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ORIGINAL ARTICLES

# The application of social marketing principles in health care campaigns

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**Abstract**: *Social Marketing offers new insight into the design of health care programs that focus on the comprehensive vision of understanding the target audience. As there have been several confusions between the Health Care Social Marketing and education or preventive health care programs, the characteristics refer to the social good and behavior change on voluntary grounds. This paper aimed to elaborate some guidelines for Health Care Social Marketing campaigns to increase the chances of success and trigger the expected behavioral change in the target audience. To ensure the successful implementation of a Social Marketing campaign in health care, a plan that describes the necessary steps to respond in terms of efficiency and effectiveness to the public health campaign outcomes needs to be elaborated. The proposed model has three levels of intervention, as found in the scientific literature: Diagnosis of social problems, Benefits, and social change, and Social Marketing Mix.*

**Keywords**: *social marketing, health care campaigns, Health Care Social Marketing*

## INTRODUCTION

Since its beginnings, Social Marketing has been a controversial concept, without having a formally approved definition. However, in 1971, Kotler and Zaltman considered that Social Marketing could be defined as "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" [1]. Similarly, in 1989, Kotler and Roberto described Social Marketing as "a program planning process that promotes the voluntary behavior of target audiences by offering benefits they want, reducing barriers they are concerned about, and using persuasion to motivate their participation in program activity" [2]. Moreover, a more recent perspective offered by Kotler and Lee stated that Social Marketing should be "a process that applies marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate and deliver value to influence target audience behaviors that benefit society as well as the target audience" [3]. These definitions have highlighted some common elements of Social Marketing, such as social good, behavior, the impact of Social Marketing on the target audience. In a broader sense, Social Marketing is based on the following orientations [4]:

- Client orientation, which is the identification of the people's needs, aspirations, values, and priorities;

- Creative orientation in finding imaginative methods to engage the target audience;

- Collective orientation is shaped by the recognized social context matters of a target audience;

- Competitive orientation represents the critical addressing

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to the competition through active strategic measures, for instance, brand competition, product competition, enterprise competition, and generic competition.

Thus, in practice, Social Marketing should be used when there is a voluntary behavior exchange and it is helpful when applied from the start in the planning process of a campaign. Social Marketing principles may be applied in any field. For example, Social Marketing offers a new approach to the design of health care programs due to its more comprehensive focus on the target audience, namely, the audience orientation [5]. An audience-oriented perspective is materialized under a bottom-up philosophy in contrast to the traditional approach [6].

Consequently, Social Marketing is more suitable to be used in the health care field, as it: (a) guides consumers from the beginning of the planning process, having a consumer orientation; (b) improves the management, implementation, and evaluation of intervention programs using efficient marketing activities through the development of a plan, lined up to a target audience; (c) promotes the message of campaigns through Mass-Media following the target audience; (d) improves public satisfaction using marketing research to have an accurate perspective on the desired outcomes; (e) helps individuals identify the need for behavior change [7].

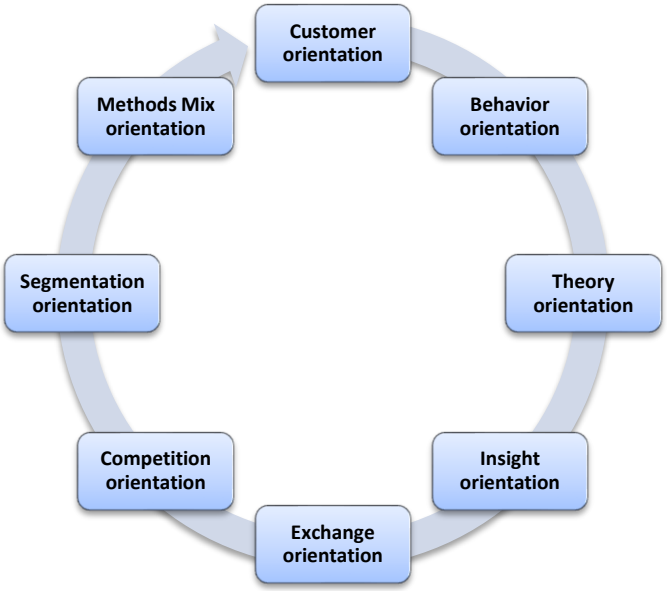
Although most Health Care Social Marketing campaigns focus on the operationality of integrating the Marketing Mix to encourage the target audience to change their behavior, they do not provide the expected results not because the Marketing principles have been inappropriate, but rather because there has been an incomplete analysis of some elements at the design stage [8]. Therefore, this article aimed to elaborate some guidelines for Health Care Social Marketing campaigns to increase the chances of success and trigger the expected behavioral change in the target audience

