

Social marketing: effective marketing tool



This paper tries to look into social marketing as an effective tool in influencing public behaviour. The concept of using social marketing in practice went back to implementation of family planning programmes in USA in 1960s. But still social marketing has not evolved as a completely specialised discipline. In most of the cases excessive thrust on promotional aspect restricts social marketing from achieving desired behavioural change. Therefore for a better result social marketers need to manipulate all 4Ps. There were cases where marketing programme was successfully implemented for anti drug and anti tobacco campaign, improving the public health in USA and addressing occupational safety problems amongst young workers their by establishing that social marketing construct based on multi dimensions.

Need for such a study

More and more companies, Governments, NGOs are using social marketing as an effective tool in influencing individual behaviour. This approach is extremely helpful in implementation of various programmes in health related areas and wellbeing of society. Social marketing is used in anti tobacco campaigns, population control and other type of social welfare programmes in public health related areas. Therefore social marketing has a profound impact on the life of people particularly people belonging underprivileged section. So effective implementation of social marketing programmes is a must for human development.

Introduction

Social marketing is defined as “ The application of marketing in the solution of social and health problems” (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971). In the initial days

social marketing means marketing of products which are useful in social change but nowadays it focuses mainly on influencing individual behaviour to bring desired behavioural change. Social marketing in many cases involve a product offering but there are cases like anti tobacco campaign where thrust is purely on behavioural changes. As many social and health problems have behavioural causes and marketing influences human behaviour, therefore social marketing offers a promising strategy for promoting improvements in health and wellbeing of society. As per Andreasen " Social marketing is a process for developing social change programme".

Commercial and Social Marketing

Defining precisely what is social marketing and what is not is a matter of debate amongst social marketers and academics. One fundamental difference between commercial and social marketing is that social marketing involves much more consumer involvement for successful implementation of programme. The social marketing offerings are often much more complex and it often encounters stiff resistance from consumers as it tries to influence consumer behaviour. Therefore one needs to be extra careful while developing a social marketing programme. Commercial marketing examples can be successfully used in social marketing programmes. Advanced advertising strategies proposed by Rossiter and Persey (1997) were successfully implemented in National Illicit Drug Campaign (NIDC) in Australia. In the theory authors proposed four steps in campaign planning- Target audience and action objectives, communication objectives and positioning , creative strategy and media strategy.

In National Illicit Drug Campaign (NIDC) (Talk to your kids about drugs) all the steps are followed and social marketing programme was successfully implemented. Now let us examine the programme: (Jones and Rossieter, 2002)

Target audience and action objectives: Normally such programmes target parents and children but this programme solely targets parents who will play the roles of initiator and influencer in providing medicine to children. The action objective is for parents of 12-17 years old to obtain and read NIDC booklets and talk to their kids about drugs.

Communication objective and positioning: The communication objective was to encourage parents to talk to their children about ill effect of drugs and providing a guideline to children acting as a facilitator.

Creative strategy: This campaign used role models and creative ideas just like as commercial marketing. The execution strategy relied upon commercial marketing principle. “Talk to your kids about drugs” is a new brand. Thus the emotional portrayal has to be an accurate representation of parents motivation. The ads therefore use a very strong emotional look that engages the fears parents are most likely to have. The emotional portrayal was used in TV ads modeling the targeted role for parents.

Media strategy: Like commercial marketers, NIDC utilized a mix of TV ads, radio, newspapers, magazine, online ads.

From the above case we can conclude that commercial marketing strategies can be used in a social marketing programme.

The most famous concept in the commercial marketing is 4P theory (Product, Pricing, Place and Promotion). But the same theory can be used in social marketing field. (Mathew, 2008)

Social Product: In social marketing the “ Core” product comprises the benefit of behavioural change, which is the actual product. The “ augmented” product consists of “ tangible objects and services to support behavioural change.”

Social Pricing: In commercial marketing price is the value paid by consumer to obtain certain product or services. But in social marketing cost not only involves the price paid to obtain a particular product or service but also includes the cost of time, efforts to be employed by a consumer to buy a changed behaviour, and there is a price involved with negative impact of social relations with modified social behaviour.

Social Distribution: “ To an extent there is a degree of overlap with commercial marketing in making services available to the target market. Augmented product elements in social marketing programme, for example nicotine patches or condoms, have to be physically distributed effectively to potential users. Frequently, however, social marketer’s primary concern is the distribution of information or ideas about behavioural change rather than a physical product” (Bloom and Novelli, 1981)

Social Promotion: Earlier discussion on use of commercial advertising strategy in social marketing programme depicts how promotion can be used both in commercial and social marketing arena.

