Digital Humanities and Information Systems: Strengthening a Tradition of Innovation

Panel

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ABSTRACT
In the last decades Digital Humanities developed from an interdisciplinary approach introducing computing in the traditional areas of study to a discipline of its own. The basis, therefore, are the traditional approaches of the humanities as a study of the experienced world – for example hermeneutics – which are transported in the digital media and used to get a deeper insight of the effects of new media on society. In both areas of study, a close relationship of Digital Humanities to the discipline of Information Systems, that addresses “IT, along with procedures and data” (Travica, 2014, p. 15), are obvious. Nevertheless, until now there is very little contact between these two disciplines, even though the mutual interchange would be very fruitful for both sides. This panel wants to introduce Digital Humanities to Information Systems, as well as to show already existing approaches for collaboration.

Keywords
Digital Humanities, theory of Information Systems, interdisciplinarity, innovation.

PANEL OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVE
Digital Humanities (DH) is regarded as an interdisciplinary endeavor that does not only digitize traditional research in the Humanities, but also attempts to enhance and renew Humanities research by fully integrating technology with these disciplines. In principle, it also looks at the social impact of computing technology: “Thus, a distinctive feature of DH is its cultivation of a two-way relationship between the humanities and the digital: the field both employs technology in the pursuit of humanities research and subjects technology to humanistic questioning and interrogation, often simultaneously” (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_humanities).

Golumbia (http://www.uncomputing.org/?p=203) says that, although it is academic-politically more acceptable to use the wider definition of DH, the narrower understanding is more prominent in the practice of DH. Therefore, it seems that the cultural and societal aspects of Computing have not received that much attention in DH. A typical definition of DH in the narrower sense is the following one by Segolen Tarte: “The Digital Humanities are – or should be – a movement in the Humanities that aims to design, develop, promote, and use digital tools to support work – academic or not – in the various disciplines of the Humanities. It strongly encourages, benefits from, and contributes to interdisciplinary practices, including beyond the Humanities. I hope that these practices will soon be so natural to the Humanities that they won’t need to be qualified Digital anymore” (http://whatisdigitalhumanities.com/). Leif Isaksen goes a bit deeper by mentioning the influence of changes in society on Humanities, but ignores the reverse effect: “I see ‘Digital Humanities’ as an umbrella term for two different but related developments: 1) Humanities Computing (the specialist use of computing technology to undertake Humanities research) and 2) the implications for the Humanities of the social revolution created by ubiquitous computing and online access. Since the late Noughties the latter seems to have become the driving force in DH with responsibility for much of the ‘boom’ in public interest and funding” (http://www.artsrn.ualberta.ca/taporwiki/index.php/How_do_you_define_Humanities_Computing_/Digital_Humanities%3F).

As such, the humanities disciplines, and even DH, do not seem to have many links with Information Systems (IS). However, if the field of DH is committed to also explore the wider context referred to above (i.e., studying technology from a humanistic perspective), it comes much closer to what has been done over the past few decades in IS. For example, one of the sub-
disciplines in IS, Human-Computer Action (HCI), may be quite useful to DH scholars who would want to look a bit further than the effect on the humanities discipline itself. “DH values collaboration, plurality, investigation of human culture, and the disruption of and reflection on traditional practices and is concerned with not just the use of digital technology for humanities projects but how the use of digital technology for humanities projects changes the user’s experience” (https://docs.google.com/document/d/129_260mhp6C6JaqmylmhMTXA1sv7YYQ0OLsAOA0oCJE/edit).

One may conclude that DH is not limited to the use of information technology and systems to optimize the traditional ways of doing research in the humanities disciplines, but that the digital tools and methods also affect and change the fields themselves. The digital revolution of the past century affected all branches of science in the widest sense of the word, including the liberal arts, philosophy and the social sciences. On the other hand, the new approaches and subsequent findings in the humanities probably have also changed aspects of society itself. These movements are very close to phenomena that are studied by IS.

IS, indeed, is defined as the study of the impact of software programs on the organization, business cultures and society at large, while undergraduate teaching in the discipline also includes the study of systems analysis and design, and programming skills. While an information system (a computer program) is defined as “software that helps you organize and analyze data [which] … makes it possible to answer questions and solve problems relevant to the mission of an organization” (http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-are-information-systems-definition-types-quiz.html), the academic field of IS is defined as “a discipline that is concerned with the development and use of information systems by individuals, groups, organizations and society, where usually those information systems involve the use of computers” (Oates, 2006, p. 1).

The learning objectives of the ACM 2010 IS curriculum (on undergraduate level) include a number of “softer”, social aspects: “Students will learn to …

• Explain the technology, people, and organizational components of information systems
• Understand globalization and the role information systems has [sic] played in this evolution ...
• Be aware of emerging technologies that enable new forms of communication, collaboration, and partnering …
• Evaluate the ethical concerns that information systems raise in society and the impact of information systems on crime, terrorism, and war” (http://www.acm.org/education/curricula/IS 2010 ACM final.pdf/view) [p. 36, punctuation edited].

On postgraduate level and in IS research the focus on the societal aspects of IS are even more evident, especially in the interpretivist branch of IS: “Interpretive research in IS and computing is concerned with understanding the social context of an information system: the social processes by which it is developed and construed by people through which it influences, and is influenced by, its social setting” (Oates, 2006, p. 292).

