SIGCHI Lifetime Research Award

Talk: Online Communication and Psychological Well-being

Robert E. Kraut

Human-Computer Interaction Institute
Carnegie Mellon University
robert.kraut@cs.cmu.edu

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Award Overview

The SIGCHI Lifetime Research Award is presented to individuals for outstanding contributions to the study of human-computer interaction. This award recognizes the very best, most fundamental and influential research contributions. It is awarded for a lifetime of innovation and leadership and carries an honorarium of \$5000. The criteria for the award are:

- Cumulative contributions to the field.
- Influence on the work of others.
- Development of new research directions.
- Reasonably active participant in the ACM SIGCHI community, although people outside of this community with outstanding and relevant achievements are considered in exceptional circumstances

Abstract

Since the dawn of the Internet era, researchers, policy-makers and the general public have questioned how new technology is influencing our psychological well-being. This talk will review research I've done with students and collaborators over the past 18 years to cast light on this question. Our earliest work in the 1990s indicated that

more Internet use, independent of type, predicted increases in depression and declines in other measures of well-being. However, later research that differentiated communication with stronger from communication with weaker ties and differentiated types of communication shows that whom one communicates with online and the nature of the communication are the important factors, not Internet use per se. In Facebook, for example, receiving targeted, composed communication from strong ties predicts improvements in well-being, while viewing wide-audience broadcasts, receiving one-click feedback, and receiving composed communication from weak ties does not. In online health support groups, it is messages exchanged in public that predicts improvements in well-being, while private message exchanges predict declines.

Bio

Bob Kraut is the Herbert A. Simon Professor of Human-Computer Interaction in the School of Computer Science and Tepper School of Business at Carnegie Mellon University and one of the founding members of CMU's Human-Computer Interaction Institute. Previously he

was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University and a research scientist at Bell Laboratories and Bell Communications Research.

Bob is a social psychologist with broad interests in the impact of computing and telecommunications on individuals, groups and organizations and ways to design them to improve human lives. He has conducted empirical research on online communities, the social impact of the Internet, the design of information technology for small-group intellectual work and related topics. Starting with his HomeNet project, he has spent over 15 years conducting research to understand how the way people use technology influences their psychological well-being and personal relationships. His research on online communities combines careful empirical studies of communities with interventions and design ideas to improve them. This approach is illustrated in his book with Paul Resnick, *Building Successful Online Communities: Evidence-Based Social Design*. His most recent research focuses on ways to improve productivity and creativity in online production.