it is warranted for IS research to pay theoretical and empirical attention to the complex roles of digital technologies when it comes to social justice.

Objectives of the Special Issue

The IS scholarly community has accumulated a large body of research on the transformative role of digital technologies in business and society (Bharadwaj et al. 2013, Majchrzak et al. 2016). Several IS research streams and special issues published by IS journals including *MIS Quarterly* have focused on digital divide, ICT for development, and broader societal effects of digital technologies (Srivastava and Shainesh 2015, Hsieh et al 2008, Lin et al. 2015, Venkatesh et al 2019, Majchzrak et al. 2016). These research traditions suggest that technology also has potential to play a pivotal role in the endeavors aimed toward addressing social justice. This special issue seeks to build on this momentum and channel the scholarly community's focus toward digital technology and social justice. As members of civilized society, it is imperative for the scholarly community to leverage our intellectual capital toward advancement of social justice. The intertwining of digital technology and social justice on a global scale presents a valuable opportunity for IS research to lead the discourse in a manner that is substantively meaningful in terms of scholarship, policy, and societal impact. The momentum for research interest in social justice and related domains continues in the IS community[1] and the broad organization and management disciplines (Amis et al. 2020, Quresh et al. 2018, Bapuii et al. 2020), and now is the opportune time to take this further with more ongoing, concerted efforts toward highly impactful work.

The IS scholarly community has set itself apart in its longstanding ability to embrace and grapple with complexity at the nexus of digital technology and social phenomena. We see this special issue as an opportunity to help other academic disciplines and our external stakeholders to better understand the complexity underlying the potential role of technology in social justice. We believe that digital technology can have multiple roles – they can be seen as a means for revealing justice phenomena, as an instrument of delivering or breaching justice, as an algorithm for calculating or determining justice, and as a context that alters justice phenomena. What other roles could they have and what theories or frameworks can we offer to enable other fields and our external stakeholders to better understand technology's role?

There are numerous questions to be investigated and answered. These include, but are not limited to:

- How do digital technologies affect the six important areas of inequality according to the U.N. – income, assets, opportunities for work, access to knowledge, provision of a safe environment, and civil and political participation (United Nations 2006)?
- How do digital technologies affect different dimensions of justice (e.g., distributive, procedural, interactional, retributive, and restorative) (Cropanzana et al. 2007, Sabbagh and Schmitt 2016)?
- How do dominant groups use digital technologies to perpetuate/strengthen systems of inequality? How do marginalized groups use digital technologies to overcome inequalities or seek justice?
- How can governments or business organizations take advantage of digital capabilities to protect the rights, opportunities, and living conditions of marginalized groups (United Nations 2006)?
- How can we design digital technologies and platforms to promote social justice and deter elements in society that propagate hate and oppression?
- What role do technology firms play in normalizing, reproducing or reinforcing inequalities? What responsibilities do technology firms have towards social justice/inequality – as an organization and as a technology/platform provider?
- Given the increasingly prevalent permeation of algorithms and artificial intelligence in our daily lives, how can we design and evaluate justice and fairness in AI?
- How should policymakers develop frameworks, regulations, and laws on ethics and accountability regarding the deployment of digital technologies in society?
- What role has technology played in exacerbating/alleviating the inequalities due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

[1] See the calls for papers on JAIS Special Issue on "Technology and Social Inclusion" (https://aisnet.org/news/488216/JAIS-Special-Issue-CFP-Technology-and-Social-Inclusion.htm) and ISJ Special Issue on "Responsible IS Research for a Better World" (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/pb-assets/assets/13652575/Responsible%20IS%20Research%20for%20a%20Better%20World%20SI%20CFP%20210219-1550758914320.pdf)

Submission Criteria for the Special Issue

Submissions to this special issue (in both submission tracks) must meet the following criteria:

Criterion SI-1
Submissions are expected to thematically focus on digital technology and social justice. They should clearly define the social justice issue that is being investigated and the connection to digital technologies.

