TRACK 8

ENGLISH VERSION

Weak Systems
Exploring bias, bugs and the vulnerability of digitization

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After two decades in which enthusiastic (if not ecstatic) visions of digitization have prevailed in the public sphere, the so-called *critical turn* has challenged the propensity of digital technologies to strengthen the mechanisms of protection of the individual and the democratic organization of contemporary societies. The Snowden case and the turmoil following the Cambridge Analytica controversy, for example, have inspired debates and discussions about Internet surveillance, the perils of the data economy and potential "weaponization" of social media platforms. The supposed "horizontal" architecture of the Web has been subverted by centralizing actors such as digital media corporations and national governments. Moreover, news about hacks, data breaches and systemic failures of digital platforms and devices have become topics of frequent media coverage.

Nevertheless, a systemic and articulated reflection on how different kinds of "vulnerabilities" in digital technologies impact directly or indirectly on individuals and social groups has not emerged yet. For instance, the literature about platforms manipulation, data hacks, bugs and bias in technological systems has just started providing insights about how technologies may actually raise serious democratic concerns and actually work against citizens' rights, needs and desires.

The track aims at filling this gap in the literature by gathering and putting in dialogue theoretical and empirical contributions from different fields of study (e.g., STS, media studies, journalism studies, Internet studies, history of technology). Contributions will focus on concepts such as "bug", "hacks" "error", "limit" and "bias" that characterize the vulnerability of those technologies which have penetrated or are penetrating contemporary societies, with direct or indirect effects on individuals and social behaviors.

Authors are asked to interrogate and analyze the following topics (the list is not exhaustive):

- Theoretical and empirical contributions on the concept of vulnerability in digital media and technology
- Errors and defects of digital platforms and their effects on privacy and data protection
- Defects and prejudices of e-voting systems and their effects

- Journalistic coverage of hacks, hackers, crackers, data breaches, cybercrime and other forms of cyber and digital threats.
- Theoretical and technological weakness and defects of the Web and the Internet (e.g. architecture, infrastructures)
- The vulnerability and defects of artificial intelligence
- Bugs and bias in machine learning and data-driven decision making
- Stories of bugs and engineering mistakes (e.g., millenium bug, the Galaxy-Note-7 case, accidental data breaches)
- Critical reflections on the vulnerability of overestimated theoretical concepts on digitization (e.g., "network society", "superintelligence", "collective intelligence")
- Weaponizations of digital platforms (such as Cambridge Analytica)
- Pop culture representations of technology bias, errors and vulnerabilities in TV series, novels and movies.