**Bien-être and well-being in consumer research: A comparative analysis**

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**Abstract**

This article provides a critical overview in which French-language research on consumer bien-être (BEC) is compared to English-language studies of well-being as part of Transformative Consumer Research (TCR). We begin by identifying the specific positions adopted and themes addressed by the researchers, before exploring the cultural roots of each approach. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and suggested research perspectives and avenues for the future.

**Keywords**  
Bien-être, labelling, Transformative Consumer Research (TCR), well-being

**Introduction**

At a time when the prevailing economic, social and environmental risks are compelling political and economic players to think about indicators of progress, the notion of well-being is increasingly placed centre stage, either as a measure of a country’s development or as a means for companies of positioning themselves on the market. According to certain experts, the so-called phenomenon of *do-gooding* is now fashionable in the business world (Borau and Mohr, 2014). Yet the search for well-being is part of the very foundations of marketing, since its primary vocation is to satisfy the needs of individuals through consumption (Andreasen, 1994; Bergadaà, 2004). Indeed, the world of consumption has historically developed alongside notions of modern progress and improved
living conditions for all (Cohen, 2003). However, this interpretation of marketing is now being compromised, and the discipline itself is regularly accused of departing from the aim of satisfying our needs and instead creating needs and desires with negative consequences that include unsustainable development, a growing sense of poverty and health-related risks.

Against this backdrop, much research has emerged on the respective notions of être in French and well-being in English. This article provides a comparison between French-language research exploring consumer well-being (être du consommateur – BEC) and English-language research on well-being, or Transformative Consumer Research (TCR). The aim of this comparison is to identify the issues addressed in each perspective, offer a critical reading thereof and suggest future research avenues for the analysis of consumer well-being/être. More than a simple translation, we are interested in the cultural foundations of well-being/être. In conceptual terms, ‘être is part of a general feeling of pleasure or fulfilment brought on when the needs of the body and/or mind are completely satisfied. The English term well-being is more comprehensive as it adds a dimension of wealth and prosperity (…)’ (Guibet Lafaye, 2007: 127).

In developing our analysis, we systematically selected French-language publications that address the notion of BEC. We chose four journals that reflect a wide range of themes and positions. Recherche et Applications en Marketing, Décisions Marketing and Management et Avenir were subjected to analysis beginning with their first year of publication (respectively 1986, 1993 and 2004). The Revue Française de Gestion was studied from 2002 onwards, when its articles were first made available online.

In respect of well-being, we focused on academic work published in the field of TCR since the seminal article by Mick (2005). The following sources were chosen: special issues dedicated to TCR in the Journal of Consumer Research (2008), Journal of Public Policy and Marketing (2011), Journal of Research for Consumers (2011) and the Journal of Business Research (2012); biannual conferences with a focus on TCR (in Dartmouth in 2007; Villanova in 2009; Baylor in 2011; Lille in 2013); articles providing an overview of TCR (Mari, 2008; Ozanne et al., 2011; Veer et al., 2012, etc.) and the reference work by Mick et al. (2011), which together highlight the objectives and theoretical stances of this research stream.

The selection process took place in three phases. The French-language research was chosen through a systematic reading of all four journals, followed by a selection of articles addressing efforts to improve BEC. Our English-language corpus includes all of the articles from the above-mentioned sources, and we also conducted an inter-textual analysis of the content from each body of research in an effort to identify over-arching themes and to determine the positions adopted by these researchers on consumer well-being/être. It should be noted that, as with any research designed to provide an overview, this required us to do a certain amount of ex post facto (re)construction, as the intentions of the researchers cited could not be determined with any certainty. Our approach therefore requires a distinction to be made between the critical position we adopt herein by associating researchers with a particular position and the approach initially adopted by the researchers themselves when carrying out their work.

This review article is structured as follows: we begin with a description of the selected research on être, followed by that on well-being, highlighting the specific features in each case in respect of three dimensions: their philosophical foundations, political aspects and the role of the market. We conclude by proposing certain approaches with a view to developing future research on consumer well-being/être.

Reading between the lines of French-language research on consumer être

être generally relates to happiness and quality of life. More specifically, it is based on notions of desire, preference and needs, as well as a framework of social thinking designed to improve the fulfillment of each individual (Guibet Lafaye, 2007). French-language research on être can be divided into
six themes: poverty, sustainable development, health, at-risk consumers, combating social exclusion, and consumer rights.

**Poverty**

Poverty is studied in terms of the repercussion of economic restrictions on consumption and the way the market operates. Two special issues have focused on this question (Aurier and Zollinger, 2009; Dalsace and Ménascé, 2010). The first, which appeared in *Décisions Marketing* (2009), concentrated on the sharp fall in purchasing power, its impact on consumers (Fosse-Gomez and Özçağlar-Toulouse, 2009) and retailers (Bertrandias and Lapeyre, 2009; Djelassi et al., 2009), and the solutions proposed (Viot, 2009). The second appeared in the *Revue Française de Gestion* (2010), offering reflections on structural issues and emphasizing the role of businesses in dealing with poverty through three subjects of analysis: markets at the bottom of the pyramid (Perrot, 2010), the advancement of microcredit (Stervinou, 2010) and the solutions put forward by businesses in the emerging markets facing persistent social (Thieme and Koszmovszky, 2010) and organizational challenges (Leca, 2010). Alongside these two special issues, occasional research studies focus on the behaviour of consumers in positions of subjective and/or objective poverty. Trinquecoste (1990) and Derbaix (1990) analyse the consequences of unemployment on the consumption decisions made by individuals. A more recent study (Gorge and Özçağlar-Toulouse, 2013) looks at the needs and capabilities of the poor.

