
Call for papers

The Tracked Society

Interdisciplinary Approaches on Online Tracking

Online tracking in its various forms (from simple web cookies to more sophisticated technologies that follow users across different devices and application contexts) is a backbone of digitalization that has sparked hopes and fears alike: It opens up new opportunities for users and businesses as it enables individually targeted content. At the same time, the encompassing tracking of often unaware and ill-informed users and the opaque practices of data procession has alarmed critics from multiple sides.

In recent years, tracking-related issues have gained increasing attention by experts but also the general public. Heated debates on Big Data, privacy, filter bubbles or the challenges of governing algorithms are now part of daily news. But despite this intensive and wide discourse, many open questions remain. Since online tracking is vital to digital innovation, it is also likely to persist regardless of the associated problems. Therefore the question arises, how we can better understand but also proactively and constructively shape the emerging tracked society.

While attempts to answer such questions have been made before, we aim at taking the debate one step further by bringing together multiple relevant perspectives in a **workshop** and a related **special issue** (to be published in a reputable international journal). The workshop will be held at the University of Amsterdam (Netherlands), providing a space for intensive interdisciplinary exchange in order to improve the quality of the contributions and to create a mutual understanding between the **various relevant fields of expertise**. Moreover, we welcome particularly contributions which aim at constructive solutions, enabling the innovative opportunities of tracking while minimizing the associated risks. These may involve (but are not limited to) the following fields and questions:

Engineering and computer science

- Are there common misconceptions on a technical level in the discourse around tracking? How can a better understanding of these aspects improve our conversation?
- What are the technical challenges related to tracking (e.g. in regard to the quality and the precision of the analyses)? Can it really live up to the current economic expectations?

Social science and media studies

- How is tracking used in online media? Which networks of trackers can be identified? Who are the most powerful actors and how do they shape the socio-technical setting?
- What are the implications of tracking for journalism? How can the emerging problems (e.g. filter bubbles, “clickbaity” journalism) be tackled while making use of the opportunities provided by tracking?

Economics

- How effective are online tracking practices from a business perspective?
- Which economic transformations are induced by online tracking?
- What are the business models of trackers and their counterparts (e.g. ad blockers)? Which alternative models appear promising?

Behavioral science/psychology

- What is the impact of online tracking on users and how does it shape their experience?
- Which strategies can individuals apply to maintain their autonomy in a digital landscape that is increasingly filled with nudges aiming at manipulating their behavior?

Legal science

- How does the European General Data Protection Regulation impact online tracking?
- What is the legal assessment in relation to takeovers of web services which own databases with tracking data? To what extent are legal changes required?

Political science

- How can online tracking be governed in a useful way? What can different countries learn from each other in this regard?
- Does tracking-based personalization undermine democratic values through the effects of filter bubbles and the fragmentation of audiences? How can this be addressed politically?

Philosophy/ethics

- What are the ethical implications of online tracking? For example, how does it affect different values (e.g. self-determination)?
- How can tracking be designed according to these values?

Contributors are expected to attend the workshop (see below for dates and deadlines) and submit a full paper which will be developed in three steps: Authors of accepted **extended abstracts** (1.000-1.500 words, including references and footnotes) will be invited to submit a further developed **draft** (2.500-4.000 words) which will be discussed with the other contributors at the **workshop** in Amsterdam. Each paper will be critically presented and debated by invited discussants with the relevant expertise (30 min./paper). This will help to finalize the paper as full articles (6.000-8.000 words).

The workshop will start with a **keynote** followed by an empirical exercise involving **digital methods** on "Mapping the Infrastructures of the Tracking Society" by Anne Helmond, Fernando van der Vlist and Esther Weltevrede (Digital Methods Initiative, University of Amsterdam).

Core insights of the workshop will also be used for a report for the project **Assessing Big Data** (ABIDA, see www.abida.de for more details), funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. **The workshop is free of charge. Travel costs can be refunded.**¹

Please send your submissions (as PDF files) or any questions to cfp@abida.de.

¹ Hotel rooms will be reimbursed up to 119 € (max. 2 nights). Train tickets are limited to 2nd class, flights to standard economy class.

Important dates

05.03.2018	Deadline for abstracts
26.03.2018	Selection of accepted abstracts
04.06.2018	Deadline for drafts
21.-22.06.2018	Workshop
03.09.2018	Submission of full papers to editors
01.10.2018	Feedback by editors
02.11.2018	Submission of revised full papers to journal

Editors and organizers

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