
Guest editorial

It is argued that we have transitioned from the Holocene to the Anthropocene (Edwards, 2015). The latter derived from the Greek *anthropo* “human” and *cene* “entire recent”, and thus the era in which humans are increasingly driving geological and ecological change on planet Earth. This understandably anthropological view of the power of humans to change their environment overlooks the elephant in the room: technology. It is really technology that has changed the planet, and increasingly the people who use it. But we hear you cry, people invent technology and thus humans are the prime cause. However, just as in biology, where humans are seen as vectors for genes (Dawkins, 1976), there is the nascent awareness that the same can be said of the relationship between humans and technology (cf. Kelly, 2010). Thus, we propose that we live in the *technopocene* – the era of technology. For it is technology that is transforming every aspect of our lives, of our environment and of ourselves.

In this special issue of the *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, there are eight papers in total. We look at how technology is transforming people, products and brands, and we also feature an additional paper contributed by the *Journal's* Senior Advisory Board as a part of the celebration of 25 years of the *Journal*. The lead paper is from Roderick Brodie and Maureen Benson-Rea, and uses a systematic literature review and an illustrative case study, and offers a new conceptualization of the process of country of origin branding. This is followed by seven papers on the theme of the special issue.

The first themed paper is “Consumer Generated Brand Extensions: Definition and Response Strategies” by Boon, Grant and Kietzmann. They explore how technology in the form of the internet and social media have facilitated the phenomenon of consumer-generated brand extensions. Using the popular card game “Magic: The Gathering” as a case study, they describe various consumer-generated brand extensions, outline the impact on the parent brand and explore the range of possible firm responses. A second paper on the transformative power of the internet and social media is “Transforming Celebrities Through Social Media: the Role of Authenticity and Emotional Attachment” by Kowalczyk and Pounders. They explore how technology is changing the way consumers and celebrities interact. Specifically, they explore how technologically mediated perceptions of authenticity impact emotional attachment and thus the subsequent behavior of consumers. A third paper in this theme looks at how Web 2.0 technology is transforming branding into an ongoing process of storytelling. Specifically, in “Storygiving as

a Co-Creation Tool for Luxury Brands in the Age of the Internet: a Love Story by Tiffany and Thousands of Lovers”, Ucock Hughes, Bendoni, and Pehlivan explore how technology has transformed the consumption and branding of luxury offerings. Focusing on Tiffany, they explore the strategy of storygiving, whereby luxury brand consumption experiences are created and shared by consumers.

Two papers look at how technology is changing the relationship between social actors. In “How Customer and Product Orientations Shape Political Brands”, Bigi, Treen and Bal use the Berthon *et al.* (1999) strategic orientations framework to explore political strategies and the ways in which technology is changing how political campaigns are run. In “Producer Push to Consumer Pull: Who Curates New Media Content? Developing Strategies For New Media Environments”, Chipp and Chakravorty explore how technology has transformed the relationship between producer and consumer, empowering the consumer so that increasingly they curate the content they consume rather than have their choices dictated by the producer.

Technology has had a long history of turning people into objects, symbols and products. Athletes have long advertised sponsoring firms on their clothes, and this has been taken to the next level with celebrities selling advertising real estate on their flesh. In “Tattooing and Brand Sponsorship: How Far is Too Far?”, Weidner, Bal, Rains and Leeds explore how consumers view sponsored tattoos on top athletes and how it changes perceptions of the brand and the athlete.

Finally, in “When Creative Consumers Go Green: Understanding Consumer Upcycling”, Wilson explores the fascinating practice of consumers’ repurposing products for innovative uses, and thus offers intriguing insights into technological transmutations (cf. Berthon *et al.*, 2005) where technologies take on trajectories very different from their creators’ original intentions.

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References

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