

# Social Marketing: A Literature Review

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**Abstract:** *The term social marketing was first coined by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman in the year 1971. The nature of social goal is complex and social marketing is a purpose driven platform aimed at bringing improvement in the targeted society as defined by the driving forces behind it. The principles of commercial marketing is holding good for social marketing. At the beginning goal of social marketing was to bring desired change in the society through behavior change. Later the focus shifted from behavior to attitude. The effect of fear, threat, and shame appeals were studied by many scholars and researchers. However, till date a concrete theory has not yet established. Instead of taking universal approach, social marketing started to formulate campaigns on the basis of target audience. It may be said that social marketing is all about communication. The better the communication, the more it will be effective. The world is digitally divided. The people living outside the digital world have more social problems, which may be solved by adopting appropriate social marketing strategy.*

**Keywords:** Social Marketing, Commercial Marketing, Society, Behavior, Target Audience

## 1. Introduction

The term social marketing was first coined by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman in 1971. They realized that the same marketing principles that were being used to sell products to consumers could be used to sell ideas, attitudes, and behaviors. Kotler and Andreasen explained the difference in the objective of social marketing with other areas of marketing by saying that social marketer seeks to influence social behaviors not to benefit the marketer, but to benefit the target audience and the society in general. Marketing has been successful in encouraging people to buy products and use services. In the same way marketing can also encourage people to adopt behaviors that will enhance their own and others' lives. Many social and health related problems have behavioral causes. Social marketing provides a mechanism for tackling the problems by motivating people to adopt healthier lifestyles. Social marketing is an approach aimed at changing or maintaining people's behavior for the benefit of individuals and society as a whole. This technique has been used extensively in international health programs, especially for contraceptives, oral rehydration therapy, drug abuse, heart disease prevention, and organ donation.

## 2. Definitions

There are many definitions of social marketing. Some popular definitions include:

"Social marketing is the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research", (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971).

Social marketing is "the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of society of which they are a part" (Andreasen, 1994).

"Social marketing is the use of marketing principles and techniques to influence a target audience to voluntarily

accept, reject, modify, or abandon a behavior for the benefit of individuals, groups, or society as a whole", (Kotler, et al., 2002)

Social marketing is a consumer-centered, research driven approach to promote voluntary behavior change in a priority population (Grier and Bryant, 2005).

Social marketing is "a process that applies marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate, and deliver value in order to influence target audience behaviors that benefit society as well as the target audience" (Kotler, Lee and Rothschild, 2006).

"Social marketing is the systematic application of marketing alongside other concepts and techniques to achieve specific behavioural goals, for social or public good", (National Social Marketing Centre, 2006).

Kotler and Lee (2008) define social marketing as "process that applies marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate, and deliver value in order to influence target audience behaviour that benefit society (public health, safety, the environment, and communities) as well as the target audience".

From the above definitions it is observed that the goal of social marketing is the wellbeing society. However the target audience may be individual, group, or the society as a whole. Principles followed for social marketing are the same as that for commercial marketing. The social welfare goal is achieved through voluntary change of behavior.

## 3. Development of Social Marketing

Social marketing evolved in parallel with commercial marketing. In 1951, Wiebe asked the question, "Can brotherhood be sold like soap?". Philip Kotler in 1967 used the term "societal marketing" in his marketing management book by which he meant socially responsible marketing by companies. This was known as corporate social responsibility. In 1971 Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman at Kellogg published the first article using the term social

marketing. They explained that there is a subset of marketing practices that marketers and public can approve to achieve social purpose rather than a monetary gain. The article "Social Marketing: An approach to planned social change" of Kotler and Zaltman put social marketing on the academic map. At the first stage the focus of social marketing was on behavior. The attention of social marketers in the 1970s was on behavior not attitude. At the second stage focus shifted to develop a process view of social marketing planning. Nancy R Lee suggested a ten step model of the social marketing process. The third stage started with Alan Andreasen (2005) when he proposed three levels of social marketing practice: downstream, mid-stream, and upstream. The digital revolution has opened up many new channels. The present age is of social media to reach very specific target individual or group. Incorporation of social media into social marketing is the fourth stage. Now it is evolving further to encounter new problems and solutions. The challenges ahead with social marketing are to address new issues with changing time, establishment of relationship with commercial marketing, and development as a distinctive theoretical domain.

#### **4. Literature Review**

Social marketing is influenced by positivist methods. Social marketers like Hastings, 2007; Kotler, Roberto and Lee, 2002 have consumer centric approaches. Tapp and Hughes, 2008 aligned social marketing with the everyday reality of marketing.

