Introduction to the HICSS-54 Minitrack on Digital Society

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This minitrack provides a venue for research that innovatively addresses current challenges of the digital transformation and how it affects certain pillars of society. Whether it is commerce, political communication, journalism, or transport – novel technology shapes the mechanisms that uphold our social togetherness. Thereby, it offers new potentials for society (e.g. transparency, consensus building) but also raises challenges such as misinformation, manipulability, or dehumanization of social processes. Hence, this minitrack comprises scholarship introducing comprehensive concepts as well as methods which provide value independent of the layer of application. This minitrack features three contributions that address a range of relevant topics that will stimulate further discussion and exploration of the key phenomena within the common understanding of a flourishing digital society.

The first paper addresses a pressing societal issue, opinion polarization, against the backdrop of the omnipresent COVID-19 pandemic. The authors' approach is based on a case study of political discussions during the pandemic inside the Brazilian Twittersphere. The study uses descriptive measures of online conflicts, that is, follower-relationships, retweet and reply rates. Results obtained in this multi-context case study showed that polarization levels are higher in the following frequencies than retweet and reply frequencies. The findings also reinforced that retweets are likely to support ideological views within echo chambers, whereas replies are more used to exchange ideas. The presented method based on network centrality is feasible for selecting polarizers, which are then utilized to compute the amplitude of polarization.

• "A Polarization Approach for Understanding Online Conflicts in Times of Pandemic: A Brazilian Case Study" (by C. Kamienski, L. Mazim de Sousa, C. Penteado, D. H. Goya, D. di Genova, F. O. de Franca, D. F. Ramos and F. Horita)

The second contribution deals with the socio-ethical dimension of AI-based surveillance technology. In their survey-based investigation, the authors empirically show that a lack of perceived usefulness of AI-based surveillance technology is connected to the ethical dimension. In other words, in order to resolve ethical dilemmas in regards to the use of AI-based technology, increasing the perceived usefulness, and therefore, the acceptance of the technology is crucial for decision-makers. Particularly in light of the broad definition of AI as an umbrella term for various technologies, the authors argue for more transparency about what AI actually is and what it is capable of in societally important scenarios.

• "Is Ethics Really Such a Big Deal? The Influence of Perceived Usefulness of AI-based Surveillance Technology on Ethical Decision-Making in Scenarios of Public Surveillance" (by E. Anton, K. Kus and F. Teuteberg)

The third study in this minitrack addresses how the world of work is affected by digitization, and thus shifting working models. Exemplified by the phenomenon of digital nomadism, the authors confront contemporary corporate structures and management with the demand for hypermobile and flexible work arrangements that challenge the paradigm of the 9-to-5 corporate job. Whereas existing research has placed a focal point on understanding digital nomad work to be limited to freelance work and entrepreneurship, this study questions whether the future of work will uphold this separation of digital nomadism and corporate work. At present, practitioners acknowledge the potential of fostering digital nomad work in organizations but fear the challenge to manage local and remote workforces and the disparate values, beliefs, and normative expectations of the two.

• "Integrating Digital Nomads in Corporate Structures: Managerial Contemplations" (by N. Frick and J. Marx)

We trust that these contributions will push ahead interesting discussions and will advance the scholarship within our discipline.

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