

GUEST EDITORIAL PREFACE

Intercultural New Media Research for the 21st Century

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The current issue of the *International Journal of Interactive Systems and Technologies* is truly special with its focus on intercultural new media research. Although new media are ubiquitous, there is a dearth of research on the influence of culture on the social uses of new media and the impact of new media on intercultural communication—two critical components of intercultural new media studies. First described by Shuter (2011, 2012) as the next frontier in intercultural communication, intercultural new media studies explores the intersections of culture, new media, and social context, which could potentially augment extant intercultural communication theories derived from a face-to-face paradigm as well as generate new media theories that include culture. This special issue spotlights five top papers from the inaugural honors graduate student seminar on intercultural new media research sponsored by the International and Intercultural Communication Division of the National Communication Association (NCA) held during the 100th annual convention of the association in Chicago on November 20-23, 2014.

Coordinated by Robert Shuter, the honors graduate student seminar was the first of a kind offered by the NCA's international and intercultural communication division for masters and doctoral students in communication and allied fields. Invitations to submit manuscripts for consideration were posted on association and academic websites and also sent to selected directors of communication graduate programs. Each submitted manuscript was blind-reviewed by two top scholars with expertise in new media and international or intercultural communication. Based on the results of blind review, the manuscripts of six finalists were selected for presentation at the honors seminar with an acceptance rate of 30%. At the seminar, the six top scholars who reviewed manuscripts were asked to thoroughly critique in real time each finalist's paper. Authors then had the opportunity to respond and the audience to offer its reaction(s). All finalists were

invited to submit their manuscripts for possible publication in this special issue contingent on meeting editorial requirements by the special issue editors. Five manuscripts from the honors seminar are presented in this special issue.

NEW MEDIA AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION THEORY

A primary area of intercultural new media studies (INMS) explores the many ways digital media can affect intercultural communication (ICC) theory. An examination of new media and intercultural communication theory may alter our understanding of the process of intercultural communication by identifying new digital theories of intercultural contact. Moreover, it is likely to refine and expand intercultural communication theories that focus on a range of areas like acculturation/adaptation, third culture development, intercultural competence, high context/low context communication, co-cultural communication, cultural identity, intercultural dialogue, culture shock/stress, stereotyping, ethnocentrism, intercultural conflict, and speech codes. The available research, though limited, suggests new media play a significant role in intercultural encounters, resulting in the potential for augmentation of twentieth century ICC theories.

Acculturation, for example, appears to be influenced by the Internet and selected online communities. Ye (2005) found that Chinese international students who utilize Internet-based ethnic support groups have significantly less stress from acculturation due to online support. In contrast, Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2011) discovered that French Muslims who communicated with other Muslims on social networking sites reinforced their Islamic rather than their French identities, which complicated their acculturation. Relying on cultivation and ethnic group vitality theories, Croucher (2011) argues that increased use of social network sites with homogeneous populations may increase in-group identification and negatively affect acculturation. A meta-analysis of the research on new media and acculturation suggests that computer mediated communication, virtual gaming, and social media affect acculturation both positively and negatively (Shuter, 2012). Acculturation theories developed before the advent of new media may not adequately explain acculturation processes in the 21st century.

In addition to acculturation, new media may impact theories of intercultural dialogue and third culture that were generated in the 20th century and derived from a face-to-face paradigm. It appears that intercultural dialogue and third culture may be regulated by different processes in virtual and physical communities. That is, limited research suggests that increased social distance inherent in virtual communities combined with anonymity can lead to reduced social costs and, hence, increased cultural risk taking which can culminate more readily in virtual intercultural dialogue and third cultures (McEwan & Sobre-Denton, 2011). Interestingly, if social distance and anonymity are inimical to third culture and intercultural dialogue in face-to-face communities and yet central to their development in virtual communities, there needs to be a paradigm shift. Furthermore, research indicates that new media platforms, such as Internet-based video chat and other virtual conference technologies, may increase chances for achieving virtual intercultural dialogue and third culture building (Dooley, 2011; Wang, 2012).

