PhD Position in Social Computing and Algorithm Auditing, 4 years

The Social Computing Group led by Prof. Hannak focuses on how digitization affects people and society, especially problems that arise in automated decision-making. In the quickly changing online ecosystem of online platforms, companies track users' every move and feed the collected data into big data algorithms in order to match them with the most interesting, most relevant content. Since these algorithms learn from human data they are likely to pick up on social biases and unintentionally reinforce them. Our projects focus on both uncovering the problems imposed by these large algorithmic systems and also on coming up with mitigation strategies and policy recommendations.

Your responsibilities

You will work on a project investigating the way novel search engine page elements such as featured snippets or knowledge panels work and how they affect users' knowledge gathering and opinion formation processes. This position is centered on the examination of web search as a system using computational techniques. You will address questions such as how personalization works across different types of search results, and how the quality of information varies across contexts.

Your profile

- You have a Master's degree and a background in Computer Science
- You have strong skills in programming, experience with web scraping and cloud computing is a plus
- Knowledge of statistics is a big plus
- Understanding of basic principles of algorithm auditing is a plus
- You have strong interest in the impact of information technology on individuals and society
- You are creative, highly motivated and a team player
- You are committed to driving your own project and to actively contributing to an inspiring scientific environment
- You have an excellent command of English; working knowledge of at least one of the national languages of Switzerland is a plus.

What we offer

- Four-year PhD funding, the salary is in accordance with the regulations of the Swiss National Science Foundation

- Excellent research conditions (including access to state-of-the-art equipment, infrastructure, and shared facilities) in Zurich
- Working with a diverse international and interdisciplinary team of researchers in an inclusive environment. Currently, the research group consists of 10 researchers with backgrounds ranging from mathematics and computer science to psychology and communication science.
- Option to apply for the DSI PhD Excellence Program

Place of work

Andreasstrasse 15, Zurich

Start of employment

Expected starting date is 01.01.2024, however it can be slightly modified upon mutual consent. Please submit your complete application (CV, motivation letter, an academic writing sample (e.g., (a chapter from) a Master's thesis or a term paper), 2 letters of reference or names of 2 potential referees compiled in a single pdf file) by email to Prof. Dr. Aniko Hannak (hannak@ifi.uzh.ch) and Dr. Aleksandra Urman (urman@ifi.uzh.ch). We will be accepting the applications on a rolling basis until the position is filled. We will start reviewing the applications on 15.10.2023. The interviews will take place in the fall 2023.