



**TRANSFORMATIVE  
CONSUMER RESEARCH**

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## **2013 CONFERENCE**

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**SKEMA BUSINESS SCHOOL •  
LILLE, FRANCE • MAY 24-25, 2013**



# 2013 PROCEEDINGS

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## Poverty and Vulnerability

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Poverty is a central aspect of life for more than one billion people in the world; it reaches across Europe, Central Asia, America, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, making poverty a major global concern. Poverty can be conceptualized in economic terms as a shortage of income, and in more holistic terms, with a focus on “poor living” conditions that accompany a shortage of income (Blocker et al, 2012; Sen 2000). Both approaches are useful to understanding poverty and vulnerability from a TCR perspective. The focus of previous TCR poverty tracks has been on subsistence marketplaces; we want to broaden the focus to include a wider understanding of the experience of poverty from different country perspectives. We aim to explore both macro forces that impact on the condition of poverty as well as the lived experience of poor consumers in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the “interaction of individual states, individual characteristics, and external conditions” (Baker, et al 2005:134) that create vulnerability. There are a number of key issues that are particularly important and useful to this discussion:

- Political perspectives: If poverty is deprivation of the means to live a minimally decent life as shaped by society (Blocker et al 2012), then what are the links between poverty and ideology? What are the ideological barriers that prevent poverty eradication? How does this impact on social exclusion of people from mainstream society?
- Socio-cultural perspectives: Recognizing that poverty is a relative concept, what are the similarities and differences between impoverished consumers around the world? How does the experience of poverty compare between developing and developed countries? How does the social construction of poverty led to the stigmatization of poor consumers, by both other consumers and service providers?
- Psychological perspectives: What are the consequences of experiencing poverty? What are the impacts of poverty on self-identity? What coping strategies are employed and are coping strategies aimed at meeting economic needs or social needs? What cognitive and emotional capabilities and conditions improve well-being in relation to consumer decision-making?
- Economic perspectives: How is the incidence and experience of poverty changing in the current (recent) global economic crisis? How are people, especially the working poor, responding to this: What can we learn from

the emergence of the 'nouveaux pauvres' whose economic capital has decreased?

- Historical perspectives: How have understandings of poverty evolved? What is the impact of an increasingly globalized world? What is the impact of the emergence and development of a welfare state?

We seek researchers from across the world with an interest in poverty and vulnerability. All disciplinary, theoretical (e.g. practice theory, sociological theory etc.) and methodological perspectives are welcomed. We will aim to stimulate collaborative work that sheds new light on poverty, vulnerability and the challenges and opportunities associated with reducing its negative impact.

## **Developing Markets**

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This track will address what “development” is and how “development” is related to markets and economic growth of markets. The approaches to developing markets have been largely dominated by economists and financial analysts. Yet, there is a growing awareness about the issues of human development – beyond the economic and the financial – especially given the recent series of global crises. The purpose of this session is to introduce social, cultural, and political perspectives into the study of (“developing”) markets and interrogate the prevailing notions of ‘developing markets’. This track will assemble researchers 1) who think about such issues, 2) who are interested in exploring ways to transform citizen-consumer well-being and welfare in emerging markets, and 3) who want to develop research approaches to study emerging markets from a broader perspective; using political-social-cultural-historical as well as the economic-financial perspective.

The research topics of potential exploration could entail consumer choice, free markets, power and conflict relations, and individual-community interactions, among others. Such questions can be addressed with an array of tools in the eclectic tool-kit familiar to consumer researchers who bring insights and methods from multiple disciplines and perspectives. The unit of analysis can be individual consumers, families, communities or other groups of consumers. An overarching objective of the track is to advance new theory and/or ground-breaking policy to enhance citizen consumer well-being and welfare in emerging markets.

Inspired by Flyvbjerg’s recent book titled Making Social Science Matter, this track calls for thinking about the types of questions we scholars should be asking. We should consider questions such as: Where are we going with the research on developing markets? How to examine who gains, who loses, by which mechanisms of power? Is where we are going with the research we have been doing desirable? What should be done?

## **Immigration, Culture, and Ethnicity**

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This track originates from a simple but hard to tackle question: What happens to consumer acculturation studies when they come across Transformative Consumer Research? Rephrasing, to what extent and how does the focus on consumer well-being modify the research agenda of scholars investigating the role of markets and consumption in multiethnic societies?

We argue a preliminary answer is detectable in the role that ‘being like’ and ‘being different from’ play in the making of personal and social well-being. Contributions in the field of consumer acculturation have long questioned the accommodation of immigrants to local (market) cultures and the domination of the host culture on original ethnic, religious, and national cultures.

