Impact for good: a journey toward impact through marketing scholarship

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to propose approaches to cocreating new knowledge at the intersection of theory, practice, policy and consumers, broadly inspired by the United Nations’ sustainable development goals.

Design/methodology/approach – Following a process perspective, this study’s approach begins with a well-being-related problem and collaboratively works with stakeholders to exchange, disseminate and generate knowledge, with the goal of helping to improve quality-of-life for consumers.

Findings – To demonstrate applications of impact in action, this study provides illustrative cases from three scholarly research collaborations that involve working closely with organizations in health-care and financial services.

Research limitations/implications – This research provides recommendations for facilitating impactful research collaborations.

Practical implications – This study emphasizes the vital role that consumers and practitioners play in collaboration for impact.

Originality/value – A central theme in this work is the idea that being more inclusive of vulnerable and previously underserved customer populations can lead to potentially beneficial outcomes for consumers and firms, while also helping to facilitate the creation of new scholarly marketing knowledge in the process.

Keywords Impact, Sustainable development goals, Greater good, Consumer well-being

Paper type Research paper

Positive impacts for the greater good that favorably influence consumers, organizations, society and the environment can stem from rigorous scholarly marketing research. We refer to the greater good as fostering the sustained health, ability to flourish, and prosperity of individuals, communities, and society-at-large; this includes efforts that help promote peace, education, human dignity, environmental sustainability, and economic growth as well as eradicate poverty, hunger, illness, and oppression (Labroo and Goldsmith, 2021; Mende and Scott, 2021). Impactful greater good research in marketing is based on the acknowledgment that business can be leveraged as a catalyst in helping to solve grand challenges faced by society (Chandy et al., 2021; de Ruyter et al., 2021). This objective can be achieved and assessed through a variety of lenses. In our research, we often consider impact in two central contextual areas that affect consumer and societal well-being: health and financial services. We posit that when individuals and communities prosper, in terms of their health and financial well-being, they enjoy greater self-sufficiency and are better able to contribute to society and the economy.
In this article, we reflect upon approaches to rigorously cocreate new knowledge at the intersection of theory, practice, policy and consumers, broadly inspired by the United Nations’ 17 sustainable development goals (UN SDGs; de Ruyter et al., 2021; Mende and Scott, 2021). The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the foundation for the UN SDGs, which strives for a “universal, integrated, transformative and human rights-based vision for sustainable development, peace and security” for all people; [1] the 2030 Agenda was adopted by all UN member states in 2015.

Our reflection of some of our work follows a process perspective (Table 1) and, therefore:

- begins with the notion of identifying a well-being-related problem;
- discusses how to work collaboratively with stakeholders to actively exchange, disseminate and generate knowledge; and
- illustrates some forms of impact that can help to improve quality-of-life for consumers and may help create more satisfied and loyal customers for organizations.

Indeed, one major theme in our work is the idea that being more inclusive of vulnerable and previously underserved customer populations can lead to potentially beneficial outcomes for consumers and firms, while also helping to facilitate the creation of new scholarly knowledge in the process.

In addition, we will link our discussion to various types of pathways for consumer research to promote positive changes in the world. Specifically, we reflect our research journeys through the lens of relational engagement with various stakeholders (e.g. business, nonprofit organizations, consumers). Ozanne et al. (2022) conceptualized a typology of such relational engagements; Figure 1 defines the specific types of engagements that allowed us to strive for positive impact through our scholarly endeavors.

Identifying well-being-related problems: inside-out and outside-in

Beginning scholarly research projects with impact as a central goal can take different approaches, which often are collaborative in nature. That is, various forms of relational engagement of scholars with stakeholders outside of academia is often a crucial ingredient for research to create new knowledge and foster societal benefits. Some are inside-out approaches such as starting with a scholarly question and seeking out an organization to study this question with the goal of improving outcomes for consumers, firms and/or society. Other approaches are outside-in approaches such that the stimulus for research comes from outside the scholarly realm (e.g. scholars respond to a firm’s problem and/or collaborate with an organization to address societal challenges). Many grand challenges (e.g. UN SDGs) require the engagement of nonacademic partners to include difficult-to-reach consumers, such as those coping with lower literacy, poverty or various forms of stigma. The collaborative problem generation process can take on a variety of forms, as we briefly illustrate next (Ozanne et al., 2022 provide a more systematic consideration).

