Social Marketing: Can We Utilize Marketing Concepts and Techniques for the Promotion of Social Objectives?

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Editorial

1. INTRODUCTION

Social marketing emerged as a valuable commercial tactic in the 1970s; it was created by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman. Its basic notion is that the same marketing ideologies that are utilized to sell consumer goods can also be employed to promote concepts, attitudes, and behaviors. Rather than aiming to persuade the public to buy whatever the firm happens to be selling, both marketing methods aim to understand what consumers want, need, and then provide it. In contrast to consumer marketing, social marketing "seeks to influence social behaviors not for the advantage of the marketer, but for the benefit of the target audience and society as a whole" (Weinreich 2006). This method has proven to be immensely effective for states, politicians, and social strategists; it can also help in fighting addiction, terrorism and promoting peace among any target sample.

Moreover, social marketing techniques can be considered a vital factor for international health programs, especially for such diverse topics as drug abuse, heart disease, and organ donation (Weinreich 2006).

The effectiveness of social marketing relies heavily on techniques from marketing that are used to persuade consumers to purchase products and services. In addition to various kinds of advertising, other strategies like market segmentation, product design, etc. can be valuable. Similar to traditional marketing, the primary focus of social marketing is based on the consumer. The planning process of social marketing takes the elements of the "marketing mix," which refers to (1) the conception of a Product, (2) Price, (3) distribution (Place), and (4) Promotion. The marketing mix is often called the "Four Ps" of marketing (Weinreich 2006).

STEPS OF SOCIAL MARKETING PROCESS

Social marketing embraces many of the strategies of marketing, in general, but the process is somewhat distinct. It includes at least five steps, namely, (1) identify the problems that need to be solved, (2) conduct background research, (3) design a solution that will reach a group of people who are negatively affected by the problem, (4) implement the solution by raising awareness and creating demand, and (5) evaluate the outcome of the project. Each will be briefly discussed (Gwynne 2003).

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

This means that social marketers need to develop a description of the social problem to be addressed and create a compelling rationale for addressing it.
Background Research

Effective social marketing process starts with a careful study of the target audience; research techniques like documentary research, informant interviews, participant observation, focus groups, and surveys in distinctive and relevant ways. This way helps in understanding the big picture of the campaign; it also provides marketers with the basic tools that enable them to use ways that

are more successful in influencing people. For example, in order to change the smoking habits among youth, we need a deeper understanding of their triggers of smoking, types of smoking, places they smoke in and cost of smoking.

DESIGNING A SOLUTION

From an empirical perspective, developing solutions to a specific problem/issue requires a careful review of the research results; this would help marketing professionals to include socially acceptable solutions to specific problems. After reaching applicable solutions, a need to test the efficacy of the solutions arise; this would save a lot of cost and secures a better solution implementation.

From an anthropological perspective, social marketing strategists find it much useful to use ideas and notions derived from the areas of behavioral psychology and commercial advertising; these ideas help to design culturally appropriate solutions to specific problems. In addition, researchers in the fields of psychology and sociology found out that decision making is a process that involves a series of stages; it is not as was thought previously an event. When a person decides to buy something or to embrace a new idea, he or she passes a number of steps called a hierarchy of effects (HOE) (Dudley 1993). The sequence of these steps differs according to the would be-made decision.

Lavidge and Steiner (1961) suggest seven steps: (1) Unawareness, (2) Awareness, (3) Knowledge, (4) Attitude from who likes the product, (5) Preference, (6) Conviction, and (7) Actual Purchase (Lavidge and Steiner 1961). McGuire developed an HOE model with six information processing steps: presentation, attention, comprehension, yielding, retention, and behavior. Other authors simplify these steps to four: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action (1968). These steps are in progress when a person makes a campaign; hence it is imperative for social marketers to consider them in any social marketing campaign.

IMPLEMENTING THE SOLUTION

Following the completion of the solution design, social marketers must efficiently implement the solution by creating a demand. The implementation consists of two distinct steps: first, raising awareness among members of the target audience about both the problem and the proposed solution, and second, implementing the solution. Second, persuading members of the target audience to use the solution. These two steps could be accomplished through designing an effective media strategy capable of delivering information about solution to the target audience. In order to make decisions more culturally appealing, researchers in the marketing campaign must include culturally appropriate messages to the target group.

EVALUATION

Evaluation can be considered a judgment to decide whether a problem has been solved effectively or not. Social marketing campaigns are measured continuously. The best use of social marketing campaigns is to join them with a parallel commercial marketing campaign that can stir up the targeted social effect. Finally, there should be evidence review that identifies "what works" in social marketing programs to measure the change in the targeted behaviours.

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