Social marketing ethical dilemmas: pursuing practical solutions for pressing problems

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Abstract
We discuss calls, and apparent support, for ethical resources to support social marketing practitioners, in the light of research findings from a study of actual ethical dilemmas encountered by social marketing practitioners and resources used to resolve them. We highlight nine key ethical challenges facing social marketers, and highlight the prominence of social marketers’ concerns about funders’ influence on social marketing activity. The low use of existing general resources indicates the need for social marketing-focused resources, the need to ensure that any resources developed offer practical decision-making support rather than broad general principles, and the need to advocate for an environment in which social marketers can do good-quality work.

Keywords
pursuing, dilemmas:, problems, ethical, pressing, marketing, social, solutions, practical

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Incentivizing Online Social Marketing Message Diffusion: A Conceptual Framework
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Abstract
In recent years social marketers have taken advantage of social media networks to promote positive social, environmental and health messages. With considerable research in viral marketing, few studies examine the impact of incentives for online message diffusion, also referred to here as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). More specifically, the crucial role of intrinsic motivations needs further investigation to fully understand online sharing behaviour within social media networks. This paper develops a conceptual framework to identify the main marketing, individual and network factors affecting online message diffusion and to clarify the role of incentives. Keywords: Social Media Networks, Social Marketing, Incentives, Diffusion.

Number: 97

Looking through a glass onion: A mixed method formative research case
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Justin Fidock
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Abstract
The purpose of formative research in social marketing is to understand the target audience to generate consumer insight, which in turn informs the development of more efficacious programs or initiatives. Focus groups, interviews or surveys, all of which are self-report methods, are most commonly used to gain this understanding in social marketing, which may constrain understanding and insight. This paper challenges social marketers to mix methods or use multiple methods and perspectives to generate a broader understanding of the consumer and the context in which they behave. A case study is used to demonstrate how mixed methods were used in a formative research study to inform the development of a program designed to change eating behaviour.

Number: 81

Moving Forward: Conceptualising the Social Marketing Value Chain
Abstract
Social marketing and new public health research pervasively focus on the problems and deficits of the social issue under consideration which, in turn, constrains solution opportunities. Extending Polonsky et al.’s (2003) Harm Chain the Social Marketing Value Chain (SMkVC) involves valuing the skills and knowledge of individuals, alongside connections and resources within communities and organisations, rather than maintaining a singular focus on the problems and deficits of the behaviour under consideration. The SMkVC contributes to social marketing theory by broadening the parameters within which solutions to social issues are viewed. To this end, we contribute to a developing conversation that seeks to open new perspectives for creating viable, relevant social change solutions.

Number: 7

Social Marketing Ethical Dilemmas: Pursuing Practical Solutions for Pressing Problems
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Abstract
We discuss calls, and apparent support, for ethical resources to support social marketing practitioners, in the light of research findings from a study of actual ethical dilemmas encountered by social marketing practitioners and resources used to resolve them. We highlight nine key ethical challenges facing social marketers, and highlight the prominence of social marketers’ concerns about funders’ influence on social marketing activity. The low use of existing general resources indicates the need for social marketing-focused resources, the need to ensure that any resources developed offer practical decision-making support rather than broad general principles, and the need to advocate for an environment in which social marketers can do good-quality work. Keywords: social marketing, ethics, ethical dilemmas, codes of ethics

Introduction
Over the last two decades, professional associations worldwide have faced increasing challenges in attracting and retaining members (Prideaux, 2005), especially where membership is not a requirement for professional practice (Wilson, 1997). It is therefore important, if the relatively new social marketing associations are to be perceived as representing the Social Marketing sectors worldwide, that the range of services offered are relevant to members’ needs. One need that has been identified is the provision of resources to help address ethical challenges in social marketing practice.

Given that social marketing activity aims to change behaviours in ways that benefit individuals, communities and / or society at large, it often surprises novices that ethical issues can arise. In fact some working in the sector advocate that social marketing can be value-neutral. (Dann, 2007), Others (with whom we agree) stress the value-ladenness of social marketing (Rossi and Yudell, 2012). Social marketing unavoidably incorporates values in many ways: in, for example, the definition of ‘desired’ behaviour, consideration of potential harms and benefits, issues of consent for, or legitimacy of, intervention (Guttman and Salmon, 2004: 537), and balancing of consequences and freedoms for individuals and communities or society as a whole (see, for example, Lefebvre, 2011).

