

TRANSFORMATIVE CONSUMER RESEARCH
FOR PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE WELL-BEING

**SAMPLE
CHAPTER**



Edited by

David Glen Mick, Simone Pettigrew,
Cornelia Pechmann, and Julie L. Ozanne

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To all researchers dedicated to improving well-being

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Foreword

CONSUMING AND EVOLVING

Like it or not, we are all consumers. Life is only possible because of consuming; every life-form must take in energy—sunshine, water, and minerals—to survive and reproduce. Humans are no different from plants or other animals in this respect. In fact, our species has developed into a superconsuming life-form. It can be said that what made us human—what allowed us to build pyramids and cathedrals, write symphonies, and develop scientific theories—is precisely the fact that we have been able to stimulate an upward spiraling demand for new knowledge, new artifacts, and new lifestyles.

Of course, like any strength pursued too far, our inclination to never be satisfied with what we have—our desire for more powerful technologies and more coddling lifestyles—has its dark side. Just over 50 years ago, the social philosopher Hannah Arendt (1958) warned us with impeccable farsightedness that our species, left clueless as to what it should do or aspire to do, was in danger of “consuming the world” out of listless boredom (p. 133). Year by year, her dystopic vision seems increasingly prophetic.

Is the doom of the human race to eat up the resources needed to keep alive the spark of life on this planet? The possibility is not too far-fetched, especially as the entire population of the earth is slipping into a daydream in which it is entitled to a life of effortlessness and waste formerly open only to nabobs, high priests, and other potentates. Almost 3,000 years ago, Emperor Mu Wang of China (ca. 985–907 BCE) paid a handsome salary to an engineer who was supposedly capable of building a self-propelled chariot, possibly one that could also fly. Yet, all the treasures of the Orient could not succeed in fulfilling the emperor’s dream, one that any able-bodied person with no credit and no cash can now fulfill. What will happen to all of us when the present 1.3 billion Chinese are able to attain what eluded Mu Wang?

Yet, the doom is not foreordained. We have learned in the past decades that what will happen in the future is increasingly the function of human choice. Whereas past generations could resign themselves to blame the will of gods or demons or emperors, we are getting to realize that, by and large, it is our own choices today that will determine what tomorrow will bring. Biological evolution has been shaped in the past by external events, including ecological changes, variations in prey–predator ratios, and competition between phenotypes that were more or less adapted to the natural environment. After the first tools were developed around 12,000 years ago, human societies exploded into the plethora of things that became the bedrock of the first urban revolutions. Ever since, the future of humankind has been increasingly determined by cultural, rather than biological, evolution.

The gods that people worshipped, the languages they spoke, the weapons they forged, the kind of families they lived among, and the rulers they endured were all chosen or permitted by

themselves—our ancestors. Most of the time they did not do so consciously, but rather, they followed the cultural script of their society. As the British biologist Richard Dawkins pointed out, it is the memes transmitted from one generation to the next, rather than the genes we carry in our chromosomes, that increasingly shape our future (Dawkins, 1976). In other words, we have come to realize that the responsibility for the future of the world is in our own hands. What kind of a world do we want to make and consume?

The act of *consuming*, which can be defined as the breaking down of natural or manmade structures to satisfy biological or cultural urges, is among the farthest reaching of human activities. What food we eat, what house we buy, what car we drive, and what leisure we engage in as neighbors, parents, or coworkers—these all have impacts on how the world will be a generation hence. Consuming is one of the most selective forces in determining which memes will survive, reproduce, and be transmitted into the future.

It has been in the interest of a capitalist economy to try exempting consumption from close analysis. In a free-market economy, citizens should be allowed, encouraged, or even required to consume. I remember driving home across the United States the day after the September 11 attacks, listening to the radio, as one politician after another exhorted listeners to go out and buy that car or refrigerator they had been contemplating, so our enemies would know that America was unflinching in its values and goals. The resolve to consume was framed as a sign of heroic vitality. Alas, our enemies were probably rejoicing upon hearing such messages. Who would fear a nation whose response to attack is, “Go forth and buy a refrigerator”? How do you explain to the rest of the world that in our society, you get flagged as a bad financial risk if you use your credit cards sparingly and do not go into debt? What recourse does the person in the street have when our eminent economists calculate societal well-being by lumping production vital to human welfare with the manufacture of land mines, toxic waste, tobacco, and other “goods” that will make our lives, and those of our descendants, increasingly miserable?

Given the biases resulting from a mindless worship of the invisible hand over a laissez-faire market, the responsibility for finding ways to understand the benefits and pitfalls of consuming falls on the shoulders of independent scholars. It is a serious task, one that would not be exaggerated to call a life-or-death quest, on par with cancer or climate research. The task, in short, is to make clearer how consumer behavior can help or impair human and planetary evolution.

All of us should cast a grateful optimism toward the scholars in the field of consumer research who have taken up this responsibility with the formation of a transformative agenda, by examining more closely how consumer behavior impacts personal and collective well-being. I take *transformative* in this context to mean that consumer behavior can be directed either by past habits and genetic instructions that might well destroy life on earth or by a vision based on knowledge that will transform human life on the planet from a self-inflicting disease into a self-enhancing growth. In other words, these researchers have chosen the task of helping consumer behavior become a selective factor in shaping the future that we can proudly leave as a heritage to our children and theirs.

The current volume is a significant stride in that direction. After the four opening chapters, which frame the conceptual approach of the book, the chapters that follow deal with some of the momentous issues that are involved in this difficult transformative task. They range from the socioeconomical context of consuming, the evolution of new technologies, the influence of materialism on the environment, and the effects of consumption on health (e.g., obesity, substance addictions) to considerations of debt versus saving and the neuroscience of consumption. The volume then closes with a series of upbeat chapters on topics such as sharing, resilience, and practical wisdom.

It is on these last themes that I would like to expand. As a psychologist, I have come to believe that one of the main forces in cultural evolution is the selective effect of human choice driven by enchantment and other positive experiences. In other words, we choose to support those things, persons, or procedures that we think will provide us with the greatest return—not necessarily in any material sense, but in terms of the quality of experience they may afford. The early mechanically powered technologies, like the waterwheels invented over 2 millennia ago in the Near East to turn millstones that ground grain, were greeted by poets as wonderful devices, making the lives of women easier and freer. That technology, like many more coming on its heels, spread rapidly, because it was a harbinger of a happier life—one in which women did not have to wake up before dawn to turn wheat into flour by grinding kernels between stones for hours so the family could have breakfast.

At Bell Labs, where the first transistor was developed by John Bardeen and his colleagues, the new discovery was treated as an interesting but ineffectual piece of technology. Its rights were subsequently sold for nearly nothing to Sony, where Masao Ibuka realized the transistor's potential for making radios small enough for people to carry around. He bet insightfully on the expectation that millions of people might appreciate listening to music as they walked among impersonal and noisy metropolitan crowds, and he was not disappointed. Consider, too, that cars were used at first for long-distance rallies, not useful, personal transportation. Additionally, the success of computers was due at least as much to their primitive electronic games as to their potential for helping people communicate with each other or balance their household budget.

The lesson I draw from these reflections is that if we wish to change consumer behavior in line with a positive evolutionary trend, then we need to find ways to provide alternatives to consumption that are as rewarding as consumption often promises to be. We know now that accumulating material goods, including money, is not a very powerful enhancer of the quality of life (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Kasser, 2003; Sheldon & McGregor, 2000), but perception is what counts. Emerging from a past of scarcity, people have come to equate happiness with possessions and the ability to get more. At the same time, contemporary societies have lost much of their abilities to design or find rewards in nonmaterial things. The transistor was a remarkable invention, but it also facilitated some arguably cheerless outcomes. Many Andean shepherds, for instance, put away their panpipes and *quenás* (flutes) in favor of Walkman radios. Slowly, the belief has spread that only the consumption of things, especially new things, can make a life worth living.

So, the challenge I see as the most pressing is to find forms of activity that are as interesting, exciting, and attractive as those we can buy at the store and then passively consume. Or at least, the challenge is to think of making commodities for the market that not only offer a temporary buzz or relaxation but also are in line with consciously selected, scientifically justified evolutionary goals. The present volume should serve as the first map for this transformative, evolutionary journey.

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Preface

The academic field of consumer research has evolved over the years into a radiant yet deficient prism. Its multihued insights have long served executives in making their organizations and businesses more competitive and more profitable. It has also frequently served scholars themselves in seeking breakthroughs on theories of marketing, buying, and consuming. Occasionally, it has also served policy makers in protecting the populace from deceits and hazards in the marketplace. However, scarcely has it directly served the well-being of consumers, families, communities, and their environments.

There are many reasons for these trends. Some have to do with the nature of capitalism and the needs of corporations, as well as the lucrative consulting opportunities therein. Some reasons have to do with the norms and standards of academic settings with respect to the familiar pressures of “publish or perish,” which are attended by objectives among the most prestigious journals to accept only the more conceptually abstract and empirically sophisticated work. These sorts of reasons, and many others, have combined to tamp down the fortitude of those consumer scholars who otherwise wish they could turn their talents to doing research that might make a more direct, if not bigger, positive impact on the quality of everyday life.

