

The motivation for this special issue is driven by current debates in marketing publications (Brennan and Fry, 2016; Domegan *et al.*, 2016; Dibb, 2014) and at conferences (Gordon *et al.*, 2016; ISM conference, 2015, 2016) that have called for the broadening and deepening of social marketing scholarship and practice to engage social change agendas. Much of this critique has concentrated on the limitation of social marketing's narrow, individual focus. In response, a new stream of interest and argument has been mobilised around systems thinking and relational logic perspectives in social marketing. Taking up these perspectives, however, requires social marketers to reflect on the multiplicity of stakeholders needed to achieve positive social change outcomes, beyond a myopic consumer focus (Brennan *et al.*, 2016). Typically, two critical points are raised when systems thinking is engaged: explication of “wicked problems” and discussion about the actions and interactions of industry – more bad, than good – that influence social change outcomes. Finding solutions to wicked problems has reached a pinnacle in social marketing; this has been evidenced most recently by postings on the new social marketing listserv about “super-wicked problems” and about the capacity of social marketing to address significant environmental problems like climate change (Carvalho, 2017). Whilst these discussions demonstrate the strong interest within the academy to tackle problems beyond individual behaviour change and to engage thinking about the complexity and sustainability of social change actions, it also raises questions about participation and collaboration. More specifically, it advances discussion and debate about who is “allowed” or needed to participate in social change agendas when social marketing is the foregrounded social change approach.

A significant proportion of the current discussion about social marketing “problems” has been largely uncritical reflections of the types of “problems” social marketing can/should address. Our discussions have been hindered because we focus on identifying the types of consumers and other stakeholders involved in creating the “problem” and how targeted individuals and sometimes communities, can be part of the solution. This brings us to our second motivation for this special issue; that is, to encourage scholars in the social marketing academy to take a more critical approach to examining stakeholder collaborations and partnerships – both industry and regulatory – in social marketing programs. Specifically, we ought to initiate and create conversation via this special issue, about the role and influence of industry in social marketing. In doing so, we seek to open a path to a more nuanced and progressive discussion about “industry” that moves beyond the generalised accounts of a singular “industry”, to be replaced by multi-dimensional and context-specific explorations about the value of industry resources, collaborations and partnerships in engaging with social change agendas. We argue that the social marketing academy's current reflection on industry participation treats it as a “monolith” and typically posits solutions to social problems that are premised on the exclusion of industry (Brennan *et al.*, 2016). Aligned with this discussion is also a more critical reflection on the role and influence of regulation and how regulatory structures either enhance or inhibit sustainable social change outcomes.

The papers assembled in this special issue challenge the extant thinking on the disparate “streams” of thought in social marketing, which take-up either an upstream or downstream approach to social change. The papers showcase conceptual thinking and new ideas about social change programs based on empirical evidence, which can move social marketing



---

theorisation, research and program evaluations of wicked problems beyond taken-for-granted assumptions and theoretical orthodoxies. The broader project of this special issue is to strengthen discussion of broadening perspectives on social marketing theory and practice, as initiated by other social marketing scholars (Brennan and Fry, 2016; Domegan and Harris, 2017; Kennedy, 2016). At the same time, we also bring these broadening perspectives together to demonstrate how they can relate and co-exist in an agenda for social change.

### Overview of the papers

The call for papers for this special issue of the *Journal of Social Marketing* invited contributors interested in identifying and explaining the role of social marketing in solving social problems and in detailing how social marketing technologies can be applied to engage with industries, governments and partners to foster sustainable societal benefit. The collected papers reflect two styles in scholarly writing: invited commentaries from authorities in the field and competitive papers that responded to the open call for papers. The invited commentaries from leading scholars in the marketing and social change domains are aimed at promoting discussion and critique of the role of industry (and other stakeholders) in social change management. As industry participation in social marketing programs is considered a controversial practice by some in the social marketing community, we believe the use of commentaries from thought leaders in social marketing will bring authority and generate further interest in this special issue. The commentators were asked to present their arguments for and against contentious products, such as tobacco and/or alcohol, or the marketing of fast foods and confectionary. To ensure that the high standards set by the *Journal of Social Marketing* were maintained, all submissions were desk-reviewed by the Guest Editors to ascertain their relevance to the theme of the special issue and their academic rigour. Once this process had taken place, successful submissions were sent to at least three reviewers, who undertook a blind review of the papers. The invited commentaries were also blind-reviewed. The reviewers are to be commended for working within tight time frames and providing expert and generous reviews for all submissions. The exception to this process was the paper by Thompson, Previte, Kelly and Kelly, which was submitted to the Editor-in-Chief for processing and underwent an external, independent, as well as double-blind peer review.

