

Give Me a 2x2 Matrix and I Will Build the Market

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Abstract

The 'critic' has become a key intermediary in the economy. There are suggestions that the various rankings and ratings they produce have become 'engines' or 'paper engines' capable of reshaping their environment. The paper calls for a more detailed focus on the production of ranking devices and the kinds of transformation they produce. In what specific ways are these devices shaping activities and markets? We show how a graphical ranking device called the 'magic quadrant' has begun to take hold of and create a focus around what might be thought of as 'dot-ology'; this is how people have become concerned with representing, sorting and moving dots on a graph. This, in turn, is creating a new visual and temporal culture within information technology markets. In terms of the former, because of the visual nature of the rankings, we show how the device restricts what kinds of ratings can be produced. The effect of this is that the device's authors attempt to change aspects of 'the market' to better fit what it is the device is able to depict. In terms of the latter, this temporal aspect, the device encourages its authors to modify the domain at specific key moments. This is typically at the 'outset' and at the 'end' of a specific technology market. Our work draws on observations and interviews conducted on industry analysts over several years that form part of a wider research project on the Social Study of the Information Technology Marketplace.

Background

Neil teaches and researches on the sociology of information systems at the University of Edinburgh where he is a senior lecturer in the Management School and a member of the Institute for the Study of Science, Technology and Innovation (ISSTI). After taking a degree in Computing and a Masters in Science Policy he completed a PhD in Science and Technology Studies (STS) at the University of Lancaster. Prior to moving to Edinburgh he was a Senior Research Associate at the University of Newcastle investigating the development of e-Government. He has also conducted research on virtual universities under the auspices of the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) Virtual Society Programme and has written (with James Cornford) Putting the University Online: Information, Technology, and Organisational Change. Neil is currently leading an ESRC project on the Biography and Evolution of Standardised Software Packages and is co-investigator on an ESRC E-Society project and a European 6th Framework project investigating standard setting in e-Commerce. Current research interests include the sociology of technology, actor network theory, the social shaping and generification of information systems, and the performativity of simple business tools. He has also recently completed a second book (with Robin Williams) called Software and Organisation: The Biography of the Enterprise-Wide System or How SAP Conquered the World, published by Routledge. Neil supervises a number of PhD students in the School of Management and the Research Centre for Social Sciences and is always interested in receiving applications from prospective students.

Research Interests

Information and communication technologies (ICT) and their social and organisational implications;
Sociology of technology;
Design and use of Generic Software Packages
Virtual universities;
Virtual organisations;
e-commerce;
e-government;
consultancy organisations.