



RESEARCH CENTER
**TRUSTWORTHY DATA SCIENCE
AND SECURITY**

RC Trust Newsletter – October 2026

Dear readers,
dear colleagues,

we hope you had a restful summer break. With the new winter semester just around the corner, this may be a good moment to catch up on what has been happening across RC Trust over the past weeks.

This issue brings together new colleagues, research highlights, awards, international exchange, and upcoming events from across the Center.

Marjolein Fokkema joins RC Trust



Since August, Marjolein Fokkema holds the Chair of *Computational Statistics with Applications in Psychology* at TU Dortmund University and is affiliated with RC Trust. Her research connects statistics, psychology, and machine learning, with a particular focus on interpretable methods and uncertainty quantification.

[Read more](#)

DAISY



Using AI Safely in Companies

How can companies use cloud-based AI without exposing sensitive data? The new **DAISY** project brings together researchers from Ruhr University Bochum, the University of Duisburg-Essen, Witten/Herdecke University, and WirtschaftsEntwicklungsgesellschaft Bochum.

With €1.29 million in federal funding, the project combines technical solutions with organizational and individual psychology. RC Trust researchers **Dr. Steffen Becker, Dr. Greta Ontrup, and Dr. Magdalena Wischnewski** are involved.

[Read more](#)

PEOPLE & CAREERS



A professorship shaped by trustworthy AI

On October 1, Linara Adilova will join the University of Cologne as Professor of Machine Learning and build a new Chair of Machine Learning. At RC Trust and TU Dortmund University, she developed her research profile around the theoretical foundations of deep learning, generalization, reliability, and interpretable machine learning.

[Read more](#)



New chapter for Jonathan Liebers

Jonathan Liebers has left RC Trust to take up a professorship at the Westphalian University of Applied Sciences. Since joining Sven Mayer's Human-AI Interaction group in March, he contributed research on usable security, agentic AI, implicit interaction, and human-centered intelligent systems.

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From HAIL to UQ

Lisa Townsend is moving to Brisbane to begin a PhD with the Human-Centred Computing Team at the University of Queensland. During her year in Sven Mayer's group, her work focused on XR, AI, connectedness, and wellbeing – including an Honourable Mention Award at CHI 2026.

[Read more](#)

Nico Föge completes his doctorate

Nico Föge successfully defended his dissertation *Branching into Uncertainty: Theory and Simulations in Random Forest Imputation and Inference*. His work connects interpretable Random Forests with statistical uncertainty and missing data. After completing his time at RC Trust, he will join Wavestone in October.

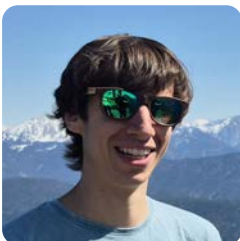
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New at RC Trust



Agathe Balayn studies AI in practice

Postdoctoral Researcher Agathe Balayn has joined Jat Singh's Compliant and Accountable Systems group. Her research examines how AI systems are produced, evaluated, and governed across supply chains, organizations, policy, and standardization.

[Read more](#)

Niklas Traser explores trustworthy access to legal information

PhD Researcher Niklas Traser has joined Ivan Habernal's Trustworthy Human Language Technologies group. Within TruQALIA, he investigates how natural language processing can make legal information more accessible to non-experts while keeping the limitations and risks of language technologies visible.

[Read more](#)



Till Holzapfel joins Inclusive Technology and Collective Engagement

PhD Researcher Till Holzapfel has joined Giulia Barbareschi's group. Building on a background in cognitive science and human-computer interaction, he will explore mixed-ability human-swarm interaction through participatory design, swarm approaches, and artificial life.



Danyang Peng visits RC Trust

Danyang Peng is spending a research stay with Giulia Barbareschi's group until the end of October. The PhD candidate at Keio University and collaborative researcher at Yokohama City University works on XR, haptics, meditation, mental wellbeing, affective computing, and immersive interaction.