Inside-out: seeking partner organizations to help address a scholarly well-being question

In our (inside-out) examination of customer participation [2] by potentially vulnerable consumers, we had a clear research question in mind (Mende et al., 2017): How does customer participation uniquely affect low (vs high)-literacy consumers in high involvement services such as health-care and financial services? After conducting an exploratory study in our laboratory, we approached a local health-care provider (a hospital) to share our initial findings. Throughout the evolving collaboration, we learned that our health-care partner...
<table>
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<th>Selected examples (Authors and context)</th>
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| Improving customer coproduction in health-care and financial services  
*Mende et al. (2017)* | Health-care and financial service systems are increasingly requiring customers to coproduce the experience along with the service provider(s). However, consumers with lower service (medical/financial) literacy may be reluctant to coproduce. What are the effects of coproduction on customers and on the service relationship? | • Collaborated with a health-care system executive team, front line physicians, a patients advocacy group and a physicians advisory board  
• Research found, for example, that when patients with lower levels of medical literacy coproduced their care, they showed greater willingness to comply with the advice of the medical team, and had more favorable behavioral intentions to the health-care provider; these effects were driven by customer eustress. Among lower literacy patients, coproduction increased compliance and loyalty intentions to the levels of higher literacy patients | • Key findings were shared with the health-care executives, health-care teams and patient advocacy group. These reports inspired health-care provider to adopt new patient coproduction practices that resulted in greater inclusivity toward lower literacy patients and greater behavioral intentions toward the health-care service provider |
| Overcoming health stigma in the marketplace  
*Harmeling et al. (2021)* | Consumers must increasingly advocate for their own health concerns and use resources beyond the direct interaction with the health-care provider. However, consumers with stigmatized diseases may be reluctant to engage in patient/health-care communities. What marketing cues can increase patients’ willingness to engage in online health-care communities? How might this differ as a function of disease stigma? | • Collaborated with the executive leadership team and the frontline marketing team; also worked with physicians external to the organization to obtain insights relating to disease stigma  
• Research found that patients coping with stigmatized diseases are particularly sensitive to and influenced by audience cues. Anticipating social devaluation can reduce beneficial consumption (e.g., engagement with the health-care platform) and can increase interest | • Findings from field experiments (i.e. focusing on customer engagement) were used to create an inclusive environment for patients with highly stigmatized illnesses. Patients engaged with others who shared the same illness, as a vehicle for improved inclusion and patient-to-patient information and resource sharing  
• A measurable impact involved demonstrating increased behavioral engagement among patients over a two-week period (e.g. Table 1. Illustrative approaches to scholarly impact (continued))
**Selected examples**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Financial inclusion of consumers in impoverished banking desert community</td>
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**Problem generation and impact goals**

Financial services firm seeking to expand customer base by reaching an un(der)served consumer segment. How are the service needs and expectations of the underbanked in impoverished areas different than existing customers in relatively wealthier communities?

**Working with stakeholders and knowledge exchange and generation**

- Collaborated with executive leadership of a partner financial institution, as well as branch/frontline employees.
- Research uncovered that consumers in financial service deserts were relatively more responsive to marketing messages that promote communal financial orientation. This positioning led to greater behavioral intentions toward the financial services provider.

**Collaborative impact outcomes**

- Contributing to the discussion, adding “likes” and related social engagement in the health-care community.
- Panel to include scholars, financial institution executives, consumer advocacy groups and US policy organization (CFPB).
- A new branch location in the banking desert provided community members with access to lower-cost financial products and access to products that can help to promote wealth building.
- Developed materials through the Society for Consumer Psychology so the research could be incorporated in the classroom.

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**Table 1.**

(Selected) Types of Relational Engagement for Impact (adapted from Ozanne, Davis, and Ekpo 2022, Table 1):

- **Substantive Harnessing:** researchers identify a topical problem and align their research to study the issue deeply and systematically.

- **Expert Consultation:** researchers use the depth of their expert knowledge forged over years to inform various stakeholders; this is a two-way dialogue.

