The Economist

Brands and Branding

Second Edition

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with

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Divided into three parts and 18 chapters and written by 19 experts on the subject, this second edition of *Brands and Branding* examines the case for brands, outlines best practice in branding and looks at the future for brands.

The case for brands
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The financial value of brands
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What makes brands great

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Brand protection

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£20.00

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Jacket design: BRILL

16 Brands 2.0 – brands in a digital world

Andy Hobsbawm

Ipsa Scientia Potestas Est. (Knowledge is power.)

Sir Francis Bacon, *Meditationes Sacræ. De Hæresibus*, 1597

Modern branding is a system heading for crisis. To understand why, we need to understand how profoundly networked digital information is changing everything. It is the lifeblood of the economies in which brands operate, it flows through the markets they serve, it forms and amplifies the culture they reflect, and it connects the societies in which their customers live. In other words, this digital connectivity is creating a brand new world which will need a new kind of brand.

There are five parts to this argument:

- The end of information monopolies. The shift from an industrial to a digital information age is changing the relationship between consumers and brands.
- Go with the flow. People sit at the centre of their social networks and information webs, into and around which all things swirl – including brands.
- Be a verb not a noun. Brands need to find active roles to play in this constantly agitating environment and generate a stream of innovations that connect with the passions of their communities.
- Be a guide not a gatekeeper. Brands need to interpret information when they can no longer be stand-ins for it.
- Brand new world. It's a time of accelerating and destabilising change and future consumers may choose to embrace or reject brands just as quickly.

The end of information monopolies

Modern branding came of age in an era of industrial information. At the end of the 19th century, new technologies had industrialised the economy, creating mass production and mass distribution for mass markets. Media industries like publishing and movie studios became part of this new breed of titanic corporations. They too were built on large-scale investments in modern infrastructure and the cultural goods they made (from newspapers and films to television shows) became mass manufactured, communicated and consumed much like Model T Fords.

Broadcast TV, radio and print advertising expanded with the economy and contributed to its growth by promoting new products through high-reach media channels. Populations were already moving into cities which became centres of gravity for making and selling this type of information. In urban environments it was easier to cluster around and share these universal stories and media messages made in factories of cultural meaning.

It was possible for Orson Welles's infamous CBS radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* in 1938 to cause widespread panic only because nearly 3m people were listening to the same broadcast and thought there was a real alien attack. In communication terms, this was an Orwellian world with big screens where central authorities told people what to think. In the case of brands, and sometimes governments, a progression of print, radio and as-seen-on-TV advertising was used to tell people that "Guinness is good for you", that "Your Country Needs You", or that Rice Krispies "Snap, crackle and pop".

Some of today's most enduring brands from Coca-Cola and Singer sewing machines to American Express were built in this way. This is how Coca-Cola could realistically claim to "teach the world to sing" in 1971 with a radio and television advertising jingle which became a top ten hit in the American and British music charts and has since spawned over 75 different cover versions (it is still one of the 100 best-selling singles of all time in the UK).

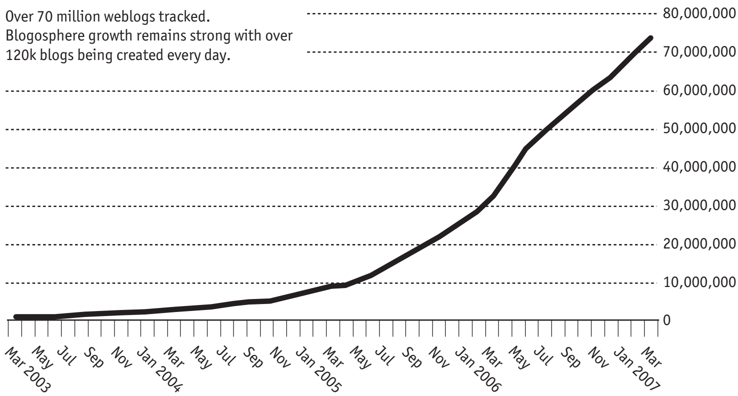
It was a society where large institutions dominated all forms of information – from news and entertainment to details about products and the companies that made them. Brands became a way of summarising this information in one place.