The strong links between the IS discipline and the “humanistic” or social elements related to the current widespread use of information technology expose the theoretical overlaps between IS and DH. Although they both are independent disciplines or fields that include many divergent aspects of study, they intersect each other where they focus on the social settings of software use. Surprisingly though, the two fields have not collaborated significantly in this interdisciplinary arena. In fact, they are relative unaware of each other. And this is an academic pity, because they could complement each other by contributing unique perspectives on the same phenomena, while both fields could be enriched by borrowing ideas and integrating approaches back and forth. Although the study of the social aspects of IS has been accepted as part-and-parcel of the discipline, very little research has looked at DH for enrichment of its theories and methods. The objective of this panel is to foster a debate regarding the interdisciplinary enrichment of IS and DH as a new area of exploration in both disciplines.

**PANEL LAYOUT AND DESIGN**

This panel investigates the similarities and differences between DH and IS, suggesting opportunities for collaboration and the renewal of their classic roots and methodologies. The two moderators will introduce the topic and make a few position statements, respectively focusing on IS and DH. The other panel participants will then reflect on the objectives and related questions from their unique perspectives regarding the symbiotic relationship between DH and IS:

• Ladan Cockshut will look at the case of ‘world games’ as a new movement in the games industry. Looking at the 2015 game *Never Alone* in particular, the panelist will argue how it exemplifies how DH and IS can work both symbiotically and transdisciplinarily to generate new insights and build in new forms of community engagement.
• Wolfgang Spickermann will make contributions towards the theoretical and practical aspects of the humanities and DH.
• Nik Hassan will be discussing the need for the IS field to clarify where it stands with regard to DH, the unique socio-technical expertise that the IS field offers for DH and will elaborate on areas in which the IS field is particularly suited to contribute. These areas are where existing questions related to DH have not been addressed satisfactorily.

The chairs (moderators) will then take questions from the floor to the panel as a whole or to individual panel members. The panelists will also have the opportunity to debate points raised by other panelists.
PANEL MODERATORS AND PARTICIPANTS

Jan H. Kroeze is Professor at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in the School of Computing. He has PhDs in Semitic Languages and Information Technology, and his current research focuses on IS theory and philosophy and Humanities-enriched IS. Jan was the first president of the Southern African Chapter of the AIS and he served a term as the publications officer of the AIS SIGPHILOSOPHY. He is currently the president of the South African Institute of Computer Scientists and Information Technologists (SAICSIT). Jan will discuss a few possibilities in which IS can be innovated by borrowing ideas and methods from DH.

Leif Scheuermann is working at the Centre for Information Modelling – Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities at the University of Graz (Austria). After his studies in history and philosophy at the University of Stuttgart (Germany), he worked as a research assistant at the Institute of Nuclear Technology and Energy Systems, at the University of Stuttgart, at the historical Seminar at the University of Hamburg (Germany) and the Max-Weber-Center for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies at the University of Erfurt. In 2016 he was fellow at the excellence cluster Topoi Berlin (Germany) and visiting researcher at the School of Computing at the University of South Africa (UNISA). During this stay he got a deeper insight in the methods and research of IS. He will give an overview in common research questions and the approaches to solve them.

Ladan Cockshut is Senior Lecturer in Computer Games in the Games, Art, and Design (GAD) department of the School of Computing at Teesside University. She was awarded her PhD in human geography from Durham University in 2013 where she conducted an ethnography into space, action, and formation amongst digital gamers. Ladan's research interests include games studies, theories of play and games, sociality in computer games, creativity and digital society, innovating games platforms for research use, gamification, the social impacts of digital technologies and participatory action research. Before coming to Teesside, Ladan held an EPSRC-funded postdoctoral post in the School of Applied Social Science at Durham University, researching cybercrime and the public's confidence in its policing (March 2014-Nov 2015). She is also a Junior Research Fellow at Hatfield College, Durham University.

Wolfgang Spickermann is Head of the Institute of Ancient History and Classical Antiquities at the Karl-Franzens University of Graz. Since the 1990s he works in the field of DH and especially digital history. He is one of the founders and a long-term board member of the “Arbeitsgemeinschaft Geschichte und EDV e.V.” – the German branch of the International Association for History and Computing (I-AHC) – and editor of the AAGE (Abhandlungen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Geschichte und EDV). With his long experience in the field of humanities as well as DH he is highly qualified to give a theoretical and practical introduction in these fields.

Nik Rushdi Hassan is Associate Professor of MIS at the Labovitz School of Business and Economics (LSBE), University of Minnesota Duluth. He worked in the IT industry as software engineer, general manager, consultant and entrepreneur. He served as President of the Association for Information Systems (AIS) Special Interest Group on Philosophy in Information Systems (SIGPHILOSOPHY), Director of the Information Technology Program at LSEB, Associate Editor of the Business & Information Systems Engineering Journal and is currently Associate Editor for the History and Philosophy Department of the Communications of the AIS and Senior Editor of Data Base Advances in Information Systems. He is leading a Special Issue for the European Journal of Information Systems on Philosophy and the Future of the IS field.

CONCLUSION

Although both disciplines – IS and DH – have been existing in parallel for a few decades and have reached considerable levels of maturity, we believe that there is still room to innovate and to enrich both fields by exploring and promoting deliberate interdisciplinary collaboration. It is quite surprising that both disciplines are relatively ignorant of each other while there are many touchpoints in terms of the study of human aspects of software and systems. We hope that the outcome of this panel will raise awareness of the two related disciplines and stimulate collaboration across disciplinary borders to innovate and strengthen both fields. While IS can explore many of the scholarly approaches that belong to DH, for example digital hermeneutics and exegetical methods to analyze business texts, DH can follow the example of IS to study the social impact of software on the organization, community and society.

REFERENCES
