The Origins of SIG-III and Its 30 Years’ Journey: Visions and Reflections

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ABSTRACT
In this panel we will discuss the origins of the Special Interest Group for International Information Issues (SIG-III) of the American Society for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T) and its early years. In addition to the reflections of the last 30 years, Toni Carbo (one of the co-founders of SIG-III), Nadia Caidi (SIG-III Advisory board member), Anatoliy Gruzd (Social Media Administrator), Daniel Alemneh (SIG-III Chair), and Abebe Rorissa (SIG-III Chair-elect) look forward and discuss the future of the SIG-III including strategies to facilitate collaborations and information exchanges globally.

Keywords
International Information Issues, interest group, 30th Anniversary

INTRODUCTION
ASIS&T was established in 1937 with the goal of stimulating communications and interactions within the information community. Although it began as a professional association mainly for professionals, researchers, students, etc., from North America and continues to have a significant portion of its membership of scholars from North America, ASIS&T is a truly international organization, with members from over fifty countries from around the world. The international nature of ASIS&T has allowed for a cross-continental network of digital scholars and experts on digital libraries and information technology in developing countries; and

In light of the 75th ASIS&T Anniversary Celebration and the 30th Anniversary celebration of SIG-III, the participants on this panel will discuss the history of the SIG and its future plans. Toni Carbo one of the founding members of SIG-III, will present on the origins of SIG-III and its early years as well as provide us with the reflections. Followed by more presentations and discussions by past and current SIG-III officers, who will explore the progress over the past 30 years and discuss how SIG-III plans to foster international informational exchanges in today’s increasingly digital and connected world.

SIG III: The Origin Story
Founded in 1982, the Special Interest Group for International Information Issues (SIG/III) is an interest group of the American Society for Information Science & Technology. The purposes of the SIG, as outlined in its mission statement are:

- to promote better awareness among ASIS&T members and information professionals of the importance of international cooperation;
- to facilitate and enhance better communication and interaction among ASIST members and their foreign colleagues on information issues;
- to develop an international network of digital scholars and experts on digital libraries and information technology in developing countries; and
- to provide a forum for exploring and discussing international information issues and problems. SIG III membership includes most non-U.S. ASIST members and a true cross-section of U.S. ASIST members.

SIG III: New Paradigm
This original mission statement remains to be highly relevant and even more pressing in today’s globalized world. We believe that the ability to form connections with other scholars from around the world is one of the most important skills an academic can possess. The formation of an international network of colleagues allows for academics to stay on top of current global trends, internationally disseminate information, and form cross-border and cross-cultural research teams. However, maintaining international
relations can become time consuming and costly for all parties involved.

Social media tools such as Academia (academia.edu) and Twitter (twitter.com) can help address these problems, as they allow scholars to discover potential collaborators, find relevant publications and easily communicate with colleagues from around the globe.

In this regard, SIG-III tried various (face to face and virtual) ways to engage the broader ASIS&T community. The Global Information Village Plaza for example provided such a forum. The first Global Information Plaza was facilitated by Michel Menou and Nadia Caidi at the 2002 ASIS&T Annual Meeting in Philadelphia. Up until late 2000’s the Global Plaza offered an opportunity for all ASIS&T members and information professionals at large to share opinions and consider these implications in an informal setting.

Today we are living in an era where social media play increasingly more roles in facilitating such information sharing and discussions. The panel will explore how ASIS&T members are using social media and the entire landscape of tools available to reach out to a broader audience in order to maintain the continuity in international information exchanges, and collaborations. For the purpose of this panel, one of the presentations by Anatoliy Gruzd will focus on the use of Twitter by a sample of 141 active Twitter users from the ASIS&T community. The analysis was done using http://AcademiaMap.com, a new online influence assessment application for scholars, developed by the Social Media Lab at Dalhousie University. AcademiaMap follows public Twitter conversations among scholars and visualizes their Twitter connections in real-time. This application also helps scholars to filter the “noise” from their Twitter streams using various “influence” metrics and gives scholars an easy way to identify trending topics and interesting voices to follow from Twitter.

This case study has shown that Twitter is being actively used for international informational exchanges by ASIS&T members. Twitter messages (tweets) ranged from friendly remarks, to discussions over grant proposals, to conversations on conference proceedings, to the sharing of articles and blog posts pertaining to Library and Information Science research.

SIG III: Looking into the Future
To address the growing reliance on social media among scholars, the current SIG-III officers on the panel will discuss their plans to encourage and facilitate international informational exchanges via social media. They will also share they experience engaging the ASIS&T community through the SIG-III Facebook group and a new Twitter account @sig3i (launched on June 1, 2012). At the end, the panel will engage the audience in a broader discussion about the role that social media play in the creation and maintenance of cross-border connections and stimulate international knowledge exchange.

For any professional association such as ASIS&T and its various special interest groups to continue to grow their memberships in North America and beyond, a regular assessment of its past and current missions, activities as well as strategies is crucial. In order to facilitate ways for the members to form local/regional groups, connect, collaborate, and share among the various groups and their members, various stakeholders need to coordinate their efforts. One of the presentations on this panel will focus on how the work of pioneers such as those whose vision led to the establishment of SIG-III 30 years ago (e.g., Toni Carbo and Michel Menou) as well as those who worked tirelessly to continue ASIS&T’s growth internationally since then will offer possible avenues forward. Because, a forward looking organization, while mindful of past achievements and building on a strong foundation of those achievements, will fulfill its core mission and at the same time adapt to changing environments. Such an organization and its members will contribute to society’s development globally only if, from time to time, it is able to reflect on its past and look forward to the future. This is the general theme of this panel with respect to ASIS&T and SIG-III.

REFERENCES