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Sustainability in Subsistence Marketplaces, a Community Challenge

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TCR Scholarship for the Latin American Context—Session 2

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Paper #1: Choice Architecture, Norms and Sustainable Consumption

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Paper #2: Sustainability in Subsistence Marketplaces, a Community Challenge

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Paper #3: Sustainable Consumption: Driven by Purpose, Redirected by Emotions, Compromised by Income

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SESSION OVERVIEW

The Transformative Consumer Research movement was born around 12 years ago as an initiative to develop a scholarly agenda for improving “life in relation to the myriad conditions, demands, potentialities, and effects of consumption” (Mick 2006, p. 2). Although the initiative started with a focus on individuals’ vulnerability in the marketplace, recent changes in the world have brought several pressing social problems (e.g. terrorism, online violence, migration, among others) highlighting the need for a broader research agenda (Davis et al 2016).

Over the last 12 years, TCR has evolved to become an academic movement that is inspiring other business areas such as services, with the “Transformative Service Research” movement (Rosenbaum et al. 2011). Nowadays, TCR develops an ambitious rigorous research agenda to improve individuals’ well-being using different topics and different theoretical and methodological lenses (please see TCR’s 2017 website for an example of the list of current themes covered).

The evolution of the TCR agenda has also internationalized the dialogue, especially at times when worldwide academic researchers are increasingly expected to demonstrate productive engagement with external constituencies (Davis, Ozanne, and Hill 2016). This also resonates with calls for the identification of the macro forces, such as the environmental and sociocultural context of a region, which provide the resources that can be leveraged to improve people’s well-being (Mick et al. 2012, Shultz et al. 2012). Given the importance of the topic, we propose a double session to provide a geopolitical lens on the TCR research agenda:

Session 1 assembles four papers to discuss one of the traditional challenges faced by Latin American consumers: poverty. These papers analyze how consumers develop different legal and illegal practices to cope with their lack of resources. Session 2 assembles three papers to discuss an emergent but important issue worldwide: sustainability. These papers analyze alternatives to promote consumers’ environmentally friendly practices at an individual and community levels.

Although consumers’ culture is not limited by regional borders, it is shaped by the sociohistorical context (Chelekis and Figueiredo 2015). These research experiences currently developed in three Latin American countries (Colombia, Peru, and Brazil) highlight the relevance of the TCR movement for the region. Two general questions will be presented to the audience for discussion: 1) how do consum-

ers cope with the current most pressing social problems faced by the region? And 2) how can academia build upon Latin American sociocultural elements to contribute to improve consumers’ well-being? We expect these sessions to become a platform for: 1) Gaining insights for those interested in the intersection of social problems and academia; 2) Raising awareness about the challenges and opportunities for researchers pursuing TCR in Latin America; and 3) Building an informal network of researchers to continue developing the TCR research agenda.

Choice architecture, norms and sustainable consumption

Environmental problems are caused not only by industrial production but also by consumption patterns and behaviors of consumers (World Wildlife Fund, 2012; Popescu & Iosim, 2015; DuNann Winter & Koger, 2004; Gardner & Stern, 2002; Vlek & Steg, 2007). Many Latin American countries are experiencing significant progresses in their economies and it is expected that this will yield an increase in citizens’ available income and consumption levels. However, such advancement may negatively impact environmental conditions in these countries.

Therefore, studying how we can promote pro-environmental behavior and sustainable consumption is of crucial importance for Latin America. It has been shown that people in Latin American countries are generally very concerned about the environment. However, to attain sustainability in the environment, it is the commitment to consume in a sustainable manner - rather than the concern or short-term actions - that are important to achieve long-term social changes. This paper advances knowledge about mechanisms that affect pro-environmental behavior and sustainable consumption, and identify simple and actionable interventions that promote these virtuous behaviors.

We investigate the extent to which consumers are likely to engage in pro-environmental behavior and sustainable consumption when social and/or moral norms activate those behaviors. Consumers often experience conflict when they have to decide whether to consume in a sustainable way (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007; Nordlund & Garvill, 2003; Samuelson, 1990; Steg, Dreijerink, & Abrahamse, 2005; Steg & Nordlund, 2012). Sustainable consumption is intended to benefit others (including future generations) and nature. However, acting in sustainable ways can be costly (in time, effort and money) for the consumer (Steg & Nordlund, 2012). We propose that consumers use social and/or moral norms to solve these conflicts. Specifically, they use the information from the norm to decide about the appropriate behavior. Imagine that you are in a hotel room and are unsure of whether you should reuse the towel or not. How do you know what to do? A well-known study showed that guests in a hotel were more likely to reuse the towel when they were informed that a certain percentage of guests in that room reused that towel (Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008). This study exemplifies how the activation of a social norm was used to motivate people to reuse the towel.