Some 20 years ago Apple's 1984 advertisement could sum up the signs of the times for you, Levis or Nike could let you know what was cool, and as late as 1997 IKEA could still tell you to "Chuck out your chintz", just because that was how they said the world works. The costs for consumers to find this out for themselves were high since e-mail and mobile phones were not yet part of the mainstream and Google had not been invented, so brands served as useful information surrogates. In effect, brands were built on information monopolies.

16.1

Cumulative weblogs

March 2003–March 2007



Source: Technorati

The rise of digital information networks

Today, it is well understood that this mass-media world is splintering into niches. In 1965, three national TV advertisements could reach 80% of American 18–49 year-olds. Some 40 years later, you needed 117 prime-time spots to reach the same proportion of the population. TV channels in the average American household have more than tripled since 1994 and over three-quarters of Americans are now online, many in micro communities based on individual enthusiasms.

The types of digital media people can access have exploded – even software applications (Google, Facebook) have morphed into media owners with advertising inventories. Converged information and multimedia content now streams through new communications channels and technologies such as wireless broadband, smart mobile devices and search engines, low-cost content production tools (Garageband, iMovie), free collaboration and publishing software (wikis, blogs, RSS), and a free global distribution system thanks to social networks and peer-to-peer networks.

These new media are interactive, immersive and socially connected, radically different from the old media archetypes. A new culture of active consumer participation in media has arisen in which content can be created and shared across digital networks; consumers have almost total access to information and the ability to communicate it instantly.

Along with many industries such as health care, media or finance, the knowledge monopolies that brands enjoyed have been undermined by this online word of mouth combined with access to information sources and professional databases previously only available to specialists.

This can be seen clearly in fashion publishing. Streetwear blogs, sites such as Flickr, MySpace and YouTube, and niche social networking fashion sites such as MyStyleDiary or Stylehive have made it easy to see and connect with other people who are into the same fashions anywhere in the world, every day – not when the editorial calendars of media organisations decide something should be published.

See through brands

Modern marketing is now a global conversation between hundreds of millions of customers in blogs, social networks, discussion groups, review sites and countless other word-of-mouth forums, where they judge, reject, embrace and endorse the brands in their world. Travel recommendation site Tripadvisor.com, for example, carries 15m customer reviews and has been adding them at a rate of more than 115,000 a week since late 2007.

There are sites for brand fans and brand terrorists in equal measure. Try Googling a random brand name followed by the word "sucks" (for example, Sony, Dell, IKEA, Ford, Disney and, ironically, Google). There is now a Wikipedia for whistleblowers. On Wikileaks.org anyone can post comments and leak documents untraceably and anonymously about governments and corporations all over the world.

Brands such as Dell may spend $1.5 billion per year on marketing, but that doesn't help when consumers Google "Dell customer service" and, after some official dell.com links, find results such as the following on the first page:

- "YouTube – Funny Dell Customer Service Call"
- "My unbelievable experiences with Dell"
- "Consumer complaints about Dell Computer's Customer Service"
- "Cuomo Sues Dell For False Advertising, Failure To Provide Services"
- "I tested Dell and they failed"
- "Want to complain about Dell? Forget it"
- "Growing pains hit Dell's customer service"
- "If you've exhausted the normal routes of solving your problems with Dell try sending an email to…"

These days a brand is no longer what a company claims it is, as *Wired* magazine's Chris Anderson observed, "but what Google says it is".

Even if a brand manages to control the distribution of some information online, it can never control what people are saying about it. While every entry on the first page of a Google search for "BMW" is an official BMW site, apart from one Wikipedia listing, not one of the top ten links on Google Blog Search is controlled by the BMW brand.

Companies are used to not just controlling the distribution of information they want to communicate, but also giving away as little as possible about the information they don't want to release. These days you cannot control, censor or cancel out the information you don't want people to have. It is a time of total transparency, from pricing to ethical behaviour; everything that can be known about a brand will be.

Go with the flow

Brands will need to find a place in this swirling, memetic media system where all sorts of information freely flows: word of mouth, fashion, trends, imitation, flattery, truths, half-truths, rumour, panic, entertainment, news, deals, alerts, brands, friendships, passions, tastes, memories, moods – pretty much everything that makes up our personal and professional lives.

