

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

Social marketing research trends in consumer psychology

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8nn9h7km>

Journal

Recherche et Applications en Marketing (French Edition), 30(3)

ISSN

0767-3701

Author

Pechmann, Cornelia

Publication Date

2015-09-01

DOI

10.1177/2051570715598732

Peer reviewed

Page Proof Instructions and Queries

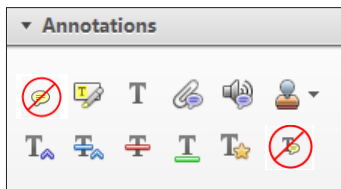
Journal Title: Recherche et Applications en Marketing (English Edition)

Article Number: 598732

Greetings, and thank you for publishing with SAGE. We have prepared this page proof for your review. Please respond to each of the below queries by digitally marking this PDF using Adobe Reader.

Click “Comment” in the upper right corner of Adobe Reader to access the mark-up tools as follows:

For textual edits, please use the “Annotations” tools. Please refrain from using the two tools crossed out below, as data loss can occur when using these tools.



For formatting requests, questions, or other complicated changes, please insert a comment using “Drawing Markups.”



Detailed annotation guidelines can be viewed at: <http://www.sagepub.com/repository/binaries/pdfs/AnnotationGuidelines.pdf>

Adobe Reader can be downloaded (free) at: <http://www.adobe.com/products/reader.html>.

No.	Query
	Please confirm that all author information, including names, affiliations, sequence, and contact details, is correct.
	Please review the entire document for typographical errors, mathematical errors, and any other necessary corrections; check headings, tables, and figures.
	Please ensure that you have obtained and enclosed all necessary permissions for the reproduction of art works (e.g. illustrations, photographs, charts, maps, other visual material, etc.) not owned by yourself. Please refer to your publishing agreement for further information.
	Please note that this proof represents your final opportunity to review your article prior to publication, so please do send all of your changes now.

Social marketing research trends in consumer psychology

Recherche et Applications en Marketing

1–4

© l'Association Française du Marketing, 2015

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/2051570715598732

rme.sagepub.com



Cornelia (Connie) Pechmann

The Paul Merage School of Business, University of California, USA

Abstract

This article discusses structural changes that have encouraged research in social marketing, including the Transformative Consumer Research movement. It also discusses substantive topics that are studied in social marketing including consumption and well-being, combatting threats to self, improving financial decision-making, and regulating the advertising of tobacco and other adult products. Recent methodological innovations in social marketing are identified, including the use of field studies that measure actual consumer behavior and that complement more controlled lab studies. Finally suggestions for junior social marketing scholars are provided, such as targeting journals that appreciate their specific research approach.

Keywords

Social marketing, consumerism, positive psychology, sustainable consumption

The field of social marketing is growing dramatically in size, scope, stature and impact due to a variety of factors that I will discuss. In particular I will discuss the structural changes that have facilitated research in social marketing, important substantive topics and theoretical advances, methodological innovations, and suggestions for junior researchers to succeed. For the past three years I have been Editor of the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* or JCP (www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-consumer-psychology), and I am intimately involved and up-to-date in this area, and so I will focus on social marketing trends in consumer psychology and JCP. However, outstanding social marketing research is also being published in journals such as the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Marketing Research* and *Journal of Marketing*;

and so I would urge readers to look at these journals, e.g. the *Journal of Consumer Research* special issue in October 2008.

Structural changes

Perhaps the most significant structural change that has stimulated research in social marketing has been the Transformative Consumer Research or TCR movement, spearheaded by the Association for Consumer Research (www.acrwebsite.org). The TCR movement supports research that seeks to improve well-being, employ rigorous theory and methods, encourage paradigm diversity, highlight social-cultural and situational contexts, partner with consumers and caregivers, and disseminate findings to stakeholders. Since 2006 TCR has provided annual

Corresponding author:

Cornelia (Connie) Pechmann, The Paul Merage School of Business, University of California, Irvine, CA 92617, USA.

Email: cpechman@uci.edu

seed grants to support research, and biannually since 2007 TCR has held a conference that is typically dialogical in nature in which small workgroups collaborate to come up with new research frameworks and proposals. The 2013 TCR conference was in Lille, France.

Another significant structural change has been the proliferation of newer journals that publish social marketing research. *Recherche et Applications en Marketing* was founded quite recently in 1986, and it has published this relevant special issue in 2015. *Journal of Service Research* (jsr.sagepub.com), founded in 1998, will publish a special issue on Transformative Services Research in August 2015. An article by Martin and Hill will discuss the importance of providing financial services to impoverished consumers to improve savings and increase well-being. An article by Mende and Van Doorn will discuss how financial counseling should increase consumers' involvement and foster coproduction in planning and implementation.

