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Researching *with* places: On using engaged scholarship in marketing

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Structured abstract

Purpose - As a core element of the marketing mix, place is of central concern within marketing. Yet existing literature typically presents accounts of research *about* rather than *with* places. This paper, therefore, argues engaged scholarship can help academics, practitioners, policy-makers, and communities to work collaboratively to solve place-based 'wicked problems'. Specifically, we focus on high street revitalisation, a challenge frustrating policy-makers and communities since the 1980s.

Design/methodology/approach - We draw on a mixed method research project conducted with place-based stakeholders in Manchester, UK, to discuss the benefits and challenges arising through an engaged scholarship approach.

Findings - We outline several benefits to engaged scholarship, including forming tailored solutions to place-based problems, engendering trust and ongoing research partnerships, and generating real-world impact beyond the academy. However, we also draw attention to the challenges including political sensitivities within places, additional layers of scrutiny, and challenges to dissemination arising through partnership working with organisations external to the university.

Originality - Whereas a range of techniques have been utilised to research places within marketing, engaged scholarship is lacking. We therefore provide first-hand insights into the benefits and challenges we experienced using the approach. This is of significance due to the rising importance of generating real-world impact within the academy, which we feel requires more institutional support. We also suggest Van de Ven's diamond model of engaged scholarship extends to encompass issues of research governance.

Keywords: collaboration; engaged scholarship; high streets; impact; participatory methods; place

Introduction

Place is a core pillar of marketing theory and practice; as Chatzidakis *et al.* (2017: p.149) explain, “Place’ is, arguably, one of the axiomatic principles of marketing as one of the four Ps...’ Whereas at the outset ‘place’ may have simply referred to where goods and services were consumed, latterly marketing scholars developed a more nuanced understanding of place. For instance, regarding consumption *in* place (Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2017), there is established literature about retail and service atmospherics (Turley and Milliman, 2000). Furthermore, reflecting the ‘spatial turn’ in the field (Coffin and Chatzidakis, 2021), there is growing focus on the consumption *of* place (Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2017), which explores consumers’ lived experiences of a range of places (e.g., Anderson *et al.*, 2017; Hill *et al.*, 2021; Skandalis *et al.*, 2017), alongside offering more critical theorisations of place (e.g., Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2012; Coffin, 2020; Warnaby and Medway, 2013).

A range of research techniques have been adopted to investigate places in marketing, including experiments (Turley and Milliman, 2000); interviews (Anderson *et al.*, 2017; Hill *et al.*, 2021; Maclaran and Brown, 2005; Skandalis *et al.*, 2017; Visconti *et al.*, 2010); focus groups (Maclaran and Brown, 2005; Ripoll-Gonzalez and Gale, 2020; Steadman *et al.*, 2021); netnography and online methods (Anderson *et al.*, 2017; Hill *et al.*, 2021; Steadman *et al.*, 2021; Visconti *et al.*, 2010); ethnographic observation and visual methods (Anderson *et al.*, 2017; Hill *et al.*, 2021; Maclaran and Brown, 2005; Skandalis *et al.*, 2017; Steadman *et al.*, 2021; Visconti *et al.*, 2010).

Yet, despite rising interest in participatory place branding (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015), participatory *methodologies* remain underutilised within place-focused marketing research. Existing literature, therefore, typically conducts research *about* rather than *with* places – or local place-based stakeholders. That is, public organisations with responsibility for a geographical area (e.g., local government), private organisations interested in place (e.g., local businesses), organisations representing local businesses (e.g., Traders’ Associations), community organisations (e.g., Civic Societies), and local community members (e.g., residents). There are a growing number of place-focused studies in consumer research taking a more interpretive and/or phenomenological perspective accounting for how places emerge through people’s lived experiences. This involves researchers speaking with people

living and visiting places, often coupled with ethnographic immersion within the places under study, such as an anti-capitalist neighbourhood (Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2012), football stadium (Hill *et al.*, 2021; Steadman *et al.*, 2021), music venue (Skandalis *et al.*, 2017), public urban spaces (Visconti *et al.*, 2010), and shopping malls (Maclaran and Brown, 2005). However, this literature does not usually involve collaboration with place-based stakeholders, which would more closely resemble what we are calling a ‘researching *with* places’ approach. As discussed later, our research with local high streets, for example, was conducted in partnership with local government. Given the rising impact agenda in the academy (Jaakkola and Vargo, 2021), it therefore seems timely to revisit how place-based research is conducted in marketing.

