Responsible Innovation: The Role of MIS in the "Right to be Forgotten" Discourse

Anat Hovav
Korea University Business School
Seoul, South Korea
anatzh@korea.ac.kr

Abstract

In my 2014 paper, I called on the MIS discipline to transition from being a passive observer of innovation to an active participant and true change agent in what von Schomberg termed responsible innovation. In that paper, I suggested that MIS scholars could investigate potential positive outcomes and unintended consequences when a technology is at its preliminary stages of development and subsequently propose mechanisms (e.g. design, policies, standards) to facilitate favorable effects and overcome adverse outcomes. I suggested that MIS is well positioned to engage in responsible innovation discourse as it is at the cross-section of technology, organizations, society and policy. In this TREO talk, I will introduce and discuss one example of an emerging debate that encompasses technology, privacy, policies and business. I will briefly introduce the current dilemma, the various organizational and technical challenges involved and close with a number of potential research questions that can be addressed by the MIS discipline pre-ante.

Presently, governments are struggling with the "right to be forgotten versus the right to be remembered" question. This early discourse on the matter involves mostly ICT companies and governments. What should be the role of the MIS discipline in this debate? Should we wait until the issue is determined by governments and then investigate its effects on organizations? Or should we take an active role in shaping relevant policies? Should we follow the healthcare industry, where medical sociologists are tasked at investigating the effects of new medical technologies on society often BEFORE these technologies are fully disseminated? If so, what type of research tools, methodologies and theories can be used by the MIS community to help with the discourse on this question? Some of the potential research questions that we could be addressing as a discipline are:

Data classification: How do we classify what data should be forgotten and what has to be remembered? How do we "forget" data that is distributed over a large number of servers located in various geopolitical boundaries?

Control and governance: Who should decide what and when data should be forgotten? How will these entities be governed, and how do we ensure transparency in the forgetting process? How should international policies be shaped given the disparity in political, cultural and legal frameworks among these geopolitical regions?

Economics: What are the economic implications of relevant policies for Internet companies whose business model is based on the use of publically available information? Would we be willing to pay for the use of Google, facebook.com or any other free services for the "right to be forgotten?"