Criterion SI-2
Submissions are to have potentially real-world impacts by reshaping dialogues in social justice, by influencing policymaking, or by affecting actions of organizations, leaders, or individuals in business and government.

We Welcome First-Time Authors and Interdisciplinary Teams. In the spirit of advancing diversity and inclusion in the journal and the IS field, we look forward to receiving submissions from all around the world, particularly from first-time authors or those from regions that have been historically underrepresented in *MISQ*, for which we plan to offer support and assistance for paper development.

We welcome author teams with interdisciplinary backgrounds and approaches. Many of the questions related to the digital technology-social justice interface require a combination of disciplinary backgrounds to address the inherent complexity. The questions themselves are much broader in scope than just the IS discipline. The goal of this special issue is in fact to foster collaborations across disciplines to identify and answer important questions. This can help bring out the true strength of the IS discipline and avoid the trap of the "siloed approach" that is inherent when attempting to answer grand challenges (George et al. 2016) solely through the lens of one discipline.

Submission Tracks

We offer two tracks – Regular Articles and Curated Case Collections.

Regular Articles Track

In the Regular Articles track, we seek high-quality and ambitious research that tackles social justice and injustice. Papers that address grand challenges are welcome. These submissions can be in any of the manuscript categories that *MIS Quarterly* currently publishes (see https://misq.org/categories). Papers are equally welcome whether they focus on technology's role in advancing justice (e.g., supporting freedom, equality, and tolerance) or injustice (e.g., aggravating bigotry, perpetuating intolerance, and promoting violence). Likewise, submissions are equally welcome whether they focus on *understanding* the role of technology in social justice (discovery-oriented research) or *achieving* social justice. Submissions to the Regular Articles track are encouraged to meet the following criteria:

Criterion RA-1
Submitted manuscripts are expected to make substantive theoretical or empirical contributions with strong managerial or policy implications.

Criterion RA-2
Submissions are encouraged to take a multidisciplinary approach to investigating problems or devising solutions to issues in digital technologies and social justice. This may involve a team of researchers from different disciplines.

Criterion RA-3
Submissions are desired to showcase ambitious research and clearly illuminate how digital technology enables efforts to advance social justice or investigates how it hinders such efforts or even exacerbates social injustice.

Criterion RA-4
Submissions should describe how they provide innovation and intellectual contributions to the IS field. Contributions to other disciplines beyond IS and clarity on why the contribution is at the intersection of these disciplines or domains is desirable.

We welcome submissions from researchers with all disciplinary backgrounds or any methodological preferences.

Curated Case Collections Track

In an effort to guard against potential blind spots as an IS community, we seek original case submissions that shed a bright light on pressing social justice phenomena, which future IS research can build upon for further theorization and expansion of IS knowledge. With curated case collections, we wish to collate several individual empirical case studies into a joint, peer-reviewed paper. These curated case collections are intended to bring the research community's attention to particularly relevant understudied issues and ongoing initiatives on the ground relating to social justice and digital technology. As such, they may serve as a starting point and motivation for further research attention to important aspects of social justice.

This format also provides an avenue to bring to light insights and accomplishments from researchers that otherwise would not publish their work in *MIS Quarterly*. Researchers in the global community experience very different working conditions and the major effort involved in writing an ordinary *MIS Quarterly* submission may not be possible for everyone. Given the theme of social justice, it is particularly important to be aware of, and seek to mitigate, the skewed representation of real-world phenomena that this inequality entails. Thus, this format will allow us to implement social justice concerns into the Special Issue process.

We seek empirically oriented descriptions and analyses of phenomena, issues, or specific initiatives that offer insight into the Special Issue theme. We do not require the case descriptions to make a theoretical or methodological contribution, however, they should adhere to academic standards in the problem formulation and data analysis. A number of cases (e.g. 4-5) will be grouped together and complemented by an introduction to make up a joint paper (which will be peer-reviewed). The submissions should be maximum 2000 words and fulfill the following criteria:

Criterion CC-1
Submissions should be based on analysis of empirical data that focus on the connection between social justice and digital technologies. Relevant insights would encompass both studies of how digital technology enables efforts to advance social justice and studies of how it hinders such efforts or even exacerbates social injustice.

