

MEDIA, TRUST & TECHNOLOGY

Preconference

ICA
2025



JUNE 11 2025 • 9AM - 5.30PM •
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO (CU) BOULDER

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Dr. Agata Stepnik
University of Sydney

Dr. Timothy Koskie
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Venue Information

Event will be held in the
**[Center for Academic Success &
Engagement \(CASE\) building](#)**
Room E330
University of Colorado Boulder



Please see our [event FAQs](#)
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there from Denver

Pre-conference Schedule

8:30 - 9:00 Greetings & coffee

9:00 - 9:15

Chair: Terry Flew

Media, Trust and Technology

Pre-conference Opening

Professor Terry Flew opens the conference with the key questions guiding this conference: What is the role of trust in modern communications debates, particularly as it pertains to digital societies and emergent communication technologies? What implications does it carry for policy, regulation, and communication practices—especially in light of growing calls for accountability and transparency in digital media governance?

9:15 - 10:30

Chair: Timothy Koskie

Session 1: Trust influences and social impacts

This session discusses the sociological aspects, socialization processes, and interpersonal or communal influences on trust in media, technology, and public institutions. These presentations also demonstrate how public trust is shaped in ways that potentially challenge traditional models of governance.

Terry Flew

Mediated trust beyond 'the media': Institutions, technology and communications as mediators of trust relations (p.5)

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Folk Theories About Media Trust: How German Users Navigate Trustworthiness in High-Choice Information Environments (p.5)

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Rethinking News Media Trust and News Efficacy in the Contemporary Information Environment (p.6)

Roeland Dubèl

How the Public Expresses News Media Trust on Social Media (p.6)

Ilka Jakobs

The Role of Socialization-Related Factors for Adolescents' Trust in News Media (p.7)

10:30 - 10:45

Morning Tea

10:45-12:00

Chair: Agata Stepnik

Session 2: Trust and political polarisation

This session focuses on trust as it impacts and is impacted through politics, government, and polarized contexts. It considers how trust is mobilized, eroded, and reconstructed, highlighting how news media, policymakers, and institutions respond to or exacerbate these tensions.

danah boyd

Jenga Politics: The Strategic Weaponization of Distrust (p.7)

Parker Bach

Bet on It: Shifting Trust in Representing Public Opinion, from Political Polling to Prediction Markets (p.8)

Efrat Nechushtai

From Trust to Trustworthiness: Reorienting Journalism in an Illiberal Era (p.8)

Lori Young

Beyond fact-checking? Media provenance and the promise of visual content authentication (p.9)

12:00 - 13:00

Lunch

13:00 - 14:15 Chair: Mark Boukes	Session 3: Trust and AI Presentations in this session examine the intersection of artificial intelligence and the trustworthiness of automated systems. The conversation also extends to questions about regulatory frameworks, ethical standards, and the role of policy in managing AI development in sensitive social and communicative contexts.
Hadar Levy-Landesberg	“Deep Trust” and The Politics of Voice Biometric Authentication (p.9)
Timothy Koskie	The AI Trust Debate: How Reddit Users Framed Artificial Intelligence in Election Discussions (p.10)
Jinny Zhang	Advancing Trust in AI-Powered Search Engines through Explainable AI: A Human-Centric Approach (p.10)
Agata Stepnik	Trust, algorithmic literacy, and active curation: The future of digital life in a generative AI world. (p.11)
14:15 - 15:30 Chair: Terry Flew	Session 4: Trust and Platforms This session analyses media trust related to specific digital platforms, content moderation, and credibility in online spaces. The presentations explore how platform governance, regulatory interventions, and public scrutiny intersect in shaping the trustworthiness of digital infrastructures.
Audrey Halversen	TikTok Journalism: News Credibility Perceptions and Learning on TikTok (p.11)
Giles Moss	Communicating Platform Regulation, Justifying Public Trust? (p.12)
Andreas Schellewald	Trust in Gaming: Moderation and personalization on gaming platforms (p.12)
Sophia Baik	Politicized mistrust in platform governance: How claims of anti-conservative bias in content moderation persist in the United States (p.13)
15:30 - 15:45	Afternoon tea
15:45 - 17:00 Chair: Sharon Strover	Session 5: Trust around the world This session explores how trust in media and technology is shaped by diverse national and cultural contexts. These studies highlight the varied sociopolitical, institutional, and cultural factors that underpin trust in global settings, offering insights into how media systems adapt or falter in the face of public scepticism, technological disruption, and shifting civic expectations.
Christopher Ali	Future-proofing PBS: American Public Serving Broadcasting in the Post-Trust Era (p.13)
Ling Liu	Understanding Media Trust: The Perception of “The Media” in a Changing Media Landscape (p.14)
Biying Wu-Ouyang	How to increase trust and participation in the age of AI? Examining the role of AI awareness and comfort level based on evidence from 26 Countries (p.14)
Nina Steindl	Reasons for Trust: General and Situation-specific reasons for Media Trust among Adolescents in Germany (p.15)
17:00 - 17:15 Chair: Mark Boukes	Closing statements Concluding remarks from conference presenters reflect on common themes and tensions across sessions, emphasizing the role of interdisciplinary scholarship in guiding future research. This includes the urgent need for continued dialogue between researchers, policymakers, and organisations on how trust is cultivated, managed, and regulated in a rapidly evolving media and technological landscape.

