

Humanities Initiative (HI) Annual Symposium on “*Digital Inequalities and the Question of Global South*”

Department of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), IIIT Delhi

28-29th August 2025

Based on the insights received at the 2024 Humanities Initiative (HI) collaborative roundtable discussion hosted at IIIT Delhi with distinguished faculty members and past participants, Academic Writing Lab (AWL) is happy to announce the theme of the 2025 symposium as “**Digital Inequalities and the Question of Global South**”

The term ‘global south’ was coined in 1969 by American writer Carl Ogelby. He was an active scholar in the anti-war movement in the United States, who used the term while writing about the Vietnam War, to show how northern “dominance over the global south” produced an unequal social order. Subsequently, the 1980s Brandt Report, which introduced the “Brandt Line” introduced a visual division of the world into a “North-South divide,” based on economic development and wealth disparities, dividing the wealthy, industrialized North from the South.

However, the concept of the global south transcends mere geography; it is fundamentally geopolitical, rooted in power dynamics and historical contexts rather than physical location. In contemporary society, while the term serves as a powerful rhetorical tool to highlight global inequalities and a descriptor of post-colonial and developing country solidarity, it also presents critical conceptual and practical challenges. The term invites a plethora of complex insights into the geopolitical orientation of its construct with political labels evolving in response to changing realities, insights, and sensibilities. Given the ubiquitous use of the term Global South, it is important to conceptualize and theorize this term. Is it a geographical, spatial, or normative term?

We live in a world where digital transformation is underway globally, which is rapidly changing how we live and work. This brings its own set of challenges. In 2015, the United Nations established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to provide a framework for addressing research and social needs aimed at fostering equity and sustainable growth in society. The emergence of digital technologies presents a promising opportunity to support and drive progress toward all 17 SDGs.

In discussions about digital transformations, the Global South often becomes a catch-all for issues like access, governance, and innovation. However, the Global South, however, presents a complex paradox. On one side, rapid technological advancements promote economic growth, enhance communication and information access, and support democratic initiatives. Conversely, not everyone benefits from these digital technologies, and increasing digital inequalities obstruct economic and social development, deepening existing disparities.

This Call for Papers (CFP) invites papers that highlight the complex nature of the digital divide, particularly in terms of the quality of internet usage. The true divide is reflected not only in access to digital technologies but also in the intensity and form of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) utilization. Context plays a critical role in this discussion, as the extent and quality of internet access vary across communities that experience unique forms of social and economic exclusion—factors that exacerbate the digital divide. While social media has expanded opportunities for free expression and diversified communication in impoverished societies, the intertwined issues of democratic and social disparities have hindered the establishment of a public sphere grounded in rational and critical debate. The democratic divide refers to the gap between those who effectively use digital resources to engage in public life and those who are unable to do so. Given these complexities, the following questions naturally arise:

1. Has the democratization of access to digital platforms compromised by persistent issues of the democratic and literacy divides?
2. Are marginalized communities in the Global South fully capitalizing on these opportunities?
3. Who truly benefits from the advances in digital technology?
4. How do the infrastructures of knowledge production, along with their associated norms and agendas, shape our understanding of the world?
5. How do we define "Global South" in the digital era? What distinguishes "Global South 2.0"?
6. How does digital inequality manifest ideologically, empirically, and normatively?
7. How does the digital sphere reshape activism and state accountability?
8. What are the challenges of public infrastructure investment in digital technologies?
9. What does it mean to theorize technology in the global south?
10. What kind of frameworks or theoretical approaches are helpful in capturing the intricacies and challenges of this theorizations?
11. How does it differ from or align with existing theoretical framework of decolonization or postcolonialism?
12. What are the specific approaches required to understand the disruptions of technology in India?

We welcome abstracts addressing any of the above themes or related areas. Submissions may include original research, theoretical contributions, case studies, or critical analyses. Selected papers will be accepted for oral presentations in Graduate Students' Panels based on the thematic clusters (to be decided after the blind review process). Additionally, there will be specific panels on certain themes, including papers whose topics closely align with them.

We encourage creative approaches to investigating digital and social inequalities in the Global South. The need to address the crisis of digital inequality emerges from the anticipation that if these issues remain unaddressed, they may delay or even deter the progress toward realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Join us in shaping the discourse on digital transformation and equity in the Global South. Let's explore emerging inequalities and develop a collaborative intellectual foundation.

Those interested in participating are invited to submit a **500 word** abstract for a 30-minute slot (20 minutes presentation and 10 minutes discussion) by **July 15, 2025**. Notification of acceptance will be sent out tentatively by **July 30, 2025**. Please send your proposal as an attachment prepared for blind review to awl@iiitd.ac.in.