- **Interactive Dissemination:** researchers publish articles that are then promoted using forums that allow for two-way exchanges between researchers and potential users.

- **Trickle-Down Dissemination:** researchers publish articles that they or academic journals promote primarily through press releases and various media; these are one-way exchanges, targeted at a general audience.

- **Capacity Building:** researchers and stakeholders collaborate to study a problem for their mutual benefit.

- **Community Building:** researchers introduce new ways of thinking that shift institutional practices providing new resources around which to form new communities.

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**Figure 1.**

Inside-out and outside-in relational engagement for impact.
was concerned that patients were not always compliant with their physicians’ recommendations (e.g. taking medications, making lifestyle adjustments). This was particularly alarming because the focal hospital was located in a region of the USA that was higher than average in tobacco and alcohol addiction, obesity and poverty, especially among its rural communities. Drawing on prior literature, our team recognized that customer participation had multiple potential favorable outcomes on both customers and service providers. However, in line with our goal of giving the underrepresented a stronger voice in the scholarly discourse, we were interested in the potential unintended consequences for some vulnerable populations, who may be less equipped for their role as service coproducers (here, the rural poor, who had lower medical literacy); in other words, one major research goal was to explore the moderating role of customer (medical) literacy in service coproduction. Against this background, bringing together our scholarly perspective with the practical challenges faced by the hospital, we collaborated with the management team to develop a field study that tackles this question. In this study, all patients completed standard check-in paperwork upon arrival for their appointment, but we manipulated levels of customer participation (high vs low) in the health-care experience by asking patients to complete more (vs fewer) materials (e.g. completing forms about their health and medical history, completing reading assignments) before meeting with their physician (Mende et al., 2017). We developed these materials based on guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and in collaboration with the hospital’s advisory board, patient advisory board and hospital administration. Therefore, we were able to incorporate the needs of various key stakeholders throughout this research journey.

The results revealed that in the low participation condition, patients with lower (vs higher) health literacy indicated significantly lower intentions to comply with the physician’s recommendations. However, when patients were asked to participate in their health-care experience to a higher degree (i.e. high participation condition), the patients with lower health-care literacy exhibited an increase in willingness to comply with their physicians’ recommendations, and their compliance intentions were not different from those of patients with higher levels of health-care literacy. We also discovered that these positive effects were driven (mediated) by consumer eustress, such that these patients appraised the coproduction task as a positive and meaningful challenge that needs to be met. These insights were fruitful not only because consumer eustress was a novel construct in marketing but also – and potentially even more important – because the notion of eustress provided our health-care partners with crucial insights into the psychological mechanism of consumers with lower medical literacy, a population that does not always receive the attention in marketing research it deserves.

This research drew upon the perspectives and needs of various stakeholders (the hospital, the service providers, patient advisory boards) to help improve the outcomes of patients with lower health-care literacy, who were not consistently complying with their physicians’ recommendations. The results, which were subsequently presented to various hospital stakeholders, helped this organization to better understand some of its vulnerable consumers and how to potentially tailor the service provision to them.

Outside-in: bringing firms’ problems into the scholarly realm to address societal challenges
Firms are often interested in grand challenges, such as taking a more inclusive approach in reaching the full range of their customer base with a new offering; this notion inspired two of our recent well-being-related research projects.

One of our partners (a health-care organization) had created a new online patient platform to facilitate engagement between individuals suffering from different diseases. This organization aimed to provide a platform for patients to receive educational resources,
engage with others and share information and experiences. However, not all patients were engaging with the online platform. Drawing on research related to stigmatization and working closely with our partner (i.e. taking into account their business goals), our team conducted field studies to uncover how to encourage engagement among patients, especially those with relatively more stigmatized diseases. We found that the health-care organization needed to use a distinct communication approach to better engage consumers with relatively more (vs less) stigmatized diseases; specifically, patients coping with stigmatized diseases are particularly sensitive to and influenced by audience cues and cues that signal potential social devaluation can reduce beneficial consumption (e.g. engagement with the health-care platform) and can increase interest in detrimental consumption (e.g. products with considerable risks) (Harmeling et al., 2021).

