

Guest editorial: Impact through transformative consumer research

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Transformative consumer research (TCR) is the pre-eminent sub-field in Marketing addressing the key intersections between consumer theory, marketing practice and policy to explicitly promote solutions for improving societal well-being (Mick, 2008; Scott and Mende, 2022). Since its inception almost 20 years ago TCR has contributed seminal conceptual and empirical scholarship on some of the most pressing societal challenges (Anderson *et al.*, 2013; Bahl *et al.*, 2016; Block *et al.*, 2011; Kipnis *et al.*, 2021; Ozanne *et al.*, 2017). Recent recommendations from the TCR Impact Task Force have highlighted the urgent and critical need to prioritise and reorient research goals around societal impact, to develop robust strategies for stakeholder engagement and to grow and foster a culture of collaboration and community-centric research (Ozanne *et al.*, 2024). As impact-focused work grows in prominence across a range of business and management disciplines, we are also witnessing an escalating number of scholars around the globe undertaking TCR scholarship. To recognise and highlight their contributions, our vision for this special issue was to cultivate a space for scholars to share the nature of their diverse impact journeys and outcomes, as publishing avenues for such insights remain nascent in scope and number (Ozanne *et al.*, 2024).

Adopting the innovative format of an EJM impact article, this special issue focuses on TCR's strength in developing rigorous scientific findings in collaboration with stakeholder organisations and groups to alleviate social problems. Representing a first-time collaboration between the *European Journal of Marketing* and the bi-annual Transformative Consumer Research Conference, all papers contained in this issue have emanated from the 2023 TCR Conference, held at Royal Holloway University of London. As change can be achieved only if, and to the extent to which, researchers mobilise all the relevant actors involved in the goals at stake (Fiandrino *et al.*, 2022), the dialogical conference model of TCR is uniquely positioned to strive towards impact development. Comprised of groups of researchers and non-academic stakeholders who share common commitments to addressing social problems, attendees convened for an extended period during the conference to pursue solutions for enhancing marketplace well-being for consumers and communities. By focusing on positive individual and collective change, this exclusively impact article populated special issue showcases the breadth and depth of outcomes that TCR uniquely delivers in terms of partnership, community-building and empowerment-focused collaborations to achieve greater societal impact on wide-ranging issues such as, social media mindfulness, misinformation interventions, gender equity in advertising, social impact measurement for nonprofits and children's digital well-being.

Often the relationship between research and societal impact is more indirect, non-linear and complex than many evaluation frameworks allow (Bornmann, 2012). Consequently, social impact measurement approaches remain notoriously difficult to implement, yet are fundamental to the successful operation and continued survival of nonprofit organisations delivering societal change. Harnessing their extensive expertise in transformative services collaborations, Alkire *et al.* (this issue) outline the journey involved in co-developing a practical toolkit designed to identify and report social impacts for a UK-based nonprofit supporting refugee communities. The co-created toolkit enables a more holistic self-assessment, directly impacting nonprofits' organisational resilience.



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Embracing the move towards directional thinking for impact across a breadth of market actors, the impact papers by Schneider *et al.* (this issue) and Zayer, Guerrier and Coleman (this issue) demonstrate how delivering impact through an intentional decision to link research to change can result in multi-level generative outcomes. Collaborating with thought leaders from social media, advertising, artificial intelligence and advocacy groups, Schneider *et al.* provide an important and timely contribution to combat misinformation through the co-design, dissemination and implementation of their anti-misinformation WISER framework. By developing a framework with demonstrable impact, authors provide a roadmap for further collaborative action to counter misinformation for TCR scholarship and beyond.

Zayer, Gurrier and Coleman, illuminate how their transformative advertising framework and associated education curriculum have been applied to the SeeHer initiative from the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), the nonprofit, ANAEducational Foundation (USA); and by an action coalition, shEqual (Australia), led by a women's health organisation in alliance with industry, government, academia and the gender equity and violence prevention sectors.

Recognising that impact collaborations are not without their challenges, two impact papers surface the emotional dimensions of relational engagement and solution co-creation. Elf *et al.* (this issue) and Preece *et al.* (this issue) reinforce how overlooked effects are not consequences of research impact efforts but are essential for impact to occur from the outset. Explicating the role of resonant-seeking approaches in developing and evidencing impact with arts-based collaborations working on inclusion, Elf *et al.* provide detailed insights on the application of the emancipatory praxis methodological approach (Hutton and Heath, 2020) in generating impact outcomes for collaborators and researchers alike. Preece *et al.* sensitively highlight the hitherto absent role of navigating power imbalances in relational engagement within the cultural sector. They present a dynamic experience-based roadmap for relational engagement in action [ROC: Resourcefulness Obliquity Caring], to help scholars navigate the possible obstacles which may arise when collaborating with stakeholders.

