This special issue of the *International Journal of Interactive Systems and Technologies* focuses on technology-mediated online social behavior, a phenomenon that is currently attracting increasing scholarly attention. With the widespread proliferation and adoption of social interaction technologies such as social networks, blogs, microblogs, and virtual worlds, the nature and functioning of human social interaction in online environments remains a subject of keen interest for social scientists in diverse areas including social psychology, communication technologies, information systems, cultural studies, public relations, marketing, and advertising, to name a few (see Amichai-Hamburger, 2005; Barak, 2008; Brewer, 2011; Joinson, 2003; Kappas & Krämer, 2011; Kock, 2010). This is timely and of great importance in an age where smart phones and other digital devices allow individuals to be online all the time.

Emerging research indicates that scholars have evaluated the interaction between people, computers, society, and technology (Avgerou, Ciborra, & Land, 2004), interactivity in computer-mediated communication (Cabiria, 2011; Rafaeli & Ariel, 2007; Sundar, 2007), online social influence both in terms of persuasion and compliance (Guadagno, & Cialdini, 2005; Sassenberg, 2011), and gendered social interactions (Fisher, 2011; Guadagno, Muscanell, Okdie, Burk, & Ward, 2011; Kimborough, Guadagno, Muscanell, & Dill, 2013; Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012). The role of technology-mediated social interaction has been scrutinized in various contexts (Birchmeier, Dietz-Uhler, & Stasser, 2011; Joinson, McKenna, Postmes, & Reips, 2007), ranging from social networks and online communities (Haythornthwaite, 2007) and social support groups (Tanis, 2007) to video-mediated (Manstead, Lea, & Goh, 2011) and avatar-based settings (Bitti & Garotti, 2011; Guadagno, Swinth, & Blascovich, 2012). Recent research has also analyzed online social identity and self-presentation (Guadagno, Okdie, & Kruse, 2012; Okdie, Guadagno, Bernieri, Geers, & Mclarney-Vesotski, 2011; Walther, 2011), emotions (Parkinson & Lea, 2011; Surakka & Vanhala, 2011), and trust and social interaction on the Internet (Green, 2007; Green & Carpenter, 2011).

In the opening article, “Making ‘Real’ Connections: The Perceived Reality of Online
Interactions,” Jenna L. Clark and Melanie C. Green explore the subjective aspects of online social interaction that can help clarify the often contradictory outcomes of prior research into technology-mediated communication. Clark and Green propose a new theoretical construct, the perceived reality of online interactions, defined as the extent to which an individual believes online interactions are suitable for the maintenance and formation of relationships online. Higher levels of perceived reality of online interactions are theorized to lead to greater personal investment and effort in computer-mediated interactions, resulting in benefits such as perceived social support generated by online relationships. The authors report an experiment using a sample from Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk and an undergraduate student sample. They found evidence that the perceived reality of online relationships predicted perceived social support from online sources. In addition, the degree of association between perceived reality, personality traits, and general attitudes toward the Internet suggest differential implications of this variable as a function of the different samples.

A study by Bradley M. Okdie, Rosanna E. Guadagno, Petia K. Petrova, and Wyley B. Shreves, “Social Influence Online: A Tale of Gender Differences in the Effectiveness of Authority Cues,” examines how authority-based social influence, communicator salience (operationalized by varying communication modes) and gender affect persuasion in online environments. Participants engaged in a persuasive interaction with a same-sex confederate via text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) or face-to-face. The confederate was either presented as an authority figure or as a peer. The results of the experiment reveal that men in the authority condition were more receptive to persuasive messages than men in the peer condition while interacting via CMC. Overall, men were more likely to report higher self-confidence and to be influenced by the online confederate in a CMC setting. The study found that perceptions of the confederate varied by both gender and communication mode. Analysis suggests that authority based social influence via CMC can be more effective for men than women.

The article by Brandi A. Watkins and Regina Lewis entitled “Building Marketing Relationships on Twitter: A Content Analysis of University Twitter Accounts” investigates the social media strategies of 22 top-ranked universities through a customer relationship marketing lens. To explore how universities use Twitter services to communicate with their audiences, the researchers applied a model of five levels of relationships (Kotler, 1992) to the interactive environment enabled by social media. A content analysis of 1375 tweets sent by universities focused on the level of relationships that universities establish through social media outlets with current and prospective students, alumni, donors, and external audiences. Results of the analysis indicate that the vast majority of tweets in the sample were used to provide opinions or share information rather than to utilize proactive communication strategies. The authors conclude that universities are more likely to engage in a reactive social media strategy, which is defined as the broadcast of an original message with opportunities for followers to initiate interaction afterwards.

A study authored by John E. Edlund and Jessica L. Hartnett and entitled “Second Life in the Psychology Classroom: Teaching and Research Possibilities” dwells upon the benefits of using online virtual environments such as Second Life in teaching psychology classes such as introductory psychology and research methods. Although Second Life has become a popular teaching tool in various disciplines, it has not been widely applied to the teaching of psychology. The authors share their experiences and offer recommendations on best practices for instructors interested in incorporating Second Life into the psychology classroom. They also present a Second Life classroom activity for teaching research methods in psychology.
classes, which can be easily modified to other subjects. The researchers report student satisfaction data and demonstrate that such an activity can be utilized to help achieve specific learning outcomes and enhance overall student engagement.

The article, “Facebook History Collector: A New Method for Directly Collecting Data from Facebook,” concludes this special issue on technology-mediated online behavior. A team of scholars including Rosanna E. Guadagno, Tonio A. Loewald, Nicole L. Muscanell, Joan M. Barth, Melissa K. Goodwin, and Yang Yang introduce a new research tool for capturing real-time social media interactions by gathering data directly from Facebook pages. The authors argue that social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter offer a rich source of untapped data, and they review the existing methods for gathering information from online social networks such as surveys and self-reports, ratings of current or mock-up user profiles, and analyses of content retrieved directly from social media platforms. The authors developed the Facebook History Collector, a web-based data aggregation tool that was tested by examining Facebook in the aftermath of a destructive tornado in Tuscaloosa, Alabama on April 27, 2011. The researchers maintain that the new tool allows for retrieving massive amounts of text, photographs, and videos directly from Facebook and has broad implications for the scholarly community. They make this tool freely available to other scholars interested in examining data from Facebook.

While scholars may not necessarily agree on the details and specific aspects of social interaction that happens when it is technology-mediated, there is consensus with respect to a growing importance of the impact of modern technologies on human social behavior (Anderson & Rainie, 2010; John, Adamic, Davis, Nack, Shamma, & Seligman, 2008). The editor would like to praise the efforts of the esteemed contributors to this special issue of the International Journal of Interactive Communication Systems and Technologies whose research explores new frontiers of technology-mediated online behavior and the particulars of human communication in mediated environments.

Rosanna E. Guadagno
Guest Editor
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REFERENCES


**ENDNOTES**

1 Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk is an online crowdsourcing marketplace found at https://www.mturk.com/mturk/.