The reluctance of French-language researchers to address this theme may be due to the polemical nature of studying poverty in the field of marketing. Trinquecoste (1990: 66) asks: ‘how can we justify applying a method and a range of tools developed in the context of a consumer society to a group of individuals who find themselves excluded from that society? How is it possible not to appear to be using unduly mercenary concerns to pursue a segment of the population that is already significantly disadvantaged in economic and social terms?’ Is it appropriate to help companies understand these new markets at the risk of seeing them profit from the economic difficulties facing these individuals, or is it possible to conduct truly transformative research in this area (Dussart, 2007; Pras, 2009)? This tension associated with the nature of research on poverty is compounded by another source of tension – the definition of the impoverished consumer.

**Sustainable development**

The question of sustainability, both in social and environmental terms, is an area of research that first developed in the 1990s. However, it was only in the 2000s that research on sustainable development began to assert a more ‘transformative’ ambition. As part of an exploratory approach, certain researchers sought to circumscribe the ‘doctrine’ of sustainable development (Flipo, 2004; Lauriol, 2004). Others focused on consumers in an effort to understand their representations and the meaning of responsible consumption on the one hand (Elgaaïed, 2013; Gonzales et al., 2009; Monnot and Reniou, 2012; Özçağlar-Toulouse, 2009), or to better understand their decision to purchase so-called sustainable products on the other hand (Böcker et al., 1991; Daniel, 2013; François-Lecompte and Valette-Florence, 2006; Giannelloni, 1998; Rémy, 2004). Recent studies have also shown that resistance to products associated with sustainable development is not only linked to pricing but also to the moral stance associated with the discourse on ecology (Monnot and Reniou, 2013) or to the difficulties in identifying with these products (Gurviez and Sirieix, 2013; Pernin and Petitprêtre, 2012).

Another group of researchers has extended the focus on bien-être to include other stakeholders from the world of sustainable consumption, including small-scale producers in the context of fair trade (Béji-Bécheur et al., 2005; de Ferran et al., 2013; Robert-Demontrond and Özçağlar-Toulouse, 2011). Bien-être in this case is understood as the product of a new contract that is changing the market, a contract between consumers who are concerned by social and environmental issues and companies increasingly committed to addressing these issues (Bocquet, 2013; Dampérat and Dussart, 2007; Dufeu and Ferrandi, 2013). Under this contract, marketing appears as a tool with which to legitimize policies of sustainable development (Gabriel, 2003), especially through communication (Binninger and Robert,
This means that consumers and companies – via marketing – are now seen as contributors to a form of collective bien-être.

Despite the wealth of this research, there is a regrettable lack of studies on sustainable development from a macro-social perspective, as notions of progress, needs and responsibility are particularly rooted in institutional, cultural and historical contexts.

Health

Health is a recent field of study in French-language research and is developed in particular around the consumption of food and harmful substances such as tobacco. In the case of food consumption, researchers offer reflections on educating consumers on nutrition and food diversity (Mourre, 2011), a joint management approach involving the public authorities, retailers and consumers (Bergadaà and Urien, 2006), nutritional innovation strategies (Gomez, 2008) or improving product information (Chalamon and Nabec, 2013; Guichard and Muratore, 2011). Health is a topic that is closely linked to at-risk consumers such as children. Several studies have demonstrated the influence that advertising (Charry and Pecheux, 2011; Masserot and Brée, 2010), social interaction (Ayadi and Brée, 2010) and packaging (Muratore and Guichard, 2010) can have on ensuring a more balanced diet for children. Studies on the health risks associated with tobacco consumption have questioned the effectiveness of health warnings on cigarette packets (Gallopel-Morvan, 2005; Gallopel-Morvan et al., 2011).

At-risk consumers

At-risk consumers are those most likely to be in a position of vulnerability, such as children and the elderly. Caring for the elderly has become a major issue in contemporary society (Grenier, 2009; Raulet-Croset and Amar, 2013; Smida, 2009), requiring synergies between public and private actors and associations. The ageing process itself also has repercussions for the needs of vulnerable consumers (Guillemot and Urien, 2010; Guiot, 2006; Urien, 2003; Urien and Guiot, 2007). There would appear to be two particularly appropriate strategies for improving the living conditions of the elderly. First, symbolic forms of consumption that facilitate transmission between generations may address the identity-related needs of these consumers. Second, social and community-based activities are recommended in combating feelings of isolation and exclusion.

