

# THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO DIGITAL CONSUMPTION

The first generation that has grown up in a digital world is now in our university classrooms. They, their teachers and their parents have been fundamentally affected by the digitization of text, images, sound, objects and signals. They interact socially, play games, shop, read, write, work, listen to music, collaborate, produce and co-produce, search and browse very differently than in the pre-digital age.

Adopting emerging technologies easily, spending a large proportion of time online and multitasking are signs of the increasingly digital nature of our everyday lives. Yet consumer research is just beginning to emerge on how this affects basic human and consumer behaviors such as attention, learning, communications, relationships, entertainment and knowledge.

*The Routledge Companion to Digital Consumption* offers an introduction to the perspectives needed to rethink consumer behavior in a digital age that we are coming to take for granted and which therefore often escapes careful research and reflective critical appraisal.

**Russell W. Belk** is Kraft Foods Canada Chair in Marketing at the Schulich School of Business, York University, Canada. He is past President of the International Association of Marketing and Development and is a Fellow, past President and Film Festival co-founder of the Association for Consumer Research. He also co-initiated the Consumer Behavior Odyssey and the Consumer Culture Theory Conference. He has received the Paul D. Converse Award and the Sheth Foundation/*Journal of Consumer Research* Award for Long-Term Contribution to Consumer Research. His research involves the meanings of possessions, collecting, gift-giving, materialism, sharing and global consumer culture.

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### **The Routledge Companion to Digital Consumption**

*Edited by Russell W. Belk and Rosa Llamas*

# THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO DIGITAL CONSUMPTION

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## **PART I**

# What's digital?



# 1

## LIVING IN A DIGITAL WORLD

*Rosa Llamas and Russell Belk*

Men are suddenly nomadic gathers of knowledge, nomadic as never before, free from fragmentally specialism as never before – but also involved in the total social process as never before; since with electricity we extend our central nervous system globally, instantly interrelating every human experience.

(Marshall McLuhan 1964)

Our technology forces us to live mythically.

(Marshall McLuhan 1967)

### **Keywords**

digital age, digital consumption, *homo connectus*, technoscape

### **Digital consumption**

In January 2012, there was a major winter snow storm in Toronto on the first day of Winter Semester classes at York University. Traffic accidents clogged roads, public transportation was snarled, and sidewalks were buried under a foot of blowing snow. Russ taught a 7:30 a.m. MBA class and students straggled in late and exhausted. When a reasonable number had arrived he asked how many had been on Facebook that morning and about three-fourths of the class raised their hands. He then asked how many had been on Facebook before they got out of bed and nearly a third raised their hands. Clearly there is something compelling about the digital world in which we live. Spending a large proportion of our time online, adopting emerging technologies easily, and multitasking fluidly are all signs of the increasingly digital nature of our everyday lives. New media have been integrated into our daily routines and agendas, shaping, shifting, and transforming the way we interact, play, shop, read, write, work, listen, create, communicate, collaborate, produce, co-produce, search, and browse. Each of these actions is now very different from the way we did these things in the pre-digital age.

New media have altered our daily lives. Even the most mundane routines in the early morning have been replaced by switching on technological devices. Logging on is now first thing in the morning for many, even before getting up. We may text our children to wake

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them. Sharing breakfast with the family with a newspaper as our only source of distraction is an increasingly old-fashioned memory as we now substitute computers, mobile phones, and other technological devices for what was once family time (Stone 2009). We then check the traffic online if we cannot work from home and must head to the office. Once there, we are apt to work in a collaborative way using new media. During the day we may go online to find restaurants, to book movies and entertainment, to listen to music, watch television and movies, and to keep track of our daily exercise, using specialized apps for each. Technology permeates every aspect of our everyday lives and gives rise to dependence on new media to such an extent that we may feel panic if our Internet connection is down for even a short time.

