

Social Informatics and Participatory Design: Exploring ways to inform one another

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Workshop Aims and Goals

This half-day workshop examines how Social Informatics (SI) and Participatory Design (PD) focus on similar topics. The workshop is designed to discover ways that these two research areas might better inform one another by exploring and sharing theories, experiences, methods, literature, and emerging work. Equally important is to develop relationships between emerging scholars in PD and SI for future collective academic endeavors.

Background

One area of SI research is related to the design of information systems. Participatory design falls under the normative orientation in which Social Informatics research is involved [5]. Kling [4] contended that social informatics research has produced useful outcomes that could be applied in a number of settings for the design, development, and operation of information systems. According to Kling, the study of social informatics “has developed theories and findings that are pertinent to understanding the design, development and operation of usable information systems, including intranets, electronic forums, digital libraries and electronic journals.” In addition, social informatics approaches have been applied to some design issues such as

the design of documentary systems. Thus, social informatics research both studies and informs the design of computerized information systems.

Relevance to PD

PD actively involves people in the design of the technologies they use [1, 2]. SI also acknowledges the presence of the end user as an actor in the process of technology design and diffusion. Recent trends in PD have included domains in which SI researchers share interests, such as e-government, community issues, and cultural production, to name just a few. Kensing and Blomberg [3] explored a similar interdisciplinary linkage, focusing on commonalities between the fields of CSCW (Computer Supported Collaborative Work) and PD. Beyond domain similarities, there are many ways in which SI and PD might align, including¹:

1. Seeking to understand the design and use of technology from a networked perspective, understanding that the relationship between individual and technology is directly tied to the larger network of people and artifacts to which the end user is connected.
2. Employing similar methods for understanding the context into which technology is embedded. There is often a focus on studying in “the field”, rather than in “the lab” to observe the broader environment and obtain unexpected insights.
3. Taking a critical stance, recognizing that problems often exist in the interaction between people and technology.

¹ Adapted from “What is Participatory Design?” available at <http://cpsr.org/issues/pd/introInfo/>

They openly acknowledge that technology is only one possible solution and that its ability to benefit people is very context specific and difficult to measure.

4. Concern for ethical issues as they relate to technology design, recognizing that there is the possibility for technology to both support and constrain our everyday decisions.

Workshop Format

The workshop will be organized so that participants will decide its content, borrowing from an “unconference” format. That is, those present dictate the topic of conversation, a strategy for engagement aligned with the concept of participatory design. Student researchers will submit a 1-2 page abstract of a working paper describing a current research project relevant to both Social Informatics and Participatory Design. The abstract should include brief sections on goals, methods, theoretical orientation, and relevant literature. Organizers of the workshop will find common themes from the best 12 to 16 abstracts and create 3-5 break-out groups consisting of 2-4 papers each.

On the day of the workshop, attendees will be presented with these initial break-out group topics. Student researchers will present each abstract informally as a 5-minute verbal description of the project. Open discussion within the group follows. One person in each group will be appointed as note taker (scribe) to summarize issues and questions and then report to workshop participants at the end of the break-out sessions. One of the leaders of the workshop will guide a discussion on emerging themes, which will inform the topics of conversation in the second breakout session. These themes might center on application domains, methods, theories, or a combination of topics.

The most important goal is to allow the workshop to develop around themes and issues identified by the participants, encouraging ideas to flourish and drive the process. The workshop will end with a summary of the day and brainstorming of next steps.

Intended Participants

Accepted working papers will preferably be from students whose research lies at the intersection of PD and SI. However, senior researchers are strongly encouraged to attend, providing feedback and depth of knowledge. Participants will be recruited via calls for abstracts sent to SI and PD email lists. August 1st will be the deadline for abstracts (submitted via email to khanks@indiana.edu).

Participants will be notified by September 1st if their abstract is accepted.

Schedule

An approximate schedule for the half day workshop is presented below.

<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Activity</u>
15	Short keynote address
45	Break out into 3-5 topic discussions revolving around submitted working papers
30	Regroup for summarization of session 1 break-out groups
45	Session 2 break-out sessions
30	Regroup for summarization of session 2 break-out groups
30	Discussion of themes which emerged from the two sessions
15	Summary of workshop and plans for future action

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