

Introduction to the Special Issue on Negotiating Truth and Trust in Socio-Technical Systems

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Social technologies play an increasingly central role in shaping the flow of information that people produce and consume in their personal and professional lives. These systems push boundaries around truth and trust, requiring users to negotiate new tensions and tradeoffs between risk and benefit. The growing importance of these social technologies places new pressures on both designers and users of socio-technical systems where notions of truth and trust take center stage. Designers are challenged to consider broader systemic impacts and unintended consequences of their work, while users must simultaneously bring greater scrutiny and greater trust to their mediated social interactions. Further, researchers are just beginning to understand how designers and users negotiate these tensions in real-world settings.

This special issue of *ACM Transactions on Social Computing* explores interdisciplinary perspectives on negotiating truth and trust in socio-technical systems. Rather than seeking to define or promote one “truth,” this issue focuses on how users identify and wrestle with competing notions of truth and trust in highly contested online information environments, full of risk and reward. The authors explore how designs of infrastructure and policy help or hinder online interactions. This theme arose from discussions at the 2018 workshop on Designing Socio-Technical Systems of Truth organized by Virginia Tech’s Center for Human-Computer Interaction (CHCI). Following the workshop, a team of guest editors from Virginia Tech and Airbnb publicized an open call for papers on this theme. Submissions underwent a rigorous review and revision process, and three articles were accepted for publication in the special issue.

This special issue of TSC opens with the article “[Experiences of Trust in Postmortem Profile Management](#).” Katie Gach and Jed Brubaker conduct qualitative interviews with people who serve as legacy contacts for memorialized Facebook profiles (i.e., profiles for deceased Facebook users), focusing on their experiences and the challenges they face. The authors find that trust plays a central role in the selection of legacy contacts, yet the ambiguity of interpersonal trust poses technical challenges for platform designers that can prevent legacy contacts from fulfilling their role. In the special issue’s second article, “[A Mixed-Methods Approach to Understanding Funder Trust and Due Diligence Processes in Online Crowdfunding Investment](#),” Helen Jones and Wendy Moncur combine qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to understand how funders decide whether to invest in online crowdfunding campaigns. The authors find that social

information and social media are critical in providing the social proof necessary for funders to trust campaigners. In the concluding article, “[Visual Narratives and Collective Memory across Peer-Produced Accounts of Contested Sociopolitical Events](#),” Emily Porter, P. M. Krafft, and Brian Keegan investigate competing notions of truth in imagery selection for articles about coups d’état across Wikipedia language editions. The authors develop a novel method to analyze cultural variation in contested political imagery and, by applying this method in multiple case studies, find key differences in both content and network structure.

These three articles employ a range of qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews, surveys, content analysis, and new techniques. They build on prior theory and empirical findings from a breadth of domains, including psychology, management, rhetoric, and human-computer interaction (HCI). They examine real-world data from three distinct socio-technical systems: social networking sites, crowdfunding campaigns, and peer production platforms. However, all of them focus on illuminating ways that people negotiate truth and trust in highly contested information environments. While specific design recommendations may differ in each setting, these articles re-emphasize the “socio-” in socio-technical systems, pointing to the central role of social and cultural processes in the production of truth and trust.

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