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ECIS 2017 Proceedings

Spring 6-10-2017

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Jane Fedorowicz

Bentley University, jfedorowicz@bentley.edu

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Recommended Citation

Fedorowicz, Jane, (2017). "POLITICS AND AIS: WHERE DO WE DRAW THE LINE?". In Proceedings of the 25th European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS), Guimarães, Portugal, June 5-10, 2017 (pp. 3264-3267). ISBN 978-0-9915567-0-0 Panels.

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POLITICS AND AIS: WHERE DO WE DRAW THE LINE?

Panels

Jane Fedorowicz, Bentley University, Waltham, USA, jfedorowicz@bentley.edu

1 Introduction

The Association for Information Systems (AIS) is the preeminent global professional association for academics in the Information Systems (IS) field. Throughout its twenty-plus year history, AIS has not intentionally entered the world of national or international politics. However, recent events have challenged AIS to reconsider its responsibility as a political or moral advocate for its members and the field it serves. This panel will explore the ways in which AIS has inadvertently or intentionally entered the political fray, and debate the benefits and drawbacks of taking on a more formal political position.

2 Issues and Dilemma

The members of the panel were chosen because each has been involved in one or more politically oriented activities or perspectives that impact our members and/or IS research and education. Examples of politically sensitive issues that have recently appeared on AIS' radar include:

- **Conference location.** The ECIS conferences, in particular, have suffered from pushback on some of their location selections. ECIS 2014 in Tel Aviv was boycotted by members who objected to Israeli-Palestinian relations. ECIS 2016 in Istanbul lost attendance when participants and some universities refused to attend in a country with recent, nearby terrorist activity.
- **Research with political implications.** ICIS 2016 in Dublin included a panel on how IS researchers can help to leverage technology to aid in refugee integration. AIS' Bright ICT (Information and Communication Technology) Grand Vision Project is working with the United Nations and national agencies to propose new standards for global communication as well as mechanisms for addressing the dark side of ICT adoption.
- **Restrictive travel policies.** President Trump's recent attempt to limit travel to the U.S. by citizens of seven majority-Muslim countries has set a troubling precedent for members who work in countries other than their country of origin, or who wish to travel to or from countries where they may be denied access or return. Doctoral students in many countries must be extra vigilant that their visa status will not affect conference attendance opportunities.
- **AISWorld and social media postings.** Trump's travel ban instigated substantial, heated discussion among members, calling for AIS to publish an official position (and then, a stronger position) on the topic. The AIS mission was roundly discussed as to whether political advocacy is or should be covered therein. The Social Inclusion Special Interest Group was identified as a home for research and discussion of related issues.
- **Government policies that affect IS.** As technology has itself permeated all aspects of life, government regulations have been adopted that project a strong influence on ICT and uses of ICT for members, business, and all of society. The EU Privacy Directive both helps and challenges us in what we do and the data we engage with. AIS' only venture to date with a formal political statement comprised a written Statement of Support on Net Neutrality to the US Federal Communication Commission's position. This was submitted after polling the membership and obtaining strong support for the Comment from the membership.

- Outreach mission. AIS recently committed to increasing outreach efforts to communities outside of our membership, such as universities, IS professionals, the media, and society at large. The outreach effort supports the organization's mission, which is: "The Association for Information Systems (AIS) serves society through the advancement of knowledge and the promotion of excellence in the practice and study of information systems. AIS is the premier professional association for individuals and organizations who lead the research, teaching, practice, and study of information systems worldwide." There is no explicit mention of political stances or lobbying in this statement.

3 Panel Structure

Each of these issues are worthy of debate about the role of AIS. Each will be described by members of the panel with the goal of extrapolating the pros and cons of AIS taking a position on each. Panelists were chosen who have professional and personal experience with the issues to be tackled, and their experiences reflect multiple perspectives and strong opinions. The ultimate goal of the panel will be to document both sides of the issues, and to provide guidance for AIS Council and all of AIS' communities (special interest groups, chapters, and colleges), and AIS' conferences and journals in deciding on what appropriate measures we should condone and support.

The moderator will begin by posing a set of questions to specific panelists. This should consume about half of the panel time. The second half of the panel will be a question and answer session with the audience, which is expected to be quite lively and divided.