This 4P theory (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) has been turned to create a new paradigm in social marketing known as SIVA (Solution, Information, Value and Access) that modifies 4P for social marketing programme. (Dev and Schulz, 2005). The genesis of this theory went back to an idea that 4P focuses mainly on products not on consumers. The founder of the model focuses on the fact that customer wants information, the customer wants solution and customer is not looking for next new thing but instead looking for a need to be met, in this information age customers wants to learn more.

The 4P has been modified as follows,

Product = Solutions.

Promotion = Information.

Price = Value.

Place = Access.

This model advocates that marketers do not develop and market products, rather understands and solves problems, all in the context of helping the customer think of values (i. e how much does the benefit outweigh cost).

This model provides an opportunity for social marketers to develop a programme keeping consumers at centre.

Another aspect that links commercial marketers and social marketers is partnership. The social marketers need to focus more on partnership than commercial marketers as they lack resources like a sales force, established distribution network etc. Social marketers need to build a infrastructure and

marketplace to successfully sell their products. It is a difficult task with limited resources, therefore social marketers need to depend upon partnership more than commercial marketers.

Challenges for social marketing

In the age of rapidly changing marketplace, social marketing has to continually adopt itself to new environment as changes in commercial marketing affects social marketing. Literature revealed that many challenges faced by social marketing as follows: (Dann, Harris and Gillian, 2007)

New dominant logic and new eras of marketing:” Marketing is moving from goods-oriented exchange approach to service dominant logic and value creation paradigm. As social marketing consistently been seen as the transfer and application of commercial marketing, social marketing practitioners and academics need to adapt to keep pace with evolution of parent discipline”(Jones and Rossiter, 2002). So challenges for social marketing is to continually reinvent itself and adopt to the service dominant logics, relationship management.

Clarifying social marketing in social change marketplace:

As more and more commercial marketing principle are used in social marketing, the line demarcating commercial and social marketing is getting blurred and commercial intrusion is creating confusion what is really social marketing. It has mainly concentrated on a downstream approach of changing behaviour but an upstream approach of integrating community, media, law, business into social marketing will bring a more favourable change in individual behaviour.

Developing social marketing theory for social marketing applications:

It is a major challenge for social marketing to firmly establish itself as a discipline. Social marketing programmes are mostly developed on borrowed theories from health, psychology and commercial marketing. It often leads to more emphasis on health aspects or business aspects rather than bringing desired behavioural changes. So there is a need to develop social marketing specific theories.

Putting the consumer first in marketplace: Unlike commercial marketing where consumer is at centre of activity, in social marketing often social marketers decides the agenda i. e a top down approach is adopted. So consumer often resists changing their behaviour. To put consumers first social marketers need to do more research on social marketing product buying behaviour and consumer behaviour on future uncertain benefits, so that social marketing offering can become more acceptable to consumers. In cases specific behavioural goal changes evolve over a period of time as social marketers receive feedback from audience. In order to reduce infant mortality rate in developing countries WHO undertakes a programme to reduce number of children dying from preventable disease. Diarrheal dehydration was the major cause of infant death in many countries. So social marketing programme was initiated to reduce diarrheal dehydration. But latter it was found that social marketing programmes addressing diarrheal dehydration was ineffective in reducing infant mortality, because diarrhea was only first threat to infants life. After surviving the bout of diarrhea, the infant went on to die of respiratory infections or some immunizable diseases.

It was learned over time that to achieve the goal of lower mortality it was necessary to have a package of interventions. Social marketers arrived at the conclusion after having feedback from consumers.

Social marketing programmes over the years have been dominated by social advertising and social communication. The participation of public sector in social marketing is limited and it lacks strategic vision. There simply is no brand managers, no marketing executive and no integration of product development, pricing, distribution and promotion in the public sector.

