SPECIAL ISSUE INTRODUCTION: JAIS SPECIAL ISSUE ON TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Information systems are integral to interacting with nearly every social institution (healthcare, employment, government, education) and to maintaining social roles and relationships (Carter and Grover 2015). The inability to access and leverage these information systems, and the social institutions they support, perpetuates inequalities and differences between "haves and have nots" that create or sustain destructive social divisions. In contrast, access to these information systems affords opportunities to close the gap between "haves and have nots" and build a stronger global economy and society (Hsieh et al. 2008). Thus, understanding the interplay between technology and people's access to social institutions is critical for understanding how to build fair and equitable modern societies.

While some argue that the advance of technology has closed the digital divide, recent research suggests that information systems can simultaneously include and exclude the digitally disadvantaged (Pethig and Kroenung 2019). Evidence from our shared recent experiences from navigating shocks and jarring events such as COVID 19, the war in Ukraine, and more, as well navigating the normal such as access to the Internet, healthcare, education, and financial services, suggests that inequities persist and that this complex bricolage of access and inequity requires fresh perspectives on information technology.

To understand this complexity, we crafted a call for papers at the intersection of information technology and social inclusion, which carefully solicited papers from all genres, epistemologies, and research traditions in the information systems community. We asked for submissions to focus on shedding new light on how technology relates to social inclusion, that is users' ability to participate fully in the sociotechnical systems in which they live work, and play. We sought research that theorizes the critical role of information systems in enabling or preventing individuals and social groups from participating in the societies in which they are embedded.

We specifically sought papers that advance theoretical understanding, because while IS social inclusion research tends to point to surface differences, e.g., sex and race, the growing access to information technology has created opportunities for inclusion and exclusion on a wider spectrum of diversity, including differences in age, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, nationality, emotional, physical, mental and developmental abilities, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, skin color, socio-economic status, and values/ethics (Trauth 2017). Biases against individuals and social groups based on these characteristics are undeniable, as evidenced by recent work on algorithmic bias and artificial intelligence among others.

Because social inclusion research can be about observable phenomena as well socially constructed by members of academic disciplines, we solicited two categories of papers: societal and discipline specific.

Our call for **societal opportunities** to study inclusion was inclusive. We asked authors to consider contexts, such as Silicon Valley's abysmal diversity metrics (Ioannou 2018), events, such as the Google anti-diversity memo (Bogost 2017), and jarring events, such as gamergate controversy (Dewey 2014). We asked for work that shed light on how persistent biases against

marginalized groups that manifest in the cultures of "corporate IT", online communities, and broader society shaped the opportunities afforded to historically disadvantaged groups. For example, we sought insight into persistent gaps in the IT workforce such as the fact that 80-90% of software developers worldwide are men (Stack Overflow 2015). This hoped for papers that would help explain how this staggering imbalance helped to explain implicit biases woven into the fabric of IT artifacts, such as Amazon's AI recruiting system, which systematically discriminated against women candidates (Dastin 2015), or facial recognition tools that misidentify people of color at a rate of five to ten times higher than Caucasians (Simonite 2019). Hence, we solicited papers that consider the implications of biases and excluding individuals from access to the broader information economy, be it access to technologies and data or access to participate in the IT workforce or IT enabled-economic activity.

Our call for **discipline-specific opportunities** focused on issues tied to social inclusion and how we conduct and construct the Information Systems discipline. We drew attention to a multitude of issues in need of attention: from how economic disparities frame opportunities to participate in the discipline, including but not limited to: emergent "pay to play" publishing; the demographic composition of IS doctoral programs (Payton 2005); our tradition of locating conferences in expensive locations, and examining how research norms prioritize understanding technology's implications for Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD) societies. Such work is important, because research shows that 80% of academic studies are conducted using participants from WEIRD societies, but only 12% of the world population falls into this category (Henrich et al 2010). These dual drivers of economics of participation and norms for research means valuable cultural contexts that could contribute to rich theories are lost (Davison and Martinsons 2016) and that we run the risk of a particular worldview being inscribed in how we study and design IT (Walsham 2005).

The Information Systems community responded in an overwhelming and positive manner to our call for participation. Our workshops, designed to screen and sharpen ideas, were oversubscribed, with 31 submissions and required recruiting additional faculty mentors. To our surprise, the number of actual submissions exceeded the number of workshop submissions, with 41 completed papers. Taken together, we screened and reviewed 50 distinct ideas and papers for the special issue.

Our review team of senior editors, purposefully constructed to represent people who identified from different parts of the IS community, along gender, geographic and intellectual fault lines screened the completed submissions and solicited at least two reviews per paper. Because timelines are tight for special issues, papers were then subject to at least three rounds of peer review before acceptance. Papers of high potential, that could not be improved through three rounds of review, were graciously moved to the regular peer review process. Please note, this is a departure from the JAIS SI tradition, and we are thankful to the EIC of JAIS for granting our authors this opportunity to share their ideas on this important topic.

Out of this rigorous screening and peer review process, our editorial team accepted six papers that span the breadth of topics considered in social inclusion research.

In “Principles to Facilitate Social Inclusion for Design-oriented Research,” Wass et al. develop principles for socially inclusive design-oriented research with marginalized groups. The research is grounded in an empirical investigation of a multi-year project that aimed to design IT-based solutions for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The study analyzes the design process of these solutions as individual cases, collecting primary data from various sources and examining it through the lens of three facets of social inclusion: self-determination, belongingness, and social capital.