Full Abstracts

Mediated trust beyond ‘the media’: Institutions, technology and communications as mediators of trust relations

Terry Flew

The University of Sydney

The concept of trust has a long history in communications scholarship. However, work in the field has been fragmented across sub-fields (interpersonal, organizational, mass communication, philosophy of communication, etc.), and its standing has often been implicit rather than explicit (e.g. the significance of mistrust in the rise of populist ideologies, the relationship of social media to “post-truth” discourses). In many respects, the heartland of trust studies remains sociology, political science, and sub-disciplines such as management studies rather than communication studies (Bachmann & Zaheer, 2006; Möllering, 2006).

The term ‘mediated trust’ has come to be used recently with regard to science communication (Schafer, 2016), Blockchain technologies (Bodo, 2021) and ‘post-truth’ (Harsin, 2024). At the same time, tension exists in these works as to whether the focus is primarily on trust in media institutions or technologically-mediated communication more generally. This paper draws upon work associated with mediatisation (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), as well as work on the philosophy of technology (Arthur, 2009; Scharff & Dusek, 2003), to argue that mediated trust is best understood as emerging in a three-way force field between communication, institutions and technologies.

This framework will address longstanding debates about the relationship between trust and trustworthiness (Habermas, 2018; Hawley, 2019; Luhmann, 2017) and whether one can ‘trust’ digital platforms or artificial intelligence. It will conclude by considering what it may mean for communications as a field to give new forms of agency to information processing machines.

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Schafer, M. (2016). Mediated trust in science: Concept, measurement and perspectives for the ‘science of science communication.’ *Journal of Science Communication*, 15(5), 1–7.

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Folk Theories About Media Trust: How German Users Navigate Trustworthiness in High-Choice Information Environments

Anna Litvinenko¹, Florian Primig², Anna-Theresa Mayer³ & Christoph Neuberger¹

¹Freie Universität Berlin, ²LMU Munich, ³Weizenbaum Institute

The digitalization of news environments has brought renewed attention to the complexities of how trust in media is formed and maintained. While research indicates that trust in media within Germany remains relatively stable and is closely linked to trust in political institutions (Quiring et al., 2024), quantitative studies often struggle with the ambiguity surrounding the notions of “trust” and “media”, leaving definitions open to individual interpretations, which causes methodological challenges. Our study explores how individuals in Germany assign trust to media sources in today’s high-choice information environment, focusing on “folk theories”—personal interpretations shaped by individual experiences. The research draws on media diaries and semi-structured interviews with 29 participants from diverse social milieus, categorized using the Sinus-Milieus® framework. This method transcends traditional social class by integrating cultural and value dimensions. We focused on the largest milieu groups within German society (SINUS, 2024): adaptive pragmatic middle class (modern mainstream), expeditive (ambitious creative bohemians), nostalgic middle class (harmony-oriented lower middle class), performer (efficiency-oriented and progress-optimistic elite), and post-material (confident educated elite with post-material values). The preliminary analysis identifies three media trust assignment types: (1) The Know-it-all, who claims complete intellectual autonomy and maintains a self-sufficient image aligned with an informed citizen ideal, yet often denies the practical limitations of this approach; (2) The Escapist, who avoids critical media engagement, preferring to avoid political content in media due to the exhaustion associated with maintaining media vigilance; and (3) The Cynical Pragmatist, who accepts that complete truth may be unattainable through media, viewing it as inherently political and reserving scrutiny for issues of personal importance. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of media trust by uncovering nuanced trust assignment patterns across German social milieus and regional East-West distinctions, demonstrating how personal interpretations and life contexts shape media engagement in a complex digital landscape.

Augusto Valeriani¹, Diego Garusi² & Sergio Splendore³

¹University of Bologna, ²University of Vienna, ³University of Milan

This study leverages a survey to be administered to a representative sample of the Italian population in February 2025 to propose novel measures for investigating news media trust and the underexplored yet pivotal concept of news efficacy. Empirically, it explores the relationship between these two dimensions, aiming to shed light on their interplay within today's information environment. Recent advancements in news media trust research challenge traditional definitions of trust as a mere attitude, suggesting instead that trust entails a decision to suspend vulnerability and uncertainty toward news media (Blöbaum, 2021). While prior studies employing this conceptual shift have predominantly relied on qualitative methods (Garusi and Juarez Miro, 2024), this paper extends the approach to a quantitative framework. Specifically, respondents are asked to evaluate the extent to which their decisions across various domains—including economics, health, environment, politics, lifestyle, and entertainment—have been taken by relying on the news consumed. The current media environment is characterized by contested truths and misinformation (Waisbord, 2018) and the rise of novel actors, such as the so-called “newsfluencers” (Hurcombe, 2024), establishing novel relational patterns with their audiences. Hence, we hypothesize that individuals’ self-perception of “news efficacy” plays a central role in shaping trust decisions. To date, journalism studies have primarily conceptualized news efficacy through its internal dimension—i.e., an individual’s belief in their ability to comprehend and engage with news content (Park and Kaye, 2021; Hopp, 2022). However, drawing on the political science construct of political efficacy, which encompasses both internal and external dimensions, we argue that incorporating an external dimension of news efficacy could enrich both the explanatory potential of the concept and our broader understanding of news trust. We thus define—and measure accordingly—external news efficacy as a person’s belief in their capacity to influence the newsmaking process and their perception of the media system’s responsiveness and utility for them. By integrating this external perspective and advancing novel measures of news media trust, the study contributes both empirically and theoretically to the field of news media trust research, offering a comprehensive framework for analyzing trust dynamics in the contemporary information environment.

