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Panel: Social informatics and information systems research: Where are we going?

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ABSTRACT

This panel intends to explore the future of social informatics and the legacy of Rob Kling in Information systems research. Participants (listed in alphabetical order) tentatively include: Elisabeth Davenport (Napier University), Kristen Eschenfelder (University of Wisconsin), Noriko Hara (Indiana University), Roberta Lamb (University of Hawaii), Lisa Murphy (University of Alabama), Howard Rosenbaum-organizer (Indiana University), Steven Sawyer, Pennsylvania State University.

Keywords

Social informatics, information systems, sociotechnical systems research agenda

INTRODUCTION

According to Kling (1999), social informatics (SI) is “the interdisciplinary study of the design, uses and consequences of information and communication technologies that takes into account their interaction with institutional and cultural contexts.” It is also a label for the study of the social aspect of computing and, since the turn of the century, the corpus of SI research has been developing apace in several disciplines including information systems research (Kling, Rosenbaum, and Sawyer, forthcoming). We are learning much about the complex and subtle interrelationships among technologies, the people who design and use them, and the contexts in which they are used (Orlikowski, 1993; Newell, Scarbrough, Swan and Hislop, 1998, Clement and Halonen, 1998). SI researchers have developed concepts and findings that are pertinent to understanding the design, development, and operation of usable information systems -- including digital libraries, web sites, intranets, courseware environments, knowledge management systems, electronic forums, digital reference environments, and electronic scholarly communications environments (Kling, Rosenbaum, and Hert, 1998; Bishop and Star, 1996). To date, a diverse and ever increasing number of researchers engage social and sociotechnical theory as a means to critically examine the constitution of ICTs, and their role in organizations and society.

After the untimely passing of Rob Kling in 2003, a leading thinker in the establishment of SI, it is time to take stock of the current status and future direction SI research and theorizing in information systems research. This panel brings together seven researchers, all of whom have substantial research experience in SI. Each will present different and provocative positions on the state and future of SI in information systems research. Each will also share their thinking about the paths that they think are worth following using SI to investigate IS, organizations, and society.

This panel, will focus on:

- Future directions for Information Systems research informed by social informatics. Dr. Roberta Lamb and Dr. Lisa Murphy will speculate on Kling’s legacy and lay out possible futures for IS research that investigates themes central to Kling’s vision of social informatics.
- The exploration of the legacy of Rob Kling in social informatics and information systems research in the United Kingdom. Dr. Elisabeth Davenport will discuss the extent to which the themes popularized in Kling’s work have been picked up by IS researchers in the UK.
- The nature of socio-technical theorizing, with explicit attention on characterizing what is technical. Dr. Steve Sawyer will unpack the meaning of “technical” in the term “sociotechnical,” arguing that it is often taken for granted as understood while in reality is a complex and thorny concept.
- Ways to cultivate the interdisciplinary nature of SI in Information Systems research. Dr. Noriko Hara will discuss the ways in which the SI approach can provide a basis for fruitful collaboration across subspecialties in IS.
- The value of a social informatics approach for IS education. Dr. Howard Rosenbaum will discuss the ways in which the

next generation of IS educators and researchers can benefit from an exposure to and understanding of social informatics.

- An example of information systems research informed by social informatics: Dr. Kristen Eschenfelder will discuss the usefulness of a social informatics approach in the analysis of public policy issues. Focusing on the controversy surrounding digital rights management, she asks how the public reacts to, resists or otherwise shapes digital rights management systems (DRM)? While DRM clearly shapes how users can access and use intellectual property, how have users attempted to shape development, use, or efficacy of DRM technologies?

Both beginning and established scholars who would like to learn more about SI research, who want to better understand what to expect from SI work, or who want to network with other SI researchers are encouraged to attend.

BACKGROUND OF PARTICIPANTS

Elisabeth Davenport <e.davenport@napier.ac.uk> is a Professor of Information Management in the School of Computing at Napier University, Edinburgh, Scotland and leads the Social Informatics Group. Her current research interests include sociotechnical analysis, digital genre, and knowledge infrastructures.

Kristin R. Eschenfelder <eschenfelder@facstaff.wisc.edu> is an Assistant Professor at the Library and Information Studies School at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and also a member of the UW-Madison Communication Technology Research Cluster. She conducts research about the impact of electronic government on government agencies, the societal effects of digital copyright law with a current focus on public resistance to digital rights management systems.

Noriko Hara <nhara@indiana.edu> is an Assistant Professor in the School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University, Bloomington. Her research focuses on resource mobilization from a social informatics perspective, such as the roles of the Internet in mobilizing civil society movements, online learning, and knowledge management.

Roberta Lamb <lamb@cba.hawaii.edu> is an Assistant Professor in the College of Business Administration at the University of Hawaii. She studies intranets, socio-technical networks, and informational environments.

Lisa Murphy <lmurphy@cba.ua.edu> is an Assistant Professor in the Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration at the University of Alabama. Her work focuses on knowledge creation and use in complex work, digital documents, communities of practice, systems development and management, infrastructure management and geographic information systems.

Howard Rosenbaum <hrosenba@indiana.edu> is an Associate Professor in the School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University. He studies trust in digital economies, the social structures of digital libraries, and community networking.

Steve Sawyer <sawyer@ist.psu.edu> is an associate professor at, and one of the founding faculty of, Penn. State's School of Information Sciences and Technology. Steve's research focuses on the relations among work, computing and social organization.

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