1. Introduction

Many individuals are involved with behaviour change activities. However, changes sought by the application of social marketing are quite specific. The primary aim is to achieve a particular ‘social good’ (rather than commercial benefit), with clearly defined behavioural goals. While social marketing is not a new concept, it has been (and continues to be in some cases) misunderstood in many circles. The term is used interchangeably in the literature depending on the paradigm of the authors. Two of the most common of these interchangeably used terms, are social marketing and health behaviour change. To clear up the potential confusion, in recent times the peak organizations concerned with social marketing (Australian Association of Social Marketing [AASM], 2013) have reached an international consensus with regard to a definition:

Social Marketing seeks to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches to influence behaviours that benefit individuals and communities for the greater social good.

Social Marketing practice is guided by ethical principles. It seeks to integrate research, best practice, theory, audience and partnership insight, to inform the delivery of competition sensitive and segmented social change programmes that are effective, efficient, equitable and sustainable. (AASM, 2013)

This definition of social marketing has been developed and endorsed by the AASM along with the European Social Marketing Association (ESMA) and the International Social Marketing Association (iSMA) to articulate the role and purpose of social marketing.

An aim of this book is to identify and describe the most recognized and useful theories that have been used in both the social marketing and the behaviour change literatures. A multitude of theories have been developed and previous studies have set out to evaluate each of the theories. For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Munro et al. (2007), and another project by the UK Government Social Research Unit in 2008 have demonstrated the respective advantages and limitations of a range of these theories. We believe that this book is the most complete review and discussion of the theories currently being applied in social marketing.

Part I of the book provides an overview of theories and how they may
be applied in social marketing applications. While the outcome of theory application in the social sciences is usually less certain than those for many other scientific theories (e.g., the physical and chemical sciences) they nevertheless play an important role in providing a basis for a particular intervention that may be applied to change a targeted behaviour. More than one theory may be used for an intervention. An emerging trend in this area suggests that integrated approaches and synthesis of multiple theories may be more effective in promoting behaviour change than the use of an individual guiding theory. In this way the chosen theory or theories serve to guide the application of social marketing. However, methodological pluralism can be both beneficial and detrimental to research and it is important to consider the antecedent theories before combining them to create ‘new’ theoretical frameworks.

The next seven parts of the text systematically identify, review and analyse a number of the most popular behaviour change models that have relevance to social marketing. Each of the parts includes theories and models based on the underpinning theoretical basis of the behaviour change model. Each part also includes a case study that illustrates how a behaviour change model from this group has been used in a social marketing application.

Part II discusses the ‘rational choice’ or ‘economic’ models. These are probably the most widely used and are founded in rational economic theory, which presupposes that the individual will act in a certain way to maximize the benefit they receive (‘homo economicus’). Part II contains a description of the key rational choice economic models that have been tested and are used in social marketing behaviour change applications. For example, one of the most widely applied models, the ‘theory of planned behaviour’, is discussed in this part of the book.

Part III discusses the ‘behavioural’ or ‘conative’ models that are used extensively in social marketing. These models are founded in sociology, social psychology and related fields. They focus on how individuals behave in certain settings rather than what they think or feel – although these aspects may also be taken into account in some of the models such as the ‘model of pro-environmental behaviour’. Probably the most widely known contributor to the conative models in social marketing is Bandura, particularly for his ‘health promotion model’ (see in particular, Bandura, 1969, 1977b, 1997, 2000 and 2004).

A third category of models that is used in social marketing is where the principal effect is to bring about emotional engagement to change the individual’s attitude towards a prescribed behaviour. The underlying assumption is that an attitude change will lead to a behaviour change (although this relationship has been questioned by some, as will be indicated in
Part IV). It should be noted that models included in other parts of the book may also rely on attitude changes in behaviour modification. Emotional engagement can be attached to the social marketing message, concept or ideals. The main discipline informing this part of the book is psychology, although social psychology and sociology have contributed to the field. Specifically, models in Part IV aim to influence the behaviour change process through positive and negative emotions (such as fear and pride), rewards and benefits, motivation, norms, values, beliefs, and persuasion.

Part V describes a series of models that we have categorized as socio-cultural models. We have classified the models as socio-cultural because they tend to focus less on the individual and more on the environment in which the behaviour is taking place. Socio-cultural models are those models that extend beyond the individual as a decision-maker and include social and cultural factors in their dimensions. Underlying theory for these models is principally from sociology and social psychology. This part of the book suggests that behaviour changes through social marketing may need to take into account aspects beyond the individual, such as family and other socio-cultural factors. An exemplar descriptive model is the socio-cultural ‘ecological systems model’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This model takes into account the influences that impact on the decision-making of the individual, ranging from those relatively close the individual to the wider ecology of societal influences on behaviour.

Part VI includes models used in social marketing that have interdisciplinary underpinnings. The research foundations for this part are psychology, sociology, anthropology and social psychology. This part of the book includes a number of theories that do not clearly fit within any paradigm and those that use multiple theoretical frameworks. Those that have multiple paradigms at work can lead to quite complex relationships between the various concepts under consideration. There may be advantages of using this approach for complex applications. For models that have multiple interventions (for example, a ‘stages of change’ model), the overall success (and evaluation of the value of the model) may be dependent on a single stage that is not suitable for the given situation. Nevertheless these models have been widely applied in health, physical activity and environmental social marketing interventions.

Part VII covers a range of theories that are based in the commercial marketing theoretical domain. While social marketing has expanded its philosophical, theoretical and practice boundaries to include a large collection of theories, this part is included in recognition of the foundational roots of social marketing theory. There is still research to be done in the social marketing ‘consumer’ behaviour domain, especially in the areas of de-marketing, anti-consumption and the environment.
Part VIII describes models of social change in the social marketing context. This is possibly the most wide-ranging and controversial part of the book. Antecedents of these theories can be found in business (e.g., social entrepreneurship and social innovation), sociology and social psychology (e.g., the ‘seven Cs of social change’), anthropology (e.g., communication for development) and, of course, social marketing. While none of these theories qualifies as a ‘theory’ in the sense we use to define theories in this book, they are all important additions to conceptualizing a better way to create a positive future for a global society.

The book finishes in Part IX with a summary of the key learnings and considerations for conducting future research and enquiry in social marketing.