EDITOR'S COMMENTS

A Time for Reflecting and Looking Forward

By: **Susan Brown, Editor-in-Chief**

The end of the calendar year is often a time to reflect on the past year and look ahead to the coming year. This issue of *MIS Quarterly* is well-aligned with that year-end perspective: While the impact award editorial looks back at a highly impactful paper and reflects on how the field has evolved since it was published, the special issue on digital technologies and social justice addresses socially relevant topics likely to be important well into the future.

Reflecting

In this issue, we celebrate the Davis-Dickson Impact Award winner from 2023. The award was established in honor of Professors Gordon Davis and Gary Dickson who played central roles in founding and leading *MISQ* for many years. Both Gordon and Gary were interested in work that would have a lasting impact. Thus, this award recognizes a paper published a decade ago that has had a significant and sustained scholarly impact, as shown by citations, by how it led to a change in thinking in the field, and by its prescience in identifying an issue that is important today. The paper should have a real or potential impact beyond academia, especially through how it influences the way our field engages in an important real-world domain. As part of the award process, the authors are invited to write an editorial reflecting on the paper in light of the state of research and practice today. The editor who accepted the paper is also invited to offer a reflection.

Last year's award recipient was "The Generative Mechanisms of Digital Infrastructure Evolution" by Henfridsson and Bygstad (2013). This paper examined the causes of digital infrastructure evolution. By taking a critical realist view, the authors identified the mechanisms that influence such evolution. The last decade has experienced a diversification in digital infrastructure that has only served to highlight the value of this paper. In their editorial in this issue, "Time for a Decentralization Journey of Digital Infrastructures? Reflections on the 2023 Impact Award," Henfridsson and Bygstad take us through the past decade to discuss the changes in the field of information systems and to offer a promising direction for future research in the area of distributed infrastructure. This reflection piece serves to further highlight the impact of their original work and its ongoing relevance to today's research.

Looking Forward

This issue also features a special issue on digital technologies and social justice, a topic of great importance today. In their introduction to the special issue, "Digital Technologies and the Advancement of Social Justice: A Framework and Agenda," Pang et al. clearly articulate the increased salience around social justice. This is a global phenomenon in which technology plays a key role. The global importance is highlighted in the curated case contribution in the special issue. The special issue editors have done an excellent job of providing an overview and background of social justice and explaining why it is not only relevant for *MISQ* today but also an important part of our future research landscape. I applaud the special issue editors for how they have curated an interesting and impactful set of papers and how their special issue introduction provides multiple avenues for future research.

As I reflect on this topic, I recall that it wasn't all that long ago that work like this would have had a hard time finding a home at *MISQ*, which began as a journal that would be "useful for the practitioner and at the same time appeal to those interested in theory and research" (Dickson 1977, p. iii). This focus on the practitioner made sense in the early days of the journal, as organizations were where computing took place. And, with a certain CEO famously saying, "There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in their home" (attributed to Ken Olsen, president of the Digital Equipment Corporation, 1977),

it seemed reasonable that computing would stay in organizations going forward. So, this emphasis continued for many years, as reflected in editorials across the decades. As McFarlan (1986, p. i) stated: "An important mission of the *MIS Quarterly* is the dissemination of research articles to shed light on the nature of these new applications and how they can help the firm." In 1999, Lee suggested that "the strength of the *Quarterly* (and its truly unique position among academic journals) has always been its meaningfulness to both academicians and practitioners" (p. v). In his opening editorial, Weber (2002, p. v) established a goal to "publish papers on a broader range of topics in the information systems field." He indicated that we should publish "papers on the full gamut of topics that command the attention of researchers in the information systems field. We will continue to keep a strong focus, however, on the managerial and organizational phenomena" (p. v). I recall going through the review process for our household adoption paper (Venkatesh & Brown 2001) and the review panel asking us to articulate the managerial relevance of understanding why people do and do not adopt technology for home use. Addressing that question was essential to publishing the work in *MISQ* in 2001. And the topic of that research demonstrated that computing was moving out of organizations and into society.

With each successive editor-in-chief, we have seen the base of methods and topics expand as *MISQ* becomes more and more of a big tent journal. Today, this openness to *any* research genre is well-understood in the discipline (Burton-Jones, 2023). We still strive to publish research that has both research and practical impacts. However, we have incorporated more research for which the practical impacts may be considered societal rather than managerial.

