



Guest Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue: Information Communication Technology (ICT): People, culture, and globalization



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Information Communication Technology (ICT): People, Culture, and Globalization

The broad objective of this Special Issue (SI) was to deliver new insights into the management of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the view of ICT users', consumers', or managers' cultural diversity, in order to enhance our understanding of how ICT connects people across countries or cultures and affects their behavior. Understanding how ICT and culture affect human decisions is timely and of crucial importance because ICT is a driving force behind almost any form of business internationalization or globalization. Although the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine currently lead to a slowdown in business globalization, it is clear that many firms continue to operate in, or expand into foreign countries, as well as deal with people from different cultures within a country. Almost all firms and organizations today use ICT to connect with people and must therefore address questions of how culture affects ICT usage and user behavior, and what the consequences are for the organization.

We therefore aimed to bring together a group of international researchers in marketing and related disciplines broadly concerned with business globalization and ICT management. The SI was initially planned as part of the Royal Bank International Research Seminar (RBIRS), which has since 2001 been very successfully held bi-annually in Montreal, Canada. RBIRC, the international conference version, was also very successfully held in 2010 in Tokyo, Japan, in 2012 in Shanghai, China, and in 2016 in Wuxi, China. RBIRS has since many years brought together likeminded researchers from across the globe, who share research interest frequently in fields related to the role of culture in consumer behavior, how consumers interact with technology, as well as links between the two. We thus planned to organize the 2020 edition of RBIRC at Kedge Business School in Marseille, France and link this SI to it as an opportunity for researchers to publish innovative and relevant work. Unfortunately, the emergence of COVID-19 as a global pandemic has scuttled our ambitious plans, and we were ultimately forced to cancel RBIRC 2020 for the well-known restrictions that prevented us making the conference meeting happen in Marseille. We regret these circumstances very much and hope that future issues of RBIRS can happen in-person again.

Given that a number of authors had prepared targeted manuscripts before we cancelled the conference, we decided to maintain the SI, with the kind approval of the Editor-in-Chief, Yogesh Dwivedi, to whom we are most grateful. Despite the difficult circumstances, we received 11

manuscripts that underwent careful peer reviews, and we have finally accepted three of them for inclusion into the SI. The three papers cover three different forms of modern ICT, namely social media, human-like service robots, and P2P accommodation-sharing platforms. The authors of these papers use various types of methods and data to tackle different phenomena that enhance our understanding of how culture affects ICT usage and behavior.

The first paper by [Takhar, Bebek, & Jamal \(2021\)](#) offers insights into the role of social media's liminal characteristics (anonymity and freedom) for ethnic minority consumers' social-cultural identity construction. Given their multicultural social environments, ethnic consumers in particular experience cultural tensions in their daily lives related to potentially conflicting online- and offline cultural-social identities. Focusing on Instagram and third-generation British Sikhs, and using a multi-method qualitative research design (observations, ethnography, and semi-structured interviews), the authors demonstrate how liminality enables imagined or idealized social-cultural identities with important implications for social media marketing, such as virtual brand communities. Marketers should consider liminality as a factor that empowers consumers' identity construction, which can help them develop stronger and more sustainable customer relationships.

The second paper in this SI, written by [Pitardi, Bartikowski, Osburg, & Yoganathan \(2022\)](#), focuses on how culture affects consumer experiences with humanlike service robots. Using an experimental design, the authors demonstrate that human-robot gender congruity (i.e., the match between consumers' own gender and the artificial gender of a service robot) is critical to consumer behavior because gender congruity can elicit feelings of control within consumers. Foremost consumers who are high (as compared to low) on the cultural value of masculinity experience control as a consequence of human-robot gender congruity, with important consequence on behavior. Following the authors, individuals perceive robots similar to social entities and apply human social-cultural norms and rules when interacting with them. Marketers can benefit from these ideas as they may elicit feelings of control by situationally adapting important aspects of a service robot's gender (e.g., the voice type, color or name) that create human-robot gender congruity, or they may in some instance even let consumer chose the preferred service robot gender.

The third paper in this SI, written by [Ma, Ling, Zhang, & Li \(2022\)](#) explores effects of physical attractiveness of P2P providers cross-culturally. Using large-scale secondary data, crawled from China's largest P2P accommodation-sharing platform, combined with cross-sectional primary data from three countries (China, Hungary, and

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the U.S.), the paper enhances our understanding of attractiveness effects, for which previous research has produced inconsistent results. The literature demonstrates effects of physical attractiveness either in the form of u-shaped or n-shaped functions, such that higher attractiveness may promote either more positive or more negative consumer reactions. The paper by Ma, Ling, Zhang, and Li (2022) contributes to resolving this inconsistency as it shows that the function explaining how attractiveness affects consumer citizenship behaviors is contingent on P2P users' cultural values in terms of collectivism, power distance, and masculinity. These insights are relevant to P2P marketers, who may consider customizing the display of higher or lower physical attractiveness of P2P providers depending on users' culture.

Taken altogether, the three papers deal with a wide scope of issues related to ICT and culture, were written by scholars representing a variety of cultural and academic perspectives, and use a broad range of methodological approaches, including qualitative observations, netnography, semi-structured interviews, experimental designs, as well as regression-based methods including structural equation modelling. We are very grateful to the authors of these papers, and the reviewers. We hope that their combined efforts will attract interest, create impact, and help to initiate further ICT- and culture related research.

The reviewers for this Special Issue were: Boris Bartikowski (Kedge Business School, France); Mark Cleveland (University of Western Ontario, Canada); Alexander Davidson (Wayne State University, U.S.A.); Mohammad Reza Habibi (California State University at Fullerton, U.S.A.); Nick Hajli (Swansea University, U.K.); Amna Khan (Manchester Metropolitan University, U.K.); Chankon Kim (Saint-Mary's University, Canada); Hatice Kizgin (University of Twente, The Netherlands); Kashef Majid (University of Mary Washington, U.S.A.); Nicolas Papadopoulos (Carleton University, Canada); Michèle Paulin (Concordia University, Canada); Devendra Pitnis (University of Tennessee at Knoxville, U.S.A.); Hamid Shirdastian (Bishop's University, Canada); Zhiyong Yang (Miami

University, U.S.A.); Chun Zhang (University of Dayton, U.S.A.). We are most grateful for their service to this special issue.

We would also like to thank most profoundly Yogesh Dwivedi, Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Information Management (IJIM)*, for continuously supporting our RBIRC efforts and for making this SI ultimately possible.

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