

## **‘Digital Economies of Disability’**

Call for papers for special issue of *Information, Communication & Society* (ICS)

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This special issue aims to bring together original research papers from a diversified range of disciplines in disability studies, media and communication studies, social policy research, economic anthropology, and sociology to explore pragmatic and innovative ways to provide and enable equal economic, social and political opportunities for people with disabilities, from a comparative framework. It seeks to examine the opportunities for economic participation of people with disabilities enabled by digital and social media technologies and their political and social implications on respective communities and societies.

It is known that digital economy is developing rapidly and unevenly worldwide. It heralds a transformative force in creating digital entrepreneurs and driving future economy. Digital entrepreneurship is seen as core to digital economy in that it can lead to economic growth, job creation, and social innovation. National governments, civil society organizations, and disability activists have considered digital technologies (represented by computers, the Internet, and smart phones) potentially useful in improving the life quality and life-chances for people with disabilities and in bringing about social inclusion for all people, particularly in health care, education, and employment.

Efforts have been made to remove barriers of access to technologies, skill trainings and acquisition that are friendly to users with disability. Assistant programs are also implemented to ease the financial burden to access and acquire these technologies by people with disabilities. However, access to technologies (digital inclusion) does not equate with social inclusion. There is a long way to go before digital technologies can successfully impact on the lives of people with disabilities, as suggested by Goggin and Newell (2003).

In the context of digital and networked world, we ask questions such as:

- Can digital inclusion lead to social inclusion, particularly for people with disabilities?
- What are the power structure, hierarchy, struggle, and appropriation implied in the rise of digital economy for and by disability?
- What can be done by people (with or without disabilities), governments, the private sector, and civil society organisations to address the structural barriers to social and economic inclusion (not just digital inclusion) by utilizing digital and networking technologies?
- Will digital economy and digital entrepreneurship present an opportunity to address social inequality and contradictions?

The current economic slowdown/crisis calls for innovative and pragmatic approaches to solve social problems, approaches that can strike a balance between economic and social development. Social entrepreneurship that leverage digital technologies to create opportunities to address social issues, for example, may offer a new pathway of employment and enablement for people with disabilities and other traditionally disadvantaged groups of people. Digital social entrepreneurs with disabilities and for disabilities are part of a bigger structure and a key stakeholder in the digital social economy.

Born of necessity, social economy has increasingly employed digital technologies and platforms to achieve efficiency, transparency, and optimum results in achieving social missions and social impact through economic activities. Will social economy for and of people with disabilities through digital means be an answer to tackle barriers for people with disability to be more actively members of society and enabling people to achieve collective social goals, and ultimately enhance social justice?

This special issue welcomes critical case analyses of digital economy by and for disability and its implications for digital and social inclusion for people with disabilities from all walks of life. It is hoped that this special issue will generate scholarly interests from a wide range of geographical and disciplinary areas to explore innovative approaches to and opportunities for people with disabilities to achieve agency, social recognition, economic security, and political participation, through enterprising and digital means.

## **Timeline**

Abstract submission: 31 July 2017. Please send a 500-word abstract and 100-word author bio to the 1<sup>st</sup>-named guest editor: Haiqing Yu (h.yu@unsw.edu.au)

Invitation to submit full papers: by mid-August 2017

Full paper submission: by 01 February 2018

Expected date of publication: January 2019