Many suitable journals for social marketing research are outside the marketing field, such as the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* or JMIR (www.jmir.org). Founded in 1999, it publishes work on social marketing and social media and it has a high impact factor of about 5. A 2015 article by Yonker et al. reviews research on using social media to promote health among adolescents; and Rocheleau et al. (2015) discusses Twitter accounts for smoking cessation.

Substantive topics and theoretical advances

Prevalent social marketing topics include financial decision-making, corporate social responsibility, charities, sustainability, literacy, experiential and compensatory consumption, eating, drug use, exercise, self-control, well-being, social norms and social media. On well-being, for example, Guevarra and Howell (2015) recently extended work showing that life experiences enhance well-being more than material possessions (Dunn et al. 2011). They find that experiential products likewise enhance well-being, similar to life experiences; but the underlying process is different. Experiential products enhance feelings of competence while life experiences

enhance feelings of social relatedness. This research advances theory on experiences and well-being while teaching us how to improve well-being.

As the above example may suggest, social marketing researchers should strive to make novel and significant theoretical contributions, in addition to exploring new topics or showing that an existing theory applies to a new topic. A mandate to make a novel theoretical contribution may seem overly challenging or limiting, but it is designed to enhance the substantive contribution by broadening the applicability of the findings beyond the specific topic investigated. Although the substantive importance of a topic clearly matters, theoretical advances also matter. There are at least two established approaches that social marketing researchers can use to make novel theoretical contributions as will be discussed below.

Some researchers integrate different theories in novel ways to provide useful insights. For instance Han et al. (forthcoming) found evidence that threats to the self that lower well-being involve two fundamentally different processes. Some threats (e.g. poor academic performance) tend to elicit an approach motivation and lead to problem-focused coping, while other threats (e.g. social rejection) tend to elicit an avoidance motivation and lead to less productive emotion-focused coping. These differential responses seem to be based on consumers' lay beliefs, e.g. that they should work hard academically but give up if socially shunned. This work integrates theories of approach and avoidance motivation, problem and emotion focused coping, and lay beliefs, and suggests combatting lay beliefs that encourage avoidance.

Other researchers extend theories in novel and important ways, often by elucidating underlying processes and/or identifying moderators. For example Hershfield and Roese (2015) studied the efficacy of the 2009 US Credit Card Act, which mandates that credit card statements list the monthly amount needed to pay off the balance in three years. They found that the three-year payoff amount often perversely reduced payments due to anchoring. They also elucidated the underlying process: the anchor signaled a normatively appropriate payment amount. Moreover, they identified a moderator that nullified the problematic effect: stating that the entire balance

could be paid off, because this suggested a normatively appropriate range of payment amounts. In sum this work extends theory on anchoring by showing the mediating effects of norms, and it suggests that the Credit Card Act could be counterproductive.

Other recent social marketing work questions advertising policies regarding tobacco and alcohol (Pezzuti et al., forthcoming). This work examines the long-standing policy that mandates that advertising models for adult-only products cannot look like adolescents and must look 25 years or older to protect adolescents. The findings suggest that adolescent models are actually ineffective at promoting adult-only products to other adolescents, while 25-year-old models are highly effective. This is because an adult-only product serves as a contextual cue that causes adolescents to react to their inherent dissatisfaction with being too young to buy adult-only products, causing them to diverge from similar adolescent models and conform to dissimilar 25 year old models. This work makes theoretical contributions by studying self-concept discrepancies related to adolescents' age, and showing that products can cue such discrepancies caused divergence rather than conformity to similar others.

A recent review paper on food consumption quantity and obesity (Wansink and Chandon, 2014) presents a novel theoretical framework that posits that poor consumption monitoring and several normative, emotional and sensory factors cause consumers to eat too much. Poor consumption monitoring occurs for several reasons, e.g. consumers overeat slightly without being aware of it, visual and perceptual biases cause consumers to underestimate package sizes especially larger sizes, post-consumption food cues are lacking, and distractions abound. Normative factors that cause overeating include social conformity, health halos that cause overeating of food viewed as healthy and large serving sizes that convey normatively appropriate amounts. Emotional factors that cause overeating include negative affect, stress and cognitive depletion. Sensory factors that cause overeating include food palatability, hunger cues, individual differences in cue response and self-regulation, and ambient sound, scent, lighting and temperature. In sum, numerous important substantive topics are being studied in social marketing and theory is being advanced.