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How the Public Expresses News Media Trust on Social Media

Roeland Dubèl¹, Mark Boukes¹, Sandra Jacobs¹ & Damian Trilling²

¹Amsterdam School of Communication Research, University of Amsterdam, ²Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Public trust in news media is declining. This decline is partly due to news media having a limited understanding of the public’s expectations of the news media. Previous research that attempted to identify the expectations underlying news media trust mostly used surveys. Yet, surveys measuring news media trust rely on predefined categories, limiting their ability to capture how citizens express news media trust in natural settings. Consequently, research studying how the public communicates their trust in news media is missing. To address this gap, we analyse social media comments directed at news media channels to understand how the public expresses their news media trust.

We introduce the concept of “expressions of news media trust” to differentiate the measurement of media trust in surveys from our object of analysis, which is the communication of news media trust in a naturalistic setting like social media. Using the framework of news media trust as defined by Fawzi et al. (2021), we aim to examine: (1) Which news media objects are targeted in news media trust expressions (specific news media objects, such as news items vs. journalism in general), (2) to what extent citizens express their satisfaction with the news media’s performance, and (3) by which norms or role conceptions the news media’s performance is evaluated.

We scraped user comments from 18 Dutch news outlets across six social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube (N = 60,918). A manual content analysis will be employed: Three independent coders will analyse social media comments for the three components of news media trust. By analysing user comments across multiple platforms, news outlets, and components of news media trust, this study offers a broad inventory of how the public expresses news media trust in a naturalistic setting.

Ilka Jakobs¹, Henriette Pohle², Tilman Klawier³, Fabian Prochazka², Nayla Fawzi¹, Nina Steindl⁴, Dorothee Arlt⁵, Marco Dohle⁶, Katherine Engelke⁷, Nikolaus Jakob¹, Magdalena Obermaier⁴, Wolfgang Schweiger³ & Marc Ziegele⁶

¹University of Mainz, ²University of Erfurt, ³University of Hohenheim, ⁴University of Munich, ⁵University of Ilmenau, ⁶University of Duesseldorf, ⁷University of Muenster

Media trust has been a prominent area of research for many years. However, it remains unclear how individuals develop media trust and how this process is shaped by socialization. Adolescence is particularly important in this regard, as adolescents form long-term attitudes towards news media in interaction with family, peers and school. We therefore examine the role of these socialization agents in the development of adolescents’ media trust. Following the recent idea in media trust research that especially critical, reflective trust is normatively desirable, we investigated not only the role of socialization for trust, but also for the degree to which adolescents can justify their judgments of news media (degree of elaboration). We conducted qualitative interviews with 50 German adolescents between the ages of 14 and 19. To cover a wide range of experiences, we sampled our participants using quotas for education and gender. We developed a typology that categorized adolescents according to their level of media trust and their level of elaboration about news media, resulting in five types. We compared the groups and the roles that family, peers and school play in the development of media trust and its elaboration. Most young people in our sample show some level of media trust, but only a few show a thorough, reflective process in explaining their trust. Across all types, parents seem to have the strongest influence on young people. However, the influence of parents varies greatly between groups. The importance of peers in the development of media trust is rather negligible for most groups. However, when there is a lack of media-related discussions in the family, the importance of peers increases. In particular, discussions about media in schools were rarely mentioned. In the presentation we will present our typology of (un)reflected media trust and discuss the implications of our findings.

Jenga Politics: The Strategic Weaponization of Distrust

danah boyd
Microsoft Research & Cornell University

In 2023, Russell Vought (former Director of the US Office of Management and Budget) described his work in the final months of the first Trump Administration with an eye towards his vision of Project 2025. "We want the bureaucrats to be traumatically affected. When they wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work because they are increasingly viewed as the villains."

Journalists often believe that it is their job to hold government accountable. Because this orientation does not typically distinguish between civil servants and political appointees, there is often an assumption that politicians and the administrative state are one and the same. And, thus, most journalists tend to anchor themselves as a "check to power" through outrage narratives of terrible things going awry. The structuring work that they do tends to reinforce a narrative that government cannot be trusted. But what happens when seeding distrust is itself the political agenda?

Steve Bannon once argued that "this is not about persuasion; this is about disorientation." He also positioned "the media" as the "opposition party." In many ways, Bannon's actions harken back to canonical arguments by Marshall McLuhan. Bannon is not interested in the substance of the message. In fact, he often argues to "flood the zone." Instead, he's interested in structuring the flow of information to achieve political ends.

I will explore how political actors leverage both the media and the public's default position of doubt to intentionally and strategically undermine trust in the administrative state. In doing so, I will argue that we are living in a world of Jenga politics where the goal is to dismantle systems by enrolling journalists to increase distrust while encouraging those seeking to "fix" the broken system to put more pressure on top.