There is a growing body of literature that documents wider ethical issues and unexpected impacts of interventions, including issues regarding targeting, segmentation, use of incentive schemes and the consequences of focusing on easy-to reach or influence groups rather than those with the greatest need, and the needs of low literate groups and minority groups and cultures (Newton et al., 2013; Eagle, 2008). And perhaps most fundamentally, there is the question of who should decide on any of these ethical issues (Callahan and Jennings, 2002). Social marketing professionals seem likely to face ethical dilemmas in their everyday work, particularly when working on contentious problems such as safe sex, immunization or genetic testing. These ethical challenges will to some degree overlap with those experienced in other sectors such as public health and environmental management. One answer to this could be the development of Codes of Ethics (French, 2013). Calls for codes of ethics (CoE) for Social Marketing and related fields such as health promotion have been made for over a decade (Sindall, 2002; Smith, 2001). While CoE are seen by some as a fundamental characteristic of a profession (Sha, 2011), we questioned whether they would be valued by members relative to other possible resources and, if there is strong support, how they would be used to address ethical challenges in the sector.

Academic papers
should be developed, communicated and enforced. We report on
pilot investigations in which we sought to answer two related
research questions:

1. What ethical dilemmas are faced by social marketers?
2. What ethical resources (including CoE) do they perceive to be
useful or not useful in addressing these dilemmas?

Methodology
We conducted two pilot studies of social marketing professionals.
The first was a web-based survey, circulated to all members of the
Australian Association of Social Marketing (AASM) and to the
European Social Marketing Association (ESMA). Web-based survey
methodology was chosen as the most cost-effective means of
contacting a widely dispersed population. Similar methodology was
used in the USA to determine support for the establishment of a
Social Marketing Association (Marshall & Sundstrom, 2010). The
Australian Association is relatively new and a 1-year membership is
offered as part of the biennial conference. As the survey was
conducted in a non-conference year, association membership was
low, at slightly over 50 (Russell-Bennett, 2014). The ESMA
membership was approximately 140 (French, 2014). This first
survey asked (using open ended questions) what ethical dilemmas
had actually been experienced by social marketers. Thirteen people
responded, and their specific ethical dilemmas were recorded; 46% of respondents were male and 54% female, drawn from six
countries. The authors jointly analysed these responses, combining
them inductively into categories. Respondents were also asked
whether ethics resources were used or would have been useful and
their support for the development of specific ethics resources. The
second pilot study was conducted at the July 2014 International
Social Marketing Conference held in Victoria, Australia. This used a
shorter, paper-based instrument, which asked respondents to
indicate their support for the development of specific ethics
resources. The conference had 120 registered attendees; 50
completed the survey (42% response rate). Results were then
combined with the responses from the 13 social marketers who had
reported encountering ethical dilemmas in the online study. Of the
combined data set, 77% of respondents were Australian. Of these
responders, 54% of respondents were academics, 24% from the
health sector, 8% held both academic and health-related positions,
9% held positions in the environment or local government sectors
and 5% identified themselves as being consultants who worked
across sectors. Slightly more than half (55%) were female and 45%
males.

Findings
The online survey
Respondents in the online survey were asked to list up to three key
ethical dilemmas they believe social marketers face (Table 1). We
grouped these into nine main ethical challenges (for social
marketing in general). Consistent with the literature, (Rossi and
Yudell, 2012; Lefebvre, 2011), the dominant concern related to how
social marketers navigate power relationships, and who gets to
define the problems that need to be addressed through social
marketing. Also dominant were concerns regarding fairness
(particularly in targeting), and concerns about communicating
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(useful or not useful in addressing these dilemmas?)

Table 1: Key ethical challenges facing the social marketing
profession (listed in order of frequency)

1. Navigating power: who gets to define problems, what is ‘good’ /
needed?
2. Maintaining epistemic standards / maintaining evidence-based
practice, demonstration of measurable behavioural impact
3. Fairness and targeting, including dealing with vulnerable groups
or avoiding difficult groups
4. Dual corporate interests / industry motives / unethical claiming of
marketing / advertising campaigns as social marketing
5. Respecting the autonomy of citizens / manipulation / paternalism / involuntary behaviour change
6. Maintaining standards for good-quality social marketing practice
(not social communication)
7. Research ethics
8. Working between high and low income countries/ alternative
approaches / neo-colonialism
9. Unintended consequences of behaviour change / harms

Finally, online respondents were asked to indicate what ethical
codes, guidance or advice was sought to resolve the dilemma they
faced. Only two respondents referred to a specific professional
code of ethics (ESOMAR and Market Research Society); two noted
more general implicit codes: “health promotion and code developed
by myself” and “general ethical code of act professionally and
ethically”. Three respondents noted the use of university-specific
ethics codes. Only two respondents were extremely satisfied with
the outcome of actions to resolve the dilemma, two were somewhat
satisfied, four somewhat dissatisfied and one extremely dissatisfied.
The remainder were unsure or did not provide feedback.

The lack of use of specific codes may indicate one or more of the
following. There may not have been an appropriate code or other
supporting resource material available, or respondents did not know
where to locate it. Alternatively, existing codes may not have been
of any use in providing guidance for pragmatic decisions regarding
solutions. Four respondents noted that specific social marketing
codes or guidelines would have been appreciated; one extended
this to a regulatory system. Given that the dominant ethical problem
experienced was the power of funders working to block good-quality
social marketing practice, the existence of social marketing-specific
resources may not have been sufficient to address many of the
challenges experienced. This suggests that—as one respondent
noted—it may be necessary to clarify the relationship between
“social marketing-inspired policy and ethical guidelines”.

