Accelerating Innovation and Strengthening Digital in the BILETA 2025 Special Edition Editorial

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This special edition of the *International Review of Law, Computers & Technology* showcases insightful scholarship arising from the 40th Annual BILETA Conference 2025, organised by Dr Aysem Diker Vanberg, Senior Lecturer in Law at Goldsmiths, University of London, together with her departmental colleagues and with the support of members of the BILETA Executive Committee.

The conference was held at Goldsmiths from **2 to 4 April 2025** and, in keeping with BILETA's enduring tradition, served as a vital forum for academics, researchers, practitioners, and postgraduate students engaged with the evolving relationship between law, technology, and society. Bringing together over 120 participants from across the globe in a hybrid format, the conference facilitated rich intellectual exchange both in person and online, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue on some of the most pressing legal and societal questions of our time. The event was further supported by students enrolled in Dr Diker Vanberg's *AI, Disruptive Technologies and the Law* module, whose contribution played an important role in sustaining the collaborative and inclusive ethos of the conference and ensuring the smooth running of the event.

The central theme of the 2025 conference, *"Accelerating Innovation and Strengthening Digital Governance,"* reflects the growing urgency of addressing the challenges posed by rapid technological development within an increasingly complex regulatory landscape, while preserving the innovative character of digital markets. As advances in artificial intelligence, digital platforms, and data-driven technologies continue to reshape economic, social, and institutional structures, questions of governance and accountability have become increasingly prominent. While technological innovation promises efficiency and growth, it simultaneously raises profound concerns relating to market power, sustainability, and the protection of fundamental rights.

The contributions in this special edition collectively engage with the evolving challenges of digital governance in an era of rapid technological transformation. A unifying theme across the volume is the growing tension between innovation and regulation, as legal frameworks and institutions struggle to keep pace with the dynamics of data-driven markets and platform-based ecosystems. Several contributions highlight the fragmented and often conflicting nature of contemporary regulatory regimes, particularly in the interaction between data protection, competition law, and platform regulation. At the same time, the papers critically interrogate the increasing reliance on mechanisms such as transparency and risk assessment, questioning whether these mechanisms genuinely enhance accountability or merely create the appearance of it. Fundamental rights emerge as a central concern throughout, with contributions examining the delicate balance between privacy, freedom of expression, and the public interest in innovation and research.

The first paper, by **Edoardo Celeste, Alba Perez, Michael Rioux and Goran Dominioni,** entitled *'Defining a Blueprint for Sustainable Academic Conferences: Lessons Learned from the BILETA Annual Conference 2024'*, offers a timely and important contribution to the

growing literature on the sustainability of academic practices, using the BILETA 2024 conference held in Dublin as an empirical case study. Moving beyond abstract discussions of "green conferencing," the paper develops a structured and practical framework for organising environmentally responsible academic events. Drawing on mixed methods, including qualitative interviews with participants and quantitative assessments of carbon emissions, the authors critically evaluate the environmental impact of traditional in-person conferences while also acknowledging the limitations of fully virtual formats in fostering meaningful academic engagement and community-building. The proposed "blueprint" distinguishes between the roles and responsibilities of host institutions, conference organisers, and participants, thereby highlighting the multi-layered nature of sustainability in academic settings. In doing so, the paper not only addresses a clear gap in the literature but also provides actionable guidance for institutions and organisers seeking to reconcile the benefits of academic exchange with the imperative of environmental responsibility.

The second paper, by **Patricia de Moraes Paisani Matthey Claudet,** entitled *'Pay or Consent to Have Your Data Used – The Complex Intersection Between the DMA and Data Protection Rules'*, provides a sophisticated analysis of the complex and often uneasy interaction between the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), focusing on the central concept of user consent in data-driven business models. Through a detailed examination of the European Commission's assessment of Meta's "pay or consent" model, the paper demonstrates how the incorporation of data protection principles into a competition law framework can generate significant tensions. In particular, it argues that the Commission's reliance on data protection assumptions risks overlooking the economic realities of digital markets, leading to regulatory overreach and the design of remedies that may ultimately undermine the DMA's objectives of contestability and fairness. By unpacking the differing logics underpinning data protection and competition law, the contribution sheds light on the broader challenges of coordinating overlapping regulatory regimes in the governance of digital platforms and calls for a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach to enforcement.

The third paper, by **Roxanne Meilak Borg and Mireille M. Sant**, entitled *'Data Scraping for Scientific Research Purposes: Legal Bases under the GDPR'*, provides a timely examination of one of the most contested practices underpinning contemporary data-driven research. Focusing on publicly available online data, the article analyses the extent to which data scraping for scientific research carried out in the public interest may be lawfully conducted under the GDPR. Through a doctrinal and comparative assessment of the legal bases under Article 6(1) and the derogations under Article 9(2), the authors demonstrate that the current framework does not readily provide a clear legal basis for such processing. The contribution highlights the limitations associated with reliance on consent, legitimate interests, and public interest grounds, and examines the uncertain role of mechanisms such as further processing and academic expression. By situating these findings within the broader regulatory landscape, the paper identifies a structural tension within EU data protection law, whereby scientific research is recognised in principle but not fully accommodated in practice. It concludes by advocating sector-specific legislative frameworks to reconcile data protection with scientific progress.

