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To Whom It May Concern:

I am extremely excited to apply for the 2021 Digitization tutorial. As a brief introduction, I am a third year PhD student in Information Technologies at MIT Sloan advised by Catherine Tucker and Erik Brynjolfsson. My research interests are focused in digital media, platforms, and privacy. During the first two years of the program, I focused on coursework that emphasized applied microeconomics and industrial organization. In addition, I have taken a number of courses in econometrics, statistics, and machine learning.

To better describe my interests, I will briefly discuss two ongoing projects that focus on digital media and technologies. I am confident attending the tutorial would greatly improve the projects I am currently focusing on and grant me the opportunity to meet graduate students from other institutions interested in similar topics.

Heterogeneous Costs of Privacy in Rental Housing

In collaboration with my advisor, Catherine Tucker, we have been designing an experiment to study the interaction between privacy and race in the context of rental housing. We aim to explore the tension between having an online presence and individual privacy. Having an active online presence can bring many benefits to individuals, including gaining credibility and trust before a transaction. This often comes at the expense of individual privacy, however, as one must share information widely and publicly in order to obtain the benefit.

Turning to our setting of rental housing, we expect that having a public Facebook profile will help an applicant gain the trust of a landlord or potential roommate and increase the likelihood of being offered the apartment. Moreover, we are interested to see if the cost of maintaining one's privacy is larger for minority applicants.

To test these hypotheses, we are preparing to run an audit study on craigslist that applies to rental housing with one of four fictitious profiles. Two of the profiles will be black applicants, and two will be white applicants. Each applicant will have a Facebook profile, and within each race one applicant will have a private account while the other has a public profile. To date, we have been focused on designing and piloting our profiles but hope to launch this experiment in the coming weeks.

Digital Paywalls, Incentives, and News Consumption

A second project in progress with Erik Brynjolfsson and Markus Mobius aims to study the relationship between digital media funding sources and media quality. Specifically, we are interested in how the introduction of a newspaper paywall on a publisher's website alters a publisher's incentives to produce

high quality content. We are measuring newspaper quality in several different dimensions, including the share of original reporting and the partisan slant.

Theoretically the effect of a subscription model on content quality relative to an advertising supported model is ambiguous. On the one hand, we may expect that the subscription model allows a publisher to extract more of the surplus created from high quality content by charging a positive price, relative to an advertising model.[1] On the other hand, we may think that requiring a subscription may drive away the more casual readers, who may be more politically diverse than devoted readers. This could incentivize the publisher to cater their coverage more towards partisan preferences.

I would like to thank you for organizing the tutorial and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alex Moehring

[1] This intuition was based on the model and arguments presented in Spence and Owen (1977).