

# Te Tiriti O Waitangi – Impact on IT

Soham Sarkar

Manukau Institute of Technology  
sark17@manukau.ac.nz

Alison Hunter

(Supervisor)  
Manukau Institute of Technology  
alison.hunter@manukau.ac.nz

## ABSTRACT

Information Technology (IT) has a huge impact on almost every aspect of our lives. Hence, IT should consider the culture and values of the society in which it has been developed. This research paper investigates the impact of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in today's IT industry, the representation of Māori culture and values in information systems, and the lack of usage of Te Reo Māori in information systems. The research also looks into the measures that IT industries in New Zealand are taking to address Māori issues.

**Keywords:** Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Te Reo Māori, Whakataukī, Taonga, Culture, Values, Information Technology (IT)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Information Technology (IT) is one of the most powerful tools of modern days. Hence, IT must ensure that everyone is served equally by IT systems. Otherwise, it will benefit only one portion of society, completely depriving others (Gifford, 2000) which is not a healthy trend for society.

Information systems express the culture in which they have been developed (Nissenbaum, 2001). And, being a product of the West, IT has traditionally embodied western culture and values. But when IT started spreading across the world, different groups of people tried to incorporate it with their culture and values. In New Zealand, IT systems were also initially developed within a Eurocentric worldview, without consideration of the culture and values of the indigenous people of New Zealand – Māori.

However, the second article of Te Tiriti o Waitangi confirms Māori right to self-determination. This includes the right for Māori to have their values and culture reflected in the IT systems they develop themselves or in those developed by others.

## 2. BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE

Māori have always been early adopters of new technologies. Whenever new technologies have emerged, they have used it to their own advantage. From the earlier days when Europeans started settling into New Zealand, Māori were quick to pick up their agricultural techniques, and were successful in providing large amount of fruit, pumpkins, maize, potatoes, kumara etc (Walker, 1990). Ian Taylor, CEO of Animation Research Ltd, has rightly stated that Māori have always been good with making use of tools made by others to match their own values (Middleton, 2016). Now that Māori have started adopting Information Technology, and have started using Information systems, the IT industry has started to realise the importance of considering their culture and values.

Different cultures have different attitudes, customs, beliefs, and values. However, language is the heart of any culture. People all around the world have fought for their rights to their own language. Like any other culture, Māori's native language, Te Reo Māori, is regarded as a taonga or treasure. It is one of the three fundamental ingredients of their culture along with whānau and land (Patterson, 1992). To Māori, language is like a window to their soul – “Ko taku reo taku ohooho, ko taku reo taku mapihi mauria” (Woodward, n.d.). However, due to the lack of usage, Te Reo Māori is in danger of becoming extinct. A recent data shows, in 2013 there were only 21.31% of people in the Māori ethnic group, who spoke Te Reo Māori (Stats NZ, 2013).

Moreover, with the risk of the language becoming extinct, Whakataukī or proverbs are similarly at risk. These proverbs reflect the thoughts, values, and advice of Māori ancestors (Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori, n.d.). Hence, losing these whakataukī would not only be loss of a mere historical artefact, rather Māori would lose a medium of communication with their ancestors (Mead & Grove, 2004).

It is high time that New Zealand's IT industry finally recognises Māori cultural values, and act in accordance with Te Tiriti to serve the common good for everybody in society, including Māori.

## 3. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this research was to investigate and reflect upon the:

1. Influence of Te Tiriti o Waitangi on the current IT industry
2. Expression of Māori culture in a website
3. Lack of IT systems allowing use of Te Reo Māori



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## 4. METHODOLOGY

Data for this research was gathered from publicly available secondary sources.

## 5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

One important ethical obligation is for a researcher to debate their position in relation to their research. I have come to New Zealand from India. This research is an attempt by me, who had no prior idea about Māori culture, to explore the culture and values, and to be aware of our responsibilities towards their culture as an IT professional. This being the first step of my exploration, many aspects of Māori culture may have been left untouched. Moreover, as for any other research, future work will likely improve my understanding.

This research did not involve any human participation. Hence, no ethical permission was required for that aspect.

## 6. DESIGN

As the title suggests, this research looks into how Te Tiriti o Waitangi influences the development of Information Technology. Hence, I used the image of the actual manuscript of Te Tiriti as a background patch, and the main content was written over this.

I used an image of a Marae as the base of the poster, because Marae is one of the most treasured belongings to Māori.

The “Double Koru” symbol was used as bullet points in the poster. Double Koru is a Māori art symbol that represents new beginning, growth, and re-generation.

In the title section, I used a Māori pattern similar to the New Zealand map in order to highlight the importance of Māori culture in New Zealand.

## 7. FINDINGS

The major findings of this research were:

### 7.1 Influence of Te Tiriti in IT Industry:

Although the treaty was signed in 1840 between the British Crown and Māori, it is still very relevant in today’s context. It can be looked upon as a contract between Pakeha and Māori. As IT professionals, to engage with the articles of this treaty, we need to consider Māori welfare; we need to acknowledge their right over anything precious to them, and hence take permission from them before using their taonga; we need to consider their rights and privileges along with everyone else when designing any IT system; and ensuring we do not act in a way that might disrespect their culture and values.

### 7.2 Māori Culture in a Website:

Now-a-days, a number of websites in New Zealand, especially the ones intended to be used by Māori, are incorporating many features to show their commitment to Māori culture and values. For example, the website of Te Puni Kōkiri has the option of translating the contents into Te Reo Māori; has a Whakataukī or Māori proverb written in each of their pages; uses the Double Koru symbol as their main logo, which represents new beginning and growth in Māori culture (Zealand Tattoo, n.d.).

### 7.3 IT and Te Reo Māori:

Most IT systems use English and do not allow usage of Te Reo Māori. This deprives Māori, who perhaps do not know English or prefer to use Te Reo, from their right to knowledge and their language. Moreover, lack of usage of the language is not motivating people to learn it, which has resulted in a reduction in the number of Māori speakers as stated before. Even the New Zealand Government’s website

<https://www.govt.nz> does not provide the option to translate into Te Reo Māori. However, recently some measures have been taken by the IT industry to create more IT systems that allow the use of Te Reo Māori. For example, Facebook has improved its Māori translation services, Google translate now includes Te Reo, and some renowned banks, such as ASB and Westpac have introduced Te Reo Māori in their ATMs.

## 8. CONCLUSION

To sum up, Māori have always adapted to new technologies quickly. Now that they are using IT systems more, as well as creating their own systems, the IT industry has started to realise the need to consider Māori culture and values. This also aligns with the IT Professionals New Zealand’s Code of Ethics principle of “Good Faith”, which requires IT professionals to treat all people with dignity and equality (IT Professionals New Zealand, n.d.). Hence, IT professionals need to be aware of the articles of the Treaty, and act accordingly when dealing with issues related to Māori in order to serve the greater good of society. The IT industry needs to realise that regardless of how old the treaty is, “the treaty is always speaking” (Kernot, McBride, Orange, Karetu, & Temm, 1989).

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