Furthermore, this information ecosystem is in a permanent state of agitation and change thanks to a torrent of new technologies. Innovations in online video or social networking or mobile applications, say, are like new chemical elements which set off chain reactions and interact violently with everything else. Eventually things settle down for a bit, until the next disruption sets it all off again.

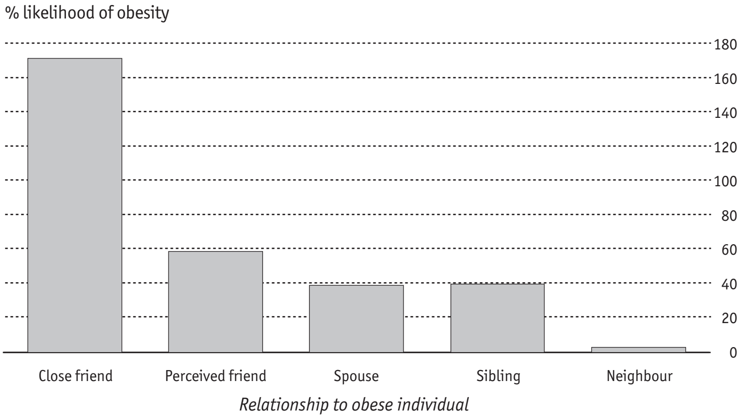
Linear communications based on the industrial model of message, sender and receiver are becoming redundant in this world where everyone is connected and information feeds back into itself.

Harvard research into social networks shows that because every node in the network is a sentient, responsive individual, changes in mood and lifestyle can spread through the system like tastes in fashion, music, films, books and food. Observing the flow of activities through social networks such as Facebook, MySpace, Flickr and Twitter, researchers discovered that people also copy powerful behaviours like happiness, depression, altruism, a need for privacy, drinking, obesity or stopping smoking.

A 32-year study into the viral spread of obesity across a social network of 12,067 people revealed that, regardless of distance, close mutual friendship had the greatest impact on behaviour (see Figure 16.2). A forthcoming

16.2

How one person's obesity influences weight gain across their social network



Source: Christakis, N.A. and Fowler, J.H., "The Spread of Obesity in a Large Social Network over 32 Years", *The New England Journal of Medicine*, July 2007

study of peer influence by Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler, authors of this study, proves how "social contagion" operates the same way across online social networks.

The identity of the modern individual is already complex, with many overlapping relationships and affiliations. Different loyalties and desires constantly compete for attention and blur together: family or friends, city or state, club versus national team, work/life balance, and so on. The fluidity of these social networks compounds this.

Online, people try out many different roles and identities, for example user names in social networks or avatars in games (there are now more avatars than people in the United States). An increasing amount of our selves already flows over digital networks along with what we say, think and do. In the future, these identities will always be in motion.

Nearly 20 years ago, a classic British Airways television advertisement hired thousands of extras to form a smiling face seen from above and told us that BA was "bringing the world together". Today the internet brings the world together and brands need to offer interactions or experiences or events that are picked up and transmitted in this flow.

They often need to behave like media companies or software applications to do so. This is why BMW makes short films, Burger King makes X-box games, Starbucks sells books and music, and American Airlines makes Facebook widgets to help brand fans share travel tips and experiences with each other.

Consumer innovation

There is no question that armed with new tools and technologies, consumers are looking for more control, filtering and choice. They are demanding the content, services, entertainment and interactions they want, on their own terms. Search engines are a powerful expression of the control over information now in the hands of individuals.

Brand managers often confuse not being in complete control of their brand with being completely out of control. It is not the same thing, although the likes of Google might argue that if you're not a bit out of control, you're not going fast enough.

Progressive companies are seeing this shift in control as an opportunity to recruit consumers to help design their next generation of products and express themselves creatively through the brand at the same time. For example, Lego gave eight competition winners a 5% royalty for products manufactured from entries created using a Lego design toolkit. Some 120,000 people joined Boeing's World Design Team to contribute to the creation of its new aircraft via an online forum. Procter & Gamble set up Vocalpoint, an innovation community of 500,000 influential mothers which uses surveys and sampling to help brands develop better offers for this audience and then spread the word to them.

