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Introduction to the Special Issue on HCI in a Sharing Society

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Abstract:

In this editorial, we introduce a special issue in *AIS Transactions on Human-Computer Interaction (THCI)* on human-computer interaction in the sharing society. We introduce the history, motivation, and key concepts behind the issue and briefly overview the four papers in the issue. We argue that a traditional “narrow” view of HCI fails to provide sufficient designs in the emerging sharing society contexts for several reasons. We briefly introduce key concepts for the sharing society, sharing economy, and collaborative economy. Subsequently, we introduce HCI in a sharing society as a call for new socio-technical HCI design approaches and new HCI tools and designs for a sharing and sustainable society. We also introduce four interesting socio-technical HCI papers in this issue. We conclude by restating the importance of HCI concepts together with the need that HCI researchers and practitioners adopt and advance a broader perspective of their work and designs to include societal, environmental, and professional concerns.

Keywords: HCI, Sharing Society, Sharing Economy, Collaborative Economy, Socio-technical HCI, Sustainable Design.

Fiona Nah was the accepting senior editor for this paper.

1 A Broad Interpretation of HCI in a Sharing Society

The socio-technical systems design approach, which considers human, social, technical, and organizational factors, has a long history of influencing how designers design systems (Trist & Bamford, 1951; Mumford, 1999, 2000; Bjørn-Andersen & Clemmensen, 2017). Accordingly, researchers have established a tradition for and continuously developed the human-computer interaction (HCI) field to contribute to knowledge about designing computing and information systems by considering all relevant human, social, and technical factors. However, traditional HCI that involves users in system design can offer a limited viewpoint for the broad and global transformations that occur in society. Contemporary technology and information systems not only influence end users but also have holistic effects on society at large (Rajanen & Rajanen, 2019). To understand to what extent socio-technical systems thinking and HCI tackle the sharing society's current transformations and challenges, we organized a track at ECIS 2019 called "HCI in a sharing society". This track focused on developing the HCI field in a sharing society in general and on consolidating a bridge from HCI to socio-technical approaches in particular. While we sought to advance socio-technical HCI, we made the track open to all research approaches and topics related to HCI. Based on the papers that we accepted and presented in the conference track, we invited their authors to submit extended versions of their papers for a special issue in *AIS Transactions on Human Computer Interaction (THCI)*. Thus, this special issue in *THCI* called "HCI in a Sharing Society" builds on four papers presented at ECIS 2019. Two papers embrace socio-technical thinking, while the other two contribute to the research area on designing socio-technical systems.

With this special issue, we aim to energize the underlying premise of the socio-technical thinking and address a larger audience. When designing information systems, one should consider both the social and technical factors that influence their lifecycle as opposed to techno-centric approaches that often overlook the human and social aspects that pertain to designing and using such systems. However, IS and HCI discourses do not yet widely use the socio-technical approach. As such, we lack theoretical models, conceptualizations, and case studies. Socio-technical approaches such as usability and user-centered design have influenced some HCI areas, but we still lack studies on how these socio-technical aspects might influence a complex and multifaceted information system's interaction design and user experience.

As we note above, both this special issue and the ECIS 2019 track focused on developing the HCI field in a sharing society in general and to bridge HCI in a sharing society to socio-technical approaches. By that, we mean systematically and constructively using socio-technical thinking, approach, principles and methods through the HCI design process (e.g., requirements gathering, specification, design, testing, evaluation, operation, and evolution) from human, social, technical and organizational perspectives. With this special issue, we hope to raise awareness about the socio-technical aspects in HCI research and practice; therefore, the theme bridges past socio-technical systems development research and the current and future of socio-technical HCI. Socio-technical HCI analyses have emerged as essential in advancing the sharing society and developing information systems and advanced digital technologies that this transformation requires.

