

Viewpoint Q&A

Associate Professor Lukas Parker

Can you tell us about yourself and your current role?

I am an associate professor in communication at RMIT University in Melbourne and [3C \(Communication and Change Co-Lab\)](#). I research into social marketing in the spaces of health and sustainability. I also lead the [National Date Labelling and Storage Advice](#) project, one of Fight Food Waste Cooperative Research Centre's many projects focused on Australia reducing its food loss and waste by 50% by 2030. Our project aims to work with governments and industry to build behavioural infrastructure to assist consumers to make better decisions about how they manage their food purchases, better store their food, and reduce household food waste.

What attracted you to social marketing?

I fell into it! Working as an information and communication advisor for a rural water and sanitation project in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, I quickly saw the limitations of merely communicating sanitation information. Telling children to wash their hands with soap so they wouldn't get sick after using newly installed school toilets would not cut it. We needed to work with teachers, parents, communities and local governments to facilitate broader community change, lowering barriers and making handwashing easy, fun and desirable. It was a huge challenge, but we improved health outcomes across over 100 communities.

What are the most satisfying parts of your work as a social marketing researcher?

The most satisfying part of my work is working on some really challenging and impactful projects with government and industry partners – especially when they give you the freedom to do your job. When you can see your research is



immediately feeding into meaningful campaigns and interventions that are happening right now is exciting.

Can you share with us a project you worked on that went particularly well?

Motorcycle crashes are a major cause of injury and death in Vietnam – particularly for children. Helmets are one effective and cheap way to reduce deaths and injuries from road crashes. [AIP Foundation](#) has made an outstanding contribution to changing how Vietnamese and Cambodians drive (ride) on the roads, from lobbying for helmet laws, road safety campaigns in schools and with police, and making helmets a normal part of driving. The fact that most Vietnamese motorbike riders now wear helmets is a testament to their unrelenting efforts. Most of my work with AIP foundation over the years has been supporting their monitoring and evaluation team to measure their impact, and their persistence and success inspire me.

In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges faced by social marketers and/or social marketing today?

Clients often seek simple 'silver-bullet' solutions to tackle complex, wicked problems. Too often,



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budgets are tied to another advertising or social media campaign to be seen as 'doing something' rather than evoking more sustainable change. Wicked problems, by their nature, are not easy (or impossible) to solve, and we often need to step back and get a fuller picture. That way, we can have a hope of making lasting positive change.

Finally, what tips do you have for other social marketing researchers?

Avoid the trap of being quick to blame consumers – look more broadly at what is happening around them.