Another “outside-in” project related to being more inclusive of poor consumers, which is the UN SDG #1. Specifically, this project related to financial services and un(der)served consumers. The landscape of financial services, even in rich countries such as the USA, presents dramatically different types of options for consumers depending on where they live. Consumers in affluent areas tend to have access to a wide variety of mainstream banking alternatives, which compete against each other for customers through their service quality, offerings and pricing. In contrast, some segments of vulnerable consumers (e.g. poor and minority consumers) often find themselves living in “financial services deserts,” where they have little or no access to mainstream financial services. Consequently, these consumers might be forced to rely on pawn shops and/or payday loan services, which can present predatory products and pricing/fee structures to the poorest consumers. Against this background, our financial service partner sought to expand their customer base by entering a banking desert and offering the corresponding consumers a dignified banking experience in line with prices at mainstream financial institutions. The organization had made the strategic decision to embark upon this journey and worked closely with our research team to understand how the needs and expectations of underbanked consumers in impoverished areas might be different from their existing customers. Some of the main findings are as follows:

- consumers in banking deserts were relatively more responsive to marketing messages that promote financial services (e.g. financial literacy programs) through a communal financial orientation; and
- positioning the service firm through such a communal orientation led to more favorable behavioral intentions toward the firm.

In other words, these insights point to a win-win scenario for under-served communities and firms because they help both improve financial inclusion and increase the viability of serving banking deserts (Mende et al., 2020).

**Working with multiple stakeholders: the yin and yang of the knowledge exchange and generation process**

Working with nonacademic stakeholders requires (the willingness and patience to develop) a deep understanding of their needs, priorities, timelines and metrics. In the aforementioned studies, we worked closely with multiple stakeholders at different levels within partner organizations as well as with customers/consumers. On the organizational side, it is important to understand and incorporate the strategic goals, priorities and contextual constraints of management teams; this can be a slow process as mutual trust needs to be nurtured. It is equally critical to minimize the potential disruption to operational team members when planning and implementing studies; therefore, we often ask operational managers for input to ensure a field study does not interfere with the business processes.
For example, when working with the financial services firm (Mende et al., 2020), we met with frontline managers and bank tellers and incorporated their insights into the study procedure.

Considering the customers/consumer side, we were centrally concerned about making sure the target customer populations were treated with dignity and respect, and that their voices were represented in our process at each stage, especially when consumers belonged to potentially vulnerable groups. We posit that perspectives from vulnerable and underrepresented communities can help to advance knowledge and heighten the quality of our scholarly discourse (Arsel et al., 2022). Indeed, there is ample opportunity to reach new, diverse consumer groups and tackle new questions. Accordingly, whenever possible, we aim to conduct initial observations in the focal field setting to better understand the customer journey. Certainly, considerations regarding the ethics of impact are crucial at every stage of the research journey. To illustrate, when working with the aforementioned hospital to study patient coproduction, we not only presented, discussed and refined our research plans with the senior leadership and medical providers of the hospital but also with the patient advocacy group comprised former and current patients as well as patient advocates of the cooperating hospital (Mende et al., 2017). We obtained their approval and support (in addition to the regular IRB approval) prior to any data collection. Similarly, in the research on financial services in banking deserts, our partner firm engaged with the local community prior to conducting the research to understand their needs (e.g. leaders from a large church actively involved in the local community, and within walking distance of the new bank branch; attending a community festival to better understand the needs of the community). These foundational steps can help facilitate approaching vulnerable, potentially stigmatized consumers/communities, in a manner that respects their consumer culture.

Collaborative efforts as platform for substantive harnessing, expert consultation and dissemination

The aforementioned studies uncovered new insights that could help inform business practices and support consumer well-being. Furthermore, they facilitated knowledge exchange between various stakeholders, in academia, organizations and the broader marketplace (e.g. consumers). In addition, to further promote knowledge dissemination, we seek opportunities to share findings from research with relevant stakeholders (e.g. managers, policymakers) after research is completed to help raise awareness and understanding of the focal issue. As such, our relational engagement with partnering organizations included facets of what Ozanne et al. (2022) describe as substantive harnessing, expert consultation, interactive and trickle-down dissemination (Figure 1). Equally important, we believe that our collaborative experiences illustrate that consumer well-being and organizational well-being do not need to be perceived as opposing forces; rather, they can be complementary and interconnected. Indeed, it was typically the creative “yin and yang” between multiple stakeholders (e.g. scholars, managers and consumers/customers) that unearthed some of the most interesting research problems and then allowed us to study them; this further underscores our view that recognizing and helping to solve well-being-related problems requires a collaborative approach between academics and outside stakeholders.