The contributions of Chan *et al.* (this issue) and Cook (this issue) underscore the strength of TCR paradigm in scholar-stakeholder alliances for co-problematizing, co-designing and co-producing societal impact as well as unpacking the constitutive practices, outcomes and insights from co-creation. Stemming from an enduring scholarly and nonprofit collaboration, Chan *et al.* showcase how aligning the motivations of non-academic and scholar collaborators enhances the process of co-development and implementation of key resources designed around a Social Media Mindfulness Practice to foster intentional social media use. Similarly, Cook's impact paper (this issue) emphasises how working interactively across community members of concern aids in the development of solutions to enhance children's digital well-being. Both papers address limited understandings of how collaborations with market stakeholders can inform responsible innovations (Voegtlin *et al.*, 2022).

Finally, longer-term programmatic collaborations for impact between scholars and organisations are an emerging phenomenon in our field. Capturing porous forms of impact which occur *during* these impact journeys are disregarded both in scholarly debates and as meaningful routes to impact realisation in practice (Pain *et al.*, 2015). In their impact article, Cross *et al.* (this issue), provide a unique insight into their impact journey as a leading network within TCR; the Diversity and Inclusion Engaged Marketing initiative. Outlining their co-creation efforts to sustain and grow their work for the long-term they discuss key outcomes achieved with two notable partners; Women in Marketing (WiM), a UK-based social enterprise aiming to empower women

in the marketing profession; the National Diversity Council (NDC), a former US-based nonprofit organisation.

As impact articles aim to celebrate and make explicit the impact of research, as well as the challenge of designing, developing, tracking and demonstrating those outcomes (Keeling and Marshall, 2022), we are delighted to be considered alongside some of the first ever EJM impact special issues (Mitchell *et al.*, 2024; Keeling and Marshall, 2022). We express our deepest appreciation to Debbie Keeling, Richard Whitfield, Greg Marshall and the EJM Editorial team for their commitment to and support of this special issue. We also wish to express our sincere thanks to the excellent reviewers for their constructive support of author teams during the process. Finally, we wish to congratulate the authors featured in this special issue for their sustained commitment to addressing societal concerns and we hope this work will encourage others in our scholarly community to pursue impact *through* Transformative Consumer Research.

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Further reading

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About the Guest Editors

Martina Hutton is Director of Research Impact and Associate Professor in Marketing at Royal Business School, Royal Holloway University of London. Her research focuses on consumer poverty and the experiences of social-material exclusion and deprivation related to gender, hunger and post-prison experiences. Actively partnering with stakeholders and communities on these issues, her methodological expertise is social justice research, critical participatory action approaches and alternative empirical representations of marginality. She has published widely in journals such as the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, *Marketing Theory*. She is the inaugural recipient of the Academy of Marketing’s Mary Kinghorn Davis Award for Research Impact.

Aronte Bennett is the Associate Dean of Community Engagement and Associate Professor of Marketing in Villanova University’s School of Business. Her research focuses on marketplace access for vulnerable consumers, political marketing, allyship and corporate social responsibility. She uses empirical techniques, qualitative approaches driven by grounded theory and secondary data in her exploration of consumers and marketplaces. Most recently, her work on access has examined the experiences of marginalised consumers, including immigrants, those living in subsistence conditions, recipients of social services and members of minority groups, in the marketplace. Her research has been published in the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of the Association of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Consumer Affairs and International Marketing Review*.

Eva Kipnis is the Director of Doctoral College and Professor in Marketing at the University of Bradford. Her research examines the impact of marketing practices and systems on social inclusion, intercultural relations and resilience versus vulnerability of underserved and war-affected consumers. She applies these foci to brand communications, product and service design in various contexts, most notably multicultural marketplaces and new technologies, using mixed methods including participatory, visual and multisensory approaches. Her work is published in the *Journal of Service Research*, *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Marketing Theory*, *Consumption, Markets and Culture* and *Journal of Macromarketing* among others. The impact of her research on multicultural inclusion is recognised by the Thomas C. Kinnear and Women in Marketing awards.