Sketch & The Lizard King: Supporting Image Inclusion in HCI Publishing

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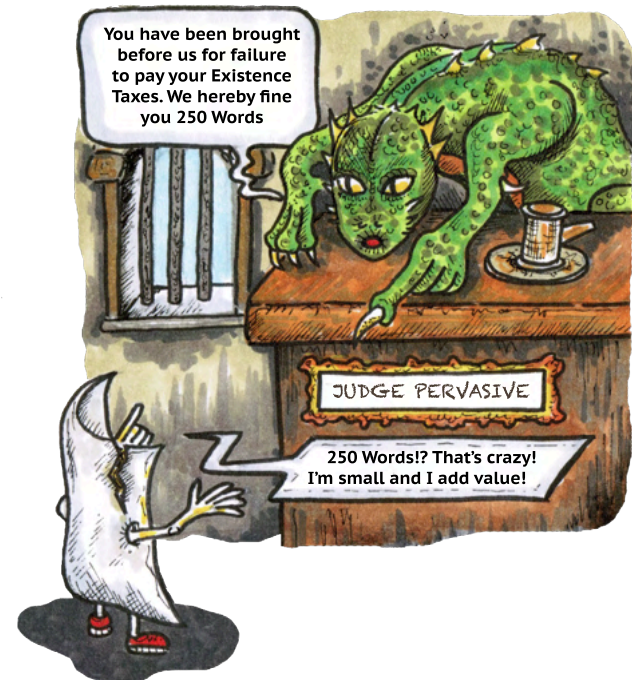Lancaster, UK
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Abstract

Author Keywords

Sketching; Comics; Pictorials; Publishing;

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation: Misc.

...there were some victories, like with DIS conference [7]...

...we used sketches to analyse data, as pioneered by our allies, Lee et al. [11]...

We've been watching them for years... waiting... analysing... these are our paper archives [17]...

Papers analysed by percentage space given to each type of output

Conference, CSCW, 1994

Conference, CHI, 1997

Conference, CHI, 1995

Conference, CSCW, 1992

Conference, CHI, 1986

Conference, CHI, 2004

Magazine, Interactions, 1999

Conference, CHI, 2008

Conference, CHI, 2008

Conference, CHI, 2008

SIGCHI 10 Most Cited
Range: 1986–2008

Text   References   Diagrams   Equations   Tables   Images

Papers analysed by percentage space given to each type of output

Conference, RecSys, 2016

Conference, Mindtrek, 2011

Conference, CHI, 2017

Conference, CHI, 2008

Conference, CHI, 2014

Conference, CHI, 2011

Conference, RecSys, 2015

Conference, CHI, 1990

Conference, RecSys, 2013

Conference, CHI, 1994

SIGCHI
10 Most Downloaded
(last 6 weeks)
Range: 1990–2017

Text
References
Diagrams
Equations
Tables
Images
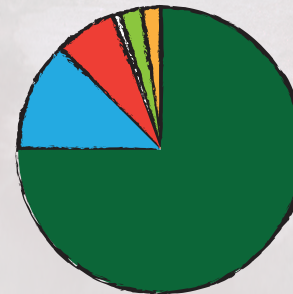
...we'll get there – but the Publishers... well, that's another story...

