RMIT UNIVERSITY

Sponsored by **ASSOCIATION FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH**

FIRST SYMPOSIUM ON WICKED PROBLEMS IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

September 1 – 2, 2015

Melbourne, Australia

Symposium chairs

Dr Kaleel Rahman, RMIT University: kaleel.rahman@rmit.edu.au
Associate Professor Ekant Veer, University of Canterbury: ekant.veer@canterbury.ac.nz
Associate Professor Helene Cherrier, RMIT University: helene.cherrier@rmit.edu.au

Keynote address by: **Professor Julie Ozanne,** University of Melbourne

Special issue arrangement: *Journal of Social Marketing*

GENERAL DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SYMPOSIUM

Wicked Problems refer to issues in society that are particularly difficult to solve due to the problems being based on contradictory, incomplete or changing information. Typically, wicked problems do not have definitive formulation, they are never solved but rather become better or worse, they are each unique but also symptoms of other problems, they morph constantly and constraints and resources for solutions change over time (Rittel and Webber, 1973). As Churchman (1967) put it, 'wicked problems do not show their teeth before they bite'. In this way, wicked problems become regularly ignored in academic research simply because they may be too complex, but it is often these wicked problems that have the greatest interest and impact on society. This symposium looks to introduce the importance of studying wicked problems in consumer research. The hosting institution will be RMIT University, Melbourne Australia. The symposium is being jointly sponsored by the School of Economics Finance and Marketing at RMIT University and Association for Consumer Research (ACR).

Based on the work by Rittel and Webber (1973), Kreuter et al (2004) summarize wicked problems as follows:

- No agreement exists about what the problem is. Each attempt to create a solution changes the problem. The solution is not true or false—the end is assessed as "better" or "worse" or "good enough."
- Many stakeholders are likely to have differing ideas about what the "real" problem is and what its causes are.
- Solution(s) to problem is (are) based on "judgments" of multiple stakeholders; there are no "best practices." Every problem is unique and solutions must be tailored.

PARTICIPATING IN THE SYMPOSIUM

We intend to adopt the style of *Transformative Consumer Research conference* in terms of a dialogical symposium. The Dialogical symposium style offers greater flexibility in its delivery and also has been shown to be more successful in creating new research streams and research collaborations when compared to a standard presentation-based conference. Here, researchers are assigned to small groups or "tracks" focused on a particular social issue. Thus instead of making formal research presentations, conference participants will primarily engage in roundtable discussions, helping to critique and enhance one another's research ideas and programs. The two-day Symposium comprises a keynote address by **Professor Julie Ozanne**, and hands-on sessions on discussing, identifying, conceptualizing, and writing-up of given wicked problems in consumer research. We have secured a **special issue of the *Journal of Social Marketing*** for each of the tracks to present a short research piece on what makes the problem a wicked one (subject to normal peer review processes, of course).

Individuals wishing to participate must submit a written statement of interest to one of the track chairs. In general, the statement should briefly indicate why the topic is personally important to the applicant and what they believe they have to offer research in this area. In evaluating applications track chairs will be looking for three things:

Relevance to wicked problems
Research questions, new theories and insights
Innovative implementation strategies

The best applications will combine passion for the topic with rigor of thought. The statement of interest should be brief, just one single-spaced, typed page (plus supporting materials as necessary). The statement of interest should be emailed directly to the track chair(s) as a PDF document. All proposals are due by **May 25, 2015**. Acceptance notifications will be sent out in early June at which point participants will also receive further details on the symposium and the process leading up to it.

DOCTORAL STUDENT TRAVEL STIPENDS

Sponsored by Association for Consumer Research (ACR), we offer a limited number of A$300 worth travel stipends for Ph.D. students outside Melbourne to assist with expenses related to attending the symposium. Successful candidates will have the opportunity to actively participate as other participants and become co-authors of resulting publications. If you are interested, when expressing your intention to participate, you have to provide the following:

A brief explanation (between 100-200 words) to make your case as to why you think you qualify for the travel stipend

A 100 word statement indicating how you can contribute to the given track

A letter from your supervisor/advisor confirming that it is acceptable for the candidate to participate in the symposium

A copy of your CV

KEY INFORMATION:

Call for expression of interest due: 25 May 2015

Notification of acceptance sent: 8 June 2015

Event Date and Time: September 1 to 2, 2015, from 9 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.