Challenges of collaborative efforts: practical considerations

Engaging in impactful collaboration efforts is not without its challenges (which can particularly affect junior/nontenured scholars). In a session at the 2022 Winter American
Marketing Association conference, the consensus among experienced panelists was that only about 1 in 10 contacts results in a successful research collaboration. Therefore, we briefly acknowledge some barriers and provide some suggestions for partnering with organizations for impactful research [3]. While we only highlight some of the major barriers we encountered, Table 2 provides some additional insights.

Managers change. Successful managers tend to advance their careers both by promotions within organizations, and by moving to different companies. As a result, key contacts can change (sometimes without notice). We recommend establishing multiple touch points among the management team in the given organization, to help ensure that knowledge about and buy-in toward the research project exists among multiple stakeholders.

Timelines differ (dramatically). The nature of their work means that managers tend to be evaluated on shorter time cycles than academics, and the idea that a project can take multiple years (rather than a couple of weeks/months) might seem foreign to some managers. We recommend explicitly discussing the timelines involved in academic research, and how the needs of the firm can be accommodated in a more expedited form (e.g. by conducting initial descriptive analyses for the firm).

Field data can be messy. Field data is a precious resource that can provide invaluable real-world insights about pressing topics. However, the nature of field data is that it is often also noisy and constrained. For example, we have found that we do not always have the luxury of administering a full measurement scale when conducting research with a firm’s customers and may also have to consider the managerial interests of the firm. Therefore, it is important to be flexible and find a middle-ground between scholarly needs and priorities of the firm. As a result, the research can introduce variance outside the researcher’s control. We recommend supplementing field research with laboratory-based studies to try to understand the converging evidence across field and lab research.

Need to explain publication goals. As a scholar, it is important to deliver novel insights that can help to support the firm’s goals. In parallel, we have found that it is important to inform the firm early in the collaboration of the goal of publishing the research in a journal, and what this process entails. As, sometimes, managers might worry about confidentiality, it can help to explain that the publication process can take years or to discuss ways how a firm’s name can be disguised in publications in the interest of confidentiality.

Impact outcomes: going beyond dissemination to capacity and community building
Outcomes in research focused on consumer and societal well-being can be measured based on the extent to which they provide a voice for underrepresented consumers, and that helps to improve business practices so these communities can be served in a fair and dignified manner; for example, providing consumers in banking deserts with access to fairly priced financial products that can help to promote wealth building. The research insights not only informed the collaborating financial services firm, as it seeks to replicate the process in other areas, but they are also disseminated to key stakeholders such as national consumer advocacy groups, and policy making agencies such as the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). In addition, in collaboration with the Society for Consumer Psychology, we prepared a set of slides that summarize key findings from this research so that educators can easily use this work in their classrooms. Another impact this research had was for financial managers to (better) understand that poor consumers are not the same as richer consumers except with less money; rather, poor consumers are likely to experience distinct customer journeys that require firms to tailor their services to these (often vulnerable)
**Be proactive and realistic**
- Proactively networking with stakeholders in the business and university communities can serve as an excellent source of prospective partners. Alumni and firms affiliated with the university may be open to learning about how they might collaborate on research.
- It is important to understand that not all touchpoints will result in collaboration (in many cases, it might be as low as 5%–10% success rate).

**Find executive champions (and be prepared for turnover)**
- Top performing managers often change roles frequently. Therefore, it can be helpful to have multiple touch points and champions within an organization. Having senior level champion(s) in the firm is helpful.
- Smaller organizations can have less hierarchy and therefore be better equipped to make decisions about proceeding with a research collaboration.
- Larger organizations may have more layers to reach senior management but may offer access to contexts that are more tailored to specific research questions.

