

Introduction to the Mini Track on Information Systems for Social Impact

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Abstract

Increasingly, information system (IS) scholars are pivoting from questions of what could be done with technology to what should be done. Questions of efficiency, productivity, and financial performance are being complemented with questions about social good, human dignity, and user wellbeing. This minitrack provides a repository for research on how IS can be used for positive social impact. Four papers were accepted to this mini track. A dominant theme in the submissions was systems design.

1. Introduction

Concerns are mounting about the potential for IS to have negative social impact, prompting scrutiny of digital platforms like Facebook. When describing Facebook's hacker culture, Founder Mark Zuckerberg was quoted as follows [1]:

"...hacking just means building something quickly or testing the boundaries of what can be done."

"Hackers try to build ... by quickly releasing and learning from smaller iterations rather than trying to get everything right all at once."

"Instead of debating for days whether a new idea is possible or what the best way to build something is, hackers would rather just prototype something and see what works."

The culture of quickly building novel digital tools and services without adequate discussion about best practices dominated the early 2000s. After decades of failing to think through the ethical implications of design choices, IS scholars and practitioners now find themselves trying to reactively redesign systems that are flawed and even oppressive to users [2]. Designing digital platforms is tricky because they may be simultaneously emancipatory and oppressive [3]. Normative, future-oriented design theorizing can optimize the positive social impacts of IS [4].

Of the four papers accepted into the mini track this year, three focus on design. "Selecting and Adapting Methods for Analysis and Design in Value-Sensitive Digital Social Innovation Projects: Toward Design Principles" by Larissa Gebken, Paul Drews, and Ingrid

Schirmer provides twelve design principles for the development of a digital donation system to combat homelessness. "Examining Power Relationships in the Use of Information Systems to Comply with Laws and Enable Social Inclusion" by Shiya Cao, Diane Strong, and Eleanor Loiacono presents four emancipatory design principles to address power imbalances and enable social inclusion. "Towards the Design of Effective Whistleblowing Systems" by Paul Jobinpicard and Ahmed Doha describes design objectives for ethical whistleblowing systems. The fourth paper in this mini track is "Peace Teams in the Protest-Repression Nexus: A Sociomaterial Perspective of De-escalatory Tactics" by Richard Canevez and Jenifer Winter. This paper contributes to understanding of online and offline dynamics in social movements.

The emphasis on design science in research about IS and social impact is appropriate given that there is significant opportunity to redesign IS that were hastily thrown together without proper foresight. The areas of IS development, implementation, and use for social impact are ripe for investigation.

10. References

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