

People, Partnerships and Policy – Macrosocial Marketing Interventions During a National Crisis

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Introduction

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

The famous quote from Albert Einstein is relevant to all kinds of problems, and more so in the case of 'wicked problems.' Wicked problems are generally understood as complex crises devoid of straightforward solutions. Most of the national emergencies such as pandemics, flash floods, bushfire, climate change, or similar catastrophes are 'wicked problems', though not all are human-made. [Kelko \(2012\)](#) indicated that wicked problems are puzzling because of "incomplete or contradictory knowledge, the number of people and opinions involved, the large economic burden, and the interconnected nature of these problems with other problems."

A graphic example fresh in 2020 is the COVID-19 pandemic. The intricate nature of a wicked problem requires a broader, systemic and macro-level approach to contain its damaging corollaries and impacts. And any solutions developed should be flexible, multidimensional, innovative and comprehensive to absorb the complexities of the issues at hand. The roles and responsibilities of a Government dealing with wicked problems, therefore, should be strategic and broad-based. This short paper proposes some aspects of a macrosocial marketing approach as a mechanism to redress a 'wicked national or global crisis.'

What is macrosocial marketing?

[The Australian Association of Social Marketing \(AASM\)](#) asserts that "Social Marketing seeks to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches to influence behaviour that benefits individuals and communities for the greater social good." The focus of social marketing has been on individual behavioural change at the micro-level that benefits the society, such as quit smoking, avoid drunken driving, donate blood, vaccinate, etc., to name a few. However, changing behaviours during a national level crisis (a wicked problem) such as COVID-19 needs a macrolevel systems perspective, to understand its magnitude, let alone managing it. Hence, a macrosocial marketing perspective is proposed in this context.

[Kennedy \(2017, p347\)](#) suggested that "macro-social marketing is the use of social marketing – up, mid and downstream – to affect holistic, systemic change." The definition emphasises the application of social marketing at three levels of the social hierarchy, namely macro, meso, and micro. This approach is commonly known as [Multi-Level Perspective \(MLP\)](#). [Little, Lee and Nair \(2019, p167\)](#) indicated that MLP deconstructs "social systems into three levels, macro (or wider landscape), meso (or dominant modes of technologies and practices – termed 'regimes') and micro (or niches, where individuals and firms influence wider system change." Addressing a wicked problem calls for holistic perspectives from all three levels indicated in the MLP. In other words, the changes effected by macrosocial marketing warrant a 'systems thinking' orientation. [System thinking](#) posits that in a broader social system, everything is interconnected and interlinked. Hence, the effects of a wicked problem such as a national crisis infiltrate into different levels of the social hierarchy.

[Kennedy \(2016\)](#) proposed the use of all core marketing-mix elements while developing and implementing macrosocial marketing, such as Product (service), Promotions, Place and Price. She also proposed an additional three elements, People, Partnership and Policy in this connection. This paper, however, focuses on these additional three elements (People, Partnership and Policy) that we believe are more relevant in a national crisis.

People, Partnership and Policy

People management, fostering partnerships, and policy development are the essential trinities of macrosocial marketing when applied to a national crisis. And that is apparent during the times of the COVID-19. For instance, the countries or states where these three elements are coordinated well have controlled the pandemic to a great extent. A good example is Australia. Arguably, the United States of America is the polar opposite in this regard. [The New York Times](#) reported that the reasons for the epic failure in arresting the pandemic in the US are "a lack of effective travel restrictions; repeated breakdowns in testing; confusing advice about masks; a misunderstanding of the relationship between the virus and the economy; and inconsistent messages from public officials." One would easily attribute some of these reasons to the trio-elements of macrosocial marketing.

Managing a national crisis should be centrally coordinated by an appropriate national body such as the Emergency Management division of the [Ministry of Home Affairs](#) in Australia. The Emergency Management team should take the lead role in managing people, building partnerships and developing and implementing policies, thereby becoming the macrosocial marketer. A brief discussion of the three elements follows.

