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THE PHENOMENA OF INTEREST TO INFORMATION SCIENCEInformation Science and the Phenomenon of InformationN. J. Belkin & S. E. Robertson

The word 'information' covers a range of concepts from genetic information to formal human knowledge structures. Steps along this range are, for example, Shannon theory, sense data, and inter-human communication. The range is discussed in terms of a unifying principle (the idea of structure).

We regard Information Science or Informatics as a problem-oriented discipline, concerned with specific social objectives. In particular, it is concerned with effective communication of desired information from human generator to human user. Should informatics concern itself with the whole range of concepts of information, or with just part of it?

The answer to this question depends on whether the nature of our practical problems derives from the properties of information as a whole, or from those properties that relate to one section of the scale. We consider that there are properties of information that are peculiar to the human communication context (from individual concept forming through social and formal knowledge structures) and do not occur outside this section of the scale, but are of vital importance in determining the nature of our problems.

Examples are discussed.