Now that the media production and distribution resources you used to find in multimillion-dollar movie studios are in the average teenager's laptop, we have witnessed a Cambrian explosion of mass amateur publishing online: the millions of product reviews on Amazon, Wikipedia entries, classifieds on Craigslist or videos on YouTube, for instance, or the hundreds of millions of eBay listings and user-created profiles on Facebook, MySpace and other social networks. The most successful online consumer brands, from Google to Yahoo, are based almost entirely on these kinds of user contributions.

Be a verb not a noun

Brand owners often see their brands as suns in a solar system, centres of energy which can pull consumers into their gravitational orbit with the forces of attraction they create with their marketing. Not only do most brands not shine half as brightly as they think – consumers see just one of many distant points of light in a starry sky – but this is an outdated view based on a relatively static model.

Today's consumers do not stay in one place long enough to have brand beliefs beamed at them en masse. They exist in fluid and fragmented communities based on a range of self-selecting passions and interests. Brands should be seen as freer roving nodes in a network of individuals and their relationships.

The internet has always been about connecting people and helping them find information and community. That is what made it exciting and interesting to begin with. Brand owners should never forget how the internet was used in the first place (e-mail, forums, using free web space to post baby scans for friends and relatives). There has only ever been one magic ingredient for truly compelling net interactions: people. The more brands can help consumers share and connect with each other, the better.

As importantly, brands have to find some kind of dynamic role in this world, to behave based on a set active principles suited to a state of perpetual motion. They must act like verbs and do things in this space, rather than exist as passive, descriptive nouns. A verb expresses action, describes an active state of being. Brand as noun is; brand as verb does. Active brands are little engines of culture – creating it, transforming it and constantly working with the flow of it.

Nike, for instance, behaves like an active participant rather than a sponsor or, worse, interrupter of someone else's show. Its Run London event let runners keep track of their training runs, make public pledges to send to friends, plan routes with Google maps and share them with a community of 45,000 runners all over the capital. The follow-up event, Nike+ Supersonic, combined a race with a rap concert to promote the company's famously innovative Nike+ product, which is based on the insight that music fuels sport. A Nike+ wireless sensor connects your running shoes to your iPod Nano, displays how far and fast you've run and the calories you've burned and uploads all these details to a site where you can compete with other runners.

An active role for brands

John Grant, a marketing author and strategist, points to UK retailer Topshop as a brand which delivers a constant stream of online and offline brand innovations to bring high fashion to the high street. It does this not just with every garment in every shop but also through a range of diverse activities that connect with the tastes and desires of its audiences. From outmoded "Flopshop" in the 1990s, Topshop is now one of the UK's highest profile high-street success stories, making a profit of £100m during perhaps the worst retailing slump in two decades.

To reinvent the brand, Topshop created designer and celebrity lines with supermodel Kate Moss and is the only high-street retailer to show at London Fashion Week. It brought out a range of specialist collections targeted at certain lifestyles (Topshop Vintage, Topshop Unique, Mini Topshop, and so on). It provided an in-store style advisory service to help customers get the right look; these personal shoppers also do home and office visits armed with knowledge of the latest fashion trends and the clothes to match. In a fashion emergency you can even text the style advisers and they'll courier over their best guess at the outfit you're after the same day.

From customisable gift-wrap generators, text-message charity auctions and Valentine's Day tattoo-makers, to RSS feeds, video podcasts and desktop widgets, Topshop has found a place in this swirling system of culture and meaning. If its brand was a stick of rock you might find it in a variety of locations, packaging and flavours, but the active principle running through the centre will always be fast fashion fixes for high-street style addicts.

People have a core human need for group relationships based on what we might call the internet's geography of passion. It is not where we are or where we come from that is important, but what we care about. According to Henley Centre research, 60% of Britons have less in common with their neighbours than the folk who share their hobbies. Online, it is easy for people to track down groups across the world to which they can belong, to relate to like minds and like-minded brands on a specific dimension or passion.

The best brands can do these days is to meet customers halfway with a constant stream of connective innovations based on these shared passions and put them out there in the right places for customers to find and socialise. Brand owners must trust that customers and their communities will make this happen by word of mouth and trade these pieces of branded social currency among themselves to make relevant meaning.

What's the big idea?

This does not mean there should not still be a core point of view at the heart of all these activities. Indeed, it sharpens the need for it. More than ever brands need to have a *raison d'être*, an ideology even, that shapes and filters the things they do. There is a lot of evidence to show that the ones that do outperform the ones that do not.