...which means researchers strive toward rigour and accessible work. We cannot lay the blame with them however! We hold workshops [12], courses [13], even release comics [1,8,15,19]...
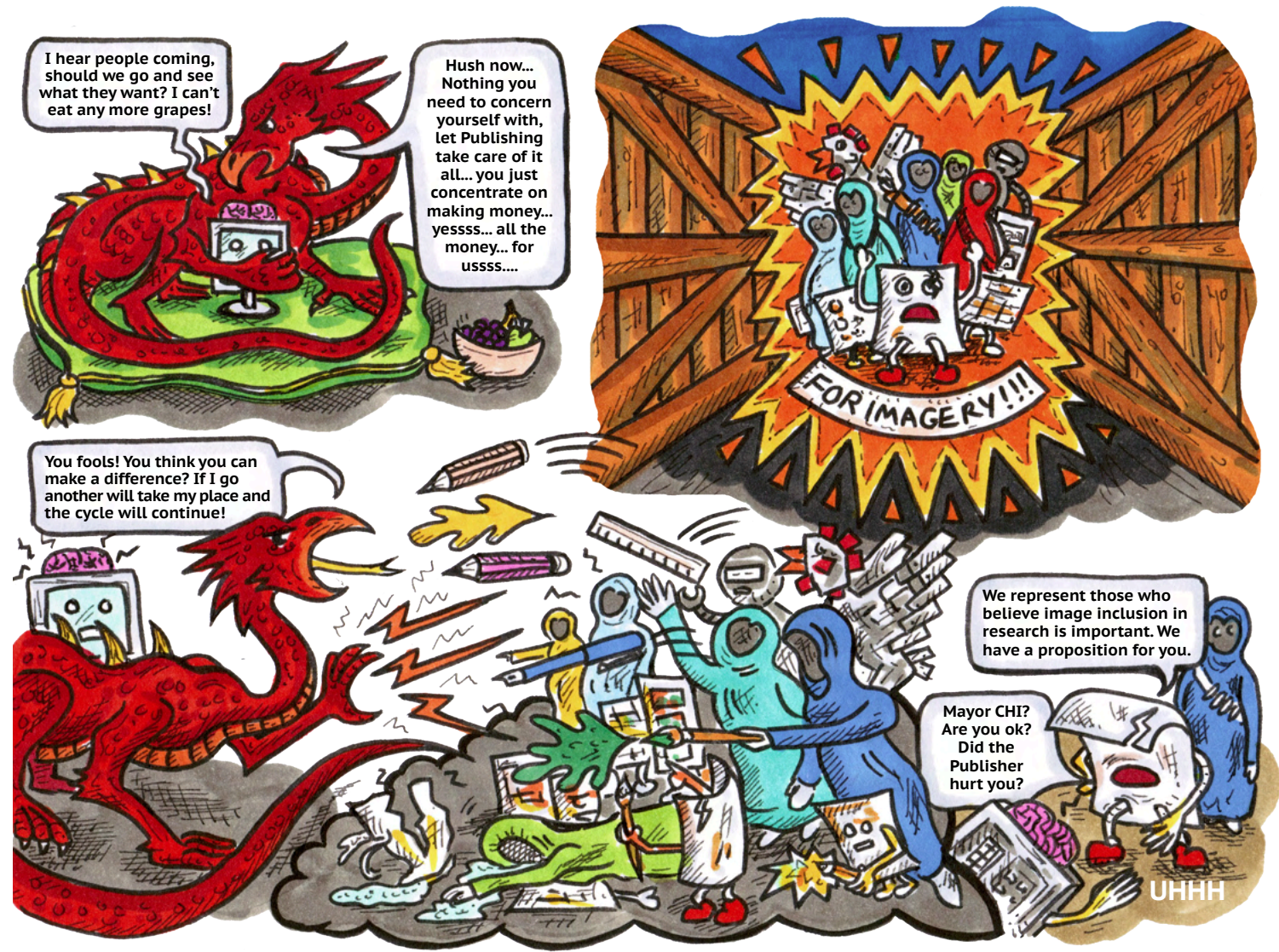
...sure they like us when they need us, to fill a gap, or if there's a Design paper [6], but there are calls for HCI to be a type of science [4]...

There are some great powers at work, little one. The References are seen as adding great value to research culture...

But didn't the References win the right to exist tax free [18] what's to stop us having the same?

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Commentary

For alt.chi paper
Sketch & The Lizard King: Supporting Image Inclusion in HCI Publishing

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This paper is cute, but not clever, for reasons I shall explain…

The authors make two proposals by the means of a cartoon/comic. The first is to add an extra page for images to each main tracking CHI paper. The second is to add a pictorial track to CHI.

There might be arguments for and against both proposals. However, the authors inadvertently demonstrate a major counter argument. Rather than presenting a balanced analysis of their proposals, the authors present a superficial argument, which is essentially no more than an assertion that something should be done because the authors say so, accompanied by some pretty pictures. If the authors had relied more on the written word, then they would have had an argument. Instead, the use of imagery has led them to put the cart before the horse. It is one thing to illustrate an argument, but quite another to allow illustrations to dictate the argument itself.

Turning to the main track, there are serious potential problems in encouraging more imagery. Pictures are less accessible for people with visual impairments, a problem that they community is trying to address. Not to mention that others with disabilities might also have difficulty in producing sketches. Given the authors claim that their approach should be accepted for reasons of 'diversity', this is rather ironic.

Even putting these problems aside, the reality is that promoting one type of work often comes at the expense of another. There is a finite budget for HCI research. Funds that go on exploratory design work, or 'provocations', and so forth are funds that are not being directly spent on what some might consider to be more prescient matters, such as the development

of new assistive technologies, or systems aimed at addressing actual societal ills. The authors do not make any real argument as to why public funds should be spent in such a way, even though the main track has a substantial bearing on their distribution.

Where the authors are perhaps on stronger grounds is that page lengths are arbitrary and problematic. However, there are better reasons for removing page limits, including that they have been successfully removed elsewhere and they can amount to unfair discrimination (See Kirkham R, et al. Being reasonable: A manifesto for improving the inclusion of disabled people in SIGCHI conferences. In Alt.CHI 2015). In any event there is no reason why sketches cannot be attached as supplementary material.

The other proposal of the authors is to establish a pictorial track at CHI. This might be good, bad, or indifferent. Unlike the authors other proposal, there is some direct evidence that a Pictorials track can be sustained productively: DIS operates one. However, the authors do not explore or investigate the evidence to see if the same conclusion should be reached for CHI (which may have different needs and requirements to DIS). So, there is no real balanced argument: only an indication that the matter should be investigated. A decision can only be made by comparing the authors proposal with other potential options: adding a track takes resource and time which would be spent on something else.

The lesson of this story is perhaps this: changes to our peer review processes require a careful analysis. They should not be done on the basis that some (arbitrary) group of researchers would 'prefer' something, or it looks 'cute'.

Commentary

For alt.chi paper
Sketch & The Lizard King: Supporting Image Inclusion in HCI Publishing

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The central argument is sound, the presentation is interesting and provocative. I say accept, we are visual beings and text is not the only way.

:D