**Understand timelines are relative and can vary dramatically**
- Managers are often evaluated on an annual or even quarterly basis. As a result, their timelines and corresponding reward structures may differ from that of an academic (and the multiyear academic publication process).
- It is important to be explicit and realistic regarding your intended timeline.
- It is also beneficial to find ways to provide deliverables within the partner’s timelines (e.g., interim reports, white papers, presentations to management).

**Expect real life to be messy**
- When involving vulnerable, underrepresented or potentially stigmatized consumers or communities in research, be cognizant of their needs and apprehensions. Obtain input from these stakeholders to make sure the research process respects their unique journey (e.g., community members can provide input on a research instrument).
- Work closely with stakeholders to develop interventions and measures that minimize disruption to the firm but also provide valid measures of the key constructs in the study.
- Supplement field research with lab-based studies to try to understand the converging evidence across field and lab research.

**Understand organizational procedures**
- Partners will expect that their business operations will not be disrupted by a research collaboration. Be careful to understand their processes so the research is streamlined.
- Other than a specific intervention, strive for minimal impact on the firm’s activities.
- Use empathy to strike a balance between the needs of the business and the scholarly needs of the research team.
- Partners likely has specific metrics against which her/his division will be evaluated. Understand what those metrics are, as well as the corresponding timeline. Explore how to incorporate those needs into facets of the project.
- A publication might seem initially problematic to the partner (e.g., based on concerns about competition). Explain timelines and potential approaches to disguise the collaborating organizations and their data. Prepare the partner for the reality that research results may not align with their a priori expectations and help the partner to use unexpected new knowledge in a way that can help strengthen their organization.

**Seek to understand the partner’s goals and be transparent about your goals**
- Partners will expect some form of value (ROI) related to collaborating with you. For example, consider offering additional analyses that are relatively more valuable for the partner (vs than yourself), keeping in mind that some aspects of the scholarly research may also be less relevant to the partner than they are to you.
- Consider presenting key findings to stakeholders that are particularly relevant to the partner organization.
- Research partnerships can also extend to other types of a win-win (e.g., student placements, classroom presentations, PR for the partner based on working with the university).

**Offer (extra) value and service – strive to create a win-win**
- Partners will expect some form of value (ROI) related to collaborating with you. For example, consider offering additional analyses that are relatively more valuable for the partner (vs than yourself), keeping in mind that some aspects of the scholarly research may also be less relevant to the partner than they are to you.
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**Table 2. Recommendations for facilitating impactful research collaborations**

(continued)
consumers. Consistent with this notion, the collaborating hospital (Mende et al., 2017) drew on our work, as it reviewed and revised its patient coproduction approaches with the goal of being more inclusive toward lower literacy patients, while also eliciting greater behavioral intentions toward the hospital. In addition, our published findings can inform other healthcare organizations with similar goals.

Taken together, these projects resemble trickle-down and interactive knowledge dissemination emerging from the results being published in scholarly journals; in parallel, they had an impact through expert consultation such that our collaboration informed not only executives but also professionals more broadly (e.g. bank and hospital employees in our partner organizations). In addition to positively impacting our partners, we strove for a broader impact through “capacity building” and “community building” (Ozanne et al., 2022).

Capacity building includes opportunities for scholars to collaborate with nonacademic stakeholders (e.g. nonprofit or [non] governmental organizations) to jointly explore an important problem. In one such effort of promoting the issue of financial service deserts, we developed a Special Session that included multiple stakeholders such as scholars, policy analysts, financial services executives and consumer advocacy experts at the 2017 Marketing and Public Policy Conference (Salisbury and Scott, 2017). Specifically, this session brought together the CEO from the aforementioned financial services firm, policy analysts from the U.S. CFPB and consumer advocates from the Credit Builders Alliance as well as the Center for Financial Services Innovation to discuss implications from these and other research findings. We believe that numerous well-being topics are worthy of such conference formats, which can then become the stimulus for related follow-up research. Therefore, we urge scholars and conference organizers to deliberately propose such program components. Notably, the Transformative Consumer Research (TCR [4]) movement and the American Marketing Association are hosting the first “Impact Festival” in 2022 to further build capacity for even more positive social change. Acknowledging the challenges of creating and measuring impact, the goal of the festival is to generate best practices for conducting impactful scholarly research, with the goal of accelerating research focused on important problems in the world.

