

Guest Editorial: Knowledge and trust in data-rich business environments

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Sinergie Italian Journal of Management has been at the forefront of the academic debate regarding the role of intangible resources in the value creation processes of firms and other stakeholders for a long time. The Journal systematically collected the studies of those Italian management scholars whose interests were associated with the international research tradition that was rooted in the resource-based view of the firm and then evolved within the broad theoretical frameworks of dynamic capabilities and the knowledge-based view of organizations. The Special Issues n. 29 in 1992 and n. 51 in 2000 are two bright examples of such a contribution. For this reason, we felt honored to be invited to serve as Guest Editors for this Special Issue, which has the main goal to provide further evidence of the liveliness and relevance of such a research tradition in 2022.

There is also a personal reason that makes such a feeling even stronger: we Guest Editors have been introduced and guided in our research on the intangible resources of the firm by our common mentor, our *maestro* Salvio Vicari. We accepted the invitation by Sinergie as a way to celebrate Salvio Vicari's outstanding scholarly career in the year of his retirement.

Salvio Vicari has contributed to the academic debate on intangible resources since the very beginning and with many studies that marked the evolution of such a debate as milestones. Two of them are the essay *Risorse aziendali e valore*, included in the 1992 Special Issue, and the Guest Editorial of the 2000 issue. In these studies - where he detailed some of the theses that had been advanced in his most distinctive and insightful theoretical work, *L'impresa vivente*, published in 1991 - Vicari underlined that a firm could only function if it is able to generate and activate new knowledge. He also advanced that part of such knowledge resides in a firm's cognitive schemes, whereas other parts reside in the cognitive schemes of external actors (customers, suppliers, partners etc.) that require trust to be activated. Therefore, knowledge and trust are the fundamental resources for the functioning of a firm, and for its evolution and survival.

With the aim to nurture the research stream on intangible resources and to celebrate Salvio Vicari, we, in collaboration with Sinergie's Editorial Team, have decided to devote this Special Issue to knowledge and trust in today's business environments, which are characterized by the huge availability of data and a variety of data-related technologies.

In the call for papers, we stated that the goal of this Special Issue is to investigate how knowledge and trust can be developed, employed, diffused, and protected in business ecosystems, where data are the main asset for several actors. We are proud to present six high-quality papers from scholars affiliated to various Italian universities who have investigated these

topics from different theoretical perspectives and by means of different methodological approaches. They represent an interesting combination of theoretical essays, research reviews and empirical studies. In addition, some of them focus on firms, some on consumers, and others on researchers who, like other actors today, need to find their way in the abundance of data and methodologies. In the following lines, we will briefly introduce each of them.

The Special Issue is introduced by Enzo Rullani's paper titled *The new economy of complexity: sense and challenges of the incoming digital transition*. This essay represents a new and further step in Rullani's investigation of the evolution of business environments determined by technological advancements. The object of his analysis consists in the paradigmatic shift that organizations and individuals are experiencing due to the dramatic impact of digital technologies in the endeavour towards a new system of working and living. The thesis that is advanced in this essay is that the most relevant change of digital transition is the assignment of a new role to complexity, namely the combination of variety, variability, interdependence and indeterminacy. Rullani opines that digital technology provides users with global communication networks and flexible machines that work at a low cost and quickly, on demand. These two factors create the conditions for a radical change in relation to industrial modernity that organizations and individuals have experienced in the past. With the advent of digital modernity, new levers of value are becoming relevant: these include the offer of customized varieties, on-demand responses to novelties, increasingly extensive and interdependent supply chains, exploratory processes projected towards the new and the possible. These will also be the factors, Rullani concludes, that are destined to change the role of labor, and are called upon to provide a contribution of creative intelligence in the expansion and management of emerging complexity.

In *Knowledge Search and Learning in Sustainability Practices*, Nilanjana Dutt reviews past research on how organizations solve problems of environmental sustainability. Referring to a relevant topic in knowledge management and organizational learning research traditions, Dutt is interested in understanding if and how organizations can learn to improve their performance whilst searching for ways to resolve issues involving the natural environment. Another important matter consists in analysing the factors upon which the rate and extent of their learning and performance improvement are contingent. The review studies the links between search activities as they apply to problem solving and sustainable outcomes. Overall, the review suggests one mode of resolving environmental problems: searching narrowly to resolve routine operational problems while experimenting and adding breadth to search activities over time. The combination of a focused search in any single time period with experimentation via breadth over time periods balances the need for operational efficiency with learning to yield the greatest improvements in environmental performance.