According to Andreasen, 2002 asking for change to more sustainable living patterns is becoming a central issue in society. However, when people as individual or at organization level are asked to change their behavior, they are asked to change their identity. Hence, asking for change in behavior is a big ask. People are not logical, rather they are rational. They prefer to act within the comfort of their own value system (Kelly, 1955). Motivations for behavior change are more often rational than logical. Every society is a complex adaptive system. Therefore, social marketing practice should focus on suggesting solutions taking care of target people's identity.

Resnicow & Page, 2008: People make changes in the long run that work for them. For this a social systems approach could be a useful starting point. Social systems being complex in nature, the outcomes are dependent on many factors. Hence, planned behavioral change may be achieved by proceeding step by step in a sequential order. Therefore, to change the behavior of people more than one approach is required.

According to Glouberman and Zimmerman (2002), our social marketing programs must be targeted. To them managing a complex adaptive socio-economic system is like raising a child. Raising a child is in our hand, but not it's assured success in life. Every child is unique, in the same way every community is unique. Hence, whether a child or a community a number of interventions are expected to fail as a matter of course. Uncertainty of outcome remains. Therefore, it is essential to understand the individual, group, or the community and their identity to know the social

problems and suggest a solution using social marketing approach.

DiClemente and Prochaska, 1998: The stages of a change framework suggest that people move through stages of pre-contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance. They suggest that depending upon the nature of the society it should be addressed. They also point out that after change in the desired behavior it is difficult to sustain it. There is always a chance of reverting back to the old undesired habits. Therefore, to maintain a new behavior necessary strategy has to be taken in time.

Conroy and Lee (2006), with an example have described how a campaign failed in a rural village near a major city in New Zealand. In the said village people were well educated upper middle class. People's peaceful existence was threatened by the proposed introduction of supersized above ground powerlines. To get consent of people the powerline company offered economic incentives. The company ignored the social conditions of the villagers and local environment of the village. The focus was only on economic compensation. The effort to change the opinion of the villagers failed because the company failed to resonate with identity of the villagers.

According to Rose and Dade, 2007 in environmental movements the impact of values in driving behavior and rising awareness are successful which consider the local conditions. Success of programs designed considering the local conditions are more in comparison with global solutions.

Grier and Bryant, 2005: Social marketing in public health include programs like increase in physical activity, increase in fruit and vegetable consumption, smoking cessation, and sexually transmitted disease prevention etc. For success of social marketing, several commercial marketing strategies may be applied. These may be social exchange theory, audience segmentation, the four Ps (price, place, product, and promotion), consumer orientation, and evaluation of the marketing campaign.

Storey et al., 2008: In social marketing price is intangible that comes in form of making change in behavior. The product is the benefit that comes in form of improved health or reduction in disease. The loci of benefit of social marketing are individuals who need to change their behavior for the wellbeing and welfare of self and the society.

Dann, 2010: Behavioral change is achieved through the creation, communication, delivery and exchange of a competitive social marketing offer that induces voluntary change in the target audience, and results in the benefit to the social change campaign's recipients, partners and broader society at large.

There are many studies on guilt and its effects (Burnett and Lunsford, 1994; Coulter and Pinto, 1995; Huhmann and Brotherton, 1997; Bennett, 1998; Abe, 2004). Guilt appeals are very effective under certain circumstances (Coulter, Cotte and Moore, 1999; Cotte et al., 2005). The relationship

between guilt and fear appeals may be studied at the expense of other negative emotions such as shame.

Bennett, 1998: In a study on guilt appeal he found that invoking guilt might lead to shameful responses in the targeted audience. This may result in negative consequences. According to him guilt appeals are more likely to result in positive responses. Shame appeals may result in negative attitudes. Hence, to make a guilt appeal effective, potential shame invoking messages need to be eliminated. No correlation is established by Bennett between guilt appeal and psychological resistance by the audience. However Coulter and Pinto, 1995; Cotte and Moore, 2005 have studied on the guilt appeal and its negative effect.

Hastings and Donovan, 2002: Social marketing should not just work to influence individual behavior, rather it needs to consider the social and physical determinants of that behavior.

Wansink, 2006 studied the influence of sociality on food consumption. He found that, food consumption increases by 35% when one person eat with other person. However the food consumption increases by 96% when people eat together in a group of seven or more. How the individual behavior differs from group behavior is explained with a suitable example.

Russell-Bennett et al., 2013: Services marketing thinking has been positioned as a mid-stream approach to social marketing. To achieve sustainable behavior movement between policy makers and people need to be facilitated.

Terblanche-Smit and Terblanche, 2010: Informational and rational are not effective with all kind of social problems. Due to this reason advertising practitioners rely on emotional appeals in formulating message.