Nonetheless, changes are occurring that demand and facilitate a renaissance of consumer research that focuses intently on well-being. The influence of consumption on the global natural environment is perhaps foremost. Severe economic imbalances are another, leading to political and social tensions that are threatening peace and security. Mounting household debt and addictions to various consumer products and activities are also experienced by millions of people. Additionally, handheld computers and the Internet now provide an unfathomable array of information and interaction venues for consumers to ply their needs and desires.

Aside from ecological, socioeconomic, and technological developments, the academic field of consumer research has matured to the point where new scholars are training to be more capable than their predecessors at mitigating the debatable trade-off between the relevance of their work and the rigor of their research designs. New journals have also appeared, and established ones are expanding their objectives and scopes, to encourage a wider range of ideas and findings that could enhance quality of life for all beings affected by the escalation of worldwide consumption practices.

Following along these parallel paths, the present book is the first of its kind to rise out of a broad movement called Transformative Consumer Research (TCR). As we discuss in the opening chapter, TCR has emerged from the coalescing of international experts in consumer behavior who are dedicated to understanding and improving well-being and join together professionally through the Association for Consumer Research (see Chapter 1 in this volume for more details on TCR and the Association). Our goals in developing this book were to fortify the mission and foundations of TCR and display and amplify its value for the present and the future. Thus, we set out to recruit

authorities in consumer behavior to write chapters that overview many of the urgent contemporary issues of well-being, including the state of current knowledge and trends about those issues. We also exhorted these authorities to reach for new insights and recommendations that are both stirring and practicable for researchers as well as consumers and their guardians.

Part I, “Declaring and Projecting Transformative Consumer Research,” begins the book by laying out TCR’s historical fundamentals, some themes and ambitions for its future, and advice on how to optimize its overall success. Part II, “Economic and Social Issues,” focuses on the challenges and best practices of doing TCR in developing economies and subsistence markets, and in more advanced commercial contexts, where poverty, discrimination, and injustice are still too commonplace. Part III, “Technological Edges,” addresses a series of questions about well-being related to accessibility, social capital, online communities, and virtual lives surrounding the Internet. Materialism and the environment serve as the motif for Part IV, “Materialism and the Environment.” These chapters place a heavy emphasis on the centrality of human values in matters of well-being as pertaining to acquiring, consuming, and disposing, while also expounding on the meanings and requirements for contentment and survival through sustainable consumption behaviors.

Health and consumer finances make up Part V, “Enhancing Health,” and Part VI, “Consumer Finances,” offering chapters covering key subdomains of those large topic areas. The discussions range from childhood obesity, nutritional labeling, tobacco, alcohol, and sexually transmitted diseases to financial planning, retirement saving, and the abuse of credit cards. Part VII, “Other Risky Behaviors and At-Risk Consumers,” a general category section on additional risky consumption and at-risk consumers, follows. Compulsive buying, gambling, pornography, visually impaired consumers, and elderly consumers are among the subjects focused on. Part VIII, “Family Matters,” concentrates on two essential family-level topics in well-being, namely parenting young consumers and creating family time in consumption activities. The book concludes with Part IX, “Enriching Behaviors and Virtues,” which brings together chapters on sharing, resiliency, and the prospects of practical consumer wisdom.

Naturally, given the breadth of consumer behaviors in daily life across varied regions and nations of the world, it was not possible to cover every topic of importance in this inaugural volume on TCR. The Epilogue by Lehmann and Hill particularly helps identify several of the topical spaces of consumption and well-being that the present book was unable to fill. Their discussion, and the elaborations on future research that other authors undertake in their respective chapters, sketches the blueprint for new and expanded content in subsequent volumes on TCR.

The intended audience for this first volume on TCR is primarily academic researchers, policy makers, and executives who have strong interests in consumer behavior and well-being. We hope the book serves as a plentiful resource of ideas and guidelines for relevant, innovative research, governmental initiatives, and corporate social responsibility strategies. It may also serve as a textbook for graduate courses in consumer behavior or marketing, policy making, and ethics. Consumers could also readily find several chapters that convey immediate and useful suggestions on quality of life.

It may seem incongruous that consumers are not the foremost audience for this initial volume on TCR. However, as much as TCR is meant to focus intensively on the actualities of well-being in consumers’ lives, for TCR to mature and have long-lasting positive influences, the academy of TCR scholars requires syntheses of prior research and detailed priority setting in terms of the unsolved challenges and new opportunities they face with respect to theories, methods, and topics pertinent to well-being, and how to reach their audiences most effectively. We believe that this book begins to meet those prerequisites.

On a sad note, during the development of the book, we lost to an abrupt death one of our most renowned authors, Martin Fishbein. A highly influential social psychologist, he spent a large

portion of the last 30 years of his distinguished career working on health promotion, including the public policy challenge of reducing sexually transmitted infections (for more details on his contributions, see the “In Memoriam” essay by Cohen, Ajzen, & Albarracin, 2010). We appreciate the efforts of his coauthor, Susan Middlestadt, to complete their chapter here.

Several people assisted us tremendously in bringing this book to culmination. First, we thank the Board of Directors of the Association for Consumer Research for supporting the development of TCR in many lasting ways. We also benefited from early discussions with our Association for Consumer Research colleagues Mike Solomon and Curt Haugtvedt, both experienced book editors who together helped us establish the right priorities and strategies for a smoother voyage toward an appealing outcome. In addition, we offer our heartfelt gratitude to Anne Duffy and Robert Sims of the Taylor & Francis Group as well as Matt Baker of Cadmus Communications, who supported us in establishing the vision for the book, ensuring the style and quality of the chapters, and fashioning the final manuscript into its handsome form. We also thank Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi for preparing an incisive and receptive Foreword. Above all, we express our respectful appreciation to all the authors of the chapters herein and the reviewers who commented on first drafts, all of whom worked hard and expeditiously to complete their contributions on schedule. Last, we thank our respective university homes that have provided us with the encouragement and resources to bring to greater realization our commitment to TCR.

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Editors

David Glen Mick is the Robert Hill Carter Professor of Marketing at the University of Virginia's McIntire School of Commerce. His research has centered on the nature and role of meaning in consumer behavior, across topics such as advertising rhetoric, gift-giving, materialism, customer satisfaction, and technological products. His recent work has focused on practical wisdom in executive leadership and consumer behavior. David has edited four prior books and authored several dozen articles, conference papers, and book chapters. His work has won several scholarly awards, including Best Paper from the *Journal of Consumer Research* (1989) and the Maynard Award from the *Journal of Marketing* (1999). He has also been invited to conduct seminars at universities worldwide, including Oxford University, the Stockholm School of Economics, Harvard University, and Stanford University. David is a fellow in the Society for Consumer Psychology, former editor of the *Journal of Consumer Research*, and past president of the Association for Consumer Research.

Simone Pettigrew is Professor of Marketing at the University of Western Australia's Business School. Her primary research interest is consumer education and empowerment, particularly in the areas of physical and mental health. Her research has focused on vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, and low-income families. She is the founder and editor of the *Journal of Research for Consumers* (<http://www.jrconsumers.com>), a Web-based journal that caters to both academic and consumer audiences. Simone has won numerous competitive grants from Australian and international funding organizations and is a regular reviewer for the Australian Research Council. She has published more than 100 articles, book chapters, and refereed conference papers. Her work has been featured in a variety of journals, including *Marketing Theory*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Pediatric Exercise Science*, *Food Quality and Preference*, *Aging and Mental Health*, and *Australian Psychologist*. She is also a coauthor of the top-selling Australasian textbook *Consumer Behaviour: Implications for Marketing Strategy* (2007, McGraw-Hill).

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Julie L. Ozanne is the Sonny Merryman Professor of Marketing at Virginia Tech's Pamplin College of Business. In 2006, she was named the Ferber Award winner by the *Journal of Consumer Research* for best article, based on a dissertation for which she was the head advisor. She was also recognized as the best reviewer of 2007 by the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*. Julie specializes in alternative methodologies for the study of social problems, such as interpretive, critical, participatory, and community action research methods. She also examines the problems of the poor and the low literate, as well as new forms of sustainable exchange. Her scholarship has appeared in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, and *Journal of Marketing Management*, among other outlets. She is an editorial review board member for the *Journal of Consumer Research* and *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*.

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I

*DECLARING AND PROJECTING
TRANSFORMATIVE
CONSUMER RESEARCH*

1

Origins, Qualities, and Envisionments of Transformative Consumer Research

DAVID GLEN MICK, SIMONE PETTIGREW,
CORNELIA PECHMANN, AND JULIE L. OZANNE

For millennia, humans have asked themselves, what is the good life? Answers to this perplexing question cannot be developed in any detail without reference to personal and collective consumption behaviors. Without consumption—at least at the basic level of air, water, food, and shelter—life ceases. Tragically, millions of people today in developing economies still face uncertain survival because they lack some or all of these necessities (Worldwatch Institute, 2004). At the same time, consumption in economically vigorous regions has increased in volume and variety to such degrees that living, thriving, suffering, and dying are more interdependently connected to the acquiring, owning, and disposing of products than in any other historical era (see, e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Schor & Holt, 2000; Speth, 2008). Consumption now facilitates a myriad of purposes and consequences, from nourishment, contentment, and achievement to gluttony, disfranchisement, and destruction.