In the transition from analogue to digital representation over the past half century, technically speaking, something has been lost; zeroes and ones substitute discrete approximations for continuous sensory phenomena like colors, sounds, and shapes. But for the consumer far more has been gained than lost. We have gained speed, miniaturization, and a cornucopia of new creations. Digital technologies of the microchip make possible not only a host of new devices and applications, but also new ways to present and fashion our identities through what Foucault (1998) called technologies of the self. The contributions in this volume outline some of these possibilities and the revolutionary changes, both good and bad, that digital devices and applications are bringing to our lives as consumers. Many earlier technologies from fire and language to electricity and photography have also radically changed our lives and spawned explosions of creative opportunities. And in the future digital technologies too may be eclipsed by nanotechnologies, the “internet of things” (see Chapter 4 by Campbell in this volume), or some other game-changing ways of interacting with our environment and each other. For the moment, however, we are caught up in the swirl of digital possibilities.

The excitement and anticipation characteristic of the current era of digital consumption are illustrated by the yearly Consumer Electronics Show to which the media swarm in order to report on the next new thing. Apple’s new product announcements draw equally rapt media and consumer attention. Numerous websites, blogs, magazines, television shows, and news reports help to sustain the excitement and feed the desires of digital aficionados seeking the magic that each new device and application seems to offer. By the time of his death in 2011, Steve Jobs had been virtually deified (Belk and Tumbat 2005; Deutschman 2000; Isaacson 2011; Kahney 2004), not so much as Prometheus bringing us digital fire as Vulcan forging wondrous new things from digital magma.

### **Some impacts of digital consumption**

Disruptive changes are brought by major new technologies, even if like the automobile, they may be better appreciated after the fact. In a loose play on Foucault’s technologies of the self, Abbas and Dervin (2009) suggest that we are now enjoying digital technologies of the self with the power to transform us. And even if they do not fully transform our identities, they have very likely changed our lives. The new economy is one of post-humanization, Feenberg and Barney (2004) state, proclaiming the “symbiosis of humans with machines.” Turkle (2011) points out that, metaphorically speaking, some time ago a computer could be considered “a second self, a mirror of mind.” Nowadays, such a metaphor is not enough to represent the situation in which “new devices provide space for the emergence of a new state of the self, itself, split between the screen and the physical real, wired into existence through technology” (ibid., p. 16). Particularly for teenagers, “technology has become like a phantom limb, it is so much part of them” (ibid., p. 17). The distinction between the real and the virtual is no longer entirely clear. The line between the two is blurred as the two worlds intertwine in an almost Gibsonsque way – our flesh and blood

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are now mixed with circuits and devices. We have become wired and wireless selves, *homo connectus*, always logged on (Rainie 2007).

*Homo connectus* is always on, seeking to know what's going on and what's in, ever catching up on the latest news and updates. They are versatile, chameleonic, tech-savvy, information junkies, juggling several tasks at the same time so their attention is fragmented. There is a blurred line separating the professional and personal life, so fuzzy that instead of making a distinction between work and leisure time, their days are hybrid, and free time, as understood in the pre-digital age, has vanished. They have adopted non-linear approaches to learning, thinking, playing, and expressing self. They are digital nomads, wired to the world but becoming more and more wireless. App-addiction permeates all spheres of their lives in order to manage a wide range of everyday issues, tracking everything from health status, to caloric intake, to miles run, or sleep patterns, retouching and sharing pictures, learning other languages, exchanging money online, or writing shopping lists.

*Homo connectus* lives in a digital ecosystem, in a media bubble, in an instant era, a "Nescafe" age. Communication becomes vivid and disinhibited via instant messaging, SMS, and microblogging, which are replacing once-popular e-mail and voice mail. It is fast, alive, fresh, and only semi-intrusive, since it does not impose on the receiver when to respond. Nevertheless netiquette has evolved demanding instant responses. Mobile phones are nowadays more used for data than for calls (Wortham 2010). Instant messaging is becoming more popular while phone calls are becoming obsolete and landlines are rapidly losing ground. This immediacy not only permeates communications but also other actions available online, actions and procedures that in a pre-digital era would have required going to an office, queuing up, and waiting. Digital identity and signatures have replaced physical and ink-based expressions of personality (Hawkins 2011). Mobiles phones are not only a tool for communication but they have acquired a wide variety of uses, "replacing wallets, watches and doorbells" (Watson 2010).