Parker Bach
Microsoft Research & University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

Trust in political polling has been faltering for some time in the U.S., particularly following undercounts of voters for Donald Trump in three consecutive presidential elections (Toff, 2018; Kennedy et al., 2018; Madson & Hillygus, 2020; Zitner, 2024). Meanwhile, political prediction markets (PPMs), which allow users to gamble on potential political outcomes, have gained prevalence. PPMs first attracted attention two decades ago, buoyed by a belief in the wisdom of crowds and economics’ efficient market hypothesis (Surowiecki, 2005; Sunstein, 2006; Wolfers & Zitzewitz, 2004). More recently, PPMs reached new heights of popularity alongside the rise of sports betting apps, a legal victory allowing PPMs to operate in the U.S., and references from high-profile figures like Elon Musk. PPMs uniformly selected Trump as the favorite in the 2024 U.S. election, which, in combination with another undercount of Trump voters, led PPM platforms to declare their victory over polling, and mainstream news to position PPMs as a potentially more trustworthy proxy for public opinion (Oldreal, 2024; Hoover, 2024). How was this shift framed by journalists and PPM platforms, and how might we evaluate its validity? To answer these questions, this study comprises a discourse analysis of coverage of PPMs from mainstream news sources, newsletters and statements from PPM platforms, and user comments from PPM forums, using the 2024 U.S. election as a case. Ultimately, I employ the concept of counterperformativity (MacKenzie, 2008; Barnes, 1983) to argue that though PPMs may help predict political outcomes in a vacuum, the attention to PPMs and their positioning as proxies for public opinion undercut their validity in 2024 by allowing politically motivated users to use their cash to manipulate the markets, gaining media attention that suggested the likelihood of their preferred political future and thereby transforming PPMs into an antidemocratic form of pay-to-win campaigning.

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From Trust to Trustworthiness: Reorienting Journalism in an Illiberal Era

Efrat Nechushtai
George Washington University

Declining trust in media is typically framed as one of the major contemporary challenges for journalism and threats to democratic health, and building more reciprocal relationships with audiences is therefore cast as a promising solution. Drawing on my forthcoming monograph *Trustworthy: Rethinking Trust in the News in Polarized Times* (Columbia University Press), I argue that while declining trust in professional news is concerning, in the face of lawless digital spaces and rising illiberalism, prioritizing trust as a key metric could make journalists more vulnerable to manipulation and propaganda, and lead media to strive to please the illiberal preferences of growing publics. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews with 97 journalists in four countries that experienced a significant growth of illiberalism in the last decade (US, Germany, Hungary and Israel), I argue that the emphasis on restoring trust rests on three implicit assumptions: (1) that audience attitudes and preferences are simple to understand, (2) that feedback is authentic and comes from real news consumers, and (3) that publics share journalists’ values and support a free and critical press. Yet the past few years have seen growing debates on the conceptual clarity of trust and the effectiveness of its measurement, evidence of the extent to which the current media environment facilitates the manipulation of any perceived vox populi, and electoral gains for illiberal political players in established democracies. And so, in global and regional newsrooms alike, all three assumptions are increasingly questioned every day. I therefore propose a re-conceptualization of trust in the media as part of a broader framework that explores the interplay of public trust and journalistic values, recognizing the growing tensions between critical/accountability journalism and audience approval — and acknowledging that without such contextualization, increasingly sophisticated attempts to undermine journalism can easily weaponize the desire to gain trust.

Beyond fact-checking? Media provenance and the promise of visual content authentication

Lori Young & Mona Kasra
University of Virginia

Visual content authentication has become a critical challenge due to the proliferation of synthetic and manipulated media online—including AI-generated images and deepfakes—which pose significant threats to democracy by spreading disinformation.

Media provenance has recently gained significant attention as a potentially transformative approach to visual content authentication online. Adapted from the art world, provenance involves tracing the origin and documenting the history of a digital asset, providing indicators of authenticity and/or knowledge of altered content. Provenance differs from traditional fact-checking by offering a technological and independent authentication assertion without requiring trust in a source, which can be polarizing, particularly when truth claims conflict with personal beliefs. By separating the authenticity evaluation of media content from the source presenting it, provenance has the potential to restore and enhance trust in digital content across partisan divides.

Methods for establishing media provenance have been developed in recent years, including initiatives to create universal technical standards for providing the signals of trustworthy digital content, such as C2PA’s Content Credential icon. While these tools are gaining traction amongst creators and viewers, their effectiveness and reach has not been fully assessed.

Our study is one of the first to examine whether provenance indicators enhance visual disinformation discernment and trust in the digital environment. Using an experimental design, we first assess whether provenance information attached to a visual media online improves disinformation discernment, and whether media provenance conveys and ensures trust in the viewers. We then evaluate its efficacy in non-sociopolitical compared to more divisive sociopolitical domains. Finally, we explore whether gains in accuracy and trust from non-sociopolitical contexts can transfer to contested sociopolitical content, improving disinformation discernment across polarizing topics. By examining the efficacy of provenance indicators, we aim to contribute to strategies that better combat visual disinformation and improve digital literacy, while exploring the potential for provenance to deliver on the promise of restoring trust in digital content.

