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Consumer Centered Policy Inquiries: A Call to Explore Policy Through a Consumer Lens and Consumers Through a Policy Lens

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**CONSUMER CENTERED POLICY INQUIRIES:
A CALL TO EXPLORE POLICY THROUGH A CONSUMER LENS AND
CONSUMERS THROUGH A POLICY LENS**

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The *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* has long welcomed scientific inquiry at the intersection of public policy and consumer behavior. While the existence of this intersection feels like a given, defining the contours and borders of this intersection is arguably much grayer. It is not uncommon for readers and authors new to *JPP&M* to puzzle over whether their consumer research is policy-oriented enough, or question how their policy interest can be studied using methodologies characteristic of consumer research. To provide some insight, we define the body of work at the intersection of public policy and consumer behavior as *consumer centered policy inquiries* and provide an organizing framework for how to both define and characterize it (see Figure 1).

INSERT FIGURE 1

Our framework introduces four types of consumer centered policy inquiries that explore policy through a consumer lens and/or consumers through a public policy lens. We provide in-depth examples of each category in Table 1. Our aim is to offer researchers new ways to view consumer research questions that allow for behavioral research to uniquely inform both consumer research and public policy discourse.

INSERT TABLE 1

The Effect of Policy on Consumers

Many consumer centered policy inquiries published in *JPP&M* involve the application of consumer behavior theories through a variety of methodological lenses (e.g., experiments, field

studies, qualitative work) to study the consequences of existing or proposed policy on consumers. For example, work in *JPP&M* studies the effects of nutrition labeling on food choices (e.g., how consumers process front-of-package nutrition information; Andrews, Burton, and Kees 2011), particularly when such food choices have direct impact on consumer health (e.g., calcium consumption for high-needs consumers, Block and Peracchio 2006). While the primary purpose of this research is to document whether and how existing policies impact consumers, other research tests the effectiveness of interventions designed to mitigate potential harm (see Table 1).

Approaching consumer research through a policy lens, work in this area starts with extant policy and explores when and why policy is effective, as well as when it renders unintended consequences. As well, researchers can propose and test theory-based interventions aimed at sharpening the effects of policy. Myriad theories have demonstrated applicability in this space, and potential areas for future research might include an exploration of disclosures related to food, medicinal products, cannabis, or chemicals, for example. Social marketing campaigns related to food, financial, physical, or environmental well-being also offer potential for consumer researchers to explore the impact of policy on consumers.

The Effect of Consumers on Policy

Also included in the Journal is research exploring behaviors that undermine well-being for consumers and society. Such inquiries work to identify issues that policy might address, as well as to propose and/or demonstrate consumer theory-based interventions that might guide policy efforts. Much of this work is anchored in an effect or theory (e.g., choice architecture; see Table 1), and is explored through a consumer lens.

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There is opportunity in *JPP&M* for theory development that explores problems that seek policy solutions. It is here where we believe many consumer researchers struggle to find an appropriate connection to public policy; it is not enough to merely suggest that policy makers should explore a topic. Instead, researchers must make concrete suggestions regarding when and how the findings might drive policy decisions. For example, in discussing the implications of their findings related to licensing, Garvey and Bolton (2017) propose that regulatory changes that are highly visible (e.g., eco-product positioning in advertisements) are more likely to trigger unintended licensing effects than less visible changes (e.g., adopting sustainable manufacturing). This provides specific guidance regarding what product changes might be associated with claims highlighting sustainability, and which might generate boomerang effects. A direct and clear connection to policy is essential for consumer centered policy inquiries.

The Consumer's Environment as Context for Policy Research

Explorations of the consumers' environment offer rich avenues for consumer centered policy inquiries—particularly those that reflect and result from inequitable access to goods and services. Grier and Davis (2013), for example, demonstrate that the proximity of fast-food restaurants to schools drives adolescents' unhealthy food consumption; this is accentuated for black students at lower-income urban schools (for additional examples, see Table 1).

In addition to empirical research, *JPP&M* has published conceptual articles that explore the impact of environment through a consumer lens. For example, consumer researchers have explored food well-being (Block et al. 2011) as well as related issues, such as food waste (Block et al. 2016). The review papers cited here and in Table 1 pose important research questions that consumer researchers might use as a springboard for empirical inquiries at the intersection of

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marketing and public policy, and particularly those that relate to equitable access. The complexities facing individuals today suggest many topics that might be explored, including healthcare availability, access to affordable energy, and fairness in wages.

The Consumer's Environment as the Principal Element of Policy Research

An emerging opportunity to do consumer centered policy research is to focus on the consumer's environment as the unit of inquiry itself, and to explore how it benefits or harms consumer well-being. Marketing scholars can play a critical role in informing related policy programs. For example, researchers in the marketing and public policy community are investigating with the city of Oslo how to balance the effectiveness and perceived intrusiveness of smart camera systems that recognize when people in the street experience a medical emergency, and that could autonomously call for assistance (Dorotic, Stagno, and Warlop 2021). Experts agree that this technology will save lives; it will also likely activate citizens' privacy concerns. In line with the argument that the use of artificial intelligence in public services should be explainable (i.e., people affected by the system should understand how it works; Gunning et al. 2019), this raises policy questions that consumer researchers might address. Extant theories might be borrowed to design the language used in the explanations based on the sensitivities and needs of the users, or to propose solutions related to privacy concerns.

