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Article

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Editorial: Innovation, knowledge and digitalization: building trust to face today's challenges

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In the contemporary global business and economic landscape, the dynamic interplay of innovation, knowledge and digitalization has become a transformative force. Within an increasingly interconnected and rapidly evolving world, the imperative of cultivating trust has reached unprecedented significance. Trust, serving as a foundational element for the sustainability and resilience of societies, forms the bedrock upon which thriving economies and flourishing enterprises are constructed. This special issue endeavors to scrutinize the intricate mechanisms by which innovation, knowledge and digitalization act as catalysts, fostering and fortifying trust to address the multifaceted challenges confronting societies today. Concurrently, the foremost challenge for firm growth resides in the adept integration of digital technologies within novel business models. Consequently, firms are progressively engrossed in digital transformation, involving the digitalization of business models and the application of technology to enhance internal and external processes, all while integrating these advancements into innovative business frameworks (Kraus *et al.*, 2022). The efficacy of such digital transformation inherently demands diverse knowledge derived from various sources within the firm.

Digital transformation, a pivotal force in the contemporary global business and economic landscape, is intricately intertwined with the dynamic interplay of innovation, knowledge and digitalization. Its transformative impact extends beyond particularly innovative businesses, digital start-ups and high-tech giants, encompassing companies of all sizes and operating in diverse industries. This paradigm shift, exemplified by innovative companies like Uber, Airbnb and Spotify, revolutionizes the way companies operate and develop relationships within and across ecosystems, introducing new managerial opportunities and challenges across industries of all sizes and types (Di Vaio *et al.*, 2021; Hanelt *et al.*, 2021). As the imperative of cultivating trust gains unprecedented significance in this era of rapid change, trust becomes a linchpin in navigating the complexities of multi-stakeholder collaborations for new product development (NPD) within the digital transformation landscape. Strategies for NPD must align with the digitalization of business models, where the integration of technology plays a central role in enhancing internal and external processes, and these advancements are seamlessly woven into innovative business frameworks (Bounchen *et al.*, 2021). Digital transformation, marked by revolutionary technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, 4.0 machines, 3D printers and social media networks (Bhukya and Paul, 2023; Chen *et al.*, 2022; Li *et al.*, 2021; Rajarathinam *et al.*, 2022), fundamentally shapes contemporary business practices. However, despite the wealth



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of knowledge, there remains a crucial gap in understanding how businesses of all sizes can effectively implement digital innovative strategies for growth and scalability.

The articles were selected from the 18th Academy of Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Knowledge (ACIEK) Conference, which took place in a hybrid form. The papers were then submitted to a rigorous double-blind review process following the journal's ethics, in addition to having potential reviewers in the mentioned area. The papers selected for publication in this special issue represent a diverse array of cutting-edge research and scholarly inquiries, illuminating the intricate dynamics between innovation, knowledge and digitalization within the realms of management and business economics. From explorations of disruptive technological advancements to analyses of knowledge-sharing networks and the strategic deployment of innovative practices, the contributions within this issue collectively offer a comprehensive and insightful examination of the contemporary landscape of business and economics.

The first paper, titled "Branding fashion through gameplay: the branded gaming and the cool dynamics in the fashion markets. A game-theory approach" (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJMBE-06-2023-0179>) by Alshaimaa Bahgat Alanadoly and Suha Fouad Salem, explores the influence of immersive gaming on brand coolness and equity, specifically focusing on collaborations between the fashion industry and gaming. Using game theory as a conceptual framework, the study analyzed the decision-making process of fashion consumers within gaming environments, with a particular emphasis on the moderating role of gender. The study employed a quantitative approach, utilizing the partial least squares structural equation modeling technique and a sample of 160 active Malaysian gamers. The findings indicate a positive association between brand equity and perceived brand coolness. Of the three core values of online games, perceived enjoyment was found to have the strongest correlation with perceived brand coolness, surpassing self-expression and perceived emotional challenge. The analysis of gender differences suggested that while female respondents were significantly influenced by branded gaming experiences, the impact was comparatively weaker among male respondents, implying a potential gender-specific approach in fashion gaming marketing strategies. The research contributes to the existing literature by providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of immersive gaming branding practices on fashion brand equity. The findings shed light on the critical role of gaming experiences in shaping consumer behavior and offer valuable insights for fashion brand managers seeking to leverage gaming collaborations to enhance consumer perceptions. The article's theoretical implications extend the conceptualization of brand coolness to incorporate Web3 immersive gaming experiences, underscoring the significant influence of gender in the context of branded gaming. The study emphasizes the pivotal role of perceived enjoyment, self-expression and emotional challenge in shaping perceptions of brand coolness, with these factors collectively explaining a substantial portion of the variance in perceived fashion brand coolness. Practical implications suggest that fashion brand managers should focus on integrating enjoyable gaming experiences into their marketing strategies, emphasizing customization options and interactive elements to enhance player engagement. Creating opportunities for players to showcase their self-image within the game environment can contribute significantly to perceived brand coolness. Moreover, the findings emphasize the potential of branded gaming as a means to foster brand loyalty and connection among consumers. In conclusion, the article underscores the significant potential of gaming collaborations in shaping brand perceptions and highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of the role of gender in the context of fashion branding within gaming environments. The insights presented in the study offer valuable guidance for practitioners seeking to optimize their marketing and branding strategies within the increasingly interconnected realms of gaming and fashion.