The power in a strategic thought increasingly lies in its ability to serve a thousand small purposes effectively. Brands need to have the elasticity to be stretched and moulded by consumers into an infinite variety of shapes and sizes to fit their individual preferences and passions. To do this, brands need an active role through which they can generate a constant stream of small brand interactions, which exist in many different forms and places – catchy individual melodic phrases which chime when played together in different arrangements.

These days the big brand idea is to not forget about all the small ideas along the way. One recent example was Barack Obama's ground-breaking presidential campaign. His central, governing thought was simple: change, expressed in the iconic rallying cry of "Yes we can". But it was a self-organising army of individuals who spread this message far and fast in their own individual ways, using a range of campaign tools and content made available all over the net. A nation was mobilised online by making people active agents in the process of change, not witnesses to it. In a fitting campaign postscript, the bottom of every page on Barackobama.com reads: "Powered by hope and supporters like you."

Brands that think small

IKEA's role is to improve everyone's home with stylish, affordable furniture. It does this by organising furniture swaps between customers, furnishing hotel rooms with product designs customers can try out during their stay, or putting cushions on New York park benches to promote how good design improves living.

IKEA has contests to create home media storage solutions where the winning designs are made and sold as part of the IKEA range. It runs mobile loyalty clubs with special offers and games like text message trivia quizzes where the answers are in its catalogues. It creates microsites just so happy home owners can download a "Not For Sale" sign to drive away annoying estate agents.

Be a guide not a gatekeeper

People's relationships with brands change based on how much they know. AOL was a great starter brand for the internet until people got confident enough to do without the training wheels and did not need the protective wall AOL put around content. When people start buying wine they look for product brands such as Jacob's Creek or Sutter Home. But as they learn more about the subject they move to a relationship with a wine merchant such as Oddbins or Majestic, which specialises in helping them through the world of wine and editing choice on their behalf.

Individual product brands are always vulnerable to attack from fresh sources of information swirling around in this flow of media and social experiences. One year pomegranate was the superfood of the moment, but the next year the world had moved on and açai berries were the new black; tomorrow it will be something else. Expert consensus changes as fast as consumer opinion. In the future, brands offering consumers readymade solutions they don't need to think about will not be the default choice in a category if people work it out for themselves and arrive at a different conclusion.

Brands based on knowledge rather than ignorance act like guides and interpreters, not information surrogates. They may be involved in hosting places where you can find cool and interesting stuff, but they do not try to be a substitute for it. By helping consumers make sense of the world they invite them into a dialogue and a lasting relationship.

To launch the PS3, for example, Sony Playstation partnered with club promoters, artists and fashion stylists as well as magazines to create a platform for cultural content and new talent. KCTV magazine ran a fashion show, Dazed and Confused put on some live bands and Marmalade staged a multimedia show with user-generated content. All this was videoed, e-mailed, blogged about and otherwise digitally socialised by the artists and audiences.

Silicon implants

It is logical that the most successful new brands will follow the economic shift from the industrial to the information age. Billionaires such as Rockefeller and Ford, who made their fortunes from oil and engineering, are being replaced by Gates and Buffett in a world where matter matters less and chips, bits and bandwidth replace railway steel and motorway concrete as the driving force of the economy.

The future looks bright for media brands such as MTV and Disney, software brands such as Microsoft and Google, and service brands such as UPS, as well as for brands which increasingly behave like media and software and service brands such as Nike or Nokia. And for brands which carve out an active role as advisers and guides or aggregators and intermediaries in this new world – retailers such as Tesco and Amazon, branded venture capital groups such as Virgin and information intermediaries and aggregators such as Expedia.

Of course, many of these brands do many or all of these things. Google is a media aggregator with Google News and YouTube (indeed the core "Page Rank" search algorithm is based on aggregating the information about how sites link to each other created by millions of web users). It is also a media owner selling advertisements next to its own searches and other content. It provides media services such as Ad Sense syndication, Google Analytics and ad serving through the acquisition of DoubleClick. It also provides software, of course, from core search to office applications, photos, social networks, blogging, enterprise, commerce and intermediary services such as Google Product Search.