The first paper in this special issue, an invited commentary from Janet Hoek, directly addresses the question of industry participation in social marketing. Hoek applies the concepts of market justice and social justice as a useful framework for examining the role of industry. Her argument is that market justice, while being a libertarian model, also assumes that markets will respond to consumers' needs and that if consumers need health, then the market will respond. However, she also points out that "because harm does not always manifest immediately – it took decades for the causal link between smoking and many illnesses to be documented – market justice may occur too slowly to protect consumers". As a consequence, she proposes a social justice perspective be brought to bear on social marketing campaigns, whereby government and citizen interests can be made to overrule commercial imperatives. Drawing on a topical and interesting example of electronic nicotine delivery systems, she questions the role and motive of tobacco companies in promoting these products in the market as a means to shifting or substituting smoking behaviour. In drawing a conclusion to her commentary, Hoek makes the point that tobacco occupies an unequivocal status in the marketplace as it cannot be used without causing harm. She explains that it is consequently difficult to draw generalisation from marketing of tobacco to other products. Her thoughtful argument should motivate social marketers working with or

in specific industries to bring evidence and critique to the roles they engage in for supporting positive social change.

The second paper, an empirical piece from Holly Thompson, Josephine Previte, Sarah Kelly and Adrian Kelly, responds to the issue of industry partnership and sponsorship and the specific challenges in the managing of the relationship between alcohol and sport in community club settings. Thompson's research addresses the issue of how community sport clubs manage alcohol regulation and at the same time, position themselves as "Health Promoting Sport Clubs" to attract new participants and increase club appeal to local communities. Her research reports on a series of interviews with club managers and examines the macro, meso and micro-level influences on decision-making about alcohol sales in sport clubs. The findings outline the tensions that club managers face in overcoming the alcogenic environment that prevails in community sport clubs. She argues that Australia's multipronged regulatory and policy interventions targeted at club settings introduce a range of challenges for the volunteer administrators of sport clubs and she also demonstrates the complexities faced by club administrators in translating and communicating policy initiatives. At the same time, Thompson remains optimistic that the challenges are not insurmountable and, as such, suggests policy-related strategies to foster change, including the need for a greater awareness of the demands placed on volunteers and sporting clubs in relation to regulations on the responsible management of alcohol. In short, she contends that policy which is not sufficiently resourced is ineffective. Thompson's paper also demonstrates the value of embracing a multi-level analysis of social change processes – micro-meso-macro – and reveals that a multi-level analysis can inform the conceptualisation of a suitable framework that can then be applied to address the wicked problem in sport (Westberg, *et al.*, 2017). In these respects, she indicates productive areas for future research in both social marketing and sports management.