The paper-based survey
The paper-based conference survey focused on the question of
what ethical resources would be most useful to social marketers.
Table 2 shows that respondents reported strong support for all five
types of ethical resources tested. Academic reported a slightly
higher level of support for using the academic literature, compared
with practitioners (mean 4.3 for academics, 3.6 for health
practitioners and 4.0 for environmental managers on a 5 point Likert
scale, with 5 = strongly support and 1 = do not support at all). Only
one respondent listed other resources that would be useful – conflict
of interest declarations, which they noted would be particularly
useful when dealing with commercial organisations.

Table 2: Support for Types of Ethical Resources (5 point Likert
scale, with 5 = strongly support and 1 = do not support at all)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific Social Marketing Ethics Code</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>1.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics training</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>.985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support person to contact</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics case studies</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>.935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic literature</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>1.112</td>
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Given the relatively high support for all of the options presented, this
may be best interpreted as a general desire for support and

(5 point Likert

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resources in the context of limited experience of any such support.

**Conclusion**

Methods and processes for moral reasoning have a long history, and there are a wide range of approaches to deliberation about practical ethical problems. Codes of ethics can be helpful rubrics to assist professionals facing practical dilemmas under time pressure. However they can never be sufficient to the task of ethical deliberation. If a CoE merely lists broad principles it will, in common with codes in other areas, “occupy the role of platitudinous platitudes” and be of little operational value (Malloy et al., 2009, p. 381). If a CoE is to be a living document with value as a decision-making support tool, the process of development will require “thoughtful debate” (Skubik & Stening, 2009), involve extensive consultation with, and co-creation by, social marketing practitioners, and the development of acceptable mechanisms for enforcement. Such deliberation would also be consistent with the moral values of transparency and accountability. Such process would undoubtedly be lengthy, but is potentially rewarding. In order to inform these deliberations, comparative cross-jurisdictional and cross-cultural research could be undertaken. This could gather lessons learnt by a range of professional bodies—in established professions such as medicine, law and accountancy, and related sectors such as health promotion and environmental management—when developing resources and compliance and regulatory mechanisms, and measuring effectiveness (Bull et al., 2012). However our findings suggest that other supports and resources would also be welcomed by social marketing professionals facing significant ethical dilemmas, a responsibility that could be taken up by social marketing professional organisations.(see, for example, Sha, 2011). The primary ethical dilemma the online respondents reported was being unable to do good-quality social marketing work because funders had intractable views about the nature of the problem and the solution. A code of ethics may be of limited value in addressing such a fundamental structural issue. This finding suggests that social marketing associations should not only develop a code of ethics, but also engage in the advocacy required to establish a just, transparent and open environment for the practice of good-quality social marketing.

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**Number: 79**

**The incorporation of Transformative Consumer Research principles within the ‘Cancer Good News’ social marketing project: A Case Study**

Lyn Phillipson1, Julie Hall1 and Leissa Pitts2

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**Abstract**

This paper takes a case study approach to model the use of Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) principles within the ‘Cancer Good News’ social marketing campaign. Overall, the paper highlights the value of TCR principles within the development of the intervention to reduce cancer stigma and fatalism and promote cancer screening within two culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. The case study suggests the potential for TCR to enhance community engagement and produce sustainable solutions within Social Marketing interventions when working with CALD communities, suggesting the need for further action to explore the benefits of TCR to address current cancer inequities.

**Number: 168**

**Ethnography and filmmaking for Indigenous anti tobacco social marketing**

Kishan Karrippanon, Datjarranga Garrawirtja, Kate Senior, Paul Kalfadellis, Vidal Narayan, Bryce McCoy

**Abstract**

The smoking rates of 82% in Aboriginal communities of North East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia are the highest in the country (Robertson et al. 2013). Macassan traders introduced tobacco as a trading commodity (Berndt, 1954) in Aboriginal communities in the 18th century and has since become part of culture. The influence of the Methodist Mission (Cole 1979) has also had a profound effect on tobacco consumption. Anti tobacco social marketing that is sensitive to Indigenous culture and history supports a more complex and gradual approach to reducing uptake amongst young people. The limitations of the Health Belief Model and the Theory of Planned Behaviour commonly used for social marketing in this context are due to the cultural value of tobacco in traditional reciprocal relationships and ceremonial practice. Through a combination of ethnography and filmmaking, this project was able to capture and showcase the cultural and historical factors of smoking in a format that is respectful to local culture, specifically in Indigenous anti tobacco social marketing. The use of ethnography and Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson 2005) for social marketing in this context, addresses the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings in a culturally relevant and conceptually meaningful manner. The