

INCORPORATING SOCIETAL CONCERNS INTO COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

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Abstract:

The design of communication technologies is not autonomous, but is shaped by conflicting social groups. As a result, communication technologies may have different properties depending upon their designers. In this paper, we show how communication technologies are differentially designed depending upon their institutional environment. Specifically, we examine how the consideration of societal concerns, such as privacy, differs between universities, firms, consortia, and the open source movement. The results show the biases of each institution, whether it is the flexibility given to university researchers, the emphasis on profitable societal concerns by firms, or influential role given to members within a consortium or in the open source movement. The resulting analysis is useful for policymakers seeking to incorporate a specific societal concern into a communication technology. The analysis shows why a firm may not address or incorporate a societal concern, and as a result, policymakers may then have to look to other institutions to vindicate their preferences. To this end, this paper has highlighted tendencies and biases for each of these institutions when incorporating societal concerns.