When it comes to the vulnerability of children, researchers have focused on the potentially negative consequences of consumption among this segment of the population. First, the rise in obesity in recent years has been the subject of significant research, as well as a special issue in the Revue Française de Gestion (Brée, 2010), and is an area that falls under the previous theme, health. Finally, the risks associated with intense marketing aimed at children have also been examined. Delabrière (1997), for example, considers the consequences of promoting brands within schools. De Lassus (2003) looks at the presence of advertisers on websites designed for children, while Nabec (2013) looks at the forms of resistance to the increasing development of so-called kids marketing.

Combating exclusion

This theme relates to consumers who are potentially denied democratic access to consumption. One approach adopted by researchers is to consider the shift towards free access to heritage sites and museums (Bourgeon-Renault et al., 2009; Le Gall-Ely et al., 2007). They find that this policy is only effective when combined with communication and information policies targeting members of the population with less awareness of such cultural manifestations. Gombault (2013) also demonstrates the ambiguity of this type of approach, which he suggests is mid-way between public policy and a pure marketing strategy.

Another perspective is to consider that the increase in the movement of persons raises a problem of ‘cultural’ vulnerability in the field of consumption. The overview provided by Özcaglar-Toulouse et al. (2009) encourages researchers to give greater consideration to sociocultural context and social interactions in order to better understand the process of ethnic construction. The role of the market and of marketers (whether practitioners or researchers) in
this process has also been emphasized (Béji-Bécheur et al., 2011; Özçağlar-Toulouse et al., 2009). Finally, two recent studies (Benabdallah and Jolibert, 2013a, 2013b) consider the consequences of certain consumers displaying a low level of acclimatization to the dominant culture.

**Consumer rights**

We are referring here to studies that look at consumer freedoms. Some researchers have focused on the protection of consumer privacy at a time when companies increasingly use their personal data. Dumoulin and Lancelot Miltgen (2012) question the relationship between companies and consumers through the way in which individual data is collected. Gauzente (2013) focuses on the inadequacy of the regulations in place despite policies to ensure respect for privacy in the context of e-commerce, comparable to the work of de Pechpeyrou and Nicholson (2013), who highlight the lack of clarity in charters that offer greater protection for companies than for consumers. Consumers’ right to information, in terms of access, transparency and objectivity, is addressed by Notebaert and Le Pogam (2006) in the context of excessive consumption of medication and defending the right to health care, and by Roux (2012) in the context of consumer management of disputes.

**The cultural roots of bien-être**

When interpreted in philosophical terms, bien-être reflects a vision of happiness (Alain, 1985[1925]) or a state of balance that leads to harmony between the body and mind (Guibet Lafaye, 2007). This is an interpretation that can be found in the research currently available. Researchers look at health as a condition of physical bien-être, access to culture as a condition of intellectual bien-être, purchasing power as a possible condition of material bien-être, and sustainable development as an assurance of collective bien-être for the future. As understood by French speakers, bien-être is not simply about prosperity but rather an overall sense of satisfaction. Indeed, Lamont (1995) confirms the importance for various social categories in France of making the most of life, of leisure activities and of balancing one’s professional and personal lives. A recent survey also shows that chief among the values associated with bien-être in French-speaking nations in Europe are personal relationships, solidarity, the idea of happiness and leisure activities (TNS Qual+, 2011).

Bien-être can only be made tangible when combined with a political vision of man’s place in the way society is organized. It is this vision that influences the definition of bien-être by legislating for the conditions of our development and by institutionalizing the values to which members of society are attached. In the context of French-speaking countries, there is a clear desire to combat the exclusion of those in a position of vulnerability. The research cited above emphasizes the importance of supporting and raising awareness about the situation facing immigrants and of ensuring the democratization of culture. It also includes indications of policies underpinned by objectives of social justice and solidarity. In research on sustainable development and fair trade, this solidarity extends to all economic contributors both in time (future generations) and space (small-scale producers in developing countries). Research on vulnerable consumers therefore indicates a need for inter-generational solidarity.

Finally, since we are considering bien-être in the context of marketing, the role of the market must be questioned. The articles we have selected (either in terms of their author or the context of the study) are from countries whose State structures have acted as the main regulatory forces in society since the second half of the 19th century (Rosanvallon, 1992). The state protects individuals in various areas associated with bien-être, including health, work and efforts to reduce social and economic inequality. This approach reflects more of a social than a liberal ideology, in which the market must function in a way that respects principles laid down by the State (Fontaine, 2014). The role played by companies is therefore called into question in French-language research. For example, studies on vulnerable consumers such as children emphasize the damaging impact that marketing has on their consumption habits. Studies on poverty challenge the ethical stance of companies, while in the case of sustainable development, consumer standards may be criticized for imposing moral choices on individuals.
The right of consumers to access more transparent and respectful information has also been the subject of research. The involvement of companies in areas previously reserved for the state or other bodies such as charities seems to be perceived with caution, although this is a reflection of a wider trend in which the market economy is gradually penetrating all aspects of life.

