

Global dialogue on the ethics of digitalisation launched

18.08.2020

On the 17th of August, under the patronage of the Federal President of Germany, the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIG) launched a worldwide research project.

On the 17th of August German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier presided over the launch event of the two-year project “Ethics of digitalisation – from principles to practices”. The project by the [NoC \(Global Network of Internet and Society Research Centers\)](#) is coordinated by the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIG) and supported by Stiftung Mercator. In the course of the event, international experts from science, politics, civil society and business analysed ethical questions of digitalisation, including the use of artificial intelligence and algorithms.

What criteria should be applied when programming chatbots to ensure that they communicate in a non-discriminatory way? What rules do we need when programming AI so that it increases everyone’s well-being? How can we design the algorithms that shape our society by, for example, deciding what content is visible on social media channels? The project focuses on the social impact of digitalisation and aims to generate application-oriented and practice-focused results that are societally relevant.

German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier discussed these issues with Annette Schavan (Co-Chairperson of the German-Chinese Dialogue Forum), Wolfgang Rohe (Executive Director of Stiftung Mercator), Wolfgang Schulz (Research Director of HIIG and spokesperson of the European section of the NoC) and Sunimal Mendis (participant in the Ethics of Digitalisation fellow programme and Assistant Professor at the University of Tilburg).

Interdisciplinary and international research formats form the core of the project. Researchers from different disciplines are given the opportunity to work together on an interdisciplinary and international basis to develop answers to ethical questions concerning digitalisation. Furthermore, the innovative research formats give scientists the opportunity to communicate with each other and to network with high-ranking stakeholders from politics, business and society.

Dr. Wolfgang Rohe, Managing Director of Stiftung Mercator, says:

“The increasing use of algorithmic systems is fundamentally changing our society in all respects. The issue is, among other things, about how to preserve the foundations of democracy: individual and collective civil liberties, sovereignty, the revocability of decisions. This requires an informed public debate, a committed civil society and the development of proposals for political implementation. With this project, we would like to make a contribution to this.”

Coming together under the umbrella of the NoC (Global Network of Internet and Society Research Centers), the project partners include HIIG as the coordinating centre as well as the Leibniz Institute for Media Research | Hans Bredow Institute, the Berkman Klein Center at Harvard University and the Digital Asia Hub as project partners. German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier is the patron of the project. Stiftung Mercator is supporting the project over two years with around one million euros.

Source: Stiftung Mercator/ IDW Nachrichten

Editor 18.08.2020 by Mirjam Buse, VDI Technologiezentrum GmbH

Countries / organization: Germany, Global

Topic: Ethical Issues and Society, Information and Communications

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