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## **Editorial: Marketing transformation to the new e-business environment**

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## 1 Starting reflections

The principles and pillars supporting marketing have not been static at all, since the discipline made its first steps in the early years of the 20th century to the present day. On the contrary, the ideas providing a framework and meaning to marketing have become increasingly more complex, interdisciplinary, accurate, dynamic, and, in sum, suitable as it has matured. But, if we were to ask an experienced senior marketer or a wise academic with decades of experience studying how marketing morphology has evolved, both would probably confess to feeling that they have lived through several stages of this supposed maturity. In fact, marketing shows itself, especially in the last two decades, to be a scientific discipline which is quite alive and in continuous development. Marketing constituent elements such as knowledge structures, mission and values have experienced several moments of renaissance since first appearing originally as business-related tasks; for example, just flicking through Bartels' (1962) old but classic and much-referenced book *The Development of Marketing Thought*, it can be seen how periods of conception and reconception were already taking place during the first half of the past century. More controversial periods came later, raising fruitful debates on the evolution of the marketing conception. All those moments implied changes with a diverse degree of intensity depending on the time period in question, leading to incremental developments of the discipline.

Nowadays, the discipline is passing through a passionate stage. From the late 1980s/early 1990s till now, scholars have made several proposals on the necessary evolution of the marketing conception and practices at strategic, operational and tactical levels, in order to work with marketing ideas and frameworks that are able to achieve higher levels of value in exchanges. Some of the most relevant will be commented on later.

However, in spite of the new advances in marketing, even considering that it is not difficult for any new 'weapon' added to the 'marketing arsenal' to be rapidly put in practice, the generalised marketers' perception is that investments in marketing are increasingly less productive. We wonder why marketing seems to have experienced a continuous decline in terms of effectiveness and efficiency (see, *e.g.*, Sheth and Sisodia, 2002) or, adapting the ROI ratio, in terms of returns on marketing investments. Obviously, the key to understanding this situation should be found in the environment of business and organisations, as their geographical scope is wider. On observation, the situation is almost similar in the diverse markets of any developed country analysed. Some of the habitual characteristics are those associated with hypercompetitive conditions, with lots of alternatives, with indecent amounts of money spent on aggressive marketing campaigns, supported by mixing diverse media – marketing communication channels and tools, such as TV, radio and press advertising, direct marketing-based tools such as telemarketing, junk mail and e-mail spam.

Definitely, people are becoming more and more exhausted, even fed up, with the intense pressure exerted by companies, which are also perceived sometimes as intrusive. Somehow, they are more and more immune to marketing actions. Probably, they look for a certain empathy in the organisations they interact with. Under these circumstances, the organisations' success with their stakeholders, and especially with their customers, may come, not from colossal marketing programmes, but from accurate offers developed in coordination with every single customer. With respect to this, some might surely think that this way of managing exchanges is an entelechy, inefficient and even impossible to

put into practice in a large number of situations. But it is not risky to say that the current moment of history we are living in, with a blooming information technology revolution, is characterised by a wide variety of resources and capabilities that situate us in the closest position ever to realising such an entelechy. However, the way marketing is usually done worldwide by organisations is not the most appropriate for moving in optimal universes of value with their stakeholders and, especially, their customers.

Hence, there is more than enough evidence to indicate that the current mental models applied in marketing, though appropriate for decades, are not as good as they were in the past. This is why Wind (2006) recommends that, though it is not necessary to reject the traditional ways of doing marketing, broader and richer marketing approaches more suitable to the changing business environment characteristics must be developed and applied. From a list of the changes, we highlight the following: the turbulent global economy, the impact of the internet on societies, the continuous advance in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the consumers' reticence towards conventional marketing actions, and a decrease in consumer loyalty and in the employees' identification with and commitment to their companies. One point is particularly remarkable, the empowered hybrid consumer. This is a consumer who lives indistinctively in physical and electronic markets, in other words, not substituting one for the other, but looking for their convergence. A new term has recently been coined for this new consumer, the centaur (see Wind *et al.*, 2002). Certainly, in the present day, the individual's life is increasingly a continuous virtual-real experience (Wilson, 2006), so it may not be untrue that our lives, in metaphoric terms, may be adequately illustrated by this creature of Greek mythology, developed partly in physical and partly in electronic environments.