On closer inspection, the similarity/difference frame is also central to the understanding of market functioning. Markets may help human beings to leverage their “similarities” (e.g., achieving collective well-being) and establish mutually beneficial relationships through the sharing of multiple resources and the exchange of socio-cultural signs and values, economic gains, aesthetics, and/or ideas and ideals. Yet, markets are battlefields where focus on “differences” has given rise to a plethora of socio-cultural, economic, ideological, and political conflicts.

Discussion may address conceptual, methodological, and empirical issues in the field of acculturation research and multicultural markets at large. Possible but not exhaustive directives include: (1) innovative methodologies or empirical works to diagnose similarities and differences that impact immigrants and/or autochthonous people? well-being, (2) analysis of conflicts as a result of which consumer well-being is at risk, (3) multidisciplinary approaches to the field, (4) connections between ethnic minorities and other minorities in the market (bottom of the pyramid, LGBT, elderly consumers and more), and (5) realistic social or economic policy implications for individuals, organizations, NGOs and governments.

## **Family, Risk, and Consumption**

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A significant proportion of children are at substantial risk for negative outcomes due to the family, community, social, political, and economic conditions they inherit. These outcomes include, but are not limited to, infant mortality, undernourishment, abuse, neglect, poor health, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, crime, violence, and academic underachievement. Consumption and consumer behavior underlie many of these adverse outcomes. For example, poverty exacerbates most other risk factors, and it is the central reason that many children and families do not thrive.

In this track we focus on families at risk. We strive to examine consumption and both positive and negative contributors to family resiliency, vulnerability, and well-being. These contributors might include individual role development and identity, individual (parent and child) functioning, social determinants of family health and well-being, social support and cohesion, public policy, socio-cultural structures, access, literacy, media, and service use.

Health and well-being are resources that build and sustain family resiliency, supporting their capacity to adapt to, respond to, and control life's challenges and changes. Family well-being is the result of multiple and interwoven determinants ranging from individual-level factors (biological, genetic, behavioral) to local resources and opportunities for well-being to society-wide factors (environmental, cultural, and socio-economic). This track seeks to examine all these influences on families at risk. In this spirit, we especially encourage using different paradigms to view families at risk. For example, the examination of families at risk from a "social determinants of health" approach (Marmot and Wilkinson 1999) would see unequal outcomes for families and children as social injustices rather than the result of individual dysfunction or deficit.

A broad range of topics would fit in this track, including the following:

- antenatal behavioral determinants
- sibling influences
- parenting styles
- family structures (e.g., grandparents, blended families, same-sex parents)
- housing and the physical environment
- teen pregnancies
- brain development vulnerability (e.g. the teenage brain)

- youth identity formation
- susceptible developmental periods
- impacts of social structures on families
- cultural and cross-cultural aspects of family (myths, rituals, values, norms, etc.)
- technology and families (cell phones, video gaming, etc.)
- media/advertising portrayal of family roles/relationships
- immigration and family challenges
- ethnicity and family challenges
- elder abuse (e.g., manipulation of reverse mortgages)
- family-related public policy



## **Sustainability**

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We believe the defining challenge facing humanity in the twenty-first century is to learn how to live well while, at the same time, preserving the natural systems that make it possible for all people, including future generations, to enjoy a similarly high quality of life (Martin & Schouten 2012). The challenge is daunting. Rising populations demanding higher standards of living run a collision course with finite natural resources. Collapsing ecosystems, disappearing sources of fresh water, increasingly pervasive toxins and the effects of global warming all are observable in our time. What's more, such destruction is inevitable as long as our systems of production and consumption continue to operate within the dominant social paradigm (Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero 1997). Only a complete paradigm shift embracing global culture, politics and economics will likely be sufficient to reverse current trends and bring about a sustainable society: one that continually conserves or restores natural capital while respecting and building human capital.

As consumer researchers our domain of inquiry encompasses both marketing and consumption. It is through marketing systems that most of humanity's material needs and many of our psychological needs are met. Marketing institutions have an enormous environmental and social footprint. At the interface between business and society, marketing also has great potential for driving cultural change. Among other roles, transformative consumer research should be a forum for understanding and shaping marketing's pivotal role in the future of business and society. The question is, "What can TCR do to help marketing step outside the dominant social paradigm and help define a new world order"? The vision for 2013 is to advance research with the potential to shakeup marketing thought, to wakeup business leaders and policy makers to the enormity and urgency of the sustainability crisis, and to refocus the energy of the marketing discipline toward embracing the global sustainability project.