Testing statistics before reality puts them to work

As his Erasmus+ internship comes to an end, Enes Ün looks back on three and a half months in Markus Pauly's group. Working with Marlène Baumeister, he explored MANOVA and simulation studies and gained first-hand experience of academic research.

[Read more](#)

RECOGNITION & RESPONSIBILITY



Markus Pauly joins expert group for Census 2031

Markus Pauly is one of nine scientific experts appointed to advise the Federal Statistical Office on the methodological development of Germany's Census 2031. The group will address questions including data quality, record linkage, missing information, machine learning, and the use of administrative and statistical registers.

[Read more](#)



RC Trust strengthens ties with Australian justice research

Jessica Szczuka has been appointed Adjunct Associate Professor at the QUT Centre for Justice at Queensland University of Technology. The appointment strengthens an international collaboration around AI, psychology, digital intimacy, justice, and AI-generated abuse material.

[Read more](#)



Philip Buczak receives DStatG publication award

Philip Buczak received the German Statistical Society's prize for the best scientific publication produced as part of a doctoral thesis. His award-winning paper introduces a faster Random Forest-based approach for predicting ordinal outcomes and grew out of his doctoral research in Markus Pauly's group.

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RESEARCH & PUBLICATIONS

Two perspectives on relationships with AI companions

Jessica Szczuka and colleagues contributed two new publications on relationships with AI. Together with Lisa Mühl, Paula Ebner, and Simon Dubé, she examined interpersonal closeness toward potential human and AI partners in *Human-Machine Communication*. In *Communications of the ACM*, Jaime Banks and Jessica Szczuka argue for evidence-based research into AI companionship rather than conclusions driven by moral panic.

URL: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/hmc/vol13/iss1/3/>

URL: <https://cacm.acm.org/opinion/dont-panic-about-ai-companions/>

Beyond tool versus teammate

A paper involving Greta Ontrup and Magdalena Wischnewski has been accepted for BritCHI 2026. *Beyond the Dichotomy of Tool vs. Teammate: Functional, Normative, and Experiential Perspectives on AI in Organizations* examines different ways of understanding the role of AI in organizational settings.

Causal effects under selection bias and confounding

Marlies Hafer presented joint work with Alexander Marx at ECML-PKDD. Their paper, *Regression-Based Estimation of Causal Effects in the Presence of Selection Bias and Confounding*, develops a regression-based approach for estimating causal effects when observational data are affected by both challenges.

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10994-026-07054-6>

Researchers around **Steffen Becker** are contributing three papers to international conferences this October, spanning AI-supported qualitative research and hardware security.

- Elisabeth Kirsten et al. examine the potential of AI support for qualitative data analysis at NordiCHI '26.
URL: <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3829807.3829820>
- Zehra Karadağ et al. review two decades of hardware reverse engineering research in a paper to be presented at CHES 2026 in Antalya.
URL: <https://tches.iacr.org/index.php/TCHES/article/view/13235>
- S. Tommasone et al. present work on recovering design intent from clock distribution networks at PAINE '26, developed in cooperation with TechInsights Inc. in Canada and originating from a bachelor's thesis.

RESEARCH EXCHANGE



RC Trust at Mensch und Computer 2026

RC Trust contributed to Mensch und Computer 2026 both scientifically and organizationally. Giulia Barbareschi served as DEI & Accessibility Chair, while Jonathan Liebers was a Short Paper Chair. Researchers from across RC Trust contributed talks, short papers, demos, workshops, and work-in-progress projects on topics ranging from AI-powered smart glasses and system prompts to content moderation and educational LLMs.

[Read more](#)



Digital sovereignty is also a question of trust

Scientific Director Nicole Krämer joined the first Ruhr Innovation Lab Future Dialogue on digital sovereignty. Her contribution brought a psychological perspective to questions of technological independence: digital sovereignty also depends on how people understand, assess, and decide when to trust digital systems.

[Read more](#)



When should AI know better – and humans stay in control?

Assistant Professor Tuğrulcan Elmas from the University of Edinburgh visited the RC Trust Graduate School. His talk explored human-AI interaction through three questions – who should know, who should decide, and who should act – ranging from epistemic authority to relationship advice and AI-supported university assignments.

