

International Marketing Perspectives on Digital Platforms and Ecosystems

Special issue call for papers from International Marketing Review

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About the special issue

Digitalization has led to the emergence of platform business models that have disrupted many industries around the world and continue to transform the global economy (Nambisan, Zahra, and Luo 2019; Rangaswamy et al. 2020; Wirtz et al. 2019). Today, many of the world's most valuable companies – Apple, Amazon, Alphabet, Meta, Tencent, Alibaba – operate one or more digital platforms (McIntyre et al. 2021; Statista 2021). These platforms are internet-based and provide an interface (e.g., website or app) that facilitates interactions between different groups of users. Digital platforms typically generate revenue by charging some of their user groups (e.g., sellers or advertisers) fees for accessing their platforms or conducting transactions on them (Stallkamp and Schotter 2018). Prominent examples include *social media platforms*, such as Weibo, Facebook, and LinkedIn, which connect billions of users across the world and provide firms opportunities to interact with them (Sheth 2020); *online marketplaces*, such as Alibaba, Amazon, and Etsy, which bring buyers and sellers of products and services together (Bei and Gielens 2020); and *sharing economy platforms*, such as Uber, Didi, and Airbnb, which allow users to provide other users (“peers”) access to an underutilized asset, such as a room or a car (Kozlenkova et al. 2021).

Due to their modular architecture and scalability, digital platforms can grow into large ecosystems incorporating diverse sets of actors who contribute different resources and capabilities to the process of value co-creation. In fact, the locus of value creation is not inside but outside the platform, which calls for new insights to understand the complex, multilateral interactions among platform providers and its users (Li et al. 2019). The complexity of digital platforms and associated ecosystems, paired with their enormous economic footprint, has sparked much interest across different disciplines, such as management (e.g., McIntyre and Srinivasan 2016), information systems (e.g., Constantinides, Henfridsson, and Parker 2018),

international business (e.g., Brouthers, Geisser, and Rothlauf 2016), and marketing (e.g., Rangaswamy et al. 2020).

Marketing plays a key role in attracting users to a platform, increasing the number and quality of interactions that take place on it, reducing transaction costs for its users, and lowering a platform's production costs (Rangaswamy et al. 2020).

Accordingly, marketing scholars have shed light on various phenomena related to digital platforms, such as consumers' adoption behavior, user- and firm-generated content, online brand communities, electronic word-of-mouth, product reviews, customer trust, and online conflicts (Chandrasapth et al. 2021; Dwivedi et al. 2021; Lamberton and Stephen 2016). Overall, these efforts provide rich insights into the nature, mechanisms, and outcomes of online relationships, defined as relational exchanges that are mediated by digital platforms (Steinhoff et al. 2019). However, few studies on digital platforms have adopted an international perspective (notable exceptions include recent contributions by Agnihotri et al. 2022, Bei and Gielens 2020, Kozlenkova et al. 2021, Kumar, Nim, and Agarwal 2021, Nam and Kannan 2020, and Steinhoff et al. 2022).

Extant studies' limitation to specific domestic markets is problematic. The huge economic potential of most digital platforms lies in the very fact that they are scalable beyond the borders of a single market (Nambisan, Zahra, and Luo 2019). Many digital platforms are "born globals" in that they are designed to expand internationally shortly after their inception (Monaghan, Tippmann, and Coviello 2020). For example, founded in 2009, Uber started expanding internationally after just two years and managed to enter almost 70 countries in only six years (Ghemawat 2016). Yet, contrary to common misconceptions, the digital economy is not entirely location-agnostic nor fully independent of national contexts (Shaheer 2020; Steinhoff et al. 2022). Indeed, entering foreign markets can pose substantial challenges to digital platforms. For example, Uber sunk over \$2 billion before giving up on its ambitions to conquer the Chinese ride-sharing market (Kozlenkova et al. 2021). The company's failure in China was attributed to its inability to navigate the market's cultural, political, and economic complexities (Kozlenkova et al. 2021; Salomon 2016). This assumption is corroborated by recent conceptual work suggesting that the effectiveness of consumer engagement strategies likely depends on cultural, institutional, societal, and economic contingency factors (Steinhoff et al. 2022). Such country-level contingencies may also explain why we observe fundamental cross-national differences in digital platforms' architecture and user behaviors. For example, Alibaba's Taobao Live hosts live-stream shopping events that combine e-commerce with social media features, such as a chat function and reaction buttons (Cooper 2021). Today, two-thirds of Chinese consumers have purchased products