The fourth paper by **Te-Ying Chen** titled, '*The Evolution of UK Online Governance: An Examination of the Compatibility of the Risk Assessment Model within the ECHR'* moves in a different direction and takes discussions into the online safety realm more firmly. It provides a critical reflection on the UK's Online Safety Act, questioning whether the risk assessment regime it has introduced really provides a structured approach to intermediary liability, or

otherwise. Through a doctrinal assessment of the legal interpretations of human rights jurisprudence within the European Court of Human Rights relating to Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Chen assesses the compatibility of the OSA regime with fundamental rights protections against the backdrop of risk assessments. Positioning the assessment within a human rights framework offers a checkpoint, and a perspective from which to reflect on the development of online safety more widely while acknowledging the novel approach that the UK has elected to develop in pursuit of safe spaces online. It concludes by indicating there has been an evident expansion in intermediary liability for third party content, all while noting that there is still a lack of clarity but that such a lack of clarity does not mean that there is an incompatibility with human rights protections under Article 10.

The fifth paper, by **Sandra -Schmitz-Bernt, Marinos Emmanouil Kalpakos and Nils Victor Langensteiner,** titled, 'Non-Consensual Deepnudes: Responses under EU Law to a Novel Form of Sexual Abuse', also pursues still the mantle of online safety, albeit with a different focus – both substantively and jurisdictionally. As the paper itself discusses, deepnudes and their legal regulation is somewhat under-developed, and a as a result, worth of a legal assessment. Through an assessment of different legal mechanisms that *could* regulate deepnudes, and deepnude technologies, the paper explores the EU's AI Act and the potential liabilities for actors involved in the production of deepnudes. It does this in combination with what is referred to as the "limited scope" of other EU legal instruments, including the Directive on Violence against Women, before moving on to consider a number of different national perspectives on deepnudes, or nude images across Belgium, Germany, and the UK. The paper then moves on to consider the role and scope of the EU's Digital Services Act as the ultimate arbiter in such regulatory conversations. The paper concludes that EU law has – at best – an indirect effect on end-users, but that this is creating a mixed-picture at national levels because some states criminalise the creation and sharing of deepnudes, but not all, posing additional challenges for the regulatory sphere. Ultimately, despite a flurry of legislative efforts, there is a gap – as the paper comments – affecting the criminal nature of AI outputs, and that is where there is a need for greater action, even against a backdrop of high-level European Parliamentary support for prohibiting AI systems capable of generating deepnudes.

Finally, the sixth paper, by Maxime Zimmer, Philippine Ducros, Pedro Cavalcante, Mustapha Jid, Rafiga Malikova, Bouthayna Mesraf, and Luisa Perez, entitled, **'Opacified Transparency? Assessing the DSA Transparency Database via TikTok's Moderation during the 2024 Romanian Presidential Election'** pursues online safety, but in yet another direction, and with a different focus to the other papers in this special issue. This article, on an important topic, explores the impact of the Digital Services Act's provisions relating to the obligation to render moderation practices subject to scrutiny – arguing that this needs to be handled sensitively in democratic contexts. The paper, which uses the Romanian Presidential Election of 2024 as a case study discusses the limitations, challenges, and delays that arose in the context of removal orders issued by the Romanian Electoral Authority. The paper uses a substantive body of empirical data to conclude that there may have been a modification of the moderation activity of TikTok in response to the electoral context, but increases and delays puts this conclusion into a position of fragility. Ultimately the paper concludes that while there is hope that a formal transparency requirement may offer the potential of meaningful oversight, this alone is no guarantee of effectiveness – a situation described as giving rise to 'opacified transparency', all while remining cautiously hopeful that researcher access to such data could be fruitful in understanding the effects of legislation on key actors.

Taken together, these varied contributions offer critical and forward-looking perspectives on how legal frameworks, policymakers, and academic institutions can respond to the accelerating pace of technological change. Ultimately, as the papers included in this volume highlight, there is a wealth of work being done in the pursuit of governance and regulation of digital spaces, actors, and tools – but, as is ever the challenge, legislative and regulatory activity does not necessarily mean that we all enjoy 'safety'. Nevertheless, these papers also evidence the breadth, depth, and rigorous commitment to discussing the thorny digital issues, and critiquing the 'problems' that face us every day. This has perhaps never been more important when it comes to upholding, protecting, and enacting our fundamental rights, especially in digital settings.