Subsequently, drawing on research conducted with local high streets in the UK, we call for greater use of ‘engaged scholarship’ (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006) - collaborative inquiry between academics and practitioners - to tackle ‘wicked’ place-based problems within marketing. By this we mean particularly challenging societal problems which can be difficult to define, involve a wide variety of actors with conflicting views, and often resist attempts at being solved (Termeer *et al.*, 2019). Wicked problems are thus difficult to address as a lone researcher and instead necessitate participatory approaches (Ntounis and Parker, 2017). Finally, we conclude by calling for wider institutional support for engaged scholars.

Participatory research and engaged scholarship

Participatory research originated in the 1970s as a means of encouraging societal change through working with groups perceived to be ‘hard-to-reach’ (Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2018). It captures several approaches emphasising collaborative production of knowledge with societal partners (Bergold and Stefan, 2012; Pain, 2004; Pain and Kindon, 2007), such as (participatory) action research (Grønhaug and Olson, 1999; Ripoll-Gonzalez and Gale, 2020; Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2018), community-based participatory research (Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2018), relational engagement (Ozanne *et al.*, 2017; Piacentini *et al.*, 2019), and engaged scholarship (Boyer, 1996; Van de Ven, 2018; Ntounis and Parker, 2017).

Participatory research involves shifting the positionality of research informants from objects of inquiry to partners and co-producers in the knowledge-production process (Bergold and Stefan, 2012; Pain, 2004). As Wilkinson and Wilkinson (2018: p.16; *their emphasis*) stress,

'...participatory research is conducted in partnership with the individuals or community of interest – that is *with* them, and not *on* them'. This approach can address power imbalances in traditional research (Bergold and Stefan, 2012; Pain, 2004; Pain and Kindon, 2007; Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2018), give members of marginalised groups a voice (Bergold and Stefan, 2012; Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2018), and attain more localised knowledge about a phenomenon (Bergold and Stefan, 2012; Pain, 2004). Bergold and Stefan (2012), however, warn of 'pseudo-participation', whereby participation in some cases remains tokenistic.

Engaged scholarship has been put forwards by proponents such as Boyer (1996) and Van de Ven (2018) as a 'participatory, reflexive, transdisciplinary, collaborative' research approach 'directed towards accomplishing societal advancements while maintaining research quality' (Ntounis and Parker, 2017: p.350). Although engaged scholarship does not have a singular meaning (Holland *et al.*, 2010), Van de Ven (2018) explains how it involves engaging academics from different disciplinary backgrounds, in addition to non-academics (e.g., practitioners, policy-makers, and community groups), in problem formulation, theory building, research design, and problem solving (the 'diamond model' of engaged scholarship). Furthermore, the terminology of 'scholarship' emphasises how it involves learning, teaching, and engagement beyond the research (McCormack, 2011).

Crucially, engaged scholarship is beneficial for addressing theory-practice gaps and generating real-world impact (Ntounis and Parker, 2017). As Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) outline, such theory-practice gaps have traditionally been framed in three ways: first, as a 'knowledge-transfer problem', whereby it is argued academic knowledge is not effectively translated for use in practice. Second, it is assumed theory and practice are distinct forms of knowledge difficult to integrate. And finally, such gaps are often framed as a 'knowledge production problem' due to siloed behaviour, which engaged scholarship seeks to overcome through the co-production of knowledge.