via live streams (Arora et al. 2020), while no comparable platform has yet emerged in the West. Indeed, China has developed a unique digital ecosystem, with little to no involvement of firms that dominate Western markets, and is deemed the world's most digital and efficient consumer market (Wirtz, Lin, and Das 2022).

These observations underscore the need for adopting an international perspective in studying digital platforms and ecosystems. "Context matters in marketing," as Sheth (2020) puts it, "and it matters even more in international marketing" (p. 3) because of the variety of contextual factors that may moderate or mediate effects of interest. Due to the lack of research with an international focus, international marketing scholars face a "blue ocean" of research opportunities related to digital platforms and ecosystems.

This special issue seeks to push the boundaries of international marketing research by publishing original work on digital platforms, such as *social media platforms* (e.g., social networks, content sharing & curation platforms, micro-blogs, discussion forums, consumer review sites), *online marketplaces* (e.g., B2B platforms, B2C platforms, C2C platforms), *sharing economy platforms* (e.g., lodging, ride-sharing, freelancing, crowd-funding), and *hybrid platform types* (e.g., social/live commerce platforms). We welcome any conceptual or empirical (qualitative or quantitative) work that sheds light on (1) the role of international marketing constructs (e.g., country-of-origin, psychic distance, ethnocentrism, cosmopolitanism) in the context of international interactions and exchanges on digital platforms, (2) cross-national differences (e.g., China vs. the U.S. vs. Europe) concerning relevant phenomena, such as consumer privacy and personal data protection (e.g., corporate digital responsibility), platform architecture and designs (e.g., platform governance and regulation), and market structures (e.g., digital maturity, competitive intensity, entrepreneurial ecosystems), or (3) culture-specific phenomena that have been neglected by the mainstream (Western-centric) marketing literature. The scope of the special issue includes, but is not limited to, the following topics:

Platform	Topic	Example questions
Social media platforms	User motivations and behaviors	In what ways do consumers' SNS-related motivations and behaviors, such as interacting with branded content, diverge across countries?
	Content diffusion / virality	Does the diffusion of content in social media follow similar patterns worldwide? What characteristics make content go viral in different markets?
	Behavioral consequences	To what extent does brand buzz drive sales? Do sales elasticities vary across countries? Which factors explain potential cross-country variations?

Platform	Topic	Example questions
	Brand communication	How should brands communicate across different social media channels and countries? Which communication style (e.g., tone of voice) works best? What scheduling of content is most effective in different markets, and why?
	Customer engagement	What tools are most effective in promoting cognitive, affective, and behavioral customer engagement? To what extent do country-level factors, such as cultural, institutional, societal, and economic aspects, moderate their effectiveness?
	Customer complaints and online firestorms	Does customers' propensity to complain publicly differ, and why? What events have a high vs. low potential to spark online firestorms in different markets? How can brands best detect and mitigate online firestorms in different markets?
	Influencer Marketing	What role do influencers play for consumer attitudes and product adoption in different markets? In what markets do macro- vs. micro- influencers work better, and why?
	Misinformation	What drives the creation and circulation of fake content (e.g., fake news) in SNS? What impact does it have on societies, including businesses, around the world?
	Data privacy	How do consumers worldwide view the privacy-personalization paradox? What explains consumers' level of awareness and concern for data privacy? How can platforms effectively address such concerns in different markets?
Online marketplaces	Relationship marketing	How can digital platforms effectively increase buyers' and sellers' trust in their foreign counterparts? What incentives (e.g., monetary vs. non-monetary) work best to enhance user loyalty in different markets?
	Product reviews	How do culturally shaped communication styles affect product reviews? How does culture influence consumers' processing of product reviews? What incentives work best to stimulate product reviews?
	Fraudulent ("fake") reviews	What characteristics of a product review lead consumers to (not) trust it? To what extent do the antecedents and consequences of product review trustworthiness vary across cultures?
	Infringement / counterfeiting	How prevalent are counterfeits in the international marketplace, and what measures can platforms and sellers take to combat them?
	Platform architecture and design	To what extent do consumers' preferences for curated offers vs. matched offers vary across cultures, and why? What cultural, institutional, societal, and economic factors are conducive or detrimental to specific monetization strategies?
	Social shopping	How does social shopping (e.g., live-stream shopping) evolve globally? What makes social shopping successful in different markets?

