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## Editorial

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**Biographical notes:** Piet Kommers is a Professor from the UNESCO Learning Technologies affiliated with the Universities of Twente and Utrecht, The Netherlands. His specialty is social media for communication and organisation. As a co-Chair of the IADIS multi-conference, he initiated the conferences of web-based communities and social media, e-society, mobile learning and international higher education. He is a Professor at the UNESCO Institute for Eastern European Studies in Educational Technology and Adjunct Professor at the Curtin University in Perth, Australia.

Margriet Simmerling is a Peer Consultant/Senior Manager for R&D projects in the area of e-society and web-based communities. She participated in the advisory board for the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and is active as a reviewer for the European Commission. She designs and moderates e-learning modules and workshops in the domain of education technology and psychology at PhD level.

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Social media and web gatherings were fascinating in itself, regardless of its social and political effects. As we are now used to the vigilance of citizens in monitoring minute to minute actualities world-wide, another dimension is announcing itself through the articles of this new special issue of web-based communities; it is the fact that as an extrapolation of broadcasting media, social media are step by step ruling our collective awareness, even at a subliminal scale. Politics faces the job to control this process; however at a more subtle level marketers see the same option and progress quickly in doing the same. Good examples are multinationals who see the magnitude of investing in branding, reputation and identity control via social media. Initially, public opinions were seen as inevitable side effects of explicit messages in media campaigns. Through the penetration of social media, we now see that the implicit messages come through much stronger than in the mass media before. Recognising that fake news can be orchestrated just by manually manipulating the many smaller pieces of information, we see now too that the power of 'one-switch tuning' by one of the big social media suppliers can even exert more impact

upon what citizens ‘feel’ after been exposed to their daily portion of Facebook, Twitter and Google findings. In other words: Social media providers inevitably land in a similar position as the broadcasters before; the virtues of journalism, trust and customer-loyalty. Web-based communities can be seen as one of the counter balances to this ongoing trend in social media. The community-metaphor articulates ‘social proximity’ based upon location, age group, lifestyle, ideology, etc. In other words: just like local communities, the web community targets unity rather than diversity. Social media are hired by commercial parties and tend to differentiate ‘the citizen’ into profiles; the more we know about some-one’s unique feature, the more effective it can affect opinions and behaviour. Given the primary social genre of web-communities, it may even exceed the potential political momentum of the current generation of social media. This is the alertness we can see in the articles of this special issue; “fasten your seatbelts!”

In this issue we present research results and state-of-the-art report from Spain, Australia, India and Tunisia. Hot topic at the moment: how do web-based communities influence the politics in a country. Especially around election time, this issue arouse a lot of attention.

- 1 The article ‘Mapping the agenda-setting theory, priming and the spiral of silence in Twitter accounts of political parties’ presents a way for studying the relationships between political parties and the topics that are subject to public debate. Marc Blasco-Duatis, Germà Coenders, Marc Saez, Nuria Fernández García and Isabel Ferin Cunha use well-established statistical methodologies to discuss certain content in tweets regarding the Spanish political life during the 2015 elections. This article regards a quite recent and important aspect of European political life using sound statistical and visualising techniques.
- 2 The article ‘Investigating virtual communities of practice with social network analysis: guidelines from a systematic review of research’ contributes to the literature field by giving an overview of studies that applied the SNA method to vCoPs. Shazia K. Jan presents guidelines as a step towards development of a methodological framework with SNA as a key methodology for identifying and evaluating vCoPs. The key objective of the review is to assess the viability of SNA as a primary technique for investigating vCoPs by surveying, evaluating and consolidating previous research in the area. To achieve this objective, the review is guided by research questions.
- 3 The article ‘Racism and social media: a study in Indian context’ contributions to explaining how tweets from Twitter contain racist hate speech. Naganna Chetty and Sreejith Alathur presents a quantitative analysis of tweets. Hate speech is a common problem and an evaluation of it in a national context, especially with regards to national media institutions is important.
- 4 Smart cities are a big challenge. Decision makers face the task to transform cities in smart cities. In the article ‘A web-based platform for strategy design in smart cities’ Aroua Taamallah, Maha Khemaja and Sami Faiz propose a web-based platform which provides a space for strategies design and sharing. Suggestions for future research are provided.

- 5 The article ‘Lexicon-based Twitter sentiment analysis for vote share prediction using emoji and N-gram features’ contributes to the continued flow of papers in relation to analysing tweets as a predictor of some phenomenon. Barkha Bansal and Sangeet Srivastava use statistical methods to employ Twitter sentiment analysis (TSA) to monitor and forecast elections. An analysis of emojis contained in tweets is also incorporated.