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User Psychology: Re-assessing the Boundaries of a Discipline

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ABSTRACT
Currently, efforts of psychologists to improve interactive technology have fragmented and the systemization of scientific knowledge stalled. There is no home for integrative psychological research on computer use. In this programmatic paper, we reassess three meta-scientific issues defining this discipline. As the first step, we pro- pose to extend the subject of study from the analysis of human mind in the interaction to the broader view of human as an intentional user of interactive technology. Hence, the discipline is most aptly called user psychology. Secondly, problem-solving epistemology is advocated as an alternative to the notion from natural sciences that progress in science involves increased truth likeness of theories. We hold that implications to design is only one outcome of psychological work—user psychologists should help solving the problems of other stakeholders of technology as well. Thirdly, to help integrating fragments of research, analyses should be re-organized around explanatory frameworks that can span multiple technical application areas. An explanatory framework combines a problem domain, relevant knowledge, and the logic of scientific inference. To conclude, we argue that technology has become so pervasive an aspect of modern life that its relationship with human mind deserves the status of a basic research question and its own discipline. Psychology of the computer user should not be the handmaiden of technologists but de- fine itself by its own terms.

KEYWORDS
Psychology HTI User

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