All these modifications observed in the business environment, along with the deficiencies widely detected in the performance of current marketing programmes, lead us to think that marketing, though in dynamic evolution, has not evolved or been applied in the right way. Certainly, the kind of marketing we are all used to seeing may be becoming old-fashioned, even though part of it may be relatively new in form. This question suggests the plausibility of a paradigm shift, a profound evolution of the marketing core. In this regard, Wolfe (2006) notes that such a paradigmatic change must necessarily imply a new mindset to marketing: in particular, a transcendence of the product-centric paradigm of the 20th century that gives way to a customer-centric paradigm for the emerging century. If we relate the previous idea to some of Sheth and Sisodia's (2003) reflections on the future of marketing, said paradigmatic evolution would imply a shift from market-centred transactions to customer-centred interactions. These scholars defend the use of a customer-centred marketing in these circumstances. However, though such customer-collaborative marketing is on a one-to-one basis, it must not be assimilated with one-to-one marketing – less evolved in terms of involving the customer in the process of value creation – nor necessarily associated with it by relationship marketing exchanges.

Indeed, changes in the external contexts of organisations are one of the key reasons to understanding why a dominant (marketing) paradigm declines and a rejuvenating or replacement one is necessary (van Raaij and Poiesz, 2003). As mentioned above, major changes in the environment of organisations and, in particular, businesses seem to be the landmark these days. This is why there is significant agreement among marketing professionals and scholars on the more than reasonable necessity for evolving the

marketing mainstream. An important part of such changes, a set with a notable role in redefining the way of developing exchanges, comes from the rapid ICT diffusion and, especially, the interactive communication technologies with the internet as the maximum exponent. These are singular innovations that, as Rogers (2003) underlines, due to their distinctive features promote a reciprocal interdependence among early and later adopters, resulting in a substantial acceleration of their diffusion processes, with no precedent in the history of humankind.

In sum, marketing has to evolve in order to respond to the changes around it. Marketing models traditionally used during the 1980s and 1990s seem not to be all that efficient and accurate for addressing properly the changing environment of organisations. This question is even more critical when taking into account the significant part of activities which are now managed, fully or partially, through the new business contexts supported by ICT. In fact, rather than talking about an e-business environment that is parallel to the traditional/physical business environment, we think it is more and more appropriate to talk about a new hybrid environment for business, as individuals move from the physical to the electronic and vice versa with increasing normality.

## **2 A brief overview of the evolution of marketing thought**

Marketing thought has experienced many periods of expansion and development throughout time, especially interesting being those times characterised by certain people's claims, usually academics, who, at certain significant moments, prodigiously took the steering wheel of the vehicle in which most marketers and marketing scholars were travelling. Without any doubt, one of the most significant moments in the historical evolution of marketing, though – maybe the one that indeed fostered, paraphrasing Plato, the leaving of 'the cavern' and gave the essential key to the modern basis of marketing – is Levitt's (1960) seminal paper 'Marketing myopia':

“The reason they defined their industry wrong was because they were railroad-oriented instead of transportation-oriented; they were product-oriented instead of customer-oriented. (p.45)

... the entire corporation must be viewed as a customer-creating and customer-satisfying organism. Management must think of itself not as producing products but as providing customer-creating value satisfactions.” (p.56)

