

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE OF CULTURAL ASPECTS OF E-COMMERCE**

The global connectivity, accessibility and interoperability of the Internet have contributed greatly to the rapid proliferation of e-commerce around the world. While a growing array of innovative e-commerce applications have been designed and deployed to reduce or remove business barriers that result from geographic dispersion, temporal difference or national borders, cultural diversity remains a critical challenge to business organizations that currently participate in this global market-space or plan to do so in the near future. Towards this, a fundamental but crucial issue is to understand important effects and/or implications of cultural differences on e-commerce across nations.

Several questions are essential and deserve our research attention. For instance, will individuals with varying ethnic backgrounds use the Internet or e-commerce differently? Will consumers from various cultures exhibit significantly different online shopping behaviors? Will business organizations located in different countries perceive or evaluate e-commerce in a considerably dissimilar manner? If the answers to these and related questions are affirmative, we then have to examine their implications for e-commerce (business) strategies, operations, and system designs.

We had received a total of twenty-four submissions of which, after two rounds of review, seven were accepted for publication in this special issue devoted to cultural dimensions of e-commerce. These papers examine different cultural aspects of e-commerce and collectively have contributed to our increased awareness and understanding of their effects and implications. The first paper by Muthitacharoen and Palvia investigates and compares online shopping behaviors by consumers in the United States of America (USA) and Thailand. The second paper by Hornby et al. is a case study that compares perceived barriers and impacts of e-commerce by small exporters in Australia and the United Kingdom. The third paper by Lee et al. examines the usage patterns of mobile Internet exhibited by Korean and Japanese consumers and proposes a value structure for investigating cultural differences in mobile Internet usage. The fourth paper by Pavlou and Chai extends the Theory of Planned Behavior to identify key intention determinants for online transactions using subjects from the USA and China, and analyzes the comparative results based on the cultural dimensions discussed by Hofstede. The fifth paper by Rettie explores noticeable culture changes made the Internet by comparing the attitudes of the “Net” generation with those prevailing among individuals from an earlier generation. The sixth paper by Becker investigates cultural barriers that affect Web design and usability evaluations. Last but not least, the seventh paper by Yap examines key elements that are likely to lead to the elite fitness in e-commerce and discusses their cultural implications.

Each accepted paper highlights a different but relevant cultural aspect of e-commerce and thus advances our knowledge about important effects and/or implications of cultural diversity in the global virtual market-space. Although not comprehensive, findings from the reported studies definitely have contributed to e-commerce research and practices. We thank all the authors and reviewers for their valuable contributions to this special issue. It is our hope that researchers and practitioners will address key cultural dimensions of e-commerce and that readers of this issue will enjoy reading these selected articles.