Researchers have recently proposed the term, sharing society, to denote the sharing economy's benefits for using open data in society (Jetzek, Avital, & Bjørn-Andersen, 2014). They have defined it as an open economic and social system in which actors leverage information technology to empower individuals, corporations, non-profits, and governments with data that such actors share, reuse, and transform into sustainable value through different mechanisms (Jetzek et al., 2014). The idea involves supporting sustainable value production in society by using open data to combat economic inequality, climate change, (in)efficient use of public resources, and (problems in) urban planning. One may design generative mechanisms to increase information transparency, collective impact, data-driven efficiency, and data-driven innovation, which all contribute to creating sustainable value for organizations and society. Here the special issue's theme comes in as we sorely need human-computer interaction research and practice to design the value-generating mechanisms for sustainable value.

1.1 Why a "Narrow" HCI Fails in the Sharing Society

Interesting developments continue to occur in the HCI and sharing society fields. For one, given the sharing economy's evolution and growing ubiquity and sharing economy model's growing ubiquity, much evidence has begun to accumulate that HCI as a field addresses too "narrow", context-weak, and primarily technology-oriented issues. Traditional HCI research and practice may pose risks in developing technology in the long term in that it does not consider important aspects, such as environment, work practices, and

other long-term and societal effects that socio-technical thinking addresses (Rip & Kemp, 1998). The mobile sharing economy apps, Uber, Wolt, and so on, may have a perfect design from an HCI perspective and provide an excellent user experience (UX) to customers and workers, but they may lack connections to the backend systems that usually ensure accountability in how companies treat their employees and the service ecology around them, such as human resource systems, tax systems, and so on. Thus, work's digital transformation in the sharing economy has a duality to it (i.e., both positive and negative outcomes) (Baiyere, Islam, & Mäntymäki, 2019).

In a very broad sense, a narrow HCI fails in the sharing society because it cannot help one design for the common good, such as addressing human needs associated with meaning, fulfillment, dignity, and decency (Light, Powell, & Shklovski, 2017). We need new HCI design approaches to help HCI and UX professionals be attentive, critical, different, and provide long-term sustainable design (Light et al., 2017). Furthermore, in the digitalization age, advancements in technology proceed further and further, and it becomes important to be able to conduct sustainable HCI design for people who live “on the margin” (Hertzum et al., 2018). It appears that, despite intense co-design activities, HCI app solutions frequently focus more on introducing a new service and practice than on supporting existing (and sustainable) work practices and individual users' subjective view of their world and previous knowledge (Hertzum et al., 2018). Traditional HCI design may potentially help design services and critical touchpoints that empower the users rather than regulate their practices, but it lacks the socio-technical HCI concepts and tools to consider the wide and more complex service ecology and stakeholders that surround people's working practices.

1.2 Brief Introduction to Research in the Sharing Economy

Researchers have proposed the “sharing society” to denote an open economic and social system in which actors leverage information technology to empower individuals, corporations, non-profits, and governments with “open data” that such actors share, reuse, and transform into sustainable value through different mechanisms (Jetzek et al., 2014). The emergence of multisided platform technologies has spurred new types of platform interactions (Staykova & Damsgaard, 2018). Generally, the movements towards sustainable consumerism through resource sharing coupled with the emergence of multisided platform technologies have spurred many to widely use the sharing economy concept (Oh & Moon, 2016). Recently, researchers have made attempts to move from “sharing” to “caring” to broaden the perspective from simply using multisided technology platforms to sharing economy services for profit or nonprofit to how one might imagine and create different forms of collaborative economies, such as new forms of connection, welfare, labor, and service, based on the ethics and logic of care (Avram et al., 2017). The making movement exemplifies the sharing society as everyone shares and uses expensive digital fabrication resources to build products for personal or common use, to acquire digital skills, and to share the products and services further (Hatch, 2013). We can help more people engage in the sharing society and co-create sharing economy models and practices through participatory, human- and user-centric approaches (Bødker & Kyng, 2018). However, some have expressed concerns that a few use the many's “participation” to gain commercial benefits rather than to empower the participants and contribute to individuals' and society's wellbeing (Bødker & Kyng, 2018).