“Deep Trust” and The Politics of Voice Biometric Authentication[^]

Hadar Levy-Landesberg
Tel Aviv University

Using one’s voice as a uniquely identifying characteristic, voice biometric authentication (VBA) is increasingly hailed by tech companies as a reliable method for seamless data access and enhanced security. In recent years, however, with the increasing use of deepfakes and synthetic media by hackers and criminals to impersonate customers and obtain access to their financial accounts, VBA companies are faced with new challenges and are required to provide voice anti-spoofing solutions. This paper analyzes the VBA industry discourse through white papers, promotional materials, and media interviews to locate possible solutions to the problem of where lies the “identity” component within the voice. I examine various VBA models, techniques, and tropes, such as “voiceprints” and “liveness detection”, designed to answer the question—“Are you the person you claim to be?”—but also, “Are you a real person?”

The question of trust in this context is multifaceted: On the one hand, VBA technologies provide institutions with the technological means to determine whether a person is trustworthy, while on the other hand, customer trust in service providers is exploited as their voice is unknowingly collected for information. This paper argues that VBA companies mobilize traditional Western notions about the human voice as an expression of identity, presence, and truth to promote their cutting-edge AI-powered solutions and legitimize their part in the big data project of vocal identification that feeds into a broader techno-capitalist desire for perpetual datafication and its subsequent monetization. Building on this analysis, I further explore the theoretical concept of “deep trust,” which I have proposed elsewhere (Levy-Landesberg & Cao, 2024), positioning VBA platforms within a larger trend in the AI industry aimed at counteracting the bad reputation of “deepfakes” and restoring credibility and legitimacy.

[^] This is a pre-recorded session

The AI Trust Debate: How Reddit Users Framed Artificial Intelligence in Election Discussions

Timothy Koskie¹, Justin Miller¹ & Christopher Hall²

¹University of Sydney, ²University of Technology Sydney

Trust in media is seen to have an impact on democratic engagement, yet it is increasingly tested in our rapidly shifting digital landscape. Discussions and debate over the 2024 U.S. election took place within an online information ecosystem where artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT had an unprecedented prominence in public discourse. While AI offers new avenues for information access and content moderation, its potential implications can simultaneously fuel skepticism and distrust. This study investigated how AI was invoked to provoke trust or distrust in political news and analysis on Reddit during the final ten days of the election. Analyzing 220,373 posts and comments across five major political subreddits, a clustering analysis identified four key themes: the use of AI accusations to delegitimize political discourse, appreciation for transparent AI in moderation and curation, critiques of AI’s accuracy and reliability, and concerns over AI as a systemic threat to information ecosystems. While some users valued AI’s role in moderating online discussions, accusations of algorithmic bias, bot interference, and AI-generated misinformation heightened distrust in both AI itself and the platforms mediating election discourse. These findings highlight the growing intersection of AI and media trust, revealing how technological disruptions shape public confidence in democratic processes. As AI becomes further embedded in news ecosystems, addressing these trust dynamics is essential to mitigating the risks of media manipulation, fostering digital literacy, and preserving public trust in democratic information environments.

Advancing Trust in AI-Powered Search Engines through Explainable AI: A Human-Centric Approach

Jinny Zhang

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The evolution of technology has driven the decentralization of information, characterized by diverse sources ranging from social media to synthetic data generated by artificial intelligence (AI). Today, AI-powered search engines (AIPSEs) have revolutionized information retrieval by enhancing accessibility and efficiency. However, these systems face critical challenges, including AI hallucinations, misinformation, and a growing trust deficit—particularly among low-literacy populations who may struggle to critically evaluate AI-generated content. Transparency emerges as a pivotal solution to these challenges, aligning with the principles of Explainable AI (XAI). XAI emphasizes designing systems that provide clear, interpretable explanations for their outputs. In the context of AIPSEs, this translates to transparent source attribution, explicit risk disclosures, and user-friendly explanations of how information is synthesized. To investigate how XAI-driven transparency can foster trust and mitigate risks, this study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating behavioral analytics from a browser extension with user surveys. The browser extension will track and analyze real-world user interactions with AI-powered search engines (AIPSEs), capturing data on how users navigate, assess, verify, and engage with AI-generated content. Meanwhile, surveys will explore users’ perceptions of AI trustworthiness, their literacy level, and their overall comprehension and attitudes of AI-generated content. By combining behavioral data with self-reported insights, this research aims to uncover how transparency influences trust and helps users—especially those with lower literacy levels—better navigate AI-curated information. This research provides actionable insights for designing AI-powered search engines that enhance transparency and user trust, especially for low-literacy users. By informing practical interventions—such as clear source attributions and interactive explanations—it bridges the gap between AI transparency and human interpretability. The findings aim to create more trustworthy, user-centric AI systems that empower individuals to critically engage with AI-generated content, fostering confidence in digital information navigation and promoting a more equitable and reliable information ecosystem.

Trust, algorithmic literacy, and active curation: the future of digital life in a generative AI world.

