Why Research-oriented Design Isn’t Design-oriented Research

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Abstract

Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) is the discipline concerned with the design, evaluation, and implementation of interactive computing systems. Typically, HCI researchers do not primarily study existing technologies, styles of interaction, or interface solutions. On the contrary, one of the core activities in contemporary HCI is to design new technologies—prototypes—that act as vehicles through which the researchers’ ideas for novel and alternative solutions materialize and take on concrete shape.

Despite this situation, there is very little discussion in the field on HCI as design discipline and what the role of design is as an activity in the research process. This article is specifically about the element of design as currently manifest in HCI research. We dig deeper into HCI as a design discipline by suggesting, analyzing, and discussing what appears to be two competing traditions in the relationship between design and research; that of design-oriented research and research-oriented design.

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The way in which researchers develop research designs is fundamentally affected by whether the research question is descriptive or explanatory. It affects what information is collected. For example, if we want to explain why some people are more likely to be apprehended and convicted of crimes we need to have hunches about why this is so. But this does not mean that divorce causes crime. Rather than divorce causing crime, divorce and crime rates might both be due to other social processes such as secularization, greater individualism or poverty. What is research design? Students at fee-paying private schools typically perform better in their final year of schooling than those at government funded schools.