Trust and authority in scholarly and research communications: proposed research project involvement with ICSTI. Focus on non-academic researchers.

Background
The CIBER research group in the UK and the University of Tennessee (UT), with funding from the Alfred P Sloan Foundation (http://www.sloan.org/), are researching how emerging digital behaviours are challenging and, perhaps, changing concepts of trust and authority in the scholarly world. We wish to understand how academic researchers assign and calibrate authority, reliability and trustworthiness to the scholarly sources and channels they choose to use, cite and publish in. These may be sources and channels like journals and books but could be reports series, conference proceedings, websites, datasets, and social media. We would like to discover how researchers are coping in what is a crowded, dynamic and dis-intermediated digital scholarly environment where it is ever more difficult to establish the quality, veracity, authorship and authority of information. We are especially interested in discovering whether social media are having an impact on conventional practices of establishing the authority and trustworthiness. We are using a mixture of methods, including literature review, meta-analysis, critical incident interviews, focus groups and questionnaires to obtain the data we need.

ICSTI involvement
What we would like to do now is to extend the study significantly to an examination of the views and behaviours of a bigger, more heterogeneous and largely neglected community of researchers - commercial and professional researchers. These are researchers who may have a different culture; do not necessarily have the benefits of big library budgets and who might be as interested in data, conferences and reports as they are in journal articles. They are of particular interest because they are (potentially) big beneficiaries of Open Access policies and, possibly, use smartphones more to access the internet. The problem with this research community is they are not so easily defined and located; nor are their habits and behaviours so open to inspection. So it is difficult to obtain their cooperation and this is where ICSTI members can help us.

The original (Sloan) research questions, scope and methodologies remain so that valid and invaluable comparisons between academic and non-academic researchers can be made. The study would be international, with national comparisons a focus. This is what we would like from participating ICSTI members: a) assistance in accessing their users, members and employees for the purposes of interview and questionnaire survey (this would involve nothing more than sending on invitations); b) hosting 2-5 focus groups (just providing a location and assistance in recruiting participants). In return we would provide participating organisations with an opportunity to shape the study, reports and progress bulletins and a bespoke analysis in respect to their own communities. The following ICSTI members have already expressed an interest in being involved – OSTI, VTT, Microsoft, ANR, ISSN, CISTI, and the Library of Congress, and, hopefully, others may come forward. The degree and intensity of participation will depend on members’ own specific interests and resource constraints and not all will want to be involved in all the above activities; for instance, some might not be in a position to provide practical help and would prefer to provide advice and guidance instead. The deadline for expressions of interest is 25th March 2013. Further information and person to contact: Professor David Nicholas (dave.nicholas@ciber-research.eu)