Witte and Allen, 2000 in their meta-analysis found that individual differences have little influence over people's response towards fear appeals in public health. Watson, et al., (2007) about fear appeals in road safety suggest that "demographic characteristics such as age and gender influence the effectiveness of threatening messages". De Meyrick, (2010) studied on effect of fear appeals in Australia and found that campaigns had a different effect on males and females. These findings indicate towards adopting differentiated and tailored campaigning strategies considering the demography of the targeted audience. There is inconsistency in the available literature due to the complex nature of fear-persuasion relationship.

Marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion) from commercial marketing are essential for social marketing to make a social campaign successful (Grier and Bryant, 2005). Other key elements of social marketing are market research (Walsh et al., 1993), audience segmentation (Grier and Bryant, 2005), and branding (Keller, 1998). Hence, research at the formative stage of a campaign design is necessary to understand the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the target audience. Social marketing is maturing as an independent discipline with application to a wide range of

social goals. It requires new and better-adapted approach to the social marketing mix.

Pilloton, 2009: suggested to all social marketers to market products and services that lead to behavior change as part of their core competencies. These products and services may be developed either by social marketers or by social entrepreneurs and profit making organizations.

McKenzie-Mohr and Smith, 1999: The goal of social marketing is to influence the societies to change through interventions aimed at individuals. To achieve large-scale behavioral change, social marketing campaigns are tailored to target population that share common characteristics and who are expected to adopt the desired behavior through the use of incentives and removal of barriers.

## 5. Communication in Social Marketing

Andreasen, 1995 suggests that to build an effective communication campaign to change the behavior, understanding of the needs and perceptions of specific target audience is necessary. A message designed and developed must be tailored to the needs, concerns, and interests of the target audience (Lundgren, 1994). To make the communication successful effort must be put to understand what people know and believe along with their expectation from communication process (Jardine, 2003).

Covello, 2003 suggests techniques like interview, group discussions, information exchanges, toll free numbers, and surveys to understand what people think, know and want to know about an issue. To make the communication effective, knowledge and perception of public on the issue and level of motivation towards it must be determined.

Fischhoff and Downs, 1997: If people already know the information or the information is not deemed relevant, than the whole effort to communicate are wasted. Hence, before communication good understanding of the targeted audience is essential. The key to effective message development is the recognition that, individuals are unique and each individual respond to a message using his or her own filters of knowledge and experience (Lundgren, 1994).

McDermott et al. (2003) suggest the communicators to define the target audience so as to suggest appropriate channels for communication. World Health Organization (2002) has observed that specific needs of a target audience are met by selecting specific media preferred by that audience. Acceptance of message by an individual depends upon the source of information. Hence, audience should be reached through trusted channels of communication (freimuth et al., 2000). A study by Buzby and Ready (1996) indicated that 40% of the respondents did not trust the information received from government publications and food labeling on food safety as reliable. Rather people relies more on the information available in cookbooks.

People sometimes ignore risk communications with the assumption that the messages are targeted at more vulnerable populations (Miles et al., 1999; Sparks and Shepherd, 1994). Consumer based focus groups have

suggested to use words that affect the people at emotional level to make an effective message (USDA FSIS, 2001).

Morgan, Cole, Struttman, and Piercy, 2002 found that messages based on stories have more impact in comparison with the presentation based on statistics alone. Howard, 1991 argues that story telling and narratives are effective methods for communicating messages as there is a better understanding of one's position and place in a system. In a story an individual sees himself or herself as an actor of the story. Facts are reinforced in the stories using theoretical information (Lordley, 2007).

Leventhal, Singer, and Jones (1965): Surprising and fearful messages are more convincing than informative messages, but helps in changing behaviour when personal and practical advices are provided related to audience's lives.

According to Covello (2003), message should contain clear non-technical languages appropriate to the target audience. Use of graphics and other pictorial materials also help in understanding the message. As far as possible visual messages may be used avoiding words to convey meaning of the message. The message may be framed in such a way that the audience will be able to understand it immediately without any question in mind (Lundgren, 1994).

McDermott et al. (2003) suggested to pretest the message with target audience to revise on the basis of the results so obtained.

## 6. Conclusion

This literature review searched for definitions of social marketing. Social marketing is still emerging as an independent academic field. So far few theories have been developed but less literature is available on its application. The principles of commercial marketing are applied in social marketing. The main focus of social marketing has been shifted from behavior change to change in attitude of target audience. Through incorporation of social media, social marketing entered a new stage. But, in our society there is digital divide. Therefore, social marketing need to focus on the target audience living outside the digital world to address their social problems.

## 7. Scope for Future Research

From the literature review it is found that more study is required to understand the effect of fear, threat, and shame appeals in social marketing. Celebrity endorsement has been successful in commercial marketing. Hence, effectiveness of celebrity endorsement as a marketing tool in social marketing needs to be explored. Combining ideas from different fields like, commercial marketing and social science, the social marketing may be established as a proven tool for the benefit of the society in a sustainable and cost-effective way.

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