Consumers at the “bottom of the pyramid” (BOP) are not just targets of social action aimed at poverty reduction, improved consumption aspiration and capability, and enhanced well being. These “next four billion” consumers also represent an unprecedented opportunity for economic growth and innovation. However, this “marketplace” poses nontrivial challenges for governments, development agencies, NGO’s, corporations, entrepreneurial organizations and others who work to foster new economic opportunity, create new jobs, and drive positive, sustainable social change. BOP consumers constitute a complex milieu in which traditional economic, psychological, and socio-cultural thinking about behavior often bite the dust. Hence, an informed understanding of the tenets of consumer behavior that drive demand for goods and services in BOP markets is essential for both practitioners seeking impact and academics seeking new conceptual challenges. This session underscores the challenges that BOP markets pose for consumer researchers, whether academics or practitioners. The two panelists bring distinctly different perspectives to the table. Verghese Jacob is Chief Integrator of the Byrraju Foundation, a non-profit foundation that seeks to build progressive self-reliant rural communities - using a holistic approach - by providing services in healthcare, environment, sanitation, primary education, adult literacy and skills development. The Hyderabad-based foundation currently works in 200 villages in 6 districts of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, positively transforming the lives of nearly 3 million people. The talk draws upon this experience to present a paradigm that places the BOP market center-stage in product and process innovations. The paradigm recognizes and adapts to BOP consumer behaviors that may not conform to traditional conceptual frames. Prashant Malaviya is Associate Professor of Marketing, Georgetown University. His remarks also focus on the non-traditional features of consumer behavior in BOP markets. Building on his market analysis, he argues the marketing and business model implications for firms that wish to play in these environments. He argues why these firms must treat their BOP marketplace efforts as an integral part of their business model as opposed to one-off market servicing efforts that contribute to the firm social responsibility and citizenship profile. Dipankar Chakravarti is Professor of Marketing, Johns Hopkins University. He will chair the session, provide some relevant commentary, but mainly facilitate discussion among the panelists and the audience. The goal is to explore new consumer research opportunities that focus on BOP markets.

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