

# RECOGNIZING UNDERREPRESENTED ETHNIC GROUPS THROUGH ICT: AN EXPLORATION OF TWO-SPIRIT WEBSITES

**Jose Ortiz**

California State University, Los Angeles

*SUMMARY: While the information systems literature has provided insights into the economic impact of websites, little is known about the implications for the development of underrepresented ethnic groups. This paper presents an exploratory analysis of Two-Spirit websites. Many gender and sexual and minority Indigenous Peoples in North America use Two-Spirit to describe their gender and sexual identity. The analysis of the Two-Spirit websites uncovered four themes: mission, identity, remembrance, and unity, which reflect the interconnectedness of ethnicity and sexuality embodied in Two-Spirit. This paper recognizes the use of websites by Indigenous Peoples in North America to free themselves from societal marginalization.*

## Introduction

Websites are one of the most prolific forms of information and communication technology (ICT). The information systems (IS) research literature has examined the different ways in which websites generate value for organizations, such as enabling more efficient and more innovative forms of buying and selling goods and services (Winter et al., 2003), e-government (Carter & Bélanger, 2005), and new venues for political campaigns (Wattal et al., 2010). While this literature has provided insights into the economic implications of websites, little is known about the implications for the development of underrepresented ethnic groups (Lin & Myers, 2015; Young, 2018). A review of the ICT for development (ICT4D) literature reveals that development projects often focus on fostering economic growth or material progress through developmental agencies bringing technology to impoverished communities (Díaz Andrade & Urquhart, 2012). Thus, this literature has yet to recognize cultural initiatives that promote the development of underrepresented ethnic individuals and their communities.

On the other hand, the literature on gender and sexual minorities has lent insights into the different forms of support these populations can obtain from ICT in navigating their stigmatized identities. For example, gender and sexual minorities often rely on social networking and blogging sites to cope with the constraints of their immediate social settings (Brandt & Carmichael, 2020). ICT can also be helpful for these populations by improving self-acceptance (Harper et al., 2016), reducing feelings of loneliness (Taylor et al., 2017), and facilitating their coming out (Chester et al., 2016). While these studies shed light on the potential benefits of ICT for gender and sexual individuals, the literature tends to assume these populations experience discrimination in the same way, ignoring the dual stigmas of racism and homophobia (Fox & Ore, 2010; Kumashiro, 2001). Rates of suicidal thoughts have trended upward among gender and sexual minority people in the US over the last years, with the highest percentage among underrepresented ethnic groups (Powell, 2022), as these populations must often contend with the compounding effects of racism and homophobia (The Trevor Project, 2020). Given this reality, the ICT literature has yet to account for society's ethnic composition, including underrepresented

ethnic groups, in its inquiry into ICT's role in contributing to human development.

Motivated by these gaps in the research literature, this paper presents an exploratory analysis of Two-Spirit websites. The term Two-Spirit is used by many gender and sexual and minority Indigenous Peoples in North America to describe their sexual and gender identity (Jacobs et al., 1997; Wilson, 1996). The analysis uncovered four themes: *mission*, *identity*, *remembrance*, and *unity*, which reflect the interconnectedness of ethnicity and sexuality embodied in Two-Spirit. This manuscript recognizes initiatives by Indigenous Peoples in North America to develop websites that promote their identity and free themselves from societal marginalization.

### **Information and Communication Technology for Development**

The ICT for development (ICT4D) literature studies how ICT can improve people's lives (Qureshi, 2019). A review of the ICT4D literature by Young (2018) reveals two prevailing practices. First, many ICT4D projects focus on gifting or providing low-cost technology tools to economically deprived communities in their effort to bring progress (Díaz Andrade & Urquhart, 2012). A notable example of this practice is the provision of laptop computers to poor children (Odhabi, 2007), such as the One Laptop per Child (OLPC) project (Thomson, 2011) and Intel's Classmate PC (Murph, 2006). A problem with these practices is regarding ICTs as innately emancipatory (Young, 2018), assuming ICT4D users are merely passive recipients of the benefits of technology (Díaz Andrade & Urquhart, 2012). These practices thus fail to recognize people's initiative to engage with technology and use it innovatively to improve their condition.