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For more than a decade, everyday users of search, social, and streaming platforms have become increasingly aware of the algorithms that manage content visibility on them, that they are occasionally tweaked for performance, and the potential for bias in their coding (Cotter, 2019; Noble, 2018; Willson, 2017; Zarouali et al., 2021). In response, many users have begun to actively engage in curation practices that they believe will influence what they see (or don't see) in their feeds and search results, trusting that their actions will deliver predictable results (Davis, 2017; Merten, 2021; Author, 2022). But what happens to that trust when platform algorithms no longer respond in ways that users expect? In the wake of Trump's re-election to the US presidency, leading US tech companies have begun to reposition themselves, aligning with his administration's agenda and policies through abrupt changes to their platforms. These include publicly acknowledged changes such as Meta's prominent removal of fact-checking from their platforms and Facebook's short-lived AI user accounts, as well as anecdotal claims of increased censorship in Alexa virtual assistant results, as well as reports of non-consensual following of political actors and shadowbanning. Add to this a rise in false or misleading content appearing online from AI generated sources, as well as search platforms including AI Generated summaries of search queries at the top of page, we must begin to question how well previous knowledge and experience of algorithms has prepared users for the next phase of digital life. We must also examine the impact that the current pace of change has on users' trust in their ability to navigate these platforms and systems. This paper aims to explore how algorithmic literacy has been conceptualised in the last decade, and how these theoretical frames are challenged by the rapidly changing digital information landscape. In doing so it proposes a research agenda for developing an integrated framework of digital literacy that incorporates a wholistic understanding of how AI, media, information, platform and algorithmic literacies converge.

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TikTok Journalism: News Credibility Perceptions and Learning on TikTok

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As news organizations face considerable challenges, many journalists are utilizing alternative platforms and storytelling techniques to reach citizens. Of note, several newsrooms now disseminate news through video-based social media apps like TikTok, using strategies and aesthetics common on these platforms (i.e., humor, sketches, trending sounds, etc.). However, the extent to which audiences trust and learn from this news content is unclear. In this study, we conduct a randomized, controlled online experiment (N = 538) using media produced by The Washington Post to assess two main questions: 1) Do audiences trust and find credible journalists who disseminate news through TikTok? and 2) To what extent do audiences learn from a TikTok news video, especially in comparison to a print article that delivers the same information? The results indicate audiences may find journalists less trustworthy, credible, professional, and knowledgeable (but more likable) when they convey information over TikTok, rather than through a print article. However, participants who viewed a news TikTok demonstrated higher topic knowledge than those who read an article containing the same information, and this relationship was mediated by attention to the stimulus. These results suggest that journalists are able to create likable personas, capture potential consumers' attention, and subsequently inform audiences through video-based apps like TikTok. However, this may come at the expense of reduced credibility perceptions and trust. This study echoes previous research on text-oriented social sites like Facebook in suggesting that translating news information to social media incurs consumer skepticism. Likely, journalists will have to expend significant effort to earn audiences' trust, over time, through video-based social media apps.

Communicating Platform Regulation, Justifying Public Trust?

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Given years of ‘public shocks’ in platform governance (Annany and Gillespie 2017) and now growing anxiety about development in generative AI, public trust in the regulation of digital platforms is low. One hope is that governments can restore and build public trust through strengthened regulation (Flew and Martin 2022; Kretschmer, Furgal, and Schlesinger 2022; Schlesinger 2022). If independent regulators can judge the trustworthiness of digital companies on behalf of the public, the hope is that a ‘regulatory trust triangle’ is established and public trust can be improved (Six and Vergoest 2017). However, trust in new and emerging form of government regulation cannot be taken for granted. Regulatory authorities and their expertise are more contested (Koop and Lodge 2020), and publics lack confidence that governments can regulate digital technology effectively (Edelman 2024:16).

To gain public trust, regulatory regimes for digital technology must demonstrate they are ‘trustworthy’: that is, will be competent and responsive to the public’s dependence on them (Jones 2024:5). Meanwhile, the public must determine whether their trust is warranted or not. In this paper, I outline an empirical and normative research agenda for investigating the public communication of digital regulation and public trust. Research should focus on: 1) how those who ‘represent’ regulatory systems (politicians, regulatory authorities and regulated companies) communicate regulation and ‘signal’ trustworthiness (Kroeger 2017:496, Knowles and Richards 2021), 2) the role of ‘trust proxies’ (including journalists and civil society groups) in helping to test and interpret claims of trustworthiness on the public’s behalf (Moore 2018); 3) the processes by which publics interpret signals of trustworthiness and forms judgements about trust; and 4) the types of resources and practices that can help the public to determine whether their trust is justified or not (Forst 2020). "

