

The Third Search Futures Workshop at ECIR’26

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Abstract. As advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI), primarily Generative AI, continue to push research and practical boundaries in the research, development, and evaluation of Information Retrieval (IR) systems, continuing to envision how the field could and should develop is a critical question. In the third edition of the Search Futures workshop, we continue the trend of prompting critical discussions of what IR currently is but what it can and should be. As part of this edition, we look back at previous visions of search futures and look at how the community has attained those futures. Moreover, the workshop continues to be a venue for the IR community to work collaboratively to build new visions of the future, address concerns with the trajectory of research, and to continue to further strengthen the field going forward.

Keywords: Search · Information retrieval · Artificial intelligence · Generative Information Retrieval.

1 Introduction and Motivation

The Information Retrieval (IR) field is experiencing significant transformation due to ongoing advancements and breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, as well as shifts in the broader research landscape. This period of change has brought a sense of uncertainty to our field and community [6], prompting us to reconsider our role and importance within the broader context of computing and information sciences. Even now, several years into these changes, best practices are still nascent in how to leverage these new advances. By gathering as a community to step back and reflect on what Information Retrieval can and should mean, this workshop acts as a springboard for new insights and ideas for the future of search. We face many challenges and risks ahead, but also new opportunities. Bold research is needed to drive us toward the goal of fully autonomous intelligent assistants [7] or the next generation “memex machine” [4].

This iteration of Search Futures workshop provides a space for the IR community to discuss critical issues openly. It is a forum to voice concerns, share ideas, and propose innovations that strengthen our field and the community behind it. Moreover, the workshop allows the entire community to reflect on visions of search futures past and present.

We face critical questions at the crossroads of technological innovation and scholarly reflection, much like those raised in previous Search Futures workshops at ECIR [1–3] and in the recent SWIRL report [10]. *How can we leverage AI to improve IR? What safeguards are necessary to protect data privacy and integrity? How do we ensure our research benefits everyone? How can we design systems that promote fairness and minimize bias in search results? What role should user agency and transparency play in developing intelligent retrieval systems? How has and how will information access change with advances in the field? Should IR methodologies change as user behaviours change and adapt to new systems?* These are just a few of the pressing challenges shaping the future of IR.

This workshop is dedicated to exploring the future of search. It offers a platform for the community to discuss and shape the next directions in research. Our goal is to ensure that IR remains vital and relevant while pushing the boundaries of discovery. We aim to drive innovation and tackle emerging challenges in our field by working together.

2 Workshop Goals and Objectives

The Third Search Futures Workshop aims to provide a much-needed forum for the IR community to continue discussing emerging challenges to the field and community. Our goals are to:

- Continue our workshop series for open conversations about possible Search Futures,
- Provide a forum at ECIR to discuss the pressing and emerging issues our field faces, and,
- Produce a report detailing the initial outcomes of this second workshop on Search Futures.
- Continue this ambitious series for Search Future workshops at subsequent IR conferences to include further and wider perspectives.

2.1 Topics of Interest

Short position statements from participants will be solicited through direct invitations and an open call to the ECIR community. From the submitted position statements, we will select a diverse and representative subset to present their perspectives during the workshop. Our aim is to attract a wide array of viewpoints on the future of search. Topics of interest may include similar subjects like previous iterations [1, 3], but are not limited to:

- IR and related fields

- What the field of IR is tackling, should be tackling, is not tackling,... and is such research is even important?
- What is IR in the context of recommender systems, NLP, ML, AI, etc.?
- What are the core questions we are answering?
- IR in the age of generative AI
 - How generative AI is changing the nature and relevance of search?
 - When everything can be generated, what is a document? What are we retrieving?
 - How is user behaviour changing with respect to information access and consumption?
- IR and community
 - How can we build and grow the IR community?
 - How can we support newer community members?
 - What should the scope and remit of IR conferences and journals be?
- IR and the business
 - What are the new economics of IR?
 - How does conversational interaction change current business models?
 - How do traditional media and content-based models fit into the emerging landscape?
 - Can IR further optimize workplace productivity?
- IR ethics, trust and responsibility
 - What is the duty / responsibility of an IR system?
 - Can trust in IR systems be maintained in the presence of generative retrieval?
 - How environmentally responsible are the IR systems we are making, especially when using LLMs?
- IR and people, users, consumers, creators,...
 - Are creators still needed in the age of generative AI?
 - Is IR helping overcome the digital divide?
 - Is IR addressing the disparity in information access, especially in marginalized communities?

