Social Inclusion in a Hyperconnected World

Panel

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ABSTRACT

Early 'digital divide' research focused on inequalities between those who had access to information technologies (IT) and those who did not. This research reflected the view that IT was creating a parallel reality, which people needed to connect to, or risk being left behind. Fast forward to 2013 and a 'hyperconnected' world has emerged, characterized by immediate access to information, institutions, and people. The central place of IT in this open, digital world creates a need to investigate the part IT plays in determining the extent to which people can participate in a hyperconnected society. To that end, this panel considers how information systems (IS) research can help reframe digital divide research to address broader issues related to social inclusion. The panel includes reflection on whether investigating the implications of hyperconnectivity for social inclusion requires IS researchers to expand their conceptualizations of 'legitimate' IS research questions, theories, and methods.

Keywords: Digital divide, social inclusion, IS research

OBJECTIVES

In the dot.com boom of the late 1990's, policy makers and academics began focusing attention on the economic inequalities between those who had access to information technologies (IT) and those who did not—the so-called 'digital divide' (Van Dijk and Hacker, 2003). With its focus on getting people connected, research in this area often framed the digital divide in terms of socio-economic and racial barriers to technology access (Eastin and LaRose, 2000). This emphasis reflected the view that IT was creating a parallel, online reality, which people needed to connect to, or risk being left behind (i.e., experience increased social and economic inequalities) (Kvasny and Trauth, 2002; Warschauer, 2004).

Fast forward to 2013 and a 'hyperconnected' world has emerged, characterized by immediate access to information, institutions, and people (Dutta, Bilbao-Osorio and Geiger, 2012; Wladawsky-Berger, 2012). While this does not imply universal and equal access, the central place of IT in this open, digital, world creates a need to investigate the part IT plays in determining social exclusion vs. social inclusion (Warschauer, 2004; Wolske, Williams, Noble, Johnson and Duple, 2010). Social exclusion (or marginalization) has been conceptualized as "detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live" (Silver, 2007). As the converse, social inclusion focuses on enabling groups and individuals to participate fully in such activities. Proceedings of conferences organized around themes of diversity, inclusion, and empowerment—e.g. SIGMIS CPR Conference 2003 (Mandviwalla and Trauth, 2003), IFIP 8.2 Working Group Conference 2006 (Trauth, Howcroft, Butler, Fitzgerald and DeGross, 2006), and ECIS 2010 (Alexander, Trupin and van Deventer, 2010) reflect growing awareness of social inclusion at information systems (IS) conferences. Moreover, the topic is attracting increasing attention from IS researchers, as evidenced by the formation of an AIS Special Interest Group on Social Inclusion (SIG-SI).

Given that, in a hyperconnected world, engaging with IT is critical to participating in the normal activities of society (Fredette, Marom, Steiner and Witters, 2012), this panel discusses how IS research can reframe digital divide

research to address broader issues related to social inclusion. The panel includes reflection on whether investigating the implications of hyperconnectivity for social inclusion requires IS researchers to expand their conceptualizations of 'legitimate' IS research questions, theories, and methods. In particular, panelists will consider and comment on the following questions:

- Has the anticipated digital divide come to fruition? What does the digital divide look like in 2013?

- Is hyperconnectivity impacting the digital divide positively, negatively, or not at all? If so, how?

- Hyperconnectivity implies access to anything, anytime, anywhere. What are the implications of this for minority groups? Does hyperconnectivity give everyone an equal opportunity to actively participate in and benefit from our society?

- Network technologies (and the Internet in particular) have made it possible for people to create and maintain multiple personas. However, as boundaries between the social roles that people play become ever more blurred, has hyperconnectivity increased or reduced the ease with which a person can live in multiple personas? How do we balance hyperconnectivity with privacy, particularly in regard to minority status?

- As the lines between employees' public (at work) and private (away from work) personas become increasingly blurred, how can IS research investigate ethical practices and policies that empower employees to reassert and protect their private personas in a hyperconnected world?

- Does investigating the implications of hyperconnectivity require information systems researchers to reframe how, and what, they think of as legitimate IS research questions? For example, related to business, should IS researchers investigate how to create ethical, IT-enabled recruitment processes that respect job candidates' privacy? Should IS research investigate how IT can be used to promote community participation, foster social relations, and encourage active citizenship? Or should we cede these lines of inquiry to other research domains?

- To diagnose and prescribe for social inclusion in a hyperconnected world, what new changes in theory and method, if any, will be needed?

- Business schools are typically thought of as conservative places – mirroring the relatively conservative nature of business itself – and most IS departments still live in business schools. Are we as an academic community doing enough to ensure diversity and inclusion, just as business is now striving to do? As a community, how can the IS field ensure that visible and invisible minority groups are not marginalized? What would a truly inclusive community look like for the IS/AIS community?

APPROACH

The panel consists of a moderator and 4 discussants. The moderator will open by introducing the subject, panelists, and discussion guidelines (5 minutes). Each discussant will then give a brief presentation, addressing one or more of the questions under consideration (5 – 10 minutes each). Following the presentations, audience members will be invited to offer their perspectives and panelists will address questions posed by audience members (20-30 minutes).

PANELISTS

Michelle Carter (Moderator) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Information Systems and Quantitative Analysis at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Michelle's work has appeared in *MIS Quarterly Executive,* the *European Journal of Information Systems* advance online publication*, Communications of the AIS,* and *ACM Transactions on Management Information Systems*.

Deborah J. Armstrong is an Associate Professor of Management Information Systems in the College of Business at The Florida State University. Dr. Armstrong's research interests cover a variety of issues at the intersection of IS personnel and cognition involving the human aspects of technology, change, and learning. Her research has appeared in *MIS Quarterly*, *Journal of Management Information Systems*, the *European Journal of Information Systems* and *Communications of the ACM*, among others.

Allen S. Lee is a Professor of Information Systems at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). He has served as associate dean at VCU and McGill University, as editor-in-chief of *MIS Quarterly*, and as a founding senior editor of *MIS Quarterly Executive*. His publications have typically taken a philosophy-of-science perspective in examining research methodology and designing research methods for the study of information systems. In 2005, he was named a Fellow of the Association for Information Systems. A member of the Circle of Compadres of the Information

Systems Doctoral Students Association of the KPMG PhD Project, he was also a founder of the organization Chinese American Professors of Information Systems.

Eleanor T. Loiacono is an Associate Professor of IT at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Her research focuses on the intersection of technology and the user. After developing a website quality measure, WebQual, that is widely used within the IS community, she expanded her research to focus on accessibility of IT for people with disabilities. Accessibility influences a user's experience with the technology and thus must be understood in order to create more effective technologies that reach a larger part of society. Besides having chaired the AIS Special Interest Group on HCI, she serves as a Guest Senior Editor for *AIS Transactions on HCI*. Her works appear in numerous journals, including the *Communications of the ACM*, *Communications of the AIS*, *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, and *Decision Support Systems*.

Jason Bennett Thatcher is an Associate Professor in the Department of Management in the College of Business and Behavioral Science at Clemson University. His research interests include the management of information technology workers, diffusion of complex technologies, and research methods. At Clemson University, he served as founding faculty lead of the Social Media Listening Center. His work has appeared in journals such as *MIS Quarterly*, *Journal of Management Information Systems*, *Journal of Applied Psychology* and other journals. He lives in Greenville, SC where he enjoys mustard based barbecue, shag dancing, and sweet potato casserole.

EQUIPMENT NEEDS

A projector and computer (or cable to connect to a laptop to display any material needed).

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