

## GUEST EDITORIAL PREFACE

# Social Media in Asia: Rising to the Challenge in Social Inquiries

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As the most populous continent in the world, Asia has experienced an enormous transformation in its social, cultural and economic arenas in recent decades. A major engine of growth spearheading these changes has been the Internet-led information and communication technologies sector (De Prato, Nepelski, & Simon, 2013; Rowen, Hancock, & Miller, 2007). In particular, countries such as Japan, South Korea and China have been fertile test beds for a large variety of wireless communication innovations as well as global trend-setters in the mobile culture (Hjorth & Arnold, 2013; Rao & Mendoza, 2005).

The unparalleled rise of social media and its rapid permeation into routine life across globe lately has attracted considerable attention from the research community. The role of social media in the Arab Spring movement in 2011, especially the involvement of Twitter for mass mobilization and coordination as well as grassroots information dissemination, has stimulated quite a bit of discussion and buzz (Christensen, 2011; Howard & Parks, 2012). This naturally triggers deliberation about vari-

ous implications and possibilities for countries in Asia (Abbott, 2013). As Lee and Park (2014) observe, despite the amazing accumulation of academic literature concerning diverse roles and impacts of social media in different contexts in recent years, it is rather unfortunate that there has been a lopsided focus on the Western world, heavily dominated by the U.S. and to a lesser extent the U.K., and scant attention has been paid to social media dynamics in Asia.

This is rather deplorable, because Asia is a region that is as culturally diverse as it is populous, and research inquiries in this area have much to contribute to global debates and contemplations. Asia also boasts some of the most avid social media followers in the world. Notably, besides a sizable presence of the two leading social networking platforms of Facebook and Twitter, Asia has incubated some of the most popular and vibrant social media applications, as exemplified by Sina Weibo, QZone and WeChat in China, Mixi and Line in Japan, and Cyworld and Me2Day in South Korea.

The present special issue of the *International Journal of Interactive Systems and Technologies* marks our effort to fill this research lacuna. The collection of five articles represents a diverse range of methodological approaches and topical focuses in scrutinizing the role of social media in Asian societies. In the first article, “*To See and to Be Seen: Chinese White-Collar Workers’ Interpretation of Microblogging and Social Capital*,” Xiaoqing Fan and Huan Chen analyze the data from their in-depth interviews of white-collar workers in China, and find that use of Sina Weibo, China’s most popular microblogging service, is associated with an increase of social capital at both the individual and community level.

In the next article, “*Use of SNSs, Political Efficacy, and Civic Engagement among Chinese College Students: Effects of Gratifications and Network Size*,” Qian Xu and Lingling Qi investigate the impact of social media use on Chinese college students, and their findings indicate that social connection exerts a strong influence on internal political efficacy and civic engagement. These thematic lines have attracted quite a bit of research productivity over the years, with a focus on the Western world, which features an open and free information environment; the two studies make a welcome contribution to this overall rich body of literature by examining the niceties of these dynamics in China’s highly controlled information context.

The third article by Lik Sam Chan and Hing Weng Eric Tsang, “*“Hey, Look at My Body!”: An Exploratory Study of Body Display on Facebook among Hong Kong Young Adults*,” is based on a survey of Hong Kong young adults in relation to social media identity construction through body display, and shows that grandiose exhibitionism, as a sub-trait of narcissism, results in a constant desire to post selfies on Facebook.

Relatedly, in the following article titled “*Cultural Differences between American and Japanese Self-Presentation on SNSs*,” Kikuko Omori and Mike Allen investigate Japanese college students’ practice of self-presentation on social networking sites through the cross-national lenses of their U.S. counterparts and found that, contrary to conventional wisdom, Japanese users are more likely to share partying and drunk pictures than U.S. individuals, and this tendency is more prominent with Japanese students on Facebook than on Mixi. By throwing cultural traits into the equation, this type of research extends the well-trodden tradition of comparative frames of the individualistic vs. collective cultures to the social media landscape.

The final article authored by Debashis “Deb” Aikat is entitled “*The Rise of a Networked Public Sphere: The Role of Social Media in India’s Media Landscape*.” It offers a much-needed sweeping overview on how multifaceted social media applications and practices have empowered individuals and enriched the democratic experience by cultivating a networked public sphere in India. These perspectives have broad relevance to similar deliberations in a vast array of democratic yet fast-developing nations across the globe.

We would like to conclude by acknowledging our deep gratitude to the esteemed authors contributing their work to this special issue. And our thankfulness also extends to the numerous reviewers whose diligent and admirable service has been indispensable to the fruition of our editorial effort.

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