Conceptions of well-being and developments in TCR

TCR denounces the collateral damage caused by consumer society and promotes the development of research with the aim of improving consumer well-being. Well-being is defined as a state of health, happiness and prosperity (Mick et al., 2011). According to McGregor and Goldsmith (1998, in Mick et al., 2011: 6), the dimensions of well-being are as follows: emotional, social, economic, physical, spiritual, environmental and political. This section presents the five predominant research themes in TCR (poverty, sustainable development, health, risky consumption and materialism) identified during our analysis of the literature, and goes on to discuss their cultural roots.

Poverty

Impoverished consumers now represent a market experiencing massive growth (Prahalad, 2004) in two respects: the emerging markets (Viswanathan, Sridharan and Ritchie, 2010) and new types of poverty in developed countries (Picentini and Hamilton, 2013). Research studies on impoverished consumers have gradually been emerging, with several different angles. Some researchers have set out to identify the characteristics of poverty (Chakravarti, 2006; Hamilton and Catterall, 2008). As a combination of economic, social and cultural difficulties, the culture of poverty confines consumers to a situation of vulnerability (Baker et al., 2005) and disadvantage (Hamilton, 2007; Hill, 2008), especially when it comes to their relationship with market players and market structures (Talukdar, 2008). Impoverished consumers have also been studied in terms of the coping strategies put in place to manage their difficulties in the context of a consumption-oriented society (Hamilton and Catterall, 2008; Hill, 1991). These psychological and/or behavioural strategies allow us to assess the capacity of consumers to resist and survive adversity (Hill, 1991). Finally, researchers have also explored the needs of consumers in developing markets (Varman et al., 2012; Viswanathan, Rosa et al., 2010). The presence of 2.9 billion consumers who earn less than two dollars per day (PNUD, 2012) makes for a complex market potential. However, recent developments in addressing this issue leave several questions unanswered. Efforts to define and identify impoverished individuals remain limited to the notion of a culture of poverty, although new categorizations such as the *nouveaux pauvres* are emerging (Ulversnæistrup and Östberg, 2011). Furthermore, if we are to develop our understanding of poverty in the world of consumption, there is a need for more in-depth study of its political, socio-historical and economic dimensions (Blocker et al., 2013; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013).

Sustainable development

Even before TCR began to question materialistic lifestyles (Kilbourne and Mittelstaedt, 2011; Varey, 2010) in favour of a more sustainable way of life, certain types of consumer behaviour had already been studied in the literature. Several researchers showed an interest in notions of voluntary simplicity (Cherrier and Murray, 2007; Shaw and Newholm, 2002), frugality and degrowth (Cherrier and Murray, 2002), or looked at the motivations behind the purchase of fair trade products (Moore, 2004) and socially responsible consumption (Roberts, 1995). While the literature clearly shows the emergence of a process of reflection among consumers and businesses, there remain certain obstacles to the spread of this movement: the environmental scepticism of consumers (Mohr et al., 2005) and the lack of initiatives and innovation on the part of companies continue to impede sustainable development (Bansal, 2005).

It is worth highlighting three aspects of the ‘transformative’ research on sustainable development (McDonagh et al., 2011). First, the need for real change in the lifestyles and values of consumers must be backed up by subsequent political, social and economic change (Kilbourne et al., 2009).
Second, the drive for sustainability and responsibility raises a more general concept of the citizen-consumer (Varey, 2010). Lastly, studies on sustainable development question the theoretical foundations of notions such as needs and materialism (Mick et al., 2011) and more generally the very basis for the ideology of contemporary consumption (Kilbourne and Mittelstaedt, 2011). The perspective developed within TCR has involved raising managerial questions linked to sustainable development, particularly about the capacity of marketers to communicate on sustainability while avoiding pitfalls such as greenwashing.

Health

This theme relates to awareness-raising and adopting healthy and balanced consumer behaviours. By identifying with a social approach, TCR has called for the implementation of concrete steps by providers of healthcare and marketers, as well as new levers with which to apply prevention and health care policies (Scammon et al., 2011).

Raising awareness of risky behaviour (Berger and Rand, 2008), monitoring and catering for patients (Scammon et al., 2011), the poor understanding of food intake among consumers (Chandon and Wansink, 2007), and suitable food labelling systems (Grunert, Bolton and Raats, 2011) are all sensitive issues that have been addressed by TCR in recent years. Transformative research has also taken a particular interest in the causes behind the rise in obesity in western societies. The studies carried out so far have considered, for example, the increase in food portions and the increased speed with which meals are eaten (Sharpe et al., 2008). Our lack of awareness and understanding of food labelling can be added to the list of factors potentially responsible for weight-related problems (Chandon and Wansink, 2007) and have become topics increasingly studied by researchers.

This field of study has benefited from the emergence of new areas such as nutritional marketing (Grunert et al., 2011) and health prevention. This development is particularly noticeable through advertising campaigns designed to increase awareness among consumers of the positive impact of healthy eating (Grier and Moore, 2011) in reducing the risk of serious disease such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes. However, it is regrettable that TCR has primarily adopted an individualized approach to health. This observation can be linked to the risk of healthism, an individualized conception of health that is said to demand excessive levels of responsibility on the part of individuals (Crawford, 1980).