In response to the exponential growth of global consumption, numerous governmental and nongovernmental organizations have arisen to support consumers, societies, and the earth. The governmental efforts include a wide range of country- and region-specific agencies that oversee public welfare in such areas as agriculture, product safety, merchandising, and advertising. For example, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is the oldest comprehensive consumer protection agency in the U.S. federal government. Although not formally known as the FDA until 1931, its regulatory functions trace back to 1906 with the passage of the Pure Food and Drugs Act, which prohibited interstate commerce in adulterated and misbranded food and drugs.

Among the oldest of the relevant nongovernmental organizations is the National Consumers League (NCL), founded in the United States in 1899. The NCL has sought throughout the years to protect workers in their employment conditions and safeguard consumers in terms of product use. Shortly afterward, the International Federation of Home Economics was founded in Switzerland in 1908 to address food nutrition, housing, textiles, and home management, among other topics. A year later, the American Home Economics Association was established and has since become known as the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences. A decade hence (1919), Stuart Chase and Frederick Schlink founded Consumers' Research (now defunct) and began publishing comparative tests of branded products, analyses of advertising claims, and so forth. Then, in 1936, Arthur Kallet, Colston Warne, and a few others established Consumers Union and began publishing *Consumer Reports*. This publication remains today as one of the most circulated and consulted sources of consumer product information, especially in the United States. The staff of Consumers Union also seeks to influence laws and regulations on issues such as telecommunications, car and food safety, health care, financial services, and energy.

More pro-consumer organizations appeared during the second half of the 20th century. For instance, in 1953, the American Council on Consumer Interests grew out of the Consumers Union to focus on consumer policy research and education. Soon afterward on the global scene, Consumers International (formerly the International Organization of Consumer Unions) was founded in 1960 and now includes over 220 member organizations in 115 countries. It focuses on consumer rights, consumer safety, and sustainability. In 1962, the Bureau Européen des Unions de Consommateurs was created to represent consumer organizations from 6 European nations, expanding eventually to cover 30 European nations. A few years later, the Consumer Federation of America began operations to advance pro-consumer policies and educate on consumer issues. Additionally, in 1974, the Worldwatch Institute was established to conduct interdisciplinary research specifically on consumption and ecology, including climate change, natural resources, and population growth.

Several journals also began to publish research on the welfare of consumers, societies, and the earth. Among the first was the *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, inaugurated in 1967 by the American Council on Consumer Interests. Other publications followed, each with similar foci but varying emphases, including the *International Journal of Consumer Studies* (1977, originally known as the *Journal of Consumer Studies and Home Economics*), *Journal of Consumer Policy* (1977), *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* (1981), and *Journal of Macromarketing* (1981). Produced through the Illinois Consumer Education Association, the *Journal of Consumer Education* also began publishing in 1983 to facilitate communication about consumer education among researchers, educators, and practitioners. With the growth of the Internet, the *Journal of Research for Consumers* was founded in Australia in 2001 as a free, Web-based resource of scholarly consumer studies that are simultaneously summarized in laypersons' language for public audiences (Pettigrew, 2001). Many other journals from diverse fields also periodically publish special issues and individual articles on consumer and earthly welfare (see, e.g., the October 2008 issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research*).

Of course, the number of books over the years that have taken pro-consumer perspectives is large, and the variety is wide. To mention one that is now dated, but grew to have iconic status, is Ralph Nader's (1965) *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile*, which analyzed and detailed the reluctance of car manufacturers to invest in more safety features as new designs were developed. As a more recent example, the marketing field has seen the rise of its own community of vocal scholars who write and edit books from the tradition of critical theory. These researchers scrutinize social institutions and deconstruct their roles in the international consumption system, with the goal of motivating positive social change (e.g., Tadjewski & Maclaran, 2009).

Our summary here of organizations, activism, and research on behalf of consumers and the environment they inhabit has been unavoidably selective and brief. A comprehensive history has yet to be constructed. However, several excellent articles, books, and book chapters have focused on additional and different components of these developments, including Andreasen, Goldberg, and Sirgy (Chapter 2 of this volume), Cohen (2010), Hilton (2008), McGregor (2010), Speth (2008), and Wilkie and Moore (2003). More details can also be found on the websites of relevant nongovernmental and governmental organizations, and in editorials from related academic journals.

Taking these activities as a whole, it is apparent that interests in consumption and quality of life have ebbed and flowed over time, depending on many factors, including the booms and busts of global and regional economics, developments in geopolitics and governmental leadership, and evolutions in science and education. Inevitably, this complex arena is fragmented, since different organizations and researchers have often worked independently on similar as well as different issues, and often used disparate research paradigms, theories, and methods. Although many sources of outstanding programs and insights on behalf of consumers and the planet exist, they tend to reside

in disconnected silos of institutes, agencies, associations, and publication outlets. To date, there have been few efforts to coordinate research and organizations on behalf of well-being.

The book you are holding has grown out of recent and exciting developments at the Association for Consumer Research (ACR), from a movement known as Transformative Consumer Research (TCR). This volume on TCR is part of the long tradition of organizations and research outlined above that aims to support consumers, societies, and the environment. With its broad scope of topics, paradigms, and distinguished authors, this book seeks to fill gaps and overcome some of the fragmentation and separation that characterize the field of consumer research in the essential domain of well-being.

THE ASSOCIATION FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH (ACR) AND TRANSFORMATIVE CONSUMER RESEARCH (TCR)

ACR began in 1969 and has grown into one of the largest international organizations of highly trained scholars who focus on consumer behavior. Several of its founders perceived the association's mission as centering on consumer problems and orchestrating "the natural talents of academia, government, and industry so as to enhance consumer welfare" (Kernan, 1979, p. 1). The earliest ACR conferences involved academics as well as executives from consumer-oversight organizations, such as the FDA and the Consumers Union. In 1974, the association served as a founding sponsor of the *Journal of Consumer Research*, which, in its initial years, included articles on subjects such as energy and conservation, consumer credit and debt, consumer education, product safety, nutrition, poverty, and elderly consumers.

Eventually, both ACR and the *Journal of Consumer Research* put less emphasis on research that could benefit consumers and the environment. Part of this change in the 1980s and 1990s was due to a new surge of faith in capitalism, as corporations and people worldwide became more engrossed in the profits and pleasures of consumption rather than concerned with quality of life as a function of consumption. Concurrently, ACR and the *Journal of Consumer Research* turned more strictly to making theoretical and methodological advancements, due to the growing influence of the cognitive/information-processing paradigm in experimental psychology, with its focus on human memory and attitudes for revealing the processes underlying consumer judgments and choice. Around the same time, there also began the rise and maturation of a sociocultural orientation to consumer behavior. Consumer culture theory, as it is now called, draws heavily from anthropology, sociology, and the humanities to provide more macro and experiential perspectives in consumer research, including underappreciated qualitative methods, while maintaining a strong focus on theoretical advances (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

The advent of the 21st century brought ruptures that spurred reconsiderations of the aforementioned paradigms and practices. The United States underwent an immense economic downturn that spread throughout the world; large corporations such as Enron and Tyco were destroyed or severely damaged by their own rogue executives; and political and religious extremists attacked the United States, England, Spain, Indonesia, and other countries, partly as an ideological declaration against the perceived hegemony of Western capitalism and its defenders. Also, scientific evidence continued to mount regarding the disturbing effects of consumer behaviors on the earth's ecology, reaching a new vista through Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) and his subsequent receipt of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize. In addition, new health studies elevated concerns about the overconsumption of unhealthy foods and the growth of tobacco consumption in developing parts of the world. As a result of these and other trends, debates intensified about capitalism and materialism, religion and consumption, immigration and discrimination, economic growth and environmental sustainability, and the continuation of abject poverty in many regions despite a dynamic global economy.

Voices within ACR and scholarship within the *Journal of Consumer Research* began to call for a rebirth of research on well-being and the ethics of consumption (see, e.g., Adkins & Ozanne, 2005b; Bazerman, 2001; Bernthal, Crockett, & Rose, 2005; Borgmann, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Denzin, 2001; Henry, 2005; Khare & Inman, 2006; Pechmann & Knight, 2002; Thompson, 2005; Wansink & van Ittersum, 2003). David Mick's (2006) presidential address before ACR sought to channel these concerns and aspirations into TCR, through which he challenged the association to take greater leadership. Founded within ACR, TCR strives to encourage, support, and publicize research that benefits quality of life for all beings engaged in or affected by consumption trends and practices across the world.

In the next section, six defining qualities and commitments of TCR are highlighted (see Figure 1.1). Then, each of the four coeditors of this book develops an envisionment of TCR that represents a more nuanced understanding of its tenets and their role in guiding the future of TCR.