*Homo connectus* is gregarious and hypersocial, in constant communication (albeit not often face to face) with the digital others on the other side of a screen or keyboard. Hypersociability is enabled by "screen culture." Friendship is also instantaneous in the digital era. The saying "you can count your true friends on the fingers of one hand" is so analog! Friends sprout in the fertile field of the social media, even though the concept of friendship is redefined in the connected world. Inviting hundreds of friends to a party or any other event just takes a few seconds on Facebook and they will accept or decline the invitation immediately. Even previously formal and important announcements like births, engagements, and weddings have migrated from the paper and face-to-face worlds to the digital world, adopting the form of SMS, videos, and other highly creative digital formats. Our language has also muted into a cyberlanguage with a "gr8" deal of new expressions. Sharing status updates with friends as well as personal information, whereabouts, and pictures, engaging in public conversations and communities, and checking-in at various online and offline places are all part of the *homo connectus's* self-representation today. Socialholics (Polo and Polo 2012) share their knowledge, collaborate with other peers, and engage with social causes. Calling people to take action through social media has been a key ingredient in activist movements like the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street. *Homo connectus* engages with social and civic activism, supporting and taking part in movements which are shaping the political and economic arena. *Homo connectus* belongs to *The Empathic Civilization* (Rifkin 2010) has connection, collaboration, and caring engraved in its DNA (Finkelstein and Gavin 2011). In this technoscape there is no room for hierarchies, and seemingly the whole world is brought closer by subscribing to their updates on Facebook or becoming a follower on Twitter.

*Homo connectus* needs to be connected as much as to breathe; e-mails, messages, and notifications are the foods that feed them. But they may get caught in a spiral, checking and rechecking,

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looking for their daily dose of notifications. An overdose of connection may be stress-inducing, while a lack of connection may cause their anxiety levels to sky rocket. According to one study, the obsessive use of the digital devices leads to high levels of stress in some users who feel imaginary vibrations from mobile phones that are not buzzing (Schwarze 2012). Not being able to sign off and getting trapped in the Net is one of the typical illnesses in the digital age. Practicing digital detachment has proved to be a harsh cure for this illness of the postmodern digerati. Disconnect to reconnect, digital detox, or what Powers (2010) has termed an *Internet Sabbath*, brings several benefits. According to Powers, “Your mind slows down, it really goes to a different place when you’ve been off the internet for a day or two” (NPR 2010). Finding a “high-tech, high touch” balance is a challenge nowadays. This concept was introduced by Naisbitt in his visionary book, *Megatrends* (1982). He admonishes that we must increase “high touch” in parallel with the rise of “high tech” in our lives for a more emotionally satisfying existence (Naisbitt 2001).

In this constantly “on” world, *homo connectus* no longer enjoys those sacred analog moments, typical of earlier time. Digital devices have intruded on what was once considered “down times,” like dinner with the family, the golden moments devoted to reading a newspaper over a cup of coffee, and even the sleep time. They have conquered the most precious moments, and violated the most sacred spaces. One of the recent conquests starring an iPhone was at a concert by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. The strict protocol of virginal silence was breached by the profane “Marimba” ring tone of someone’s iPhone during a particularly emotional part of the symphony. Gilbert Alan, the orchestra’s music director, said: “It was so shocking what happened. You’re in this very far away spiritual place in the piece. It’s like being rudely awakened. All of us were stunned on the stage” (Wakin 2012). Even the lamas in Tibet, one of the most isolated, untouched, and spiritual places on Earth, use mobile phones. The combination of their traditional robes and the new technologies shocks the Western eye which sees with disillusionment how these devices have even conquered the Himalayas.

