Interrogation and torture

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simple decisions by predicting the most likely actions to perform.

**Intelligent search agents in action.** A search model that uses intelligent-agent technology and natural language processing techniques was designed and implemented to investigate the extent to which information overload and intelligent search capabilities can be effective for the Web search.

The results produced by a prototype system were defined in order to establish whether search-driven natural language dialog generation is possible. In addition, the approach exploits the benefits of using this kind of interaction to decrease information overload as well as the time spent by users searching the Web. The following is an example of a dialog between the system (S) and a user (U):

S: What are you interested in?
U: I need basic information on linguistics.
S: Your query is too broad; could you please be more specific?
U: Fine.
S: There are twenty references about that topic. Do you want to check all of them?
U: Yes.
S: Do you need further information about that topic?
U: Yes.
S: I found commercial pages. What kind do you prefer?
U: I'd like to look at financial services.

The model was then assessed in terms of the average number of conversational turns in the dialog necessary to get a precise requirement, and information was filtered against the number of references/documents that matched these requirements. Initially, the set of possible candidate documents was more than 30,000, but the scope was reduced to 1000 or less.

Several experiments were done involving themes ranging from Java to Animaniacs (Fig. 3). In order to understand the analysis, each interaction is defined by one or more dialogs (exchanges) between a user and the system. Interactions for the experiment in Fig. 3 showed an increase in the number of documents matched as more than three turns are exchanged—this result does not come up by chance. For the same number of interactions (five), different results are shown mainly due to the adaptive way the dialog goes. That is, the context and kind of questions made by the agent are changing, depending on the situation and the document's contents. Different results were obtained for the same number of interactions because the kind of document searched for was changed as other features were restricted. A similar situation occurs as the dialog states a constraint regarding the language, in which case most of the original document references were not matched.

Experiments showed important drops in the results with a minimum of conversation turns due to constraints on the nature of the information finally delivered. The prototype search agent took into account previous issues, so there are some classes of high-level requests that are more likely to happen than others, depending on the context.

Overall, the current model, based on dialog interactions, shows promise as a novel and interesting work strategy to deal with specific information searching requirements. In addition, designing and implementing a natural language generation system easily can be adapted to tailored communicating situations.

For background information see ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE; INFORMATION MANAGEMENT; INTERNET; LINGUISTICS; NATURAL LANGUAGE PROCESSING; WORLD WIDE WEB in the McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science & Technology.

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In November 2001, three citizens from Tipton, England, were detained in northern Afghanistan and sent to Sherbegan Prison. Thereafter they were handed over to the U.S. military and transferred to Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba, where they
remained for over 2 years. Following their release in 2004, the “Tipton Three” reported enduring what might be considered torture, including prolonged isolation, poor living conditions, deprivation of food and water, lack of medical treatment, sexual humiliation, drug inducement, and physical abuse. In addition, the three described hundreds of hours spent under interrogation, often placed in uncomfortable positions for long periods of time and questioned by persistent interrogators who claimed to have evidence of their involvement with the terrorist organization al-Qaeda. As a result of their harsh treatment, they eventually confessed to traveling to Afghanistan to fight a holy jihad and to having been present at a rally with al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. The three were later returned to the United Kingdom and were able to prove to British authorities that they had no involvement with al-Qaeda—rather, their confessions had been elicited falsely as a result of the physical and psychological torture they had endured at Guantanamo. This article will review research on the effectiveness of physical and psychological torture in the context of interrogations, and discuss the psychological processes that lead to both true and false confessions.

**Brief history of physical torture and psychological manipulation.** Though shocking, the purported torture and coercive interrogation techniques recently evidenced at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib Prison (Iraq) have been recorded throughout history, including the trials and public confessions of Soviet citizens under Stalin’s rule (mid-1900s) and the interrogation of U.S. military personnel by communist China (post-1949). Furthermore, organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International regularly document instances of torture and coercive interrogation around the world. Standard torture tactics have included isolation and sensory deprivation, direct physical abuse and threats of death or harm, deprivation of food or sleep, sexual molestation or humiliation, confinement in “stress” positions for long periods of time, and inducements involving minor comfort items (bottled water, blanket, pillow, etc.).

Harsh interrogation tactics have also been employed within the U.S. criminal justice system. Although often more subtle than the extreme instances observed in military and political interrogations, “third degree” tactics were regularly employed by police investigators in the United States through the early twentieth century, including the use of physical abuse; incommunicado detention; deprivation of food, sleep, and medical attention; and explicit threats of harm to oneself or one’s family. Reforms in the 1940s, including a Presidential commission’s “Report on Lawlessness in Law Enforcement,” eventually discouraged the use of physical coercion and led to the development of interrogation manuals that emphasized psychological manipulation. Such psychologically based interrogation techniques frequently involve presenting false evidence to a suspect that reinforces guilt (“we have a witness that identifies you as the murderer”), preventing a suspect from ever denying his/her involvement in the crime (“we know that you did this, so there’s no use in denying it”), maximizing the potential consequences of not cooperating with law enforcement (“if you don’t cooperate with us, I’m sure the district attorney is going to place the death penalty on the table”), and attempts to minimize a suspect’s potential involvement in the crime (“maybe it was an accident”) or the perceived consequences associated with confessing to the crime (“I know the judge in your case, and if you confess I’d be happy to speak on your behalf”).

