



**PANEL #1**

**VENICE  
2025**

**Theme**

**Human Interaction in the Digital Era**

**IARIA Congress 2025 & DigiTech 2025**



# PANEL #1

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2025

## Moderators

**Prof. Dr. Claudia Heß**, IU Internationale Hochschule, Germany

**Prof. Dr. Sibylle Kunz**, IU Internationale Hochschule, Germany

## Panelists

**Prof. Dr. Matthias Harter**, Hochschule RheinMain, Germany

**Prof. Dr. Júlio Monteiro Teixeira**, Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC),  
Brazil

**Dr. José Miguel Martins Lucas**, Universidade de Coimbra - Faculdade de  
Direito, Portugal

**Dr. Andras Horvath**, Peter Pazmany Catholic University, Hungary

**Prof. Dr. Petre Dini**, IARIA, USA/EU



# Chair Introduction

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- Discussing Human Interaction in the Digital Era
- Topics:
  - *Digital Dependency*
  - *Empathy Erosion & Phubbing*
  - *Digital Burnout*
  - *Virtual Intimacy & Cyber-Bullying*
  - *Digital Divide, Aloofness, Digital Detox etc.*



Prof. Dr. Sibylle Kunz  
Media Computer Science



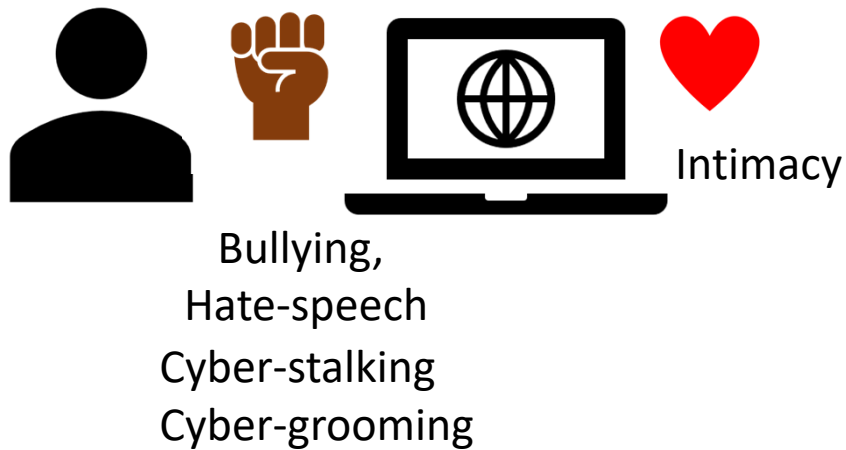
Prof. Dr. Claudia Hess  
Digital Transformation



# Chair Introduction

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## Computer-mediated Communication



Multi-modal  
Natural Language Processing  
3D (immersion, presence)

## Digital Divide, Burnout, Aloofness



## Digital Dependency



## Digital Detox





# Chair Introduction

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## Virtual Intimacy & Cyber-Bullying

- Have happened from the beginning, e.g. in bulletin-boards, Usenet etc.  
(Rheingold, H. (1993). *The Virtual Community*.)
- Online harassment: “interpersonal aggression or offensive behavior(s) that is communicated over the internet or through other electronic media”  
(Slaughter, A. and Newman, E. (2022). New Frontiers: Moving Beyond Cyberbullying to Define Online Harassment. *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*, 1(2), <https://doi.org/10.54501/jots.v1i2.5> .)
- Sexual harassment in XR / 3D Environments
  - Stop-gestures (user, real-time)
  - Guarding personnel in virtual environments (real-time)
  - Forms to report misuse (ex-post)
  - AI/Natural language understanding as a chance for auto-detection of misbehavior?
  - Discussion: "Freedom" vs. "Security", protection of children/teenagers/women/LGBTQ+...
  - Cultural aspects
- **Chair position: It's not 'only a game' - we need to establish & enforce virtual house-rules. AI can help in doing so.**



Prof. Dr. Sibylle Kunz  
Media Computer Science

Kunz, S., Hess, C., Steffen, A. (2025)  
*It's NOT "only a game"! Strategies against sexual harassment in immersive VR environments.*  
International Conference on Gender Research 8(1)500-503. DOI:  
[10.34190/icgr.8.1.3209](https://doi.org/10.34190/icgr.8.1.3209)



Digital  
Dependency ?

Nomophobia ?  
abbreviated form of "no-  
mobile-phone phobia."