*Homo connectus* is always learning and sharing. For this *ibersocial* individual, learning is also a social activity. Learning is nowadays multi-linear, visual, and ubiquitous, using both online sources as well as peers to get knowledge and share it with the digital others. In a pre-digital age learning was an individual process based on internalizing knowledge, while in the digital era, it is a social activity of externalizing knowledge (Veen 2007). The *Global Brain* is the term coined in 1982 by Peter Russell to refer to collective intelligence in a networked world. The openness to sharing knowledge has resulted in the so-called *crowd-accelerated innovation*. The term was coined by Chris Anderson, the curator of TED Talks, and it characterizes the collaborative boost in learning fostered by the Internet. Finkelstein and Gavin (2011) refer to the *Participation Age* to describe how digital media have changed the way information is created, published, managed, and consumed. Other labels include co-creation, infotopia, and we-think.

New technologies have become part of the basic infrastructure of the modern world, reshaping every sphere of our lives. In order to adapt to this new scenario, Nicholas Carr (2011) more critically asserts that “What we’re experiencing is, in a metaphorical sense, a reversal of the early trajectory of civilization: we are evolving from cultivators of personal knowledge into hunters and gatherers in the electronic data forest” (p. 138). In the process, Carr contends, we seem fated to sacrifice much of what makes our minds so interesting.

### **Realms of digital consumption**

In the chapters that follow, a vast range of digital consumption topics are addressed. As Venkatesh and Dunkle document in Chapter 2, communication, entertainment, information, shopping,



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banking, health care, and socializing are among the consumption arenas in which digital technologies have thus far had the greatest impact in transforming our lives. While they emphasize the digitization of aspects of our lives such as bill paying, photo making, storage, display, and television viewing, all of which previously used analogue technologies within the home, other chapters add to this list of digital substitutions: blogging (Chapter 5, Arsel and Zhao; Chapter 6, Kretz and de Valk), Internet-based sharing (Chapter 13, Siebert; Chapter 18, Vicdan and Dholakia), gazing (Chapter 14, Veer), dating (Chapter 17, Lawson and Leck), stock trading (Chapter 19, Schroeder and Zwick), gambling (Chapter 23, Cotte), worshiping (Chapter 25, Lanier and Fowler; Chapter 27, Muñiz, Antorini, and Schau), gaming (Chapter 26, Fleck, Lanioro, and Rossi), protesting (Chapter 34, Handelman), and mourning (Chapter 35, Lim).

In order to more fully consider the impact that such digitally facilitated actions may have in transforming us, other chapters focus on personal and interpersonal processes involved in consuming digital technologies. The influence of new technologies on our social capital and the way they affect our relationships were examined in a study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Boase *et al.* 2006). They found out that while some people see the Internet as amplifying relationships both socially and geographically, others see it as creating alienated forms of life that are far from being “authentic” and “real.” Technologies are also reshaping the nature of the relationships, and in this digital era a re-examination of concepts such as friendship is important.

As Hoffman, Novak, and Stein detail in Chapter 3, motivations for engaging with social media are far from homogeneous. They also join a number of other chapter authors in discussing user roles in not only consuming, but also producing social media content, e.g., Parmentier and Fischer (Chapter 16), Bonsu (Chapter 22), Schau and Gilly (Chapter 7), Hemetsberger (Chapter 15), Lanier and Fowler (Chapter 25), Molesworth and Denegri-Knott (Chapter 20). Although user-generated content may provide an outlet for creativity and enhance the reputation of those producing it, another impact is to influence other users’ subsequent consumption of music, movies, fashions, and food, e.g. Arsel and Zhao (Chapter 5), Kretz and de Valck (Chapter 6), and Parmentier and Fischer (Chapter 16). One of the reasons that word of mouth from fellow consumers is trusted is the assumption that those providing their opinions and evaluations are not trying to sell us anything (see Chapter 21, Penz and Hogg). In a broader sense what these consumers are “selling” is themselves. The expanded possibilities for self-presentation through digital media mean that we can say and show aspects of the self that are inappropriate or difficult to display in face-to-face encounters with others. We can display our favorite brands, list our favorite music and movies, make evident who are friends are, show photos, provide updates on our activities, and much more.

