

## **JOB OFFER**

**Position:** Postdoctoral Fellow

**Institution:** UOC – Universitat Oberta de Catalunya / Open University of Catalonia

**Research group:** CNSC – Communication Networks & Social Change

**Supervisor:** Ass. Prof. Mireia Fernández-Ardèvol

**Duration:** 1 Year, non-renewable

**Annual Salary:** 30,000 € gross

### **Program description**

**Aging in Data** is an interdisciplinary and multi-methodological research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada (ref.: 895-2021-1020) to investigate aging in an era of unprecedented digital data-gathering. The AiD research team spans a dozen countries and brings together researchers and organizations that see age as more than a number or a variable; age provides a lens to reflect upon an increasingly data-driven world.

The selected candidate will develop their proposed research project within the **Digital Paradoxes research program**. The Postdoctoral Fellow will be based in Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain) at the Open University of Catalonia/Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (*Campus UOC*). They will join the Communication Networks & Social Change (CNSC) research group, part of the IN3 research institute, and the Faculty of Communication.

The principal location will be the *Campus UOC* in Poblenou, Barcelona (Rambla del Poblenou 156), with agreed teleworking of a maximum of 2 days per week. For legal reasons, it is essential to reside in Spain and hold a valid work permit.

### **Academic qualifications required**

- PhD in Communication Studies or related areas.  
The candidate must have completed their doctoral after Jan. 1, 2020.  
Applications from students who are due to defend their doctoral thesis in the coming months (thesis submitted and awaiting defense) are also welcome.

### **Eligibility requirements**

- The candidate must not hold a permanent faculty position or a faculty position leading to permanency;
- The candidate must not hold another full-time postdoctoral position at the same time;
- The candidate must be eligible to be legally hired and paid in Spain;
- The candidate must reside within a reasonable distance of the institution, preferably in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (this position requires a minimum of 3 days per week of presence);
- The candidate must be proficient in oral and written English and have working skills in Catalan or Spanish.

In addition, the following aspects will be positively assessed:

- Background in research in the field of critical studies on data-driven technologies.
- Experience in fields relevant to the research project.

- Skills to conduct qualitative and quantitative research (including using appropriate software).
- The candidate must be competent in working in an international and interdisciplinary research team in a coordinated, collaborative way and in an innovative research environment.
- The candidate must have a proactive attitude, the ability to contribute significantly to the domain, and leadership capacity.

Responsibilities:

- Lead and development of the research agenda designed for the position.
- Publication of papers and participation in academic conferences.
- Knowledge sharing (knowledge mobilization) with AiD, academia, the general public, communities of older adults and policymakers.
- Proactive involvement in relevant AiD activities.
- Regular involvement in and contribution to activities of the CNSC research group, the research institute/unit and the Faculty of Communication Studies.

### **Timeline and procedure**

All documents listed below must be sent in a single message to Mr. Samuel Thulin ([samuel.thulin@concordia.ca](mailto:samuel.thulin@concordia.ca)) by **February 25, 2025**, with the subject line **"AiD Postdoctoral Fellowship."**

The successful candidate will be awarded a post-doctoral full-time contract for a period of 12 months, starting as soon as possible.

### **Submission process**

The candidate must submit the following documents:

- **Five-page research statement** demonstrating fit with the "Digital Paradoxes" research program (see below).
- **One-page knowledge mobilization plan.**
- **Current curriculum vitae** demonstrating research excellence, potential for significant contributions to the domain and a capacity for leadership (**maximum 5 pages**).
- **Two letters of reference** from academic supervisors or employers. These must be sent directly by the referees to [samuel.thulin@concordia.ca](mailto:samuel.thulin@concordia.ca) with the subject line **"Reference Letter – [Candidate's Name] – AiD Postdoctoral Fellowship"** by February 28, 2025.

## [Research program] **Digital paradoxes**

Exploring the disconnection between digital practices and digital concerns when facing data-driven surveillance. An analysis from the perspective of the older population

Hyper-digitization has given rise to an enormous increase in the volume and variety of digital data people generate in everyday life, and **unprecedented forms of data-driven surveillance have emerged**. In many cases, they affect the whole population without distinction (e.g., facial recognition systems in public spaces or personalized advertising in social media). However, they can have particularly harmful effects on disadvantaged and marginalized social groups. Beyond racialized people, women or immigrants, **older people have become in the spotlight of new data-driven surveillance technologies** in the last decade, especially for care purposes (e.g., Berridge & Fox, 2020).<sup>i</sup> However, the research on this technological shift has **understudied** how older people's lives and fundamental rights are affected.

There is an **increasing concern about surveillance**. Despite this concern, research results often highlight that, **paradoxically, people's digital practices do not correspond to these concerns**. A paradigmatic example is the so-called **privacy paradox** (e.g., Barth & de Jong, 2017).<sup>ii</sup> It refers to individuals aware of how their privacy is undermined—due to massive datafication and surveillance—who maintain a positive attitude towards privacy-protection practices but rarely show digital protective practices. For example, they do not reduce—or stop using—digital services to enhance their privacy.