Cultural identity theory is also embedded in 20th century assumptions about the origins of self and others. That is, social contact, fixed in space and time, is foundational to social identities, which are reported to be co-created and negotiated. In a new media era of perpetual contact, where individuals live in myriad virtual spaces with time fluidity and compression, 20th century assumptions about identity construction may not be sufficient for a technological age as presciently discussed by Gergen (1991). That is, because virtual communities are often pseudo communities, frequently anonymous and not connected to space or time, it is unclear how cultural identities

are constructed in these communities. Moreover, the dynamics of identity preservation in virtual communities may be different, especially in light of research that co-cultures and marginalized individuals may find rich online opportunities to reinforce their cultural identities, sometimes more readily than in organic communities (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2011; Hopkins, 2008).

NEW MEDIA, CULTURE, AND CULTURAL GROUPS

In addition to exploring the intersections of new media and ICC theories, INMS examines how new media affects culture as well as the social uses of new media. Cross-cultural new media investigations, unlike the exploration of ICC theories, have grown exponentially with most of the research investigating country variations in the social uses of new media. However, this research tends to involve single culture studies, hence, an intracultural rather than intercultural focus. The majority of these studies tend to focus on computer-mediated communication with less, though growing, emphasis on online social networks and mobile phones (Shuter & Chattopadhyay, 2014). The overwhelming majority of these studies attempt to either validate extant new media or mass media theory rather than mine the socio-cultural implications of this research or utilize it to formulate culture-based theories of new media. With emphasis on a socio-cultural perspective, future intercultural new media research should explore such topics as indigenous cultural patterns of new media use, critical analyses of new media and society, and the impact of culture on the social uses of new media. Moreover, a socio-cultural perspective should generate studies that culminate in culture-based theories of new media communication such as cultural values, the social uses of new media, co-cultural theory, and technology-mediated online behavior (Shuter & Chattopadhyay, 2014).

The articles in this special issue include examples of new media research grounded in a socio-cultural perspective as well as studies that explore the intersection of new media and selected intercultural communication theories. Two articles advance the theoretical agenda of intercultural new media studies and extend ICC theory into new media frontiers. Jennifer L. Seifert addresses the uses of new media for third culture building, and Jenny Ungbha Korn explores cultural identity construction in Facebook groups. Each article discusses gender and race respectively and is discussed in more depth below.

In *A Culture of Survivors: SlutWalk, Third Culture, and New Media Communication*, Jennifer L. Seifert explores third-culture building via new media use by the SlutWalk social movement. Through data analysis of extensive interviews with SlutWalk organizers from various cities in the United States, Seifert identifies the prominence of new media in this transnational movement's existence as a third-culture. Yet, the virtual movement inherently requires a local face-to-face component without which this virtual third culture would not be possible. Regardless of the virtual nature of this third culture, the discussion acknowledges the potential exclusionary nature of this virtual culture, like all cultures, to construct itself in ways that inadvertently create perceived borderlines between itself and other cultural groups as evidenced by group members. The results highlight the synchronicity between traditional communication channels and new media based channels for facilitating intercultural communication.

Framed within self-categorization theory and the communication theory of identity, Jenny Ungbha Korn's article, *Black Nerds, Asian Activists, and Caucasian Dogs: Online Race-Based Cultural Group Identities within Facebook Groups*, explores categories used to self-identify by race in Facebook groups. The study has a specific focus on self-identification of users in Facebook groups such as White/Caucasian, Black/African-American, and Asian/Asian-American. Through a thematic analysis, the study discusses how racial identification reflects cultural systems of

white privilege, the prominence of racial markers over other cultural identities, and a redefinition of identity through alternate self-categorization such as religion, sexuality, occupation, and politics. The findings suggest intra-racial similarities and inter-racial differences across groups. The analysis indicates that individuals of color can use new media to foster counter-stereotypical images through self-identification.

