

CALL FOR PAPERS

Global Connectivity in a World of Disruptions

Guest Editors:

Snehal Awate, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, India - snehal.awate@iitb.ac.in

Ram Mudambi, Temple University, USA - ram.mudambi@temple.edu

Vittoria G. Scalera, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands – v.g.scalera@uva.nl

Andreas Schotter, Ivey Business School, Canada - aschotter@ivey.ca

BACKGROUND TO SPECIAL ISSUE

It is obvious that human connectivity is the basis of all civilization. A simple thought experiment, considering the standard of living any one of us would obtain in a Robinson Crusoe like situation on a desert island, is enough to establish this. Yet the very obviousness of the crucial nature of connectivity leads us to take it for granted, much like the air we breathe. And like any essential requisite, it is only through disruption that we recognize its true nature.

Examining extant data illustrates that human capital and energy generate exponential returns when reinforced by inter-personal connectivity (Galperin and Vicens, 2017). Technology-based infrastructural networks have been the prime driver of connectivity since the industrial revolution. It began with transportation technologies of the 19th and 20th century (ships, railroads, aircraft, containerization), and continues in the 21st century in the form of IT and digital based technologies. Widespread technology diffusion has underpinned the hockey stick association between enablers of human connectivity and human prosperity (McCloskey, 2013).

In this context, it is important to distinguish between the fundamentally different aspects of technology – (a) speed; (b) quality; and (c) reliability.

- (a) Ever since the widespread diffusion of the telegraph in the nineteenth century, connectivity has been possible at the *speed* of electrical impulses. While these signals travel a bit slower than the speed of light through copper cables, they enable connectivity that is virtually instantaneous over terrestrial distances.
- (b) Over the century and a half since the telegraph, the *quality* of connectivity enabled by IT based technology has been constantly improving. However, there was a discontinuous change at the end of the twentieth century with the development of the Internet and worldwide web that was built on top of it. The capabilities and the very nature of businesses were transformed to incorporate high quality instantaneous connectivity.
- (c) Finally, the *reliability* of connectivity was also fundamentally altered by the Internet, that is a system that was originally designed to withstand a thermonuclear war. Businesses have come to depend on ever higher quality connectivity with near 100% reliability.

The widespread availability of instantaneous, high quality, highly reliable connectivity, that is virtually free, underpins most of the realities of the twenty first century global economy. A second contemporaneous phenomenon is the rise of a class of globally mobile knowledge workers (Saxenian, 2006). These two phenomena – the “hard” technology-based infrastructural networks and “soft” inter-personal (primarily diaspora) networks – have braided together to create an unprecedented level of global connectivity. This has ensured that the 21st century economy has witnessed fundamentally different characteristics and outcomes as compared to its 20th century predecessor.

These include the rise and incredible speed of catch-up in emerging economies and industry laggards (e.g., Awate et al., 2012; Cano-Kollmann et al., 2018; Enderwick and Buckley, 2021), rapidly declining innovation cycle times of technologies, new forms of collaborations and partnerships between organizations and individuals who are increasingly geographically dispersed (e.g., Ambos et al., 2021; Gereffi, 2019). Further, we now see different and richer patterns of location choices by multinational enterprises (MNEs) in locating their subsidiaries and setting up their value chains (Castellani et al., 2021; Goerzen et al., 2013; Useche et al., 2021). The current century has witnessed the phenomenon of new global industries from social media and internet-based businesses to digital platform businesses (Stallkamp and Schotter, 2021), including ride and home sharing that arise seemingly overnight, accompanied by unicorn firms (e.g., Fraccastoro et al., 2021; Reuber et al., 2021).

These dramatic improvements of connectivity, through both hard and soft networks, have been associated with exponential increases in the transmission of information and knowledge, goods and services, and entertainment, as well as in the mobility of people, with positive implication on the flexibility, creativity, and innovativeness of individuals and organizations (Makarius et al., 2020; Marino et al., 2020; Scalera et al., 2018). But increased connectivity also implies increased interdependence and complexity, and increased risk from disruption. Every location on Earth today is exposed to risk from almost every other location, emphasizing even more the interdependency of MNEs' decisions and the key role played by their network of resources (Gereffi, 2020; Meyer et al., 2020).