1.3 HCI in a Sharing Society

We need HCI approaches and tools for sustainable design to help build the sharing society. HCI places the user and human at the center in efforts to design socio-technical systems; however, we need to advance and consolidate the bridge between HCI and socio-technical approaches to respond to current challenges in society. These challenges resemble the effort to introduce the user perspective into system development from the early 1990s to early 2000s. The open source movement, including open source software development, represents one foundation of sharing economy, and researchers have invested sustained efforts in introducing user perspective and usability in open source system development (Rajanen & Iivari, 2013; Rajanen, Iivari, & Anttila, 2011). Further, socio-technical HCI design frameworks about use in the sharing economy have begun to emerge that move the focus from user and individual to society at large (Cassano-Piché, Vicente, & Jamieson, 2006). Researchers have made proposals for HCI design tools to address the collaborative economy since sharing economy services increasingly include both for-profit activities (e.g., ride and apartment sharing) and non-profit activities (e.g., communities and local organizations offering collections of shared things such as books and tools) (Fedosov, Kitazaki, Odom, & Langheinrich, 2019). Researchers have begun to refine key UX and usability concepts to fit the information technology in the age of collaboration and sharing (Abhari, Davidson, & Xiao, 2019). Usability represents a core concept in socio-technical system development because it impacts how users and society perceive

and experience technology-driven transformations, and it acts as a mirror of the world or *speculum mundi* (Rajanen & Rajanen, 2019). This special issue contributes to the emerging body of knowledge on HCI in a sharing society.

2 Overview of Papers

This special issue includes four papers. In the first paper, Schwalb and Klecun (2019) focus on applying a socio-technical HCI approach to study the adoption and use of a digital platform in the health sector. They apply activity theory to model an empirical HCI setting in a developing country. Their study's contributions include recommendations to socio-technical HCI designs of a telemedicine system for healthcare professionals in Sri Lanka. They employ the concept of contradictions in the initial activity system and discuss how improvised telemedicine mediated contradictions and how an intended telemedicine application addressed these contradictions. Moreover, the study brings forward aspects about how this approach help users accept the new system and influenced their motivation to adopt the new HCI design. In particular, they discuss the local social norms construct as a potential factor that influences how users use telemedicine and technological features in digital platforms that enable shared economy services. They adopt healthcare professionals' viewpoint; as editors, we observe that the logic of HCI for a sharing society in this case provides support for addressing these professionals' needs and values such as work-life balance, dignity, and delivery of high-quality services to their patients and that the case does not focus only on technical and interface design issues about the digital platform in use.

In the second paper, Tarkkanen and Harkke (2019) discuss usability testing as a tool for socio-technical system development and point out challenges to define usability testing's scope. They recount how the literature has addressed the scope of usability testing, how usability testing that involves users constitutes a method to embrace the socio-technical system development thinking, and how a case study enlightened them to advocate for extending the scope of usability testing. Usability, an established construct in HCI, addresses how users interact and perceive an interactive system, product, or service, and both designers and users consider it a multidimensional, multifaceted issue. One can see the usability of the systems that exist in the world as mirroring technological advances, a *speculum mundi* (Rajanen & Rajanen, 2019). Thus, one needs to consider usability in designing and developing socio-technical systems. However, researchers continue to debate what usability really captures. This debate extends to usability testing's scope, what usability testing looks for, and usability testing measurements' reliability and validity. Through their literature review, Tarkkanen and Harkke show that, for a long time, usability testing did not naturally implement users' and organizations' view, which includes wider socio-technical design dimensions. Therefore, they say, "one should not take users' and organizations' views for granted in usability testing but deliberately attach them to the method performance requirements when needed." (p. 150) The presented case study illustrates this idea by identifying new insights into the use and use impacts on the users of a mobile device in the healthcare domain. Similar with the first paper, the case addresses the viewpoint of practitioners in a healthcare unit and the system evaluated was a mobile device. We (the editors) see the logic of HCI for a sharing society in this case as residing in an open approach to usability testing that lacks a predefined scope to the finite space of interaction design but that addresses the impact of use on the broader context of healthcare practitioners' work practices.

