FUTURE LEADERS

The IIC's Future Leaders Competition, for members aged 35 and under, attracted a strong entry on the given topic of the sociology of technology. Here is a round-up of the runners-up – the winning entry is on page 30 of this issue

VARDHAN KAPOOR – FOCUS ON TECHNOLOGY FIRMS

The essay argues that a large portion of the challenges facing contemporary society stem from the intentional manipulation of emotion and fact in ways that would have been unthinkable, if not impossible, as little as a decade ago. There's a pivot away from the societal impact of technology towards the sociology of the technology industry itself, and a focus on two potential solutions: increased systems thinking in technology companies and shifting pressure on tech companies and their surrounding ecosystem to engage with more holistic, stakeholder-first, growth structures.

FAIZA SALEEM – WOMEN'S HEALTH IN ASEAN

This essay looks at women's health in the region covered by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and examines how growing technology uptake can play a role in improving health outcomes. The status of women and gender parity remain crucial concerns for the region. To close the gender gap and increase growth and productivity, women's health, education and employment outcomes need attention by governments, especially in ASEAN's developing economies.

MICHAEL KHOO – SOCIAL HABITS AND FAMILY TIME

While society has focused on the positive externalities of technology, maybe it is time to reflect on some of the negative externalities which threaten to disrupt family interactions. How often have we sat at a restaurant only to observe families in complete silence, with family members glued to their smartphones and ignoring each other? It may seem irrational to try to think of policies or regulations to improve personal behaviour, but the erosion of sociability warrants targeted prevention.

STEFANO DE LUCA – TRUST THROUGH BIG DATA

While big data has been the key tool in the private sector to adapt to the new economic challenges, it is still largely unused in the public sector despite the growing economic constraints. This paper shows concrete and successful cases of big data use by governments and offers inspiration for how big data can play a significant role in reducing public administration costs and in increasing public service performance in the EU. By tackling the privacy risks, big data might be one of the tools to rebuild EU citizens' trust in the efficiency of public institutions.

Entrants were asked to provide a digital report or multimedia presentation on the subject of the sociology of technology. Tim Hogg, consultant at Oxera, was the winner, and gave a presentation on holistic consumer outcomes at the IIC's annual conference in Mexico City. The judges were Derek Wilding (University of Technology, Sydney), David Fares (21st Century Fox), Robert Pepper (Facebook), Steve Simpson (former commissioner at the CRTC, Canada), and Andrea Millwood Hargrave (IIC director general).

MARK DATYSGELD – NO NEUTRAL GROUND

When the subject of contemporary technology is discussed, there are arguments which have become so commonplace that they are close to reaching the status of mantras. A position that stands out is the claim that there is an inherent neutrality to most technologies. What this overlooks is the fact that technology derives from a process of creation, which is informed directly and indirectly by the social and cultural structures that surround it. Once technology exists and is given a purpose, it then shapes the interactions and culture.

TAISHA GRACE ANTONY – POLITICAL PROPAGANDA

This paper examines the role of computational propaganda, particularly the use of technology to influence electoral outcomes. It also explores some of the potential solutions to this threat, including regulatory measures that have been attempted in some countries.

JULIA JASINSKA – ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND WELFARE

The balance of AI's impact on society can be tilted towards welfare and benefits, but it requires sound policy actions. Governments now have an opportunity to steer AI development towards solving big societal challenges and to employ AI to increase our welfare. When doing so, they should not forget AI's dark side: any AI policy should include programmes aimed at mitigating AI's potential negative consequences.

SAGARIKA SENAPATY AND EVELYN OOI-WIDJAJA – AI AND ETHICS

The use of AI technology can be subject to bias, but at the same time can be used to overcome human judgement by eliminating emotions from a situation, hence policymakers will need to strike a balance between protecting citizens' interests and encouraging technological innovation.

CLAIRE BARRACLOUGH – LOVE ISLAND, A CASE STUDY

The television series Love Island, very popular in recent years, illustrates key changes that technology has had on society, including online echo chambers, moving the boundaries of what is acceptable speech, and how society is more open to behavioural manipulation.

RYHAN MOHD YAZID – CROSSING BORDERS

Technology has empowered people from different cultures to come together, while at the same time working with their peers from the same ethnic or cultural background to maintain and preserve the traditions of earlier generations. Striking a balance between the two, without causing both worlds to collide, is achievable but requires much more than just optimism.