

Powerful Possibilities: Differentiating Consumer Power to Understand Vaccination and Opioid Epidemic Responses

Track Participants (alphabetical): M. Paula Fitzgerald; Meng-Hua Hsieh; R. Bret Leary; Matthew Meng; William Montford; Rhiannon MacDonnell Mesler*; Richard Vann*

Track Description: Power changes the way people behave. Confident, optimistic, and ready for action, empowered consumers should be ready to tackle major health and social issues. Yet, consumers experience power in different ways. Power takes many different forms (coercive, reward, legitimate, referent, expert, informational), and varies in how interpersonal control is exerted (e.g., power to compel vs. power to influence).

When faced with a societal challenge like the opioid epidemic, one consumer might feel empowered to compel doctors to prescribe them less opioid or dictate a policy requiring closer monitoring of unused prescriptions. Another consumer might feel empowered to share information about addiction prevention and treatment options to influence their family, friends, and coworkers. These consumers, experiencing different forms of power, would likely diverge in the content (i.e., strategies selected) and effectiveness of their prosocial advocacy and behavior. When consumers experience different forms of power (or powerlessness), how does this alter how their responses to prosocial health appeals (vaccinations) or an ongoing health crisis (opioid epidemic)?

Theoretically, this track seeks to differentiate forms of consumer power, and investigate how these differences change the psychological experience of empowerment. Transformatively, this track seeks to offer insight into the relationship between power and consumer responses to timely public health challenges requiring prosocial action (i.e., increasing vaccine adherence, decreasing opioid overconsumption and in turn addiction). By connecting these themes together, our track should offer improved insights into consumer empowerment while offering actionable advice to social marketers and policy makers on the use of differentiated power appeals for encouraging prosocial health behavior.

Track Leaders

Dr. Richard Vann is an assistant professor of marketing at Penn State Behrend. A graduate of the University of Wyoming, he investigates the influence of motivation, cognition, and emotion on consumer goal pursuits, focusing on health, sustainability, and ethics-related goals. He co-chaired the 2017 TCR track, “Staying on the Virtuous Path: Helping Consumers Do What They Should.” With work featured in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Psychology & Marketing*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, and *Journal of Macromarketing*, he now serves on the Editorial Review Board for *Psychology & Marketing*.

Dr. Rhiannon MacDonnell Mesler (PhD, Calgary; Postdoc, Alberta) is an assistant professor at the Dhillon School of Business at the University of Lethbridge (Calgary Campus) in Canada. Her research on prosocial consumer behaviors like recycling, charitable giving, and ethical consumption and [reducing] food waste has been featured in *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Marketing* and *Journal of*

*denotes track co-chairs

Marketing Research. She is currently examining the role of help recipient appearance on consumer charitable giving and micro-lending, with an interest in how attributes of the consumer mindset (e.g., scarcity, power, conservatism) affects consumer behavior.