

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54663/2182-9306.2025.SpecialIssueMBP.1-5>

Editorial

Rethinking Marketing and Communication in the Digital Era: Innovation, Sustainability, and Inclusion in Focus

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, digital technologies and cultural transformations are profoundly reshaping the fields of marketing and communication. The emergence of artificial intelligence, the emphasis on value co-creation, innovations in vocational education, and the growing focus on inclusive and sustainable tourism are not merely trends—they signal a fundamental shift in how organizations operate, engage with stakeholders, and define strategic priorities. These shifts demand more than technical adaptation; they require a rethinking of business models, communication practices, and the role of data and analytics in decision-making (Cosa, 2024; Dutt et al., 2024; Omol, 2024).

This Special Issue of the International Journal of Marketing, Communication and New Media, titled “Transformative Insights for Marketing and Communication in the Digital Era,” brings together thirteen peer-reviewed papers originally presented at the fifth edition of the International Conference on Applied Business and Management (ICABM2024). The conference was held on 20 and 21 June 2024 at ISAG – European Business School, in collaboration with the Research Center in Business Sciences and Tourism (CICET-FCVC) of Consuelo Vieira da Costa Foundation.

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With 85 presentations delivered by national and international researchers from over 18 countries—including Algeria, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Spain, France, Italy, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam—ICABM2024 provided a dynamic forum for critical dialogue and applied research across the fields of business, management, tourism, marketing, and innovation.

The thirteen articles featured in this Special Issue reflect the diversity of themes, methodological approaches, and practical implications that defined the conference. Collectively, these contributions explore the transformative impact of digitalisation on consumer engagement, branding strategies, stakeholder communication, and sustainable development. In particular, the role of artificial intelligence in generating deep consumer insights and supporting data-driven marketing strategies is examined as a critical frontier for innovation and competitiveness (Rupigaa & Syahputra, 2025).

In the editorial that follows, we outline the thematic structure of the selected papers and highlight their relevance for advancing contemporary debates in marketing and communication within the digital era.

2. STRUCTURE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

1. Technological Disruption and Artificial Intelligence

Opening the issue is the article "*Torn between practicality and fear: how strategic communication professionals are adopting artificial intelligence*". Based on qualitative interviews with communication professionals, the study offers an exploratory mapping of AI tools used in strategic communication, particularly ChatGPT, and analyses the opportunities and challenges they introduce. The findings show a widespread use of AI for content creation, data analysis, and workflow optimization, while also pointing to concerns about data privacy and the future of creativity. This article sheds light on the evolving professional landscape and offers insight into how communicators are navigating technological disruption.

2. Organizational Strategies, Internal Marketing and Education

This section brings together three studies that investigate organizational practices and educational dynamics. One article with the title "Internal Marketing as a Driver of Workplace Happiness and Organizational Performance", highlights the critical relationship between internal marketing practices and employee well-being. Through qualitative research conducted in four Portuguese companies, the authors show that transparent communication, training, and recognition improve motivation, reduce turnover, and foster organizational commitment.

Another contribution, "The Value Co-creation in HEI Organizational Management" explores how co-creation can enhance management and service quality in higher education institutions (HEIs). Drawing on empirical data from students and teachers across five polytechnic institutes in Portugal, the study reveals how satisfaction, collaboration, and shared value creation can serve as levers for institutional improvement.

The third article in this section focuses on vocational education, with the title "The influence of choice factors on student decision-making of Vocational Education", presents a quantitative study based on 848 responses. The research identifies key drivers in students' decision-making, such as job prospects and internship opportunities, while highlighting areas that are less influential, such as school rankings. The study also notes the motivational challenges of engaging Generation Z, offering practical guidance for institutions seeking to attract and retain students.

3. Sustainability, Territory and Tourism

Tourism and sustainability are at the core of several contributions. The study "How to measure tourism sustainability? Proposal of a tourism sustainability index for Portugal", the researchers analyse national tourism plans and propose a methodological framework for developing a sustainability index tailored to Portugal. This research fills an important gap by offering a practical tool to assess sustainable development across destinations.

Another paper "Can Location be a Competitive Factor for Hotels in Low-Density Territories? A Study in Alto Alentejo", investigates how rural positioning can offer a unique competitive edge to hotels. The results underscore the importance of natural and cultural assets and highlight location as a strategic differentiator in tourism development.