However, though this is one of the most meritorious steps in marketing history, for what it supposed – *i.e.*, an inflection point in the essential focus of marketing, from product- to customer-orientation, from a core value based on technical and production improvements to a core value based on customer's needs' fulfilment – there have been subsequent advances in marketing thought that have given rise to fruitful results and debates.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, there were several voices that stressed the idea of broadening the concept of marketing in diverse ways, two of which may be highlighted: on the one hand, demands pursuing the expansion of the universe of marketing towards nonprofit organisations (Kotler and Levy, 1969); on the other, some academics also claimed the societal dimension of marketing (Lazer, 1969), hence its role in catalysing social exchanges (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971). An integrative result of this constructive period in the advance of marketing thought may be seen in Hunt's (1976) milestone

Three Dichotomies Model. Nearly a decade later, in 1985, the American Marketing Association (AMA) released its second conceptualisation of marketing, the one that has impregnated most marketing management books and classes during the last two decades:

“[Marketing is] the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives.”

This definition definitely solved some of those reasonable criticisms of the narrow scope of marketing. It regarded marketing as a strategic process, transcending its application beyond profit organisations. Also remarkable, and in accordance with the previous idea, is the essential focus of marketing emphasised here, being expanded from the classic transaction concept associated with business contexts to the exchange of tangible, and even more interesting, intangible objects. Surely, this effort by the AMA intended to provide the general, not conditioned by any specific context of application and integrative conception of marketing claimed by many scholars at that time. Indeed, the materialisation of the 1985 definition established essential pillars for the discipline, which have been supporting many of its practical and theoretical advances ever since.

However, it did not convince all those who thought that the short-term view inherent to it was not appropriate for addressing the wide variety of exchanges organisations may have to face. Satisfaction, as the final result pursued by marketing, was not enough for many who thought that the transactional orientation subjacent to that AMA definition was not the most suitable in the successful management of relations with the organisations' stakeholders. On the contrary, some scholars claimed that the characteristics of the environment, with customers who were more and more demanding and competitors ever more aggressive and smart, required a new, more appropriate approach for those times, where exchanges were faced with a relational orientation. This idea represents, in essence, the gist of the Relationship Marketing School, which began to emerge with determination during the early 1990s; a significant date for its impulse was the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science's* release of a monographic issue on relationship marketing in the fall of 1995. But, as we know, its roots are in Services Marketing (for an in-depth review, see Brown *et al.*, 1994), a kind of very client-focused marketing school which especially stresses the importance of an interactional relationship of quality (see Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985) between companies and customers, in order to achieve more valuable exchanges. From the collection of good definitions on relationship marketing proposed by many scholars, a very comprehensive one is the following, by Sheth and Parvatiyar (2000, p.9):

“[Relationship Marketing is] the ongoing process of engaging in cooperative and collaborative activities and programs with immediate and end-user customers to create or enhance mutual economic value at reduced cost.”

The brand-new principles integrating this academic stream in marketing, along with other questions associated with the changing environment of organisations, highly determined by the ICT revolution, revealed some shortcomings in the AMA definition. In this regard, the AMA realised that it should be more active in revisiting the definition of marketing, in order to be able to capture the dynamism and continuous evolution that have characterised the marketing field in recent years. This fact has motivated the AMA to

relaunch two new definitions recently. In 2004, the AMA aimed to mitigate those criticisms arising during the lifetime of the 1985 conceptualisation of marketing by issuing the following definition:

“Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders.”

This third definition of the AMA had some distinguishing elements compared to the previous ones. In particular, the following could be highlighted: it formalises the role of marketing in organisations; the classic McCarthy’s 4 P’s-based marketing mix is surpassed – this is a part of marketing that irremediably needs to be regenerated after the impact of the new emerging technological framework (Shugan, 2004); it uses the generic concept of ‘value’ as the exchange’s object; it substitutes the transactional for the relational orientation; it talks about providing ‘benefit’, instead of ‘satisfaction’; and, finally, its application is extended to the organisation’s stakeholder, thus going beyond the narrower element of customers.