Trust in Gaming: Moderation and personalization on gaming platforms

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Everyday socialities increasingly play out within and through the worlds of digital games (Flew & Humphreys, 2005; Hjorth & Richardson, 2020). However, gaming remains often studied as a specialised field outside the “mainstream media landscape” (Schwarzenegger et al., 2024). Moreover, there exists limited research on the privacy implications of gaming platforms (Bourdoucen et al., 2023; Lazcano et al., 2018). In this paper, we discuss the question of trust in gaming platforms understood as a facet of today’s social media landscape. More specifically, we focus on two data-driven technologies of gaming platforms and interrogate their role in shaping and eroding trust in gaming platforms. The first is that of matchmaking understood as a form of personalization in which gamers are sorted and grouped for fair play. The second technologies are anti-cheat and anti-toxicity, forms of moderation that govern gamer’s ways of interactions with games and each other. Both types of technology establish trust in platforms as sites of playful interaction. Yet, their reliance on datafication systems creates a potential friction in the trust relation that users can have with given platforms – making them fruitful cases to study negotiations of trust as forms of accepted vulnerability (Baier, 1984). Our argumentation on this duality will be based on two things. Firstly, the analysis of the data practices of 37 multiplayer online games (e.g., League of Legends), gaming distribution platforms (e.g., Steam), and online community sites (e.g., Discord). Secondly, the discussion of specific cases studies and controversies that surrounded some of studied platforms– such as Riot Game’s launch of the Vanguard Anti-Cheat system. We will situate this discussion within broader debates about digital media governance, arguing that gaming provides a critical lens for understanding how trust is negotiated in data-intensive digital environments.

Politicized mistrust in platform governance: How claims of anti-conservative bias in content moderation persist in the United States

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Claims that mainstream digital platforms unfairly “censor” conservative viewpoints have persisted in the U.S., even as research found them unsubstantiated (P. M. Barrett & Sims, 2021). Key moments fueling this discourse include allegations against Facebook (Meta) in 2016 for suppressing conservative news in Trending Topics and the banning of Donald Trump from major platforms following the January 6 U.S. Capitol attack. These claims continue to gain momentum, with Republicans and legislatures in states like Texas and Florida introducing bills to restrict platform “censorship” (Brannon, 2022). Such claims complicate efforts to address harms like disinformation and hate speech while reinforcing “free speech absolutism” in the U.S. (Citron, 2009; Gillespie et al., 2023). They fundamentally mobilize ‘mistrust’ in content moderation, politicizing platform governance.

This study explores how the anti-conservative bias narrative persists, even when unsubstantiated. In 2019, the Trump administration solicited instances of social media censorship through an online White House form. A thematic analysis of related Twitter (X) discourse reveals that the claim is situated across ideological/legal, political, social, and platform-based dimensions. The ideological/legal dimension involves contested interpretations of free speech, First Amendment protections, and Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act. Politically, the claim reflects perceptions of tech companies as “liberal” and reactions to Trump’s leadership. Socially, users often report frustrations over community elements, citing changes in follower count or content visibility as evidence of perceived anti-conservative bias. The platform-based dimension highlights tiered moderation practices (e.g., public figures vs. everyday users) and the role of targeted advertising in amplifying divisions, all of which compounds user perceptions. These dimensions suggest that ‘mistrust’ in platform content moderation has become deeply politicized. Addressing this polarization requires examining the interplay of ideological/legal, political, social, and platform factors, especially as regulatory approaches evolve with shifts in administration.

Future-proofing PBS: American Public Serving Broadcasting in the Post-Trust Era

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The present political economic moment has been described as one of “post-trust” (Jones, 2023). U.S. citizens’ trust in public institutions, in news, in (legacy and social) media and in each other has decreased precipitously (Deane, 2024; Pew, 2019). Remarkably, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) goes against trends, continuously ranking amongst the most trusted U.S. institutions (Jurkowitz et al., 2020; PBS Publicity, 2022). Despite this trusted position and its potential to help restoring broader trust, PBS receives little support from U.S. policy and lawmakers. Worse, President Trump and the Republican Party have launched renewed calls to defund U.S. public media, while eliminating the Corporation for Public Broadcasting is a priority for the Department of Government Efficiency under auspices of Musk (Klebanov, 2024). This paradox between trust and politics inspires three research questions:

(R1) How can PBS maintain its position as trusted media institution in a “post-trust” society and antagonistic political climate?

(R2) What are the views and impact on the future of PBS as trusted institution of its three main stakeholders (PBS stations, audiences and the U.S. government)?

(R3) What are the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats that PBS face in future-proofing its position?

To address these research questions, first, we build a framework combining stakeholder, advocacy coalition and multiple streams analysis (Beland & Howlett, 2016; Kingdon, 1984; Authors, 2019). Next, we analyze the views, visibility and power of PBS’ three main stakeholders, relying on three data sets: for PBS organizations the results of our survey of local PBS station managers (N= 67); for PBS audiences the results of our nationally representative survey of PBS viewers (N = 1533); for government press articles about political-economic issues related to PBS. Analysis and comparison of these results will show weaknesses and strengths that can be shored up to ensure a strong future for and continued audience trust in the institution. Weighing the visibility and power of the three stakeholders, we formulate recommendations to ensure the longevity of this media organization and its potential to contribute to a renewed trust in media.