Another prevailing practice is ICT4D projects' emphasis on fostering economic growth, which often prevails over enhancing socio-cultural practices and promoting cultural values (Thapa & Sæbø, 2014; Young, 2018). Zheng et al. (2018) discuss that development is broader than economic growth as it involves changes in social and political processes to shape social and cultural values toward improving people's living conditions. Therefore, the predominant economic orientation of ICT4D projects calls for a shift in focus toward using ICTs in cultural initiatives (Heeks, 2016), such as those that promote the recognition and development of Indigenous Peoples and their communities (Young, 2018). Echoing this call, Lin and Myers (2015) raise the question of considering the "renaissance of indigenous cultures in many parts of the world and see whether ICT4D can play a part in such initiatives" (p. 711). This research responds to these calls by studying and recognizing websites to promote the development of Two-Spirit peoples.

### **Two Spirit**

Indigenous Peoples coined the term Two-Spirit during the third Native American/First Nations Gay and Lesbian Conference held in Winnipeg, Canada, in 1990 (Thomas & Jacobs, 1999). Since then, the term has grown in acceptance as a self-descriptor among Indigenous Peoples to "proclaim a sexuality deeply rooted in their own cultures" (Wilson, 1996, p. 304). Many urban Indigenous Peoples have found in Two-Spirit a concept that embodies traditions of gender diversity within their respective tribes as an alternative to mainstream Western gay and lesbian identities (Jacobs et al., 1997).

Research studies on Indigenous Peoples of North America have exposed oppressive tactics intended to eliminate many aspects of Indigenous culture that date from the colonial

period (Brave Heart et al., 2011; Thornton, 2005). Despite these assaults, Native culture prevails and still shapes the lives and communities of Indigenous Peoples across North America (Wilson, 1996). “Today, most leaders in Indigenous communities express a commitment to traditional spirituality and an Indigenous worldview” (p. 306). Under this commitment, Two-Spirit people continue to work tirelessly to increase their recognition throughout Native communities and beyond.

### **An Exploration of Two-Spirit Websites**

This paper reports on an exploratory analysis of websites collected from the Two-Spirited People Web Resources preserved by the University of Winnipeg Library. The Two-Spirited People Web Resources consist of a curated selection of websites that pertain to Two-Spirit people (University of Winnipeg Library, 2019). The Two-Spirited People Web Resources is part of the Two-Spirit Archives initiative that centers on documenting the cultural heritage of Two-Spirit (Lougheed, 2016), thereby assisting the ongoing decolonization process of Indigenous Peoples (Smithers, 2022).

The analysis consisted of collecting and reviewing all the websites collected by the Two-Spirited People Web Resources. These consist of 78 websites collected since October 2019. Following the steps by Lacity and Janson (1994) for making sense of text data, the analysis consisted of (1) describing facts or social reality shared by all the webpages, (2) determining the meaning ascribed in each webpage, and (3) using coding procedures for identifying themes that serve as an interpretation of the webpages’ content. A common fact shared by all the webpages is recognizing the Two-Spirit identity. Building on this fact and guided by coding procedures standard in the IS literature (Birks et al., 2013), the analysis led to four themes describing the motives of Two-Spirit websites: *mission*, *identity*, *remembrance*, and *unity*, explained in the following paragraphs.

#### ***Mission***

Websites under this theme represent non-profit organizations that support and promote Two-Spirit causes. These websites often communicate courses of action by calling for participation in an activity or support of a cause. This theme thus relates to a sense of direction and purpose in social groups or organizations (Leidner & Kayworth, 2006). The website shown in Figure 1 communicates the work and actions carried out by a Two-Spirit organization, fostering a sense of mission as a value that “provides purpose and meaning” (Denison & Mishra, 1995, p. 216) to the followers and members of these organizations.

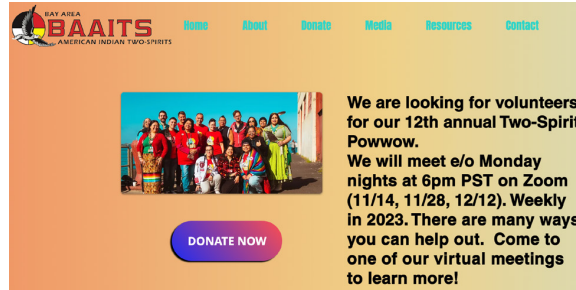
#### ***Identity***

Websites under this theme facilitate the identification of Two-Spirit people through life stories, conveying “internal locus” (Leidner & Kayworth, 2006). Internal locus refers to a person’s recognition of having control of their life and making personal life decisions instead of being controlled by luck or powerful others (Leidner & Kayworth, 2006; Smith et al., 1995). Websites expressing this value recognize Two-Spirit people as contributing members of society and the

personal merits of individuals who have excelled in various areas, such as music, scholarship, and science.