Engaged scholarship, however, is not without its critics and challenges (McKelvey, 2006). There can be competing temporalities between academic and practitioner research (Barbour *et al.*, 2017), difficult power dynamics to negotiate (Strumińska-Kutra, 2016), and researchers can struggle to balance academic and community roles (Mistry *et al.*, 2015). Whilst others argue academic institutions are not fully supportive of engaged scholarship because it lies outside conventional academic reward systems (Boyer, 1996; Paynter, 2014;

Robinson and Hawthorne, 2018), which typically prioritise the ‘scholarship of discovery’ rather than the time-consuming ‘scholarship of engagement’ (Holland *et al.* 2010). To adopt engaged scholarship, therefore, calls for ‘considerable courage and willingness to swim against the current’ (Bergold and Stefan, 2012: p.203).

Those working on Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) have swum against the current; as Davis *et al.* (2017: p.167) elucidate, ‘transformative consumer research is a grassroots academic collective organized around developing rigorous scientific findings to alleviate social problems’. Ozanne *et al.* (2017), for instance, encourage marketing scholars to adopt ‘relational engagement’, which involves researchers working in partnership with affected stakeholders on activities such as creating research outputs, and embedding the goal of social impact throughout the research. To illustrate, during research on disability and the marketplace, Higgins worked with those living with disability, disability support groups and charities to create a public art exhibition to ‘shatter ableism in the marketplace’ (Lancaster University, 2021). Furthermore, working with the *Fatherhood Institute, Working Families*, and the UK Government, Banister and Kerrane (2018) created video case studies with parents with lived experiences of Shared Parental Leave, to positively shape policy and employment practices in this area. Finally, Piacentini and colleagues investigate plastic packaging in consumers’ lives, working with stakeholders in the supply chain to enable policymakers to address consumers’ attitude-behaviour gaps and the climate crisis (Lancaster University, 2022).

Participatory methodologies have also been used in place-focused research. For instance, featuring in the *Methods for Change* project which seeks to create socially impactful methodologies (see Pottinger *et al.*, 2021), Barron (2021) conducted photo ‘go-alongs’ with older people to understand their changing experiences of Manchester, UK. Similarly, McIntyre (2003) used participatory action research and photovoice techniques to explore how working-class women in Belfast experience place. Within marketing, Ripoll-Gonzalez and Gale (2020) adopted participatory action research to study place branding within Tasmania; collaboratively creating place branding strategies through interviews and focus groups. Whilst, Ntounis and Parker (2017) adopted engaged scholarship to investigate the factors impacting high street performance. Here, academics and practitioners collaborated on *problem formulation* (seeking views of high street stakeholders); *theory building*

(developing a model of retail change through reviewing academic literature and discussions with high street experts); *research design* (using a ‘Delphi’ panel of academics and practitioners to rank identified factors impacting high streets); and *problem solving* (half-day workshops with 10 partner towns to apply identified high street performance factors in practice). This project has generated significant ongoing impact for high streets policy and practice (Chartered Association of Business Schools, 2022), further illustrating the potential merits of engaged scholarship.

Yet engaged scholarship remains underutilised within place research in marketing. We thus call for greater use of this approach to transcend research silos and inspire greater collaboration between academics, practitioners, policy-makers, and communities to solve pressing place-based problems and generate impact beyond the ‘ivory tower’. Building on conceptual discussions of engaged scholarship, we contribute novel insights into the use of this approach in practice, drawing on research with local high street stakeholders.

Researching *with* local high streets

UK high streets are facing a ‘perfect storm’ of challenges through competition from out-of-town retail, retail concentration, consumer behaviour changes (Millington *et al.*, 2018; Parker *et al.*, 2017) and, more recently, Covid-19. Local high streets – referred to as ‘district centres’ in UK planning practice, or ‘main streets’ in the USA – are small agglomerations of businesses and services providing everyday needs for local neighbourhoods. Typically, they accommodate at least one food supermarket, convenience goods, and services such as a library, personal care, cafés and restaurants (Millington *et al.*, 2020). Although distinct from the range and scale of offer found in larger town and city centres, they face similar challenges; as Thomas and Bromley (2003: p.48) note, many smaller centres are in a ‘spiral of decline’. In a context of austerity, it is becoming incumbent for local stakeholders to take greater responsibility for managing high street change. However, there remains spatial disparity in terms of local capacity, together with little guidance about how local government can support local high streets.

