Description

The Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) Movement

Academic researchers, especially in the field of marketing, have been studying consumer behavior for decades. The promise of greater profits through targeted advertising campaigns and improved capability to directly influence consumer behavior has produced a deep well of research funding.

Critics have argued that more socially relevant research on broader consumer issues such as poverty, addiction, and sustainability have lacked equal amounts of such generous funding.

The potential for more practical research on consumer behavior didn't gain wider acceptance until 2006 When Mick (2006) first coined the term *transformative consumer research* (TCR) to present the argument that good research could focus on developing solutions to consumer problems rather than just seeking methods to better influence behavior.

Problems of Consumption

As it approaches its' first decade of recognition as a distinct theory-based research methodology, TCR has become the preferred approach to studying the role that consumption plays in many of the social problems that currently plague our society.

Whether it's the "affluenza" of the overly materialistic who live beyond their means, the over consumption of the obese and addicted, or the poor, homeless, and hungry who represent under consumption on a scale of consumer behavior, TCR offers the opportunity to do applied research to deliver practical results.

A Transdisciplinary Approach

None of the problems listed above have been vanquished or even partially corrected by a single discipline approach. Prior to TCR, consumer research was confined to surveys and/or focus groups run by single specialty researchers – marketers, anthropologists, medical researchers, public health specialists, etc. Results from that research then gets shared in the academic journals that represent the corresponding discipline.

TCR starts from the premise that these social problems are more complex and are therefore beyond a single solution. A transdisciplinary approach would build research teams across multiple disciplines to break traditional research paradigms in proposing multi-faceted solutions to consumption-related problems.

Living Up to Its Promise

The inherent commitment to delivering practical solutions rather than just gleaning more data to sell

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more widgets is a noble one. However, the functional challenges of TCR are not to be dismissed lightly. The research track record is still nascent in this area, and the prospect of seeking grant funding for large transdisciplinary research teams from agency reviewers that are used to single discipline projects is a daunting one.

In addition, the management of larger research teams of equally passionate stakeholders will require a new collaboration paradigm. Hopefully the urgency of many of our consumption-related troubles will inspire researchers to venture into this brave new world.

Citation: *Mick, D.G. (2006). ACR presidential address: Meaning and mattering through transformative consumer research. Advances in Consumer Research, 33, 2–5.*

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