Four years after announcing the third definition, in October 2007, the AMA released what is now its latest marketing definition:

“Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.”

This latest conception of marketing has an even wider scope than the previous. For instance, it is more general, transcending the sphere of organisations, as well as having greater societal involvement. Doubtless, it might be the most adequate alternative to satisfy the variety of members integrating marketing, a discipline that is increasingly more plural ideologically.

Notwithstanding, we see a significant inconvenience, mainly derived from the scarcity of explanations. In particular, we would like to point out several questions not explicitly treated by the two latest AMA definitions. These deserve to be discussed.

First, there is a clear advance when any potential object of exchange is understood in terms of value. In fact, it is curious how at this moment of the discipline’s evolution, paths for its development which match the essential ideas of some classic thinkers of marketing are selected. In particular, it was Peter F. Drucker who said marketing is the driver of value. But, there is a core question that is still missing, which needs to be tackled now: the creation of value. What should the process of value creation addressed by organisations in these times be? Which parts should be responsible in such value creation? At this moment in time, considering the diverse factors characterising the changing environment, with special attention paid to the new opportunities offered by the new emergent ICT for developing exchanges in a different manner, profit, nonprofit organisations and marketing agents in general are obliged to reflect on how these changes may imply reconfigurations in the process of value creation.

Secondly, it is also necessary to clarify what value is used by the organisations’ stakeholders and, in particular, by their customers. This implies a reflection on both the intermediate and final or supreme aims of marketing with respect to them. A good exercise could be taking the individuals which integrate a society as the elements of reference. So, what are the benefits marketing should provide to individuals and society as a whole?

In conclusion, marketing needs to live a period of ‘high-renaissance’ today in order to refresh, reinvent, transform and whatever verb the reader would like to choose that implies constructive evolution itself. Throughout this editorial and this special issue many of these questions, new insights and approaches are directly and indirectly discussed within the e-business framework, though much more debate is still necessary.

### **3 Towards a new model of value creation in marketing triggered by the new technological environment**

#### *3.1 Previous reflections on marketing’s final goal*

As indicated above, value is a central question for marketing. Shortly, we will specifically reflect on the convenience of rethinking the process of value creation, but let us first think about this general, even philosophical, question for marketing: Why do individuals (*e.g.*, customers) look for value in exchanges? Though it may seem a simple question – it is, in part – we are not sure about why it is not clearly and properly addressed in practice, at least, as present times require. Definitely, organisations are generally aware of the importance that any individual gives to value in exchanges, so they are committed to it. But, do organisations and, in particular, businesses know what their customers value the most? In other words, are the keys of value properly known?

A basic idea: people get involved in exchanging processes in order to cover their needs. Thus, an individual will perceive that an exchange has more value if those needs are better covered. Consequently, the individual’s needs must be accurately identified and addressed by organisations, if they want such an individual to have an optimum level of perceived value.

Based on Maslow’s classic and widely accepted seminal work, we know that human beings’ needs are diverse but set on a hierarchical structure of relative prepotency, from lesser to higher degrees of psychological sophistication, which determine their behavioural motivations. In this regard, it is worth making some reflections on this, starting from Maslow’s bases, mainly those integrating his *Motivation and Personality*, originally published in 1954. We may state that, as societies are more economically and socially developed, individuals tend to be motivated by higher needs. Specifically, as a Maslow set, individuals aspire to become self-actualising, so they feel motivated to get to the top of the pyramid. Such an aspiration is more intense when they feel that lower needs are covered.