Risky consumption

Consumption and the different lifestyles associated with it increasingly involve legal risks or risks relating to the health of individuals (Forbes and Lyon, 2006). In recent decades, addictive behaviour and factors used to explain excessive or harmful behaviour have been explored by many researchers as well as public health authorities. TCR plays an active role in identifying consumers with risky behaviour or behaviour that is harmful to society and the individual (Faber and Vohs, 2011; Pechmann et al., 2011).

Such behaviour may include gambling addictions (Cotte and LaTour, 2011), personal debt (Soman et al., 2011), compulsive buying (Ridgway et al., 2008), or tobacco and alcohol (Griffiths et al., 2011). Combined with increasing cultural acceptance, the ease of access to information and the absence of regulations have led to a rise in often pathological consumer behaviours (Albright, 2011) which appear to extend beyond the hedonic aspect of consumption.

The approach advocated by transformative researchers is mainly to help individuals to control their consumer habits. TCR aims to enable consumers to develop their ability to manage their consumer decisions (Soman et al., 2011). Raising awareness among at-risk segments of the population is a fundamental aspect of this stream of research (Ridgway et al., 2008). This is made all the more important by the fact that popular culture, technological advances and increasingly innovative retail channels point to the democratization, trivialization and privatization of extreme modes of consumption in a market that remains largely unregulated (Albright, 2011).

Materialism

Although materialism is already a well-established research topic when it comes to consumer behaviour (Belk, 1985; Richins and Dawson, 1992), TCR
has added a new dimension by systematically linking it to the notion of well-being (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002). Materialism, which is deeply rooted in our institutional structures (Kilbourne et al., 2009) and ideological systems (Kilbourne and Mittelstaedt, 2011), is often referred to as a ‘trap’ or as the ‘dark side’ of consumer behaviour (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2011), leading to a decline in individual well-being. Based on this observation, TCR sets out to answer the following question: how can we substitute sustainability for materialism as the basis for development in society? In other words, how can we ‘transform’ our social project as such?

Various strategies have been put forward (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2011). First, the role of institutions has been highlighted in eliminating the existing conflicts between materialistic, environmental and wellness objectives (Kilbourne et al., 2009; McDonagh et al., 2011). Second, individuals are themselves encouraged to align their personal interests with collective interests and local actions with their global consequences. Finally, cultural changes are deemed necessary if materialism – through consumption – is no longer to be the only way of constructing one’s identity or of addressing feelings of social and economic insecurity among citizens.

**The cultural roots of well-being**

In philosophical terms, more so than bien-être, well-being has been influenced by utilitarian thinkers (Bentham, 2011[1789]; Dubois, 2008) and reflects a more economic perspective linked to the importance of prosperity (Pancer and Handelman, 2012). The idea that the acquisition of goods makes happiness accessible has dominated the construction of a consumer culture, particularly in the American context. Authors like Wilkie and Moore (1999) consider the increase in the access to and supply of products such as televisions to be a factor of well-being for consumers. Despite the central importance of the notion of prosperity, defined by the possession of goods in studies on well-being, TCR has endeavoured to distance itself from this narrow mindset so that ‘well-being can take on the meaning of “being well” as part of a multidimensional vision that stands in contrast to that of monetary well-being (welfare) evocative of utility’ (Dubois, 2008: 88). Studies on materialism within TCR have revealed a negative correlation between well-being and materials (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002), thereby exposing the negative consequences of behaviour deemed materialistic (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2011). Furthermore, a model of society based on materialistic values is considered to run counter to one which encourages sustainable development and responsible behaviour (Kilbourne et al., 2009).

In political terms, well-being under the Anglo-Saxon liberal model depends more on the market players. It is felt that the State should only intervene in the case of negative externalities and should allow the market to regulate society (Smith, 1995[1776]). As a result, English-language research has proposed few tangible recommendations in terms of public policy, although its importance is underscored. The political causes of poverty and the drive towards materialism are called into question, as is the absence of regulation for certain risky forms of consumer behaviour. In the absence of public regulations, well-being under this model prioritizes the freedom of consumers, although this is limited by consumer standards implicitly incumbent on individuals, particularly in studies dedicated to ‘risky consumption’.

Finally, although TCR does not challenge the importance of market players in well-being, it questions their relevance when it comes to the difficulties associated with poverty, the environment and materialism. TCR studies have developed a critical approach to the market in which the influence of the cultural and social consumer standards created by economic players are called into question.