Figure 1

### Example of Mission



Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirits. (2022). BAAITS Home Page. Retrieved November 15, 2022, from <https://www.baaits.org/>

Figure 2

### Examples of identity

North · Video

#### 2-Spirit Cree singer releases video about journey from struggle to hope



19-year-old now works with Indigenous art and music programming group, inPath

Susan Bell, Betsy Longchap · CBC News · Posted: Feb 12, 2020 4:00 AM CT | Last Updated: February 12, 2020



Cree singer and art educator Angel Baribeau has released a single and video called Love is up the River about her journey to happiness and self-expression through art. (Submitted by N'we Jinan Records)

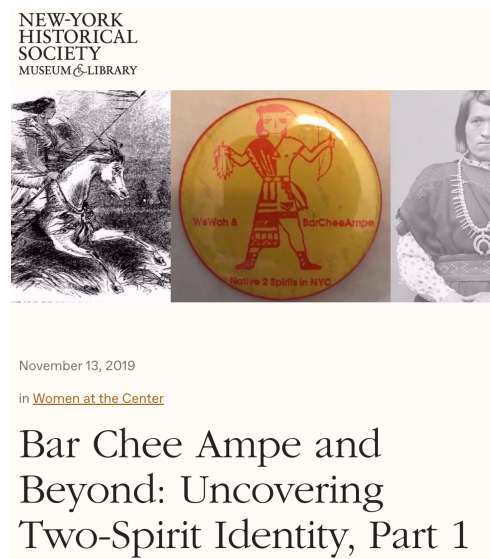
CBC Radio-Canada. (2022). 2-Spirit Cree singer releases a video about the journey from struggle to hope. Retrieved November 15, 2022, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/cree-mental-health-art-programming-angel-baribeau-1.5460008>

## **Remembrance**

These websites relate to past figures and events at different times in history. These websites express a “time-orientation” cultural value associated with people’s attitudes toward time (Leidner & Kayworth, 2006). Accordingly, these websites recognize Two-Spirit heritage and legacy.

Figure 3

### **Example of Remembrance**



*New-York Historical Society. (2022). Bar Chee Ampe and Beyond: Uncovering Two-Spirit Identity, Part 1. Retrieved November 15, 2022, from <https://www.nyhistory.org/blogs/two-spirit-identity-1>*

Accounts of the past are of central importance to Two-Spirit people due to the social and economic marginalization of North American Indigenous Peoples imposed by federal governments, often seen as colonizing powers (Wilson, 1996). Consequently, the presentation of Two-Spirit elements, like images of historical figures, artwork, and memorabilia, seeks to promote ethnic pride alongside an intent to establish links with a past “that had previously been severed by government policies and actions” (Wilson, 1996, p. 305).

## **Unity**

These websites show various actions taken together by a group of people. These websites contain elements reflecting the “supportiveness” value in their emphasis on collaboration, support, and the degree to which community members are helpful to one another (Leidner & Kayworth, 2006). These websites depict people united in pursuit of a common goal, reflecting the notion that people act collectively rather than individually because “they believe that there is strength in numbers” (Kendall, 2012, p. 601).

## Discussion

Myers and Klein (2011) describe three elements that lay the foundation of critical research in IS: *insight*, *critique*, and *transformation*. *Insight* provides a broad insightful understanding of the current situation before engaging in critical analysis. *Critique* reveals the normative basis of the current situation and the forms of legitimation that justify the current social order. It explicitly relates to the conditions of power and social asymmetries. *Transformation* suggests improvements to the conditions of human existence, existing social arrangements, and social theories.

Figure 4

### Example of Unity



*Native Youth Sexual Health Network. (2022). Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) Home Page. Retrieved November 15, 2022, from <https://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/>*

First, this short paper propitiates *insight* by identifying four themes on websites pertinent to the ethnic representation of gender and sexual minorities. These themes reveal the potential of ICT to promote the visibility of Two-Spirit people through the mediation of elements descriptive of their efforts to promote their causes.