This paper draws on engaged scholarship research (2016-2020) about the ‘wicked problem’ of high street regeneration in Manchester, UK. Led by academics from The Institute of Place Management (based at Manchester Metropolitan University) in partnership with

Manchester City Council (MCC; the local authority/municipality), the project aimed to create an evidence base to underpin new city-wide policy. Furthermore, whereas much academic attention has been given to the vitality and viability of larger centres (e.g., Parker *et al.*, 2017), smaller high streets remain underexplored. The project, therefore, also addresses this academic lacuna. Table I maps research stages against Van de Ven's (2018) diamond model. Regarding *problem formulation*, the 'wicked problem' being tackled, project objectives and deliverables were derived through discussions between the interdisciplinary academic research team (with backgrounds in consumer research, marketing, place management and geography) and senior representatives from MCC. Indeed, Bechara and Van de Ven (2007: p.68) explain how engaged scholarship does not subscribe to a single underlying research philosophy; but is instead focused on making real-world impact through a pluralistic perspective 'engaging people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives...', which often 'requires communicating across different philosophical perspectives' (ibid: p.37) to make positive change happen, with flexibility and compromise therefore paramount.

The *research design* was inspired by the High Street UK 2020 project (Ntounis and Parker, 2017), and involved a collaborative agreement between the academic researchers and local authority, undergirding Pain's (2004) call for shared ownership of research in participatory methodologies. First, given footfall (pedestrian counting) is an important measure of high street performance (Mumford *et al.*, 2020), automated counters were installed in 10 of Manchester's high streets by retail intelligence specialists Springboard, working with MCC to provide a robust evidence base for measuring centre performance, and annual activity patterns. The academic team shared footfall analysis during stakeholder workshops and through project reports. Importantly, MCC officers were trained in how to access and analyse the data through an online dashboard, to continue sharing insights with local stakeholders beyond the project.

Second, in-depth studies were conducted with five local high streets - Chorlton, Gorton, Harpurhey, Northenden, and Withington - with a rationale for centre selection developed between the academic researchers and MCC, and later approved by the District Centres Sub-Group - a limited-life committee established and chaired by democratically elected members who provided project oversight and scrutiny. Initially, the academics undertook independent observations - 'place quality audits' - in each centre, benchmarking them

against the '25 priorities' for high street vitality and viability developed by Parker *et al.* (2017). This stage enabled us to build up a level of familiarity with each place, ahead of direct engagement with communities. This involved workshops attended by 10-40 stakeholders including elected members, traders, housing associations, property owners, civic society members, and residents. Indeed, group discussions are recognised as a useful method for bringing people together and facilitating honest exchanges (Bergold and Stefan, 2012). Content devised by the academic researchers, and approved by MCC, involved an initial presentation by the academic lead outlining structural change impacting high streets, alongside localised findings from footfall analysis and place quality audits. Proceeded by interactive tasks, requiring participants to draw on local insights to identify factors impacting their high street. The workshops were designed to generate a shared understanding of high street challenges, and nurture consensus about what to do next. Finally, meetings between the academic researchers and Neighbourhood Teams for each location were held to collaboratively form workshop attendance lists and gain additional insight into current issues and developments. Project findings were presented to the District Centres Sub-Group and Economic Scrutiny Committee during public town hall meetings, before being made available in report format to the general public via MCC's website.

The above activities informed *theory building* by developing understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing Manchester's local high streets. Such insights subsequently facilitated *problem solving* by harnessing local insights to collaboratively develop 'quick wins' for revitalising each centre and establish longer-term objectives. This is important since paralysis can often accompany wicked problems, whereas 'quick wins' can generate momentum by creating incremental progress through fast and easy changes to gain some early 'victories' (Termeer and Dewulf, 2019).

We now outline our first-hand experiences using engaged scholarship through three thematic areas: partnership working, research impact, and publishing.

