



Digital Anthropology Open Design Challenge - Challenge Framing

## Digital Anthropology Addressing Discrimination and Gender Bias Online

The augmented capacities for cultural exchange and massive decentralized online communication derived from Artificial Intelligence and Big Data have reshaped and amplified the ability to produce and perpetuate stereotypes and false narratives against marginalized and discriminated groups, leading to exclusion and violence. While the historical impact of discriminatory and biased content has existed for as long as there were people to create and spread them, online discrimination has reached new and critical levels. The speed and scale of the proliferation of discriminatory and hateful content shared by active digital communities on social media have raised unprecedented challenges for our societies as governments struggle to enforce their national anti-discrimination laws and Big Tech companies take insufficient content moderation measures. In the words of António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, “*Social media provides a global megaphone for hate*”<sup>1</sup>

The issue of online discrimination sits at the intersection of multiple global challenges addressed by UNESCO SHS. Fairness and non-discrimination are principles defined in the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and relevant topics across its policy areas<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the problem of online discrimination is closely related to UNESCO's global priority on gender equality, as women belonging to minority groups are disproportionately subjected to discriminatory actions, such as hate speech<sup>3</sup>.

Groups regularly targeted for online discrimination through the spread of prejudice and false narratives include national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, migrants and refugees, women and the LGBTQI+ community.

### Contribution of Digital Anthropology to Address Discrimination Online

Digital anthropology is well positioned to contribute to the fight against online discrimination, drawing on the tradition of anthropology to delve into human communication processes, and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233231?posInSet=6&queryId=bf013c44-801e-4bf7-8a3e-d0d140f6f377>

<sup>2</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381137>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2021/03/report-online-hate-increasing-against-minorities-says-expert>

relevant digital anthropologists and Labs have researched the specific issue in great depth in the past few years. From an anthropological perspective, communication is a ritual that plays a fundamental role in representing shared beliefs. Digital Anthropology methods can support the early detection of discriminatory social behaviors and discourse. In addition, insights from anthropological studies allow us to delve into the factors that lead to the construction of online discrimination, false narratives and prejudice.

## Challenge Framing

Design Challenge will produce digital anthropology methods for the early identification of discrimination in social media, and the definition and understanding of the social and cultural patterns that drive it. For this purpose, teams of anthropologist and data science will tackle discrimination observing the process of sharing online content dissemination as a ritual of representation of shared beliefs.

The following Challenge Statements aim to explore this objective, using real data from social media:

1. How might we use Digital Anthropology methods for the early identification of online discrimination?
2. How might we use Digital Anthropology methods to understand the causes and implications of online violence against Women and LGBTQI+<sup>4</sup>?
3. How might we use Digital Anthropology methods to identify and prevent the spread of stereotypes and false narratives about women migrants and refugees<sup>5</sup>?

Some of the characteristics we look for in solutions are:

1. Potential application in problem-solving and decision-making.
2. Speed and depth of the results obtained in rapidly changing contexts.
3. Innovative ways in which "thick" and "big" data are used and combined.
4. Accessibility and adaptability of the methods to different cultural and material contexts.
5. Sound social and anthropological theories.
6. Ethical contributions to data privacy, online discrimination, digital surveillance, ethical algorithms, public opinion formation, and disinformation.
7. Use a real example in an online context, using actual data.

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<sup>4</sup> According to UN Women, online abuse against women has intensified, alongside a rise in offline domestic violence. LGBTI youth are five times more likely to attempt suicide compared to heterosexual youth, with social media amplifying hateful and dragging youth into isolation, depression and suicidal thoughts <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/09/1047322>

<sup>5</sup> As extremist groups, politicians, and news agencies, fuel hate speech against migrants and refugees to serve their populist agenda, acts of intimidation and violence have spiked and disinformation has intensified, especially in times of pandemic.