Criterion CC-2
Submissions are expected to have clarity in presentation of the case—i.e., a well-defined problem formulation, a clear description of the context and its pertinent features, sufficient empirical details, sound analytic work, a good organization of the text, and succinct formulations of the insights and learnings.

Criterion CC-3
We seek submissions with a potential to create novel insights about the theme of social justice and digital technologies.

List of Potential Topics

Potential topics for this special issue, both in the regular article and the curated cases tracks, include, but are not limited to:

- Social justice implications of digitally-enabled visibility and transparency
- Social justice policy design and implications for digital technologies
- Technology to surface and assess social justice issues and challenges
- Digital infrastructures for social justice policy enforcement (e.g., fair voting and e-participation)
- Bias and discrimination in digital platforms
- Representation of subpopulations in data and data work
- Use of social media for social justice movements as well as by hate and fringe groups
- Evaluation of technology use by government and business with respect to social justice
- Digitization of law enforcement, compliance, and regulation
- Design and experiments of "digital nudges" to prevent implicit or explicit bias
- Development and assessment of algorithms and machine learning toward fair and equal treatment
- Digital technology's impact on uneven access to healthcare, education, housing, and capital
- Investigation of who is represented in the design and deployment of digital technologies

- Challenges faced by minority technology entrepreneurs
- The impact of digitally supported hiring and promotion practices on fairness and discrimination
- The state-of-the art of social justice within the IT industry, exemplified by hiring and promotion
- Surveillance technology use by authorities

Process and Timeline (subject to change)

- Information sessions for prospective authors in Summer 2021
- Optional extended abstract submissions: November 30, 2021
- Workshops for prospective authors with abstract submissions: January 2022
- First-round submissions: June 30, 2022
- First-round decisions: September 30, 2022
- Workshops for authors with first-round revise and resubmit: November 2022
- Second-round submissions: January 31, 2023
- Second-round decisions: April 30, 2023
- Third and final round submissions: August 31, 2023
- Third and final round decisions: November 30, 2023

We offer a one-year timeline for first-round submissions to give authors enough time to pursue ambitious and innovate work as well as to accommodate first-time authors. At the same time, we may consider commencing a review process for early submissions with high quality as soon as we receive them.

The Special Issue editors will screen submissions for fit using the extended abstracts. The review process will aim for a 3-month review cycle and require authors to adhere to a 4-month revision cycle.

Special Issue Editorial Board

The SI editors will choose an anonymous associate editor for each submission from MIS Quarterly's current board of senior or associate editors or from the Special Issue Editorial Board. Reviewers may also be chosen from the SI Editorial Board or from the broader IS community.

Hilal Atasoy, Rutgers University
Chrisanthi Avergou, London School of Economics
Sulin Ba, University of Connecticut
Frank Chen, ESSEC
Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic, UNSW Sydney
Antonio Diaz Andrade, Auckland University of Technology
Rayid Ghani, Carnegie Mellon University
Tan Chuan Hoo, National University of Singapore
Dirk Hovorka, University of Sydney
Ke-Wei Huang, National University of Singapore
Carol Hsu, University of Sydney
Lucas D. Introna, Lancaster University
Damien Joseph, Nanyang Technological University
Nishtha Langer, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Dokyun Lee, Boston University
Gene Moo Lee, University of British Columbia
Ting Li, Erasmus University Rotterdam
Ojelanki Ngwenyama, Ryerson University
Chris Parker, American University
Sundeep Sahay, University of Oslo
Øystein Sæbø, Agder University
Pankaj Setia, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad
Leiser Silva, University of Houston
Anjana Susarla, Michigan State University
Juliana Sutanto, Lancaster University
Yingliang (Ricky) Tan, Tulane University
Wei Wei, University of Houston, Clear Lake
Jaime Windeler, University of Cincinnati
Jie Jennifer Zhang, University of Texas, Arlington

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