

SOCIAL MARKETING: BUSINESS STRATEGIES FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

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Abstract: This article aims to provide an overview on the concept of social marketing and its practice in healthcare. It is also an attempt to prove that social marketing can serve to the best social ideas as well as to profitability of for-profit businesses.

Key words: social marketing, health promotion, Philip Kotler, four Ps.

Before starting it is necessary to identify the notion “social marketing” due to various meanings used in media. In this paper the term “social marketing” is understood 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. Originally this definition was published by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman in 1971 [Ph.Kotler, 1971]. Using marketing techniques enables to link the simple possession of knowledge and the socially useful implementation of what knowledge allows. Thus social marketing is a much larger concept than social advertising. It is also not social media marketing, the term used for word-of-mouth nowadays.

According to the published evidences [Ph.Kotler, 1971], the first idea about selling social valuables like usual commodities arose in 1952. In fact, it could be possible to implement some instruments and strategies so successfully practiced in traditional marketing to spread society interests and change people’s behavior. It is a known fact that 90% of health determinants result from individual behavior and social and physical environmental conditions, 95% of health expenditures go to treatment rather than prevention [Rothschild, 2010]. The awareness of marketing’s power to make people choose healthier life style became a starting point for numerous social advertising campaigns in USA. Unfortunately, as any advert it is able only to inform and persuade someone in respect to products and services. It does not include other functions of the proper marketing.

In his article Philip Kotler gave a thorough reasoning for elements of social marketing. Based on traditional marketing social marketing also operates with four main Ps: product, promotion, place and price. Each of them needs special estimation and understanding in terms of a specific social idea. To date there are no radical changes or additions to the concept presented in 1971. Thus, its postulates are summarized further. Because social marketing tend to deal with social causes as commodities they have to get material implementation in real products or certain activities. For instance, a core product - idea of “health eating” - may be reflected in balanced set menu in canteens and cookery-books with recipes of dishes from vegetables and cereals. It also implies such behavioral habits as eating four times a day. Furthermore the idea should be presented in a desirable for each group of target audience manner so that they are willing to purchase. Promotion campaign also contributes to this. It should be noticed that in this case promotion includes not only social advertising, but also personal selling, publicity and sales promotion. All these activities concern to the core idea and its material implementations and require proper planning and budgeting. Noteworthy is a fact that the person’s predisposition prior the motivation determines much more effectiveness of the whole campaign. The third not less crucial point of social marketing is place. This component covers all outlets and mechanisms which promote person to consummate the social idea’s implementations. The potential consumer should know clear where and how to buy the desired product and to get needed additional information. The final variable that influences effectiveness of buying social ideas is price. Besides money, it represents opportunity costs, energy costs and psychic costs. This point clarifies why some people prefer to pay money for private medicine instead to spend more time and energy by state medical service. Thus, even in regard with noncommercial products customers somehow estimate the potential costs of “for” and “against” decisions.

This managerial instrument inspired lots of campaigns on changing public behavior in a healthier way. Unfortunately, a great part of them was limited by social advertising and health communications. But the fact that people know what to do, does not guarantee they change their behaviors to do what is “right”. The blueprint of social marketing implementation stems from understanding the behavior of the target audience. As it was established, three major segments of consumers exist [Rotschild, 2010]:

- those who are prone to behave appropriately, and are able to do so, may need only messages to remind them;
- those who are resistant may need the force of law as motivation;
- those who are aware and motivated but who are unable to behave. Reducing barriers and increasing benefits among those who are unable or unwilling may provide sufficient environmental change to allow behavior to occur.

People’s behavior depends on different constant and temporary factors. First of all, to make any decision people compare the potential costs and awaited performances for all possible variants. Moreover, short-term costs and benefits play often more important role in choosing process. In case of health the desirable results seem to be distant and not guaranteed but have everyday costs (e.g. waking up earlier to do morning exercises; embarrassment to deny drinking alcohol with friends). That is why “good” choice often failed in comparison with “bad” ones having short-term benefits like tasty pizza or a classy look when smoking. This highlights the importance of positioning, the framing of the product so that the perceived benefits are maximized and the perceived costs are minimized. The consumer’s attitude to the product also depends on the people around. Publics influence one’s behavior sometimes even more that it is thought. Primary and secondary external and internal stakeholders in the social programs must be considered throughout the planning process. Thus to reach the defined goal the program of social marketing should include the different sides’ influence on the target audience. Partnership with other organizations allows dealing with problems so complex that no single organization could hope to solve them alone. It is noticeable that during the social marketing the core idea reflects in some determined activities and/or some real products of healthcare industry. Thus the popularization of one society interest stimulates the consuming of medical services and devices and other health related products. Laws and public policies that have to be made to support behavior change provide environmental and contextual changes. In other words, positioning, publics, partnership and policy may be called the additional Ps in term of social marketing. They are also completed with so called “purse strings”, that represents the variety of funding sources (e.g., foundations, government, private donors) needed to support social marketing efforts.

When analyzing one social marketing program Aschemann-Witzel suggested that success of the described cases was first, attributed to characteristics of the macro environment or to public private partnerships in the initiation of campaigns, second, to the engagement of social communities, elements of empowerment of the target group, and thirdly, in citizens adoption of the campaign and in accompanying structural changes [Aschemann-Witzel, 2012].

In the end it is necessary to sum up the main conclusions. The concept of social marketing promises to be more effective as traditional methods of health propaganda. To reach public benefits all groups of marketing activities should focus on the behavior of target audience. They also have to be planned and implemented in partnership of governmental and business subjects. As for-profit businesses of healthcare industry benefit the most and directly from the increased demand they should be more interested in social marketing campaigns.

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