People

Any crisis management process needs a network of dedicated people to work in tandem with social marketers and policymakers. The critical people in the macrosocial marketing context are the service providers such as social marketers, the networks of volunteers, the aid workers, healthcare professionals, essential workers and the citizen groups at large. These essential providers of service coordinate with other stakeholders at macro, meso and micro levels. An inclusive people-oriented approach is necessary in this regard that calls for intense training, development and coordination of such service providers. Hence the relevance of macrosocial marketing. A case in point is the yeoman services of the [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee \(AHPPC\)](#) during the times of health emergencies. The committee is chaired by the Australian Chief Medical Officer and supported by five standing committees and an advisory group (macro-level). All state and territory level chief health officers are members of the committee (meso-level). In South Australia, the [chief public health officer](#) has three deputies to tackle the COVID-19 situation. The three deputies are in charge of coordinating the microlevel changes in their respective areas. It is essentially a macrosocial marketing system of people working at different levels of the Government that coordinates behavioural and other modifications to tackle a national health emergency.

Partnership

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the [Australian Federal Government](#) has had partnership agreements with 657 private and not-for-profit hospitals in Australia and is a good case in point. Government's partnership with [Universities and research organisations](#) for vaccine development is another example. However, the partnership should not end with such key stakeholder groups alone. The partnership should be extended to other institutions at all levels such as state governments, councils and districts, NGOs at the national and local levels, or any other organisations that are willing to cooperate during the times of crises. [The Royal Commission Report \(2020\)](#) on national natural disasters has recommended coordination and cooperation between different stakeholders to manage the crises effectively. The report emphasises the

need for fostering partnerships at all levels to tackle national-level disasters. It would be the responsibility of the national coordinating agency (the macrosocial marketer) to plan, develop and maintain such strategic partnerships at all three levels that deliver the desired change in the society.

Policy

Policy encompasses everything that a macrosocial marketer does. Policy development to tackle the crisis is the responsibility of the social marketer, ideally a federal agency. Policy development to tackle a national emergency, however, should be multidimensional. The macrosocial marketer develops policy at the macro-level and then coordinates with other national, state and micro-level policies to manage the crisis. For example, a COVID-19 federal policy should go hand in hand with the health policies of the federal and state governments, employment policies, job keeper policies, economic stimulus policies, disaster management policies and the like at all levels.

However, in a recent [study on COVID-19](#), the influence of national policies on the containment of the pandemic indicates that an early start with policy development and implementation is critical. Australian Government's [COVID-19 vaccination policy](#) is the most recent example of a macro-level policy that has broad strategic importance in managing the current crisis. The policy stipulates the roles and responsibilities of the federal, state and local governments in the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccination programme in the country. The policy coordinates with many macro-level regulatory bodies in the country, such as the National Immunisation Program (NIP), the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR). This initiative is reasonably early policy development to get the nation ready for the vaccine availability and administration in early 2021.

Conclusion

The three macrosocial marketing elements discussed in this paper are nothing novel to a public administration system when it is managing a crisis. However, a micromarketing approach provides the multi-level systems perspective in spearheading and coordinating these efforts. The discussion of microsocal marketing is never complete without discussing the core marketing mix elements, that is, product, promotion, place and price. However, the core marketing mix elements are relatively well-formed in the context of macrosocial marketing. The people, partnership, and policy elements of coordinated macrosocial marketing still need to be further conceptualised and practised in the context of a national or global crisis. This paper uses the context of COVID-19, and bushfires to a smaller extent, in the discussion for its currency and aptness as a national crisis. Similar wicked problems at international, federal and local levels can be managed effectively by the governments, ably supported by the non-governmental organisations, with a well-orchestrated macrosocial marketing approach. However, macrosocial marketing in the context of national crisis management still needs further conceptualisation and empirical evidence for its successful applications.



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