[Table 1 around here]

Partnership working

A criticism levelled at academics is that they sometimes ‘parachute’ into a situation, impart their knowledge, and then quickly disappear. Pain and Kindon (2007) suggest this extractive approach fails to dismantle knowledge hierarchies, and can generate suspicion about academic motives within non-academic groups (Bergold and Stefan, 2012; Mistry *et al.*, 2015; Piacentini *et al.*, 2019). Engaged scholarship, however, can potentially generate trust and ongoing relationships with research partners, since it tends to span a longer time-frame than traditional research (Barbour *et al.*, 2017; Bergold and Stefan, 2012). In our case, the project involved several years of dialogue between ourselves and local government officers, neighbourhood teams, and local elected members from MCC. In engaged scholarship, these partnerships can often be rekindled (Barbour *et al.*, 2017), contrasting with the need to carefully create ‘exit plans’ in traditional participant-researcher studies (Franco and Yang, 2021). The construction of ongoing relationships with external partners not only helped to mitigate any initial distrust, but also meant MCC and the academic team were well-placed to successfully bid for European funding to extend the existing work by several years.

Furthermore, rather than imposing top-down solutions from the local authority or academics, as would be the case in public consultations and consultancy projects, engaged scholarship provides a channel for local stakeholders to work alongside policy and research teams to mutually devise tailored and viable solutions to local challenges- in our case, high street regeneration. This local insight is important since all places, including high streets, are unique and dynamic, meaning one-size-fits-all solutions often fail (Parker *et al.*, 2017).

Engaged scholarship, therefore, was central to building trust and reciprocity, by involving people confronted by societal challenges in the co-production of knowledge (Pain, 2004).

We attained this contextual understanding through ongoing dialogue with MCC officers, regular updates to the District Centres Sub-Group, and stakeholder workshops. This on-the-ground insight was used to inform the tailored recommendations provided in project reports. For instance, in Northenden local stakeholders identified the need to build on the centre’s existing - but overlooked - strengths (i.e., riverside location) and heritage (i.e., heron symbol); local insight which was integrated into a recommended *The Riverside Village* ‘rebranding’ strategy. The validation of community ideas by the academic team helped to

strengthen a sense of ownership and enthuse local stakeholders to take actions they had previously not considered or perhaps thought unviable.

Yet since engaged scholarship comprises multiple methods and voices, conflict is commonplace (Van de Ven, 2018; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). As Pain and Kindon (2007: p.2809) observe, participatory research involves ‘...openness, emergence, surprise, tensions, and irreconcilability that often make up the process of co-researching with non-academics’. For Van de Ven (2018) conflict is not necessarily a major hindrance, since he argues much learning about a phenomenon is borne out of debate and contrasting ideas, with ‘intellectual arbitrage’ (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006) important for leveraging diverse perspectives. Given these inevitable tensions, we experienced varying degrees of success in using engaged scholarship to learn from those embedded in each place, reflecting the different histories of partnership working and capacity levels. Whilst some places demonstrated great willingness to collaboratively address local problems, in others, workshops were poorly attended and there was less enthusiasm to carry forward any recommendations. Ultimately, high street success and resilience is dependent on local leadership and networks; yet, as we found, places have differing – and in some cases limited – structures to enable proactive local leadership (Peel and Parker, 2017).

Consequently, it is important during engaged scholarship to factor in time to build understanding and respect between project partners (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006), and shift perceptions of academics from ‘foreigners’ to ‘allies’ (Bergold and Stefan, 2012). However, we advise engaged scholars to be prepared at the outset for how this approach is dependent on stakeholder input to generate actionable insights (Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2018) - which can vary considerably - by creating participatory methods to inspire greater partnership working. Ultimately, engaged scholarship has the potential to be an effective participatory approach; but it may fail to produce desired outcomes if partners do not fulfil their commitment to the project.