Venue: RMIT University city campus (Building 80, 445 Swanston Street, Melbourne, 3000, Australia).

Symposium registration fee: A$ 195 per delegate (for 2 days). Optional dinner A$70.

Registration due: 15 July 2015

Accommodation: Most affordable to high end accommodation is available in and around the venue (https://www.google.com.au/maps/search/accommodation+franklin+street+melbourne/@-37.8075493,144.9594641,17z)

Symposium tracks

TRACK 1: The Wicked Nature of Disasters

Track Chairs:
Lucie K. Ozanne, University of Canterbury. Email: lucie.ozanne@canterbury.ac.nz
Julie L. Ozanne, University of Melbourne. Email: julie.ozanne@unimelb.edu.au
Marcus Phipps, University of Melbourne. Email: mphipps@unimelb.edu.au

The World Bank defines disaster as, "A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic, or environmental losses that exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources (World Bank, 2006, p. xlix)." Disasters are increasing in frequency as the line between natural and man-made disasters is blurred in the event of droughts, earthquakes, pandemics, global warming, wildfires, heat waves, mudslides, terrorism, and food contamination, to name but a few (Squires and Hartman, 2006). Disasters meet a number of the distinctive characteristics of wicked problems put forth by Weber and Khademian (2008). Disasters are complex and unstructured in nature, which means that exact causes and effects are difficult to identify or tease apart. Solutions to wicked problems, such as disasters, involve multiple stakeholders with diverse perspectives; but the high degree of interdependency among stakeholders and uncertainty makes planning challenging. Finally, preparing for the wicked nature of disasters is an inexorable process with no permanent solutions and consequences spanning multiple policy arenas. For example, measures to abate drought will have repercussions for consumer behaviour, as well as economic development and agriculture. Or efforts to minimise the impact of global warming are likely to be relentless, involving multiple actors with diverse viewpoints and the need to make myriad trade-offs.

We invite both junior and senior scholars with an interest or expertise in disasters to join us in this discussion. We welcome scholars from a variety of paradigmatic, theoretical, and methodological approaches as well as geographic areas.

References

Squires, G. and C. Hartman, eds. (2006), *There is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Katrina,* New York, NY: Taylor and Francis.

Weber, Edward P. and Anne M. Khademian (2008), "Wicked problems, knowledge challenges, and collaborative capacity builders in network settings," *Public administration review*, *68*(2):334-349.

World Bank (2006), *Hazards of Nature, Risks to Development: An IEG Evaluation of World Bank Assistance for Natural Disasters*, Washington, DC.

TRACK 2: Eating and Obesity

Track chairs:

Joy Parkinson, Griffith University. Email: j.parkinson@griffith.edu.au
Chris Dubelaar, Deakin University. Email: c.dubelaar@deakin.edu.au

The global obesity epidemic has been increasing for four decades, yet sustained prevention efforts have scarcely begun (Finucane et al., 2011). The rates of overweight and obesity amongst adults have doubled over the past two decades with Australia now being ranked as one of the fattest developed nations (ABS, 2006). As the prevalence of obesity has increased so too has the incidence of obesity related diseases (Finkelstein, Ruhm & Kosa, 2005). Obesity not only impacts individual physical and psychological health, but also encumbers social and economic development. Economic costs linked to obesity are high and are expected to continue to rise (Li & Hooker, 2010). Obesity is a complex problem, is often broader than the individual and is strongly influenced by the social and cultural context in which individuals exist. Individual factors contributing to obesity include poor nutrition and low rates of physical activity. Environmental factors include limited access to fresh produce, poor infrastructure and an abundance of energy dense food options readily available. Furthermore, complex, interrelated behaviours such as obesity are difficult to change and maintain through simple communication of health risks and benefits, the social context in which they occur and emotional barriers also need to be recognised.

Participants with an interest or expertise in obesity related behaviours are invited to join us in this discussion. We encourage participation from a variety of disciplines such as social marketing, health and public health.

