BEYOND THE HUMAN SUBJECT: IMPACT AND MARKET TRANSFORMATION

TRACK CO-ORGANIZERS

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Short Track Description

This track invites scholars interested in transformative consumer research, market justice, critical animal studies, and marketplace ethics to join a timely conversation on the consumer-animal nexus. The track challenges the longstanding treatment of animals as objects of consumption and instead explores what becomes possible when animal well-being is positioned as a central concern of market justice. Participants will investigate how markets construct animal categories, how consumers negotiate interspecies relationships, and how human-animal relations shape identities, consumption practices, regulation, and market systems. Together, we will develop a research agenda that rethinks impact beyond human-centered measures and advances more-than-human approaches to transformation in consumer markets.

Extended Track Description

Animals are everywhere in consumer markets, as food, companions, and raw materials (Aboelenien and Arsel 2025; Bettany and Daly 2008; Bettany and Kerrane 2018). Consumer research has largely treated them as objects of consumption rather than as participants whose well-being is a question of market justice (Waverley 2024). This track centres on the consumer–animal nexus, asking what changes theoretically and empirically when animals enter transformative consumer research as active subjects whose wellbeing is central to discussions.

This reframing unsettles how the field currently accounts for impact, a concept at the heart of TCR scholarship. TCR is organized around the conviction that scholarship should change the world, yet impact is still largely captured through bibliometric proxies, such as citation counts and journal rankings, and along narrowly human and economic axes (Bornmann and Marx 2014; Hampson 2021; Ravenscroft et al. 2017). Research rarely transforms markets through a traceable citation, rather, it does so diffusely, by reshaping practitioners' and consumers' mental models, informing regulatory language and policymaking, and legitimizing new market categories (Ozanne, Davis, and Ekpo 2022). Our move is to take this problem to TCR to extend impact metrices to encompass non-human flourishing. That multidimensional account broadens the unit of analysis to the more-than-human economy in which impact is registered in the vitality of the systems within which all market actors are embedded (Adams 1991; Daly and Farley 2011; Fraser and Taylor 2020; Hickel 2020; Tsing 2015).

This track convenes researchers to develop a research agenda on the consumer–animal nexus, and to articulate a shared framework for measuring multidimensional impact, covering:

1. How do consumer markets construct the category of "animal" and what would it mean to treat animal well-being as a central question of market justice?
2. What does "impact" look like when the unit of analysis extends beyond human consumers to the more-than-human systems, and how might it be assessed?
3. How do consumers experience, and negotiate their relationships with animals in the market and how do those relationships shape interspecies consumption and identity?
4. Where have ideas about human–animal relations already reshaped policy, regulation, or industry practice, and how can we learn from these cases?
5. How do market categorizations of species intersect with other axes of difference and inequality, and what does an intersectional lens reveal about how markets distribute harm and flourishing across human and non-human lives?
6. How can scholars, industry, and policy actors collaborate to produce research on the consumer–animal nexus that is methodologically rigorous and capable of changing market practice?

After the conference, the track chairs will lead the researchers involved towards a piece aimed the Journal of the Association for Consumer Research special issue and pursue additional scholarly outlets as appropriate. The chairs will also sustain the group as an ongoing working network through follow-up virtual sessions and a shared resource base. The entire team will also co-author an agenda-setting piece articulating a multidimensional, more-than-human framework for assessing the impact of consumer–animal research and translate findings into practitioner-facing briefs and governmental bodies.