Impact and its limits

Engaged scholarship is a recognised approach to creating real world impact (Ntounis and Parker, 2017), which universities are increasingly concerned about given they now gain recognition and income for impact through the UK’s national research assessment exercise (McCormack, 2011; Ozanne *et al.*, 2017). This emphasis on impact, however, stands at odds

with how research is traditionally valued by institutions, where there remains a focus on 'scientific impact' (Jaakkola and Vargo, 2021), and career progression is dependent on publishing in top-tier outlets. Top-tier papers may contain high quality world-class research, but often are inaccessible to non-academic partners, reflecting the 'knowledge-transfer problem' (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). Accordingly, Tourish (2020: p.105) observes how academia can often '...build barricades to keep readers out rather than open doors to invite them in', through an opaque academic writing style. Without costly open-access agreements, much research remains behind expensive paywalls or confined within extraordinarily priced books.

Yet, whilst impact is often considered at the end of traditional research through dissemination strategies (McCormack, 2011), real-world issues run through engaged scholarship. For example, gathering evidence to inform a city-wide policy response for supporting local high streets was integrated into our project contract and deliverables from the outset. Subsequently, our final policy recommendations to strengthen local networks to enact change, align placemaking interventions around the '25 priorities' for high streets (Parker *et al.*, 2017), and monitoring and sharing data, were approved by the District Centres Sub-Group and later endorsed by the higher Economic Scrutiny Committee. This enabled senior officers to create new policy guidance in Manchester's Local Plan – a statutory document setting out planning and area-based development policies embedding the notion of local collaboration. In one location, the local partnership network developed a regeneration framework incorporating our underpinning research. Hence, our project to some extent helped to change understandings about high streets at a city policy level. With our methodological approach considered a successful model of engagement, our policy impact has since gone beyond the local to inform a national programme of support offered to English local authorities through the UK government's High Streets Task Force (2021).

Moreover, engaged scholarship can offer insights which are perhaps more comprehensible to multiple audiences and actionable in practice. Through working with non-academic partners, we began to translate and communicate in ways which were embedded in the language and practices of place-based stakeholders, rather than those of academia. This was achieved by drawing on the aforementioned '25 priorities' (Parker *et al.*, 2017) to frame stakeholder discussions, workshops, and project recommendations; a framework which

originally stemmed from discussions with UK town centre practitioners to ensure it was actionable in practice. Subsequently, businesses in Withington created a traders' association who together formed a 'Withington by Night' event comprising late night shopping and entertainment, as 'activity hours' and 'networks' – two of the '25 priorities' (Parker *et al.*, 2017) - were communicated by researchers as impactful factors within local control. This resulted in a footfall uplift compared to a normal Friday night, with local traders reporting record takings, thus signalling how an engaged approach can also potentially support positive impacts for places researched with.

Unfortunately, this was not the case in all the places researched with, as capacity to effect local change through community-led place leadership varied greatly. Consequently, an engaged approach perhaps works best in terms of generating positive societal change if there is a range of committed stakeholders willing to act on the recommendations co-produced through the research. Where this capacity was low, or even absent, we could only recommend the municipality led on strengthening community networks, signalling how it could be important to directly build capacity-building activities into place-based engaged scholarship projects, to ensure they have greater potential to generate real-world impact.

Publishing perils

As outlined above, we have generated real-world impact through engaged scholarship, which has been written up for two impact case studies for REF2021. Results have also been disseminated via a research website, blog posts (Millington *et al.*, 2020), research seminars and conferences, a case study video, media outputs, and through using real-world project examples in teaching (Paynter, 2014). However, we have experienced challenges in publishing from our study.

We first encountered difficulties disseminating the research through final project reports, due to the political sensitivities involved in researching places with local government. For example, our publishing timeline was pushed back multiple times due to a clash between organising community workshops and the scheduling of local elections. Our experiences thus reflect the 'temporal clash' (Barbour *et al.*, 2017) or 'time incongruity' (Piacentini *et al.*, 2019) between academia and practice. In the UK, the time between the announcement of an election and election day is referred to as a 'period of sensitivity'. During this time, there are strict rules on the use of public resources by elected politicians and government officers.

Subsequently, we had to be sensitive to the concerns of local politicians about engaging in community workshops in the run-up to local elections, which in some cases meant delaying our research until well after local elections had been decided.