All these brands are fundamentally information-based. Even a physical retailer such as Tesco bases its competitive edge on analysing purchasing data from the hugely successful Clubcard loyalty scheme which gives it deeper customer insight than any other UK organisation.

The urge to converge: the integration of marketing and operations

We have talked about the convergence of content and culture flowing through media and information systems. Equally importantly, the lines between operations and the customer experience brands deliver are collapsing.

Spanish fashion retailer Zara – think Topshop on steroids in terms of international reach and speed of organisation – uses efficiencies to drive down costs and therefore prices, which helps generate demand. But the real story is that by focusing on real-time merchandising innovation, Zara has created a powerful marketing strategy to build the brand.

Zara staff constantly capture and profile customers' shopping behaviour on handheld devices. This information is batched and sent daily to the La Coruña design and logistics centre where a team of 300 designers modify existing patterns or create new ones based on constantly updated market activity. Designs are then transferred to computerised cutting facilities and assembled in factories via the company intranet. This flexible, network-based operation allows Zara to make and ship 10,000–12,000 new designs and over 90m articles of clothing every year, and restock 3,245 stores in 64 countries twice a week.

By using information networks to tightly integrate sales data with distribution and product development, Zara observes and responds to demand faster than anyone else, then makes and sells products faster than it can promote them through traditional campaigns. It is quicker and more efficient to put new ranges in its shops and see how they do.

Because new styles arrive twice a week in small batches and are replaced every two weeks, constant product scarcity creates a sense of urgency and desire: all stocks are effectively limited-time-only offers. Rather than talk about what it does in marketing campaigns, Zara prefers to keep doing it and invest profits in designing an irresistible retail experience and opening new stores. Most clothing retailers spend 3–4% of sales on advertising; Zara spends 0.3%.

Sometimes the lines are more blurred still. Skype, for instance, built a virtual telephony service by drawing on the computing and bandwidth resources of every user. Skype's product markets itself because people tell each other to download it (you cannot talk for free over the net unless the other person also has the software). And since every download increases the power and reach of its system, marketing and product and operations become one and the same.

Branded utility

The best strategy a brand owner can have whatever category it is in is to care about being the best in the world at what it does and actually mean it. Actions speak louder than words so brands that show they mean it in a hundred different ways, rather than just talk about it, are more likely to be believed.

It helps, of course, if you are like Apple, designing products and services like the iPod and iTunes that are special and interesting enough for people to care about, tell their friends about, create their own shared meaning around and keep coming back for more. Entertainment is traditionally the Trojan horse brands smuggle themselves inside to bypass consumer cynicism and be invited into people's lives, but so-called "branded utility" is an alternative social currency based on giving people something useful that is worth passing on. Intel, for instance, gave MySpace users an application that increased the amount of music they could store on their page.

Even if you sell something as mundane as toilet paper, you can give people something to talk about. For instance, during the 2007 Christmas holidays, 392,862 people visited Charmin's 20 hand-cleaned, high-class toilets in Times Square with the invitation: "You're in New York. Go in style."

Brand new world

A world of digital information creates relentless and accelerating change. Start-ups such as YouTube can become internationally recognised and part of global culture in a heartbeat, while 120-year-old brands such as Kodak can fall off a cliff in a few years if they do not keep up with the changing digital times. (The company that invented the consumer market for cameras and film, Kodak's shares have fallen by more than 80% in the past ten years and it has laid off 30,000 staff and lost hundreds of millions of dollars trying desperately to reinvent itself in a digital age.)

New products invented in student bedrooms quickly become a mainstream part of the global software industry, such as Linux, or evolve into global media distribution systems, such as Napster and its peer-to-peer progeny, disrupting multibillion-dollar industries along the way. Information-based sectors like the global financial markets slice up and trade packages of risk in such startlingly sophisticated ways that the banks themselves do not fully understand what they are buying and selling. Resulting crashes like the recent sub-prime mortgage meltdown bankrupted one of America's oldest and biggest investment banking brands, Lehman Brothers. Other brands such as Bear Stearns and Merrill Lynch, as well as financial giants Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and American International Group (AIG), were saved only by being bought by other banks or bailed out directly by the government.