However, as Schau and Gilly show in Chapter 7, as our self-representations have migrated from free-form web pages to the templates of social media sites and blog consolidations, creativity has been constrained and we are encouraged to provide the same types of information about ourselves as others do. Our specific content differs, but we are following the equivalent of what Rick Wilk (1995) calls global structures of common difference. That is, the general structure of self-differentiation is similar even though our local articulation within this structure shows some uniqueness. Arsel and Zhao as well as Kretz and de Valck provide rich accounts of why people blog. In addition to expressing actual and ideal self by creating a self-narrative, displaying taste, and revealing brand and style affinities, blogging can also be cathartic, a form of connection providing feelings of community, a way to create a sense of individual power in influencing others’ opinions, a way of seeking celebrity, and sometimes a way of earning money, receiving free goods, and acquiring entry to special events. The latter benefits are more likely for those fashion bloggers who acquire significant followings. The rise of influential bloggers is one instance of a more general shift of power within the digitized marketplace from marketers to consumers.

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However, the monetized connections between marketers and some bloggers mean that, like product placements, what may appear as spontaneous, innocent, consumer-driven commentary can also be a sometimes hidden form of paid promotion. Laws differ from country to country on requirements for disclosing freebies or compensation a blogger has received.

### **Being influenced in digital consumption**

In other cases the presence of the market in digital media is more explicit. Darke, Benedicktus, and Brady examine in Chapter 36 the role of trust in patronage of Internet sellers and why consumers are often willing to pay a premium price to buy directly from a prominent retailer whom they trust. They consider various theoretical models of why online retailing is not the level playing field it was expected to be. In Chapter 23, Cotte reviews another case of seemingly irrational digital consumption: online gambling. In accounting for the more extreme behaviors of gamblers online versus in brick and mortar casinos, she points to the use of more ephemeral electronic money, the anonymity of the player, the lack of the verbal and non-verbal cues present in dealing with embodied others, and the familiarity and safety of gambling online from within the player's home. In turning to her own research with young online gamblers, Cotte finds that contrary to Darke *et al.*, there is a great deal of unwarranted trust in the, usually foreign, online casinos that they patronize. She concludes that the assumption of digital expertise among these "digital natives" is not always warranted.

In Chapter 24, Yeo highlights another case of digital influence in the viral spread of both marketer-generated and consumer-generated digital content. He points out that some of this rapid propagation of content is also seen in pre-digital urban legends, rumors, and word-of-mouth behaviors. Among the processes involved when video clips and other narratives "go viral" are the fan dynamics addressed by Lanier and Fowler in Chapter 25 as well as the sharing addressed by Siebert in Chapter 13. As with passing along interesting, amazing, or titillating rumors, video spoofs, and word of mouth, passing along digital content that fascinates and entertains those in our social networks can similarly enhance our image as being knowledgeable, fun, and well-connected. However, as Siebert finds in the context of dating couples sharing cellular phones in Indonesia, there can also be intense jealousy when a partner suspects that their loved one has been sharing messages with rival love interests. Although, as Lanier and Fowler emphasize, digital fandom can be consumer-driven and oppositional, it can also be producer-driven through transmedia storytelling. But in both cases, as with consumption-related blogging, consumers are engaging with marketers to co-construct the meaning and even co-create the content of the object of their fandom (e.g., with fan fiction authored by consumer-fans using the characters and settings of *Harry Potter* or *Star Trek*).

Such co-construction and consumer participation in production are also evident in many of the practices of crowdsourcing that Hemetsberger analyzes in Chapter 15. In her broad view, crowdsourcing includes not only open source software like Linux, collaborative online projects like Wikipedia, and crowd voting participation in shows like *American Idol* (see Parmentier and Fischer in Chapter 16), but also uploading photos and videos to sites like Flickr and YouTube, submitting profile material to dating sites like eHarmony and Yahoo Personals (see Lawson and Leck in Chapter 17), writing reviews and recommendations on sites like Amazon and Apple's App Store (see Penz and Hogg in Chapter 21), constructing and participating in virtual worlds and games like Second Life and World of Warcraft (see Fleck, Dalmoro, and Rossi in Chapter 26), and participating in social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. In Chapter 22, Bonsu warns that such activity not only can be part of the co-creation of value for both users and the usually commercial entities behind them, but can also be a form of unpaid labor and exploitation of

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consumers by those who seek to profit from them. This is not to say that consumers may not also benefit in social reputation, enjoyment, connections, celebrity, respect, and even job opportunities based on co-production, but the few originators who benefit from the labor of the many consumers providing content certainly enjoy the vast majority of economic benefits that such collaborations produce.