[Read more](#)



Past climates can put future projections to the test

Nils Weitzel presented invited research at Statistische Woche 2026 on combining observations, climate simulations, and reconstructions of past climate. His work uses statistical methods to identify where climate models capture variability well – and where regional discrepancies remain.

[Read more](#)



From Dortmund to Stralsund

At ECDA 2026, Fokkema recently presented RuleSHAP, developed with Giorgio Spadaccini and Prof. Mark van de Wiel. The approach combines efficient Shapley-value computation with uncertainty quantification, helping move machine-learning explanations toward scientific inference.

[Read more](#)

Daniel Neider at IFIP Working Group 2.2

Daniel Neider gave the invited talk *“Formal Methods and Machine Learning: A Guided Tour of the Borderlands”* at the annual meeting of IFIP Working Group 2.2 on September 17.

[Read more](#)

Elisabeth Kirsten at the AutoML Summer School

Elisabeth Kirsten gave the invited talk “*From Tool-Using LLMs to Orchestrated Agent Systems*” at the AutoML Summer School 2026 at TU Dortmund University.

[Read more](#)

Javier Aguilar at StanCon 2026

Javier Aguilar presented “*Intuitive R2 based prior specification for high-dimensional models*” at StanCon 2026 in Uppsala.

[Read more](#)

Jessica Szczuka at the Tag der Informatik

Jessica Szczuka spoke at the University of Duisburg-Essen’s Tag der Informatik on September 29. Her talk, “*Intimacy by Design: Wenn KI zwischenmenschlich wird,*” examined how AI systems are entering increasingly intimate and interpersonal contexts.



Behind the scenes at CUI 2026

Aria Kalforian and Soumik Bhattacharjee represented the Human-AI Interaction group as student volunteers at CUI 2026 in Bremen, gaining insights into conference organization while connecting with the wider HCI community.

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LLMs meet future industry

Sven Mayer and Ankur Bhatt joined the workshop *Large Language Models Empowering the Future of Industry* in Heilbronn. Mayer contributed the talk “*Designing Human-Centered Computing Systems in the Age of LLMs.*”

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COMING UP



Linus Hany begins research stay in Dortmund

Linus Hany from the University of Basel has joined Marjolein Fokkema's group for a one-month research stay. On September 30 at 2:15 p.m., he will speak at TU Dortmund University's Statistical Colloquium about split-selection bias in multilevel decision trees.

[Read more](#)



Responsible AI: Building AI We Can Trust

On October 5, RC Trust will co-host a FAIR-PLAI event at Fraunhofer IML in Dortmund. The program brings together researchers, practitioners, and students around bias and fairness, explainability, regulation, and sustainable AI. Prof. Markus Pauly will represent RC Trust on site.

[Read more](#)

Bilal Zafar at Tsukuba Global Science Week

Bilal Zafar is representing Ruhr University Bochum and RC Trust at Tsukuba Global Science Week in Japan. The international event runs from September 29 to October 3, and Zafar will contribute a talk during the program.

[Read more](#)

Elisabeth Kirsten presents at COLM

On October 8, Elisabeth Kirsten will present *On Epistemic Diversity in Large Language Models*, co-authored with Nicole Krämer and Bilal Zafar, at COLM 2026 in San Francisco.

[Read more](#)



Save the date: Gottschalk-Diederich-Baedeker Award

Jessica Szczuka will receive the Gottschalk-Diederich-Baedeker Award for outstanding achievements in research and technology transfer at the University of Duisburg-Essen on November 19. **Registration is open until November 6.**

[Read more](#)

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

New perspectives on careers after the PhD

TU Dortmund University and Ruhr University Bochum have developed a joint concept to provide more targeted support for researchers navigating career paths after their doctorate. Developed within the Ruhr Innovation Lab and approved by both rectorates over the summer, the concept is now being implemented step by step.

[Read more](#)

Thank you for reading. We hope you enjoy exploring these highlights from RC Trust.