Thus, it is not risky to state that a significant part of the population living in developed countries is more concerned, consciously or unconsciously, with higher rather than lower needs. Moreover, self-actualisation is probably now the mental state most sought after by individuals; these ideas are truer as individuals mature. For instance, it is not strange to see how people are increasingly more existentialist, involved with their spirituality and finding inner peace, as well as being in harmony with their environment of reference, *etc.* The significance lately acquired via these questions is closely connected to the prominence of higher needs and, in particular, to the need for self-actualisation in societies. Most of us probably know people (relatives, friends, neighbours, *etc.*) – it may even be ourselves sometimes – with a decent salary, a nice family, good friends, *etc.*, in sum, with a good life, but who still confess to missing something they cannot explain. Such feelings generate a state of inner anxiety that moves the individuals to find their

authenticity, their own truth, in essence, their way in life. Summarising, we think that people are increasingly involved with self-actualisation, and this fact influences most of their behaviour, in all facets of their lives. Are organisations aware of this question? In particular, do companies take these kinds of needs into account when developing their offers and interacting with their customers?

We would like to quote the final paragraphs of a very inspiring volume of essays on the suitability of reforming marketing, recently edited by Sheth and Sisodia (2006, p.332):

“The problem [...] is that as people have matured and markets have evolved, marketing has not [...] While people have become more spiritual in outlook, marketing remains crassly materialistic. While people focus more on achieving their own potential, marketing remains obsessed with ‘keeping up with the Joneses’. While people are digging deeper to discover the substance of people and things, marketing remains fixated on outward appearances. While people are more concerned with authenticity in every aspect of their life, marketing is riddled with inaccuracy and insincerity.

Clearly, marketers have to change a great deal to adjust to this new world order.”

This reflection is absolutely brilliant. But, now, let us try to relate it to Maslow’s (2007, p.64) definition of self-actualisation:

“[Individuals need] to be ultimately at peace with themselves. What humans can be, they must be. They must be true to their own nature. This need we may call self-actualization. [...] It refers to people’s desire for self-fulfillment, namely, the tendency for them to become actualized in what they are potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one idiosyncratically is, to become everything one is capable of becoming.”

We have the impression that a considerable number of companies still do not attend to their customers’ higher needs, and especially the self-actualisation need, when setting and addressing their marketing programmes. Marketing managers must pay attention to this question, as these are the kinds of needs that are most valued, those for which individuals are willing to make more sacrifices. This implies that time has to be spent on identifying how every firm, attending to the specific characteristic of its offer, may promote the self-actualisation of their customers. Ideally, this should be the final goal of marketing: contributing to the self-actualisation of people; optimally, this would imply considering individualised programmes of value creation controlled by every customer. Likewise, if this tenet were applied by every profit and nonprofit organisation to their customers and other stakeholders, the benefits from a macroperspective would be clear: healthier societies.

### *3.2 Rethinking the process of value creation*

In the previous sections, we have discussed several questions related to the consequences that a changing environment has on marketing nowadays. Basically, an evolution of the current marketing mainstream is necessary. Various scholars have recently highlighted the need for a redefinition of the process of value creation in marketing. The question why this is important lies, in essence, in the new dominant position that customers are acquiring in exchanges with businesses. From the set of lines of



reform that can be identified, the firm-customer collaboration in the creation of value emerges as the fundamental pillar of a new necessary approach to orienting exchanges, *i.e.*, customer-centric. In market-based economies, where the factors responsible for significant customer empowerment are diverse, new conceptions of the collaborative process of value creation may mark the difference. In particular, companies' real differentiation is expected to be based more and more on how they collaborate with customers (Wolfe, 2006). This idea is congruent with the premises and new perspectives that can be found in Vargo and Lusch's (2004) seminal paper on the new service-dominant logic of marketing:

“A service-centered dominant logic implies that value is defined by and co-created with the consumer rather than embedded in output (p.6) [...]

[It has] a heavy focus on continuous processes, [where] the consumer is always involved in the production of value. [...] Increasingly, both marketing practitioners and academics are shifting toward a continuous – process perspective [...] and toward a recognition of the advantages, if not the necessity, of viewing the consumer as a co-producer [...]