We propose to conduct a working paper session. The objective is to bring together authors with work in progress for friendly, rigorous critique, feedback and ideas for preparing papers or other works for high-impact publication. Participants would be selected based on the state of development of their thinking, including current research projects, and their potential to provoke systemic change in

marketing thought, education, practice or policy. Ideally any research projects would be under way but not yet completed, so as to offer a basis for further improvement. Proposals to participate should contain both a summary of the work in progress and a plan to maximize its impact upon completion, which may or may not prioritize a journal article. Optimally, half the authors will be senior scholars in order that any junior scholars might receive adequate mentoring, and the group will ideally draw from a geo-cultural diversity of people and perspectives. In workshop fashion participants would present their projects, break into small groups to work on manuscripts and then reconvene to formulate dissemination and impact strategies.

## **Health and Nutrition**

Track Co-chairs:

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Previous research found many ways in which food decisions and marketing impact consumer health. Studies reported the influence of the 4P's of food marketing as well as the effects of cognitive, motivational, social, and environmental factors on the healthfulness of consumers' decisions (e.g., Aydinoglu and Krishna 2011; Chandon and Ordabayeva 2009; Chernev and Gal 2010; Dhar and Simonson 1999; Irmak, Vallen, and Robinson 2011; McFarren et al. 2010; Mukhopadhyay & Johar 2005; Raghubir and Krishna 1999; Wansink and van Ittersum 2003). Poor food choices were linked to such pressing health issues as the rise in the obesity epidemic and the accompanying healthcare costs (Chandon and Wansink 2007; Finkelstein et al. 2010; Thorpe 2009). As a consequence, many suggestions and tools were put forth to help consumers lead healthier lifestyles. And yet, the growing salience of health goals in contemporary society has not always led to healthier choices. For example, the growing presence of healthy options on restaurant menus and supermarket shelves has actually caused some consumers to overindulge (Chandon and Wansink 2007; Scott et al. 2008; Wilcox et al. 2009). Moreover, the rise of a new health ideology, "healthism", created a moralized landscape of prescriptions and prohibitions, which is growing increasingly complicated for consumers to navigate. A surge of new agents, products and services in the health market has transformed consumers from passive recipients of treatment into empowered actors who can actively choose the types and the quality of treatments that they receive. These developments call for renewed attention to what people do in the pursuit of good health and how their behaviour relates to particular understandings of what health and health risk is, of rights and responsibilities – personal, public as well as private – of the individual and the common good.

The Health and Nutrition track of the 2013 Transformative Consumer Research Conference aims to inspire a balanced discussion of these multiple facets of consumer health and nutrition issues. We invite submissions of empirical and theoretical nature that uncover the multidimensional, multi-actor, and multidisciplinary nature of health and nutrition questions. We welcome contributions that extend the understanding of the health-nutrition link as well as those that adopt broader perspectives of health and food to offer new avenues for improving consumers' physical, mental, and food well-being. We also invite research that adopts a critical perspective on contemporary healthism, even if these ideas run contrary to the prevailing view.

## **Technology and Marketplace Transformation**

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For us, the purpose of transformative consumer research is two-fold. One purpose is to consider ways in which the field of consumer research can become an agent of progressive transformation. To do so, we call for transformative consumer researchers to engage with important ongoing but largely ignored intellectual conversations about social justice, environmental protection, economic equality and political self-determination. Another purpose is to transform consumer research itself so as to confront the reality of systematic economic exploitation, environmental degradation, de-democratization, social alienation and breakdown.

To accomplish this double transformation, consumer research must avoid falling into one of the two common ideological traps of non-transformative consumer research. The first trap is the common inclination to focus almost obsessively on the personal experiences of consumers using technologies (struggling to construct identities, finding personal empowerment and self-actualization, build communities, cope with failure, produce a sense of belonging, and so on), which deflect from the larger political-economic context that gives birth and meaning to these technology-aided consumption phenomena and experiences in the first place (e.g., why do we even look at commodity consumption as a site of empowerment in any form?). The second ideological trap is to give in to the postmodern cynicism – commonly found under the heading of marketplace studies – that consumer resistance, and indeed any acts of resistance more generally, represent little more than fuel for the rejuvenation of capitalist market dynamics.

Therefore, for our track we encourage contributors to escape or sidestep these traps of consumer research (see also Zwick, 2012; Zwick & Schroeder, 2013). Instead, we seek empirical and theoretical interventions that connect critically individual experiences of technology consumption to the politico-economic contexts of technology production and marketing, and we call for studies that look for real possibilities of resistance to hitherto unquestioned forms of technology production, consumption, and marketing.

