

# Introduction to the Special Issue on Expressions of Information and Communication Theory and Practice

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**Abstract.** This paper provides an introduction to the special issue on expressions of information and communication theory and practice. It surveys each paper, identifies commonalities and dissimilarities among them, and suggests the potential readership for the papers based on the problems addressed and the findings.

**Keywords:** identity, knowledge sharing, virtual communities, sustainable fashion, internal communication

## Specialiojo leidinio, skirto informacijos ir komunikacijos teorijos ir praktikos raiškoms, įvadas

**Santrauka.** Šiame straipsnyje pristatomas specialusis leidinys, skirtas informacijos ir komunikacijos teorijos ir praktikos raiškoms. Jame apžvelgiami specialiojo numerio straipsniai, nustatomi jų bendrumai ir skirtumai, taip pat pagal nagrinėjamas problemas ir išvadas pasiūloma galima šia tematika besidominti bendruomenė.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** tapatybė, dalijimasis žiniomis, virtualios bendruomenės, tvari mada, vidinė komunikacija.

## Introduction

The theme of this special issue was advertised broadly, including strategic and corporate communication, creativity and innovation, knowledge management, and cultural aspects of communication, among others. Out of eleven papers submitted, five were published. The guest editor for this special issue was Asta Mikalauskienė.

The five papers collated in this special issue are diverse in both topic and methods used. Two of the papers can be loosely brought together for their focus on organizations and the concept of hybridity. Yet, these very concepts which bring them together also distinguish them from each other.

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Beniušis (2023) conducted a case study on hybrid work practice in a government organization. The study of Stonkienė “Creating the Identity of a Lithuanian Social Business Enterprise“ (2023) focused on the hybridity aspects of enterprise identity. The two studies also deployed different data collection and analysis methods.

Beniušis reports on internal communications (IC) and work organization challenges brought by the COVID pandemics. Pandemics disrupt routine practices, forcing management and employees to seek technological and managerial solutions to continue working. These solutions, among other things, include supervisory and guidance responsibilities for society at large.

The study focused on internal communications (IC) management in a public sector organization and deployed participant observation and semi-structured interviews with IC specialists and heads of the units as data collection methods.

The findings of Beniušis’ (2023) study at the Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Lithuania will be of interest to managers of IC and other departments, which consider deploying or are deploying hybrid working methods (presence and online). The study can also be recommended to doctoral students as an example of a case study approach in communications and organizational studies. Beniušis’ (2023) work adds well to Grabuschnig & Vizgirdaitė’s (2016) model, which provides a comprehensive framework that emphasises both universal and culture-specific elements, balancing rational and emotional factors in employee communication. Beniušis’ (2023) research offers a structured, culturally sensitive approach to managing internal communication challenges in a hybrid work environment, ensuring both effective information dissemination and the fostering of a supportive, engaged workforce.

Differently from the work of Beniušis (2023), who explored hybrid organization of work and the associated management challenges related to internal communications, Stonkienė (2023) dwells on the meaning of the concept of social enterprise as a hybrid form of nonprofit and for-profit market entities. In the focus of the study are seven law projects submitted to the parliament of Lithuania that aimed to establish criteria defining social business enterprises. The author analyses the text of the legislative documents seeking to identify what she calls “the defining attributes of the identity” or “the identity referents” of social enterprises. This study approaches the problem of communications from a perspective of company’s identity formation, probing into causal relationships established by communication between legislative, economic, business, and societal domains. This study will likely find its readership among communications studies scholars, scholars of organizational and marketing studies, and policy makers. Stonkienė’s (2023) work complements the findings of Pušinaitė-Gelgotė, Pučėtaitė & Novelskaitė (2019) by providing a detailed understanding of the legal and organizational identity of social enterprises in Lithuania.

Three remaining papers in this special issue can be brought together under the umbrella of the interplay of two keywords: “formation” and “communication”. Formation and propagation of a concept of sustainable fashion in the work of Telyčėnaitė (2023), formation and sustaining a virtual readers community in the work of Siudikienė and Jokūbauskienė (2023), and formation of the concept of identity through communication

of cultural symbols in tattoos in the work of Černikovaitė and Mitkutė (2023). While staying within the paradigm of qualitative interpretative studies, the three papers adopt different data collection and analysis methods.

The study of Telyčėnaitė (2023), “Communication Features of Sustainable Fashion on Instagram: Use of the Hashtag #sustainablefashion” sought to identify the contexts of sustainable fashion communication on Instagram in Lithuania. Similarly to the work of Stonkienė on the formation of the image of an enterprise, Telyčėnaitė (2023) seeks to uncover what establishes the concept of sustainable fashion and who are the “key actors” promoting the concept. The author opens the “black box” of the concept of sustainable fashion, showing its multidimensional nature and what can be referred to as deceptive actions of promoters of the concept – commercial actors, who use the popular hashtag to promote commercial interests that can only remotely be identified as pertaining to sustainability concepts. Telyčėnaitė’s (2023) work offers new insights on Kiaušienė & Mikalauskienė (2020) findings by providing a focused case study on sustainable fashion in Lithuania, demonstrating the practical application of cultural contributions to sustainability via social media, and discussing specific challenges and dynamics within this cultural sector.

