

Editors' Introduction

NICK ARNOSTI

University of Minnesota

and

SAM TAGGART

Oberlin College

With EC 2026 just around the corner, we are happy to add to the festivities with the Summer 2026 issue of the SIGecom Exchanges. This issue includes an update from the SIGecom executive committee, and a recap of the 2026 SIGecom Winter Meeting, written by Sara Fish, Vrinda Pareek, and Rui-Jie Yew. The technical part of the issue starts with a letter highlighting an award-winning paper from EC 2025. Next, we have four (!) excellent surveys across different topics in EconCS. The issue concludes with an annotated reading list. We detail the technical contributions below.

Our opening letter by Peng Shi describes three of his recent papers. Each of these appeared in EC, and one was chosen as the Exemplary Applied Modeling Paper in 2025. These papers study recommendation systems in two-sided marketplaces where providers vary in quality and capacity, and can choose their own prices. Although each provider's capacity is limited, a central message from these papers is that the platform need not explicitly account for this constraint: providers' will choose prices that distribute demand. These papers study three simple ranking strategies (ranking by estimated consumer surplus, by providers' willingness to pay for attention, and by a weighted combination of these terms) and show that these strategies can perform well even when the platform has only limited information.

Our first survey, by Paul Dütting, Michal Feldman, and Inbal Talgam-Cohen, offers an introduction to algorithmic contract theory. Contract theory is a pillar of classic microeconomic theory, and in the last decade or so, the EconCS community has uncovered a rich, complementary algorithmic view of the subject. Their survey provides a great first treatment of this fundamental topic.

In our next survey, Daniel Halpern, Evi Micha, Ariel Procaccia, Benjamin Schiffer, Itai Shapira, and Shirley Zhang show how tools from social choice theory can be applied to the alignment process for large language models. Intuitively, tuning processes like reinforcement learning from human feedback are typically treated as a mapping from human annotation (i.e. comparison) of LLM outputs to a global utility function over outputs. This utility function is then used to change the base model's output distribution. The process of producing the utility function is voting in disguise: the survey describes how to use existing theory, as well as new theoretical issues arising from LLM alignment specifically.

Our third survey is by Moses Charikar, Prasanna Ramakrishnan, and Kangning Wang, who provide an introduction to modern voting theory. While classical

Author's address: arnosti@umn.edu, staggart@oberlin.edu.

theory is filled with impossibility results, recent work has introduced new desiderata, leading to positive results and new voting rules. This survey shows how two game-theoretic concepts – maximal lotteries and stable lotteries – have been integral to proving new results on the *metric distortion* problem (where voters have cardinal utilities but express only ordinal rankings) and the *committee selection* problem (where each modestly-sized coalition of voters should be assured adequate representation on the committee).

Our final survey comes from Martino Bernasconi and Federico Fusco, who provide an overview of recent work on online learning in bilateral trade, complementing their EC 2025 tutorial on the same topic. Bilateral trade is a classic problem in mechanism design, and the Bayesian version is famously subject to the impossibility result of Myerson and Satterthwaite. This survey avoids this impossibility by considering a (non-Bayesian) online learning setting. The authors do a great job providing intuition for the key technical ideas set bilateral trade apart from other online pricing problems.

We close with an annotated reading list by Amin Rahimian and Yuxin Liu on Differential Privacy. This includes three classic papers and seven modern papers (all from the last four years), which connect differential privacy to platform design, revenue management, recommendation systems, and more.

Looking ahead to future issues, we are pleased to announce an **open problem initiative**, which will be supported jointly by the Exchanges staff and SIGecom communications team. The idea will be to circulate writeups of important unsolved problems in EconCS, both through the Exchanges and in an online repository. The initiative is still in the very early stages: expect further discussion at the EC 2026 business meeting and more formal solicitation over the SIGecom listserv. In the meantime, start thinking whether you have something to contribute!

Thanks to all the authors in this issue for their insights and hard work. Further thanks to communications chair Yang Cai, technical lead Jinzhao Wu, and social media chair Kira Goldner. Their help publishing this issue is greatly appreciated. Please continue to volunteer letters, surveys, annotated reading lists or position papers. We hope you enjoy this issue.