**Discussion**

Table 1 highlights the similarities and differences between French-language (BEC) and English-language research (TCR), both in respect of the themes addressed and the positions adopted. While poverty and health are developed in similar ways, sustainable development reveals clear differences. BEC focuses on the act of purchasing and the meaning of sustainable development for consumers, while TCR looks more at the ‘macro’ dimensions of sustainable development, in particular by contrasting its
Table 1. Perspectives on bien-être and well-being.6

| Bien-être Du Consommateur (BEC) | Consumer Well-being (TCR) |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| **Poverty**                   |                           |
| • Objective poverty: impact of economic difficulties on consumer experiences, development of their coping capabilities/strategies (Chakravarti, 2006; Derbaix, 1990; Gorge et Özçağlar-Toulouse, 2013; Hamilton et Catterall, 2008; Hill, 1991; Placentini et Hamilton, 2013; Trinquecoste, 1990) | • Cultural, social and institutional causes of poverty (Blocker et al., 2013; Talukdar, 2008) |
| • Specific features of emerging markets: identification of social and organisational challenges vs. encouraging the development of local markets (Revue Française de Gestion, special issue, 2010; Varman, Skalen et Belk, 2012; Viswanathan, Sridharan et Ritchie, 2010; Viswanathan, Rosa et Ruth, 2010) | • Notions of vulnerability (Baker, Gentry et Rittenburg, 2005) and disadvantage (Hamilton, 2007; Hill, 2008) |
| • Subjective poverty: problems associated with declining purchasing power; reactions from retailers and consumers (Decisions Marketing, special issue, 2009) |                           |
| **Sustainable development**    |                           |
| • Meanings and experiences of responsible consumption (Elgaaied, 2013; Gonzales et al., 2009; Monnot et Reniou, 2012; Özçağlar-Toulouse, 2009) | • Diverse forms of sustainable development: frugality, voluntary simplicity, citizen-consumer, etc. (McDonagh, Dobscha et Prothero, 2011; Varey, 2010) |
| • Motivations, tensions and resistance to purchasing (Bocker, Hausruckinger et Herker, 1991; Daniel, 2013; Flipo, 2004; Français-Lecompte et Valette-Florence, 2006; Giannelloni, 1998; Gurviez et Sirieux, 2004; Monnot et Reniou, 2013; Pernin et Petitprêtre, 2012; Rémy, 2004) | • Dominant paradigm and social, political and cultural transformations (Kilbourne et Mittelstaedt, 2011) |
| • Consumer-producer relations (Béji-Bécheur, Fosse-Gomez et Özçağlar-Toulouse, 2005; Bocquet, 2013; Dampérat et Dussart, 2007; de Ferran et al., 2013; Dufeu et Ferrandi, 2013; Robert-Demontrond et Özçağlar-Toulouse, 2011) | • Opposition between materialism and sustainable development (Mick et al., 2011) |
| • Marketing tools that favour sustainable development (Binninger et Robert, 2013; Gabriel, 2003) |                           |
| **Health**                     |                           |
| • Causes of and fight against obesity (Ayadi et Brée, 2010; Chandon et Wansink, 2007; Charty et Pécheux, 2011; Grier et Moore, 2011; Masserot et Brée, 2010; Muratore et Guichard, 2010) |                           |
| • Improving health-related behaviour of consumers (Bergadà et Urien, 2006; Berger et Rand, 2008; Gomez, 2008; Scammon et al., 2011), for example by improving nutritional information (Chalamon et Nabec, 2013; Grunert, Bolton et Raats, 2011; Guichard et Muratore, 2011; Mourre, 2011) | • Impact of preventive campaigns against tobacco (Gallopel-Morvan, 2005; Gallopel-Morvan, Le Gall-Ely et Rieunier, 2011) |
| **At-risk consumers**          |                           |
| • Vulnerability of the elderly (isolation and exclusion) and children (exposure to marketing) (de Lassus, 2003; Delabrière, 1997; Guilemot et Urien, 2010; Guiot, 2006; Nabec, 2013; Urien, 2003; Urien et Guiot, 2007) | • Identifying at-risk consumers and aggravating factors (Faber and Vohs, 2011; Pechmann et al., 2011) |
| • Collective care for the elderly (Grenier, 2009; Raulet-Croset and Amar, 2013; Smida, 2009) | • Addictive consumption with negative externalities: gambling, compulsive buying, illegal substances, etc. (Albright, 2011; Cotte et LaTour, 2011; Ridgway et al., 2008) |
| **Risky consumption**          |                           |
| • Collective care for the elderly (Grenier, 2009; Raulet-Croset and Amar, 2013; Smida, 2009) | • Absence of regulations and lack of understanding of cultural norms governing such behaviour (Griffiths et al., 2011; Soman et al., 2011) |
| **Materialism**                |                           |
| • Negative correlation between well-being and materialism (negative externalities associated with materialistic behaviour) (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2011) |                           |
| • Role of institutions in collectively addressing challenges associated with consumption and sustainability (Kilbourne et al., 2009) and changing our ideological frameworks (Kilbourne et Mittelstaedt, 2011) |                           |
| **Combating exclusion**        |                           |
| • Democratization of access to cultural consumption (Bourgeon-Renault et al., 2009; Gombault, 2013; Le Gall-Ely et al., 2007) |                           |
| • Accounting for the sociocultural environment of so-called ‘ethnic’ consumers and exploring the relationship between minority and dominant cultures (Béji-Bécheur et al., 2011; Benabdallah and Jolibert, 2013a, 2013b; Özçağlar-Toulouse et al., 2009) |                           |
| **Consumer rights**            |                           |
| • Protection of consumer privacy (de Pechpeyrou and Nicholson, 2013; Dumoulin et Lancelot Milgten, 2012; Gauzente, 2013) | • Right to transparent and objective information for consumers (Notebaert et Le Pogam, 2006; Roux, 2012) |
values with those of materialism. The different positions adopted by the researchers is reflected by their focus on ‘at-risk consumers’ and ‘risky consumption’. In the former, emphasis is placed on the vulnerability of consumers, while the latter stresses their responsibility when faced with consumer practices deemed harmful or dangerous. Finally, certain themes are addressed disproportionately in one stream of research or the other: TCR highlights the importance of materialism in thinking about ways to improve well-being, a theme that is absent in the French-language research. In contrast, the latter more closely associates bien-être with consumer rights and efforts to combat exclusion. Although Transformative Consumer Research and French-language research on the Bien-Etre du Consommateur have every reason to mutually benefit one another, there are specific themes in each stream of research that could usefully be developed in light of what is being done in the other. We have tried to illustrate this in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Bien-être and well-being: research avenues and perspectives. Source: adapted from Mick et al. (2011: 6).
suggested future research perspectives and avenues, we propose a new version of this diagram that challenges those dimensions initially identified. The specific features of our proposals are explained in the following section.