AIMS AND SCOPE OF THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

These new scenarios represent challenges for existing theories adopted in the International Business literature and should stimulate scholars to assess, and eventually revise, current models and their assumptions to predict and explain MNEs' decision and performance. MNEs that can leverage information and knowledge from ideally anywhere in the world are exposed to disruptions that can originate far from their centers of operation. Local disruptions can rapidly become global and involve different actors and organizations across global value chains. While disruptions have been widely studied, their link to connectivity largely remains underexplored (Jackowska and Luring, 2021; Lorenzen et al., 2020; Schotter, 2021).

On the one hand, connectivity spreads disruptions and poses a challenge to MNEs. On the other hand, connectivity may help ride over the disruptions. Increased virtual communications, enabled by the internet connectivity, has helped several kinds of MNE activities to continue during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the disruptions to normal human based face-to-face contact. Work-from-anywhere is becoming a new normal in some professions where it does not affect worker productivity (Choudhury et al., 2020).

The disruptions also highlight the drawback of concentrated supply centers and the resulting disruptions to global supply chains. The supply disruptions during COVID-19 pandemic are particularly acute in certain industries, for example the semiconductor chip industry (Vicente, 2021), and the associated industries such as graphics card (Molloy, 2021), as well as auto parts and drug manufacturing industries (Shih, 2020).

Global connectivity has indeed enabled the catch-up of emerging market-based firms (Mudambi, 2008), through their initial participation in global value chains at a lower value position and then upgrading to perform higher value adding activities. Anecdotal evidence points out that, as a result of disruptions, some firms may lose business due to their location, while others pick up the slack (Whalen, 2021).

POTENTIAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This special issue solicits research that analyzes the concept of connectivity from different perspectives and level of analysis (e.g., individuals, teams, organizations, global value chains, industries, countries, cities, clusters) (e.g., Breman et al., 2020; Lorenzen et al., 2020). We are particularly interested in studies that focus on the links between the generic forms of human connectivity, through organizational pipelines, personal relationships (Goerzen, 2018; Lorenzen and Mudambi, 2013; Perri et al., 2017; Schotter et al., 2017), geographic and technological networks (Awate and Mudambi, 2018), and the diverse forms of global disruptions across different worldwide locations characterized by heterogeneous quality of institutions and infrastructures (Kumar et al., 2013). Global disruptions include public health (for example, pandemics - Asian flu, SARS, COVID19), geopolitics (for example, regime changes - both electoral and coups, populist policy changes, wars), as well as technologies (for example, the rise of social media, 3-D printing, AI), and many others.

In addition, we are interested in research that examines implications of these forms of disruptions on two action items - MNE strategy and public policy. Typically, the MNE's strategic response must be to maximize the resilience of firm performance metrics, while the public policy response must be to maximize the resilience of social processes.

The following list of a few potential research questions may be helpful in identifying some interesting potential topic for this special issue. It is by no means an exhaustive list.

1. To what extent are connectivity-enabled new work patterns generalizable to different tasks and industries? What do they mean for MNE strategy (e.g., location choices, entry mode decisions)?
2. How can MNEs benefit from greater connectivity to ride over disruptions, given that they are already geographically dispersed?
3. If today global value chains are reorganized as a response to disruptions, what does it mean for firms in locations heavily affected by such disruptions? How does firms' location affect their participation in global business and catch-up? How does this dynamic play out across various industries?
4. How does the connectivity across the MNE's internal network enable the re-configuration of MNE's global activities in response to disruptions?
5. How can MNEs leverage different forms of human connectivity to respond to global disruptions?
6. Which forms of connectivity are more effective to minimize the MNEs' exposure to disruptions?
7. What type of governmental policy affecting connectivity at different levels (e.g., local, national, supranational) would facilitate MNEs' response to disruptions?

SUBMISSION PROCESS AND DEADLINES

Authors can submit their paper between March 15th and May 1st 2022 to *JIM* for review. All papers will be reviewed following the JIM double-blind review process and should be prepared using the JIM Guidelines, which can be reviewed at https://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/601266?generatepdf=true.

Authors should submit an electronic copy of their manuscript via the journal's online submission system via <https://www.editorialmanager.com/intman/default.aspx>.

The editors welcome informal enquiries related to proposed topics.

Manuscript Development Workshop:

The guest editors of the Special Issue will hold a manuscript development workshop, which will be online or hyflex. Details will be communicated to submitting authors. Authors of manuscripts who receive an invitation to revise and resubmit for a second round of review will be invited to attend this workshop. Presentation at the workshop does not guarantee acceptance of the paper for publication in JIM. Conversely, attendance is not prerequisite for publication in the special issue.

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