It seems fitting to end the year by publishing a special issue on social justice, since we began the year by publishing an *MISQ* curation on the societal impacts of ICTs (Krishnan et al., 2024). The curation identifies 71 articles in *MISQ* that have an overarching theme of societal implications. In the first 39 years of the journal, 25 papers were published that were considered to have addressed societal impacts. In 2016, *MISQ* published 14 papers in a special issue on ICT and societal challenges (see Majchrzak et al., 2016, for the special issue introduction). Since then, 32 papers classified as having societal impact have been published. Clearly, the number of submissions in this genre has increased in recent years. The curation identifies six themes across the papers: understanding socioeconomic inclusion, promoting health and well-being, caring for the environment, networking for social impact, developing underserved communities, and enhancing public management. The analysis demonstrates the shifting focus in the societal implications over the years. Most specifically, promoting health and well-being and networking for social impact have significantly increased in popularity in recent years.

As we look forward, the increased access to artificial intelligence (AI) applications presents multiple opportunities to pursue research across social impact themes. AI has the potential to level the playing field or further exacerbate differences from a socioeconomic perspective. We saw social media's potential to promote well-being when it connected people during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have also seen the potential for social media to have a negative impact on well-being in increased incidents of cyberbullying and fake news. Introducing AI into the equation has the potential to further enhance both the positive and negative impacts. In their introduction to the special issue on managing artificial intelligence, Berente et al. (2021) highlighted the ethical issues of AI, the abuse of which can have a significant impact on well-being. Further, Kane et al. (2021) discussed the potential for an oppressive future of machine learning (ML) due to the potential for increased monitoring. Kane et al. highlighted the evolution of ML and AI and its potential to have significant impacts for society in the future. An important element of how society evolves is associated with the justice elements embedded in the technology we deploy. And from an environmental perspective, when Microsoft reported a significant increase in water use associated with the launch of Open AI, it raised concerns regarding the environmental impact of AI (Singh 2023). The role of AI in the spread of misinformation and deepfakes on the internet has profound impacts on a myriad of social topics, not the least of which is our elections. And, as is typically the case, the law and governmental policies lag far behind the evolution of AI. There are multiple topics worth studying at the intersection of AI and societal impacts. AI is not the only digital technology for which these issues exist, it just happens to be the one most top of mind today.

In addition to topics obviously falling under the category of social justice, it is incumbent upon us to address the broader topic of digital responsibility. Every choice that is made regarding the use of advanced digital technologies carries with it significant outcomes. There are many areas where AI and other digital technologies can be of benefit to organizations and society more broadly. But we must also consider the unintended consequences of our technology choices. As the special issue on social justice points out, there are important tensions for us to consider. Just because AI *can* be used does not mean it *should* be used, and if it is used, we must consider both the positive and negative consequences in our research.

With the publication of this special issue, I would like to issue a continuing call for research that focuses on societal impact. Issues of social justice, sustainability, and overall digital responsibility are important topics in the future of information systems. As information systems scholars, we are extremely well-positioned to study and make an impact through our work in these areas. Our historical focus on practical issues positions us well to examine the evolution of work as it is influenced by the rapid changes in technology. Our discipline's understanding of technology at a deeper level, as well as its psychological, sociological, and economic aspects, more broadly positions us to continue our examination of the societal implications. *MISQ*'s emphasis on being a big tent journal extends to the research topics we study, and these topics of social impact and social justice are particularly important today and into the future.

Finally, I would like to thank the special issue editors and congratulate all the authors whose work appears in the special issue. Your papers have the potential for significant impact. This impact will likely not be fully captured through the citations to the work. I believe the impact will be felt at a deeper level as readers engage with the topics and connect either through their personal experiences or the experiences of those they know. This special issue has the potential to spawn even more work in the area of social justice, and I truly look forward to seeing it submitted to *MIS Quarterly*.

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Editorial Board Changes for 2024/2025

The following editors complete their terms on the *MISQ* editorial board in 2024. It has been a pleasure to work with them, if only for a short time. I want to thank them for their dedicated service and their significant contributions to authors and the field.

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The following editors join the board in 2025. I am excited to welcome these exceptional scholars to *MIS Quarterly*. I know they look forward to serving the community and providing excellent guidance to authors and reviewers.

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Awards

Each year, we offer awards for exceptional reviewing and editing and outstanding research. In 2024, we awarded the following scholars with *MISQ* awards. Congratulations to all.

Reviewer of the Year for 2023
Dominik Gutt, Erasmus University Rotterdam
Shu He, University of Florida
Hongchang Wang, University of Texas at Dallas

Outstanding Associate Editor for 2023
Jingjing Li, University of Virginia
Maha Shaikh, ESADE
Dezhi (Denny) Yin, University of South Florida

Paper of the Year for 2023
Pujol Priego, L. & Wareham, J. (2023). From bits to atoms: Open source hardware at CERN. *MIS Quarterly*, 47(2), 639-668.

Davis-Dickson Impact Award 2024
Kane, G. C., Alavi, M., Labianca, G. (J.), & Borgatti, S. P. (2014). What's different about social media networks? A framework and research agenda. *MIS Quarterly*, *38*(1), 274-304.