

Viewpoint Q&A

Dr Sandy Fitzgerald

Can you tell us about yourself and your current role?

Hello, I'm Dr Sandy Fitzgerald, Senior Lecturer in Marketing, School of Economics, Finance and Marketing at RMIT University. I have 10+ years of experience in academia and spent 4+ years working in the transnational education context, in Singapore. When I first started my career, I worked in the advertising industry. Reflecting on that career, I informed my work practice, with additional knowledge (or theory/frameworks) in projects I was involved in. Upon switching to academia, the opposite happened, whereby I am now keen to have knowledge (our theories and frameworks) be informed by professional practices. I will say that my teaching and research practices are applied in orientation. In addition to coordinating marketing courses, I am also the school's work-integrated learning coordinator. In this role, I manage student progress and provide academic support while they are in a 1-year work placement in the industry. I relish this role as it aligns with my worldview – that knowledge and practice are intimately connected.

What attracted you to social marketing?

I like that social marketing aims to study ways to shape people's behaviour for their own benefit and for societal benefit. Living in a capitalistic society by and large, it is refreshing to see that more policies, organisations and societal practices are reflective of good social practices because of social marketing efforts.

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

Being a social marketing researcher gives academic work more meaning. It truly is satisfying that I can use my skillsets to make the world a better place (as cheesy as it sounds, but



somehow true.) As a social marketing researcher, it is an identity that resonates with me as the way I view it, I am an agent for positive change.

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

I can share with you broadly about a project that I did some years ago. The client was Ovarian Cancer Australia, and I was brought in to assess the efficacy of their educational mobile app. It was a very meaningful project and provided improvement recommendations and I thought it went particularly well as it was well received by the board!

Fast forward a few years, and the mobile app is no more! This is a lesson, and I am hoping the audience here can resonate with this. That is, "you have the right to work, but never to the fruit of work". So, be conscious not to be disheartened if policy makers, or stakeholders will not take up the recommendations. In this project's case, the client is unable to find sufficient funding to maintain the app. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the ride while working on this project as I enjoyed the process of actively using knowledge to inform industry practices.



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

Social marketing is still, to date, from the industry perspective, confused with social media marketing. I find this fascinating as industry professionals generally do not understand how social marketing works unless one is explicit by sharing the context in which the study is in e.g., health. To my mind, this suggests that the discipline/field requires further development in lexicons we can use to express the work of social marketing.

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

Don't go after social trends! There are no shortages of social issues to tackle using marketing knowledge. The key is, though, to find an issue that you really care about (it does not matter if it is not a popular topic yet!) and go for it! The other thing to consider is this. You don't need to solve the world's problems. Let's face it, most issues that are tackled by social marketing researchers are arguably wicked problems. If you are contributing towards advancing knowledge and academic discussion, you are doing well. No contribution is too small and in academia, it is a journey, not a race. Enjoy the research process, and pause to celebrate milestones and successes along the way. Finally, it is always good if you can seek out a mentor. Speaking of which, I am grateful to Prof. Maria Raciti, for being my mentor!