Even broader impact can be achieved through community building, which aims to promote novel ways of thinking that shift paradigms and form new communities around social problems (Ozanne et al., 2022). Community building can take various forms, to include academic and nonacademic community building. We had the privilege of contributing to community building as the cochairs of the 2019 TCR Conference, which took place at Florida

Table 2.
State University. This conference brought more than 200 scholars from around the world to Tallahassee, Florida to promote actionable marketing solutions that help improve individual and societal well-being. The TCR conference included more than 30 tracks, which belonged to one of three types of tracks; notably, all tracks were inspired by the synergistic goal of generating impact, as Figure 2 illustrates.

**Cautionary reflections: the ethics of impact and unintended consequences**

Although scholars may design their projects with the best intentions to promote greater individual and collective well-being, it is important to consider potential unintentional negative consequences that might arise from the research, such as unexpected spillover effects across facets of consumers’ lives. For example, might financial literacy education for consumers result in a certain level of overconfidence that increases their willingness to take financial risks that are inconsistent with their long-term goals? More broadly, scholars should investigate the extent to which an increase in individual well-being (e.g. financial well-being) has positive or potentially negative effects on community well-being, and why such downstream effects might occur. Turning to the organizational level, ethical issues might also arise when a firm aims to financially support its vulnerable customers (e.g. via a discount program for its poorest customers) but, to protect its profitability, raises prices for other customers; when and why would this approach (not) be ethical?

Yet another ethical consideration relates to the organizations scholars collaborate with. Typically, companies focus on improving their economic performance. Accordingly, scholars need to understand that not every collaborating firm will engage with them driven only by philanthropic motives, which might require a frank assessment of this reality in the

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**Figure 2.** Synergistically building impact through the TCR conference format

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**Notes:** The goal is to avoid a paternalistic and top-down approach that makes assumptions about what is best for the recipients of the focal research agenda without incorporating insight about and input from the corresponding communities. Conference tracks are one fruitful open forum to avoid such paternalism.
exploratory stages of a collaboration. For example, researchers might (need to) explain to managers how promoting consumer well-being is not only an ethical responsibility but can also support traditional goals such as profitability and business performance.

Another tricky question is to what extent it might (not be) consistent with well-being-focused research to collaborate with companies that produce products that can harm consumer and societal well-being? Some might argue that working with such companies provides a particularly fruitful platform to make a difference, while others might worry about helping to “whitewash” such companies. We do not presume to have answers to such questions, as scholars ought to reflect these issues themselves; however, we urge marketing scholars to carefully examine these ethical aspects of our work.

Especially because marketing academics are increasingly interested in the idea of “better marketing for a better world” (Chandy et al., 2021), the unintended impact of our efforts must be better understood; to date, they remain largely unexplored. Focusing on unintended consequences is a catalyst for research that is likely to generate richer and more comprehensive frameworks about the impact of well-being-focused marketing research over time (Blocker et al., 2022 for a more detailed discussion).

In conclusion
A derived manifestation of the impact of the 2019 TCR conference was a Special Issue of the Journal of Public Policy and Marketing on TCR that envisions “Marketing as a Force for Good” in a more sustainable world (Mende and Scott, 2021). As we are typing these words, Russia is waging war against Ukraine and the United Nation’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change just released its latest report [5], which provides further evidence that human-induced climate change is causing dangerous disruptions in our natural environments that affect billions of people around the world. These are powerful reminders that the time for positive change and impact is now!

Notes
1. For further details, visit: www.unhcr.org/2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development.html
2. A discussion of the concepts of customer participation, coproduction and co-creation is beyond the scope of our brief discussion (Mende et al., 2017).
3. Note, we certainly do not claim to have a universal formula for successful research partnerships; these are merely some of the lessons we learned.
4. TCR is a movement within the Association for Consumer Research that seeks to encourage, support and publicize research that benefits consumer welfare and quality of life for all beings affected by consumption across the world.

References


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