

State of Social Marketing in Malaysia:

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State of Social Marketing in Malaysia: Challenges and Reflections of a Multinethnic, Multilingual and Multi-cultural Nation.

Abstract:

Malaysia, a nation that celebrates the rich tapestry of Asian cultures and diverse people, has been on a progressive journey toward development since gaining independence from British rule in 1957. However, despite strides in various sectors, the country grapples with three pressing issues: brain drain, human rights, and mental health. The existing policies and practices struggle to support social marketing endeavours aimed at addressing these challenges.

The allure of education abroad for better prospects and job security has led to a critical examination of the role of education in navigating evolving socio-economic pressures, particularly among the younger generations (Jauhar et al., 2015). The debate centres on the Malaysian government's dual approach: dedicating resources to cultivating domestic talent while simultaneously attracting highly-skilled foreign migrants.

Recent years have witnessed Malaysia's educational landscape realigning itself to embrace STEM disciplines and character education. The latter emphasizes nation-building traits found in Islamic and Moral Education, as well as subjects like Malay and English Language, and History Education (Mahanani et al., 2022b). However, the separation of religious and moral education in schools fails to actively engage students in current social issues (Purwaningrum, 2020), limiting the practical application of values crucial for character development (B. P. Tan, Mahadir Naidu, & Jamil@Osman, 2018).

Mental health awareness in Malaysia is hindered by a lack of understanding, leading to misinformation and stigmatization. The resulting barriers prevent sufferers from seeking help (Chua & Rao, 2021; Hanafiah & Van Bortel, 2015). Stigma is exacerbated by the absence of inclusive societal programs, education, and expertise to effectively address these issues through social marketing campaigns.

The intertwining challenges of food waste, environmental pollution, and climate change create a unique situation in Malaysia. Casual dining in restaurants contributes significantly to the country's food waste, with potential repercussions on CO2 emissions and climate change (Abeliotis et al., 2014; D. Ong et al., 2023; C. H. Tan et al., 2021). Despite recent efforts to curb emissions, inadequate measures and waste mismanagement contribute to biodiversity degradation, impacting the natural flora and fauna (Tang, 2019).

Social marketing visibility, often reported in newspapers (Tham & Zanuddin, 2015), is a positive step forward. However, there is a need for broader coverage across diverse issues in Malaysia. The country's multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual population presents an opportunity for social media influencers to disseminate messages to various ethnic groups. To ensure effective social

marketing, public education on distinguishing social marketing from other related concepts, mutual cooperation, religious and governmental support, and allocation of resources are crucial (Bamkin, 2018a; Jelas et al., 2010; Othman & Othman, 2014; Purwaningrum, 2020).

Malaysia's journey to development involves addressing complex issues through informed policies, inclusive education, and impactful social marketing. As the nation navigates its unique challenges, fostering understanding, collaboration, and support from various sectors will be key to realizing its potential as a centre of excellence in positive and impactful social marketing.

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