Everything is information and information is everything

We are living in an age when more information has been produced in the last three years than in the previous 40,000. The *New York Times* once estimated that, in the not too distant future, the "32 million books, 750 million articles and essays, 25 million songs, 500 million images, 500,000 movies, 3 million videos, TV shows and short films and 100 billion public web pages" currently stored in archives and libraries will compress onto an iPod.

Today the virtualisation of virtually everything we know is a given. If content does not already exist as ones and zeros like, say, all modern recorded music, it soon will. The world's stored knowledge and culture are being inexorably indexed, preserved and poured into an unending river of bits.

All modern commercial operations, and indeed national economies, are computerised and rely on a free and fast-flowing stream of digital information, so almost everything these days exists in a database somewhere at some point or other.

A world of new information is on the way, as more of our physical experience is measured and managed virtually with data-collecting wireless sensors. Futurist Bruce Sterling fabricated the buzzword "Spimes" to describe entities that will be so utterly smothered in traceable data, from bar-coded cradle to recycled grave, that they will exist as information all the time and objects only once in a while. There will be no need to hunt anxiously for our missing shoes in the morning, we'll just Google them.

It is unclear exactly what this means for brands in a world where everything can talk to everything else, where connected intelligence animates all inanimate objects. What happens to perfume brands, for instance, when computerised nano particles in their formulas alert us every time someone is attracted by our scent?

During this period of massive change, brands will constantly be jockeying for roles and grabbing land in an emerging, networked world. It is entirely possible that the biggest brand on the planet by the end of the next decade has not yet been invented.

Brands in the fast lane

As Alan Kay, a computer interface pioneer, once famously observed: "Technology is anything that wasn't around when you were born." For an emerging generation of consumers, "digital" is no longer a thing, it just is. The free flow of digital information is like oxygen – a natural condition of life.

The benefits of brands as handy shortcuts to help people choose how to spend their money will not hold so true for this generation. These multitaskers, who can manage 20 simultaneous instant messaging conversations while doing their homework, won't be overloaded by choices and need brands as attention management devices. ("I've never heard a Digital Native complain about information overload," one researcher wrote, "it's a fact of life for them.") They swim in an ocean of communications and connectedness where it is more convenient to choose things recommended by people they trust. Table 16.1 shows the results of a survey of teenagers aged 12–17 in which they were asked to list what other activities they did while engaged in four main types of activity.

There will not be time to establish beliefs that organic is better or you know where you are with Persil, when choices are filtered through a constant stream of instant messages, friend feeds (which track what people you know are doing from moment to moment – for example, "Pav just became a fan of Sony"), or taste-making social networks and blogs. Not to mention Google's ultimate search ambition to bring you whatever you need of the world's information without even having to ask. There will not be ingrained cognitive biases towards certain brands when everyone in your Facebook group can tell you that it's not cool any more or that something else is much better.

Table 16.1 **How teenagers multi-task (%)**

	Went online	*Watched TV*	*Did homework*	*Read*
Watched TV	31	–	31	19
Listened to music	38	12	42	28
Surfed the internet	–	21	8	3
Talked on the phone	24	35	14	6
Instant messaged	22	13	6	3
E-mailed	27	12	3	2
Played video or computer games	16	18	3	2
Read	5	16	9	–
Nothing else	21	27	32	49

Sources: North American Technographics Retail and Marketing Online Youth Survey, Q4 2007; Forrester Research, 2008

People will continue to define themselves by what they buy (although because of climate change and an inevitable shift to a low-carbon economy, conspicuous non-consumption will become as important), but most of the individual product brands they choose will become much more disposable.

Modern branding was largely developed for the category of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), so consumers did not have to spend hours working out which grocery products to put in their shopping baskets. But branding the individual products on shelves means companies can only ever own a limited bit of our attention. In the future it will not make sense economically for the Procter & Gambles and Unilevers of the world to keep launching and maintaining thousands of brands for a slice of, say, the global polyunsaturated fats market, when they could be creating a mega-brand like Tesco instead.

There will be increasing power invested in the few higher-order mega-brands that can stay on top of this fast-moving flow and advise, guide, aggregate, consolidate, curate and innovate with a stream of products, services and brand novelties. As for the rest, when most individual product brands become as temporary and throwaway as low-cost fashion or the latest gossip, they will morph into a new category. Welcome to the world of PDCB: perpetually disposable consumer brands.

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