

Symposium on Dialogue Systems for Health Communication

Statement of Interest

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Behaviour Change is of fundamental interest to Unilever, e.g. for personal hygiene, beauty, and lifestyle goals. Currently Unilever uses new product forms coupled with mass advertising to achieve this. Behaviour change in people is often mediated through dialogue, and this is an appropriate vehicle for Unilever (www.Unilever.com).

Advances in behaviour change theory and interactive dialogue technologies, coupled with the new media communication channels, give rise to the opportunity to leverage elements of human dialogue in automated 'dialogue-like' systems. These could be deployed on a mass scale with consumers to help them achieve beauty, health, hygiene and lifestyle goals through new behaviours.

Unilever Corporate Research is based at Colworth in Bedfordshire, UK. The team comprises scientists from mathematical, chemical, physical, biological and engineering science. The Change Behaviour through Dialogue project sits within the Maths & Consumer Dialogue science area.

Within the Change Behaviour through Dialogue project we are exploring the application of commercially available programmes such as those offered by ProChange (www.prochange.com).

We have also set-up a research activity for the in-house development of automated motivation and action support systems, interacting with users via web, email & mobile phone. Initially we have focused on exercise motivation, primarily due to the greater ease of advice (say compared with nutrition) and the opportunities for objective measures indicating behavioural action (e.g. fitness level).

Key science fields applied to development of this system are computer science/adaptive systems, natural language engineering and the psychology of behaviour change. Hence the scientists involved in the project have a wide range of skills, including, social psychology, computational linguistics, complex algorithms and technical software programming. So far we have completed design and build of the first system and have begun pilot studies to test its performance.

In addition to development of motivation and action support systems we are funding research with Dr Marco Perugini at the University of Essex to explore the drivers of health behaviours, both from the perspective of his Model of Goal-directed behaviour and the conflict between Implicit and Explicit attitudes. We are also forming a working relationship with BJ Fogg at Stanford University, whose research on Persuasive Technology is of particular interest.

We are excited at the opportunity to take part in this Symposium, particularly with its focus on the practical issues of design, implementation and evaluation of effective health dialogue systems.