Also in this domain, scholars have made substantial advances to consumer well-being by partnering with organizations or governments to explore topics related to consumers' environments (see Table 1). Efforts in this space—both inside and outside of the Journal— help to provide an in depth understanding of policies designed to attenuate the harmful effects that aspects of an individual's environment may have on consumers. Indeed, partnerships like those

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described here can be difficult to initiate and maintain, but do have the ability to drive immediate impact through the communication of results to partners—like social impact organizations or communities (Bublitz et al. 2022).

A Call for Consumer Centered Policy Inquiries

In its essence, public policy is about people—and more specifically, designing and implementing strategies aimed at solving problems that undermine the welfare of individuals and communities. Given its focus on understanding people, we believe that consumer research can make valuable contributions to the literature at the intersection of marketing and public policy and, in turn, provide insights that drive change. We call on consumer researchers to bring consumer theories and methodologies to the *JPP&M* audience in their exploration of policy through a consumer lens, and consumers through a policy lens.

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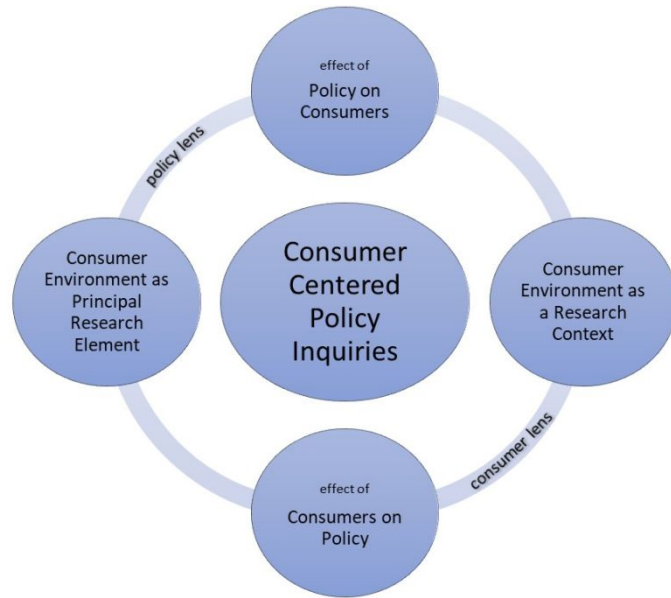
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FIGURE 1: CONSUMER CENTERED POLICY INQUIRIES



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TABLE 1: CONSUMER CENTERED POLICY INQUIRY EXAMPLES

| Example Consumer Centered Policy Inquiry | Policy/ Behavior/ Context | Key Consumer Centered Policy Findings |
|--|---|---|
| Effect of Policy on Consumers | | |
| Elizabeth Howlett, Scot Burton, Andrea Heintz Tangari, and My Bui (2012), “Hold the Salt! Effects of Sodium Information Provision, Sodium Content, and Hypertension on Perceived Cardiovascular Disease Risk and Purchase Intentions,” <i>Journal of Public Policy & Marketing</i> . | Food Labeling (NLEA) | Demonstrates increased attention to sodium information on nutrition panels among hypertensives, relative to non-hypertensives. Enhancing motivation through an educational campaign increased attention to information in both groups. |
| Jesse R. Catlin, Cornelia (Connie) Pechmann, and Eric P. Brass (2015), “Dangerous Double Dosing: How Naive Beliefs Can Contribute to Unintentional Overdose with Over-the-Counter Drugs,” <i>Journal of Public Policy & Marketing</i> . | OTC Drug Dosage (FDA) | Applies a classic consumer information processing model to examine how consumers evaluate the risk of OTC drugs. Additionally, this work compares the efficacy of different interventions to discourage double-dosing due to decreased risk perceptions. |
| Joseph M. Johnson, Gerard J. Tellis, and Noah VanBergen (2022), “Fooled by Success: How, Why, and When Disclosures Fail or Work in Mutual Fund Ads,” <i>Journal of Public Policy & Marketing</i> . | Investment Disclosures (SEC) | Explores consumer reactions to SEC required financial disclosures in ads, finding that the hot hand bias—the belief that past performance will continue—is only attenuated by strongly worded disclosures. |
| Linda Court Salisbury and Min Zhao (2020), “Active Choice Format and Minimum Payment Warnings in Credit Card Repayment Decisions,” <i>Journal of Public Policy & Marketing</i> . | Minimum Credit Card Payment Warnings (CARD Act) | Shows that presenting a payment format that increases the salience of full balance payment increases credit card repayments due to anchoring effects. |
| Effect of Consumers on Policy | | |
| Tingting Wang, Anirban Mukhopadhyay, and Vanessa M. Patrick (2017), “Getting Consumers to Recycle NOW! When and Why Cuteness Appeals Influence Prosocial and Sustainable Behavior,” <i>Journal of Public Policy & Marketing</i> . | Prosocial and Eco-Friendly Behavior | Cuteness appeals can promote feelings of tenderness among those with a high approach motivational orientation, leading to more prosocial and eco-friendly behaviors. |
| Luca A. Panzone, Alistair Ulph, Denis Hilton, Ilse Gortemaker, and Ibrahim Adebisi Tajudeen (2021), “Sustainable by Design: Choice Architecture and the Carbon Footprint of Grocery Shopping,” <i>Journal of Public Policy & Marketing</i> . | Eco-Friendly Behavior | Presenting a carbon-based choice architecture in a shopping environment reduces the proportion of choices consumers made from a high-carbon aisle. |
| Shannon Lantzy, Rebecca W. Hamilton, Yu-Jen Chen, and Katherine Stewart (2021), “Online Reviews of Credence Service Providers: What Do Consumers Evaluate, Do Other Consumers Believe the Reviews, and Are Interventions Needed?” <i>Journal of Public Policy & Marketing</i> . | Online Review Behavior | Findings show that claims made in reviews of credence service providers, like physicians, focus on experience attributes, such as promptness, rather than credence attributes, such as knowledge. Consumers are more likely to believe experience claims (vs. credence claims) made by other consumers. |

