



KONINKLIJKE
HOLLANDSCHE MAATSCHAPPIJ
DER WETENSCHAPPEN

Jury report

Thesis Prizes Responsible Internet 2023

We now come to two prizes for master theses ‘Responsible internet’. ‘Internet’: the worldwide networks of computers that support many essential processes in our time. ‘Responsible’: The internet is not just a technological sphere. It is a sphere of human responsibility. We have to take care of the internet, in two ways. We are responsible for its continued functioning. And we have to make responsible use of the internet. It is a powerful sphere, but also vulnerable. And as a human sphere, it is open to abuse. It can be used for surveillance by the state or other big actors, but also be used by those who avoid or oppose such surveillance.

Before presenting to you the winning prizes, we want to thank the sponsors, the SIDN Fund, Freedom Internet and Mijndomein for making these prizes possible. The SIDN fund supports projects that contribute to a stronger, safer internet, skilled internet users and valuable initiatives for our society. The fund has been created by the foundation that handles domain name registrations in the Netherlands.

The jury received seventeen nominations of good quality. One third regarded master theses by students in programs that focused on technological issues, cybersecurity and the like. One third came from law programs that address issues such as governance and consumer protection. And one third came from programs that focus on social and cultural issues.

2e prize: Yan Cong MA, University of Amsterdam

Anonymous dissent outside the motherland: Transnational activism on Instagram among overseas Chinese

The jury decided to award the second prize, of 1,000 euro, to the thesis “Anonymous dissent outside the motherland. Transnational activism on Instagram among overseas Chinese” by Mrs. Yan Cong, a thesis in the Research Master Media Studies of the University of Amsterdam. By focusing on the bottom-up practices of a specific group of users of the internet, this thesis makes clear how humans can make good use of the internet, sharing information on issues of great concern, in this case during the Covid pandemic in China, while seeking to avoid censorship. The thesis is well written, rooted in personal experience but transcending that, and very timely.

1e prize: Max van der Horst MSc, University of Amsterdam

Global Vulnerability Vigilance: Timely Disaster Notification using Internet-Scale Coordinated Vulnerability Disclosure

The first prize, of 2,000 euro, is awarded to the thesis “Global Vulnerability Vigilance: Timely Disaster Notification using Internet-Scale Coordinated Vulnerability Disclosure” by Max van der Horst. It served as his final thesis in the Master program Security and Network Engineering, also at the University of Amsterdam. This may appear to be on the technological



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side of issues, but it actually is also about humans. Max is an active participant in the Dutch Institute for Vulnerability Disclosure, the DIVD, which one might characterize as ‘ethical hackers’, as people who seek to uncover vulnerabilities and disclose those, so that users may update their systems and protect these against criminal attacks and other forms of abuse. The challenge is not merely to find glitches in the software, in the technology. It is at least as challenging to make sure that end-users follow up on warnings about vulnerabilities. Human inaction is central to this thesis. Based on theoretical analysis and personal involvement, the author proposes improvements to the way end-users are addressed. The jury was impressed by the quality of this thesis, the urgency of its topic and the constructive approach towards addressing the issues.

The human dimension of ‘responsible internet’ is not necessarily about crunching ‘big data’; qualitative methods can lead to an illuminating analysis. Both winners approach the challenging world of internet as participants but also as young scholars, with passion. The jury congratulates them as most worthy winners of the 2023 Master Thesis Prizes Responsible Internet.

Drs. I.C. (Inge) Bryan, bestuurslid KHMW, (voormalig) managing director Fox-IT, lid raad van advies Politieacademie, lid raad van advies Nationaal Archief, lid raad van advies The Hague Security Delta, oud-Public Policy Leader en Partner Cyber Risk Services Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Ltd.

Prof. dr. L.M. (Lisa) Herzog, hoogleraar politieke filosofie en decaan Faculteit Wijsbegeerte Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

Prof. dr. C.H. (Claes) de Vreese, universiteitshoogleraar Artificial Intelligence and Society Universiteit van Amsterdam, hoogleraar politieke communicatie Universiteit van Amsterdam

The meeting of the jury took place in Zoom on October 25th, 2023, was chaired by KHMW-social member Mr. M.B. (Michiel) Kramer and was also attended by Prof. dr. W.B. (Wim) Drees, Board member and Academic secretary for the social sciences and humanities KHMW.