### **Benefits and problems of digital consumption**

The digitalization of life creates and reinforces changes, from micro routines like the alterations in family life mentioned above to changes at a macro or societal level. On one hand, technology is separating family members even as it enables communication among people around the world. On the other hand, information technology is fostering inequalities among countries giving rise to the “digital divide” regarding possession, creation, and dissemination of knowledge. There is also a “generation divide” segregating the “adaptive immigrants” from the “digital natives” and particularly from the “M-Agers” – youngsters born since 1997 who have always had internet and mobile devices as a part of their lives and who do not draw a line between the real and the virtual world (Hudson 2011).

The case of co-construction and co-creation in digital environments is another aspect of a broader assessment of the costs and benefits of digital consumption. Much can be said of the new and empowering possibilities that have emerged and will continue to emerge online. These include sharing medical information (Chapter 18, Vicdan and Dholakia), trading stocks (Chapter 19, Schroeder and Zwick), enjoying better communication (Chapter 3, Hoffman, Novak, and Stein; Chapter 8, Patterson; Chapter 2, Venkatesh and Dunkle), fashioning and presenting the self (Chapter 5, Arsel and Zhao; Chapter 7, Schau and Gilly; Chapter 6, Kretz and de Valck), creating new and enhanced or transformed selves (Chapter 4, Campbell; Chapter 20, Molesworth and Dengri-Knott), shopping online (Chapter 21, Penz and Hogg); interactive gaming (Chapter 26, Fleck, Dalmoro, and Rossi; Chapter 20, Molesworth and Dengri-Knott), finding or forming community (Chapter 25, Lanier and Fowler; Chapter 27, Muñoz, Antorini, and Schao; Veer), finding partners (Chapter 17, Lawson and Leck), joining and participating in consumer activist movements (Chapter 31, Albinsson and Perera; Chapter 34, Handelman), and even paying final respects and memorializing the dead (Chapter 35, Lim).

At the same time there are a number of danger areas for consumer well-being that are identified in these chapters. They include threats to privacy (Chapter 29, Grant and Waite; Chapter 28, Singh and Lyon; Chapter 30, Weijo; Chapter 10, Pridmore and Zwick), threats to the young, to women, and to sexual minorities (Chapter 11, Tingstad; Chapter 33, Tufte); threats to our attention span and ability to concentrate (Chapter 32, Chinchachokchai and Duff), and threats to self-control and “reasonable” spending (Chapter 23, Cotte; Chapter 36, Darke, Benedicktus, and Brady; Chapter 20, Molesworth and Dengri-Knott; Chapter 19, Zwick and Schroeder).

Any attempt to tally or compare the benefits and problems created by digital consumption would be overly simplistic. Furthermore, the impact of digital consumption is largely positive for some and largely negative for others. New media evangelists coexist with digital detractors. And for the many others in the world who are not directly involved in digital consumption, the effects are distant, although in this case too they are two-sided. By not being involved in the digital revolution, they are missing opportunities that are afforded to others; they are being left further behind in advances in economic, health, communication, entertainment, and the other realms that digital consumption has aided or created. But they are also shielded from spam, digital scams, digital distractions, digital addictions, and the other ills that have accompanied the digital revolution.