Furthermore, reflecting how issues around representation are particularly pertinent in engaged scholarship (Pain, 2004), the dissemination process also involved long back-and-forth processes of submitting draft reports to local government officers and elected members for review, feedback, and eventual sign-off for publishing in the public realm. This meant we were at times pulled in different directions, reflecting the ‘dance of the academic’ (Fuller and Kitchen, 2004, cited in Mistry *et al.*, 2015), necessitating us to balance our academic integrity with requirements of ensuring any outputs conformed to a steer not to present the local authority or centres in an overtly negative light, or to present recommendations which the local authority might be unable to fulfil. In contrast with the assumption that ‘industry time’ runs faster than ‘academic time’ (Barbour *et al.*, 2017), these additional levels of project scrutiny sometimes slowed project momentum, reduced our editorial control, and diluted our capacity for critical analysis.

Second, we have encountered difficulties writing our project up for academic publication. Even in writing this article, we have been particularly sensitive to how we are presenting the places and partners involved to minimise any disruption to our research partnerships. The outputs stemming from engaged scholarship often look different to academic publications written up from traditional research, and hence they are not always fully valued by universities (Boyer, 1996; Holland *et al.*, 2010). Indeed, the struggles of publishing within ‘top’ academic outlets have been recognised even for traditional academic research:

We are required to dodge the bullet of desk rejection, overcome the hurdle of reviewer comments, and crawl through a long process of multiple revisions... Submitting a paper to a top journal seems akin to becoming a hostage, with rejection (i.e., termination) the ultimate sanction for disobedience (Tourish, 2020: pp.103-104).

Such challenges arguably become exacerbated within engaged scholarship, since local issues are foregrounded over academic problems and theory gaps. In our case, supporting local high streets took precedence over academic theory development. Yet, as Robinson and Hawthorne (2018: p.278) explain, ‘the traditional academic reward system... puts the highest value on individual, in-depth, theory-based research that expands knowledge within

a specific field'. Although we took a systematic approach to collecting data across the centres, our research did not unfold neatly; but unfurled in an iterative way, with flashes of insight often arising from project partner meetings and discussions. Moreover, we had to adapt our methods to produce data understandable and actionable by local authorities and communities, such as interactive workshop activities; rather than using traditional data collection methods more readily written up for systematic analysis and publication, such as the verbatim interview. This approach jars with academic publications that often present neat, polished accounts of the academic research process, '...cleaned of all the vagueness, slipperiness, contradiction, ambivalences, and unpredictability...' (Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton, 2009: p.663). Therefore, we now call for academia to further recognise engaged scholarship outputs and activities, rather than placing so much value on 4* journal articles.

Conclusions

To conclude, through drawing on research into Manchester's local high streets, we argue for greater use of engaged scholarship (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006) to research places in marketing. Our engaged scholarship project involved working in partnership with senior officers from Manchester City Council and other place-based stakeholders and brought benefits such as forming tailored solutions to place-based problems, developing trust and ongoing research partnerships, and generating real-world impact. We subsequently make two main contributions to marketing and qualitative methodologies.

First, we mapped our project against Van de Ven's (2018) diamond model of engaged scholarship, which includes problem formulation, theory building, research design, and problem solving. However, we call for this model to more explicitly recognise how research governance is also integral, particularly when working with public bodies. In traditional academic studies, researchers must adhere to ethical and institutional codes of conduct and are guided by their professional integrity. However, we navigated a parallel layer of research governance, where interim findings were subject to scrutiny by elected councillors during public meetings. Any documentation we produced and all meeting minutes, reports and even slide presentations had to be signed off by local politicians before being deposited in an open access repository. Such transparency is a fundamental requirement in projects funded by public money. Subsequently, researchers should respect how non-academic institutions might have their own research governance protocols. In our case, protocols

which carried significant weight given scrutiny was provided by democratically elected officials with a mandate to serve the citizens of Manchester. Through explicitly including this aspect in the diamond model, researchers may be better prepared for these additional levels of research scrutiny, in terms of creating achievable project milestones and negotiating complex relationships with research partners.