Second, this paper describes websites where a historically marginalized community has developed and deployed ICTs on their own initiative. In doing so, this article joins the growing *critique* in the literature challenging prevailing practices in ICT for development projects. Research has demonstrated that participation from recipients is essential for the success of ICT4D projects (Heeks & Kanashiro, 2009; Young, 2018). Therefore, this article draws attention to projects centered on the “agency of individuals for social change” (Zheng et al., 2018, p. 8), as evidenced in the development of websites by Two-Spirit people.

Third, in line with Young (2018)’s study of website development and design by the Klamath tribes of North America, this paper lays out a path for promoting the *transformation* of a different Indigenous group, i.e., the Two-Spirit community. The development of websites by a once marginalized group to take back control of their identity narrative contributes to our understanding of how ICT can promote values oriented toward improving people’s living conditions.

The use of websites by Two-Spirit organizations to assist decolonization processes is a phenomenon that is hardly exclusive to North America. Nations in Latin America, Asia, and the

Pacific are home to Indigenous populations subject to historical marginalization and oppression. Future studies could compare this research's findings with efforts to promote inclusive online spaces in other countries. This study joins calls in the literature for research centered on recognizing the potential of ICT to support the development of underrepresented ethnic groups and other marginalized groups (Ortiz et al., 2019).

## References

- Birks, D. F., Fernandez, W., Levina, N., & Nasirin, S. (2013). Grounded theory method in information systems research: its nature, diversity and opportunities. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 22(1), 1-8.
- Brandt, S. A., & Carmichael, C. L. (2020). Does online support matter? The relationship between online identity-related support, mattering, and well-being in sexual minority men. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 111, 106429.
- Brave Heart, M. Y. H., Chase, J., Elkins, J., & Altschul, D. B. (2011). Historical Trauma Among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas: Concepts, Research, and Clinical Considerations. *Journal of psychoactive drugs*, 43(4), 282-290.
- Carter, L., & Bélanger, F. (2005). The utilization of e - government services: citizen trust, innovation and acceptance factors. *Information Systems Journal*, 15(1), 5-25.
- Chester, M. R., Sinnard, M. T., Rochlen, A. B., Nadeau, M. M., Balsan, M. J., & Provence, M. M. (2016). Gay men's experiences coming out online: A qualitative study. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 28(4), 317-335.
- Denison, D. R., & Mishra, A. K. (1995). Toward a Theory of Organizational Culture and Effectiveness. *Organization science*, 6(2), 204-223.
- Díaz Andrade, A., & Urquhart, C. (2012). Unveiling the modernity bias: a critical examination of the politics of ICT4D. *Information Technology for Development*, 18(4), 281-292.
- Fox, C. O., & Ore, T. E. (2010). (Un) Covering Normalized Gender and Race Subjectivities in LGBT 'Safe Spaces'. *Feminist Studies*, 36(3), 629-649.
- Harper, G. W., Serrano, P. A., Bruce, D., & Bauermeister, J. A. (2016). The Internet's Multiple Roles in Facilitating the Sexual Orientation Identity Development of Gay and Bisexual Male Adolescents. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 10(5), 359-376.
- Heeks, R. (2016). Seeking a New Link Between ICTs and Human Development. *Information Technologies & International Development*, 12(1), pp. 51-54.
- Heeks, R., & Kanashiro, L. L. (2009). Telecentres in mountain regions—A Peruvian case study of the impact of information and communication technologies on remoteness and exclusion. *Journal of Mountain Science*, 6(4), 320-330.
- Jacobs, S.-E., Thomas, W., & Lang, S. (1997). *Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality*. University of Illinois Press.
- Kendall, D. (2012). *Sociology in Our Times*. Cengage Learning.
- Kumashiro, K. K. (2001). Queer Students of Color and Antiracist, Antiheterosexist Education: Paradoxes of Identity and Activism. In *Troubling intersections of race and sexuality: Queer students of color and anti-oppressive education* (pp. 1-25). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