Furthermore, with article "Olive oil tourism in Beira Interior Territory – the present offer", an exploratory mapping of assets associated with olive oil tourism in Portugal's Beira Interior region. From fairs and producer visits to rural accommodations and olive museums, the study reveals a promising yet underdeveloped potential for rural tourism rooted in local identity and PDO-certified olive oil.

Also in the tourism cluster, the article "The role of ICT in sociocultural sustainability perceived by creative tourism artisans" explores how creative artisans in Barcelos and Óbidos perceive the role of ICT in fostering sociocultural sustainability. While acknowledging some benefits, many artisans remain unaware of the full potential of digital tools to enhance inclusion, innovation, and engagement—highlighting a need for greater digital literacy and support.

Expanding beyond tourism, the study "Responsiveness of Petroleum Profit Tax to Foreign Direct Investment in Africa: Case Study of Nigeria and Algeria" analyzes the relationship between fiscal policy and investment flows in Nigeria and Algeria. Using econometric methods, the authors find a negative correlation between petroleum tax levels and foreign investment, suggesting that policy reform could play a critical role in attracting capital to the sector.

4. Emerging Segments and Cultural Consumption

The last three papers highlight shifting consumer behaviors and new cultural dynamics. The article "An insight into the Journey of Digital Nomads in Portugal" investigates why digital nomads choose Portugal and how their lifestyle blends mobility, work, and leisure. Based on questionnaires and profiling data, the study finds that factors like geographic location, safety, affordability, and quality of life make Portugal particularly attractive. Despite limitations in reaching this mobile group, the paper offers valuable recommendations for integrating digital nomads into local economies.

In turn, the article "Inclusive Co-Creation: Rethinking Museum Experiences using technologies for Sensory-Impaired Visitors" focus on accessibility and co-creation in cultural spaces. Their large-sample study involving 254 respondents explores how technology and environmental factors affect the museum experience for visitors with sensory impairments. The article not only contributes to co-creation theory but also offers practical guidance to museum managers seeking to foster inclusive visitor experiences.

Closing this special issue, the study "Food, Culture and the Media: A Critical Analysis of Food Advertisements and Cultural Politics" presents a historical analysis of food advertisements and cultural politics in mid-20th century Turkey. The study dissects how American food products were marketed through a local magazine, revealing deeper narratives about cultural influence, consumer identity, and media framing in post-war society.

Final Considerations

The thirteen articles in this Special Issue offer a broad, multidimensional understanding of the transformations reshaping marketing and communication. Together, they engage with critical questions: How do we balance automation and creativity in professional communication? What are the human and cultural implications of internal marketing or co-creation in education? How can sustainability be measured and communicated in tourism and agriculture? What role does digital inclusion play in cultural and territorial development?

These papers not only reflect current academic inquiry but also provide practical insights for professionals, policymakers, and institutions navigating an increasingly complex communication landscape. The editorial team thanks the authors for their scientific rigor, the ICABM2024 organizing committee for curating a rich and diverse selection of research, and the journal's reviewers and editorial board for ensuring academic excellence.

We hope this Special Issue will serve as both a resource and an inspiration for scholars and practitioners alike, fostering innovative thinking and responsible action in marketing and communication for years to come.

3. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We extend our sincere gratitude to all the authors who submitted their manuscripts and to the reviewers for their invaluable contributions. The scientific relevance and quality of the articles published in this and previous issues of the *International Journal of Marketing, Communication and New Media* (IJMCNM) serve as a strong incentive for other researchers to consider submitting their work to future Regular and Special Issues.

A final thanks to Web of Science (WoS), Journal Citation Reports™ (JCR™), Journal Impact Factor™, Qualis-CAPES, ERIH Plus, REDIB, RCAPP, MIAR, OAJI, LATINDEX, DRJI, Livre, INDEX COPERNICUS, FREE for the support given to the positioning of IJMCNM in the scientific community.

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How to cite this article:

Borges, A.P.; Vieira, E.; Remondes, J.; Rodrigues, P.; & Skvarciany, V. (2025). Rethinking Marketing and Communication in the Digital Era: Innovation, Sustainability, and Inclusion in Focus. *International Journal of Marketing, Communication and New Media, Special Issue on Marketing & Business Perspectives: Transformative Insights for Marketing and Communication in the Digital Era*, May 2025, pp. 1-5.