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| J. Craig Andrews, Kristen L. Walker, and Jeremy Kees (2020), "Children and Online Privacy Protection: Empowerment from Cognitive Defense Strategies," <i>Journal of Public Policy & Marketing</i> . | Privacy-Related Behavior | The authors test interventions to provide children with the ability to restrict the information they share on social media to explore the effectiveness based on the type of cognitive defense strategy employed as well as individual factors. |
| Martin Mende, Maura L. Scott, Mary Jo Bitner, and Amy L. Ostrom. "Activating Consumers for Better Service Coproduction Outcomes through Eustress: The Interplay of Firm-Assigned Workload, Service Literacy, and Organizational Support," <i>Journal of Public Policy & Marketing</i> . | Healthcare Compliance Behavior | High levels of coproduction increase service outcomes, such as compliance in healthcare settings, especially for those with low service literacy. This results from eustress—or perception that the work of coproduction is positive and meaningful. |
| The Consumer's Environment as Context for Policy Research | | |
| Jonathan Ross Gilbert, and Christy Ashley (2020), "Access Granted? An Examination of Financial Capability, Trait Hope, Perceived Access, and Food Insecurity in Distressed Census Tracts," <i>Journal of Public Policy & Marketing</i> . | Access based on Geography | Surveys from distressed census tracts reveal that trait hope positively moderates the relationship between financial capability and perceived access, which is related to lower food insecurity. Differences related to race/ethnicity suggest interventions that may improve efficacy of food and nutrition assistance programs. |
| Srinivas Venugopal, Madhubalan Viswanathan, and Kiju Jung (2015), "Consumption Constraints and Entrepreneurial Intentions in Subsistence Marketplace," <i>Journal of Public Policy & Marketing</i> . | Subsistence Marketplaces | A field experiment in a subsistence context demonstrates that a literacy intervention can reduce consumption constraints that work to reduce entrepreneurship. |
| Melissa G. Bublitz, Lan N. Chaplin, Laura A. Peracchio, Ashely Deutsch Cermin, et al. (2021a), "Rise Up: Understanding Youth Social Entrepreneurs and Their Ecosystems," <i>Journal of Public Policy & Marketing</i> . | Entrepreneurship Ecosystem | Explores elements of the consumer's environment that drive youth social entrepreneurship and suggest ways that the ecosystem might be designed to support initiatives aimed at enhancing well-being. |
| The Consumer's Environment as Context for Policy Research | | |
| Melissa G. Bublitz, Jonathan Hansen, Laura A. Peracchio, and Sherrie Tussler (2021b), "Hunger and Food Well-Being: Advancing Research and Practice," <i>Journal of Public Policy & Marketing</i> . | Food Deserts | Based on marketing literature and the practices of the nonprofit Hunger Task Force, this work explores food deserts to illustrate the impact of hunger and hunger alleviating programming on people's food well-being. |
| Lucie K. Ozanne and Julie Ozanne (2016), "How Alternative Consumer Markets Can Build Community Resiliency," <i>European Journal of Marketing</i> . | Community Disaster Recovery | The study shows how grassroots alternative consumer markets, like Time Banks, build community capacities alongside the formal economy after disaster. This works to enhance community resiliency in extraordinary times. |
| Shikha Upadhyaya, Christopher P. Blocker, and H. Rika Houston (2021), "Evolving Two-Generation Services to Disrupt the Intergenerational Effects of Poverty and Promote Family Well-Being," <i>Journal of Business Research</i> . | Intergenerational Poverty | This research involved partnership with Ascend to assess how social services can disrupt the intergenerational effects of poverty and enhance consumer welfare and well-being. |