

Companions for ♀♂Users - C4U

Abstract

Virtual and robot companions have increasingly been playing a role as intelligent intermediaries between users and the internet, and as helpful assistants in smart-home applications. Ideally, these companions offer both entertainment and a simplified and individualized access to digital information and social networks. Although women constitute a large group of potential users, so far little research has been done about female desiderata, preferences and behavior concerning the use of companion technologies.

Consequently, the C4U projects aims at developing a better understanding of female attitudes and requirements regarding companion technology. We will investigate the gender differences in dealing with this technology and the requirements and possibilities of integrating companion technologies into female lifestyles. For this purpose, we will conduct evaluations with focus groups consisting of female and male participants of different age groups. The objective is to gather evidence concerning gender differences in usage and attitudes with respect to companion technology and to draw conclusions for the incorporation of gender aspects in the development of companion technology.

During the experiments, the participants of the focus groups will interact freely with a companion application which was developed based on the modular agent platform RASCALLI (EU Project, FP 6, ICT, January 06 – March 09). After this, we will turn to creative user-centered design methods and the evaluation which serves as a means of collecting needs and requirements concerning possible applications. Therefore, this project exceeds gender-specific interaction design: instead, gender-specific socio-economic exposure to technology is being explored and translated into guidelines for gender-conscious technology development.

The data from the experiment will be analyzed and complemented by the results of a field study which is to be conducted in the framework of the SERA project (FP 7, ICT, contract no. 231868, January 09 – December 2010). In order to create synergies between the C4U and SERA projects, the workplan and timeline of C4U is coupled with the SERA milestones. This allows that data from both projects can be used in the design of the SERA architecture and that the resulting architecture in turn can be applied to the proof-of-concept implementation of a companion application in C4U. This application will be evaluated in a second round of experiments.