

Introduction to the Mini-Track ‘Addressing Diversity in Digitalization’

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Diversity and Digitalization

The term diversity has raised much attention from scholars and practitioners alike to discuss how different viewpoints, mindsets, educational backgrounds, perspectives, and knowledge (or the lack thereof) contribute to the ongoing digitalization in a variety of industries [1, 4, 6]. Despite the presence of the topic in scholarly publications and public discourses, numerous examples indicate how homogeneity, instead of diversity in the previously outlined dimensions, leads to the development of digital technologies that can be used to discriminate against certain groups [5, 7].

At least two explanations are available for relationship between digital technologies and diversity. Either these newly created technological structures reveal a lack of diversity in the underlying social structures, or they help to create them. We have learned how machine learning algorithms in recruiting discriminated against female applicants [2] or facial recognition software fostered racial discrimination [3, 6]. Digital technologies start with representing our physical world with bits and bytes [8] and oftentimes, we find, they apply homogeneous categories in the process. In the given examples, we first see that digital technologies are trained on data reflecting male dominance in tech industries or existing recruiting patterns that support homogeneous workforces. Second, these technologies recreate and reinforce these existing homogeneous structures.

It is therefore worth asking whether digitalization can thereby be considered a ‘diversity-blind’ process. In order to promote greater awareness of diversity in this respect, it is important to encourage the generation of theoretical knowledge that can help to explain how digital technologies influence diversity (*digital impact on diversity*) and how digital technologies are shaped by diversity or the lack thereof (*diversity shaping digital technology*). Eventually, this understanding might help academics and practitioners alike in their efforts towards inclusive design and application processes that avoid the pitfalls described earlier.

Diversity Perspectives

In this mini-track, scholars advance our theoretical knowledge on inclusive design and application processes, practices and routines of organizing data and information systems that consider the role of diversity. More generally submissions advance our knowledge on the relationship between digitalization and diversity, which could lead to products and services that represent the needs and wants of diverse societies. The submissions examine the interplay between diversity and digitalization from different perspectives, such as: *design perspectives* (e.g. understanding practices that address diversity issues in designing digital artifacts, theorizing challenges related to the consideration of different dimensions of diversity in designing digital artifacts, and understanding implications of considering and neglecting societal diversity in designing digital artifacts), *organizing perspectives* (e.g. the role of individual identity and diversity in routines and practices, organizational capabilities, and knowledge sharing associated with the design and application of information systems and data, examinations of the relevance of attitudes towards diversity and related potential tensions among employees in digital ventures, and overviews of theoretical advances on diversity and its understanding in IS research), and *impact perspectives* (e.g. understanding outcomes of (less) inclusive design processes and organizing practices, highlighting the consequences of missing diversity reflections in design processes for digital artifacts across levels of analysis, and the development of theoretical frameworks that allow the holistic capture of impacts of (less) inclusive design practices for digital artifacts).

Contributions to the Mini-Track

The topic of this mini-track attracted scholars from diverse backgrounds who applied a variety of different perspectives, theoretical lenses and methodological procedures to generate theoretical knowledge of relevance for the overall topic of the track. All

submissions were reviewed by a total of 27 scholars from as diverse fields as information systems, management, organization studies, psychology, and entrepreneurship. We selected three papers that represent the methodological breadth that we find necessary to uncover the possibilities for research in this field. To different degrees, these studies have turned our attention towards how digital technologies are either shaped by diversity or have themselves made an impact.

Digital impact on diversity

The study “Digital Divide and Digital Barriers in Distance Education during COVID-19” by Isabel Gan and Rui Sun provides a timely perspective on a global issue that has influenced many lives across the globe in 2020. Their study on the digital divide between underserved student populations and their peers revealed five major digital barriers for students during the pandemic. Moreover, they show how demographic background and socioeconomic status influenced the distribution of these barriers.

Diversity shaping digital technology

The study “SkillsIdentifier: A Tool to Promote Career Identity and Self-efficacy Among Underrepresented Job Seekers” by Tawanna Dillahunt and Chiao-Yin Hsiao explores employment software by considering underrepresented job seekers. In contrast to higher-educated and affluent job seekers, these groups face challenges articulating their skillsets and understanding those skills' transferability across jobs. The authors design and evaluate SkillsIdentifier, a software product that assists job seekers in identifying key current skillsets.

The study “Citizen Diversity in e-Government Research: Moving the Field Forward” by Annika

Andersson and colleagues illuminates how research on eGovernment has addressed diversity among citizens. The authors point towards a lack of concept clarity when it comes to diversity in this research area. As regards broad socio-economic categories, they find that interests of many groups remain underrepresented.

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