

Preface from the NTCIR-15 General Chairs

Welcome to the Fifteenth NTCIR Conference (NTCIR-15 Conference).

NTCIR is a series of collective evaluation efforts designed to enhance research on diverse information access technologies, including, but not limited to, cross-language and multimedia information access, question-answering, text mining and summarisation, with an emphasis on East Asian languages such as Chinese, Korean, and Japanese, as well as English. Launched in the late 1997 NTCIR has attracted hundreds of research groups from well over 20 different countries and regions. Each NTCIR conference concludes the researchers' efforts over the course of 18 months or so, in the form of official results and future work items.

The first NTCIR Conference was held in the summer of 1999, consecutively with the IREX Workshop, another shared task evaluation on Information Retrieval and Extraction. Since then, a wide variety of tasks have been conducted through NTCIR, more than 220 researchers involved in the organizations, more than 1,100 teams participated in NTCIR task(s) and 4,723 research groups currently use NTCIR Test Collection(s) for their research (as of March 31, 2020). Part of the research impact of NTCIR was summarized and published as a book entitled "Evaluating Information Retrieval and Access Tasks - NTCIR's Legacy of Research Impact", Springer, 2020, This is available as Open Access and a printed book is delivered to the attendees of NTCIR-15 Conference as part of the conference material.

NTCIR-15 plays host to seven tasks as listed below. These are coordinated in parallel by some forty task organizers, who operate under the central coordination of the program co-chairs, Makoto P. Kato and Yiqun Liu.

[Core Tasks]

- Dialogue Evaluation ("DialEval-1")
- Fine-Grained Numeral Understanding in Financial Tweet ("FinNum-2")
- QA Lab for Political Information ("QALab PoliINFO-2")
- SHINRA2020-ML
- We Want Web with CENTRE ("WWW-3")

[Pilot Tasks]

- Data Search
- Micro-activity Retrieval Task ("MART")

NTCIR conference is a venue for task participants and organizers to discuss the official task results, open problems and future task designs. International Workshop on Evaluating Information Access (EVIA), a one-day workshop for information access to present the work on evaluation methods, measures, test collections, experimental designs, etc., is unfortunately not held this year. The NTCIR-15 Conference is operated by the NTCIR-15 Organizing Committee and the National Institute of Informatics (NII). We are very grateful to Inoue Foundation for Science and Tateisi Science and Technology Foundation for their generous support.

We also thank the following organizations and people for their understanding of the project and for providing substantial support in various forms: For FinNum-2, we thank the support from MOST Joint Research Center for AI Technology and All Vista Healthcare. SHINRA2020-ML was supported by JSPS Kakenhi 20H00617. WWW was partially supported by the the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 893667. MART is funded as part of Dublin City University's Research Committee and the Insight Centre for Data Analytics (which is supported by Science Foundation Ireland under Grant Number SFI/12/RC/2289_2).

We are grateful to the Program Committee of NTCIR-15, and to the NTCIR-15 task organizers and their affiliated institutions. In addition, several of the NTCIR-15 task organizers served as the editors of this volume and/or provided feedback on the papers submitted by the participants. Many of the task participants volunteered to help with the dataset creation, and we appreciate their great contribution to this community-based activity. We are grateful for Anja Fischer, Grainne McQuaid and all the team in Abbey Conference and Events for their substantial support to run a virtual conference. Last but certainly not least, we would like to thank the people who worked behind the scenes—especially Madoka Ishioroshi, Hideyuki Shibuki, Tomoko Ohsuga, Yuko Tanaka, and Sumika Masui for their continued effort throughout the course of the NTCIR-15.

NTCIR-15 continues the structure introduced at NTCIR-10 with multiple general co-chairs and program co-chairs, and with tasks coordinated by task organizers with an optional seed funding from NTCIR.

The Center for Dataset Sharing and Collaborative Research (DSC) was launched in NII in April 2015, to encourage the close collaboration with various data providers and enhance the research based on the dataset including NTCIR. This center provides a solid foundation for NTCIR activities.

NTCIR-15 became a memorable one in various meanings -- especially due to COVID-19, each of the participants and organizers has lived in totally new environment to work with various restrictions and difficulties. We are sorry that some of the registered teams had to give up continuing the experiments because of them. We are grateful for all the support and understanding that has enabled us to continue the activities, and finally we came here to have the conference on the scheduled dates, but as a virtual conference. Our thoughts are with the people in difficulties, and we hope that our activities also help to show the strong global links of the people and their thoughts.

We are especially grateful that participants and organizers could work through under this difficult environment. We sincerely hope that all participants will enjoy presenting and discussing their research results at the NTCIR-15 conference, socializing on the virtual conference platform and that it serves as an opportunity for new research collaborations.

We would like to thank all the participants, organizers and contributors, and would like to think and envision a fruitful enhanced next 10 years and future together with all of you in the NTCIR/EVIA community.

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