In the second contribution, titled "Expanding career adaptability: connections as a critical component of career success" (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJMBE-06-2023-0185>) written by

Anita Gaile, Ilona Baumane Vitolina, Agnis Stibe and Kurmet Kivipõld, the authors delve into the relationship between career adaptability and social connections within the context of subjective career success. They argue that professional achievement hinges not only on adaptability but also on the networks individuals cultivate in their professional spheres. Conducted in Latvia with 390 respondents, the study utilized the Perception of Career Success measure and the Career Adapt-abilities scale. Findings underscore the pivotal role of workplace relationships in subjective career success and identify 12 moderators influencing this relationship. Workplace connections demonstrate a more substantial influence on subjective career success compared to career adaptability factors. Variables such as tenure in the current position and current monthly salary exhibit no significant influence on the model's relationships. Higher educational credentials show a negative moderating impact on the relationship between connections and subjective career success, indicating that highly-educated individuals rely less on workplace connections for career fulfillment. Behaviors associated with self-assurance and future planning do not significantly moderate subjective career success. Adaptability behaviors seem less influenced by moderators than workplace connections, potentially due to their more internal focus, in contrast to the external social behaviors represented by the latter. Professionals with extensive work experience prioritize workplace relationships, while those with limited experience emphasize adaptability behaviors. Connections appear to compensate for individuals facing initial job dissatisfaction. Individuals without prior unemployment experience attribute greater significance to workplace connections in determining their career success. Marital status plays a role, with married individuals attributing more significance to workplace connections than unmarried individuals. The number of children in a family diminishes the impact of both connections and confidence behaviors on career success. The article highlights the mounting importance of interpersonal bonds in professional settings when evaluating career achievements. It challenges the conventional focus on individual career adaptability, emphasizing the pivotal role of professional collaborators in shaping career trajectories. The diverse moderation effects on the relationship between connections and career success underscore the intricate nature of career development strategies. Factors such as educational background, professional tenure, initial job contentment, unemployment history and familial contexts collectively shape individuals' perceptions and attainment of career success. The study suggests that career development strategies may diverge based on an individual's life stage, familial circumstances and sociodemographic factors. This study emphasizes that workplace interpersonal relationships exert a more substantial impact on subjective career success than career adaptability alone, introducing the concept of the "fifth C," Connections, as a pivotal factor influencing career achievements. The research provides fresh insights, particularly regarding the interplay of familial circumstances with workplace connections, adding nuance to our understanding of the complex dynamics linking career achievements and social affiliations.

Valeska V. Geldres-Weiss, Carolina Nicolas and Nathaniel P. Massa are the authors of the critically reviewed on food eco-labels in the research domain areas of business and management titled "Toward a sustainable research agenda on food eco-labelling in the business and management research domain" (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJMBE-08-2023-0246>) aiming to identify research gaps and contribute toward a future research agenda in the field. This paper presents a hybrid integrated review combining bibliometric analysis with an in-depth framework-based study of theories, contexts, characteristics and methodology (TCCM), reviewing quality research published over the 21 years between 2002 and 2022. The findings suggest that future researchers should further explore food eco-label dynamics and phenomena in areas related to consumer behavior, information, consumer knowledge, environmental concern, trust, packaging and willingness-to-pay as antecedent factors. Moreover, identifying the key research themes and knowledge structure of food eco-label research, this review contributes and adds value to the literature in the domain research areas