## THE HEALTH CARE SOCIAL MARKETING ORIENTATION

The Health Care Social Marketing orientation is a complex concept because it is not easily understood and usually confusion may occur because most specialists focus on promotion instead of the individual's behavioral change process. Put it in simple words, Health Care Social Marketing should guide the target audience towards the action and the behavior change by using health policies and decreasing the assumptions, constraints, and barriers encountered in the external and internal environment of the target audience. The desired outcome of a Social Marketing campaign in the health care field takes place when the target audience identifies and recognizes the benefits of the change.

In practice, there is a refined version of what a Health Care Social Marketing campaign is and where interventions should be applied. Using the guidelines of French and Blair-Stevens in the shape of several benchmarks, the empirical challenges have been solved, once a Health Care Social Marketing initiative has been designed [9]. These benchmarks refer to the following elements as presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:** The Benchmarks of Health Care Social Marketing



• Customer orientation - Develops a robust understanding of the audience, based on the features of a market and consumer research;

• Behavior orientation - Has a clear focus on behavior, based on a strong behavioral analysis, with a specific emphasis on behavioral goals;

• Theory orientation - Drawing the information from an integrated theoretical framework is fundamental for behavior change;

• Insight orientation - Based on developing a deeper insight approach - it promotes behavioral changes and motivations;

• Exchange orientation integrates an exchange analysis, suggesting the understanding of what the person must give to get the proposed benefits;

• Competition orientation includes a competitive analysis to understand what competes with the time and attention of the audience;

• Segmentation orientation uses a developed segmentation approach;

• Methods mix orientation identifies an appropriate mix of methods, using the de-CIDES intervention framework [10] that may help in the selection, coordination, and combination of different intervention types. The de-CIDES interventions relate to the following:

 Inform/communicate: inform/communicate/prompt/ trigger/remind/reinforce/awareness/explain;

 Educate: enable/engage/train/skill development/inspire/ encourage/motivate;

 Support: service provision/practically assist/promote access/social networks/social mobilization;

 Design: alter/physical/product/social/organizational/ systems/technology;

 Control/regulate: control/rules/require/constrain/ restrict/enforce/regulate/legislate.

## HEALTH CARE SOCIAL MARKETING PLANNING

As there have been many confusions between what Health Care Social Marketing is and what is not, with a specific reference to education and promotion, many scholars felt the need to reaffirm the main points of interest when planning a health care campaign. Therefore, Health Care Social Marketing is a sort of utility package related to the activities, processes, and efforts to deliver benefits to individuals, namely, it is more than communication, and education, it is a plan that focuses on new opportunities to trigger ideas and behavior in health care consumers [11]. Accordingly, Continho Da Silva and Mazzon [8] proposed a plan that described the necessary steps to respond in terms of efficiency and effectiveness to the public health campaign outcomes (Figure 2). This model has three levels of intervention, as it follows: (i) diagnosis - research, collect, and analyze market data and information to identify social problems; (ii) benefits and social change - design an appropriate benefit to the target audience and influence the social change to them; (iii) the Social Marketing Mix - provide and ensure mechanisms and instruments to measure, analyze, and assess the results of the health care campaign.

**Figure 2**: The steps of a Health Care Social Marketing plan

### 1. Level 1: Diagnosis of social problems

At this level there are 3 steps:

• Identifying the mission in terms of strategic intent, organization values (moral and ethical assumptions), ability and skills (performance), the market definition using consumer-oriented activities and processes, and positioning, meaning the image of the benefits of the campaign.

• The environment of the Social Marketing campaign refers to the outside environment, made up of the demography, economy, nature, legal, technology, and competition, as well as to the inside environment that concentrates on the resources and competencies, culture, suppliers, publics, and channels.