Platform	Topic	Example questions
	Marketing program standardization / adaptation	What implications does a firm's decision to distribute its products/services through an online marketplace have for its international marketing strategy (i.e., product, promotion, and pricing)?
	Country-of-origin	To what extent does the country-of-origin of sellers and their products or services matter to buyers in online marketplaces?
Sharing economy platforms	User experience	What expectations do users have towards the sharing experience (e.g., user interface design, customer journey, service levels)? What aspects of the sharing servicescape matter most in satisfying customers?
	Customer engagement	How can sharing economy platforms engage peer service providers and customers to ensure high service levels and foster their loyalty? To what extent is the success of such engagement strategies contingent on cultural, institutional, societal, and economic factors?
	Consumer trust and protection	How can platforms effectively enhance trust between customers and peer service providers? What role do cross-cultural differences in the need for safety and trust in others play?
	User misbehavior	What (cultural) factors explain the level of care with which users engage with a shared resource? What governance mechanisms (e.g., deposits, penalties) are most effective in different markets to reduce unwanted user behaviors (that may negatively affect other users' experience)?
	Service failure and recovery	What service failure and recovery strategies work best in different markets, and why? How can platforms help overcome cross-cultural barriers in international problem-solving processes?
	Corporate digital responsibility	To what extent do the benefits and costs of corporate digital responsibility (CDR) vary across countries? How much do consumers worldwide value good CDR? What country factors explain differences in the CDR calculus?
	Societal impact	What impact does the sharing economy have on society (e.g., socio-economic, ecological)? What platforms drive social innovation and improve consumer well-being, and how? What regulatory actions may help to reduce their negative consequences ("dark sides")?
	Prosumers	To what extent are "prosumers" from different cultures (e.g., varying in masculinity and power distance) comfortable with their dual role and associated responsibilities? What role may international prosumers play in product and service innovations?

Relevant research should have implications for international market selection and entry strategies, customer acquisition and retention (relationship marketing), customer engagement strategies, product development and launch strategies, pricing and promotion strategies, brand communication, crisis communication, service failure and recovery strategies, online community management, content seeding strategies, influencer marketing, or public policy.

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Submission information

All papers will be subjected to double-blind peer review. Please check the section “[Author guidelines](#)” on the journal’s official website for further information about the expected format of prospective submissions.

Please submit the manuscript to: <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/imrev>

Submission window opens: **June 1, 2023**

Submission window closes: **September 1, 2023**

Feedback opportunities prior to submission

1. Virtual Event “IMxDigital”, April 20/21, 2023. Submission deadline: January 30, 2023. Further details on this event, featuring presentations of selected submissions, will follow on October 1, 2022 at www.digital-platforms.info.
2. Special session at the 2023 Global Marketing Conference, Seoul (South Korea), July 20-23, 2023. Further details on the conference (including the submission process) are available at <https://2023gmc.imweb.me/>.

Please note that participation in the virtual event or special conference session is not required for submitting a paper to the special issue. We offer these events to support prospective authors in developing their work before entering the peer-review process.

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