of business and management in terms of quantification of extant publications and consolidation of research evolution. The study acknowledges limitations in its research scope, focusing exclusively on the Web of Science database and the field of business and management. Practical implications highlight the need for better communication and dissemination of knowledge about eco-labels to consumers. The article concludes with recommendations for future research, emphasizing the importance of solid theoretical foundations, cross-cultural considerations and the expansion of research to different food categories and types of eco-labels. The study underscores the significance of effective communication and information dissemination about eco-labels for consumers, emphasizing their role in promoting sustainability in the food industry. It calls for the harmonization and standardization of eco-labels both nationally and globally to address consumer confusion and promote sustainable practices. This paper represents a novel approach within eco-label research by integrating bibliometric analysis with a comprehensive theoretical framework (TCCM), providing a valuable perspective that will contribute to the continued advancement of this ever-evolving field.

In the last paper, titled “Exploring flexible working practices and the digital divide in a post-lockdown era” (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJMBE-08-2023-0247>) by Lebene Richmond Soga, Yemisi Bolade-Ogunfodun and Anna De Amicis conduct a comprehensive analysis of the intricate dimensions characterizing the digital divide within the landscape of flexible working practices (FWPs) during the post-lockdown period, utilizing an actor-network theory (ANT) perspective. Their research highlights the need to transcend the traditional understanding of the digital divide merely as a matter of access to digital tools, emphasizing the broader range of challenges that impede the effective utilization of technology within the domain of FWPs. The authors bring to light how the implementation of FWPs, made feasible through digital technologies, has exposed underlying inequalities, underscoring the critical significance of comprehending the diverse user responses embedded within distinct technological contexts. In a notable theoretical contribution, the paper redefines the digital divide as a complex interplay of heterogeneous networks, shedding light on the dynamic nature of FWPs which surpasses the realm of mere technological access. This conceptual reframing offers a nuanced understanding of the intricate processes and negotiations that individuals navigate within their specific work environments, pointing to the intertwined relationship between technology and socio-economic factors. Furthermore, the study underlines the practical implications of these findings, advocating for a holistic restructuring of organizational systems, custom-tailored assessment mechanisms and strategic regulatory interventions to effectively address the multifaceted challenges arising from the digital divide. The authors underscore the pressing need for proactive interventions from organizational leaders and human resource managers to cater to the needs of employees who may silently grapple with the repercussions of the digital divide, stressing the imperative of fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment. Additionally, the paper outlines key directions for future research, emphasizing the importance of delving deeper into the diverse networks influencing individual participation in FWPs, particularly as organizations navigate the transition back to physical work settings and hybrid work models. The authors advocate for a comprehensive exploration of the motivations and experiences of marginalized workers within the framework of FWPs, urging a nuanced understanding of their responses within diverse technological landscapes. Moreover, the study underscores the pivotal role of tracing diverse actors, both human and non-human, within these networks, emphasizing the need to comprehend the nuanced negotiations individuals undertake within the complex and evolving terrain of the digital divide. Ultimately, this research serves as a crucial call to action for organizations to adopt proactive measures that foster equitable access and opportunities for all employees, effectively addressing the challenges exacerbated by digital

disparities in the post-lockdown era. The comprehensive analysis provided by the authors contributes significantly to the ongoing discourse on the evolving nature of work practices and their intricate relationship with digital inclusion, emphasizing the critical importance of a holistic and inclusive approach in addressing the multifaceted dimensions of the digital divide within contemporary work environments.

We invite our readers to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of insights presented within this special issue, with the hope that the diverse perspectives and nuanced analyses contained herein will inspire new avenues of enquiry and engender a deeper appreciation for the transformative power of innovation, knowledge and digitalization in fostering trust and resilience in the face of today's multifaceted challenges. With this special issue, the *European Journal of Management and Business Economics* reaffirms its commitment to fostering rigorous scholarly dialogue and promoting innovative research that addresses the complex and evolving landscape of contemporary business and economics.

We sincerely hope that this collection of articles serves as a catalyst for further exploration and collaborative endeavors aimed at shaping a more resilient and prosperous future for our interconnected global community.

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