Examples of questions to be addressed include:

- As a global organization, what should AIS' role be in addressing challenges to academic freedom, when those challenges differ in degree, scope, legality and publicity across our members' countries of origin and work?
- English is the lingua franca of AIS and academe more broadly. Does this create a bias in what the association or our field values? Does this bias reflect political leanings?
- Most current members come from "Western" countries, as the EU and the U.S. are home to the majority of our members and conference attendees. Membership numbers from "Eastern" countries are on the rise. How – or should - we reflect the political value system of our members if the majority ascribe to "Western" values?
- If we politicize AIS, how does that affect our ability to conduct outreach or hold conferences in countries that do not reflect AIS' politics? Would remaining apolitical give us the most flexibility to help IS academics in our far reaches or in war-torn or poverty-ridden areas?
- What is the best way for IS researchers to identify, fund, conduct and share research that has social impact?

4 Panellists

- **Jane Fedorowicz**, Bentley University. As moderator, Jane will pose an initial set of questions to the panelists. She will also provide input on AIS' status on topics related to the panel discussion, such as the decision process undertaken to produce the Net Neutrality statement, the move to improve external outreach, and the roles and responsibilities of conference site selection committees, SIGs, chapters, colleges and Council with respect to AIS decision making.
- **Safa'a AbuJarour**, University of Potsdam. Being a researcher as well as an active volunteer and co-founder of an NGO to support the refugees in Germany, enables Safa'a to gain distinct in-depth insights about how ICTs can be used in alleviating the current refugees' crisis, which sparks new research questions with the goal of achieving a positive impact of IS on people's lives. Safa'a believes that ICT can play a crucial role in the integration process of the refugees, and she believes that the value of science and research is tackling

current issues and coming up with innovative solutions to them following scientific methods. Her goal is to employ research to come up with a scientific approach to interconnect the newcomers and locals' society and bridge the gap between both cultures, which will support the integration process. Safa'a is arguing that the AIS community should be more efficient in tackling and supporting the research topics with political implications, since IS research is closely bounded with the political situations.

- **Dov Te'Eni**, Tel Aviv University. I believe AIS can and should advocate appropriate deployment and use of IT on the basis of its members' expertise. Obviously, any action AIS takes must abide by well-defined procedures stated in its bylaws, having debated them in community forums (such as this panel). Any other political action should not be taken by the association, unless there is some threat to its members' wellbeing. I learnt this lesson when proposing a conference in Israel. I'd go as far as saying that political discussion should be banned from AIS official SM or bulletin boards, although censorship may be too extreme a solution. Nevertheless, members should be supported when they take individual action using their professional skills for the benefit of mankind, e.g., providing IT teaching materials to developing countries or using IT to enable dialog between partners in countries in conflict.
- **Monideepa Tarafdar**, Lancaster University. Increased ubiquity, mobility and pervasiveness of Information Systems (IS) have led to a prominent role for IS in phenomenon that affect social units other than the corporation. Examples of such phenomenon include social media enabled social movements, internet powered at-scale surveillance, algorithm driven classification, and application/device related stress and addiction. Indeed, we are now seeing constant and relentless entanglement between our life activities, such as communication, sense-making, civic participation and socialization, and the IS we use. As IS researchers investigate research questions relating to such phenomenon, policy makers are emerging as key stakeholders for the outputs of their research. How should IS researchers respond to this in their dissemination and outreach? The panelist will focus on how IS researchers can work with various organizations (finding agencies, governmental departments, NGO's and companies) to influence policy, funding or social welfare, from a global perspective.
- **Niels Bjorn-Andersen**, Copenhagen Business School. Whether we like it or not, Information Systems Research is never totally neutral and it is always to some extent political. The more we resort to studying algorithms or quantitative statistics, the less political it gets. However, few will defend even the most sophisticated BI analysis of differences between races or gender no matter how seemingly 'objective' the research formulation. Very few will defend the atrocious experiments of Dr. Mengele, e.g. exposing Jews to constant radiation until they died in order to obtain valuable information about how the body worked, which allegedly was instrumental in laying the groundwork for manned spaceflights. Accordingly, each and every IS researcher needs to be aware of the ethical and political issues related to his/her research. Indeed, for almost all of us, it comes naturally, and I have not seen any serious breach of ethical standards recently. However, AIS cannot hide behind a screen of pretending to be non-political. Who thinks AIS should have held a conference in South Africa during the apartheid regime? Who thinks that we should not help AIS members, who are discriminated against? The question is of course how strong we should react.