In summary, the customer becomes primarily an operant resource (co-producer) [key to obtain competitive advantage (p.12)] rather than an operand resource ('target') and can be involved in the entire value and service chain in acting on operant resources.” (p.11)

This approach, with potentialities to become a general theory of marketing in the future (see Lusch and Vargo, 2006), is expected to replace the goods-centred logic traditionally dominating the discipline. In essence, it defends that value is not just embedded in every unit of output during the production and distribution processes. On the contrary, the new service-dominant logic poses that the process of value creation goes further; it is a co-responsibility falling on the organisation/business and its customers.

Indeed, all these claims for change are very suitable. An evolution in the way of understanding the creation of value is indispensable. However, the question is whether all these proposals for change in marketing could be put into practice *en masse* without recent, and expected, advances in information technology. Moreover, one could also wonder which aspect of such advances will be responsible for these new approaches in marketing. The continuous ICT evolution has allowed the organisations to confront relationships with their stakeholders in a different, easier, quicker, more efficient way. In particular, due to ICT, many firms are immersed in redefinitions of the exchange processes with their customers. In sum, based on Rust's (2006) reflections, intensification in the use of ICT to support relationships with customers produces several benefits that, as a final result, represent higher levels of service to customers. If we apply an aggregate view, this leads us to think that service will acquire greater importance in our economic systems and, consequently, a service-dominant logic must impose its hegemony in marketing.

Doubtless, e-business environments are the most favourable contexts where all these new approaches to the management of the exchanges with primary and secondary stakeholders can be applied. In particular, it allows movement from asynchronous to synchronous exchanges, from low-interaction to high-interaction intensity; in sum, from broadcast marketing to real-time marketing (Berthon and John, 2006). Along this line, Dou and Ghose (2002) suggest a paradigmatic evolution in marketing towards what they have named *continuous marketing*, a kind of real-time personalisation able to perfectly synchronise variations in customers' needs with accurate marketing strategies adapted to

them. Subsequent to this tendency in managing exchanges with customers is the necessary evolution of the current market orientation towards a customer-centric orientation. This is defended by Ramani and Kumar (2008), when proclaiming what they call interaction orientation, which is necessary when managing customer relationships in interactive marketing systems. Firms like Dell, Amazon or Alibris tend to apply it. With regard to this, Urban (2006) suggests that marketers must overcome the current use that firms are making of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). Currently, CRM applications are seen by firms as tools that allow a personalised push-marketing to customers, rather than as a means to achieve the customer's advocacy in the process of value creation.

In sum, it is clear that firms need ICT support to develop all these new marketing approaches, which in essence, give a co-responsible role to the customer in the generation of value. Moreover, precisely at this moment of the ICT evolution, these avant-garde marketing approaches may only be applied with the support of e-business platforms. Nowadays, the internet is the paradigmatic context for customer empowerment. It really allows working *en masse* with customers as co-producers. In the beginning, companies used the internet to personalise and interactively adapt communications with their customers. Now, recent advances even allow what Wind and Mahajan (2001) call "customerization", a kind of customisation alternative characterised by giving the consumers the necessary power to design products/services as they prefer. This fact has, and will have, significant implications for both the transformation of marketing rules (Scott, 2007) and the e-business models' evolution; for instance, Long Tail-based models are good examples of that (see Anderson, 2006). Notwithstanding, more advances in ICT development are still necessary to get to new generations of electronic networks-based commerce, as is the case of u-commerce (Watson *et al.*, 2002), might fully crystallise. It is therefore obvious to forecast without risk a continuous increase in the specific weight of the e-marketing and new technologies research stream in the marketing discipline.

#### **4 Contributions to this issue**

In this special issue we aim to foster a promising research debate on the marketing of today, *i.e.*, should marketing be transformed to adequately manage the new e-business environment? Considering the issues already presented, the answer is positive. But there are still many questions to discover, analyse and discuss. Likewise, considering the strong connection between the physical and electronic business environment, reflecting on this question would also imply getting into the more general debate of the necessary evolution of marketing.

