



USE OF SOCIAL MARKETING IN THE PUBLIC HEALTH SECTOR

MANJU M. KAIMAL

Research Scholar, Post Graduate Department of Commerce and Research Centre
Bharata Mata College, Thrikkakara, Kochi, Kerala, INDIA 682021

ORCID: 0000-0002-1063-3827

DR. SAJOY P.B.

Assistant Professor, Post Graduate Research Department of Commerce,
Sacred Heart College, Thevara, Cochin, Kerala, INDIA 682013

ORCID: 0000-0001-7354-5704

ABSTRACT

Social marketing is a process by which commercial marketing tools and techniques are used for achieving various social objectives. Social marketing aims at voluntarily changing human behavior for social benefit. In order to influence human behavior, the principles and techniques of traditional marketing are applied to create, communicate, and deliver value ridden messages/information to the target population. Like traditional marketing, social marketing also uses the marketing mix strategies of product, price, place, and promotion (4Ps) to achieve its targets.

Social marketing has always been used as an effective tool for influencing the health-related behavior of the public. It has, in the past, been used to promote awareness against smoking, promote vaccination programs, promote family planning, etc. Hence, social marketing techniques have a significant role to play in the public health system. During the current outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, social marketing techniques have been extensively used by government agencies to promote awareness among people regarding the measures to be adopted to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

KEYWORDS: Social Marketing, Marketing Mix, 4P, Public Health, COVID-19

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1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing is an important activity in any business organization. The marketing department ensures that the product/service of the organization is consumed (Fejza & Asllani, 2013; Urbonavičius & Dikčius, 2008). The marketing department serves as a bridge between the organization's desire to make profits and the consumers' need to please them. Many techniques and principles are developed to effectively market products/services to consumers so that the company's profits can be maximized without compromising on the needs/wants of customers (Joseph Kehinde et al., 2016). Social scientists have adopted these successful marketing techniques and principles, NGO's, government agencies to achieve social goals and bring about change in human and societal behavior (Sajoy, 2012). For example, in the early 1960s, marketing techniques were used to promote India's family planning (Andreasen, 2016). When marketing techniques are used for achieving social objectives, marketing assumes the name of Social Marketing.

Social marketing has been extensively used in public health to influence people's health-related behavior (Lefebvre, 2011). It has been used to discourage the use of tobacco (Dewhirst & Lee, 2011), reducing alcohol consumption (Perreault Jr. & McCarthy, 2002), promoting vaccination (Opel et al., 2009). During the current COVID-19 crisis, social marketing techniques are being extensively used by government agencies to bring about behavior changes in people's daily routines to ensure voluntary compliance with social distancing and other related measures (Srikanth, 2020). This article briefly discusses the theoretical aspects of social marketing and its application in the public health system during the COVID-19 crisis.

2. DISCUSSION

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MARKETING

Social marketing has been very broadly defined as applying marketing techniques to social problems (Birkinshaw, 1989). The various commercial marketing techniques, namely the 4P's (product, price, place, promotion), are employed to achieve social objectives (Lefebvre, 2011). Social marketing attempts to primarily bring about a voluntary influence/change in human behavior and achieve social objectives or solve social problems (Andreasen, 2016). Thus, in sum and substance, social marketing is the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the target audience's voluntary behavior to improve their welfare and that of the society of which they are a part (Andreasen, 1994).

MARKETING MIX IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL MARKETING

The marketing mix is a set of marketing tools used by an organization to promote/sell its product/service in the market (Kotler, 2019). All the various marketing tools so used by an organization can be included in four primary groups, namely; (1) Product, (2) Price, (3) Place, (4) Promotion (Goi, 2009). These four primary groups of marketing strategies are together called 4P's. The 4P's are all about developing the right product that the customer wants, making the product available at the correct location/place from where the customer can easily



access it, using the most appropriate promotion strategy, and selling it to the customer at the right price (Perreault Jr. & McCarthy, 2002).

It must not be forgotten that a marketing mix is always developed in the context of a targeted population or market to which the organization wishes to sell its product/service. A targeted population or market is a group of customers having certain similar characteristic features (Rustandi Kartawinata et al., 2015). The kind of marketing tools adopted by the organization is decided based on the characteristic features of the customers of the target market (Perreault Jr. & McCarthy, 2002).

The marketing mix techniques (4Ps) have been extensively used in social marketing to achieve the targeted social objective. The use of 4Ps in the context of social marketing is briefly described below:

- 1. Product:** In the case of commercial marketing, 'product' is the physical product or service offered by the business organization to the customer, for which the customer is willing to pay (Išoraitė, 2016). In the case of social marketing, it is not any physical product/service, which is at the core of the marketing strategy. However, a particular proposition like 'smoking is injurious to health,' 'protect the environment.' (Peattie & Peattie, 2009). The objective of the proposition will be to achieve some form of behavior change. This does not mean that physical products/services are not involved or are not necessary, but it is not sufficient. It is necessary to ensure that the target population uses the products/services to change their behavior (Lefebvre, 2011).
- 2. Price:** 'Price' in commercial marketing is defined as the amount that a customer must pay to receive the product/service (Singh, 2012). An organization must adopt the right pricing strategy for its products/service to attract new customers, hold on to existing customers, and satisfy customer needs (Al Badi, 2018). In social marketing, the idea of 'price' goes beyond mere monetary value to include psychological value, social value, and geographic value. (Lefebvre, 2011). Hence the term 'cost of involvement' can be preferred instead of 'price' (Peattie & Peattie, 2009). For any social marketing project to be successful, the price (or cost) strategy must reward desired behaviors and discourage competing for undesirable behaviors (Cheng et al., 2011).
- 3. Place:** In commercial marketing, 'place' is defined as the mechanism through which goods and services move from the producer/service provider to the customer (Al Badi, 2018). 'Place' is also called 'distribution' in commercial marketing (Išoraitė, 2016). Since the core product in social marketing is not the physical product/service but propositions that seek to change human behavior, the term 'accessibility' is used instead of 'place' or 'distribution' (Peattie & Peattie, 2009). A social marketing project will be successful only if it makes accessible the suggested alternative behavior pattern (Sajoy, 2012).
- 4. Promotion:** 'Promotion,' in the context of the commercial marketing mix, involves the communication and persuasion of the target consumers to buy the product/service of the organization. This can be effectively done only by identifying the target consumers (Al Badi, 2018). Advertisement is one of the several promotional tools available (Singh, 2012). In the context of social marketing, the term 'social communication' is preferred to the term 'promotion' (Peattie & Peattie, 2009). For a social marketing strategy to be successful, the