Studies seeking to explain the privacy paradox usually stem from the assumption that people's digital practices respond to a **calculation of the perceived risks and benefits** at the individual level, ultimately leading to **paradoxical results in favor of non-protective practices** (Bart & de Jong, 2017). However, other authors (e.g., Hargittai & Marwick)<sup>iii</sup> consider the **origin of paradoxical digital** practices not at the individual level but at the structural one. That means that **structural factors**, including digital impositions, **hinder citizens' capacity** (even more, citizens in disadvantaged conditions) to behave as they would like (or would need) to, in line with their concerns, knowledge, emotions or attitudes. Under such a perspective, several questions arise regarding the causes of digital paradoxes. Are they the result of unawareness, conformity, irresponsibility or irrationality? Or are structural factors hindering individuals' capacity to protect themselves from surveillance, even if they want to do so?

Another crucial question is: How can this new form of data-driven surveillance be conceptualized to prompt accurate analysis and interpretations of the causes of digital paradoxes? Of relevance is to analyze who has the **power** to surveil whom and why? Moreover, who has/lacks the capacity/agency to **control** a given power of surveillance affecting their life and why? Here, *why* means: What are the individual and structural factors that give individuals the power to interfere in the lives of others through surveillance without the surveilled agents being able to control such power?

### **Aim and objectives**

The main **aim** of this research program is **to explain the causes of the disconnection between digital practices and concerns (digital paradoxes) at the individual and structural levels in the case of data-driven massive surveillance from the older people's perspective**. It will contribute to a **better understanding** of the causes and effects of digital paradoxes, **advance theorizing** about the phenomenon, and **identify strategies** to address the issue affecting not only older people but the whole society. Therefore, the research will advance specialized and innovative knowledge in the intersection of aging studies on one side and surveillance and critical data studies on the other.

The **specific research objectives (O)** are:

- O1.** To detect and explain the main individual and structural factors causing digital paradoxes among older people.
- O2.** To critically analyze how these individual and structural factors affect society, in general, and older people's lives and rights, in particular.
- O3.** To engage with and deepen current social and academic discussions on data-driven surveillance and its effects from both inside and outside the AiD network by critically discussing research results from the lens of the theories of datafication, power and freedom and their relation with digital divides.
- O4.** To create recommendations to address the causes and (potential) harmful effects of digital paradoxes around data-driven surveillance to move towards a fairer, more inclusive society that overcomes ageism.

The research agenda considers old age (and aging) not simply a variable, but a critical experiential lens to examine datafication and fits within the AiD mandate to study research questions at the intersection of data and aging.

### **Methodological approach**

**This research agenda proposes complementing the study of individual factors with a structural perspective** on the causes and effects of digital paradoxes under surveillance in the older population. To do so, the research program draws on a **mixed methods approach** combining qualitative and quantitative **data analysis on older digital practices, concerns, attitudes, emotions and knowledge** regarding data-driven surveillance. Results will be **analyzed and discussed in light of the power imbalances in our societies** to help **design and develop public policies** to address the causes and (potential) harmful effects of digital paradoxes in the case of data-driven surveillance.

The postdoctoral fellow is invited to consider the following two elements in defining their own research proposal.

### **Quantitative study**

An analysis of the digital paradoxes based on the [AiD's cross-national study: Older Adults' Perceptions of ICT-based Surveillance](#). The survey consists of 3,030 responses from Austria, Canada, Israel, Romania, Spain and The Netherlands collected in late 2023 (see Nimrod, 2023).<sup>iv</sup> Targeting older individuals (60+), it focuses on the individual level. It gathers information on the participants' digital practices, awareness of data-driven surveillance and related practices to overcome its effects in the digital sphere.<sup>v</sup>

### **Qualitative case study**

A classical qualitative case study will analyze the causes of digital paradoxes from both the individual and the structural perspectives, a necessary approach to complement the survey results. Participants will be older adults (60 years and above) living in the countries linked to the AiD survey. The data collection instrument should prioritize interviews or focus groups.

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<sup>i</sup> Berridge, C., Fox Wetle, T. (2020). Why older adults and their children disagree about in-home surveillance technology, sensors, and tracking. *The Gerontologist*, 60(5), 926–934. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnz068>.

<sup>ii</sup> Barth, S.; de Jong, M. D.T. (2017). The privacy paradox – Investigating discrepancies between expressed privacy concerns and actual online behavior – A systematic literature review, *Telematics and Informatics* 34, 1038–1058. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2017.04.013>.

<sup>iii</sup> Hargittai, E.; Marwick, A. (2016). "What Can I Really Do?" Explaining the Privacy Paradox with Online Apathy, *International Journal of Communication*, 10(2016): 3737-3757. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/4655/1738>.

<sup>iv</sup> Nimrod, G. (2023): Older adults' perceptions of ICT-based surveillance: The Ageing in Data (AiD) cross-national study. A descriptive report. Available at: <https://agingindata.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/AiD-Surveillance-Study-Descriptive-report.pdf>. Last accessed: October 2024.

<sup>v</sup> A first round of analysis has already been conducted (publication under review) although not all the analyses are exhausted.