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Introduction to the HICSS-55 Digital Society Minitrack

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The digital society minitrack assembles research that examines current challenges of the digital transformation in all areas of society. This may include the utilization of information systems for social movements, political or healthcare communications – shaping debates that uphold our social cohesion. The use of new technology unlocks mechanisms that offer new potentials for society (e.g., diversity, transparency, consensus building) but also entails challenges such as misinformation, manipulability, or dehumanization of social processes. In times of crisis, those mechanisms have become particularly salient. Consequently, this minitrack presents a selection of scholarship covering empirical research, comprehensive concepts as well as methods that are highly relevant for understanding recent societal phenomena. This minitrack features three papers that address topics ranging from social movements to information privacy. We are confident that these contributions will stimulate fruitful discussions and empower researchers and practitioners to successfully participate in the creation of a flourishing digital society.

The first paper investigates how successful charitable crowdfunding campaigns can leverage platforms to generate heightened media attention, and therefore, increase donations. To do so, the authors examine how the Black Lives Matter movement and the associated social protest cycle after the death of George Floyd have influenced fundraising behavior for campaigns supporting the black community. By applying a differences-in-differences approach on a GoFundMe dataset, the authors found attention spikes in charitable crowdfunding campaigns associated with personal concerns. Additionally, implications for campaigns aiming to surpass such temporal spikes of media attention are discussed by the authors.

- “Moment or Movement – An Empirical Analysis of the Heterogeneous Impact of Media Attention on Charitable Crowdfunding Campaigns” (by J. Seutter, M. Müller, S. Müller and D. Kundisch)

The second contribution deals with mitigation measures of decreasing feelings of loneliness provoked by pandemic-induced lockdowns and social distancing. The authors aimed to understand whether and why online self-disclosure behaviors changed during the holiday season – a time many people believe should be spent with family and loved ones – because of the pandemic. The basis of the study is a survey dataset collected in December 2020 from Facebook and Instagram users. The results show significant differences between the kinds of information disclosed online between 2019 and 2020 and that evaluation apprehension moderated the relationship between predicted and reported behaviors for socially desirable information – such as wearing a mask and working from home.

- “I’ll (Not) be Home for Christmas: The Impact of the Pandemic on Evaluation Apprehension and Self-Disclosure during the 2020 Holidays” (by T. Nability-Grover, C. M. K. Cheung and J. B. Thatcher)

The third study in this minitrack investigates how family perceptions of contact tracing (CT) apps can affect the family’s use of such apps. The authors surveyed parent-teen dyads twice over a 5-month period during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that intentions always influenced usage, including differing intentions by parents and teens. The analysis even demonstrated that a longitudinal effect of intentions on usage exists for parents and teens.

- “Family Tensions and Information Privacy: A Barrier to Diffusion of Proximity Tracing Applications?” (by F. Bélanger, R. E. Crossler, K. R. Allen, J. Resor, H. A. Kissel and T. Finch)

We believe that these papers will foster interesting discussions and will contribute to the scholarship within our discipline.