Michael Polonsky's invited commentary, which follows Thompson's paper, provides an argument for the role of corporate social marketing in fostering greater social good. However, he points out that concepts such as the "greater social good" are contestable and malleable, reminding us that social marketing campaigns in developing countries may simultaneously produce positive and negative outcomes. For example, they may result in improved quality of life for consumers while also undermining local cultural practices. This complexity, he says, renders assessing the overall impact of social marketing campaigns problematic. Polonsky's important contribution is to offer a model by which we can consider the corporate-society marketing interface. His typology can be applied to assess the influence between corporate and social impacts that can be categorised by either positive or negative outcomes for firm/industry and society. He provides a win-win positive-positive example, that is, the marketing of soaps and the establishment of sanitation in developing countries. In such circumstances, corporates produce positive outcomes and profits and societies benefit as a result. However, he also cautions that corporations can have a negative impact when they operate under the guise of social marketing; that is in situations in which what is practised is not social marketing but merely social washing. Polonsky's conceptualisation contributes to the debate about the role of corporates within social marketing settings and provides a useful understanding of where specific industry actors can make positive contributions and where caution is required. He argues that corporate social marketing is not inherently positive or negative; rather, to assess its efficacy, social marketers need to ask how effective the actions are in bringing about behaviour change. By finishing with a question, Polonsky challenges social marketers to move away from discussions of industry that frame it in monolithic terms. Further, he provides a tool – the

'corporate-society marketing interface' which can be applied to examine and document the specificity of an industry group's actions and their social benefit outcomes for society.

The next paper in the special issue, by Geoff French, Rebekah Russell-Bennett and Rory Mulchay, draws definitional boundaries on for-profit participation in social marketing. The authors disagree with the term "corporate social marketing", arguing that social marketing cannot be undertaken by profit-driven corporations. Instead, they assert that social marketing must remain in the hands of non-profit and public organisations. Their paper shares Polonsky's line of argument in examining the specific activities of industry actions and investigating how social marketers can work with industry to achieve and sustain positive social change outcomes. The title of the paper, "To travel fast, travel alone, if you want to travel far, travel together", draws on the metaphor of travel to explain the possibilities and necessary interrelationship between businesses and individuals that can be fostered to achieve social change in social marketing campaigns. French and colleagues contribute rich theoretical insight to the debate on business participation and demonstrate the meso-level marketing interactions that can evolve from planning to co-create value with for-profit organisations through leveraging a range of resource-integration activities. They note the contestability of their argument because for-profit organisations are viewed negatively by some social marketers and as a harmful competitor by others. In demonstrating approaches to collaboration, French and colleagues propose four dimensions of resources, which can be integrated to co-create value that addresses societal problems. These are the cognitive, labour, economic and network resources. Their paper makes a contribution to social marketing theory by further conceptualising value co-creation at higher levels in the ecosystem and demonstrating the meso-level resource-sharing activities that make it credible for social marketers to engage with for-profit organisations to create social change.

Walter Wymer's invited commentary continues the line of debate on how social marketers can respond to industry influences. His reflections continue earlier insights he developed as part of his original "pyramid model" (Wymer, 2011) as the "planning permit" for the type of social marketing activity required in terms of public health communication campaigns. He points out that public health communication campaigns are usually underfunded and therefore, the weight of power between corporates and social marketers is unbalanced. In these cases, he argues that political intervention is important for success. Wymer provides social marketers with a pragmatic framework for deriving political support for specific activities, especially in relation to smoking reduction. His model of thinking is useful for decision-makers aiming to affect public policy with their social marketing campaigns, but he also notes that governments may be reticent in taking action on the community's behalf if such action is detrimental to corporate concerns. Importantly, he warns that social marketers and public health officials negate their own effectiveness when they continue to apply a methodology that is useful in a specific context, to other contexts which are possibly less appropriate. Wymer believes that social marketers can occupy multiple positionalities – educators, behavioural scientists and activists. His "planning pyramid" thus focuses social marketers on extending their purview from the individual to the other environmental actors that are required when creating interventions to effect positive social change.

Christine Domegan, Patricia McHugh, Brian Biroscak, Carol Bryant and Tanja Calis's contribution to the special issue demonstrates how social marketing thinking is transitioning from linear systems model applications, which is evidenced in this issue by Wymer's pyramid model, towards non-linear systems thinking, to unravel wicked problem scoping and definition of social marketing. Drawing on an illustrative case approach,

Domegan and colleagues suggest three non-linear causal modelling techniques to explain the complex system of interactions that drive behaviour. They echo our own editorial sentiments as well as those of other contributors in positing that social marketing is becoming a richer and broader field in that its goal is not simply individual behavioural change but social good. In working towards social good, they argue for micro-meso-macro thinking, which appreciates all forms of influence and engagement with social marketing, as a transformative process involving multiple insights from multiple levels and layers of influence to effect social change. To achieve these ends, they advocate a new way of thinking about social change: one that is non-linear and includes a deep consideration of structures and processes. To demonstrate the application of systems thinking, they detail three non-linear causal modelling techniques that can be applied to unravel system complexities:

- (1) collective intelligence;
- (2) fuzzy cognitive mapping; and
- (3) systems dynamic modelling.