In the third paper, Prilla, Janßen, and Kunzendorff (2019) also address the healthcare area; namely, how we want better design technology to enhance healthcare professionals' practice. They investigate how augmented reality (AR) can support caregivers. In particular, they evaluate an application on an AR head-mounted device for its suitability in care tasks with respect to dimensions such as task performance, usability, and task load in terms of physical demand and frustration. They show that the AR device performed reasonably well when compared with a traditional touch-based interaction design; however, as with any new types of interaction, the lack of familiarity with the task and with the device's operation makes the system appear generally less usable than the more familiar counterpart. From our viewpoint as editors, we note that the paper illustrates how one can transfer work-practice challenges in a particular context (e.g., such as operating a system using a hands-free device to ensure social responsibilities towards patients) to both an effective and user-friendly device.

In the fourth paper, Santiago Walser, Seeber, and Maier (2019) study how to support companies to not only encourage idea generation and innovation in their ecosystems but also find effective ways to identify and choose the best ideas to go forward with from the many ideas that crowdsourcing innovations provide. They propose that one can perhaps use the sharing economy and its multisided platforms in idea convergence processes by supporting and nudging raters towards better idea choices if one can better understand raters'

decision steps. To gain such understanding, they vary information load on raters on a prototype convergence platform and find that less load leads to more accurate choices. Raters' having more opportunities for reviewing their choice in conditions with less load partially explains this tendency, but it depends on raters' tendency to follow crowd opinion. Thus, the authors help point out that a convergence platform's HCI design, such as how it reveals the crowd's opinion, can support and nudge raters towards more accurate choices. Again, we (the editors) note that it is not simply enough to design an interface that suitably decomposes information load to nudge raters towards accurate choices: one also needs consider raters' value systems for sharing opinions. Thus, this also exemplifies the importance of socio-technical HCI design in a sharing society.

3 Conclusion

To design for HCI in the sharing society, we need to better understand HCI concepts and tools and have flexibility and openness to defining the scope of HCI concepts, methods, and tools to incorporate both socio-technical thinking and the needs, values, and concerns of users and society at large. In this special issue editorial, we briefly introduce the key concepts of the sharing society, sharing economy, and collaborative economy and introduce HCI in the context of a sharing society. We advocate for new socio-technical HCI design approaches and new HCI tools and designs for sharing. We also introduce the four excellent papers that we invited to the special issue. We believe they will help to energize the underlying premise of the socio-technical thinking for a new generation of socio-technical HCI researchers. In this way, we provide HCI researchers and practitioners the inspiration and ambition to adopt a broader perspective and role in shaping and advancing the sharing society. We restate and reinterpret the importance of UX and usability concepts in this endeavor and point to the need that HCI researchers and practitioners adopt and advance a broader perspective of their work and designs to include societal, environmental, and professional concerns. We hope that this special issue will advance a sustainable, socio-technical HCI design for a sharing society.

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Torkil Clemmensen is a professor at the Department of Digitalization, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark. His research interest is in psychology as a science of design. His research focuses on cultural-psychological perspectives on usability, user experience, and digitalization of work. He contributes to human-computer interaction, design, and information systems.

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Mikko Rajanen has 20 years of experience in HCI research and teaching in University of Oulu, Finland. His research interests include usability in open source software development context, usability in games and gamification, and usability cost-benefit analysis. He has been involved in local HCI community, organizing the World Usability Day and initiating the UKKOSS research project for bringing the usability methods, processes and practices into open source software development context. His goal is to make the world a better place one user interface at the time.

Jose Abdelnour-Nocera is Associate Professor in Sociotechnical Design at the University of West London. His interests lie in applying socio-technical and cultural perspectives to the design and development of people-centered systems. In pursuing these interests, he has been involved as researcher and consultant in several projects in the UK and overseas in the domains of international development, mhealth, enterprise resource planning systems, service design and higher education. He gained an MSc in Social Psychology from Simon Bolivar University, Venezuela, and a PhD in Computing from The Open University, UK.

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