However, we further propose that some pro-environmental behaviors and sustainable consumption decisions are better explained by the activation of moral norms instead of social norms. One of the consequences of this is that the behavior no longer depends on what the others are doing but on personal considerations. In the first part of the paper we investigate whether choosing non-environmentally-friendly products or services, and behaving in ways that can poten-

tially damage the environment are perceived as moral or social transgressions. We ask participants to determine the moral and/or social dimension of different hypothetical situations (e.g., not closing the water while you brush your teeth; throw garbage in a river). We also ask them to report the emotions they would experience if they were the transgressors and the emotions they would experience if they observe someone committing the transgression.

Next, drawing on literature on choice architecture we explore whether cues in the decision environment can activate either moral or social norms. Choice architecture refers to the physical and symbolic environment that decision-makers face at the point where they make a decision (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Moreover, interventions using choice architecture (e.g., changing the conditions and information that people have to make decisions) have shown to be a valuable tool to influence behavior (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). We explore whether choice architecture may be directed to activate social norms in some cases and moral norms in other cases, and the effect of these two different norms on people's behaviors. To investigate these mechanisms we design lab experiments manipulating choice environments and testing for differences in both the decisions and in the observed mechanism (activation of moral norms or social norms). We use different behavioral measures to better understand the effect of choice architecture and norm activation on consumers' pro-environmental behavior and sustainable consumption.

Our findings provide important insights on whether and how the choice environments in which consumers make decisions affect pro-environmental behavior and sustainable consumption. Also, it expands our understanding on which norms (social or moral) affect sustainable consumption. Finally, these results reveal how choice architecture can be used by policy makers to promote pro-environmental behavior and sustainable consumption, in order to improve consumers' well-being.

Sustainability in Subsistence Marketplaces, a Community Challenge

Nature and biodiversity are essential to human life. However, man's excessive use of natural resources for economic development has fostered undesirable changes (McDonough & Braungart, 2002), threatening even the world's future survival (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). The Brundtland report defines sustainable development as the use of resources to satisfy the needs of present generations, without compromising the possibilities for future ones to meet theirs (Brundtland, 1987). This intergenerational perspective of sustainability has been complemented by viewpoints that set out the effects of such environmental problems on present generations, especially when it comes to the most vulnerable communities (Martinez, 2004).

Webster's dictionary defines a vulnerable person as one who is "capable of being physically or emotionally wounded." Within this definition, poverty is a factor of vulnerability, whereby people's socio-economic situation makes them likely to be hurt by environmental degradation. For example, in developing countries, most of the poor live in regions subject to environmental risks (Leach & Mearns, 1991). This creates a paradox, because those people or communities with the smallest ecological footprint are the ones suffering the most of the global environmental effects (Thomas & Twyman, 2005).

Currently, both poverty and environmental degradation have increased in developing countries fostering a need to understand this relationship and to propose alternatives for its mitigation. However, this is much like the chicken and the egg situation: In some cases, poverty has been seen as causing environmental degradation due to people's development of non-environmental sustainable practices in

order to survive. Illegal mining in Colombia (Cordy et al., 2011) and deforestation in India (Angelsen & Kaimowitz, 1999) are some examples of this situation. In other cases, environmental degradation has been considered to cause poverty due to a lack of resources needed for people's survival. The diminishment of water sources in China (Lonergan, 1998) and "El niño" climate phenomenon in Latin America (Myers, 1997) have contributed to people's displacement, which in turn causes the migrants' socio-economic destabilization. In any of those views, it is undeniable the interrelationship between living in a vulnerable community and facing negative consequences for the environment. Therefore, and following the UN Vice Secretary's advice, in order to fight climate change (and its consequences), it is necessary to understand first the importance of the environment for the culture and economies of the communities and, in particular, for the most vulnerable that depend on these natural resources for their survival (United Nations, 2015)

Over the last 15 years, community based initiatives (CBI) have emerged as a positive bottom-up alternative for reaching a sustainable development of subsistence marketplaces. This type of initiative takes place wherein individuals cooperate with one another to obtain mutually beneficial arrangements in the short and long term, making communities both the agents and objects of their economic development (Gau et al., 2014). Although different disciplines, including marketing, have studied the benefits of CBIs for the development of social programs (Conning and Kevane, 2002; Gau et al., 2014), the literature has not addressed the managerial and policy challenges these initiatives face when implemented in subsistence marketplaces.

This study aims to a) analyze how Community Based Initiatives could be an effective management approach for promoting sustainable development in subsistence marketplaces, b) identify the challenges for the implementation of these initiatives, and c) discuss the public policy alternatives to overcome them. To achieve this, the study follows an interpretative approach focusing on twelve project managers of community based initiatives within Colombia. The results of this study will provide practitioners and policy makers the benefits and challenges of community strategies for promoting sustainable practices in subsistence marketplaces.