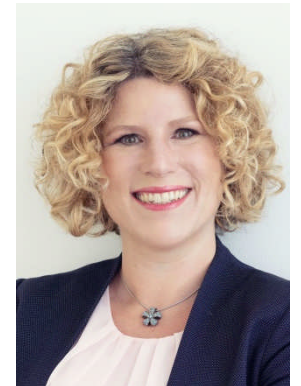


# Chair Introduction

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## Digital Dependency

- “a person's persistent inability to regulate the use of digital devices, on which he or she has become highly dependent” (Gonçalves et al., 2023)
- This is not new! Internet dependence has been described since the mid-1990s
- High technology exposure from early childhood on
- Algorithms/platforms built to maximize user engagement/time – “attention economy”
- Consequences
  - Addiction, fear of missing out
  - Brain rot & Digital dementia
  - Skill atrophy, loss of autonomy, over-reliance on digital assistants – AI assistants!!!
- Discussion
  - Are worries about AI assistants and skill loss similar to past concerns about calculators?
  - Should we deliberately “train” ourselves and future generations to remember, calculate, or decide “the old way”?
  - How can education balance the benefits of digital learning tools and the risks of overuse?
- **Chair position: In a work environment characterized by human-AI collaboration, it is particularly important for career starters to learn from the ground up in order to assess and improve the quality of co-created results.**



Prof. Dr. Claudia Hess  
Digital Transformation





# Panelist Position

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- **Empathy Erosion**

- **Consequence: emotional overload**

- It is easier than ever to generate emotionally overloaded audio and video content
- content resonates with audience
- Analytical thinking is in decline, emotionally driven considerations increasing

- **Digital Burnout**

- **Emotional overload leads to distraction and procrastination**

- Euphemism for learning disability and lack of concentration

- **Phubbing in Academia**

- **Is it new?**

- No, term described in article on Wikipedia for the first time in 2013



Matthias Harter  
Hochschule  
RheinMain





# Panelist Position

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July 2025


## ■ Empathy Erosion

### ■ Consequence: emotional overload

- It is easier than ever to generate emotionally overloaded audio and video content
- content resonates with audience
- Analytical thinking is in decline, emotionally driven considerations increasing

Zum Werbetreibenden

Procrastination Isn't Your Fault —  
It's a Broke Mentality Fueled by  
Self-Doubt



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Break free from procrastination...  
quiz.theliven.com

Weitere inf...