The second component of intercultural new media studies explores new media within the context of a single cultural group. Two articles in this special issue expand knowledge in this area by explicating how new media affects culture and how culture affects the social uses of new technologies. Bingjuan Xiong and Fan Zhang offer case studies to accomplish this by providing in-depth discussion of the interaction between new media and cultural discourse within Chinese and Buddhist cultures.

In *Tell China's Story Well? Cultural Framing and Online Contestation*, Bingjuan Xiong takes a sociocultural approach to argue that the Chinese government facilitates discursive power and control through three cultural ways of framing its response to criticism of their treatment of Chinese activist Ai Weiwei. Using discourse analysis, a comparison is drawn between the responses to this framing by Chinese nationals on popular news sites and in Twitter and by both English and Chinese speakers on Ai Weiwei's arrest and imprisonment. The findings demonstrate how strategically framed discourse occurring in a single culture can, nonetheless, evoke informed intercultural responses. Moreover, the responses to the Chinese government's framing reflects a contrast in the specific content accessible internationally about the details of the Ai Weiwei case as well as a shift in the user generated framing of the Ai Weiwei case, suggesting the integral value of new media to both facilitate and reflect cultural change.

Fan Zhang's article titled, *Remaking Ancient Virtues for the Virtual World: A Case Study of the "Voice of Longquan,"* uses rhetorical criticism to examine the role that new media has played in the rising visibility of Buddhism in international and intercultural settings. Findings suggest that technology and Buddhism are blended with the effect of modernizing Buddhism for a broader appeal. Similarly, Chinese identity is incorporated into the strategic rhetoric of Xuecheng to blend citizenship and nationalism with Buddhism to popularize Buddhist studies online and offline. The case study of Longquan Monastery and its website *The Voice of Longquan* demonstrates the potential for new media to transcend the limitations of geographic space for popularity by appealing to broader categories of potential followers. Zhang, however, provides cautions about this technological upgrade to Buddhist belief and communication strategies utilized in this process.

In the final article of this special issue on intercultural new media studies, Yashu Chen examines the role of new media in intercultural communication as well as provides insight into SNS use in Chinese culture. In the article titled, *Self-Disclosure Patterns among Chinese Users in SNS and Face-to-Face Communication*, Yashu Chen uses interviews to explore how self-disclosure patterns occur in Chinese social networking sites compared to face-to-face communication. Participants in Chen's study report indirect, subtle, and entertaining ways social networking sites are used to self-disclose. Findings of the study suggest that users have adapted social networking for self-disclosure in ways that are different from a face-to-face channel as a result of privacy concerns, reduced communication cues, and asynchronous communication endemic to online social networks. Nevertheless, users are able to self-disclose, gain social support, and construct positive self-images through this adaptation process. Findings support the hyperpersonal model of computer-mediated communication and contribute to an understanding of the influences of Chinese culture on self-disclosing behavior in online environments.

With the ongoing digital revolution, communication across cultures will continue to be bound inextricably to new media in ways not even imagined in the 20th century. The articles included

in this special issue on intercultural new media studies examine a variety of cultural groups and utilize various theories and methods from traditional intercultural communication scholarship. As these studies demonstrate, contemporizing intercultural communication requires a reexamination of intercultural theory and praxis in light of the latest social interaction technologies along with considering as yet undiscovered theoretical ramifications. The editors hope this special issue inspires faculty and students to journey into this new frontier of communication scholarship.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The guest editors acknowledge the invaluable assistance and support of the following people with the International and Intercultural Communication Division of the National Communication Association (NCA) Honors Graduate Student Seminar: the executive officers of the NCA's International and Intercultural Communication Division (IICD), especially Yoshitaka Miike, IICD past chair, and Amy Heuman, IICD current chair; and the seminar reviewers and top scholar respondents: John Baldwin, George A. Barnett, Pauline Hope Cheong, Shiv Ganesh, Beth Haslett, and Young Yun Kim. We are indebted to John Baldwin, Illinois State University, for serving as associate editor of the special issue. A special thanks to IGA Publishing for providing a venue for showcasing outstanding graduate student research in an emerging area of intercultural new media research.

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