Press release

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Mortal or Machine? Prizes for developers of automatic bot-recognition systems

The winners of the Munich Bot Challenge were awarded prizes at the Bavarian Academy of Sciences in the Munich Residenz. The award-winning teams developed new methods to quickly detect and block opinion-generating machines, or "social bots", on the Internet.

(Munich/Berlin, 01/10/2018) The task of the Munich Bot Challenge was to seek out messages generated by computer programs on social networks so as to prevent automatized manipulation. The initiators of the contest, the Munich Center for Internet Research of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities (MCIR) and the *Stifterverband*, in Munich yesterday awarded prizes to three teams that have developed bot-recognition systems:

- The first prize, in the amount of 10,000 euros, goes to Deeplora, a team consisting of Florian Ettlinger, Patrick Christ and Sebastian Schlecht.
- Coming in at second place is the team called 0x007e. The prize of 5,000 euros goes to Robert Rödler and Dennis Kergl.
- The third place, with 2,500 euros, goes to CDTM Botstop, whose members are Claas Meiners, Maximilian Wuehr, Viet Le and Florian Scherer.

The jury held that these were the teams with the most convincing concepts for identifying social bots on the web. Since the Brexit Referendum and the US presidential elections it has become clear what power social bots can have to influence opinion due to their speed and their reach. They set trends and influence discussions and the political debate. The users of social media have no way of knowing if incoming content has been sent from a real account or from a fake profile. The task of automatic bot-recognition systems is to find the computer programs behind these profiles and halt their spread of deceptively realistic messages. This is a new challenge for all, but especially for science.

“The contestants developed automatic bot-recognition systems which they then applied during the German parliamentary election campaign in the fall of 2017 to the followers of certain specified Twitter accounts, so they were already able to test their systems in the real world”, explains Prof. Dietmar Harhoff, a co-organizer of the Munich Bot Challenge and co-initiator of the Munich Center for Internet Research (MCIR), who is Director at the Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition.

The Munich Bot Challenge is a joint project of the Munich Center for Internet Research of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities (MCIR) and the *Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft e.V.*.
In addition, the project is supported by the Bavarian School of Public Policy / Hochschule für Politik at the TU München and the Center for Digital Technology and Management (CDTM). More information on the Munich Bot Challenge can be found at: http://mcir.digital/munich-bot-challenge/

About the Organizers

The **Munich Center for Internet Research (MCIR)** was launched in December 2015 as a new research center of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities. Its aim is to subject the societal change related to the Internet and digitalization to scientific study and thereby provide orientation for its successful design.

The **Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft e.V.** is the only joint initiative of companies and trusts that consults, connects and promotes institutions in the areas of education, science and innovation. The *Stifterverband* works to ensure that young people can develop their talents, and actively promotes better education with equal opportunities. It also works to enhance the quality of academic research and teaching, cooperation between commerce and science, and the dialogue between science and the public.

In the wake of technological advances, politics and society are faced with increasingly complex challenges. Expertise in just one discipline is no longer sufficient for developing comprehensive solutions to those challenges. With its new structures in cooperation with the TU München, The **Bavarian School of Public Policy / Hochschule für Politik München** offers an ideal environment to develop and promote political competence.

The **Center for Digital Technology and Management (CDTM)** is a joint research and teaching institute of the TU München (TUM) and Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU). Founded in 1998, its focal areas are teaching gifted students, applied research in information and communication technologies, and the promotion of entrepreneurship.

About the Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition

The central focus of research at the **Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition** is on examining processes of innovation and competition and on developing proposals for designing framework conditions for these processes. The research questions are examined by a law department and an economics department. The Institute was founded in 1966 as the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Patent, Copyright and Competition Law. In 2013, after the establishment of a new economics department, its name was changed

to Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition. The Institute is one of 84 institutes of the Max Planck Society, one of Germany's leading research organizations. In choosing and executing their research tasks, the Max Planck Institutes are free and independent; thus, each has its own internally administered budget, which can be augmented project-wise by external funding. The research at the Institute must meet the criteria for scientific excellence of the Max Planck Society, which is ensured by regular audits. For further information visit: www.ip.mpg.de/en