Gesponsert

Überspringen ▶

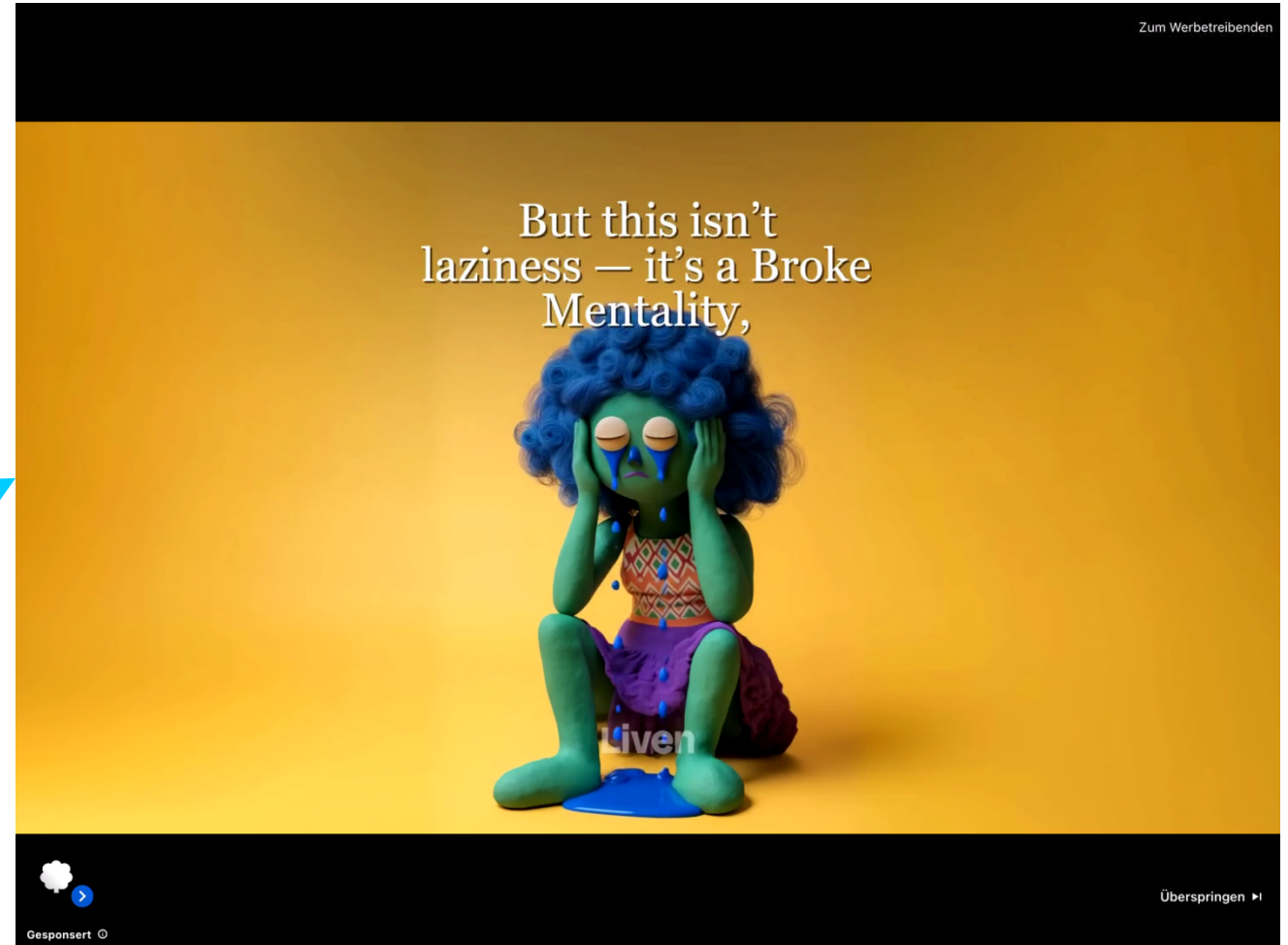


# Panelist Position

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- **Digital Burnout**
- Emotional overload leads to distraction and procrastination
  - Euphemism for learning disability and lack of concentration


Example on the right: used by dubious company pretending to coach students







# Panelist Position

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Now Your Goal

**Level of worry**  
High

**Energy level**  
Weak

**Focus level**  
Low

**Level of worry**  
Low

**Energy level**  
Strong

**Focus level**  
High

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Peter\_Jun2025 09 : 02 minutes seconds

Procrastination type Over-doer Goal State of calm

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Last updated: 7 January 2023

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## ■ Phubbing in Academia

### ■ Is it new?

- No, term described in article on Wikipedia for the first time in 2013

Photo on the left from 2011  
(by Getty Images/Corbis)

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# Panelist Position

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- **Digital dependency - Should digital platforms face legal penalties for designing addictive features that exploit human psychology (e.g. gambling)?**
  - **Negative:** Digital platforms exploit our propensity for dependency (e.g. instant gratification), draining mental energy and fragmenting attention, weakening real-world relationships.
  - **Positive:** Requiring platforms to disclose addictive design features can empower users to make informed choices, reducing dependency while fostering mindful engagement.
- **Empathy erosion - Could humans talking to AI ever legally qualify as a protected form of human interaction (if it erodes our ability to empathize with real people)?**
  - **Negative:** Digital communication erodes empathy by stripping away emotional nuance, undermining our ability to truly understand others, and mere digital literacy may not fully restore this connection.
  - **Positive:** Data privacy laws requiring AI to clearly identify itself in interactions may preserve authentic human empathy, ensuring a conscious choice.
- **AI and human interactions: Would you prefer a medical appointment with a human in 6 months or an immediate appointment with AI?**
  - **Negative:** For instance, medical appointments and AI-driven therapy risks breaching data privacy laws and lacks the emotional depth of human interaction, potentially undermining trust in health services.
  - **Positive:** In medical contexts, AI offers immediate, accessible support, helping users (e.g. initiate treatment or gain self-awareness and anticipate behavioral outcomes), if regulated (e.g. for privacy).



