TCR 2025 Track 2 Proposal

Consumer Journeys and Voices in Hunger Reduction Programs

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Poverty alleviation initiatives, including hunger reductions programs, are critical to providing help for people in need, even in developed countries. However, the same programs designed to alleviate the burdens of poverty may inadvertently yet systematically undermine the help that is provided, having unintended negative consequences (Arias et al., submitted). For instance, transportation might be a key financial asset required for commuting to employment opportunities or food banks. However, since there is no agreement on what constitutes basic needs (Hammedi et al., 2024), owning key assets may reduce or restrict the help provided by poverty alleviation programs. To illustrate, more than 54,000 Texan households were denied access to SNAP because their vehicle assets were considered too high (Willis, 2023).

Drawing from previous research examining programs with unintended negative consequences (Arias et al., submitted), the current research delves into the role of these unintended consequences in the lived experiences of consumers. In the current research, we focus on the important context of those who experience food insecurity and use the services of a food bank. Our aim is to bring together research on service gaps (Parasuraman et al., 1985) and transformative service initiatives (Blocker et al., 2022) to help create hunger reduction programs that not only feed the population they serve but that simultaneously cultivate empowerment, dignity and hope to help reduce poverty. Bringing together the model of Service Quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985) and taking in consideration the whole of the consumer attending a food bank (Blocker et al., 2022), our research seeks to answer the following questions:

- Which attributes are key in shaping the overall service experience of disadvantaged consumers using a food reduction program?
- What gaps exist between the consumer as a whole, the service provider, and the social service ecosystem? And how can they be bridged?
- How can hunger reduction programs reduce the unintended consequences following their program design to foster empowerment, dignity and hope through their programs to help reduce poverty?

To answer these research questions, we have already conducted 11 interviews with food bank recipients who used the food bank in July 2024 as well as six administrators who help operate it. We inquired about food bank recipients' service experiences, consumption experiences as full-fledged consumers, service outcomes, and thoughts on improving service design. In addition, when interviewing administrators, our questions explored the design and logistics regarding food bank coordination, the vision of their evolving work, and their perceptions of the food recipients and the barriers they face. We set out to obtain insights into how they perceived the foodbank service and how these were integrated within their everyday lives. Currently, we are starting the analysis phase of this qualitative data and data will be coded and analyzed using NVivo. In addition to these interviews, we will also use data mining to understand how these sentiments are shared (or not) across a more general population by using Reddit comments pertaining to food banks. Overall, our aim is to emphasize the voices of consumers using food banks to deepen our understanding of their service experiences and help improve hunger reduction programs. The results of this research will hold important implications not only for scholarship, but to also improve program designs created to serve those experiencing poverty, especially since research on poverty and reducing hunger in the domain of service marketing and management remains limited (Hammedi et al., 2024).

Team and Organization

Pre-Conference Activities

Our team has been successfully working together since January 2023 and attended the TCR Conference in 2023. The proposed project builds on our submitted paper on the negative unintended consequences of poverty alleviation programs (Arias et al., submitted), which was conceived during TCR 2023. Based on a thorough literature review on poverty, policies and biases, we have realized that the voices of vulnerable consumers, especially of consumers experiencing poverty, were rarely heard especially in a service context. Capitalizing on the relationship of one of our members with a major food bank in a major US city, we were able to interview and collect data from both recipients and administrators of the food bank. Preliminary review of the interviews revealed that the food bank provided excellent service to food recipients and successfully catered to many of their needs. However, the same consumers had mitigated experiences about *other* neighboring food banks, which services they would not use. We realized that in order to pinpoint what attributes shape the overall experience with food banks' services, a deeper understanding of consumers' experiences with food banks is needed. We would like to use TCR 2025 as an anchoring point in bringing this research to fruition using the timeline below:

Tasks	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Ma	Jun
Clarify theoretical framework	■	■								
Analyze interviews	■	■								
Reddit data collection		■	■							
Reddit data analysis			■	■						
Outline common data collection themes				■	■					
Additional data-collection analysis						■	■	■		
Preliminary results write-up							■	■		
Preliminary outlets and paper outlining									■	
Finalizing outlet and outlining (TCR 2025);										■

Conference Activities: The team will use conference time to come up with a complete and agreed-upon outline for paper submission. Team members will have assigned specific roles and responsibilities for completing the manuscript. We will also devote time to any project that might have evolved on the same theme (poverty alleviation) during the year until TCR 2025.
Post-Conference Activities: The team will finalize and submit the manuscript, and move forward with the most promising projects identified during conference brainstorming.

References

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