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HUMAN FLOURISHING IN THE DIGITAL ERA – WHAT RESPONSIBILITY DOES/SHOULD IS RESEARCH(ERS) HAVE?

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HUMAN FLOURISHING IN THE DIGITAL ERA – WHAT RESPONSIBILITY DOES/SHOULD IS RESEARCH(ERS) HAVE?

Panel at ECIS2023

1 Introduction and Issues

"The ultimate end of human acts is Eudaimonia, happiness in the sense of living well, which all men desire; all acts are but different means chosen to arrive at it." (Hannah Arendt, 1981)

The complexity introduced by digitalization in all spheres of society has cast established ways of thinking, working and doing into question and calls for new perspectives and approaches (Stahl et al., 2021). We have seen how digital technologies designed to entertain, connect, and enhance humanity cause negative stress, anxiety, inequality, social disconnect and more. Therefore, in this panel we will discuss and explore a wide range of issues related to human flourishing in contemporary society.

Human flourishing is both the optimal continuing development of human beings' potentials and living well as a human being. It promotes the growth, development, and holistic well-being of individuals and communities. Having a thorough understanding of the conditions that enable human flourishing will promote safety and security in people's lives. This includes health, economic, community, financial, political, and more, which are all areas that have been digitized or digitalized.

While the conception of "digital first" (Baskerville et al., 2020) is gaining much attention, it is easy to lose focus on the aspects that makes humans prosper and flourish, including belonging, emotions, lust, sensibility, close relationships, creativity, and more. Here we draw attention to the concept of human flourishing as this is an under-researched concept within the IS discipline. Establishing an understanding of what it means to be human will be a critical necessity in the near future to achieve social and emotional wellbeing.

We have brought together researchers from four academic institutions who will offer their insights and discuss the concept of human flourishing from different perspectives. They will share their views on how it can be studied, but also how we can cultivate it within the discipline (both in research and in practice), as well as what are the challenges, possibilities, and pitfalls.

With this as a backdrop, we question in this panel:

- What is our responsibility as researchers focusing on the development, design and implementation, and usage of digital technology in relation to human flourishing?
- Is it possible to amplify human flourishing with digital technology?
- What consequences does digital technology have on human flourishing?
- What new insights can information systems (IS) scholars offer regarding the possibilities and challenges in building a future where humans can flourish?

The panelists will bring forth different positions regarding human flourishing in the digital era. They will provide their educated guess and assessment of how further technological progress would impact the situation further and increase the challenge, but also bring forth possible resolutions.

1.1 Panel members

Dr. Lena Hylving, Associate Professor at the Department of Information Technology, University of Oslo and **Dr Dina Koutsikouri**, Associate Professor at the Department of Applied IT, University of Gothenburg will serve as the panel's organizers.

Professor Emeritus Ojelanki Ngwenyama, Professor of Global Management and Director of the Institute for Innovation and Technology Management, Ted Rogers School of Management, Ryerson University, Canada

Ojelanki will share his analysis of human flourishing in the digital era of Global digitalization from the standpoint 'it is the best of times and the worst of times'. Digital scientists, engineers, big tech companies and governments argue that they are building a new digital society of freedom and economic well-being in which we will all flourish. But the current catchphrases: 'sustainable digitalization', 'responsible AI', 'the data-rich world', and 'data is the new gold' all point to patterns of exploitation. To quote an iconic American sports hero; "It is like déjà vu all over again". Powerful countries and tech companies now push digitalization as value creation (wealth accumulation) and legitimize the exploitation with World Economic Forum Rankings. We worship at the altar of global digitalization, Digital First...Social Later...maybe? (Baskerville et al., 2020). But the dark side of digitalization is becoming more and more vivid: from dehumanization (quantified self) to loss of freedom and liberty (digital surveillance, predictive policing), labour exploitation (Click Work, Mechanical Turk), habitat destruction (deforestation, pollution, soil acidification) from rare earth metal mining to energy overconsumption from bitcoin mining and AI model testing. Moreover, the wealth gap between digital haves and digital-have-nots is widening: the tech giants grossed almost 1 trillion profits for 2022, while 676 million people live in extreme poverty (less than \$1.90/day) and their homelands are made unsustainable due to wars over mineral resources and mining destruction. The digital society that is unfolding is profoundly alienating as more and more sophisticated digital infrastructures are designed to extract wealth from individuals and planetary resources. The societal digitalization program is becoming a political problem. Few ultra-rich tech businesses and countries are attempting to once again, control the mineral resources of smaller weaker countries in Africa, South America, and Asia. We are now in the age of digital colonization; note Google's and Meta's (Facebook) Africa projects (Dusunmu, 2022; Perrigo, 2022). Societal digitalization is exposing historic North-South hegemony, and capitalist practices of domination, control, and exploitation.

