

TCR 2025 Track Proposal

**2025 Transformative Consumer Research Track 2 Proposal**

**“Revisiting Critical Race Theory in a Polarized Marketplace”**

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Despite persistent attempts to marginalize “race” in much of the public discourse and the scientific debunking of race as a legitimate biological concept, race still matters. As research and practice has revealed, race is a powerful social construct and signifier (Henderson, Hakstaitian, and Williams 2016; Poole et al 2022) and a key site of hierarchy upon which global marketplaces rest (Bonsu 2009, Grier et al 2024; Wilson and Liu 2010; Johnson, Thomas, and Grier 2017). Markets such as banking and soft commodities are deeply rooted in racist colonial and imperialist practices (e.g. Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2005); racial dynamics persist in post-colonial contemporary marketplace practices such as target marketing, advertising and marketing communications, (reverse) redlining, service delivery and consumer profiling (Grier, Thomas and Johnson 2017; Grier et al 2024); race is copiously commodified and used as a marketing tool by practitioners (Crockett 2008) and its dynamics negatively influence consumer well-being (Grier and Kumanyika 2013).

In the past few years, Critical Race Theory (CRT) — a movement that recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of our global society — has been under attack for revealing contemporary discourses on race and racism across several fields of study. Furthermore, race-related controversies and disparities in markets continue to grow worldwide as seen in health, sports, public safety, and immigration issues. As a result, focused critical attention to CRT is vital to continuing identifying and addressing the specific ways in which existing hierarchies within racial interactions hinder equitable markets and “question[ing] existing marketing strategies and link[ing] them to an overall framework that can promote inclusive, fair and just marketplaces. (Grier, Thomas and Johnson 2017, p.9).

The *Revisiting Critical Race Theory in a Polarized Marketplace* track furthers the transformation in the way race is treated in marketplace research, building on research approaches delineated at the groundbreaking CRT collaboration in the 2019 Transformative Consumer Research Conference and the inaugural 2017 Race in the Marketplace (RIM) Forum at American University that brought together 46 scholars from around the world. We seek to update and expand a critical scholarship approach to RIM research by demonstrating the theoretical and empirical relevance and validity of analyzing media reports and other narratives on a social media platform as an approach to investigate the ways in which contemporary discourses of race and racism and key concepts of CRT operate and are actively challenged in today’s polarized marketplace.

The 2022 CRT paper that emerged from the 2019 collaboration laid the groundwork by showing the significance of racial dynamics in the marketplace (Poole et al 2022). This track will build on that work to identify the specific types of marketplace interactions that lead to marketplace challenges related to race. At present, a RIM Facebook page contains over 1,000 incidents (narratives) of media reports related to race and racism across a broad range of consumer populations and market domains. These narratives often reflect current controversies which allow for investigation of both problems and solutions (Blanchet and Depeyre 2015). Using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 2017) the track team will utilize the narratives of race-related market experiences as data to inductively develop theory. This effort brings together diverse RIM scholars representing different geographies (African, North American, Caribbean, South American, European), academic and institutional backgrounds (academic, private, and public institutions, independent scholarship and from fields such as management, anthropology, sociology, marketing, and justice, law & criminology), and methodological approaches (qualitative, quantitative, historical, critical). Theorizing the role of race across different types of markets and different racialized groups, these scholars will pursue the following *three key objectives*: 1) Design and perform a robust empirical research program that utilizes CRT as a framework to analyze popular press and academic controversies related to race across markets and different racialized groups; 2) Consolidate extant knowledge on critically-oriented RIM research, and 3) Identify pathways for maximizing societal awareness and impact of our work through collaborative development of a program of outputs and actions.

## Preconference Plans: Updating and synthesizing conceptual frameworks and developing foundation

Our pre-conference schedule includes the following tasks:

- *Identifying key areas of focus:* each track member will be invited to provide 1-2 research questions pertinent for addressing the research problem;
- *Building a shared understanding of core literature:* each track member will be asked to identify key papers that all track members should read. A shared electronic folder will be created containing those papers;
- *Collecting evidence/data:* each track member will be asked to add to the Facebook group popular media stories, narratives, dialogues and other relevant content.
- *Developing a working approach:* to ensure everyone is on the same page related to method and analytic approach, the team will meet virtually to discuss proposed methodology and develop and refine a coding scheme for the analysis based on salient themes derived from literature reviews;
- *Organizing/ coding data and submitting analyses:* each track participant will independently code the content using a common coding scheme, identify patterns, and submit analyses for review.

## Conference Plans

The goal of the work at the conference is to discuss and finalize the analysis of the data and agree on strategies for maximizing impact. We anticipate collaboratively producing at least one paper. The paper is planned to be developed from the study described here and finalized at the conference.

- Conference Day 1 - morning session: review discrete ideas/concepts from media stories and narratives; discuss and compare results of independent data analyses;
- Conference Day 2 - afternoon session: continue to discuss results of independent data analyses; establish interjudge reliability
- Conference Day 3 - publications planning and task assignments

## Post Conference Plans

The schedule of post-conference work is planned across 12 months following the conference and involves finalizing the data analysis and the development of at least one publication. We anticipate finalizing data analysis by September 2025 with a target to prepare the publication for submission to a journal by February 2026. Target outlets for any secondary publications will be decided collectively during the conference.

## References

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