In this issue we are pleased to present nine outstanding papers that have undergone a double-blind rigorous review process, covering a wide range of topics on the general theme of the special issue. Obviously, not all the critical questions have been treated, but they represent timely and valuable contributions to the variety of themes expected to be tackled. Hopefully, this issue will provide insights that promote and inspire future researchers into these exciting topics.

The first article is by Chen and Vargo. In 'Towards an alternative logic for Electronic Customer Relationship Management (ECRM)', they defend that a shift in current CRM philosophy and applications is very necessary. These are implicitly driven by a goods-dominant logic, though CRM will not help to provide optimum levels of value while they ignore the customer's role in the process of value creation. In essence, the

authors strongly make and justify a serious, original and inspiring proposal on the evolution towards a next generation of ECRM, whose building pillars are based on a service-dominant logic (see Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

In the second article, 'Building a theoretical framework for e-services performance', Lu and Rao make a twofold contribution. First, they start from the diversity of the e-service that firms offer. Then, they point out the lack of consensus on an e-service definition, as well as the variety of existing research and academic papers treating different aspects of e-service, to suggest as a conclusion a formal framework for e-services structured in two main categories: the degree of tangibility and the degree of customisation. Second, based on the Resource-based Theory, they propose a theoretical framework for understanding the e-service export performance.

The third article, 'Sustaining the brand idea in electronic environments', is by Kollmann and Suckow. They reflect on the suitability of managing e-brands, starting from exporting the theoretical basis of branding applied in marketplaces to the online environments. The authors review diverse questions related to brands and branding. In particular, the role that functional and emotional values have in building strong connections between customers and brands is highlighted. However, they observe that both scholars and practitioners are not paying enough attention to the generation of emotional links to brands on the web, a medium with unique and varied characteristics that modify the emotional branding practices applied till now in physical markets. Finally, a set of challenges is presented and explained in detail, in order to build strong and sustained emotional-based e-brands.

Schwartz is the author of the fourth article. In 'Semantic information management and e-business: towards more transparent value chains', the author argues how the current stage of e-commerce infrastructure development, where a diversity of semantic models and e-business applications exist, irremediably needs to look for a semantic interoperability. It would be extremely convenient to research the core question discussed in this paper. The elements of business environments are more and more interconnected. They form competitive value systems highly dependent on e-business infrastructures to support their continuous interactions, so the coordination of their information flows is fundamental. Hence, widely shared e-business ontologies are necessary for working with more efficient value systems. The author shows several industry-specific semantic information standards and discusses the main flaws that can be found in such approaches. Next, he presents in detail a proposal for a tiered global semantic information management architecture. Likewise, he reflects on the adequate paths of evolution that e-business architectures should follow to avoid said problems in the future.

The fifth article, 'Online retailing: open all hours?' by Ellis-Chadwick analyses, from a global perspective, the factors explaining online retail adoption. The author's approach is twofold, as both the consumer's and the retailer's perspectives are considered. With respect to the former, she reviews and reflects on the factors influencing the extent to which consumers do their shopping online. In particular, she treats issues such as the online consumer profile and the online shopping experience. What are especially remarkable are the review, detailed description and conclusions that the author presents with respect to the factors determining the retailers' degree of adoption of the internet as a distribution channel. An aggregation of all those are set in four main dimensions: financial, operational, market and strategic. Finally, some thoughts on the future of online retailing are presented.

The next article, 'Playing cat and mouse: consumer empowerment and marketing interaction on the internet', by Rodríguez-Ardura and Martínez-López, deals with the interesting topic of the role of the internet in leveraging consumers' empowerment. The authors review and reflect on the reasons supporting the improvement of the consumer's position in exchanges when developed within electronic contexts (*e.g.*, the web). They also make diverse comparative evaluations with respect to such a position in traditional/physical markets. However, the authors draw on diverse previous studies to point out an interesting question: the apparent defensive tendency found in a significant number of online companies to thwart this empowered position of consumers. One of their main conclusions is that firms operating on the internet must understand the new rules of this context, be aware of the opportunities the internet offers to increase consumers' satisfaction and perceived value in exchanges due to its potential to empower customers and, finally, develop adequate website designs in order to match their visitors' and customers' degrees of preferences to control the online exchange processes.