Sustainable Consumption: Driven by Purpose, Redirected by Emotions, Compromised by Income

This research focuses on sustainable consumption decisions made by consumers, and seeks to identify differences across social boundaries that may have geopolitical implications. The overarching objective is to understand how enduring values and context-induced emotions influence decision consistency and persistence. The investigation contrasts samples from Colombia and the US as distinct social environments, and will query consumers in each social milieu across socio-economic levels. Affluent consumers in both settings are used as a benchmark for identifying salient differences among low income consumers. Understanding these differences contributes to the development of plausible interventions that would help make consumption decisions, be they done by affluent or poor consumers, more economically, socially, and ecologically sustainable, and salutary to long term well-being. Increased sustainability and improved well-being are both important global objectives in contemporary consumer research. Under the well-being umbrella, the project touches on two topic areas identified by Transformative Consumer Research: reduction of social and ecological degradation and disadvantaged (vulnerable) consumers.

Consumer behavior scholars across several disciplines seek to understand sustainable consumption well enough to inform institutional policies and marketing practice. Dispositional factors (e.g.,

Harlan, Staats, & Wilkie 2007), self-concept (e.g., Griskevicius, Tybur, & Van den Bergh 2010), self-monitoring (Peloza, White, & Shang 2013), validating past behaviors (e.g., Longoni, Gollwitzer, & Oettingen, 2014), and enduring values (e.g., Cornelissen, Banshur, Rode, & LeMenestrel, 2013) have been found to exert modest influence on ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable consumption; and investigations continue around the world. In addition, it has been highlighted that human values play an important role on sustainable consumption behaviors, but the triggering of such values requires the concurrent activation of select situational factors in order to elicit desired sustainable behaviors (Steg et al., 2014).

Building on Steg et al. (2014), this project explores the interaction between value networks (in which sustainability is ingrained) and situationally activated emotions. Cultural and context specific factors are expected to determine the way in which such relationships are manifest. The first project stage focuses on the influence of context induced emotions on pro-environmental behavior (Kotler, 2014) in samples of students from Colombia and the US. We expect no differences between the country samples when it comes to the main effects of induced emotions. We anticipate that positive emotions (hope, happiness) will increase engagement and allocated cognitive resources that lead to enhanced compliance with desired sustainable practices, while negative emotions (anxiety, sadness, anger) reduce attention, drain cognitive capacity, and will likely reduce compliance with desirable sustainable consumption. Moreover, three effects are expected from negative emotions: increased intertemporal discounting (from sadness), increased information search and willingness to comply (from anxiety), and decreased prosocial behavior (from anger).

Early exploration looked at whether or not incidental discrete negative emotions have an influence on peoples reported sustainable behaviors and attitudes. Two hundred fifty-two students from a U.S. university (mean age = 21.2, 30% female) completed the experiment for course credit. The study randomly assigned participants to view film clips that induced anger, sadness, anxiety or a neutral state (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Gross & Levenson, 1995). Manipulation checks reveal that the four manipulations worked as intended, with participants' emotional scores being higher on target emotions than in non-target emotions. Statistical significance was achieved at the $p < .05$ level with the exception of sadness and neutral conditions in the "neutral" score.

Immediately after viewing the film clips, participants responded to questions from scales related to sustainable consumption practices, attitudes, and beliefs (Balderjahn et al., 2013; Trujillo & Unda, 2015). As predicted, participants in the anxiety condition reported higher willingness to engage and displayed more concern with sustainability practices than participants in the neutral or anger conditions. Participants in an anxious state reported consuming more sustainability related information (e.g. "I read news articles about sustainability.") than participants in other conditions (all p 's $< .05$). Anxious participants also believe that individuals have more responsibility over economic prosperity and reported knowing about social, economic and environmental sustainability more than participants in the neutral condition (all p 's $< .05$).

On the other hand, participants in the anger condition display lower levels of prosocial behavior, especially when compared to anxious participants. Angry participants believe less strongly that the world need to change to ensure quality of life for individuals than anxious participants ($p < .05$). Angry participants also report purchasing products when absolutely required less than participants in the anxious condition ($p < .05$). Interestingly, participants in the anxiety condition also display a fairly instrumental view of sustainable

practices, and report more interest in sustainable products when they are easy to find and durable than participants in the anger condition.

Our initial results suggest that negative emotions can influence sustainability intentions and practices in various ways. Whether or not the increased interest in sustainable practices identified in anxious participants generates behavioral effects on sustainable consumption downstream remains an empirical question that will be addressed in future research. Subsequent project stages will also collect data from subsistence consumers, where cultural differences in both value networks and the influence of emotions are likely. The prevalence of emotional distress among subsistence consumers (Cohen et al., 2006) suggests that sadness, anxiety, and anger may be abundant, which in turn suggests that consumers living in poverty may be more easily swayed away from their own goal-directed behavior even in areas that would have a direct impact on family well-being, such as economic, social, and ecological domains.

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