SIX CORE QUALITIES AND COMMITMENTS OF TCR

To Improve Well-Being

Although TCR is a dynamic and evolving program of research, six core commitments serve to anchor this endeavor. First, the normative goal of TCR is to improve well-being, which is a state of flourishing that involves health, happiness, and prosperity. McGregor and Goldsmith (1998) identified seven dimensions of well-being: emotional, social, economic, physical, spiritual, environmental, and political (for a similar taxonomy, see Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009; see also Andreasen, Goldberg, & Sirgy, Chapter 2 of this volume; Burroughs & Rindfleisch, Chapter 12 of this volume). TCR concentrates on the problems and opportunities that surround one or more of the different dimensions of well-being, and thus, TCR has a pragmatic and concrete orientation at its base. In

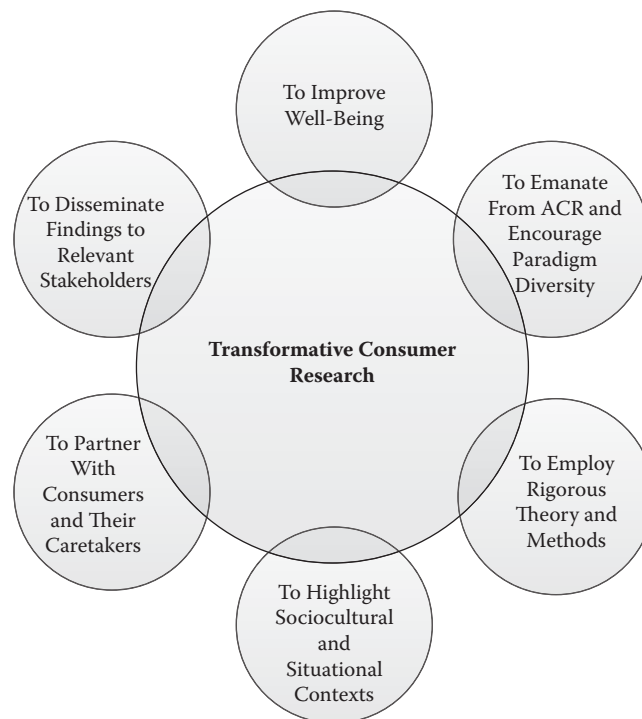


Figure 1.1 The six core qualities and commitments of Transformative Consumer Research.

David Mick's following envisionment, he philosophically grounds this focus by seeking to move beyond the mere accumulation of knowledge toward the more ambitious goal of seeking practical wisdom.

Although the emphasis on the goal of improving well-being provides TCR with a firm motivational foundation, this goal is not without significant challenges. Over 6 billion people cannot all individually maximize their well-being without considering the needs of others and even the very survival of the planet (see also Burroughs & Rindfleisch, Chapter 12 of this volume; Kilbourne & Mittelstaedt, Chapter 14 of this volume). Achieving widespread well-being will inevitably require respectful civic exchange and democratic deliberation on how the individual and collective dimensions of well-being can be met (see, e.g., Kozinets, Belz, & McDonagh, Chapter 10 of this volume; McGregor, 2010). Therefore, TCR seeks to improve well-being while maximizing social justice and the fair allocation of opportunities and resources. Meeting such a challenge will require open-mindedness, compassion, and the best scientific research.

To Emanate From ACR and Encourage Paradigm Diversity

Second, TCR emanates uniquely from ACR. With more than 4 decades of substantial progress in understanding the intricacies of consumer behavior, and with a revitalized dedication to human and earthly welfare, ACR has a distinctive capacity to guide and support consumer research on well-being toward its finest manifestations. This opportunity for TCR within ACR is spread widely across the globe as the association has been from its beginning an international organization, with regular conferences now held in North America, Europe, Latin America, and the Asia-Pacific region. Also, consistent with ACR's long commitment to fostering diverse research traditions, TCR is intended to serve as a large tent and a unifying juncture. Consumer researchers from all backgrounds and perspectives are needed to accomplish a shared mission to protect and improve well-being. TCR recognizes, welcomes, and endorses the plurality of theories, methods, levels of analyses, and paradigms needed to understand and positively influence well-being. TCR does not favor any particular paradigm, theory, or method over others in the absence of knowing the focus of the research, its challenges, and its intended audience and uses (see Anderson, 1986, for a justification of this approach). In Julie L. Ozanne's subsequent envisionment, she explores how different paths exist for research aimed at social change, depending on the intended audience and anticipated use of the research (see also Ozanne & Fischer, Chapter 4 of this volume; Wansink, Chapter 3 of this volume).

To Employ Rigorous Theory and Methods

Third, TCR promotes the meticulous application of theory and methods to achieve its mission and goals. Strong theory and methods should be neither depreciated nor traded off as a result of TCR's pragmatism. Rigorous theory and methods are more likely to optimize applied goals successfully than less rigorous theory and methods. In fact, rigor and relevance can readily go hand in hand (Lehmann, 2003; see also Lehmann & Hill, Chapter 33 of this volume; Wansink, Chapter 3 of this volume). Potent theory can provide for richer, more penetrating insights on everyday consumer behavior and well-being, while sound methods lead to more trustworthy conclusions, implications, and advice. In Connie Pechmann's forthcoming envisionment, she probes the trials and opportunities of theoretical contributions in TCR and offers some detailed cogent advice.

To Highlight Sociocultural and Situational Contexts

Fourth, TCR highlights the sociocultural context or situational embedding of the well-being problem or opportunity. The life world of consumers must be kept in clear focus if the research

is to maximize its meaningfulness, relevance, and usefulness. This focus does not mean that all TCR must be anthropological or sociological, but it does mean that TCR seeks to work on those problems that are perceived by consumers to be most pressing, and it seeks to learn and develop solutions within the proximal conditions in which consumption and well-being are mutually influential. Physical and environmental factors, family and social settings, and other situational dimensions are elemental to well-being and consumption and cannot be expediently ignored or bracketed away without compromising the *raison d'être* of TCR. Indeed, TCR's emphasis on context can also improve theory building and theory extending, as Connie Pechmann discusses in her following envisionment.

To Partner With Consumers and Their Caretakers

Fifth, given the goal to do meaningful and relevant research, TCR endorses a new role and image for consumer researchers as advocates for, and close partners with, consumers. Scholars of TCR seek to engender insights that directly translate into new capabilities and behaviors that support well-being. These researchers are neither solitary scientists nor lofty intellectuals in pursuit of basic, theoretical, methodological, or empirical breakthroughs *per se*. Instead, they are committed to a role of public servant (for further discussion and variations on this viewpoint, see Andreasen, Goldberg, & Sirgy, Chapter 2 of this volume; Lehmann & Hill, Chapter 33 of this volume; Ozanne & Fischer, Chapter 4 of this volume; Wansink, Chapter 3 of this volume). TCR investigators pursue straightforward insights about consumer behaviors that can potentially make life healthier, safer, and more rewarding.

To Disseminate Findings to Relevant Stakeholders

Sixth, TCR is planned and executed with an objective to share its insights with consumers, policy makers, or anyone else who is likely to benefit from learning and using the research results. From the start of their work, transformative consumer researchers are concerned not only with design and implementation but also with how they will communicate the findings effectively (see also Wansink, Chapter 3 of this volume). Moreover, TCR must be proffered in usable forms, and many researchers will need to roll up their sleeves and work side by side with consumers to ensure that the research outcomes are both pertinent and intelligible to them. In the final envisionment, Simone Pettigrew offers several insights on how TCR communication efforts can be customized for intended audiences.

FOUR ENVISIONMENTS FOR TCR

In light of these defining qualities and commitments of TCR, we turn now to articulating four envisionments on its behalf (see Figure 1.2) that foreshadow the chapters in this volume and look beyond to the horizon on which the next generation of TCR scholars is now emerging. Taken together, the envisionments represent our personal faith and hope in the development of TCR. In the first envisionment, David Mick appraises the role of practical wisdom for establishing a philosophy of science in TCR.

Philosophical Roots: Beyond Knowledge to Wisdom

In the 1980s and 1990s, ardent debates about philosophy of science took place at ACR and in the *Journal of Consumer Research* (e.g., Anderson, 1983, 1986; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Hunt, 1991). The natures of theory, method, and truth were contended, including whether the preeminent goal of consumer research should be explanation or understanding. Holbrook (1985) particularly criticized consumer researchers for overemphasizing the production of managerially relevant insights, rather than developing an independent field to pursue knowledge of consumption for its own sake,

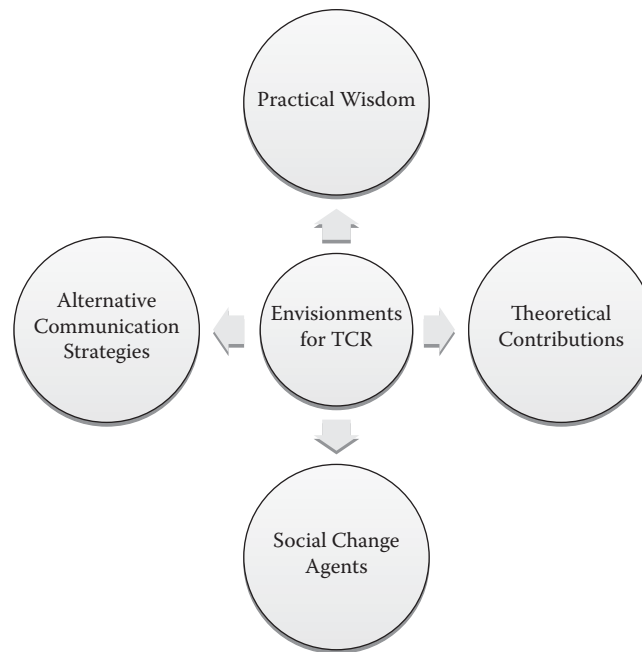


Figure 1.2 Four envisionments for Transformative Consumer Research.

but few were asking whether consumer researchers should be producing insights for improving quality of life. Then, and subsequently, an emphasis on foundational knowledge, as explanation or understanding, gained wide support across the field.