Siudikienė and Jokūbauskienė (2023) in their work focus on virtual communities of interest. Their study aims to investigate the pathways of knowledge sharing among members of a virtual reading community on Facebook. The authors seek to uncover how individual and altruistic communication practices serve the common good of the virtual community in the form of knowledge, and the reciprocal incentivizing effects of the shared accumulated knowledge on the members of the virtual community. The study identifies communication and community formation drivers at the individual, group, and community levels, and discusses the findings from the perspective of social exchange theory. This study will find its readership among scholars of knowledge management and communications studies, as well as sociologists interested in the formation, lifecycle, drivers, and barriers of collective and group practices and communities. Against the backdrop of the global trend of declining book reading practice, this study can also be of interest to policymakers and promoters of books and the reading practice. Siudikienė & Jokūbauskienė’s (2023) research complements Stonkienė & Janiūnienė (2020) by providing concrete examples of successful virtual communities that actively share knowledge and engage in collaborative practices. Their findings highlight the importance of feedback, voluntary participation, and the diverse use of media in forming effective learning networks, offering potential pathways to enhance the educational impact of podcasts as identified by Stonkienė & Janiūnienė (2020).

Černikovaitė and Mitkutė (2023) in their paper “Expression of Identity in Tattoos of Symbols of Different Cultures” seek to answer the question: is there a relationship between the cultural symbols imprinted in tattoos and the personal character traits of the tattooed people?” Do tattooed people attempt to communicate the cultural symbols through the tattoos they carry? Through interviews with representatives of different cultures, the authors seek to uncover the multifaceted nature of the concept of identity and the relationship between its “natural” and digital representations. In this endeavor, Černikovaitė and

Mitkutė (2023) reflect on ideas and theories of symbols, phenomenology, and creativity. Similarly to the work of Siudikienė and Jokūbauskienė (2023) on virtual communities, Černikovaitė and Mitkutė (2023) identify relationships between individual and collective levels of the phenomena. Similarly to the findings of Telyčėnaitė (2023) on intended deceptive communication strategies in the formation of the concept of sustainable fashion, the authors of this work find elements of unintended deception in tattoo-mediated cultural communication. The primary readership for this work will be found among scholars of phenomenology and cultural communications, although more nuanced findings of the study can be of interest to behavioral scientists. In summary, Černikovaitė and Mitkutė's (2023) work complements Siudikienės's (2013) by providing a specific, tangible case of identity construction through tattoos, illustrating the integration of cultural symbols, the role of personal choice and creativity, and the interplay between virtual and physical realms. Their research offers practical insights into the mechanisms of identity formation in a globalized, digital context.

Except for the work of Beniušis (2023) on hybrid work practices, common to four other papers published in this special issue are the themes of expression and formation through communication. The findings of the works may be seen as complementing one another, as works feature the full spectrum of possible units of analysis: the individual, the group, the community, the organizational, and – indirectly – the societal. The collection of the papers in this special issue truly speaks of the multifaceted and complex nature and function of communications.

Below, a brief outline of the content of each paper is presented, followed by conclusions on the special issue.

## Section snippets

- **Marija Stonkienė, “Creating the Identity of a Lithuanian Social Business Enterprise”.** This study examines the criteria defining Lithuanian social business enterprises, based on seven legislative proposals between 2018 and 2021. Using the qualitative document analysis method, it identifies key attributes such as entrepreneurship, social goals, and stakeholder involvement, highlighting their role in forming the identity of social enterprises. The findings reveal that these enterprises are hybrid organizations and suggest that current legal definitions are insufficient to distinguish social enterprises from other non-market entities.
- **Siudikienė and Jokūbauskienė, “Expression of Knowledge Sharing in Virtual Communities of Interest: A Reading Community-Based Research”.** This research explores knowledge sharing in a Facebook reading community, highlighting the rise of virtual communities in the digital age. Using qualitative content analysis, it examines factors promoting knowledge exchange and finds that community members voluntarily share their expertise, motivated by the potential benefits to others. The study underscores the role of social networks in fostering collaborative knowledge creation.
- **Černikovaitė and Mitkutė, “Expression of Identity in Tattoos of Symbols of Different Cultures”.** This study investigates how tattoos of cultural symbols communi-

cate identity. Using semi-structured interviews and qualitative analysis, it reveals that identity construction involves creating semantic connections and incorporating diverse cultural elements. The research highlights the role of social interaction and the body in expressing identity beyond virtual spaces.

- **Austė Telyčėnaitė, “Communication Features of Sustainable Fashion on Instagram: Use of the Hashtag #sustainablefashion”** This study analyses sustainable fashion communication on Instagram in Lithuania. Using quantitative content analysis of social media it identifies commercial entities as the primary communicators, with opinion leaders being less active. The content often only mentions sustainability without depth. However, posts that do explore the topic reveal diverse perceptions influenced by the perspectives of different actors in the sustainable fashion ecosystem.
- **Vytautas Beniušis, “Internal Communication Challenges and Their Solution When Hybrid Work is Implemented in a Public Sector Organization: The Case Study of the Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Lithuania”** This case study investigates internal communication (IC) challenges in the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Lithuania during the hybrid work era. Using observations and interviews, it found that adapting to new communication technologies, maintaining personal connections, and motivating teams were key challenges. The solutions included online management meetings and new virtual communication strategies to enhance IC in a hybrid work environment.

## Concluding comments

This introduction has surveyed the five papers that comprised the special issue on expressions of information and communication theory and practice. The papers included in this special issue offer the readers of *Information & Media Journal* a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to examining the multifaceted role of communications in problem-solving and the formation of entities, communities, or concepts. We are pleased to provide a snapshot of the work being done by scholars at the forefront of research in this area. Enjoy the special issue!

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