Studies suggest that the use of both physical torture and psychological manipulation are rather effective in eliciting information from individuals (that is, true confessions); however, these methods will also compel individuals who are innocent to provide false confessions as a means of escaping the stresses of an interrogation. For example, social science researchers have found that psychologically based interrogation techniques employed by police in the United States lead to a significant number of false confessions and ultimately wrongful incarceration. One recent study documented 125 cases of proven false confession in the United States since the *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966) Supreme Court decision, while case studies suggest that 25% of individuals who had been wrongfully convicted (but were later exonerated by DNA evidence) were found guilty largely based upon coerced false confessions. Taken together, these studies suggest that physical torture and psychological manipulation fail to yield diagnostic intelligence; that is, these tactics are likely to yield information from both those who possess guilty knowledge and those who are innocent.

**Factors associated with eliciting a confession.** Social science researchers have systematically examined both the process of interrogation and the false confession phenomenon over the past several decades. This research has shown that several factors appear to be associated with the elicitation of confession evidence. First, with regard to the psychological processes leading to confession, decision-making theories suggest that individuals evaluate the available courses of action during an interrogation by considering their options (“should I confess or should I maintain my innocence?”), and weighing the likely consequences attached with those options (“what is likely to happen to me if I don’t comply with the demands of my interrogator?”). If the benefits of providing information outweigh the costs of not providing that information, the individual is likely to provide a confession. As such, the use of torture tactics such as solitary confinement, physical abuse, and deprivation of food or sleep may force an individual to comply with the demands of an interrogator, while promises of leniency or release from imprisonment may provide a strong incentive for cooperation.

Second, physical torture and psychological manipulation can also more directly impair an individual’s cognitive ability to reason and make decisions. Research shows that intense fear and anxiety can cause a person to become defensive, hypervigilant, and insecure regarding their environment. Similarly, fatigue...
and sleep deprivation significantly impair decision-making ability and promote susceptibility to social influence. These variables then lead to uncertainty and insecurity in what may happen beyond the interrogation, and ultimately promote feelings of isolation and dependency upon the interrogator. Once again, however, these techniques are likely to create a context for compliance by both those who possess critical information and those who do not.

Finally, research has demonstrated that some individuals are more vulnerable than others in the interrogation room. First, both field and laboratory studies indicate that children are more likely to confess during an interrogation when compared with adults. Second, individuals of low intelligence are often found to be more suggestible (that is, they have a tendency toward yielding to social influence) and less able to cope with the pressures of the interrogation room. Third, individuals who have never been interrogated before appear more susceptible to providing a confession when compared with those who have endured the pressures of interrogation previously. Finally, the psychological state of the individual at the time of interrogation has been shown to be associated with the likelihood of confession. In particular, individuals who suffer from mental illness (such as depression or anxiety disorders) appear to be more susceptible to the effects of interrogation, as well as individuals who may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or who may be in a state of detoxification.

**Typography of false confession evidence.** As discussed above, the use of physical torture and psychological manipulation appear quite effective in yielding confession statements during an interrogation. However, if the individual does not possess certain intelligence information or guilty knowledge, these tactics can lead the individual to provide false information that might appease the interrogator and alleviate the individual of the pressures of interrogation. Researchers have generally classified false confession statements into three categories. First, a voluntary false confession occurs when an individual provides false information without any torture or psychological coercion. An individual may provide a voluntary false confession due to his or her desire to protect someone else, for notoriety or attention, or due to an inability to distinguish reality from fantasy. Second, a coerced-compliant false confession generally involves an individual providing information for some immediate instrumental gain and in spite of his awareness that he is lying to the interrogator. Physical torture and psychological manipulation both increase the likelihood of coerced-compliant information—as the individual does not actually believe the false information that he is giving, but perceives the consequences of confessing as less damaging than the consequences of further torture. Finally, coerced-internalized false confessions occur when an individual falsely provides information and actually begins to believe that he or she is responsible for the criminal act. Individuals who provide coerced-internalized false confessions often are made to distrust their memory for the event such that they are more willing to incorporate external suggestions. The long-term pressures of physical torture are also likely to promote the internalization of new beliefs and ideology, a tactic that proved effective in the political interrogation and indoctrination process employed by communist China.

**Bottom line on torture and interrogation.** In summary, social science research indicates that physical torture and psychological manipulation will successfully produce intelligence information and confession evidence. However, these methods are just as likely to produce information from those who possess guilty knowledge and those who are innocent. As a result, such harsh methods of torture and interrogation lack diagnostic value and, in the end, may prove rather costly to intelligence and criminal justice efforts to provide security and solve crimes, particularly with regard to financial and human resources that may be expended based upon false information. Furthermore, individuals who undergo extended periods of torture have been shown to exhibit considerable psychopathology and long-term effects of posttraumatic stress—a significant violation of human rights to those who are wrongfully imprisoned and interrogated.

For background information see BRAIN; COGNITION; EMOTION; LIE DETECTOR; NERVOUS SYSTEM (VERTEBRATE); PSYCHOLOGY in the McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science & Technology.

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