News Release

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Online society aiding rise of smart machines, science festival told

People's increased use of the web is helping usher in a new era of artificial intelligence in computers, a science festival audience will hear.

When people spend time online, either browsing the internet or communicating with others, their activity helps fill gaps in the machines' knowledge.

This helps computers make associations between words, images and ideas, helping them to make sense of complicated text, improve their language translation, or identify pictures.

This rise in artificial intelligence is helping computer scientists develop smarter search engines and technologies that can adapt to suit the needs of users.

It will help speed the arrival of the internet of things, in which everyday objects, such as domestic appliances and cars, use the web to connect with users and with each other to operate efficiently and smartly, researchers will say.

Further improvements in artificial intelligence could help computers interact with people in a more intelligent way. Computer programmes are now on a par with humans in performing routine tasks – so much so that software is used to check that interactions are being performed by people rather than robots, researchers say.

Professor David Robertson, Professor of Applied Logic in the University of Edinburgh's School of Informatics, will join Dr Gautam Shroff, chief scientist for Tata Consultancy Services Research in India, in an exploration of artificial intelligence at the Edinburgh International Science Festival.

Their event will take place at 8pm on Tuesday 14 April at Summerhall. To book tickets, visit http://www.sciencefestival.co.uk/booking-information or call 0844 557 2686.

Professor Robertson said: "Artificial intelligence is not a new concept, but we are at the stage of making big developments in smart machines – and the new ingredient in the mix is us. People are connected across the globe like never before, and society is becoming part of the solution to the challenge of developing ever-smarter technologies and tools."

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