• The data and information collections use the research and the Marketing Information System (MIS). The scope of MIS is to provide relevant information for social marketers to take decisions on time.

• The factors of the target audience's behavior are divided into external factors, such as the skills necessary to perform a particular behavior, the access to the promoted services, the policies, laws and regulations, the culture in terms of customs, values, and lifestyles, as well as the internal factors that refer to the knowledge, and attitudes of the target audience. The internal factors are shaped by the target audience's perceived self-efficacy, risks, social norms, consequences, and intentions.

• Identifying the social problem (situation analysis) provides a SWOT-like approach by analyzing both the internal and

external environments of the Health Care Social Marketing campaign. The internal environment refers to the strengths and weaknesses that the social campaign might produce, and, respectively, the external environment, made up of the opportunities and threats that may influence the health care campaigns.

**2. Level 2: Benefits and social changes**

The specific steps at this level are the following:

• Defining the goal of the Social Marketing campaign that should be SMART, meaning measurable. Moreover, it should be a reference, specific, have a date and a location, set realistic goals, be clear, and be known to all the stakeholders involved in the Social Marketing campaign.

• Identifying the social change by being a collective action on a long period, having a permanent nature and complexity arising from a social problem, and, respectively, combining the change with the idea of progress. Following several social change theories as well as behavior change models. This step refers to the cognitive, action, behavior, and value at different behavioral change stages such as the pre-contemplative, contemplative, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination. Most Health Care Social Marketing consumers are in the pre-contemplative or contemplative stages.

• Informing the change benefits to the target audience to achieve the potential cognitive consequences that will trigger a changing behavior.

• The target audience's reaction and their demographic characteristics are very important in determining the needs and the wants, their perceptions in attitudes and shared values as well as in the readiness to adopt the change.

• Positioning is the goal of every Health Care Marketing campaign as it can make the target audience reflect on the possibilities of change, mainly, on providing attractive benefits.

**3. Level 3: Social Marketing Mix**

The Marketing Mix is the operational part of the Social Marketing campaign and it focuses on the strategies applied for a target audience.

In the scientific literature, there have been many variants of Social Marketing Mix but in the health care context, it is made up of the classic Marketing Mix components such as the product, price, place, promotion, and of the specific Social Marketing Mix parts as People, Processes, and Performance.

Briefly, the Product is usually elaborated around the identified social problem and its solution arises from the educational and cultural levels of the population, as well as its popularity, which will be debated by the effects and the benefits on a long period.

The Price refers to all the costs involved in an act of change since there are more non-monetary costs such as physical, time, social and psychological. In fact, in Health Care Social Marketing, the costs are materialized in barriers for individuals in adopting a certain behavior.

Place suggests where, when, and how a behavioral change is required, after providing the necessary information to the target audience, whereas Promotion suggests communication strategies and techniques to persuade the target audience to embrace the benefits of the change rather than the costs. In Health Care Social Marketing, represents the promotion of awareness and provides knowledge about the attitudes, intentions, and behavior change expected from the target audience, and ensure a sustainable relationship between the social marketers and the target audience.

The process encompasses both the visible and non-visible activities involved in a Social Marketing campaign. An efficient process must be constantly adapted to the dynamic evolution of the environment, with the scope of avoiding failures, by excluding steps that do not bring value to the target audience and have several orientations, for instance, service quality delivery, productivity, suitable physical evidence and elaborate a blueprint of the processes.

Professional refers to the skills of the staff team that should focus on the knowledge of the entire cycle of service processes from the start to the finish to deliver qualitative services, manage conflicts between different entities and the target audience and respect the ethical patterns encountered in Social Marketing environments. In the health care context, Social Marketing professionals should be able to provide support and knowledge concerning the processes involved.

Performance is used to measure the quality of the Social Marketing campaign, in the shape of breaking the barriers and delivering several benefits, at the same time, respecting some ethical guidelines. As performance may also be considered a quantitative coefficient, the Health Care Social Marketing campaign suggests responsiveness, helpfulness, security, credibility, proactivity, and empathy.

Program is reflected in the above-mentioned elements of the Social Marketing Mix, and it may be part of a plan that will help professionals in mapping the solutions to the process failures, introduce the consumer-oriented measures

and instruments that would ensure the benefits, as well as prioritize sustainable actions and control the performance of a Social Marketing campaign.