Today, the single-minded search for basic knowledge across scientific fields has come under sharp attack. Cynicism and anxieties have arisen across the world because of the massive amounts of money being spent on science of questionable benefit (much of it coming from tax sources) and due to the exploitation of some innovations that have led to weapons of mass destruction, ecological degradation, and so on (see, e.g., Cialdini, 2009; Maxwell, 2002; Winston, 2005). A comparable scenario can be found in the growing distrust of corporations (see, e.g., Fournier, Dobscha, & Mick, 1998; Mick, 2007). Many marketers, for instance, draw from knowledge advancements in social science and consumer research to construct pricing tactics, packaging, promotions, and retail store layouts that take advantage of human biases and unconscious tendencies, among them being cognitive heuristics, social jealousies and fears, fantasies and hopes, and impulsivities and addictions.

Two intrepid scholars, Nicholas Maxwell (1984, 2002, 2008) and Bent Flyvbjerg (2001), have railed against the pursuit of knowledge in the absence of open and vigorous dialogue about society's needs and priorities. Both scholars take as their starting point Aristotle's notion of *phronesis*, translated from Greek as "practical wisdom." Their elaborations on practical wisdom offer stimulating and opportune guidance for the development and success of TCR.

In his treatise *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (350 BC/1999) describes practical wisdom as developing plans and solutions that are well reasoned and capable of action in regard to matters that are good or bad for humanity. Linking this conceptualization to his ambitions for phronetic social science, Bent Flyvbjerg (2001) has written that "The purpose of social science is not to develop theory, but to contribute to society's practical rationality in elucidating where we are, where we want to go, and what is desirable according to diverse sets of values and interests" (p. 167). He has extended the Aristotelian view of social science by drawing from Michel Foucault's work to add an additional question: Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power, when it comes to

understanding what to value as well as what solutions to consider and assess for solving societal problems? Flyvbjerg illustrates his approach to practical wisdom in social science by reviewing his involvement in regional and urban planning in Denmark, and also through brief summaries of work by Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Putnam, Naomi Wolf, and Paul Rabinow, among others.

Nicholas Maxwell (1984, 2002, 2008) has spent the bulk of his philosophic career arguing vociferously for redirecting and revitalizing scientific and academic research according to Aristotle's practical wisdom. Maxwell (1984, p. 66) has maintained that standard empiricism in science—which, in his view, obsessively seeks explanatory truth—has produced a cornucopia of disunified findings, with little prethought of their usefulness or application. Science spends too much time, in his view, on problems of knowledge rather than problems of living. Maxwell has advanced what he calls aim-oriented empiricism that pursues, first and foremost, valuable truth. The principle task of such inquiry is the application of reason to the enhancement of practical wisdom. This wisdom, he asserts,

includes knowledge and understanding but goes beyond them in also including: the desire and active striving of what is of value, the ability to see what is of value, actually and potentially, in the circumstances of life, the ability to experience value, the capacity to help realize what is of value for oneself and others, the capacity to help solve those problems of living that arise in connection with attempts to realize what is of value, [and] the capacity to use and develop knowledge, technology and understanding as needed for the realization of value. (p. 66)

Two rules, according to Maxwell (1984, p. 67), are essential to any science focused on rational problem-solving in the spirit of practical wisdom: (1) to communicate, and improve the communication of, the problems to be remedied, and (2) to propose and critically evaluate potential solutions. His writings expand on these themes in numerous ways, drawing connections to education, technology, the environment, and, periodically, economics and consumption. Maxwell's practical scientific wisdom has gained increased attention in recent years, as discussed by Iredale (2008) and Maxwell (2009). These efforts have circled around new funding initiatives as well as new institutes, centers, and so forth.

The history of consumer research has been dominated by standard empiricism and by priorities of basic fact-finding and theory testing that Flyvbjerg and Maxwell assail in the physical and social sciences (see also Kilbourne & Mittelstaedt, Chapter 14 of this volume, regarding dominant paradigms). The daunting problems and fulfilling opportunities of consumption across the world call out for a new era of enlightenment in the philosophy of science in consumer research. This new era stands to be actualized, in part, through practical wisdom as a bedrock of TCR. Accomplishing this will require some bold changes in the doctrine and practices of consumer research as we know it today. Although hardly exhaustive, the following are some of the directions we must ponder and implement for wiser consumer research and behavior in the service of well-being: First, we should newly consider, to whom are consumer researchers most responsible for their work and their legacies? Who *really* should own our research and its findings, if not the human societies and ecologies where well-being is substantiated or compromised by worldwide consumption? Second, we should convene a summit of leading consumer researchers, activists, and policy makers, from multiple disciplines and perspectives, to establish a mission, philosophy, and list of priorities that can guide the consumer research field toward the production of aim-oriented insights of timely and recognizable use. Consumers must also be welcomed into this discourse to articulate their values and goals for setting the top priorities in the evolution of consumer research in the 21st century.

Third, and based on these prior efforts, we need to establish in greater depth and detail what consumers and policy makers most need to know that will directly and materially help them construct homes, societies, and ecologies where lives are flourishing in the context of consumption. Fourth, we must similarly consider how consumer researchers can engage businesses in general,

and marketers in particular, to influence in authentic and positive ways the development and success of TCR. The Internet via social media provides various opportunities to achieve such egalitarian dialogues in ways never before available.

Fifth, we should seek ways to reinvigorate a range of conversations among journal editors and their policy boards on philosophy of science, to clarify and promote the meaning, value, and application of practical wisdom in consumer research. Finally, we must revisit the design of doctoral programs in consumer research in terms of TCR (Mari, 2008). We need to make upcoming scholars more knowledgeable about the nature of science via practical wisdom, versus historical or standard views of science. We need also to consider how these younger scholars can be encouraged and rewarded for conducting consumer research that is founded on a pursuit of practical wisdom.

TCR must be a devoted engagement with consumers and the world we all inhabit to address problems and opportunities of well-being in a manner that speaks of shared values, empathy, immediacy, and usefulness. Aristotle's practical wisdom is a profound and fertile concept on which TCR can build its future.

In the next envisionment, Connie Pechmann explores the need and opportunity for theory contributions within the TCR program and offers several concrete recommendations. Even though TCR is substantively driven—focusing steadily on consumer behavior and well-being—the development and advancement of theory remain crucial to TCR's mission and success.

Making Theoretical Contributions Through TCR

Some consumer researchers may be concerned that TCR will be consistently prone to making limited theoretical contributions. Because TCR is committed to addressing specific problems or opportunities of well-being, researchers may be skeptical that TCR can contribute new theoretical or conceptual knowledge that is not subject specific, and they may be doubtful that it can have an impact both within and across disciplines. Most consumer researchers at top research universities have a strong allegiance to academic principles and values, and primarily seek to make theoretical contributions. These researchers are evaluated on this basis as well. For them, TCR's potential weakness in terms of making theoretical contributions may not completely offset its potential impacts on well-being, however large those impacts might be. Therefore, TCR may not appear to be a viable research path for them.

In his 1981 ACR presidential address, Jerry Olson (1982) pleaded for more theory development in consumer behavior. He defined theory as "abstract conceptualizations that represent the phenomenon" (p. vii) and "a basic requirement for a science" (p. v). ACR presidents before and after have made similar pleas, and the field has followed accordingly. Thought leaders who serve as journal editors have also continued to reinforce a theoretical orientation (e.g., Erdem, 2010).

Unfortunately, between scholars focusing on theory development and those focusing on substantive quality-of-life issues, a chasm opened several years ago and remains quite discernible. Twenty-six years ago, a seminal book (Brinberg & McGath, 1985) and article (Brinberg & Hirschman, 1986) solidified the dichotomy between theory building and real-world relevance, while emphasizing that both are necessary and important. Subsequently, in her 1995 ACR presidential address, Alice Tybout (1995) stated that it was a myth that "a well-designed study will provide theoretical insight and will allow generalization of the effects observed to a real-world situation of interest" (p. 1). She opined that, in reality, "theory testing and generalization typically imply different choices regarding the subjects, the setting, and the selection of independent and dependent variables" (p. 1). Thus, she argued, "a particular study should give clear priority to one of these goals" (p. 1). Over time, many academics have taken sides in terms of valuing one research orientation over the other, in what seems to be viewed as a zero-sum game. To the extent that there is limited journal space, and faculty positions, this perspective is certainly reasonable.