- Lacity, M. C., & Janson, M. A. (1994). Understanding qualitative data: A framework of text analysis methods. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 11(2), 137-155.
- Leidner, D. E., & Kayworth, T. (2006). A Review of Culture in Information Systems Research: Toward a Theory of Information Technology Culture Conflict. *MIS Quarterly*, 30(2), 357-399.
- Lin, C. I., & Myers, M. D. (2015). Extending ICT4D Studies: The Value of Critical Research. *MIS Quarterly*, 39(3).
- Lougheed, B. (2016). The Two-Spirited Collection. *Manitoba History*(80), 59-62.
- Murph, D. (2006). Intel announces specs, production dates for Classmate PC. *Engadget*. <https://www.engadget.com/2006-09-28-intel-announces-specs-production-dates-for-classmate-pc.html>
- Myers, M. D., & Klein, H. K. (2011). A Set of Principles for Conducting Critical Research in Information Systems. *MIS Quarterly*, 35(1).
- Odhabi, H. (2007). Investigating the impact of laptops on students' learning using Bloom's learning taxonomy. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 38(6), 1126.
- Ortiz, J., Young, A., Myers, M. D., Bedely, R., Carbaugh, D., H., C., Davidson, E., George, J., Gogan, J., Gordon, S., Grimshaw, E., Leidner, D., Pulver, M., & Wigdor, A. (2019). Giving Voice to the Voiceless: The Use of Digital Technologies by Marginalized Groups. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 45(2).
- Powell, T. (2022). 45% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered suicide in the past year, Trevor Project survey finds. *CBS News*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/lgbtq-youth-suicide-the-trevor-project-mental-health-2022/>
- Qureshi, S. (2019). Perspectives on development: why does studying information and communication technology for development (ICT4D) matter? *Information Technology for Development*, 25(3), 381-389.
- Smith, P. B., Trompenaars, F., & Dugan, S. (1995). The rotter locus of control scale in 43 countries: A test of cultural relativity. *International journal of psychology*, 30(3), 377-400.
- Smithers, G. D. (2022). *Reclaiming Two-Spirits: Sexuality, Spiritual Renewal & Sovereignty in Native America* (Vol. 10). Beacon Press.
- Taylor, S. H., Hutson, J. A., & Alicea, T. R. (2017). *Social Consequences of Grindr Use: Extending the Internet-Enhanced Self-Disclosure Hypothesis* Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems,
- Thapa, D., & Sæbø, Ø. (2014). Exploring the link between ICT and development in the context of developing countries: A literature review. *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*, 64(1), 1-15.
- The Trevor Project. (2020). *The Trevor Project Research Brief: American Indian/Alaskan Native Youth Suicide Risk*. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/american-indian-alaskan-native-youth-suicide-risk/>
- Thomas, W., & Jacobs, S.-E. (1999). "... And We Are Still Here": From Berdache to Two-Spirit People. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 23(2), 91-107.
- Thomson, I. (2011). Negroponte plans tablet airdrops to teach kids to read. *The Register*. [https://www.theregister.com/2011/11/02/negroponte\\_tablet\\_airdrops/](https://www.theregister.com/2011/11/02/negroponte_tablet_airdrops/)
- Thornton, R. (2005). Native American Demographic and Tribal Survival into the Twenty-first Century. *American Studies*, 46(3/4), 23-38.
- University of Winnipeg Library. (2019, June, 2022). *Two-Spirited People Web Resources*. Internet Archive. <https://archive-it.org/collections/12894>



- Wattal, S., Schuff, D., Mandviwalla, M., & Williams, C. B. (2010). Web 2.0 and Politics: The 2008 U.S. Presidential Election and an E-Politics Research Agenda. *MIS Quarterly*, 34(4), 669-688.
- Wilson, A. (1996). How We Find Ourselves: Identity Development and Two-Spirit People. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(2), 303-318.
- Winter, S. J., Saunders, C., & Hart, P. (2003). Electronic window dressing: Impression management with websites. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 12(4), 309-322.
- Young, A. G. (2018). Using ICT for Social Good: Cultural Identity Restoration through Emancipatory Pedagogy. *Information Systems Journal*, 28(2), 340-358.
- Zheng, Y., Hatakka, M., Sahay, S., & Andersson, A. (2018). Conceptualizing development in information and communication technology for development (ICT4D). *Information Technology for Development*, 24(1), 1-14.