**EXAMPLES OF HEALTH CARE SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS**

Social marketing has opened new areas for the expertise of marketers and has intrigued public health advocates.

The early health applications of Social Marketing emerged as part of the international development effort, under the umbrella of "development communication", and were implemented in the Third World countries between 1960 and 1970 [12]. As such, programs promoting immunization, family planning, various agricultural reforms, and nutrition were implemented in many countries in Africa, Asia, and South America in the 1970s. These were based on some of the agricultural development experiences supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), as well as community-based family planning programs initiated by the Ford Foundation and the Population Council in the late 1960s.

Soon, international programs began to incorporate marketing techniques, including radio, media, and advertising, on a larger scale [13]. Hence, family planning program designers, for example, initially started distributing contraceptives in pharmacies and small stores and, subsequently, developed systems for market segmentation, mass communication, and product placement to achieve a wider and more efficient distribution of discounted contraceptives.

Peter King from the Indian Institute of Management, in collaboration with the Indian Government's Central Family Planning Board conducted the first national program focused on family planning and the Ford Foundation funded the project, as USAID supplied condoms to the program without cost.

Further, USAID increased the funding for social contraceptive marketing projects in the 1970s, supporting projects in Kenya, Colombia, Sri Lanka, and Jamaica. Much of the important research and developments to advance social health marketing applications have taken place internationally in the area of family planning. In the same vein, Bill Smith at U.S. Academy for Educational Development began using Social Marketing in several countries around the world to improve child survival rates through oral rehydration, breastfeeding, and childhood immunization [14].

Several heart disease prevention programs have also been developed in the U.S. In 1971, the Stanford University Heart Disease Prevention Program undertook a three-community study to discover a risk reduction method that could be generally applicable [15]. Another program was the National High Blood and Heart Health Program Pawtucket (National High Blood Pressure Prevention Program, and the Pawtucket Heart Health Program). Risk factors were high blood pressure, increased blood cholesterol, obesity, smoking cigarettes, and sedentary life. To assess the program, cross-sectional and cohort risk factor surveys were conducted, together with mortality and morbidity surveillance, both in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and in the non-intervention comparison city of New Bedford, Massachusetts [16]. Some of these programs used the term Social Marketing and openly declared to apply and adapt several marketing concepts or approaches without fully embracing the concept of marketing [17].

The Swiss Federal Office for Public Health and the Swiss AIDS Foundation has promoted AIDS prevention campaigns. A multi-media information campaign with the main slogan "STOP-AIDS" began in February 1987 and is still ongoing. The campaign and its objectives have reached the general population and target groups.

In its evolution, the application of Social Marketing principles has raised many community issues but has also solved them by using instruments and techniques accordingly.

After the 1990s, worldwide, government or non-profit organizations used Social Marketing techniques to implement programs to promote a change in health-beneficial behavior, such as increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, decreasing fat consumption, promoting physical activity, reducing alcohol and tobacco consumption, special programs for pregnant women, infants, and children, behavioral problems related to environmental protection [18]. At the international level, among other facts, Social Marketing has been used to improve access to drinking water [19], eradicate leprosy in Sri Lanka [20], increase adherence to tuberculosis medicines [21], promote immunizations, and universal iodine legislation [22].

Despite being heavily used, even in the pandemic context, Health Care Social Marketing, most of the time, does not have the desired outcome, namely, the behavioral change in individuals, as it needs control and monitoring instruments, as well as elaborating the messages sent differently, for instance, applying cues to trigger a certain emotion. In a study about smoking cessation, using shock advertising messages proved to be inefficient, and maybe changing the message's embedded emotion could trigger the expected result, that is instead of using fear, what should be used is

humor [23].

## CONCLUSION

Health Care Social Marketing has been a controversial concept, as the application of Social Marketing principles in the medical field has been difficult and many scholars confused the activities specific to Social Marketing with the promotion of health and prevention of health. Having an empirical perspective, Social Marketing has many particularities among which are voluntary behavior exchange, a consumer orientation, and a competitive behavioral change. Moreover, elaborating a complex plan of a Health Care Social Marketing campaign may be truly successful and it should include the following three steps: Diagnosis of social problems, benefits, and social change, and Social Marketing Mix.

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