Dr. Margio Raftopoulos, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow MSCA-IF Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences. Tampere University, Finland

Margio will argue that the current discourse in both industry and academia on transhumanism, AGI (artificial general intelligence) and AI sentience is creating public concerns, fears, unrealistic expectations, and even misinformation – it can be seen as having a net negative impact on public perception of the future of humanity. References to dystopian science fiction scenarios in public discourses are indicative of potential inhibitors to human sense of self, safety, and belonging in a digitized/AI world. Limited accessibility and transparency of digital technologies (in particular artificial intelligence) given the concentration of ownership and control by a handful of technology corporations raises serious questions about what this means for the future of human flourishing from a socio-economic-political perspective as research claims from this sector are often not open to public scrutiny and critical review (Bender et al., 2021; Birhane, 2021; Marcus, 2022; Newlands, 2021). Her analysis is that the impact of limited democratization of intelligent technologies outside of wealthy communities or developed economies on humanity around the globe has to be scrutinized further by scholars. Margio will also share early findings from her EU-funded research project *Augmented-Humans*. Research indicates that the potential value creation opportunities of intelligent human-machine systems are significant, however, there are considerable gaps and limitations that need to be addressed to not only enable its potential but also to proactively manage its potential harms to people and society. Research points to the reality that value-creation may be in the human, organisational and social ecosystems that

supports and utilises the technology rather than in the technology itself. However at this point in time, industry heroes the technology rather than the human contribution to the system.

Professor Frantz Rowe, Head of MS in Consulting and Research, LEMNA, IAE Nantes - Économie et Management. Nantes Université and Institut Universitaire de France, France.

Frantz will argue that there is a need that society organizes so that people can live a decent life without being obliged to meet ever increasing requirements of, and to be invaded by, intrusive digital technology. Notably, it should respect their privacy, defined as the right to be let alone. Traditionally in our relationship with technology humans were sovereign. The problem with the current trend is that technology tends to have greater and greater autonomy even if our theorizing does not reflect this (Markus & Rowe, 2018). Even with the best intentions, in their paper on flourishing Stahl et al (2021) make value choices based on contestable technology examples when they say that contact tracing apps are good because they reflect the value of social control. I will argue that such statements are misplaced, as is the explanation that digital is first, when we don't control technology, don't understand the problems and throw ourselves into the arms of business to embrace technology solutionism. In his view, what should be first is freedom, community and rationality. Such apps meet none of these criteria (Rowe et al., 2020). More positively, in line with this, he will argue that education and philosophy provide some safeguards against a technology and winner takes all race that has completely derailed and will call for stronger regulation and restoring personal and moral responsibility. Philosophy can help do that. Our role and responsibility is to inform our research with philosophy and discuss how human values, cognition and practices can benefit (Stahl et al., 2021), but are also challenged by technology (Hylving et al., 2022; Rowe, 2018). As a community, we should produce a scientific discourse and visions that do not stop at what can be strictly and currently observed, in order to interrogate unintended and long term effects, past or future.

Dr. Olgerta Tona, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Applied Information Technology, Division of Informatics. Member of Swedish Centre for Digital Innovation. University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Olgerta will argue that human flourishing and human dignity are interlinked. The prevalence of digital technologies in our lives has enabled human flourishing by helping people live healthier lives, increasing their cognitive capacities such as reason and attention, and supporting their emotional capacity to enjoy life (Leidner & Tona, 2021). At the same time, growing evidence suggests that digital technologies can intensify structural biases and discrimination at a vast scale casting a large shadow on human life (Crawford, 2021; Noble, 2018). As these technologies become more ubiquitous, they create fresh concerns about the ways in which human dignity is affected. On the one hand, technology can promote freedom, autonomy, visibility, and core values, but on the other hand the same technology can constrain autonomy and marginalise people. To ensure that technology promotes human dignity and thereby enables human flourishing, we should design with dignity and for dignity (Leidner & Tona, 2021). To do so, she will argue that we should broaden our attention to societal structures and social order. By accounting for the social, political, and economic context where these digital technologies will be (are) embedded, we will be better equipped to contribute to digital technologies that do not reproduce biases, harms, and discrimination. Regarding responsibility for digital technology and human flourishing, she sees it as collective in nature. As IS researchers, we should also be able to call on other actors who should feel obligated to deploy technology in ways that prioritize individuals and society. Thus, we should strive for the impact of our research to go beyond the academic circle and extend to industry and government.

