

COFFEE: A Leading Vehicle for Marketplace Transformation

Track Co-Chairs:

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The Problem: Regardless of country or personal preference, coffee consumption is almost universally recognized as utilitarian habit and/or hedonic experience (Labbe et al. 2015); as a product or as a service (Lee, Moon, and Song 2018), or; as a low-involvement decision or a high-involvement decision (Kenney, Phan, and Adhikari 2022; Kim, Lee, and Kim 2016). Consumers may drink a quick cup of coffee from Dunkin Donuts on their way in to work or they may savor a pourover coffee from Counter Culture Coffee at home on a Sunday morning. As a result, the consumer market for commodity and specialty coffees has been split among commercial and craft consumption (Dolbec, Arsel, and Aboelenien 2022; Pomiès and Arsel 2023). As an added dimension to this market bifurcation, the marketplace has responsabilized the consumer (Giesler and Veresiu 2014; Thompson and Kumar 2021) to make coffee choices that are either socially and/or ecologically sustainable. More than most other commodities— be they corn, soy, cotton, or sugar— the consumption side of the coffee industry has sought to address sustainability with consumers through promotion of the production process.

However, given coffee's deep historical ties to colonialism and economic imperialism (Morris 2018), most coffee is grown in countries where production, relative to consumption, is net-dominant. Marketplace complexity has deepened coffee's commodification processes— not just for the product itself, but also for morality in its consumption (Robbins 2013). As a result, complex exchange has disconnected production from consumption (Edelmann, Quiñones-Ruiz, and Penker 2020). And while sustainability has often been intrinsically-linked with specialty coffee (Tunarosa 2016), the consumer market has largely focused on quality or quantity of consumption instead. The result is that the responsabilization of consumer interests is not always aligned with producer interests— particularly in the face of government policies at origin countries, the effects of climate change on production, and farmers' abilities to earn living wages in the face of global competition (Jacobi et al. 2024). Just as there is a lot of heterogeneity of variables on the consumption side of the coffee industry, there is a lot of heterogeneity of variables on the production side as well. This complicates the coffee market's ability to strengthen sustainability and equity in its value chains.

Most prior research on the production side of the coffee industry comes from other disciplines, such as agronomy (de Oliveira Aparecido et al. 2017), developmental economics (Otero 2000), or cultural anthropology (Fischer 2022). On the consumption side of the industry, some marketing/consumer studies have limitedly approached the coffee industry in terms of consumer willingness-to-pay for fair trade (De Pelsmacker, Driesen, and Rayp 2005; Lingnau, Fuchs, and Beham 2019), packaging and labeling (De Pelsmacker, Driesen, and Rayp 2003; De Sousa,

Carvalho, and Pereira 2020; Loureiro and Lotade 2005), or sensory perception (Carvalho and Spence 2018). In either instance, there has been limited recognition of marketing's role in facilitating value exchange— even on ways in which coffee is marketed similarly to wine (the latter of which is robustly researched in marketing, including journals such as *International Journal of Wine Marketing*; *Journal of Wine Research*, and *International Journal of Wine Business Research*). As both the economic and social value of coffee have become increasingly commodified, it is time for marketing to add depth to the academic conversations around individual, consumer, *and producer* well-being.

Track Goal: Given the limited research available on coffee in the marketing discipline, the goal of this track is to build capacity for a discussion about mechanisms for promoting a coffee value system that generates well-being for *all* stakeholders, from bean to cup. Potential topics of discussions will cover but are not limited to: a) Producers' social and environmental practices, b) Intermediaries' roles and responsibilities, c) Consumers' motivations and purchase practices, d) the effects of colonialism and power dynamics in shaping marketplace well-being.

This track seeks to build capacity with participants from industry, non-governmental organizations, and academia, whose interests span across various research traditions and methods. In the interest of geographical diversity of perspectives, the track also seeks participants from both consumption-dominant (typically “Global North”) *and* production-dominant countries (typically “Global South”). Prior involvement with coffee (besides just drinking it!) is helpful, but not required.

The primary expected deliverable from the TCR Conference is a conceptual manuscript highlighting how coffee markets can improve consumer and producer well-being. Organizing work will start prior to the conference, conceptual development for the manuscript will be brainstormed during the conference, and the manuscript will be written and finished for peer-review in the immediate months following the conference. Aside from this manuscript, participants are encouraged to continue collaborating with each other on additional projects in the coffee marketing context.

Project Actions and Tentative Structure of the Track Session

1. Preconference

- a. “Paris Café Crawl” Community Track proposed for ACR 2024
- b. Foundation building and shared understandings based on suggested reading list and individual-driven readings

2. Conference Day 1 (Friday, June 13)

- a. Morning session (9a-12p): Organization of information and insights from foundation building readings
- b. Afternoon session (2-5p): Roundtable and brainstorming, including frameworks for multiple actors through research and practice

3. Conference Day 2 (Saturday, June 14)

- a. Morning session (9a-12p): Development of conceptual framework and preparation of poster for evening reception
- b. Evening reception: poster presentation(?)

4. Conference Day 3 (Sunday, June 15)

- a. Morning session (9a-12p): Using feedback from the poster session and other TCR members, continue work from the previous day to develop a timeline for journal manuscript and further research activities; presentation of outcomes

5. Post-Conference

- a. Competitive journal manuscript submission (JPPM, JBR, JBE?)
- b. Identifying other research opportunities and collaborations that help future coffee marketing's conceptual and empirical research capacity

Track Co-Chair Bios:



Spencer M. Ross, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Marketing at University of Massachusetts Lowell's Manning School of Business. His primary research interests focus on both marketplace justice and consumer ethics, with work published on prosocial consumption in the *European Journal of Marketing* and the *Journal of Business Ethics*. He has also published in the *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, and *Journal of Consumer Affairs* on consumer welfare-related issues such as sustainability, mindfulness, and cashless economies. Spencer was also a 2024 Fulbright U.S. Scholar through the Universidad de los Andes in Colombia, exploring (in)equity in the specialty coffee industry, with a focus on the Colombian context.



Andrés Barrios Fajardo, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor at Universidad de Los Andes Management School (Colombia). He received his PhD at Lancaster University (UK). His research interest focuses on the way in which business initiatives can promote social development. Over the last 10 years, Andrés's research has been published in a wide range of international journals, such as *Journal of Service Research*, *Journal of Macromarketing*, *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, and *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, among others. Andrés has participated in five TCR conferences, leading tracks at two of them.

