

EXPLORING MODERN CHALLENGES: DIVERSE INSIGHTS INTO MANAGEMENT, COMMUNICATION, AND TECHNOLOGY. EDITORIAL*

This year's special issue of INDECS presents a rich and diverse collection of research articles that investigate contemporary challenges and innovations across various fields, including management practices, integrated marketing communication, technological advancements, and social dynamics within different industries. These articles contribute significantly to our understanding of how these elements shape and influence modern business and societal practices, offering both theoretical insights and practical applications.

On September 14-16, 2023, the 9th Enterprise Research Innovation Conference (ENTRENOVA) was held both virtually and in Dubrovnik, Croatia, providing a dynamic platform for the latest research, trends, and discussions in these areas. Organised by IRENET (Society for Advancing Innovation and Research in Economy) in collaboration with several academic institutions, the conference attracted over 159 researchers from 24 countries, who presented 68 abstracts and 40 papers. This special issue of INDECS features extended versions of selected conference papers alongside other contributions that align with the conference's themes.

The first article, "Attitudes of Landspítali's Managers toward Lean Management", authored by Kristjana Guðjónsdóttir, Eðvald Möller, Eydís Ý. Rosenkjær and Vigdís Hallgrímsdóttir investigates the implementation of lean management practices at the National University Hospital of Iceland. The study provides a comprehensive evaluation of the current state of lean management, assessing its effectiveness and examining the factors influencing managerial attitudes. Through a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative analyses, the research highlights the critical importance of communication, ongoing training, and leadership commitment in fostering a culture of continuous improvement. The findings underscore the need for enhanced education and the establishment of dedicated training initiatives to ensure the successful adoption of lean practices in healthcare environments.

The second article, "The Myth of Influences: Does Generation Z Really Trust Them?", authored by Ruža Iva Jurišić, Krešimir Dabo, and Matilda Kolić Stanić, explores the relationship between Generation Z and social media influencers, focusing on how younger audiences perceive these digital opinion leaders. Through a combination of qualitative content analysis and quantitative survey research, the study investigates whether influencers effectively shape the attitudes and behaviours of Generation Z. The findings reveal a significant level of scepticism among Generation Z regarding the authenticity of influencer content, suggesting that while influencers play a visible role in digital communication, their ability to influence this demographic may be more limited than previously assumed. The research offers valuable insights into the dynamics of digital trust and the challenges of influencer marketing in a rapidly evolving social media landscape.

The third article, "Integrated Marketing Communication in Croatian Companies" by Mario Fraculj, Sara Brkanić, and Diana Plantić Tadić, offers an in-depth exploration of the adoption and effectiveness of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies among Croatian

companies. The study highlights a growing trend toward IMC, emphasising the critical importance of message consistency, personalisation, and innovation in marketing efforts. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, the authors identify significant challenges, such as inter-departmental coordination and the optimisation of IMC strategies, that need to be addressed to realise the full potential of IMC. Despite these challenges, the study reveals that Croatian companies recognise the strategic value of IMC as a tool for enhancing market visibility and competitive advantage.

The fourth article, “Manager Communication Style and Work Engagement of Employees in Healthcare Services” by Marko Antić, Ana Globočnik Žunac, and Ivana Martinčević, examines the impact of different managerial communication styles on the work engagement of nurses in the public healthcare system of Croatia. The study investigates how assertive, passive, and aggressive communication styles from nurse managers influence the engagement levels of their nursing staff. Based on data collected through an online survey, the findings reveal that assertive communication is positively associated with higher work engagement, while passive and aggressive styles negatively affect engagement. The authors emphasise the importance of assertive communication in fostering a supportive work environment, which is crucial for improving the overall quality of healthcare services. The study suggests that enhancing nurse managers’ communication skills, particularly in assertiveness, could lead to better employee engagement and patient care outcomes.

The fifth article, “Concessions without the Obligation to Pay a Concession Fee: The Croatian Case” by Goran Vojković and Božana Matoš, explores the legal and practical implications of awarding concessions without a concession fee in Croatia. This article delves into the intricacies of the Croatian Concessions Act of 2017, which allows for such exceptions under specific conditions, particularly in non-commercial activities where public interest is a priority. The authors analyse the conditions under which these concessions can be justified, with a focus on smaller Croatian ports where commercial viability may not be achievable. Through detailed legal analysis and case studies, the authors highlight the sensitive nature of these exceptions, advocating for rigorous justification to prevent potential misuse and to support sustainable regional development.

The sixth article, “In Board We Trust: The Role of Supervisory Board in Public Companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina” by Radoslav Barišić, Dženan Kulović, and Slaven Jurešić, provides an in-depth examination of the supervisory boards within public companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study explores the crucial role these boards play in corporate governance, particularly in the context of a country undergoing a complex socio-economic transition. By analysing the composition, roles, and effectiveness of supervisory boards, the authors assess their impact on strategic management and financial performance. The research emphasises the need for strong governance structures to navigate the challenges of economic transformation, making this study particularly relevant for policymakers and practitioners in similar contexts.

The seventh article, “Consumer Engagement with Sports Clubs on Social Media: Impact of Demographic Factors and Loyalty” by Željka Marčinko Trkulja, Dinko Primorac, and Ivana Martinčević, investigates how different socio-demographic variables and loyalty levels influence consumer engagement with sports clubs on social media platforms. The study focuses on various factors, such as gender, age, education, and employment status, and their impact on motivations, engagement, and outcomes related to following sports clubs online. The research

reveals significant differences in how these demographic groups engage with sports clubs, highlighting that younger fans are more motivated by personal identity and rewards, while older fans value empowerment more. Additionally, the study shows that students are more motivated by personal identity and information. In contrast, employees tend to express greater satisfaction with the social networks of the sports clubs they follow.

The eighth article, “Data Envelopment Analysis for Assessing Efficiency in Public Utilities with a Focus on Water and Sewerage Services” by Amra Gadžo, Benina Veledar, and Alma Osmanović Đaković, applies the Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) method to evaluate the operational efficiency of public water utility enterprises in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study uses asset value, number of employees, and total expenses as input indicators, while total revenue serves as the output indicator. The study highlights inefficiencies in resource usage, particularly in assets and labour, for some utilities. The authors conclude that DEA is an effective tool for identifying areas where public utilities can optimise resource allocation and improve overall efficiency, offering significant insights for policymakers and utility managers aiming to enhance service delivery in the public sector.

In summary, this editorial emphasises the broad scope of this special issue, which addresses vital topics ranging from management and marketing to technology and cultural diversity. The research presented offers valuable insights for academics and practitioners alike, providing practical guidance for navigating the complexities of today’s globalised and rapidly changing environment. We hope these contributions will inspire further research and stimulate ongoing discussions within the academic community and beyond.

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