product/service and the desired change in behavior must be appropriately communicated to the target audience (Lefebvre, 2011).

SOCIAL MARKETING AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Public health is the science/art of preventing diseases, prolonging life, promoting health and efficiencies through organized community effort. It is concerned with the health of the whole population and the prevention of diseases from which it suffers (Gidey et al., 2006). Since public health quite often involves the need to bring about behavioral changes in society members, social marketing has been widely used in solving public health problems. In the past, it has been used for (1) combating various chronic diseases, (2) reducing AIDS risk behavior, (3) Fighting child abuse, (4) Increasing utilization of public health services, (5) Preventing teen-smoking, (6) Promoting family planning and contraceptive use, (7) Child immunization programs. (Cheng et al., 2011). It must not be forgotten that two of the most successful public health-related social marketing campaigns were carried out in India. In the 1960s, India implemented a successful family planning program through the social marketing of low-cost Nirodh condoms with public-private sector participation (Sajoy, 2012). Similarly, in the late 1990s/early 2000s, the National Aids Control Programme (NACP) aggressively used social marketing strategies to promote the use of condoms (Sharma & Sharma, 2014).

COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND MEASURES TO COMBAT

The world is currently facing a severe public health crisis arising from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The disease, which first appeared in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019, quickly spread across the globe (Sahin et al., 2020). On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic because the disease had met the epidemiological criteria of having infected a total of more than one lakh people in at least a hundred countries (Ohia et al., 2020).

To combat pandemics like COVID-19, the World Health Organization (WHO) has developed several plans and protocols (WHO, 2009). The basic plans/protocols to deal with pandemics consists of two broad strategies, namely; (1) medical measures and (2) non-medical measures (WHO, 2007). The medical measures involve developing and using vaccines to immunize the public against the disease and use drugs to treat the symptoms of the disease seen in any patient (Holtz-Eakin, 2006). The non-medical measures, which are public health measures, can be classified into two categories: (1) personal hygiene measures, and (2) community-wide measures. Personal hygiene measures are measures that every individual must follow to reduce the possibility of getting infected. These include measures like frequent hand washing, using alcohol-based sanitizers, wearing masks. (Cowling & Aiello, 2020). Community-wide measures are those measures that must be followed by all members of the community to reduce/prevent the spread of the disease. Community-wide measures include social distancing, closing down places like schools, offices, and hotels where people congregate. (Matzler et al., 2007).



SOCIAL MARKETING AND CONTROL OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

COVID-19 disease is a relatively new one. Hence vaccines/medicines are not yet available to combat the same. Consequently, health systems worldwide extensively rely on non-pharmaceutical (non-medical) measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak (Unicef et al., 2020). It must be noted that most of the non-medical measures like wearing masks, social distancing, using sanitizers, involve a change in the behavior of the members of the society. Consequently, public authorities have extensively used social marketing strategies to promote non-medical measures (Opel et al., 2009).

The Indian government has been very aggressively using several social marketing strategies to promote various non-medical measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 disease. Some of the strategies are outlined below:

1. The Department of Telecommunication (DoT) directed various telecom operators such as Reliance Jio, Airtel, BSNL, etc. to change the default cell phone caller tune to a 30-second COVID-19 based message in early March 2020. The message aims to raise awareness amongst citizens of the disease and to recommend steps to prevent the message from spreading. For example, the messages suggest the citizens wash their hands with soap regularly, to cover their face with tissue/handkerchief while coughing or sneezing. (Outlook, 2020).
2. In March 2020, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) roped in actor Amitabh Bachchan to promote various positive behaviors regarding COVID-19 disease. In the promotion video, Amitabh Bachchan tells people about the different measures to be followed to fight the COVID-19 disease (Jha, 2020).
3. In March 2020, a promotional video campaign was also launched by the central government that educates the public regarding the various home quarantine methods for COVID-19 patients (Kothari et al., 2018).
4. In April 2020, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEiTY) launched a mobile application called Aarogya Sethu to proactively inform citizens about the best practices and relevant advisories about the containment of COVID-19 disease (Deshmukh, 2020).
5. In August 2020, the MoHFW launched an interactive video game called the 'Corona Fighters' to teach people about the right tools and behavior to be employed to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with the video game, two related promotional videos were also released. (PTI, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Social marketing uses various commercial marketing techniques, particularly the 4Ps, to promote and achieve social objectives and solving social problems. For more than half a century, public agencies worldwide have frequently been using social marketing strategies to bring about change in the behavior pattern among society members. This is particularly true in the public health sector, where several social marketing programs have been successfully implemented. Social marketing strategies are now being extensively used by public authorities in several countries like India to contain the spread of COVID-19 disease.



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