**Bien-être or well-being? Future research perspectives**

**Contributions of TCR and research avenues.** In methodological terms, addressing problems such as poverty, personal debt, addictions, etc. involves identifying certain types of behaviour of which the individual is ‘unaware’ or which have been repressed through patterns of denial. To overcome this difficulty, TCR researchers recommend immersion in the target population (Mick et al., 2011). Data collection methods such as projective techniques or ethnographic approaches are favoured. The use of associations as intermediaries (Hill, 1991) and building up relationships of trust as part of a ‘long-term’ perspective (Ozanne and Saatcioglu, 2008) are also considered to be necessary elements for successful research. These are clear examples of the action-research promoted by TCR (Ozanne and Fischer, 2011; Ozanne and Saatcioglu, 2008). French-language researchers could usefully adopt this transformative dynamic to support consumers in developing their capacities and achieving emancipation.

Several themes addressed within the context of TCR merit greater attention among French-language researchers. Materialism, for example, could be integrated into the developing research on the value of goods versus that of human links (Cova, 1995). Similarly, ‘risky’ consumption is a theme that has received very little attention by French-language researchers although it has generated fascinating legal and moral debates in respect of the market. One suspects that the apparent lack of interest in materialism or risky consumption may also relate to existing taboos and the different cultural perception(s) when it comes to money, financial planning or conceptions of addiction.

Finally, recent TCR articles have improved our understanding of individual consumption decisions. The approaches adopted by these researchers, which could be used to inspire their French-language counterparts, emphasize the importance of macro-social structures, for example by studying social constructs and representations in issues such as poverty (Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013) or sustainable development (Kilbourne and Mittelstaedt, 2011).

**Promoting French-language research specificities.** French-language research could promote the value of its own specific approaches and its perspective on the notion of bien-être. For example, the question of inequality is an appropriate subject of enquiry at a time when social divisions appear to be on the increase. As the welfare state struggles to ensure social cohesion under the Republican system, researchers could focus on the role of the market and the way it operates as a way of generating greater bien-être by creating links between citizens (e.g. new forms of collaboration, citizen participation in local economic redeployment, new ways to exchange best practices and share knowledge, etc.). The defence of consumer rights is a growing research topic that calls for greater attention both on consumption decisions at an individual level and their construction at a social, historical and cultural level. Researchers could emphasize consumerism and its politicization by for example looking at the effectiveness of associations or public authorities in defending consumer rights or the prospects of improving market access conditions for the most disadvantaged consumers, as in the case of the disabled.

The links between other research topics and bien-être could be strengthened. For example, work on donations, a prolific area of research, could focus more on notions of collective bien-être by examining the impact that charities have on poverty reduction and social justice or by studying the link between charities such as food banks and the mass retail sector.

Finally, there are two specific features of French-language research in particular that should encourage TCR to revitalize its approaches. TCR researchers should be encouraged by the vision of bien-être among their French-language counterparts to renew their own vision of well-being. The interchangeability of well-being with the notion of welfare (Mick, 2005; Mick et al., 2011) and its normative conception (Pancer, 2009) remain problematic. As research on bien-être has emphasized, it must be understood in both individual and collective terms.
as a social and cultural construct and as a complex and multidimensional concept. Furthermore, the primary vocation of TCR (to contribute to consumer well-being) cannot be fulfilled without an effective managerial proposal (Mick, 2005). This stated ambition has been the target of criticism for its ‘ambiguous attitude’ towards theoretical development (Bradshaw, 2012; Lehmann and Hill, 2011). Some argue that TCR favours an excessive focus on operational perspectives to the detriment of theory. In response to such criticism, TCR could draw on the positions adopted by BEC researchers, who are driven by a managerial vocation that in turn feeds their theoretical development. The balance sustained between theory and practice in French-language research could serve to enrich TCR.