We are not, however, suggesting engaged scholarship is a 'silver bullet' (Holland *et al.*, 2010) or 'golden standard' (Ntounis and Parker, 2017). We have also highlighted some of the challenges experienced, including differing stakeholder engagement levels, conflicts and tensions, and dissemination issues. We also acknowledge how different qualitative approaches remain valuable for projects researching about places, which we continue to use ourselves. Yet like Van de Ven (2018), we recognise the significance of engaged scholarship for tackling highly complex societal problems, some of which marketing academics are well-placed to help address, such as sustainable consumption, designing age-friendly consumption spaces, and over-tourism. The latter, for example, is another multi-faceted problem requiring multi-partner approaches to resolve through collaborative research (e.g., academics, local government, transport providers, travel industry representatives and businesses, Destination Marketing Organisations etc.) Broad and strategic responses to regulate tourism will have specific effects on particular places, especially where local people are reliant on this trade. Policy solutions, therefore, will need to be carefully negotiated with a range of place-based stakeholders, drawing parallels with our high street research, where engaged scholarship helped devise local responses to structural change.

There is a growing impact agenda in academia (Jaakkola and Vargo, 2021), including in business schools. In a recent editorial of the *Journal of Consumer Research*, Schmitt *et al.* (2022: p.755) recognise the 'growing call for consumer research to get out of the ivory tower and address a growing list of important managerial and societal concerns...'

Marketing academics are already addressing pressing societal issues, most notably those working within the area of TCR (Davis *et al.*, 2016). Yet we contend the academy is not fully supportive of engaged scholars (Boyer, 1996; Robinson and Hawthorne, 2018), as reflected through promotion and tenure criteria, research workload allocations, and academic publication conventions. However, the fluid and iterative nature of engaged scholarship

often deviates from the methodical stages of conventional academic research.

Unanticipated meetings and unplanned phone calls, evening workshops and committee meetings required not only a flexible approach, but also took up a great deal of time. The life of everyday communities moves in stages and cycles far removed from the schedules and deadlines structuring life in universities. The staging of our research was affected by the need for community groups to meet external funding deadlines, local authority commitments to planning consultations, the scheduling of committees and scrutiny groups, the availability of elected members, and constraints placed on local traders, who could only really participate in research activities after closing time.

Consequently, we call for academic institutions to better acknowledge such realities if they are committed to supporting engaged scholars. First, we suggest research impact should be more explicitly recognised in research workload allocations (as our own institution has during the process of writing this paper), which often remain orientated around top-tier publications and external income targets. Instead, engaged scholars need time to deliver impact activities which are often not directly funded through external projects or accounted for in workload allocations. From our experience, this involves organising and speaking at non-academic events; media appearances; responding to parliamentary calls for evidence; writing non-academic outputs (e.g., blogs, podcasts, *The Conversation* articles etc.); applying for impact awards; gathering impact evidence and writing impact case studies. Regarding the latter, given it is difficult to keep track of, measure and evidence research impact (Ozanne *et al.*, 2017), we have since developed a process to track five key areas of – or ‘pathways’ to – impact: academic citations, speaking events, media appearances, on-the-ground change, and policy impact, whereby an impact presentation is delivered monthly by the first author to the research team, all of which takes time. Consequently, universities who promote themselves as having value to society, might recognise how researchers need time and financial support to generate both impact and the pathways to impact.

Second, we recommend institutions offer further training and development opportunities on becoming an engaged scholar, where early and mid-career researchers can learn from those with experience in this area. This might include training around developing understanding of the policy landscape at a national and local level, writing for – and

presenting to - non-academic audiences, speaking to the media, and how to write and collect evidence for impact case studies.

Finally, we would encourage a move away from a lone researcher approach, to cultivating lab-based approaches to doing social science research, whereby early and mid-career researchers can become immersed in a supportive research environment which routinely involves them in external engagement work. Again, from our experience, working with places is complex and multifaceted, requiring a team-based approach. This change to working practices might be coupled with flatter and more networked internal research structures to enable greater cross-faculty and interdisciplinary working, which is central to engaged scholarship, to create an institutional culture around doing impactful research.

We hope the above will better support academics and non-academic partners to mutually address the wicked problems facing society and marketing practice today.

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