3 Workshop Format and Structure

We propose a full-day workshop. We will issue a *call for speakers*, rather than papers. Participants are invited to submit a brief position statement (abstract-only) outlining the key issues or challenges they wish to present at the ECIR workshop. Given the speed of development, we will also invite previous speakers from the earlier editions of the workshop to offer a retrospective on how predictive their visions of the future were and what they would change now. These statements will help us anticipate and design our breakout sessions. To keep the process simple and inclusive, submissions will be handled via EasyChair. This flexible approach was used for the first and second workshop editions and is visualised in Figure 1.

During the workshop, the first part of the day will be dedicated to invited and selected speakers setting the scene based on the submitted position statements.

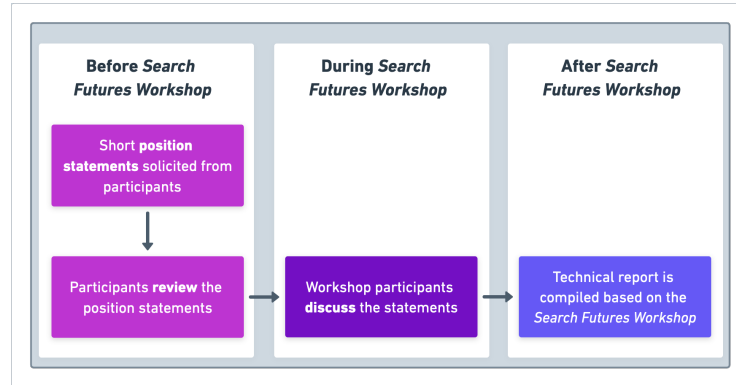


Fig. 1. *Search Futures Workshop* Overview from [2].

Then, after lunch, we will have several breakout sessions where organizers will lead the groups to discuss the issues that surfaced during the scene setting. We will also include a virtual breakout session that will be run in parallel to include attendees who can not attend in person. During the breakout sessions, we will use Google Documents to take notes and write up the discussions collaboratively. After the breakout sessions, we plan to reconvene to share the breakout findings and finish with a panel-based discussion.

3.1 Proposed Schedule

The proposed schedule is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Proposed schedule

Time	Event
09:00-09:30	Welcome and Scene Setting
09:30-10:30	Invited/Selected Speakers
10:30-11:00	Morning tea break
11:00-12:30	Invited/Selected Speakers
12:30-13:30	Lunch break
13:30-14:15	Breakout Sessions (in person and virtual)
14:15-14:45	Afternoon tea break
14:45-16:00	Sharing Session
16:00-17:00	Discussion and Wrap-up

3.2 Workshop Outputs and Follow-ups

At first pass, stemming from this workshop, we will compile a SIGIR Forum article to disseminate the workshop findings to the broader community, similar

to previous editions [1, 3]. We will use a similar collaborative approach to writing up the article as we have used in previous workshops (such as such as FACTS-IR at SIGIR 2019 [5], Future Conversations Workshop at CHIIR 2021 [8], and the ECR's Roundtable for Information Access Research (ECRs4IR 2022) [9]), where participants were contributors and co-authors for the article.

3.3 Intended Audience

ECIR, as the leading venue for IR in Europe, is the ideal forum to bring together key IR researchers to discuss the future of search. Our goal is to engage both long-standing and new members of the community in a lively discussion while also welcoming perspectives from outside the field and those working at its intersections with other disciplines. Attendance is open to all, and we will select speakers to ensure a diversity of viewpoints. We anticipate around 30-50 participants to help shape and define the future of search, similar to previous attendance.

