



Call for papers
Special issue "Marketing Decisions" 2025

Theme: The place of brands in society

The guest editors for this special issue are:
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According to an Ipsos study in France, in 2022, 41% of consumers expect brands to support society, and 39% believe they have a more important role to play than governments in building a better future. These high consumer expectations are driving brands to take a stand on environmental, societal and political causes (ecology, LGBTQ, racism, refugees, feminism, etc.). However, in 2022, another study from Havas "Meaningful brands" shows that 72% of those surveyed are tired of brands that claim they want to help society when they are only looking to make money. The changing practices of brands, coupled with people's suspicion of their sincerity, provide the opportunity in this special issue to examine the place of brands in society.

It has long been recognized that brands are not just a commercial tool for identifying and differentiating products or services, but that they also convey values and give meaning (Michel, 2022). Since the work of Schroeder (2006), which analyzes how a brand can slide from the status of commercial and economic actor to that of cultural agent, we know that a brand can be the initiator of a community. In this sense, the work of Cova (2017) shows how brands exist in society today independently of their creators, the companies. Indeed, brands participate in consumers' lives by supporting the definition of their personal identity (Escalas and Bettman 2005; Fuschillo, Cayla and Cova, 2022), by shaping the cultural environment (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003) but also by producing economic activity (Lury, 2009). Thus, the coca-colonization or McDonaldization of the world means not only a pre-emption of economic space by so-called global brands, but above all the willingness of these brands to become ideological structures that shape ways of being and doing and impose a vision of the world (Heilbrunn, 2006, 2022). Thus, Brands have become a major topic in marketing and consumer research literature, and knowledge about them is growing. Over the years, different perspectives have been introduced to address the issue of brands and their development in light of a broad economic, relational, social, cultural and experiential context (Stern, 2006). What is it like today? What place do brands occupy in society? Or rather, what place do individuals give to brands? And who are these 21st-century individuals - consumers? citizens?

These issues concern most *business-to-consumer* (B2C) and *business-to-business* (B2B) sectors, as well as different types of organizations (multinationals, SMEs, VSEs, start-ups) and different cultures. In this context, there are a number of themes that we feel are worth exploring in this special issue.

- **Brands and the environment:** In the face of climate change and dwindling natural resources, some organizations are moving towards ecologically responsible behavior, reviewing their business models and brand communications (Gupta and Kumar, 2013). In this context, the circular economy is becoming a pillar of sustainable development. Reusing, recycling, sharing, refurbishing and renting have become new practices for individuals. The development of second-hand goods and rental illustrates these new trends. It's a promising development, but its environmental and social consequences remain unclear. How do brands influence responsible consumer behavior? What role do they play in the development of responsible consumption?

- **Brands and sobriety:** Historically, consumption was associated with pleasure, social success and even happiness. Today, on the other hand, the term "sobriety" refers to reduced comfort and energy consumption (Guillard, 2019). Yet in people's imaginations, sobriety can also be associated with happy consumption that contributes to individual well-being. Individuals can find meaning in reducing, replacing or even eliminating certain consumption practices. How can brands symbolically give positive meaning to sobriety? What levers can brands use today to participate in sustainable innovation strategies and encourage more sober consumption?

- **Brands and diversity:** A recent trend in marketing research focuses on the notions of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion called "DEI" (Arsel, Crockett and Scott, 2022). At the same time, brand activism has developed (Kotler and Sarkar, 2020). The research shows how brands can promote or guide social, political, economic and/or environmental reform and also questions the authenticity of the brand activism (Vredenburg et al. 2020). Brands' commitment to these causes (DEI) touches on issues that are not necessarily linked to their core business. They may defend abortion rights, fight racism, or support the LGBT+ community without any close link to their business, and the products or services they sell. How do individuals interpret these stances, both in terms of the brand and the cause being defended? How can brand activism help or hinder the cause that is supposed to be defended?

- **Brands and the art world:** the association between brands and artists may seem unnatural. And yet, over the past few decades, they have come together in many and varied ways. In an increasingly "aestheticized" world (Lipovetsky, 2013), brands have understood the symbolic benefits they can derive from their relationship with the art world: it enables them to nurture their desirability and cultivate their differentiation. To this end, they create and maintain partnerships with the art world in a variety of ways (brand museums, art foundations, artist residencies, artist sponsorships, etc.). At the same time, artists use brands in their artistic work. They show, distort, transform, even sublimate or denounce the symbols of consumer society that are brands (Michel and Borraz, 2015). How do individuals

interpret these connections between the worlds of art and brands? How does the recognition of brands in the art world give brands a new place in society? More generally, how are these brand-artist relationships changing the place of brands in society?

- **Brands and relationships:** To understand or illustrate the different facets of brands, they are most often thought of in metaphorical terms. Brands are seen as an identity (Kapferer, 1988), a personality (Aaker, 1997), a relational partner (Fournier, 1998), an icon (Holt, 2004), a facilitator of interpersonal relationships (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi 2012; Ahuvia, 2022), or an intentional agent (Kervyn, Fiske and Malone, 2012). More recently, brands are seen as dynamic concepts, the result of co-production between different stakeholders (Sherry, 2005). Brands are thus explored in the light of psychological, sociological or philosophical approaches and are apprehended in their holistic nature, taking on the appearance of a semiotic system (Heilbrunn, 2022), a polysemous social object (Michel, 2017), or even an assemblage (Parmentier and Fischer, 2015). Faced with the current economic, social, and environmental crises and the omnipresence of digital media, which alters the perception of time (Zeitoun and VegSala, 2019), what kinds of conversations occur between brands and individuals? What kind of relationships do people have with brands? What relational dynamics are at play?

This list of topics is by no means exhaustive. If you have any doubts about an original idea for a contribution, please summarize it in no more than 1/2 page and e-mail it to the guest editors of this special issue for an informal opinion (Géraldine Michel : michel.iae@univ-paris1.fr / Nathalie Veg-Sala : nathalie.veg@parisnanterre.fr).

This special issue is open to both conceptual manuscripts and empirical studies.

Manuscripts are subject to Marketing Decision's usual evaluation process and must comply with the magazine's presentation rules as specified on its website. Any article not complying with these rules will be rejected. **Article proposals should be sent in electronic format by September 30, 2024 on the "Marketing Decisions" platform : dm.manuscriptmanager.net**

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Looking forward to discovering your research!



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