TRACK 3: Confronting Diagnoses

Track chairs:

Ekant Veer, Unviersity of Canterbury. Email: ekant.veer@canterbury.ac.nz
Helene Cherrier, RMIT University. Email: helene.cherrier@rmit.edu.au

Numerous and expanding available services permit consumers to actively seek and/or receive a medical diagnosis, included health professionals, friends and family members as well as the internet and its abundant global forums. This session aims at discussing the diverse means of health diagnoses, the motivations to

assemblage a wide array of health opinions, the tensions that emerge when conflicting diagnoses arise, and the barriers associated with personalised or socialised perceived stigma associated to health diagnosis. As an indication, we could be looking at issues associated with self-diagnosis, parents' diagnosis of their children, or professional health diagnosis avoidance. Contextually, we could consider why some men are more reluctant to accept mental health professional help; why some persons avoid seeking diagnoses for a potential cancer scare; why some parents actively avoid medical attention for their children, etc.

Participants with an interest in health, public health, social marketing, transformative consumer research, communication and consumer behaviour are encouraged to contribute to this session.

TRACK 4: The Dark Side of Sport

Track chairs:

Kate Westberg, RMIT University. Email: kate.westberg@rmit.edu.au
Con Stavros, RMIT University. Email: con.stavros@rmit.edu.au

The benefits of sport are many; including health, entertainment and social connection. Sport develops aspirational qualities such as team work and perseverance and contributes to our identity. Professional sport gives us role models and unites communities. Sport extends beyond borders, building bridges between countries and cultures. However, increasingly sport seems to be revealing a 'dark side'.

This dark side relates to a range of issues plaguing sport globally, particularly (but not exclusively) in professional sport. For example, the media is awash with stories that run counter to the spirit of fair play. Headlines carry allegations of various forms of 'cheating' and organizations have been challenged by incidents of inappropriate and illegal behaviour (transgressions) perpetrated by their athletes and the subsequent media scrutiny these incidents attract. Often the athletes concerned are idolised by children and adults alike.

The image of sport is also being further tarnished by the company it chooses to keep - in particular promotional and sponsorship arrangements with brands that fall into the category of 'risky consumption' such as unhealthy food, alcohol and gambling. Sport consumption, particularly by families, means constant exposure to these products and even the normalisation of unhealthy or risky behaviours. Further, these brands often leverage their sport association through other communication activities such as social media, engaging consumers as collaborators in disseminating brand-authored content as well as in generating consumer created content

Much of this dark side of sport stems from the increased commercialisation of the industry, putting pressure on both athletes and sport managers, and leading to decisions that have consequences for the athlete or team, as well as for the image of sport more broadly. There is also a 'trickle down' effect from professional to junior sport levels as a result of role modelling.

So, what is the wicked problem?

How does the 'dark side of sport' influence consumer attitudes and consumption of 'risky' products as well as the consumption of sport itself? What is the subsequent impact on consumer and societal well-being?

TRACK 5: Fashion Industry in Crisis

Track chairs:

Ann-Marie Kennedy, Auckland University of Technology. Email: akennedy@aut.ac.nz
Sommer Kapitan, Auckland University of Technology. Email: sommer.kapitan@aut.ac.nz

With the rise of fast fashion and the pressure on the supply chain to produce clothes faster, the two-season fashion cycle has shrunk since the 1990s from a 6-month design-to-store process to a 4-week cycle with shoddier clothing as a result (Erekin and Atik 2015). Cheap, poor quality products are produced due to cost and time constraints on suppliers, leading them to provide poor working conditions and wages, and pollute the environment (Adhikari and Weerantunga 2007). From a consumer perspective, the fashion industry cultivates perceived obsolescence, manipulates perceptions of scarcity via drastically shortened product life cycles, and drives overconsumption and impulsivity – a fun, cheap shirt is as readily available and as disposable as a tube of toothpaste from the supermarket. The interconnectedness of all the players make the negative consequences of the current fashion system a wicked problem.

From an industry perspective, rapid responsiveness techniques and just-in-time, agile, sometimes counterfeit supply chains are privileged over quality design, organic or other prestige quality sourcing. Expedited technology in supply chains collude with retail design to facilitate the speed of buying decisions. The industry itself is as volatile as the latest advance in getting product from designers' drawing boards to market. While suppliers must respond to retailers' requirements, retailers are consumer driven (Gereffi and Frederick 2010) and consumers have a constant need for new things (Fiske 1989). This need feeds fast fashion (Bruce and Daly 2006) with constant additions to product lines, but also creates waste.

