

Zahra Ashktorab

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I am a user experience researcher who utilizes mixed methods to research online phenomenon and make design recommendations to promote well-being of users through mitigation of online harassment. My dissertation addresses cyberbullying detection using machine learning natural language processing tools, designing cyberbullying mitigation through participatory design with teens, and evaluating the effectiveness of cyberbullying mitigation tools.

EDUCATION

PhD in Information Science: Focus in HCI and Social Computing

to be awarded in 2017

University of Maryland, College Park
Advisors: Jennifer Golbeck, Jessica Vitak

M.S. in Human Computer Interaction

2013

University of Maryland, College Park
Thesis: The Relationship Between Tweets and Freedom During Elections

B.S. in Computer Science

2011

B.A. in Middle East Studies
University of Maryland College Park
Minor: Arabic

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Microsoft Research, Cambridge United Kingdom

June 2015-August 2015

Research Intern

Completed an exploratory qualitative study on best tangible programming interface design for visually impaired children
Responsibilities included: leading several focus groups with visually impaired children and extracting themes for the design of the interface; as well as creating visual simulator for debugging language

IBM Research Center Watson Intern, IBM Almaden Research Center

May 2014-August 2014

Research Intern

Completed a Natural Language Processing study on discourse discovery and cyberbullying detection on social media platform askFM
Responsibilities included: data collection through scraping and crawling askFM, building classifiers to detect different types of discourse and analyzed correlations between discourse and personality types

Data Science for Social Good Fellowship, Computation Institute, Chicago, Illinois

June 2013-August 2013

Fellow

Completed project to extract relevant information from tweets during disasters for Red Cross and UN Disaster relief workers
Responsibilities included: feature engineering, building classifier to identify tweets as pertaining to disaster or not (using Machine Learning techniques)
Presented work at "Data Slam" hosted by University of Chicago
Presented work at the 19th ACM SIGKDD Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining (KDD) poster session

University of Maryland, College Park

September 2013-Present

Graduate Research Assistant

Led mixed methods study on cyberbullying detection and prevention research
Responsibilities included: research on automatic detection of cyberbullying in ask.fm, led participatory design techniques to design new cyberbullying mitigation tools, testing cyberbullying mitigation tool through longitudinal diary study
Global Election Prediction Project: Led project to analyze the relationship between sentiment and tweets and election outcomes in states with varying "Freedom Statuses"
Responsibilities included: Twitter data collection, sentiment analysis and analyzing edge relationships between influential Twitter users

National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland

May 2012-August 2012

Post-baccalaureate Intramural Research Training Fellow

Designed and built software that reproduced 3D Tumor and Organ segmentation

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution

June 2011-August 2011

Intern

Designed and built a website that showcased sustainability initiatives in the East Zone Mall of the Smithsonian
Responsibilities included: collected data for website and conducting interviews to showcase most relevant information on the website

National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland

May 2010-August 2010

Summer Intern

Led initiative to update the Amish Genealogy Database, database used by researchers at the NIH
Responsibilities included: build data structure to find duplicates in Amish Genealogy Database 4 and use Ruby to update information in Amish Genealogy Database 5

National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland

May 2009-August 2009

Summer Intern

Designed and built "Star Glyph application": a software application in language Processing that graphically represent medical data
Presented at NIH Biomedical Computing Interest Group (BCIG): "Bench to Bedside Computing"
Presented Poster "A General Purpose 2-D Graphics Package for Plotting Biomedical Data"

SKILLS

Python, Java, Processing, Ruby, PHP, MySQL, Javascript, HTML
Tableau, Data Visualization, Scikit-Learn Machine Learning Toolkit, Natural Language Toolkit, Mallet LDA

AWARDS

Winner of Hack Harassment Challenge **November 2016**
Created an application at Technica Hackathon to promote well-being of Facebook users affected by harassment by reminding them of their positive Facebook memories and interactions

Future of Information Alliance Seed Grant Competition Winner **November 2014**
Developed *ResearchIQ*, a tool to evaluate the impact of academic research across various domains

Anita Borg Scholarship **August 2014**
Scholarship to attend the Grace Hopper Women in Computing Conference

Microsoft Social Media Expo: semifinalist **March 2014**
Presented work on cyberbullying mitigation tool, "iAnon: Leveraging Social Network Big Data to Mitigate Behavioral Symptoms of Cyberbullying"

Future of Information Alliance Seed Grant Competition Winner **November 2013**
Led multidisciplinary team to pitch and compete for grant money to design cyberbullying mitigation tools with teens at a partnering organization

SERVICE

Brilliant Club, DC **Present**
Led seminars with inner city low-income children about programming constructs and computational thinking

Girls Who Code **Present**
Tutored high school girls on programming concepts

Mentor for New York University Abu Dhabi Hackathon for Social Good in the Arab World **February 2014**
Led team that developed OrphanLocator application that used fuzzy matching to find lost children during times of disaster

Student Representative for Dean Search Committee, College of Information Studies, UMD **September 2014-March 2015**

TALKS AND PUBLICATIONS

"Identifying Women's Experiences With and Strategies for Mitigating Negative Effects of Online Harassment"
J Vitak, K Chadha, L Steiner, and **Z Ashktorab** - CSCW, 2017

"Understanding Online Harassment: Definition, Ethics, Prevention"
L Blackwell, **Z Ashktorab**, K Lo, and L Lee - GHC Birds of a Feather, 2016

"Designing Cyberbullying Mitigation and Prevention Solutions through Participatory Design With Teenagers"
Z Ashktorab, J Vitak - CHI, 2016

"A study of cyberbullying detection and mitigation on Instagram."
Z Ashktorab - CSCW, 2016

"Beyond the Belmont Principles: Ethical Challenges, Practices, and Beliefs in the Online Data Research Community"
J Vitak, K Shilton, **Z Ashktorab** - CSCW, 2016

"Tweedr: Mining Twitter to Inform Disaster Response"
Z Ashktorab, C Brown, J Nandi, A Culotta - ISCRAM, 2014

"How do I get back to my Homescreen?": Education on Tablet Usage for Senior Citizens"
Z Ashktorab, A Bowser - Developing a Living HCI Curriculum to Support a Global Community: CHI Workshop, 2014

"Twitter-Informed Disaster Relief"
Z Ashktorab, C Brown, J Nandi, A Culotta - Poster Session; KDD for Social Good, 2014

"iAnon: Leveraging Social Network Big Data to Mitigate Behavioral Symptoms of Cyberbullying"
Z Ashktorab - GHC Lightning Talk, 2014

"Bear-with-me: an embodied prototype to explore tangible two-way exchanges of emotional language"
A Fong, **Z Ashktorab**, J Froehlich - CHI Extended Abstract, 2013

"Living the good life? Mortality and hospital utilization patterns in the old order Amish"
B Mitchell, W Lee, M Tolea, K Shields, **Z Ashktorab**, L Magder, K Ryan, T Pollin, PF McArdle PF, AR Shuldiner, A Schäffer A. PLoS One: doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0051560

LANGUAGES

English – native language
Farsi – speak fluently and read/write with high proficiency
Arabic – speak, read and write with basic competence