As previously emphasized, scholars of TCR start by addressing substantive problems or opportunities of well-being rather than theory contributions per se. In fact, some TCR builds on a highly substantive-oriented research paradigm known as program development and evaluation (Wansink, Chapter 3 of this volume), which itself is underpinned by educational theory. A few TCR scholars have received formal training in program development and evaluation (Pichert, Hanson, & Pechmann, 1985), a field with its own graduate programs (e.g., Vanderbilt University's Community Research and Action Program), journals (e.g., Sage's *Evaluation and the Health Professions*), and how-to books (e.g., Timmreck, 2003). Similarly, the *Journal of Marketing* encourages and publishes program evaluations and other large-scale field studies (see, e.g., Andrews, Netemeyer, Burton, Moberg, & Christiansen, 2004). Consumer researchers who conduct program evaluations typically are guided by theory, but they may use several theories that they view as complementary, and they use these theories as means to an end (e.g., to solve a problem) rather than as ends in themselves (e.g., to build theory or demonstrate that one theory is superior to another).

The program development and evaluation paradigm has a pragmatic action orientation that fits TCR's mission very well (Wansink, Chapter 3 of this volume). However, it cannot be the sole or even the favored research approach for TCR scholars, because this would be too constraining and would reinforce the stereotype that TCR cannot build theory. In our view, many more scholars of TCR should seek to make theory contributions, in addition to addressing substantive issues; otherwise, many groundbreaking and valuable insights—both practical and theoretical—may never be realized. It is highly challenging to be both substantively and theoretically focused, and it is sometimes necessary to prioritize one aim over the other when making decisions about research participants and methods (Brinberg & Hirschman, 1986; Brinberg & McGrath, 1985). Theory may not be the first priority for many TCR scholars, but this does not mean that theory contributions are unattainable or incompatible with TCR. Sometimes theory contributions are eminently achievable through TCR, especially if creative and careful research designs are utilized.

One approach to generating theoretical insights is to adopt interpretive or qualitative research methods (for a thorough volume on these techniques, see Belk, 2007), which lend themselves to theory development by nature of their flexible, incisive, and boundary-spanning capabilities. For a recent example, consider that consumer researchers have focused considerably over the years on the positive aspects of gift-giving. Marcoux's (2009) recent ethnography, however, offers a surprising and decidedly different perspective that unpacks detrimental implications for well-being within the gift economy. His work provides new insights on the humiliation, oppression, and subjection that occur on the dark side of gift-giving.

A different approach to building theory is through quantitative hypothesis testing, which primarily involves controlled lab or field experiments. However, regardless of a chosen method, we believe that transformative consumer researchers who seek to build theory need to look beyond the substantive problem they are addressing and reconceptualize the problem at a more abstract level. Furthermore, we believe that these researchers should envision the possible theoretical contributions up front and build in appropriate mechanisms to ensure these contributions are realized. In our experience, this process involves four crucial steps, which are discussed below. Our examples focus on quantitative studies, but the principles are broadly applicable.

Step 1: Conceptualize the Substantive Problem at a Higher Level of Abstraction

Imagine that TCR investigators reach out to, or are approached by, a community group to identify an important, substantive problem. In one actual example, members of the entertainment community (i.e., writers, directors) asked TCR scholars if television shows for youth can convey antismoking messages without being counterproductive (Pechmann & Wang, 2010). Members of the community were concerned that television shows with plots about youth and smoking might

convey the wrong normative message: that a lot of (attractive) youth smoke. These entertainment experts also asked if they should air an antismoking public-service announcement at the end of the television show to reinforce the health message, or if the subtle messages embedded within the show were sufficient or even preferable.

Once TCR scholars have identified the substantive research questions, in order to begin to build theory, they should reconceptualize the issues at a more general or abstract level. Antismoking messages in television shows primarily convey reference group information about peer group norms (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). Moreover, these normative messages are not overt or even conspicuous, and as a result, viewers may lack knowledge about the sponsor's persuasive intent (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1995). Hence, in this example, the TCR investigators formulated the following theory-based research questions: What combinations of normative reference group messages are effective or ineffective in preventing youth drug use, and does persuasion knowledge moderate these message effects?

Step 2: Find a Match to Existing Constructs and Theory

Next, to build theory, TCR scholars should conduct an extensive literature review to identify the constructs or concepts that are most related to their research questions and identify relevant theory about how the constructs are interrelated and the effects they produce. This literature review is essential, because new theories are built almost always on prior theories (e.g., regulatory focus theory; see Higgins, 1997), which is how theoretical knowledge grows incrementally. Returning to our earlier example (Pechmann & Wang, 2010), the TCR investigators identified reference group theory in marketing (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Park & Lessig, 1977) and the focus theory of normative conduct in psychology (Cialdini et al., 1990) as most relevant for predicting the effects of a television show with antismoking messages. The investigators also identified persuasion knowledge theory in marketing (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1995) as most useful for predicting the effects of an antismoking public-service announcement after the show.

Consistent with the core philosophy of TCR, literature reviews should be multidisciplinary. Once the research questions are conceptualized at a higher level of abstraction, researchers are likely to find that various disciplines offer useful insights. TCR scholars are also likely to discover that each discipline has focused on a different set of constructs or conceptualizations, or even different theories, related to the substantive phenomenon of interest. For parsimony, we recommend that TCR scholars focus on the constructs and theories that best match their research questions. Trying to include an exhaustive list of theories could actually diffuse the theoretical contributions.

Step 3: Develop Hypotheses to Build Theory and Verify Theoretical Contributions

TCR investigators should next develop research hypotheses that incorporate the most relevant constructs and theory from their literature reviews. Then, they should ask themselves, if these hypotheses are supported, will the research make a major theoretical contribution? The researchers should verify that the expected findings (i.e., affirmative hypotheses tests) will build theory by identifying extensions, refinements, and/or qualifications, rather than merely supporting the theory as currently formulated.

Identifying hypotheses that will actually build theory can be very challenging. TCR scholars may discover that, even if the research hypotheses are fully supported, they will only replicate past findings, albeit in a new context; hence, there will be no noteworthy theoretical contributions. If past research is already extensive, as is often the case, it may be infeasible to make any theoretical contributions. However, past research may be more limited in its scope or more inconsistent than it first appears. Researchers working in the same area (e.g., on regulatory focus theory) tend to use very similar methods in order to ensure that past results are replicated; in fact, this is often a

necessary first step to making additional contributions. This approach to research generates systematic, step-by-step, incremental contributions, but it limits the contexts and domains that are examined.

Researchers who are substantively driven often examine new contexts and domains, and/or use new methods, and this novelty can yield significant theoretical contributions. In our earlier example (Pechmann & Wang, 2010), the TCR investigators examined antismoking television shows that contained complex—but realistic—configurations of normative messages about what most people do, what attractive people do, and what people should do to avoid disapproval (with respect to smoking). As a result, the research contributed to both reference group theory (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Park & Lessig, 1977) and the focus theory of normative conduct (Cialdini et al., 1990) by examining the relative impact of each normative message type on persuasion. Additionally, the TCR investigators examined television shows with antismoking messages that some viewers would find highly counterattitudinal (e.g., smokers). Thus, the research also contributed to persuasion knowledge theory (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1995) by examining attitudinal congruence as a moderator of persuasion knowledge effects.

Step 4: Directly Test Hypotheses and Emphasize Theoretical Contributions

In this final step, TCR scholars who seek to build theory should measure their key constructs in the studies they are conducting and directly test their theory-driven hypotheses. If the prior steps have been successfully completed and the hypotheses are supported (e.g., the desired significance level is attained and the effect size is adequate), there will be a theoretical contribution. This theoretical contribution should be explicitly stated in the write-up, including in the title and abstract; that is, it should strongly influence the paper's positioning. A possible concern about emphasizing the theoretical contributions is that the substantive contributions will inevitably be deprioritized, making it more difficult for the broader community to understand and use the research results. However, in our experience, practitioners, consumers, and policy makers will usually understand the paper's substantive insights, which will not be undermined by the theoretical contributions. The pragmatic insights can also be communicated through additional essays and reports in varied outlets.

Some prominent academics in consumer behavior have argued that studies with realistic settings, subjects, and/or stimuli cannot build theory because they are too messy, which obscures the true causal relationships among the variables (e.g., Tybout, 1995). However, mounting empirical evidence suggests otherwise; for example, several studies have shown the same effects in the controlled lab and the relatively uncontrolled field, indicating that valid theory can be developed in either setting. Davis and Pechmann (2010), for instance, recently found that structured social group activity (e.g., involvement in sports or clubs) is a protective factor that reduces youths' consumption of junk food; however, this protective factor is undermined by fast food restaurants that are near schools. The researchers replicated these effects in both the lab and the field, and contributed to construal level theory by demonstrating how perceptions of construal level are affected by social group activity. In summary, although it is demanding to conduct substantively driven TCR that builds theory, it most certainly can be done.

In the following two sections, challenges and opportunities that extend beyond the community of TCR scholars are explored. To achieve the goal of improving well-being, transformative consumer researchers need to interact with an array of social change agents, as elaborated next by Julie L. Ozanne.

Engaging With Agents of Social Change Through TCR

Many academic researchers produce studies strictly for the academic community and do not consider the impact of their work beyond measuring how much their work is cited by other academics.

