

Call for Papers

TRUST IN EXPERTISE IN A CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

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Location: Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW), Berlin, Germany

As part of the PERiTIA project, Utrecht University (NL) in collaboration with ALLEA, the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities, organizes a conference on the topic of “Trust in expertise in a changing media landscape.” PERiTIA (Policy, Expertise and Trust in Action) is an international research project exploring the conditions under which people trust expertise used for shaping public policy. It receives funding from the EU’s Horizon 2020 research programme.

CONFERENCE THEME

In democratic societies, trust in the provenance and justification of policy measures are essential for their implementation. Trust in scientific expertise—both in experts and in scientific institutions—has become a contested subject in the wake of recent political and social developments, particularly the emergence of populist sentiments. At the same time, newspapers and journalists have always played an important part in the shaping of public trust in public debates. However, the recent contestations also draw attention to questions of trust in media organizations. Are they fulfilling their role as watchdogs of democracy and mediators of informed public debate? Can they be considered ‘pillars of institutional trust’ themselves?

Over the past decade, the traditional media landscape has substantially transformed into a globalized, technologically mediated and commoditized environment—a transformation that coincided with increasingly volatile levels of trust in institutions, whether academia, politics, governments, or legacy media. Online sources for information, including information about various areas of scientific expertise, provide new, low-threshold opportunities to communicate. Social media, blogs and vlogs offer unlimited and boundless sources for the public to inform themselves quickly, mostly free of charge and everywhere. The credibility and hence trustworthiness of such sources are difficult to assess. It is often unclear who says what in which context and based on what authority or expertise, particularly if information is decontextualized from its original source and distributed through social media.

The problem of trust in (social) media has been further exacerbated by the persistent problem of fake news and disinformation. A growing social media environment increasingly undercuts established societal/sectoral systems of trust, accountability and responsibility. Automated accounts (‘social bots’) as well as malicious human users (‘trolls’) play an important role in contemporary forms of disinformation. Reinforced by the anonymity of most online communication, such phenomena may bias users’ perception of the distribution of opinions, views and evidence. Meanwhile, social media platforms have attempted to refurbish trust in their online channels by resorting to human and algorithmic gatekeeping, with so far mixed results.

Some of the most heated global discussions of our time directly implicate scientific knowledge claims. In recent years, the debate on climate change was a popular area of trust contestation, pitting climate change deniers against climate scientists and other experts. In 2020, the corona-virus and its aftermath

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add a new stress test to public trust in science, politics, and media. These (online) contestations show how geopolitical and ideological battles come to target not just political and scientific institutions, but also legacy media or a combination of all three, thus raising the stakes of understanding public trust under changing conditions.

This conference highlights the question of trust in a changing media landscape, addressing the following **three general questions**:

1. How does trust in expertise play out in the context of a changing media landscape, in particular the transformation from legacy media (newspapers, tv) to digital platforms (social media, blogs, vlogs)?
2. Can we develop a better understanding of conditions of trust and trustworthiness in the context of digital platforms and social media? How may conditions differ in various (European) countries or in the (geopolitical) contexts of different continents?
3. What is the impact of digital media and its users on (institutional) trust in governance that is rooted in scientific evidence and fact-finding?

Possible **topics** may include (but are not restricted to):

- Analytical perspectives on, and empirical investigations of, public debates concerning the value of scientific expertise, e.g. in the area of climate change and the corona-pandemic.
- Theoretical and practice-based studies on the (changing) conditions for anchoring public trust in institutions and professionals; the ethics of digital communication.
- Empirical and investigative studies on the role of legacy media vis-à-vis digital platforms in undermining or enhancing trust in social institutions.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This call solicits presentations and papers from a number of (inter)disciplinary fields, bringing together perspectives from media and communication studies, information science, public policy, philosophy, social and political sciences, and more. Papers will be selected on the basis of quality of content and suitability to the theme. The two day conference will feature up to 60 presentations in various panels and keynotes. Selected papers will be considered for publication in a special issue or edited volume.

This conference aims to foster the exchange of ideas across national and disciplinary borders between senior and junior researchers. We have therefore reserved limited funds for travel grants to support excellent contributions from early career scholars and scholars from the global south. Please indicate your interest when submitting your abstract.

We invite abstracts of up to 300 words and a short bio of up to 100 words by 1 September, 2020.

Abstracts should be sent to peritia@allea.org.

Information regarding acceptance should be available by early October 2020.