

## (32) Affective Benefits in Communication: The development and field-testing of a new questionnaire measure

J. v. Baren<sup>1</sup>, W. IJsselsteijn<sup>1</sup>, N. Romero<sup>1</sup>, P. Markopoulos<sup>1</sup>, B. de Ruyter<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eindhoven University of Technology, Eindhoven, The Netherlands

<sup>2</sup> Philips Research, Eindhoven, The Netherlands

Email: w.a.ijsselsteijn@tue.nl

### Abstract

Awareness systems help people to effortlessly maintain awareness of each other's whereabouts and activities. Rather than the mere exchange of information, awareness systems aim to foster a sense of connectedness. Connectedness is a positive emotional experience which is characterised by a feeling of staying in touch within ongoing social relationships.

We developed a questionnaire measure designed to be sensitive to this dimension of human communication, the *Affective Benefits in Communication (ABC) Questionnaire*. It consists of two main scales: Control (containing the subscales privacy, obligations, and expectations) and Staying in Touch (with subscales thinking about others, situational awareness, connectedness, sharing experiences, recognition, and group attraction). A pilot test with twenty participants showed that the ABC Questionnaire is reliable ( $\alpha=.86$ ).

The ABC Questionnaire was developed in the context of the ASTRA project. This project aims to develop and evaluate a prototype that helps distributed family members to stay in touch with each other. We developed a system that supports the sharing of experiences by sending pictures, drawings and/or short handwritten messages. A field test was conducted to gather data about how people use the ASTRA system in their daily lives. In the field test, we observed the daily communication between related households for one week by means of a diary, questionnaires and interviews. In a second week we observed them while using the ASTRA system.

The results of the ABC show several significant differences: in the second week participants thought about each other more often, felt more aware of the situation of their family members, felt more connected to each other, felt they were sharing more experiences with each other, and experienced higher levels of group attraction. Results from the diaries and interviews confirmed these differences between the weeks.

The results from this study imply that the ABC is a promising measure. Apart from being reliable, it proved to be sensitive to changes in condition. Although validity has not yet been formally established, the correspondence between ABC scores and the interview results is striking and encouraging. Therefore, we believe that the ABC will be a useful addition to the currently limited spectrum of measurement tools in the field of communication.