The use of these non-linear approaches moves thinking away from individuals and towards a relational and structural view of what they label a “socially evolving world”. In proposing these alternative techniques, they contend that this type of thinking also counters assumptions that intractable social problems can be resolved with a single campaign or policy. They argue that these case examples provide evidence of a bridge between linear and non-linear causality in wicked problem research because non-linear modelling approaches require greater levels of participatory decision-making that incorporate both loud and soft voices and provide agency to those who might be disadvantaged in other forms of intervention design.

The final paper in the special issue is the ultimate in “big picture” thinking. Sarah Duffy, Gavin Northey and Patrick van Esch extend and challenge social marketing systems thinking. They explicate social mechanisms theory in relation to the social collapse of Iceland that resulted from the global financial crisis in 2009. Their perceptive case analysis of the complex human behaviours within a social setting provides important lessons to social marketers about the power of advocacy and consumer citizenship, which can be mobilised to effect change through governance processes. Duffy and colleagues mount a persuasive rationale for the value of a systems perspective in understanding and countering wicked social problems, asserting that it opens up a focus on complexity that is otherwise absent in a framing based on the buyer–seller dyad. As such, they contribute to an area of social marketing that is under-researched. Given that social marketing is indeed about social mechanisms, as Duffy and her colleagues point out, it is a surprise that social mechanisms are not as prevalent in the theory of social marketing research. Their premise, that there are institutional and social logics that need to be overturned in order to bring about positive social change, is a thought-provoking insight for those of us seeking to find the tipping point in the social system that would enable such changes to occur. Duffy and colleagues make a strong claim in arguing that a macro perspective is required; however, it is the changes at the micro-level that need to occur to generate the macro-level change desired. The key contribution of this paper is a framework that social marketing researchers can use to identify and understand wicked problems within their planning horizons. Integral to the framework is a process to identify the “cogs and wheels” that comprise the system and the interactions between individuals and their environment and others. The ideas advanced in this concluding paper indicate the scope and extent of macro systems thinking in social

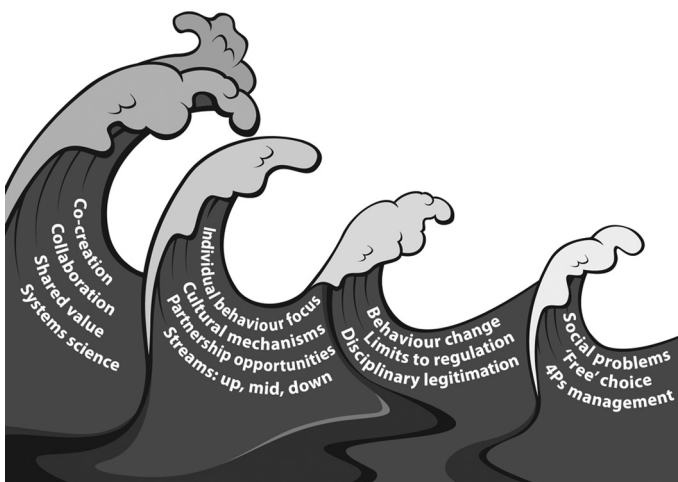
marketing. Indeed, it is not often that an entire country has the opportunity to change its complete system of logics as a result of a social and financial upheaval.