Methodological innovations

Social marketing and marketing in general has experienced substantial methodological innovations. Field studies that measure actual consumer behavior, often in response to experimental manipulations, are increasingly common and often appear alongside complementary lab studies to show both internal and external validity. In research on food, field studies of eating have become the norm. Studies using online panels or Mechanical Turk have virtually replaced student subject pools, but typically are complemented by field studies. Post-positive social marketing research that uses rich qualitative data, e.g. for theory building, is now accepted in virtually all marketing journals. For instance one theory-building post-positive paper interviewed consumers about the meanings of donated and damaged possessions after a major natural disaster and built a framework that identified three distinct meanings: possessions as agents of the community, individual or opposition (Baker and Hill, 2013).

Quantitative research still dominates in social marketing but more sophisticated statistical approaches have emerged, fundamentally changing data analysis. These include *spotlight* and *floodlight analysis* for interval predictor variables, and *bootstrapping* for mediation testing regardless of variable type. Disclosure requirements for reporting research are also rising. JCP now requires a methodological details appendix that includes instructions, stimuli, measures, sample sizes, sample descriptions and full results.

Suggestions for junior scholars

Junior scholars in social marketing should consider joining the TCR movement, participating in the biannual TCR conferences and submitting grant proposals. They should also consider targeting at least some of their research to journals other than the very top ones in marketing. Many scholars waste considerable time and effort trying to publish in top marketing journals which have very high demands regarding novel theoretical contributions; and then they give up and never publish the research anywhere. Scholars should look for journals that will appreciate their specific research approach and

expeditiously publish there. Many excellent journals exist with a high impact factors, visibility and rigor that may not be in marketing; and yet they are suitable for social marketing work.

If targeting a top marketing journal, social marketing scholars should try to ensure that their research is designed from the onset to make novel theoretical contributions. It is virtually impossible to retrofit work once data has been collected; instead the data should directly test the focal theory. Scholars can make novel theoretical contributions by integrating different theories; or by extending theories, e.g. by elucidating underlying processes and/or identifying moderators. It is often best if researchers choose an important topic and then engage in programmatic research to build expertise.

Social marketing scholars should also strive to use the most sophisticated and up-to-date methodological and statistical approaches because this is increasingly required. Finally social marketing scholars are advised to follow their hearts as well as their minds in choosing research topics and conducting research. Their hearts will tell them when research is meaningful and will rarely be wrong. The challenge will be to convey the meaningfulness of the research to others but this just takes time, patience and a suitable journal outlet.

References

- Baker SM and Hill RP (2013) A community psychology of object meanings: Identity negotiation during disaster recovery. *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 23(3): 275–287.
- Dunn EW, Gilbert DT and Wilson TD (2011) If money doesn't make you happy, then you probably aren't spending it right. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 21(2): 115–125.
- Guevarra DA and Howell RT (2015) To have in order to do: Exploring the effects of consuming experiential products on well-being. *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 25(1): 28–41.
- Han DH, Duhachek A and Rucker DD (forthcoming) Distinct threats, common remedies: How consumers cope with psychological threat. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*.
- Hershfield HE and Roesse NJ (2015) Dual payoff scenario warnings on credit card statements elicit suboptimal payoff decisions. *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 25(1): 15–27.
- Martin KD and Hill RP (forthcoming) Saving and well-being at the base of the pyramid: Implications for transformative financial services delivery. *Journal of Service Research*.
- Mende M and Van Doorn J (forthcoming) Coproduction of transformative services as a pathway to improved consumer well-being: Findings from a longitudinal study on financial counseling. *Journal of Service Research*.
- Pezzuti T, Pirouz D and Pechmann C (forthcoming) The effects of advertising models for age-restricted products and self-concept discrepancy on advertising outcomes among young adolescents. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*.
- Rocheleau M, Sadasivam RS, Baquis K, Stahl H, Kinney RL, Pagoto SL and Houston TK (2015) An observational study of social and emotional support in smoking cessation twitter accounts: Content analysis of tweets. *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 17(1): e18.
- Wansink B and Chandon P (2014) Slim by design: Redirecting the accidental drivers of mindless overeating. *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 24(3): 413–431.
- Yonker LM, Zan S, Scirica CV, Jethwani K and Kinane BT (2015) 'Friending' teens: Systematic review of social media in adolescent and young adult health care. *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 17(1): e4.