5 Target Audience

We believe all ECIS attendees would find this topic and the varied perspectives to be presented thought-provoking, intriguing and controversial. Therefore I believe it will attract a very broad audience.

6 Suitability to ECIS Audience

With the exception of the moderator, all panellists reside and work in AIS Region 2 (covering all of Europe and Africa), yet represent a variety of cultures, professional status, gender, AIS involvement and universities. These are representative ECIS attendees who will provide a wide range of opinions that are likely to reflect those of the audience.

Prior experience of the proposers in panel organisation

Jane Fedorowicz, moderator. Jane is a Professor of Accounting and Information Systems at Bentley University, USA. She is a member of the Bright ICT Task Force. She conducts research in the e-government space and examines how police uses social media to reach different publics. She is a Past President of AIS. As President, she created the Task Force on Community Outreach which was successful in proposing a number of outreach initiatives, including the Outreach Practice Publication Award and the Leadership Excellence Award presented to a leading IS practitioner. She also initiated the AIS' first formal political foray, the Statement of Support for Net Neutrality. She participates on the Bright ICT Grand Vision Project executive committee. She has represented AIS on the Leadership Team of the National Center for Women in Information Technology.

Safa'a AbuJarour, Panelist: Safa'a is a doctoral candidate at the department of Information Systems at the University of Potsdam, Germany. In her current research on "The Role of Technology in Alleviating the Current Refugees' Crisis", she studies the use of ICT by refugees in Germany. In particular, her research revolves around the use of smartphones and social networks by refugees with the goal of utilizing them to get integrated into the new hosting societies. Moreover, she has been actively engaged in assisting the refugees' crisis in Berlin as a volunteer since 2015, and is a founder of the non-profit initiative "Place4Refugees". During her research as well as her volunteer work, she has gathered many insights about how refugees use their smartphones and Social Networks to deal with the new situation in Germany by using qualitative research methods, deepening her understanding of the needs of refugees with regard to technology and integration.

Niels Bjorn-Anderson, panelist. Niels is Emeritus Professor of Business IT at the Copenhagen Business School (CBS). He has carried out collaborative research with organizations like CISCO, Heineken, IBM, Microsoft and SAP on topics such as IT governance, E-business, ERP-systems, IT for inter-organizational trade, and IT for M&As. He has been the recipient of more than 20 external research grants predominantly from EU research bodies. He has been awarded the prestigious AIS-LEO award (hitherto only awarded to four Europeans), the IFIP Outstanding Services Award, and he has been knighted by the queen of Denmark for his contributions to the field of Information Systems. He was a Past President of AIS and is currently the Danish Digital Champion appointed to the EU as advisor on Digitalization.

Monideepa Tarafdar, panelist. Monideepa is Professor of Information Systems at Lancaster University (Management School) in the United Kingdom. She is a Research Affiliate at the MIT Sloan Center for Information Systems Research and a Visiting Professor at Indian Institute of Management Calcutta. At Lancaster University she co-directs the High-Wire doctoral program, an interdisciplinary doctoral program across the Schools of Management, Computing and Communication, and Design. She has experience conducting research on phenomenon such as technostress and technology addiction.

Dov Te'Eni, panelist. Dov is the Mexico Chaired Professor of IS in the Coller School of Management at Tel Aviv University and Director of the Partner Institute for Internet Studies. He has organized several AIS conferences and served as AIS President. In Israel, he served as chair of Meital – the National coordinator of e-learning in higher education and as chair of the Advisory Committee for Lehava - the National Digital Divide Initiative. Dov is currently the Editor in Chief of the European Journal of IS (EJIS) working with the editorial board to create an effective platform for interesting and influential conversations. Dov was awarded AIS Fellowship in 2008 and the AIS LEO award in 2015.