societies

Editorial

Social and Technological Interactions in e-Societies

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This Special Issue, Social and Technological Interactions in e-Societies, aims to attract the interest of academics and practitioners alike by identifying, exploring, and investigating the interactions inherent in the emergence of new technologies in our societies. Our societies face tremendous challenges, giving rise to both hopes and concerns. New technologies open avenues to digitalization and engender optimism for better lives and opportunities for all. Concomitant environmental constrains, health issues, or security threats increase fears concerning the sustainability of our approach to production, commerce, modes of consumption, lifestyles, or governments. New types of interactions emerge between those in society, and the society itself seems to move from traditional forms of expression to the newer ones shaped by new technologies.

The papers within this Special Issue presented the complex and multifaceted nature of these interactions, encompassing a variety of particular aspects, from how do we see the interaction with Artificial Intelligence in HE to how particular dimensions of e-government influence efficiency in central administration and from what skills are required in order to lead performant organizations to how online commerce has evolved amidst the rapid evolution of new technologies.

The papers within this Special Issues, all of which present interesting results, discuss several different topics:

1. Human interactions with Artificial Intelligence. Two articles [1,2] within this Special Issue examine the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on higher education (HE) and leadership, respectively. These articles underline the importance of focusing on interactions, the consequences that using AI could have on our societies, and the proliferation of new models regarding education and recruitment in the "e-era'. Pisica et al. [1] investigate one of the many new technologies that are set to influence social interactions in our societies: AI. Based on a qualitative analysis consisting of in-depth interviews with Romanian academics, Pisica et al. [1] look into the perspectives of these academics on the positive and negative aspects of implementing AI in HE. As an internal educational stakeholders, academics' perspectives are important, as they can provide a better understanding of the impacts new technologies can have on education. Interestingly, the authors of this study found that the academics they consulted tended to focus more on describing the implementation of AI in HE ("what") and less on "how" to make its implementation more effective. The authors of [2] discuss e-recruitment systems, considering the interactions between new technologies and our existing, functioning systems, and investigate how these systems should change in order to search for more competitive leaders to ensure that our societies are better prepared for the new environment [2]. In this article, the authors analyze the arsenal of skills necessary to lead organizations to ensure their performant operation in a digital context—termed as Leadership Complementary Skills (LCS) [2].

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2. Digitalization and competitiveness for government. In this Special Issue, two articles pertain to this subject. Horobet et al. [3], for their article entitled Determinants of E-Government Use in the European Union: An Empirical Analysis proposes an investigation into the determinants of e-government use in European Union countries, used empirical data pertaining to the years 2008 to 2020 from a specific dataset in order to investigate the factors underlying e-government use. After conducting a quantitative analysis based on the generalized method of moments (GMM), the authors of the article conclude that education is the most important factor for e-government use in the European Union. However, the authors discovered surprising findings, such as the negative correlation between Internet use and e-government indicators and the fact that a better government does not automatically result in economic growth. The authors of the second article under the umbrella of this topic, The Interplay between Digitalization and Competitiveness: Evidence from European Countries [4], highlight the role of digital development from the perspective of competitiveness. Their empirical investigation was based on a panel data analysis of the European Union countries from 2017 to 2022, considering the digital economy and society index (DESI) and the IMD (World Competitiveness Index). Their analysis involved dividing the EU countries into two groups: Central and Eastern Europeans (CEE) and Western Europeans (WE). Their results are interesting and in line with those of similar other studies. For example, "for CEEI, the overall talent indicator (world talent), tax evasion, and scientific research legislation are significantly and positively influenced by DESI, while in WE, gross domestic product and digital transformation in companies are in the same position" [4].

3. Doing business and working in e-societies. The global push towards digitalization emanated from the totally unexpected and unpredicted COVID-19 pandemic. Two articles in this Special Issue, Online Commerce Pattern in European Union Countries between 2019 and 2020 [5] and Configurational Evaluation of Spanish Teleworkers' Perception and Nonperception of Stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic [6], offer insights into the use of digital systems during the pandemic. Burlacioiu C. [5] aimed to determine the key characteristics of e-commerce in European Union countries in the context of the pandemic through analyzing Eurostat Digital Economy data for 2019–2020. Based on Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and through using 27 variables, some characteristics were identified. These characteristics may change purchasing behavior in the future, and this study contains observations on heavy online purchasers, triggers for embracing digital purchasing, perceived barriers against buying online (e.g., one may have privacy and security concerns or lack a bank card), the dynamics of online interaction with public authorities, and the boost in the online enterprise sharing [5]. It is too soon to predict the speed at which these changes will occur in the future, i.e., after the return to "normality". This article specifically focuses on Romania, which has one of the biggest e-commerce industries in Southeastern Europe; however, the share of e-commerce with respect to the overall retail sector is still quite low within this nation. The paper by de Andrés-Sánchez, J. A. [6] assesses the explanatory power of individual, environmental, and job factors in relation to the presence and absence of stress among Spanish telecommuters' when working from home during the COVID-19 crisis. A fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) was used to capture how factors combine to enable and inhibit stress. The results of this study reveal that overload is the most important variable underlying stress. As the author mentions right from the beginning [6], some variables, such as overload, isolation, non-adequacy, or organizational support, symmetrically impact the presence and absence of perceived stress, while other factors, such as attaining a satisfactory work–home balance or gender, influence the presence and absence of perceived stress asymmetrically. A practical implication of this study is that clearer regulation of teleworking is needed to prevent imbalances in the rights and obligations of companies and employees [6].

4. Tools of digitalization for sustainability. Regarding this topic, the article of Torres-Toukoumidis et al. [7] considers that mobile applications, viewed as digital social change tools, are focused on sustainable development and particularly on topics regarding ecology

and the environment. This study focused on the 10 most downloaded mobile applications that use game elements in their interfaces for the above-mentioned purposes and involved organizing them according to their components, mechanics, and gameplay dynamics. This study's findings elucidate the roles of levels and achievements as more repeated dynamics, challenges and feedback as more relevant elements in gameplay, and, finally, emotions and narratives as components of the gamified experience [7]. This empirical analysis adds to the collection of publications in the literature that support the idea that gamification is no longer a superficial system in addressing sustainable goals [7].

In conclusion, this Special Issue effectively contributes to the literature mainly through providing empirical evidence and a variety of examples of social and technological interactions in e-societies. These interactions are complex and remain unpredictable. The incorporation of the aforementioned new technologies in societies is nascent, meaning that the effects are difficult to measure. As one of the articles within this Special Issue demonstrates, we are still in the early phase of understanding AI's role and its effects on HE, and we are not fully aware about how doing business and work in these new technological environments will evolve in the future. E-societies are already under construction, with developed countries managing to incorporate new technologies quicker than developing countries.

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