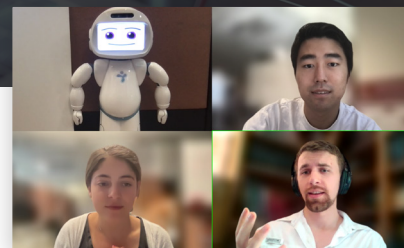


Video Mediated Support Group Interaction

2022 - Current

Project Leader: Mohammad Soleymani

Project Co-Leaders: Maja Mataric (Viterbi), Lynn Miller (Annenberg)



Background

Support groups help people to learn from others who share similar experiences and they are known to be effective in reducing stress caused by negative life events. With broader access to the Internet, support groups have also expanded into video conferencing format. In-person and remote support groups are led by facilitators with wide-ranging backgrounds and qualifications. Unfortunately, such facilitators often suffer from burnout, leading to support group closure. Automated facilitators may offer a way to maintain and sustain support groups when human facilitators are unavailable.

Objectives

The main aims of this project are (i) to identify and evaluate the characteristics of an effective autonomous group facilitator; (ii) to study and develop computational methods for measuring individual engagement and group cohesion in video-mediated multiparty interaction; and (iii) to develop and evaluate an autonomous group facilitator that can maximize group cohesion through computational means. To achieve these aims, this project builds and studies an autonomous agent facilitator in the form of a socially assistive robot for remote support groups via Zoom or a similar platform. The interpersonal connectedness and alliances in a group make a support group more effective.

Results

The research team has developed an online platform for multi-track group interaction capture and control using Microsoft Teams. Experiments are planned for Q4 2023.

Next Steps

Leveraging the findings from the pilot data, and existing videos of pre-recorded support groups, the researchers will build a semi-autonomous - and eventually an autonomous bot - for facilitating a support group.

Published academic research papers are available from <https://ict.usc.edu/research/publications>

(Search engine keyword: USC ICT Publications)

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