Apart from planning and execution related challenges social marketing has to face many ethical issues. “ Social marketing is a two edged sword perceived to have major beneficial elements, but also containing the potential to cause significant ethical controversies.”(Laczniak, Lusch and Murphy, 1979). Social marketing provides an opportunity to convey ideas in a better way but at the same time it can be misused by persons or organizations having monetary or political power. “ Social marketing could ultimately operate as a form of thought control by emotionally powerful” (Laczniak, Lusch and Murphy, 1979). In such cases social marketing can be misused to mould the thought process of society to serve the vested interest. Therefore the role of social marketers for proper utilization of this powerful tool becomes important. The abuse can be prevented by using the methods of self regulation, professional regulation and government control. Social marketing tools and techniques are like any other tools that can be used for both good and evil purposes and user determines the outcome not tool. Therefore social marketers need to play a vigilant role while implementing the programmes. In most cases the social marketing

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programme objectives are determined by government agencies and social marketers act as hired guns. On one side social marketing can be treated as value neutral tool kit for social change and on the other side it can be considered as a tool kit having implicit value statement. If social marketing tool kit has implicit value statement then it can only be used for good purpose and social marketers are doers of good. But if it is a value neutral kit for social change then the social marketers themselves were not bound to be “doers of good” as much as they were bound to be users of the social marketing tool kit. Using metaphorical description social marketing tool kit is a hammer (Dann, 2006a) and social marketers are hired guns (Andreasen, 1995). As a hammer can not determine the outcome, the tool kit can not determine the outcomes of a social marketing programme. It is just a set of marketing hammer (and other blunt instruments) for use in social marketing campaigns (Dann, 2006a). But this neutrality of tool kit contradicts the definition of social marketing. Social marketing can be presented as “the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programmes designed to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audience in order to improve their personal welfare and that of their society (Andreasen, 1995). Therefore the core of social marketing argument is the utilitarian ethical argument of action for welfare of society. So social marketers have to bear the partial responsibility of using social marketing tool kit for social good.

Now we will examine cases where social marketing programme has been implemented to address social and health related issues. Public health

related issues often have social dimensions and addressing social aspect is a key to solve health issue.

In USA the health condition of people with colour are quite bad when compared to majority white population. Normally these people belong to low income category and less educational background and this aggravates their worse health condition. Their diet and lifestyle are often main reason behind this health problem. The social marketing programme can act as an effective tool in addressing the issues. Most of the programme suffers from a problem that often these programmes are designed by people belonging to majority population with rigid mindset about the community. If the programme is developed and executed by people belonging to minority community it often yields better result. In Atlanta a programme is developed to reduce the potential for exposure through contact with caregivers who were washing and cleaning chitterling, a traditional food for African American infants, to a bacterium that causes diarrheha. The programme was developed by people belonging to same community with better socio economic background and reduced diarrheha outbreak. It shows that a successful interaction between social marketers and target audience requires a mindset shift that allows for more culturally appropriate and ethnically relevant models to reach minority population. For this shift of mindset social marketers need to follow a three step guidelines which are as follows:

Know what minority target market needs: This means social marketers must know what minority population wants rather than simply giving them what social marketers deems appropriate for them. This principle talks about getting knowledge from target audience.

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Need what minority target market knows: This principle focuses on the value social marketer places on the knowledge acquired. The marketers must understand and accept these values. The target audience becomes resource collaborator rather than mute recipients.

Target programmes to specific minority markets, but market to moving targets:

The social marketers shall keep in mind that knowledge about the needs of the minority community is not static. They need to collect feedback at regular intervals from target audience and accordingly modify the programme to achieve better result.

Social marketing in public health

North Carolina Department of Public Health (NCDPH) decided to use social marketing to change behaviour of its staff by using social marketing concept. It followed the various stages of social marketing programme. It chose the programme staff and programme manager as target audience. A structured interview was carried out to find out what these people think about social marketing programme, what are the barriers and benefits of social marketing programme. It formed the audience research stage of social marketing programme. The specific behavioural objectives are established for each group. The cost and benefit arising out of the programme for each group is developed in a way that benefit must outweigh the cost. The product, price, place and promotion strategies were developed to support the programme. This streamlined approach resulted in a far better performance of NCDPH staff.

In USA the breast cancer is the major cause of death amongst African American Women (AAW). There are many factors that have been identified as contributors to this unusual high rate, such as lack of knowledge, limited education, cultural beliefs, language barriers, late stage diagnosis, reduced access to care, and deprivation, but ultimately socioeconomics is a central determinant in differing outcomes of breast cancer mortality. Social marketing program was developed to increase breast cancer awareness that empower women with knowledge regarding early detection and prevention. In social marketing promotional campaign a cable TV program Sister Talk was aired to increase awareness about breast cancer. The participants were provided with educational material and other resources so that program could have a lasting impact. Many other promotional campaigns were also launched which included billboard ads, radio and tv program, community health program to promote awareness etc. All these promotional campaign improved awareness about breast cancer among AAWs, but the major weakness remains that all such programs focused on promotion only neglecting product, price and place aspects.