Cheap, poor quality products produced, due to cost and time restraints on suppliers, breed a disposable lifestyle for consumers, not only creating waste quicker, but also encouraging obsolescence (Ertekin and Atik 2015). Yet consumers often do not realise their impact (Goodwin 2012), or they display an attitude-behaviour gap in their purchasing behaviours (Eckhardt, Belk and Devinney 2010; Connolly and Prothero 2003). While activists such as anti-sweatshop groups target manufacturers, that may be misguided as retailers are meeting consumer demands (Brown, Deardoff and Stern 2004). Consumer groups are also advocating for concepts including slow fashion, ethical fashion and anti-consumption movements.

But, whether retailers or consumers lead the impacts on suppliers, some retail organisations do try to mitigate those issues, through additional supplier requirements. However when organisations implement/require their supply chains to meet codes of conduct with regards worker conditions and wages, or environmental aspects, this increases suppliers' costs and makes them less competitive (Adhikari and Weerantunga 2007). So if a low cost, flexible strategy is still sought by the retailer, suppliers meeting the retailer's ethical standards may not then meet their bottom line requirements. It's a race to the bottom (Rivoli 2014). Any solution needs to focus on multiple target markets within the system to enable a fundamental change in the institutional norms around fashion (Erekin and Atik 2015). Thus first systems thinking is required (Cataldi et al. 2010) to understand how the marketing system is linked to and influenced by institutional norms.

TRACK 6: When Health Pursuits Turn into Unhealthy Obsessions

Track chairs:

Sandy Ng, RMIT University. Email: sandy.ng@rmit.edu.au
Kaleel Rahman, RMIT University. Email: kaleel.rahman@rmit.edu.au

As more people are affected by lifestyle diseases such as obesity, diabetes and depression in developed economies, it is not surprising that governments, health agencies and even health insurance companies are

devising policies and rebates to encourage the population to engage in preventive health care routines such as going to the gym, eating better foods (reducing fat and sugar) and reducing alcohol consumption. At present it is safe to state that more work is required to encourage people to take a preventive stance to their own healthcare. However, what happens if people's pursuits turn into an unhealthy obsession in the name of "health" and affect their lives in other ways?

"Fitspiration"-type behaviours, although they promote fitness and health, encourage people to persevere, push, or even suffer through exercise for the sake of achieving change in physical appearance. As a result, these behaviours can have a negative impact not only on physical health but also on social, mental and relational wellbeing (Kim et al., 2012). Fitspiration-type behaviours are further encouraged and publicised to mainstream audience through weight loss programs such as "The Biggest Loser", which encourage losing weight rapidly through calorie restriction and over-exercising, both of which are unhealthy and/or unsustainable (Pappas, 2010). In other words, there is a possibility, in the quest to be healthy and fit, that individuals may fall into the trap of acquiring a negative exercise addiction with a compulsive need to exercise that takes priority over health, relationships and other interests (Glaser 1976). As a result, we now have a non-profit organisation named #StopFitspiration to offer support to those recovering from exercise addictions.

As the saying goes, too much of a good thing, such as excessive exercise, might actually be bad for people. So what can we do to prevent individual health behaviour change from going so far that it actually becomes harmful and detrimental to health? What are the warning signs? Can we as marketers do anything to intervene? How can we intervene successfully? Who are our stakeholders? These are questions we need to consider in our quest to facilitate positive and sustainable health behaviour change.

Indicative Session Schedule

Day 1: September 1, Tuesday

9:00   Welcome and administration from the co-chairs

9:15   Keynote speech by Prof Julie Ozanne

10:30   Morning tea

11:00   Breakout Session 1

12:30   Lunch

1:30   Breakout Session 2

3:00   Afternoon tea

3:30   Breakout Session 3

5:00   Close for the day

6:00   Optional dinner

Day 2: September 2, Wednesday

9:00   Breakout Session 4

10:30   Morning tea

11:00   Breakout Session 5

12:30   Lunch

1:30   Breakout Session 6

3:00   Afternoon tea

3:15   Each track to present a 10 min summary of their problem and their plans going forward

4:15   Closing remarks by Co-chairs

5.00   End

If you require further information other than track related issues, please contact the symposium chairs Kaleel Rahman (kaleel.rahman@rmit.edu.au), Ekant Veer (ekant.veer@canterbury.ac.nz), or Helene Cherrier (helene.cherrier@rmit.edu.au)

We look forward to seeing you in Melbourne.