The seventh article, 'Motivations underlying the use of technological innovations: new insights from projective techniques', is by Koenigstorfer *et al.* The authors focus on two innovations associated with the 21st century's ICT (WLAN and VoIP) to analyse the individuals' motivations to use technological innovations; though the empirical part of the research is developed on a sample of young people (university students), the results are of interest when extended to other segments of the population. The authors take as a base McClelland's general framework of human motivations to develop a specific motivational framework for the use of technological innovations. Of special interest is the empirical research developed, based on projective techniques (Thematic Apperception Test and Cartoon tests). The authors justify with rigour the appropriateness of applying qualitative techniques, instead of other quantitative techniques, for their research purposes. In particular, they show a clear preference towards using projective techniques. In sum, the authors present a specific framework of motivations constituted by and adapted from the set of factors proposed by McClelland plus two brand-new ones, the motives for enjoyment/fun and freedom. Finally, several ideas, insights, managerial implications and lines for future research are pointed out.

The eighth article is 'The challenges in adopting residual RFID technologies in the business environment: a consumer segmentation approach', by Dave *et al.* The RFID technologies clearly demonstrate their utility in improving the efficiency of the supply chain management processes. Firms are very conscious of this question. However, the authors underline the importance of researching the perceptions of residual RFID from the consumers' perspective. They highlight and discuss the utilities and also their potential liabilities, which these technologies may have in later stages of B2C commerce development; as *e.g.*, the authors reflect on the role of the RFID technologies in drawing us closer to u-commerce materialisation. The authors develop a survey, putting questions related to the RFID adoption to consumers of products with embedded RFID tags. After applying cluster analysis, three segments are identified: the moderate majority, the untrusting sceptics and the concerned realists.

The final article, 'The electronic village: digital challenges in communication strategies for sporting organisations', by Buchanan and Luck, tackles from an integral perspective the new challenges that organisations must face in order to adapt the communications strategies with their stakeholders to the new rules determined by the advance in communication networks and, especially, the Web 2.0. The authors analyse the opportunities that phenomena such as online communities (*i.e.*, 'electronic villages'),

blogging, VoIP, podcast, v-cast and sms may have for organisations if well managed. They reflect on the degree of preparation that organisations currently have to adopt such advances. In particular, they focus their empirical analyses on sporting organisations, though their conclusions might plausibly be applicable to other nonprofit organisations, and also of interest to online companies.

## 5 What's next?

The topic we deal with in this special issue is very timely and necessary for in-depth discussion and analysis from a general perspective, as well as entering the diversity of research lines that integrate it. If we had to launch some essential ideas as a conclusion of almost two years' conception and development of this special issue project, they would be the following:

- Marketing discipline effectively needs a new period of renaissance.
- A significant part of its mutations might come as a consequence of adaptations to the increasingly hybrid life of individuals, combining physical and electronic environments, and, in particular, to the continuous advances in ICT and web-based tools. The set of contributions presented by this special issue are rigorous, suitable, and even visionary in certain occasions in relation to the research themes of the issue. We are sure readers will feel inspired by many of the questions the authors present and discuss here.
- Though one can find a significant number of research papers on e-marketing-related questions published during the last decade, the research topic we tackle in this special issue – *i.e.*, the general problem of the transformation of marketing to the new e-business contexts – has not been sufficiently analysed yet. Doubtless, it deserves to be discussed in depth by further research.

## Acknowledgements

We are profoundly grateful for the involvement and support offered by the scholars of the *ad hoc* editorial board that reviewed this special issue.

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