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### Future research

Digital consumption has attracted the attention of a broad array of social sciences, physical sciences, medical sciences, humanities, arts, commerce, politics, athletics, travel, entertainment, communications, and a number of other disciplines. It is difficult to imagine an area of inquiry that is unaffected. With such a broad array of perspectives and the ongoing revolution in digital technologies, there is no single research method that is applicable across these fields. Furthermore, the same ongoing changes in digital technologies that are challenging old methods of research are also providing and necessitating new methods. There are a few exemplary methodological treatments like Boellstorff's (2008) discussion of adapting ethnographic methods to researching Second Life consumption, Kozinet's (2010) development of netnography for researching online groups and forums, and the discussions in Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets (forthcoming). And the chapters in this volume by Colleoni (Chapter 12), Kozinets (Chapter 9), Patterson (Chapter 8), Tingstad (Chapter 11); and Pridmore and Zwick (Chapter 10) provide discussions of other techniques for academic and business research on digital consumption.

Theoretically, we are at or near the beginning of trying to understand how digital technologies are shaping human relationships, sense of community, global understanding, personal, group, and national identity, business, leisure, work, governance, religion, culture, creativity, generosity, and other significant spheres of life. The key issue is not about how technology is going to evolve in the future but how we, consumers, are going to evolve through incorporating these technologies as integral parts of our everyday lives. In *What Technology Wants*, Kelly (2010) asserts that technology has been part of our lives forever, but what it is new to our times is the way we interact. According to Kelly, ten thousand years ago, humanity reached a turning point where our ability to modify the biosphere exceeded the planet's ability to modify us. This threshold was the beginning of the *Technium*. We are now at a second inflection point, where the situation has reversed and the ability of the *Technium* to modify us exceeds our capacity to alter it (ibid., p. 197). In this vein, future research should address the new digital consumer instead of merely the consumer of technology.

Future research agendas may also focus on the intersection between the digital age and transformative consumer research, finding new approaches to how technology can help to improve our individual and collective well-being. Collective and creative thinking through digital media can help in seeking solutions to challenges such as sustainability, materialism, and excess in consumption. Through social media, consumers are becoming more powerful and societies are becoming more democratic. Communities and social movements benefit from the viral effects provided by the net. The pro-social agenda of transformative consumer research may be able to leverage these same developments.

The chapters in this volume suggest some of the pressing research needs at the present time. In the short history of digitization we are already long past the point where researchers could ignore these trends and assume that we are merely using new media in the same ways we have used old media. We are also moving past the initial swell of utopian and dystopian takes on digitization as being the salvation or curse of humankind. Technodystopias focused on the extinction of the human being as we know it, and the rise of cyborgs. This dystopian view has been with us at least since the writings of Andre? Leroi-Gourhan in the 1960s (Lenoir 2003). Just as earlier technologies (e.g., the telegraph, the phonograph, photography, film, mechanization) were regarded in extreme ways initially and began to have their most profound effects when they were accepted as a part of everyday life, so it is with digital technologies. Even such advances as written language provoked a twofold reaction among the ancient Greeks. While some were enthusiastic about this "new technology," others like Socrates viewed it as a way to

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destroy our minds and advised us to “stay away from the alphabet” (Carr 2011; Manguel 1996; Powers 2010). We have moved from an era when the computer was seen as an impersonal device to be loathed and feared for its use in controlling our lives and dehumanizing us, to the present era when computing is ubiquitous and largely embraced as something very personal, useful, and fascinating.

But as Cotte finds, just because we now have a generation of digital natives who have grown up with digital devices (e.g., Palfrey and Gasser 2008; Tapscott 2009), does not necessarily mean that they are all sophisticated, wise, or appropriately cautious users of these devices and applications. Furthermore, just because young people were in the vanguard of adopting and embracing digital technologies, should not restrict us to focusing on issues like identity that may be especially compelling to this age group. Already attention is being paid to events of later life stages such as digital mourning (see Chapter 35, Lim) and disposition of our “digital estate” (Carroll and Romano 2011).

It is our hope that the chapters that follow will stimulate reader to think about the nature and effects of digital consumption. We also hope that they raise new issues for future research and make us more alert to the implications of new digital developments in the future. More generally, the great attention that digital consumption is beginning to attract should sensitize us to considering the effects of past and future technologies as well.

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