## Materialism

Track Co-chairs:

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Materialism is foundational to Transformative Consumer Research (TCR). It plays a central role in many facets of consumer behavior. Although there are a number of approaches to the study of materialism, at the 2013 TCR conference in Lille, France, we would like to focus primarily on three avenues that we think are most promising for moving the field forward. We are thus requesting that you indicate for which of these three “clusters” your work or interests are most relevant. First, Tina M. Lowrey will be responsible for a developmental cluster (i.e., how children are socialized into being brand-aware and, potentially, materialistic). Second, Ayalla Ruvio will be responsible for a cluster on the negative consequences of materialism (e.g., how materialism leads to stress or other results of the “dark side” of materialism). Finally, Mario Pandelaere will be responsible for a cluster on the positive consequences of materialism (i.e., the “silver lining” of materialism that has been overlooked, for the most part, in the extant literature). Each of these clusters will be described in more detail below.

### Cluster 1: How Does Materialism Develop in Children and Adolescents?

This cluster invites researchers interested in how children learn to be consumers, along with related issues. At what age do children understand brand symbolism? Are there age differences in levels of materialism, appreciation of experiences, stereotyping others based on their possessions, etc., (and, if so, what developmental underpinnings can account for them). We know from past literature that young adolescents have been found to be the most materialistic (Chaplin and John 2007), but do we know why? Are there interventions that parents and teachers might use to help children and adolescents be less materialistic? Should we be concerned about the level of materialism in children and adolescents? These are just a few questions that this cluster is designed to investigate, and we welcome submissions that answer these or similar questions.

### Cluster 2: The Dark Side of Materialism (Negative Consequences)

Stress and materialism are probably two of the most distinctive characteristics of modern life. As such, each of these concepts has received extensive scholarly attention. Stress is a focal theme in psychological research, and materialism is central to many consumer behavior studies. With few exceptions, these two

research streams have rarely coalesced (Moschis 2007). The small number of studies that have explored the dynamics between stress and materialism offer two somewhat contradictory points of view. Although some researchers perceive stress as a negative consequence of materialism (e.g., Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002), others regard materialism as a coping mechanism for stress (e.g., Arndt, Solomon, Sakker, and Sheldon 2004). These two propositions leave us with a fundamental, unanswered question: How do materialism and stress relate to each other? We welcome studies that will help shed light on the dynamics between materialism and stress, and possibly other negative consequences as well.

### Cluster 3: The Silver Lining of Materialism (Positive Consequences)

The third cluster deals with a silver lining of materialism. As materialism is typically regarded as a dark trait/value, spurred by various insecurities (and detrimental to well-being), such a view fails to consider why people would persist in materialistic goal pursuit if it would not yield some (perceived) advantages. Future research should investigate why materialism is considered a road to deal with one's insecurities, and the extent to which it is able to alleviate them. This view builds on research on compensatory consumption (e.g., Rucker and Galinsky, 2009; Sivanathan and Pettit 2010), on the framework developed during the 2011 TCR Conference (Wong et al., in press), and on research investigating potential benefits associated with materialistic consumption (Hudders and Pandelaere, 2012). We welcome submissions that investigate potential positive consequences of materialism in addition to that outlined here.

## **Innovative Research Methods**

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One of the fundamental aims of Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) is to change what appears to be a private trouble into a public issue. This type of research is transformative only if it is theoretically grounded creating a revolutionary consciousness that goes beyond description and engenders a process of mutual education and social action. TCR scholars are therefore working to bring academic conversations to publics. In this way, they are public intellectuals. A public intellectual reaches beyond the academy and attempts to generate dialogue on the nature of consumer society, its values, and the gap between its promise and reality. Ultimately, this dialogue attempts to create an empathetic understanding that fosters a struggle to make the invisible visible, the submissive self-assured, and the subjugated empowered to act.

Work as a public intellectual demands conceptualizing a transformative research agenda based on critical traditions and an expanding use of media (Bristor and Fischer 1993; Kozinets, Belz, and McDonagh 2012; Ozanne and Saatcioglu 2008; Penalzoza 1994). This stresses a creative use of innovative and traditional methods. Innovative methods refer to the power of alternative media. By exploring the creative potential of McLuhan's (1964) famous phrase the medium in the message, transformative consumer researchers have an opportunity to foster innovative forms of research. Surely dance, music, performance art, photography, poetry, and videography can help enhance various aspects of social change. In addition, traditional methods, such as surveys and experiments, have considerable legitimacy in policy debates.

We encourage proposals that help to articulate the meaning of the phrase public intellectual or discuss the transformative power of new media. We also seek proposals that use traditional methods in new ways, or in a context that fosters social change. Furthermore, some core concepts may need revisiting. What do we mean when we use terms like emancipation? According to whose interests can we criticize? Perhaps further reflection is needed not only in terms of our research approaches but the very political positions we adopt as we actively engage the world (Denzin 2001). The first goal of this track will be to establish meaningful scholarly relationships among researchers who have an interest in innovative methods that have the potential for social change. The second goal will be to identify an integrative research project or projects based on the interests and expertise of the track members.