José Miguel  
Lucas

PhD Student  
Faculty of Law  
University of  
Coimbra



# Panelist Position

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- **Stultification - Should Government mandate some reforms to protect critical thinking from (AI-driven) intellectual stagnation?**
  - **Negative:** Over-reliance on AI for cognitive tasks threatens critical thinking, fostering intellectual stagnation, as companies profit from simplified consumer behaviors, as noted in “Consumed” (Benjamin Barber, 2008).
  - **Positive:** Legal incentives compelling tech firms to fund programs promoting critical thinking and creativity can counteract stultification, fostering intellectual vitality.
- **Human oversight - As AI learns to mitigate biases and allies to robotics, will human oversight become obsolete, and what will humans do (professionally)?**
  - **Negative:** Over-reliance on AI for bias correction and task automation risks legal loopholes, potentially marginalizing humans and disrupting social stability without robust human oversight laws.
  - **Positive:** Adaptive legal frameworks, including mandatory bias audits and labor laws prioritizing human-centric roles like creativity and caregiving, can ensure some humans tasks and AI remains accountable.
- **Future of education with AI: If AI replaces teachers, should laws enforce uniform AI teaching standards, or should diversity in AI-driven education be encouraged?**
  - **Negative:** Uniform AI-driven education risks eroding cultural and pedagogical diversity, as well as human interaction, as well as lax data privacy laws could expose sensitive student data to misuse.
  - **Positive:** AI can democratize education by offering personalized learning, supported by legal frameworks ensuring data privacy and equitable access for all students.



# Panelist Position

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## The Human Cost of Hyperconnectivity - Digital Dependency

- Slide 1: The Human Cost of Hyperconnectivity - Digital Dependency
- Empathy Erosion & Virtual Intimacy
- “Digital platforms from large companies try to colonize our attention.”

Negative:

- Constant pings = fractured focus

Productivity  $\neq$  24/7 availability

- Constant pings = fractured focus

Mental health decline from endless engagement loops

- Productivity  $\neq$  24/7 availability

Key Questions:

- Mental health decline from endless engagement loops
- Can we reclaim attention as a human right in the age of distraction?

Where does digital convenience end and psychological captivity begin?

- Positive (Potential):

How and where do we draw healthy boundaries in a "always-on" world?

- Tools for empowerment & access

Positive (Potential):

Tools for empowerment & access

Flexibility in communication, work, and learning

Awareness rising: digital detox, focus apps, tech minimalism



András Horváth  
Pazmany  
University





# Panelist Position

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## Emotional Disconnect in a Connected World Slide 1: The Human Cost of Hyperconnectivity - Digital Dependency Empathy Erosion & Virtual Intimacy

- “Digital platforms try to colonize our attention.”  
“There is no training data for real emotions.”
- Negative:  
Negative:  
Emojis replace emotional nuance
- Constant pings = fractured focus  
Relationships become shallow, transactional
- Productivity 24/7 availability  
AI mimics feelings but doesn't understand them
- Mental health decline from endless engagement loops

### Key Questions:

- Positive Potential:  
Are we becoming emotionally illiterate in a world of emojis and reactions?  
Can virtual intimacy ever replace real-world emotional connection?  
Are we designing digital technologies for human flourishing or just for engagement?
- Tools for empowerment & access

**The tools are not neutral. They are designed with intent — and that intent matters.→**

People must learn to use digital platforms consciously, not be used by them.

Positive (Potential):

Tech can support connections across distance

Virtual spaces for mental health, community support

Opportunity to relearn empathy in digital form



# Panelist Position

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- **Adaptability as a need**
- **Awareness and Caution are different in natural vs digital communication**
- **Our society is changing, our behavior should, too!**
- **Technical Adaptability vs Technical Reluctance vs Extra effort (and Stress) vs Complexity**
  - Uninformed (**Ignorance**) and Informed (**hesitation**)
  - Hesitation and concerns on personalized **cookies vs accept all**
  - **Download apps** with unknown redirections (hides links), connecting through **unknown tools**
- **Social/Behavioral Adaptation**
  - Digitally **induced fatigue**, when communicating in a digital environment (cognitive sensory are different)
  - Allophones are more **hesitant in digital space** (volatile narrative in natural communication vs permanent digital records)
  - Communication **gestures and etiquette have different** stressing factors in natural vs digital environments.
- **Communication Awareness and Communication Literacy**
  - Selection of **communication mode** might differ (negative vs. positive news) as perception might differ
  - Watching **the tonality, mood, colloquial vs corporate styles** are different between natural and digital communications
  - Being sensitive to **aloofness, empathy, unintended harms** (sometimes tacit) add stress to digital communication



Petre Dini  
IARIA



Q&A

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**THE STAGE IS  
YOURS**