Yet, the paramount mission of TCR is to produce research that leads to greater well-being. Although no one knows definitively how to produce research that will lead to positive social change, some research paths may be more fruitful than others. Therefore, TCR is committed to encouraging a spectrum of alternative paths for improving consumer and earthly welfare and systematically assessing the success and sustainability of these efforts for affecting real social change. In this section, we explore five potential directions for those scholars who seek to make an impact through revelatory research, policy research, participatory research, coalition research, and incendiary research. These approaches link to different agents of change. Revelatory and incendiary research seek to inspire widespread social interest and involvement, policy research aligns with key political decision makers, participatory research partners with those people who are affected by the social problem, and coalition research works with organizations committed to alleviating the social problem.

Revelatory Research

Research with a purpose to unveil hidden or little known social problems can improve well-being by revealing these problems, seeking their deeper understanding, and attracting public attention and resources. Revelatory research often draws its inspiration from at-risk groups, such as the poor, the disenfranchised, and the very young or old, who lack the voice and resources to make their needs widely known. For example, Hill and Stamey's (1990) work on the homeless highlighted the consumption practices and coping strategies of a marginal group in society that is far too often ignored.

Although such topics may be studied in other fields, consumer researchers can bring a different theoretical lens and offer unique insights. For example, one problem concealed from public view is the mistreatment of elderly women by their caregivers. Whereas significant insights can be brought to bear by a gerontologist who might examine the ongoing physical neglect and abuse, consumer researchers might also highlight the dispossession of sacred objects and the subsequent assault on elderly women's identity as self-defining objects are taken and then given away or sold.

Revelatory research can have impact by delving thoroughly into the phenomenon to offer an insider's perspective on problems that are concealed from view, such as compulsive shopping. In-depth interviews and case studies, for example, might provide research findings that could be used to put a face on the problem and inspire social action (on the topic of compulsive buying, e.g., see Hirschman, 1992; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). Alternatively, quantitative methods, such as surveys, might document the prevalence of the problem as well as the special needs of the group (e.g., O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). Ultimately, the power of revelatory research increases as qualitative and quantitative findings are used to develop theoretical insights that help consumers better understand their social problems and potential solutions.

Policy Research

Within the field of consumer research, a long tradition exists of researchers who seek to understand and inform public policy (e.g., Gorn & Goldberg, 1982; Pechmann & Ratneshwar, 1994). Through laws and regulations, governments exert a significant impact on the well-being of citizens. Thus, transformative consumer researchers can seek social change by conducting studies to inform policy dialogues through examining problems that might need greater governmental oversight and protection (e.g., the consumption of violent video games, underage patronage of hookah or smoking bars) or to assess the efficacy of existing policies (e.g., the ability of health warnings on product labels to compel positive behavioral changes). The path of policy research often assumes that a division of labor exists, with researchers generating relevant results that are used by politicians or pro-consumer groups to influence laws and regulations. However, consumer researchers

can and do take a more active role by testifying before legislative bodies or working as government consultants.

The goal of policy research is to work from within the existing political system to gradually improve it. Researchers leverage their scientific credibility and expert status to generate authoritative research. These researchers, therefore, often employ research tools that have the greatest popular legitimacy, such as large-scale surveys using representative samples, or experiments in controlled laboratory conditions. Skepticism of the presumed superiority of such scientific methods has been well voiced within the academy (see, e.g., Anderson, 1983, 1986). Yet, policy makers and the public tend to give greater weight to quantitative forms of research, believing these to be more exacting and reliable than subjective forms. Nevertheless, we would not want to discount the potential power of other methods to capture the human condition and the political imagination, including those that are humanistic and interpretive (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1988). For example, the poignant photographs of Roy Stryker during the Great Depression had a significant influence on public policies regulating farming (Stryker, 1977).

Participatory Research

While revelatory researchers seek to do research *for* the benefit of at-risk and disadvantaged groups, participatory researchers seek also to do research *with* these groups (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008). Participatory research is called by many names (e.g., action research, collaborative research, community action research), but, regardless of the name, this type of research assumes that the act of doing research is a powerful and empowering act. Thus, those people who are being researched become collaborators in the research process. Individuals, groups, and communities who engage in collaborative research exert significant influence on the research itself and gain beneficial learning experiences as they define the problem to be examined, select the methods to be employed, gather and analyze the data, generate potential solutions, and implement and evaluate programs of social change.

For instance, Ozanne and Anderson (2010) worked with a range of community partners to examine consumption and health care practices in an economically poor community with a 23% rate of diabetes. Community research partners included medical practitioners, professors and local students at a community college, and a local health advocacy group. Iterative and participative data collection revealed that past health programs and recommendations often had a poor cultural fit when they ignored the community members' desire for experiential and family-based learning or the importance of food as a symbolic marker of community membership. As such, the community partners used this research to guide the creation of a promotora or local health worker program at the local community college. The community stakeholders believed that a program housed and run by a local organization would be most feasible. In addition, the local health care workers could work with local families to generate culturally appropriate interventions, such as altering local dishes to be healthier and devising exercise plans that are responsive to the opportunities and obstacles found within the community.

While the benefits of participatory research for the participants are well documented (Schultz et al., 2003), a participatory turn in research could yield significant benefits for TCR, in particular, and for consumer research in general. Yadav's (2010) recent longitudinal study of the marketing and consumer research field has documented a decline of new conceptual work, suggesting that the field's emphasis on testing and extending existing theories continues to be well entrenched. Participatory research could be theoretically generative as we explore perspectives that may be unlike our own, as we work from the bottom up using contextually grounded observations, and as we engage empathetically with those people who are enmeshed in a given social problem. Moreover, when the findings are fed back to the community and acted on, participatory research can generate

additional theoretical findings. For example, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1996) used participatory research with domestic workers to develop an intervention in which novellas were created to portray situations in which these women can be at risk. While evaluating these materials, she discovered new theoretical insights about how domestic work is more dynamic and more evolving than it originally appeared, and she also unveiled a new hierarchy of domestic labor.

Coalition Research

Some researchers become thoroughly committed to a social issue or marginalized group, and as a result, they decide to build an ongoing relationship with the relevant individuals, group, or organization to engage in additional research and assist them further. Such a coalition could arise through work with university-sponsored centers, nonprofit organizations, or even for-profit firms. It takes considerable time for researchers to develop relationships suffused with integrity and respect among their informants and organizations in the field. However, efficiencies and value in future research can be garnered by developing and maintaining long-term partnerships, such as ongoing access to data collection sites, and perhaps to more sensitive data, given that these ongoing relationships are based on greater trust. In addition, an investment in such a partnership may allow for the development of a richer understanding of the evolving social problem as it accrues over time.

For example, DeBerry-Spence (2010) created a successful social enterprise in Ghana called the MASAZI Visitor and Welcome Centre. She hoped to help increase the success of local subsistence vendors of arts and crafts by facilitating longer and more positive buyer–seller interactions. She has continued to use this site to conduct research on subsistence markets and leverage insights gained through her extensive contacts while working in this social enterprise.

Incendiary Research

A relatively small group of researchers write cogently and accessibly on important social issues, and, as such, their ideas are widely read and disseminated to the public. For example, Michael Pollan (e.g., 2008, 2009) writes best-selling books on the politics of food consumption and has translated important research ideas for a much wider audience than would be read by any journal article. Traditionally, the dissemination of our research ideas beyond the academy has not been important, but the growing attention to journals' impact factors suggests that expectations may be changing. For example, the *Journal of Consumer Research* has initiated public relations strategies for attaining increased media coverage of its most revealing and edifying scholarship, and the results suggest that these efforts have been quite successful (see <http://www.jcr.wisc.edu>).

TCR would itself benefit from more consumer researchers adopting the role of the public intellectual and seeking to spread their findings across public domains. Clearly, a different skill set is needed to write for mainstream consumers. Whereas academic writing is often obscurant, public writing needs to be crisp, creative, and stirring (see also Wansink, Chapter 3 of this volume, for discussion of his own related efforts).

Arguably, the goal of the public intellectual should be to write incendiary research, which should be passionate and inspiring. As Agger (2006) suggested, the public intellectual should write “agitationally, to enlighten, edify, engage, and energize” (p. 209). New knowledge is likely to be most transformative when it migrates out of narrow academic circles to be considered, debated, and acted on by the general public.

Consistent with the goal to partner with agents of social change, transformative consumer researchers need to disseminate their findings in the most effective and emerging new media forms. In the next section, Simone Pettigrew further details the needs and opportunities for communicating TCR insights to various stakeholders for greater consumer resolve and well-being.

Communicating TCR: Beyond Information to Empowerment

As we have stressed, a primary objective of TCR is the timely and effective dissemination of research outputs to enhance consumer, societal, and earthly welfare. In the past, academic consumer researchers have emphasized the communication of their findings among themselves, with an assumed trickle-on effect to textbooks and industry publications. This practice fails to provide an adequate research-dissemination template to achieve the most basic mission of TCR, that is, to promote well-being. Instead, alternative communication strategies are required.

The TCR mandate—to share our insights with all those who could benefit—expands the audience scope to include consumers, consumer organizations, public policy makers, nonprofit organizations, industry representatives, and the media. Although some forward-thinking consumer researchers have previously suggested the need to include these audiences in our research-dissemination strategies (e.g., Bazerman, 2001; Thøgersen, 2005; Wansink, Chapter 3 of this volume), this practice is uncommon, and we lack the guiding principles for how it can be achieved.

