

Developing a Framework for Theorizing Social Change for Impact

Topic: Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) unites diverse scholars with the goal of enhancing consumer well-being. While the TCR movement emanates from the Association of Consumer Research, it embraces paradigmatic diversity in pursuit of rigorous theoretical development (Mick et al. 2012). Over the last decade, TCR has contributed academic research across marketing communities including consumer research (e.g., special issue of *Journal of Consumer Research*; Mick 2008), consumer psychology (e.g., *Journal of Consumer Psychology*; Davis and Pechmann 2020; Ozanne, Davis, and Epko 2022), marketing & public policy (three special issues in *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*; Newman, Finkelstein, and Davis 2021), service research (special issue of *Journal of Service Research*; Blocker, Davis, and Anderson 2022), consumer culture theory (*Journal of Business Research*; Murray et al. 2019), and macromarketing (*Journal of Macromarketing*; Figueiredo et al. 2015).

TCR's dialogical conferences bring people together for the common purpose of solving social problems finding strength in our differences (Davis, Ozanne, and Hill 2016). TCR scholars are beginning to develop new shared methodologies, such as the *relational engagement* approach, to increase the societal impact of scholarly work (Bublitz et al. 2022; Ozanne et al. 2017; Ozanne, Davis and Epko 2022; Piacentini et al. 2019). Relational engagement encourages academics to collaborate with non-academics with a stake in the problem solution turning research participants into collaborators who help generate and apply relevant findings (Deberry-Spence, Akpo, and Hogan 2019). Similar work is needed to advance building new theories for social change.

Ozanne et al. (2024) organized a TCR Impact Task Force, which included leading scholars in our field, to guide expanding research for impact. The results make clear that we are at a pivotal moment as we are working within existing paradigms but transitioning to new paradigms that prioritize societal outcomes (see Figure 1). However, while TCR has flourished in the creation of academic knowledge products and enhanced capacities through dialog and relational engagement, we still lack a coherent framework for understanding how to theorize social change to help guide research for impact.

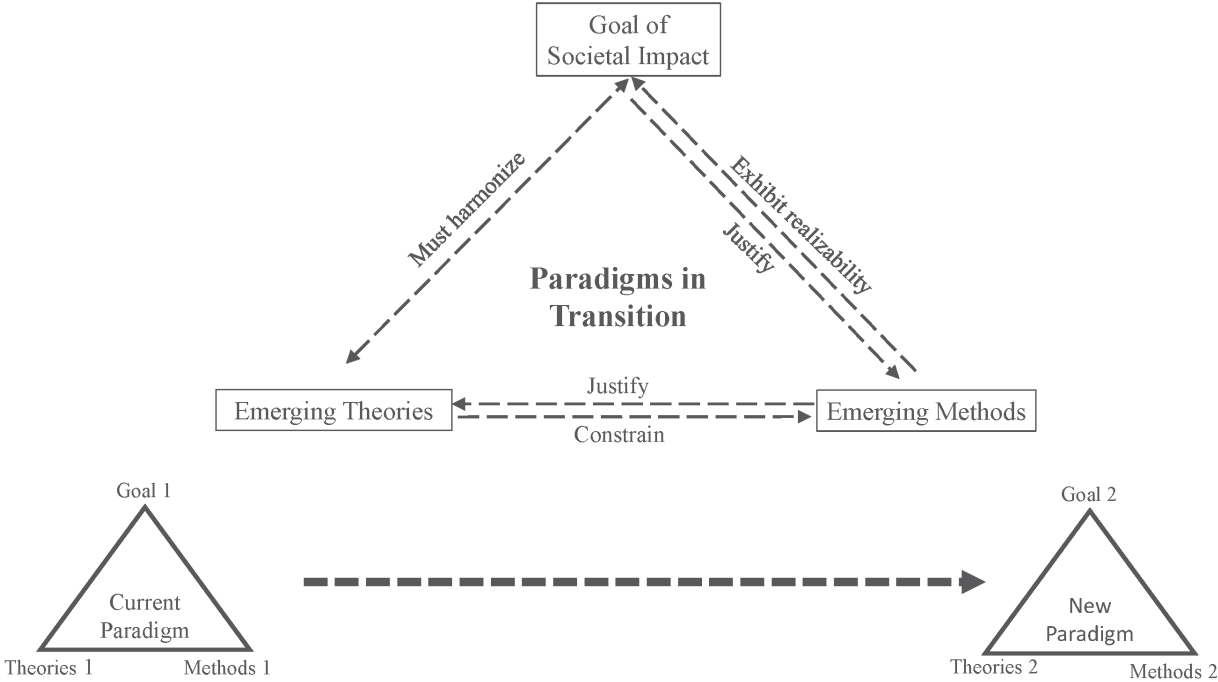
Thus, we solicit help from the TCR community through a Track 1 proposal. We seek collaborators across all career stages and diverse identities who have some experience in working with theories of social change and paradigms that affirm positive social change as a central goal (e.g., social justice, increasing equality). Paradigmatic research with the goal of social change exists across action research (Ozanne and Saatcioglu 2008), health promotion (Tian et al. 2014), social movements (Nardini et al. 2021; Ltief et al 2024), relational engagement (Ozanne, Davis, and Ekpo 2022), feminism (Steinfeld et al. 2019), stigmatized consumers (Lamberton 2019), indigenous research (George et al. 2024; Smith 1999; Wilson 2008), institutionalizing change (Kipnis et al. 2021), critical race theory (Poole et al. 2021), services (Blocker, Davis, and Anderson 2020), critical geography (Harvey 2001), marketing systems (Viswanathan, Rosa, and Ruth 2010), queer theory (Pirani and Daskalopoulou 2022), to name a few. We need a framework for theorizing social change across social problems at levels of analysis of the individual, group, and society. We need a framework that can work with behaviors that require simple changes (e.g., single vaccination for lifetime protection), sustained changes (e.g., exercising), cultural shifts (e.g., right to housing), and infrastructure changes (e.g., electrical grid). We need to theorize change for shifts that have widespread support and those that are more controversial yielding complex tradeoffs between losses and gains. We need to conceptualize the modalities of change (e.g., art, social media, word of mouth) and the complexities around measuring impact. We look forward to meeting with others who are brave enough to wander in and try to put some order and structure on the messy work of social change.

Track 1 Chairs: Julie L. Ozanne, University of Melbourne, and Brennan Davis, Cal Poly.

Action Plan for TCR 2025:

1. **BEFORE TCR:** Collect, read, and summarize articles important to the advancement of TCR theory (e.g., relational engagement, social change from other fields). Meet to discuss theory from the perspectives of multiple marketing disciplines. Identify potential future directions.
2. **DURING TCR:** Analyze and synthesize the data from past scholarship, draw out key themes, draft a framework for theory for TCR work.
3. **AFTER TCR:** Draft a paper that proposes a framework for TCR theory.

Figure 1. Paradigms in Transition Driven by Societal Impact.



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