A ‘labelling’ strategy for BEC?

French-language authors have shown a genuine interest in research questions associated with consumer bien-être. Unlike their English-language counterparts, they have not yet structured or institutionalized their work based on a label as in the case of TCR. Given the growing importance of TCR and the interest among French-language researchers in consumer bien-être, they would clearly have much to gain by structuring their research. Using a ‘labelling’ strategy to achieve this may prove beneficial, in particular by ensuring greater visibility as far as stakeholders are concerned (doctoral researchers, companies, public authorities, academic institutions and students; see Bode and Østegaard, 2013; Cova et al., 2009). As in the case of Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Özçağlar-Toulouse and Cova, 2010), such a strategy provides greater legitimacy and consolidates research while at the same time avoiding any stigmatization. It facilitates the development of academic activities such as teaching seminars, conferences and the directions taken by doctoral programmes.

Targeted use of labelling for the notion of BEC would allow research to be structured within an umbrella French-language research field. Such a structure would only be beneficial if French-language researchers could show that they belong to a cohesive field of study whose specific features could in turn feed into TCR. In this way, by generating closer links with TCR, French-language researchers would be able to preserve their cultural identity. By promoting the ‘specificities’ of this identity, BEC could serve as a veritable source of proposals within TCR itself.

A ‘moralization’ strategy for TCR?

The labelling process, combined with the normative essence of TCR (promoting well-being), nonetheless carries certain risks of which French-language researchers should be aware. For example, Mick (2008) concluded his introduction to the special issue of the Journal of Consumer Research as follows: ‘The time for authoritative and constructive scholarship on consumption and well-being has arrived’ (Mick, 2008: 379). But how are we to tell the difference between ‘risky’ and other more beneficial forms of consumption? Which criteria should be used to define ‘unacceptable’ levels of poverty or the harmful consequences of materialism? Adopting well-being as an established and predefined notion (Pancer, 2009; Pancer and Handelman, 2012) leads to the segmentation of consumers and practices according to universalizing criteria (good/bad, desirable/undesirable). TCR thereby runs the risk of holding itself up as the only discourse of ‘truth’ (Foucault, 1971), a dangerous position when one considers that research should tend towards objectivity and curiosity. Furthermore, this discourse of truth can contain contradictions between the objective of improving the living conditions of consumers and the way in which certain topics are addressed. For example, the standard advice to ‘eat five portions of fruit and vegetables each day’, considered central in developing ‘healthy’ nutritional practices, may conflict with the difficulties associated with poverty by generating feelings of stigmatization for consumers who are unable to achieve the recommended objective.

Similarly, the principled view that materialism is antithetical to happiness (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002) runs the risk of stigmatizing consumers for whom it can compensate for diminished power in other areas. TCR would benefit from a more contextual approach to this phenomenon.

Labelling also implies a certain politicization of the research in question, in which objectives of identification and power are always at stake (Bode and Østegaard, 2013; Bourdieu, 1984). To include
researchers in a particular stream is also to exclude those whose objectives are not necessarily different but are expressed differently. Such tensions were observed in the case of the Consumer Culture Theory label, deemed to impose a totalizing and exclusive narrative (Arnould and Thompson, 2007). Critiques of TCR relate less to methodology and epistemology than to axiology: nowadays who would dare boast that they are not concerned by the living conditions of consumers? This position runs the risk of distinguishing between ‘positive’ research on well-being and other ‘negative’ research thought to sustain the current problems associated with our consumer society. The politicization of TCR also relates to its use of action-research, for principled – if not militant – research, while increasingly identified as such by its authors (Klein, 2013), can undermine objectivity. For this reason, research on consumer well-being would have much to gain by developing an analysis of the power relations between stakeholders in respect of this issue.

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Notes

1. By French-language, we mean work that uses French as the language of research and publication.
2. While for the purposes of this article we chose research articles on well-being that belong to the research stream known as TCR, it should be noted that there are many other English-language studies of the same topic which are not included in TCR.
3. Some research studies explore other themes but in isolation or in a way that is fragmented. Examples include Borgès (2011), who looked at self-esteem, and the work of Baillet (2013) and Martel (2006) on disabilities. As they could not be included in a thematic group based on our analysis, these studies were not used for the remainder of this article.
4. See ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/quali/wellbeing_final_en.pdf.
5. TCR is distinct in that its purpose is social marketing, which is ‘the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of the society of which they are a part’ (Andreasen, 1994: 110). Similarly, TCR is centred on research that is concerned by well-being in society and the individual’s quality of life. However, while the objective of social marketing is to develop marketing techniques to encourage consumers to change certain types of behaviour, TCR endeavours to go beyond traditional marketing tools and transform the very objective of research.
6. There are potential overlaps between certain themes. For example, efforts to curb smoking, which belong in the ‘health’ category in French-language research, are included in ‘risky consumption’ in TCR. Similarly, TCR has established several links between sustainable development and materialism.

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