Next, in "Is it Your Fault? Framing Social Media Inclusion and Exclusion Using Just World Theory," Petter and Giddens examine responses to harm-shared experiences on social media. While some support and include, others blame victims, exacerbating exclusion. This hits vulnerable groups harder, worsening inequalities. Informed by just world theory, the study introduces a theoretical framework to uncover reasons behind these responses, shedding light on social inclusion and exclusion dynamics. The research also proposes thought-provoking questions to stimulate future research on social media inclusion and exclusion.

Following this, in "The design of social inclusion interventions: A paradox approach," Curto-Millet and Canibano challenge the conventional view that social inclusion and exclusion are binary opposites. Their three-year ethnography of an open-source civic crowdsourcing platform, uncovers persistent tensions between these concepts, shaped by information systems (IS). Design choices, they argue, significantly influence IS interventions, determining their potential for inclusion or exclusion. Proposing a framework of four strategies, the authors address the complex relationship between inclusion and exclusion in IS design. This research reframes traditional perspectives and provides practical approaches for navigating this paradox within social inclusion interventions.

While many studies emphasize the positive aspects of digital financial inclusion, in "Social Fintech Platforms and Surveilled Inclusion," Siqueira et al. shift the focus to the surveillance phenomenon within microcredit agents' roles on digital financial platforms. This study introduces a "surveilled inclusion" model that reveals hidden motives of social fintech organizations using digital platforms for microcredit. The research also extends Zuboff's surveillance capitalism framework to implicate microcredit agents in perpetuating client entrapment through continuous payment and credit cycles.

In "Social Inclusion: The Use of Social Media and the Impact on First Generation Students," Gonzalez and Deng examine how higher education institutions are turning to social networking technologies to address retention and graduation challenges for first-generation college students. Drawing on a case study at a US Hispanic-serving institution, and guided by technology affordance theory, reveals different user types, actualized affordances, and generative mechanisms. The study illuminates technology's role in fostering engagement and combating exclusion among first-generation college students, contributing to wider social inclusion research involving technology and marginalized communities.

Finally, in “Technologies of Power in Digital Inclusion”. Pandey and Zheng go beyond the typical focus on technology access and adoption in communities, to offer a nuanced perspective of digital inclusion as a mix of empowerment and subjugation. Drawing on Foucault's insights

into subjectivity and power, their case study of rural Indian community health workers using an mHealth app reveals a complex dynamic. Health workers find themselves empowered and constrained as they navigate between enhancing their individual efficacy and complying with institutional power through the app. The study provides theoretical and practical insights for those interested in a deeper, practice-based understanding of digital inclusion.

Each paper contributes a valuable and distinct perspective to social inclusion research. We invite you to explore these papers, with the hope that they will inspire new viewpoints, methodologies, and theories to advance our understanding of how technology either enables participation or marginalizes individuals and groups in our increasingly digitalized world.

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SENIOR EDITORS[1]

Jaime B. Windeler (University of Cincinnati, windeljb@ucmail.uc.edu) is Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs and Associate Professor of Information Systems in the Carl H. Lindner College of Business. Jaime investigates distributed collaboration leadership, IT professionals, and workforce diversity and inclusion. Her research has been accepted for publication in *MIS Quarterly*, *Information Systems Research*, the *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, *Information Systems Journal*, *Production and Operations Management*, and the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, among others. She is an associate editor at the *Journal of the Association for Information Systems* and *MIS Quarterly*. Jaime was awarded the 2017 AIS Early Career Award.

Cathy Urquhart (Manchester Metropolitan University, c.urquhart@mmu.ac.uk) is Professor Emerita of Digital Business at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School, and visiting Professor at Lund University's Department of Informatics, Sweden. Cathy's expertise lies in using technology to address pressing social issues. Focused on ICTs and social media, her work addresses challenges like sustainable development and social justice. Cathy is the author of "Grounded Theory for Qualitative Research (Second Edition)," published by Sage, and has held editorial roles at various journals including the *Journal of the Association for Information Systems* and *MIS Quarterly*. Cathy is a Fellow of the Association of Information Systems.

Jason Thatcher (Temple University, jason.thatcher@temple.edu) holds the Milton F. Stauffer Professorship at Temple University's Fox School of Business. He is also a faculty member at the University of Manchester and an Ambassador for the Technical University of Munich. Jason is a Senior Editor at *Information Systems Research* and the *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, having previously served as Senior Editor at *MIS Quarterly*. He has published in Financial Times Top 50 journals approximately once a year since earning his Ph.D. Jason enjoys sharing dystopian adventures with his zombie teen, collecting oddities, and shagging the night away in the Carolinas.

Michelle Carter (University of Manchester, michelle.carter@manchester.ac.uk) is a Professor of Information Systems at the Alliance Manchester Business School. Michelle's research centers on IT's involvement in identity and social change, IT usage behaviors, and IS management. Her work has appeared in *MIS Quarterly*, the *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, the *European Journal of Information Systems*, and others. Michelle contributes as an associate editor for the *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, serves as an editorial review board member for *Information Systems Research*, and previously held the role of president of the AIS Special Interest Group on Social Inclusion.

Arlene Bailey (University of West Indies, arlene.bailey@uwimona.edu.jm) is a Senior Research Fellow at the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES), University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona. Arlene's research areas include information and communication technologies (ICTs) for development and social inclusion. Arlene currently serves as an Associate Editor for the *Information Technology for Development* journal and has previously served as an Associate Dean for Research, Vice Chair, Research for the AIS Special Interest

[1] Listed in reverse alphabetical order. The senior editors worked together as team to manage the special issue.

Group on ICTs and Global Development (SIG GlobDev), and Secretary, IFIP WG 9.4 on the Social Implications of Information and Digital Technologies for Development.