Each research audience represents a different assortment of communication needs and challenges. For example, while informing consumer organizations and policy makers of research outcomes is relatively straightforward because of their smaller numbers and greater accessibility as compared to other audiences, close attention still needs to be given to the quantity and nature of information provided, and to the manner in which that information should be best packaged to maximize usefulness for particular recipients. Similarly, communicating TCR outputs to industry representatives entails careful consideration of how the information can be positioned to highlight the long-term merits of the research outcomes to organizations that adopt a pro-consumer/pro-society stance. In the case of the media as an audience for TCR, information is typically conveyed with the hope and expectation that the information will be forwarded in some manner to the public, such as inclusion in news and current affairs programs, lifestyle magazines, and even story lines in television shows (see, e.g., Sandlin, 2007). The broad range of available media vehicles underscores the need to build enduring relationships with the media to facilitate continuing access and actively ensure that the style and format of the research results provided are appropriate for the targeted outlet.

Communicating directly with consumers is relatively more difficult because it involves (a) targeting groups of consumers according to their need for and interest in the particular results being reported, (b) identifying multiple information channels that supply access to these groups, and (c) garnering consumers' attention amid the numerous other sound bites competing for their interest as they cope with the manifold complexities of daily life. In addition, it is important for research findings to be conveyed using minimal jargon, contextualized in relation to previous knowledge to allow individuals to understand the relative contribution of the new information, and translated into recommendations that are meaningful and feasible for consumers. Those of us who have researched in the area of consumer health, for example, are well accustomed to consumers' complaints about the piecemeal dissemination of research findings that are perceived in isolation to be competing, if not contradictory. Providing a more integrated and holistic approach to information dissemination represents an enormous challenge that will make new demands on our intellect and creativity.

The ideal approach is likely to be a multiaudience strategy that incorporates communications plans for all these target audiences to maximize the likelihood that the benefits of new research will translate into outcomes that enhance consumers' lives. Such an approach will require much greater attention to results dissemination than now exists among consumer researchers, and it constitutes a daunting prospect. However, there are examples of this approach outside of the TCR academia that can serve as useful guides.

For illustration, the New South Wales branch of the Australian Cancer Council (CCNSW) is a nonprofit organization that regularly undertakes consumer-focused research with the aim of improving the health of Australians. The organization actively communicates significant findings to multiple stakeholders to increase the likelihood that the research outputs will translate into constructive policies and practices. A recent example is its investigation of food labeling practices. This topic was selected for attention because the federal government was in the process of launching a review of food labeling laws in Australia. In order to have a voice in this debate, CCNSW designed and administered a detailed study that compared consumers' preferences for different visual representations of the major nutrients contained within foods, and consumers' relative abilities to understand the various representations. The results were published in the academic literature (Kelly et al., 2009) and in a consumer-friendly report (Kelly, Hughes, Chapman, Dixon, & King, 2008) that was distributed to government ministers, health agencies, research centers, seniors' groups, food manufacturers, food retailers, and international organizations that are known for their interest in food and nutrition issues (e.g., the International Obesity Taskforce). In addition, the report was made available on the CCNSW website (<http://www.cancercouncil.com.au>), where it could be accessed on demand by thousands of consumers. Media releases issued by CCNSW successfully generated coverage in metropolitan and regional media, drawing attention to the study and directing consumers to the online report. This comprehensive strategy provides an admirable model for members of the TCR movement to consider and emulate when developing their own research-dissemination plans.

A further issue is the nature of the information to be communicated. Motives for consumer education have typically stemmed from a desire to increase the efficiency of the market and remove the need for additional regulation (Fast, Vosburgh, & Frisbee, 1989; Howells, 2005; Langrehr & Mason, 1977). As a result of this orientation, there has been an emphasis in consumer education on topics such as budgeting, use of credit, complaint mechanisms, and consumers' legal rights. Information delivery has taken place largely in secondary school classrooms, often only reaching students who enroll in home economics courses (Benn, 2002; Lipstreu, 1949). If alternative methods of consumer education are developed, there is the potential to introduce more individuals to a broader range of concepts that could increase their consumer agency by offering greater insight into the consumption process. For instance, Bazerman (2001) has noted that previous efforts to encourage consumers to be more rational in their buying decisions have failed to acknowledge the reality that consumers are surrounded by marketplace actors who aim to induce them to behave irrationally. Explicitly sensitizing consumers to this state of affairs and informing them of metacognitive processes relating to persuasion may assist them to cope better in commercial environments (Wright, 2002). However, we lack any detailed understanding of the extent to which consumers can be trained in such matters and how best to implement this training (Wathieu et al., 2002). This is a crucial area for future dialogue and research within the TCR field.

Recently, there have also been increasing calls for consumer educators to deliver greater awareness of the consumer/citizen nexus (Adkins & Ozanne, 2005a; Benn, 2002, 2004; McGregor, 2005, 2008). These authors generally argue that providing consumers with information does not necessarily lead to their empowerment. Instead, consumer education should also assist people to evoke better decision processes that can have positive individual, social, and ecological outcomes, while also ensuring that people are aware of their legal rights and available methods of redress (Bannister, 1983).

In addition, consumers could be encouraged to appreciate the social interests served by existing market structures and consumer policies, and question the power imbalances that limit their knowledge and agency (Adkins & Ozanne, 2005a; McGregor, 2005). This approach would focus on assisting consumers to attain a global citizenship perspective that promotes conscious

consumption as an alternative to the mass consumption of cheap consumer goods that inevitably results in oppressive conditions for those in low-wage economies (McGregor, 2008). Consumers are thus considered empowered not only when they have access to desired goods and services, but also when they are adequately informed and motivated to make decisions that have laudable social consequences beyond the satisfaction of their personal needs and desires (see also Mick & Schwartz, Chapter 32 of this volume; Thøgersen, 2005). Once again, the challenge in TCR will be to identify effective means of conveying these complex ideas to consumers in a manner that they will find comprehensible and implementable in their lives.

Effective communication with consumers requires constant adaptation to the changing patterns of their information-gathering activities. The increasing extent to which consumers are “networked” has important implications for those attempting to disseminate their research findings at a societal level. Moreover, with enormous amounts of information readily available through the Internet, it is not sufficient to rely on the one-way information flows that have traditionally characterized academics’ interactions with the world beyond their research designs.

Instead, Repo, Timonen, and Zilliacus (2009) have recommended that, rather than trying to control information flows to and between consumers, a priority should be to facilitate these flows. They noted that information search costs have substantially declined since the advent of the Internet, especially as a result of consumers’ willingness to share their experiences with others through social media that serve to build a communal knowledge base. Information is available in real time and in large quantities, which can make it more reliable and useful than the more static information typically provided by companies and policy makers (Kozinets et al., Chapter 10 of this volume; Shankar, Cherrier, & Canniford, 2006). It is in this context that consumer researchers seeking to disseminate their findings will need to (a) determine whether the most effective course of action is to embed their findings in conversations that consumers are already conducting among themselves, (b) incorporate their findings into formal consumer education classes being delivered in schools and adult education programs, (c) attempt to obtain coverage for their findings in the mass media, or (d) create a combination of these and other approaches.

Consumer research that is truly transformative in its ability to enhance well-being will need to acknowledge the limitations of the patriarchal approach that has typified our interactions with research audiences in the past. Instead, a more inclusive and egalitarian approach that explicitly recognizes the consumer/citizen nexus and all of its implications will be required to facilitate effective engagement (Jocz & Quelch, 2008). These efforts need to occur within a rapidly evolving information environment that offers new but uncertain prospects for meaningful, mutually beneficial interaction. Rising to this challenge will be a difficult, yet ultimately rewarding, task for transformative consumer researchers.

CONCLUSION

The Worldwatch Institute and the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress have both argued that the nature and extent of the “good life” can no longer be principally judged according to a criterion of wealth or gross domestic product. Instead, the predominant standard must shift to well-being (Stiglitz et al., 2009; Worldwatch Institute, 2004). Today, it is commonly recognized that, in the march of human and earthly history, well-being has become fundamentally and intricately conjoined with the acquiring, consuming, and disposing of goods and services.

In this opening chapter, we have provided an overview of the development and chief characteristics of a recent movement emerging from the Association for Consumer Research, namely Transformative Consumer Research, whose goals are to encourage, guide, and foster a new

generation of consumer research on well-being that is conceptually rich, methodologically sound, and pragmatically influential. This first volume on TCR addresses a wide spectrum of the prevalent problems and opportunities of consumer behaviors that pertain to varied dimensions of well-being. The authors we recruited to write these authoritative chapters are among the most knowledgeable and distinguished of all consumer researchers. We thank them for their steadfast efforts, on the complex and momentous calling we share through this inaugural book on TCR, on behalf of millions of consumers and their caretakers worldwide.

At a 2009 conference on TCR, keynote speaker Marc Mathieu (2009) spoke of the inspiration he felt while listening to the numerous scholars who had gathered to present and discuss their latest insights. He closed his remarks by suggesting—half in jest but fully in truth—that TCR might consider revising its name to Tremendously Courageous Research. We agree, and we believe that the chapters that compose this book bear the fruit and the future of that tribute.

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