Understanding Media Trust: The Perception of “The Media” in a Changing Media Landscape

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Media trust has long been a key concern in communication research, yet dissatisfaction remains regarding its conceptualization and measurement. Defined as the expectation that institutional news media will report professionally and provide beneficial information, media trust is often considered a subjective attitude toward “the news media as a whole” (Tsfati, 2010). However, as the media industry rapidly evolves, the definition of “the media” is becoming increasingly ambiguous, causing problems for individuals in perceiving “the media.” Historically, “the media” was primarily associated with mainstream outlets, with a clear divide between traditional and online media. As digital platforms grow, this division has blurred, complicating public perceptions. Furthermore, media consumption habits shape how people define “the media.” Older generations, who still read print newspapers, may perceive it differently from younger generations who primarily rely on social media. These factors raise questions about whether perceptions of “the media” vary across demographics and media systems. Notably, individuals’ perceptions of “the media” may influence their trust, particularly in relation to the outlets they frequently use. A shrinking overlap between perceived “media” and actual media consumption suggests that people increasingly view “the media” as an outgroup, contributing to declining media trust. This study analyzes survey data from Japan, where media trust remains relatively high, and the US, where it is low, to test four research questions. Specifically, it examines whether people associate “the media” with online sources, whether generational differences influence perceptions, and how the overlap between perceived and consumed media affects trust. Additionally, it explores whether this perception differs between media environments. Data collection in Japan concluded after the 2024 general election, while US data will be completed by February 2025. By addressing these questions, this research seeks to advance the understanding of media trust in an era of digital transformation and shifting media landscapes.

How to increase trust and participation in the age of AI? Examining the role of AI awareness and comfort level based on evidence from 26 Countries

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Although digital media offer more opportunities for individuals to access and engage with news, trust in news and levels of news participation have declined significantly over the past decades (Altay et al., 2024; Fletcher et al., 2024). In recent years, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and deep fake in news production and distribution, alongside the increasing prevalence of fake news, has raised theoretical, normative, and practical concerns regarding the erosion of journalistic authority and autonomy. The use of AI in news and the consumption of fake news may further exacerbate issues of trust and discourage news engagement. Therefore, this study seeks to examine strategies for enhancing trust and fostering greater engagement with news, addressing a critical challenge in the current media landscape. Research has shown that news consumption—whether of general news or fake news—can increase news participation (Chan et al., 2021b; Nelson & Taneja, 2018; Wu-Ouyang, 2024). However, the underlying mechanisms driving this relationship, particularly in the context of fake news consumption, remain unclear. According to motivated reasoning theory, concerns about fake news may activate individuals’ defensive motivations, prompting greater news participation (Wu-Ouyang, 2024). Conversely, consuming fake news can also increase individuals’ verification intentions, leading them to engage more actively in news authentication efforts (Chan et al., 2021b). A key mediator in this process is trust. When individuals develop greater trust in a platform or news source, they are more likely to participate in news-related activities (Geng et al., 2021; Nagler, 2014). However, if fake news consumption erodes trust, it may ultimately hinder news participation. Grounded in the OSROR framework, this study’s first objective is to examine the mediating role of trust in the relationship between news consumption and news participation. Furthermore, the paradox of AI disclosure in news trust has become a critical concern in the age of AI (Toff & Simon, 2024). While users expect transparency regarding the extent to which news content is generated by AI—failing which they may feel deceived and uneasy—such awareness comes at a cost. Specifically, audiences tend to perceive AI-labeled news as less trustworthy than content curated by human editors. This study will further examine how AI awareness and AI comfort level amplify or mitigate the effects of news consumption on news participation. This study uses representative sample of 28 countries (N = 95,974) from 2024 Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2024). We incorporate country-level variables from the V-Dem dataset, focusing on media censorship, media corruption, political polarization, and patriotism, which capture the broader impact of media systems. Multilevel analyses highlight the critical mediating role of trust in news consumption across countries. Specifically, increased general news consumption enhances trust, thereby promoting news participation, whereas exposure to fake news reduces trust, subsequently lowering participation. While AI awareness positively influences news engagement, it does not contribute to trust. Conversely, AI comfort level presents a double-edged sword: it fosters greater engagement but simultaneously diminishes trust. Notably, under conditions of fake news consumption, trust and news avoidance both increase. This suggests that individuals who develop a sense of ease with fake news consumption may become less critical in evaluating news content, ultimately fostering a greater tendency to believe in fake news.

Reasons for Trust: General and Situation-specific reasons for Media Trust among Adolescents in Germany

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Communication science has rapidly expanded knowledge about media trust during the past years, providing considerable insights into trust and a variety of its correlates (for an overview see Fawzi et al., 2021). At the same time, fundamental questions on how trust is formed are still unanswered. The focal point of our project is the perspective of adolescents on media trust and the underlying factors that influence it. We focus on young people because adolescence is critical for political socialization and adolescents today consume news rather passively and incidentally (see, e.g., Newman et al., 2022). To understand the complex notion of media trust, we chose a qualitative approach and conducted 50 interviews with young people across Germany (14 to 19 years of age). Findings indicate that their definition of trust is strongly intertwined with reasons to trust (esp., reliability) (RQ1). As general reasons for media trust they named a variety of source (e.g., journalistic autonomy) and content characteristics (e.g., balanced coverage) (RQ2). To identify situation-specific reasons, we used the think aloud method: we presented participants with Instagram postings on a climate strike from a newscast of a public-service broadcaster, a tabloid newspaper, an alternative online outlet and an influencer, asking participants to assess their trust in each one. Results show that image and reputation of the source is the prime indicator of trustworthiness, as well as perceived seriousness, correctness and visualization. Participants also strongly rely on cues like the blue checkmark indicating a verified account or popularity indicators (e.g., likes) (RQ3). Overall, findings indicate that adolescents have a rather traditional perspective on how to assess trustworthiness. At the same time, specific indicators to determine the trustworthiness of sources and content have changed because of the online environment.