**Social marketing’s “waves of change”**

Collectively, the papers in this special issue provide evidence that social marketers are moving on from binary thinking about upstream and/or downstream social change and adopting alternative perspectives to advancing social change agendas. Figure 1 illustrates our view on how scholars with new ideas are “riding the waves” of this change in social marketing thinking and thereby strengthening the field of social marketing scholarship. Whilst the scholars contributing to this special issue reflect some of the long-standing debates and concerns about the role and impact of commercial marketing in social marketing, their reflections do not simply revisit concerns about Kotler’s 4Ps application to social change. Rather, they take up these well-rehearsed discussions in new ways, demonstrating the diversity of approaches by which social marketers are grappling with complexities and identifying alternative modes of addressing the social complexities in contemporary society through multi-level analysis and/or non-linear thinking.

Our own reflection on assembling this special issue is that, combined, the scholarly ideas presented demonstrate how a shared interest in finding solutions to complex problems opens up social change scholarship to inclusive and participatory problem-solving approaches. We hope that just like us, you too are energised by the breadth of perspectives presented in this special issue and by the efforts of scholars not simply to reproduce what we already know about addressing wicked social problems, but to reassess and reinvigorate conceptual frameworks and to challenge and subvert dominant orthodoxies in relation to social marketing’s engagement with entrenched and complex global concerns.

The ideas and evidence collected in this special issue show the trajectory of social marketing thinking, which is summarised in Figure 1. The figure illustrates that social marketing scholarship has moved on from an individual consumer focus and application of the 4Ps to a cause; and beyond legitimating social marketing as a process to guide individual behaviour change. Collectively, the scholarly ideas in this special issue demonstrate that social marketing is being applied to engage a multiplicity of actors and



**Figure 1.** Social marketing’s “waves of change”

actions, responds to considerations and issues related to working collaboratively with stakeholders, as well as demonstrates a strong interest in working with a range of marketplace actors to co-create shared value with communities, industries and government stakeholders involved in social change programs.

**Josephine Previte**

*UQ Business School, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, and*

**Linda Brennan**

*School of Media and Communication, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia*

### References

- Brennan, L. and Fry, M.L. (2016), "Guest editorial, transformations: social marketing and social change – macro, meso and micro perspectives", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 214-218.
- Brennan, L., Previte, J. and Fry, M.L. (2016), "Social marketing's consumer myopia", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 219-239.
- Carvalho, H. (2017), "Re: can social marketing tackle the super wicked problem of climate change?", Online discussion post, available at: [soc-mktg@googlegroups.com](mailto:soc-mktg@googlegroups.com)
- Dibb, S. (2014), "Up, up and away: social marketing breaks free", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 30 Nos 11/12, pp. 1159-1185.
- Domegan, C. and Harris, F. (2017), "Guest editorial", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 114-118.
- Domegan, C., McHugh, P., Devaney, M., Duane, S., Hogan, M., Broome, B.J., Layton, R.A., Joyce, J., Mazzonetto, M. and Piwowarczyk, J. (2016), "Systems-thinking social marketing: conceptual extensions and empirical investigations", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 32 Nos 11/12, pp. 1123-1144.
- Gordon, R., Russell-Bennett, R. and Lefebvre, R.C. (2016), "Social marketing: the state of play and brokering the way forward", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 32 Nos 11/12, pp. 1059-1082.
- ISM conference (2015), *World Social Marketing Conference, Rydges World Square Hotel, Sydney, (19-21 April 2015)*, available at: <http://wsmconference.com/sydney-2015/programme>
- ISM conference (2016), *ISM (International Social Marketing) Conference on "Societal Wellbeing", (25-27th September 2016), University of Wollongong, Wollongong*, available at: <http://wsmconference.com/sydney-2015/programme/>
- Kennedy, A.M. (2016), "Macro-social marketing", *Journal of Macromarketing*, Vol. 36 No. 3, pp. 354-365.
- Westberg, K., Stavros, C., Smith, A.C.T., Newton, J., Lindsay, S., Kelly, S., Beus, S. and Adair, D. (2017), "Exploring the wicked problem of athlete and consumer vulnerability in sport", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 94-122.
- Wymer, W. (2011), "Developing more effective social marketing strategies", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 17-31.