Social marketing in social issues

Apart from health related issues social marketing has found application in addressing issues such as occupational health safety among young workers. It is one of the most prevalent safety problems in many countries including developed countries like USA, Canada etc. The most difficult problem is that the most affected group the young industrial workers does not rank safety as a priority issue for them. In order to address this problem training and education has been imparted to improve safety condition but social

marketing can provide a more comprehensive approach. Using social marketing theory worker may be persuaded to give up the benefits of the unsafe behaviors or habits that the worker has previously engaged in; what is gained by the worker is an enhanced level of safety and a greater likelihood that he/she will not be injured. Comprehensive social marketing campaigns generally develop a strategy by manipulating several of marketing's 4 Ps (product, place, price, promotion).

Product: The product' element of the social marketing mix can be divided into the actual, core, and augmented product. Actual product is the desired behavior being promoted (e. g., wear gloves while operating a machine). Core product is the end benefit of carrying out the desired behavior (e. g., higher quality of life, or a better guarantee of future wages). Augmented product includes tangible products (e. g., gloves, helmets, back braces, goggles, etc.) or intangible services (e. g., training workshops on safety).

Price: The price" the target audience pays for following a particular safety practice might be a reduction in the speed with which a job can be done. The price could be financial, if the worker must buy expensive work boots, for example, rather than wearing runners. The social marketers task is to demonstrate the value of safety, so that the ' price' paid seems worth the safety that is being gained.

Promotion: It is always an inseparable part of social marketing campaign in the form of booklets, training, advertisements etc.

Place: Place' is the location where the product is made available and where safety behavior can be carried out. If use of a particular work-safety product

is being advocated, such as rubber gloves or goggles, then locating that product conveniently for worker use is a crucial element of “ place’.

If comprehensive social marketing programs are developed by manipulating all 4Ps then it can go a long way improving safety amongst young workers rather than merely focusing on promotional aspect only.

Conclusion:

Social marketing as a discipline is still at its growing stage. It is not yet established as a full-fledged discipline. Social marketing has to assimilate the theories of commercial marketing such as 4P (Product, Price, Promotion and Place) in its own way and develop its own variants. It will help social marketing to distinguish itself with other forms of marketing such as cause related marketing, CSR etc. In the social change marketplace several marketing principles like cause related marketing, not for marketing, CSR etc are trying to influence individual behaviour in the same way as social marketing does. Therefore social marketing has to compete for same budget and needs to prove that it is capable of achieving better outcome. Social marketing was able to bring desired change in individual behaviour. It was successfully implemented in many health and social issues. Particularly in case of minority and other disadvantaged communities the major problem associated with public health is not the lack of medical facilities but larger problem is lack of awareness about the health. The key challenge is to develop a programme that enables the marketers to deliver its message to target group. In order to address this problem I propose that while developing a social marketing programme for a particular community the marketing team shall include people belonging to the same community, who

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has a better knowledge about the need and culture of the community.

Understanding the culture of community is extremely important because if the message does not get a fit with the culture and values of the community, then it is highly unlikely that community will accept the message. Another major problem is that most social marketing programs puts too much thrust on promotional aspect. But it extremely important that social marketers shall also concentrate on product, pricing and place. Social marketing program shall develop some tangible products because it helps the individual to connect with the program and it supplements the promotional effort. In social marketing applications non financial costs are more than monetary cost as social marketing objective is to bring change in individual behaviour. Bringing behavioural change is the toughest job and it involves a large cost in the form of social, psychological etc. Therefore the promotional campaign shall be built in a way that target group must understand that benefits of changing behaviour outweighs the cost. Only this exchange can bring desired behavioural change. Therefore price will play a critical role in the success of a social marketing and for the success of programme benefit must outweigh the cost. In most cases the program is associated with some tangible products like medicine, pills, nicotine strap etc and one major aspect is that to make these products available to target group as and when they need it. Here the place aspect i. e distribution channel will play an important role. The social marketers shall design the distribution channel in such a way that target audience can easily access the distribution channel. Therefore the promotion shall be supplemented by other three Ps and comprehensive approach can bring desired approach. Social marketing is such an effective tool that if properly utilized it can help to solve various

social and public health issues like AIDS control, reducing infant mortality rate, reducing gender inequality etc and it can play even more critical role in addressing the problems of socially disadvantaged communities and on the other hand if it is used for unethical purposes by people having money power, it can mould public opinion in a distorted way that can do major harm to society. It is the role of social marketers that will determine the future of social marketing and if they can play a constructive role social marketing can establish itself as most potent tool for bringing desired social change in social change marketplace.