In their paper *From data to data: an overview toward qualitative data research reproducibility*, Federica Izzo and Alessandra Storlazzi suggest that new methodological approaches and massive amounts of collectible

data call for the definition of the state of the art of qualitative research in marketing and management studies. In their study, a total of 87 papers that were published from 2017 to 2021 in 10 high-ranked international marketing and management journals were collected and analysed, with the aim to provide an overview of qualitative research through the most recent literature and to detect patterns and shared practices. More specifically, Izzo and Storlazzi focus on specific issues like the used data types and sources, the application of analysis techniques, and the sharing of data, in order to re-interpret them in terms of specific importance to qualitative research.

Francesca Negri and Marco Ieva integrate different research streams related to privacy, service recovery and crisis communication management in their study *The interplay between privacy failure, recovery and crisis communication management: an integrative review and research agenda*. They aim to systematize and summarize existing knowledge on recovery after a privacy failure, as well as to develop an agenda for future research. In their study, they provide a literature review that assesses and synthesizes prior research integrating multiple research streams and proposing a new theoretical framework and research agenda. Their findings reveal that scholars of privacy, service recovery and crisis communication management have adopted multiple theoretical lenses and methodological approaches. Such a fragmentation of theories and approaches in different research streams reveals the need for a comprehensive overview of the growing complexity of the phenomenon. Negri and Ieva conclude their study by providing a synoptic framework of key variables explaining how consumers react to service recovery after privacy failure.

In their paper *The drivers of the intention to cruise during the Covid-19 pandemic: the role of the willingness to share personal information*, Giorgia Profumo and Lara Penco start from evidence that the recent Covid-19 crisis has increased consumers' need or obligation to share personal data with companies, and investigate if such phenomenon impacts on their intention to buy. Their empirical study in the cruise industry investigates the mediating role of the willingness to share personal information in the relation between the intention to go on a cruise and different antecedents based on a sample of 661 Italian cruisers. Their findings show that, during the current Covid-19 scenario, the intention to go on a cruise was primarily affected by familiarity and reputation. Another interesting result is that the willingness to share highly sensitive information mediates the relation between trust in the personnel, familiarity, corporate reputation and the intention to go on a cruise.

Finally, Fabio Cassia and Francesca Magno, in their study *Data-driven use of cross-border e-commerce platforms and export performance: The mediating role of foreign market knowledge acquisition*, underline that cross-border e-commerce is gaining popularity as a foreign market entry mode. More specifically, many small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) choose to rely on digital e-commerce platforms (or marketplaces) that provide them with inexpensive and rapid access to a large base of potential foreign customers. However, the few available studies on this topic have implicitly assumed that SMEs embrace this channel with the sole intent of increasing their export sales (i.e., to exploit existing opportunities).

They argue that SMEs can also implement a data-driven approach that uses cross-border e-commerce platforms as inexpensive tools to acquire foreign market knowledge by leveraging the large volume of data that is available on these digital platforms. Cassia and Magno propose a conceptual model in which a firm's exploration-driven use of cross-border e-commerce platforms enhances foreign market knowledge acquisition, which improves both the overall export performance of the firm and the exploitation of foreign opportunities through e-commerce. The model was tested on a sample of 110 Italian exporters belonging to the food and beverage industry. Their findings highlight that the exploration-driven use of cross-border e-commerce platforms has a positive relationship with the export performance of firms. Moreover, the results demonstrate that this effect is fully mediated by the level of foreign market knowledge (about customers, competitors, market conditions, business laws and regulations) that is acquired through the use of cross-border e-commerce platforms.

At the end of this presentation of the Special Issue, as guest editors we would like to take this opportunity to thank the authors who contributed to making this issue interesting and insightful, the Journal Editorial Team for the opportunity they gave us to select such interesting studies, the Editor in chief and the Co-Editor in chief, Prof. Marta Ugolini and Prof. Alberto Pastore, for their guidance during the various steps of the review process and, last but not least, Laura Ciarmela and Ada Rossi for their continuous support in the making of the issue.

Finally, we would like to wholeheartedly thank Salvio Vicari once more for his mentorship, friendship, and indisputable contribution to our growth as scholars and as human beings.

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