1.2 Panel structure

The panel chairs will briefly introduce the topic and the panelists and will set the ground for the topic. They will then guide the panelist through two rounds of arguments/perspectives along their main

position. This 90-minute panel will use interactive technology (e.g. Menti) to engage the audience throughout the session. However, the overall structure will be as follows:

1. Short introduction to why human flourishing is relevant to ECIS and the IS community, and an explanation of how the interactive parts of the session will work. (3-7 minutes)
 - Interaction with the audience.
2. The five panel members will start off with a short personal reflection about human flourishing in the digital era and how they think of it from a researcher's perspective as well as from an IS discipline perspective and society as a whole. (2-3 minutes for each panel member and then discussion for 15-20 minutes)
 - Interaction with the audience.
3. The second part of the panel will discuss how to approach human flourishing from a methodological, epistemological, and ontological perspective – possibilities and challenges. (2-3 minutes for each panel member and then discussion for 15-20 minutes)
 - Interaction with the audience.
4. Panel session conclusion – short summary of our learnings and
 - Interaction with the audience.

The format leaves space for audience questions and (dis)agreements as well as reactions on fellow panelists' contributions. We expect a lively debate among the panellist and the audience; it should make us think more about the role of technology and human flourishing and vice versa.

1.3 Participation statement

All participants have made a commitment to attend the conference and serve on the panel if the panel is accepted.

1.4 Biographies (in alphabetical order)

Lena Hylving is Associate professor in Informatics. Lena defended her doctoral dissertation on digitalization dynamics in 2015 and has worked at Halmstad University and at Viktoria Institute (now RISE) in Sweden before her current position at the University of Oslo in the Department of Informatics. Before starting her research career, she worked in the automotive industry with human-machine interaction. She has had several research projects within the transportation industry focusing on digital innovation, digital transformation, and the ethical consequences of digitalization.

Dina Koutsikouri is Associate Professor of Informatics in the Department of Applied Information Technology at the University of Gothenburg and is affiliated with the Swedish Center for Digital Innovation (SCDI). She was awarded her PhD at Loughborough University, Center for Innovative and Collaborative Engineering (CICE), UK in 2010. Her research is centered on digital transformation and human-AI interaction. She is interested in how emerging technologies drive change in organizations and institutions and the social and emotional implications of technology introductions. Her current research is sponsored by the Swedish Transport Administration where she explores human judgment in human-AI decision-making.

Ojelanki Ngwenyama is a critical theorist whose research focuses on social implications of societal digitalization. He is Emeritus Professor and Senior Scholar, School of Information Technology, University of Cape Town, South Africa. Ojelanki is a Fellow of AIS and member of the Academy of Science of South Africa; He is Professor at the Ted Rogers School of Management, Toronto Metropolitan University, Canada. He has a PhD (Computer Science) from Thomas J. Watson College of Engineering, State University of New York, Binghamton; and an MBA from Syracuse University, USA. In 2009, he was awarded D.Phil in Faculty of Engineering, University of Pretoria, South Africa. He was Andrew Mellon Professor in 2011, South Africa. In 2012, Velux Visiting Professor, Copenhagen Business School. In 2015 Ojelanki was Visiting Research Professor, Inter-Organizational Information

Systems, University of Münster, Germany; and is a regular Visiting Professor, Institut d' Economie et Management de Nantes, Université de Nantes, France. Ojelanki is a Senior Editor for European Journal of Information systems.

Marigo Raftopoulos is a post-doctoral research fellow in the Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences, Tampere University, Finland. Marigo is currently leading Augmented-Humans, an EU-funded project (MSCA-IF) dedicated to the study of how organisations can augment the best of human and artificial intelligence to accelerate creativity and innovation. One of the key tenets of Augmented-Humans project is that artificial intelligence must be focused on enhancing human intelligence and capability. Prior to academia, Marigo worked as a strategic business advisor to technology startups, industry and government on human-centred technology design and digital transformation. Marigo's current research interests revolve around how we can use game-based technologies as mediators of engaging and ethical interactions and problem-solving between human and machine that generate data, develop meaningful insights, facilitate business problem solving, and aid both human and machine learning.

Frantz Rowe is a professor at Nantes University. His research interests revolve around the philosophy of information systems, digital transformation, and the effects of IT. He has published in 40 different peer-reviewed journals, has coedited five books, authored, and coauthored four books, two of which were awarded the FNEGE and the EFMD prize in 2016. He is Emeritus Editor of the European Journal of Information Systems and Board member of the International Journal of Information Management and of Systèmes d'Information et Management. He is guest Editor of the Journal of the AIS (Envisioning the diversity of theory), an AIS fellow and a Senior Member of the Institut Universitaire de France, holder of a fundamental Chair (on critical theory and causality).

Olgerta Tona is a senior lecturer at the Department of Applied IT at the University of Gothenburg, with a research focus on the societal and organizational implications of algorithmic systems, personal data digitalisation, and data analytics. Her fascination with the pervasive role of digital technologies in decision-making, daily activities, and lifestyle choices inspires her research pursuit. Olgerta also serves as an Editor at the Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems and as a Managing Editor of the Journal of the Association for Information Systems. She obtained her Ph.D. in Information Systems from Lund University in 2017, and her doctoral dissertation received the Börje Langefors award for best doctoral dissertation in Information Systems.

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