4 Organisers

Leif Azzopardi is an Associate Professor in the Department of Computer and Information Sciences at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. His research focuses on building models and metrics for interactive information retrieval with a focus on model users in the lab and in the wild. Recently, he has been working with Microsoft Search and AI on (conversational) search. He has organized numerous IR events e.g. PC Chair of FDIA (2008-2015), PC Chair of IIR 2014, PC Chair SimInt 2010 @ ACM SIGIR, and PC Chair of ICTIR 2008, General Chair of ACM CHIIR 2019 and PC Chair of ECIR 2019.

Charlie Clarke is a Professor in the School of Computer Science at the University of Waterloo, Canada. His research focuses on data intensive tasks and efficiency, including search, ranking, question answering, and other problems involving human language data at scale. In addition to his academic experience, he has worked on search engine technology for both Microsoft Bing and Facebook Search. He has previously co-organized workshops at ECIR (2014, 2011), SIGIR (2016, 2015, 2013, 2012), WSDM (2012) and CHIIR (2023, 2020).

Claudia Hauff is a Staff Research Scientist at Spotify, based in the Netherlands. Her research currently focuses on evaluation problems of large-scale search and recommender systems. In the past, during her academic career at the Delft University of Technology she has worked on diverse areas within the field of information retrieval including query performance prediction, search as learning and collaborative search. She has previously organized conferences (PC co-chair at ECIR 2025, SIGIR 2024, CIKM 2020) and workshops (Dutch-Belgian IR workshop 2016, Search As Learning workshop @ SIGIR 2016, TAIA workshop @ SIGIR 2015).

Yubin Kim is the Chief Science Officer at Vody, a GenAI start-up in the eCommerce space focused on enriching product and buyer representations using multimodal LLMs. She previously worked on large-scale search in eCommerce (Etsy) and healthcare (UPMC). Yubin received her Ph.D. at the Language Technologies Institute in Carnegie Mellon University. She served in leadership roles for top IR venues: SIGIR 2025 Demo Track Co-chair, ICTIR 2024 Area Chair, CIKM 2022 Doctoral Symposium Co-chair, FNTIR editorial board. She has co-organized workshops on topics of healthcare and eCommerce, at WSDM 2020, ICDM 2025, RecSys 2025, SIGIR 2023–2025.

Adam Roegiest is the VP of Research and Technology at Zuva, a Toronto-based legal AI startup. Adam’s research has focused on the application of information retrieval and machine learning technologies to legal retrieval tasks. More recently, he has extended his research into how these technologies interact with human-computer interaction and accessibility. Adam previously organised both iterations of the TREC Total Recall track, one iteration of the TREC Real-Time Summarization track, and a workshop at CHIIR 2024. Adam is also a steering committee member for CHIIR.

Johanne Trippas is a Vice-Chancellor’s Senior Research Fellow at RMIT University, specializing in intelligent systems, focusing on digital assistants and conversational information seeking. Their research aims to enhance information accessibility through conversational systems, interactive information retrieval, and human-computer interaction. Additionally, Johanne is part of the NIST TREC program committee and is an ACM CHIIR steering committee member. They serve as vice-chair of the SIGIR Artifact Evaluation Committee and program chair for ACM CHIIR’26. They have organized the ACM Conversational User Interfaces (CUI’24) conference, workshops (CHIIR’20–22, ’24, ECIR’24–25), a TREC Track (CAST’22), and tutorials (CHIIR’21, SIGIR’22, WebConf’23, ECIR’24, and CHIIR’25).

Zhaochun Ren is an Associate Professor at Leiden University. His research interests focus on joint research problems in information retrieval and natural language processing, with an emphasis on conversational information seeking, question-answering, and recommender systems. He aims to develop intelligent systems that can address complex user requests and solve core challenges in both information retrieval and natural language processing towards that goal. In addition to his academic experience, he worked on e-commerce search and recommendation at JD.com for 2+ years. He has co-organized workshops at SIGIR (2020) and WSDM (2019, 2020).

Saber Zerhoudi is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Passau, Germany. His research is centered on interactive information retrieval, with a particular focus on modeling and simulating user search behaviors. His recent work involves developing user-centric agents for retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) frameworks and investigating novel methodologies for next-generation search. He is an active member of the IR community, having co-organized tuto-

rials and workshops on user simulation and open web search at SIGIR'25 and ECIR'24–25.

A Disclosure of Interest

The authors have no competing interests to disclose.

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