

QUO VADIS TRANSFORMATIVE SERVICE RESEARCH?

Volker G. Kuppelwieser^a and Jörg Finsterwalder^b

^aNEOMA Business School, France

^bUniversity of Canterbury, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

Transformative service research (TSR) has been labeled a “new area” in both consumer and service research. It is defined as “the integration of consumer and service research that centers on creating uplifting changes and improvements in the well-being of consumer entities: individuals (consumers and employees), communities and the ecosystem”. This encompassing definition opens the field for a broad range of potential research topics and applications related to improving the welfare of individuals and groups embedded in social systems and ecosystems. However, TSR is in its infancy and only a few researchers have to date tried to explain, develop, and apply TSR in their research.

This early and first evolutionary stage can be classified as a discovery and risk taking phase in marketing research. In line with this, the latest calls are for TSR to provide a conceptual framework that can serve as a catalyst for future research in order to inform and motivate service researchers to engage in this area. This is in line with earlier calls to focus one of service research’s future priorities on improving well-being through transformative service and through co-creation of value.

Like most other research fields, such as social marketing, transformational consumer research (TCR) as well as service-dominant logic (S-D Logic or SDL) have moved beyond their embryonic beginnings and started on their next evolutionary step. TSR adapts or includes research insights from related areas and other relevant disciplines. For example, social marketing’s scope, goal, and use of the marketing mix seem very similar to TSR’s approach toward resolving similar societal well-being issues. Further, TSR is conceptualized at the intersection of transformative consumer research and service research. On the other hand, SDL offers a value concept, which seems similar to the creating of uplifting changes and improvements found in TSR literature, thus masking the value of TSR’s contribution.

The emergence of TSR and its potential interweaving with other theoretical approaches might confuse researchers and hinder service research’s development as a discipline resolving real problems. While scholarly inquiries into the role of services and service outcomes are gaining momentum, current research still varies on how TSR should be considered in current thinking and in research models. This paper thus sets out to initiate a discussion on the theoretical TSR framework and its relationships to SDL. It aims at disentangling their interweavements and focuses on spinning the theoretical concepts’ loose ends into a single strand.

This research not only provides an overview of SDL, but also compares TSR with SDL to deepen scholars’ understanding of these approaches’ potential relatedness, their research aims, and intended outcomes. In addition, it scrutinizes the connection between these concepts by subsequently conducting TSR-related research. As such, the paper offers guidance on how to interpret TSR in the light of SDL.

This research thus not only aim to highlight TSR and SDL’s potentially diverging relations, but also contributes to the foundation of a general theoretical TSR framework.