SOCIAL MARKETING: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Social marketing as a technique of influencing voluntary human behaviour had a quiet genesis in the family planning program implemented by the Indian government in the mid 1960. In the nearly five decades that followed there was considerable theoretical development of the concept. Also the practical application of social marketing grew well beyond the health sector where it was initially used. An analysis of the theoretical development in the field of social marketing will show that it has successfully adopted the planning and segmentation strategies of commercial marketing to suit the requirements of complex social issues. In applying the segmentation technique to social marketing, one has to overcome many barriers that prevent the application of segmentation to social marketing. Social marketing process has successfully adopted the four P's of commercial marketing.

Key Words: - Social marketing, Voluntary behaviour change, Segmentation, Social marketing mix, Family planning program.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social Scientists have always tried to evolve techniques to influence and improve the quality of human life. One of the more successful techniques of influencing human behaviour is social marketing. Social Marketing is nothing but the use of the techniques of commercial marketing to influence/change human behaviour, so as to increase the well being of both the individual and the society. The success of social marketing based campaigns had led to its application to a wide range of social issues like HIV/AIDS prevention, tobacco abuse, suicide reduction, domestic violence, environment protection, voter conservation, literacy etc.

2. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

Marketing historians trace the conceptual origin of social marketing to the famous question raised by G.D. Wiebe in early 1950's – "Why can't you sell brother hood like you sell soap?" (Wiebe, 1951-52). Wiebe analysed four social campaigns in the US and found that when the conditions of the social campaign resembled those of a product campaign, the social campaign was more successful. In spite of its early origin, the idea of social marketing could not obtain traction until the mid-to-late 1960s and early 1970s when the Vietnam war caused many people in US to rethink their social obligation (Alan R. Andreason, 2003). Even before social marketing could get a foot hold in US, the first practical real life social marketing campaign was launched in India with the implementation of the family planning program in 1964 (Harvey, 1999). This program involved the distribution/marketing of low cost Nirodh condoms with public private sector participation. This campaign saw the evolution of slogan like "Do ya teen bus", Hum Do Hamare Do" etc. This venture in India was soon followed by a number of successful social marketing efforts in different countries involving the marketing of family products and services (Manoff, 1985).

The success of such campaigns resulted in the academic community analysing them. They found that the techniques used in those campaigns resembled those used in commercial marketing. This resulted in coining of the term "social marketing" by Kotler and Zaltman (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971). They also define social marketing 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"

As social marketing developed, this early conceptualisation of social marketing came to be severely criticized. As a result of this definition social marketing came to be confused with three topics namely societal marketing, socially responsible marketing and non profit marketing. Subsequently as a result of serious discussion within the academic community more acceptable and precise definition of social marketing emerged.

As social marketing began to become more conceptually clear, its use in campaigns relating to social issues drastically increased. Its use was no longer confined to health and family planning issue. It began to be used in relation to issues like environmental protection, motor accident preservation, voting, literacy, water conservation etc.

3. SOCIAL MARKETING DEFINED

In order to clearly define social marketing it is first essential to distinguish it from societal marketing, socially responsible marketing and non profit marketing.

Societal marketing is concerned about the ethical / societal implementation of commercial activity. Hence societal marketing encourage firms to market goods and services that will satisfy consumers under circumstances that are fair to consumers and that enable them to make intelligent purchase decisions and counsels firms to avoid marketing practices which have dubious consequences for society (Schwartz, 1971). Thus societal marketing is commercial marketing with a human face. Social marketing on the other hand has no direct connection with commercial marketing but nevertheless it uses the tools and techniques of commercial marketing to bring about desired behavioural changes in the target audience. Socially responsible marketing harnesses desirable social causes such as environmentalism and conservatism to advance the interests of a commercial organisation (Kotler et al, 1996). Anticipating bad publicity from public concern about the social implication of commercial activity, some organisations choose to act proactively and position themselves as socially responsible organisations. However such acts do

not constitute social marketing because measures are undertaken to protect their profit interest and not to bring about any social change. Non profit marketing is concerned with the marketing management of institutions/organisations in the non profit arenas like, hospitals, educational institutions etc. Non profit marketing is also different from social marketing in the sense that the former is concerned with success and viability of the organisation while in the latter is concerned with bringing about behavioural changes in their target population.

Any acceptable definition of social marketing must incorporate the essential difference between social marketing and the above mentioned three topics. Andreason's (1995) definition of social marketing takes care of these aspects:

"Social marketing is the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audience in order to improve their personal welfare and that of society".

From the definition the key elements of social marketing can be identified as:

1. The focus is in voluntary behaviour change.
2. The voluntary behaviour change is induced by applying the principle of exchange.
3. The voluntary behaviour change so induced is good for both the society as well as the target audience
4. Commercial marketing techniques such as segmentation and marketing mix strategies are adopted.

SEGMENTATION IN SOCIAL MARKETING

Segmentation of the target population is essential for success of any commercial marketing strategy. The same is true even with social marketing. Yet most social marketing programs do not adopt segmentation and consider the target group as a homogenous unit. This is because there are a number of barriers to segmentation in social marketing. Some of these are:

1. **Ambitious objectives**: - Most often social marketing is concerned with ambitious objectives (e.g.:- Universal Immunization) which involve targeting very large population. This goes against the very idea of segmentation

2. **Operating environment**: - The operating environment may prevent most social marketing programs from adopting segmentation because most of these programs are subject to some form of political control.

3. **Culture**: - There may be cultural / philosophical resistance to the idea of segmentation (Bloom and Novelli, 1981). If segmentation on the basis of need is adopted ignoring such resistance it can lead to accusation of discrimination and stigmatization.

4. **Resources**: - Quite often social marketing organisations do not have the necessary resources to adopt sophisticated segmentation approaches. (Currence, 1997)

In spite of these barriers, whenever possible social marketing programs must adopt segmentation as it would help make the program more effective. Usually in commercial marketing segmentation of the target population is done according to three broad criteria namely personal characteristics, behavioural characteristics and benefits sought by consumers (Wilkie, 1994).

Segmentation using personal characteristics can involve three types of segmentation based on demographic criteria like age, gender, family people, health status etc or psychographic criteria like life style, health belief etc or geo-demographic criteria like geographical area, neighbourhood type etc. On the other hand segmentation based on behavioural characteristics can involve classification of the target audience based on criteria like loyalty, attitudes, health behaviour, stage of change etc. Though very difficult, in social marketing, segmentation of the target population based on benefits can also be done particularly if the benefits are viewed negatively. Such segmentation is also called barrier segmentation (Lynn MacFayden, et al, 2003)

5. THE SOCIAL MARKETING MIX

The marketing mix strategies (commonly called on the 4P's) used in commercial marketing has been extensively used in social marketing.

1. **Product**: - Since social marketing products are usually intangible and highly complex behaviour it is difficult to formulate simple meaningful products concepts. (Bloom and Novelli, 1981). This occurs when one views the product as a physical object. A product being a physical object is often not possible in social marketing. Further even if social marketing programs can focus on the promotion of a particular type of product, at its heart, social marketing promotes a particular proposition (Peattie and Peattie, 2008). Thus,

even though the family planning programs in India focus on the sale of condoms, the basic proposition promoted by those programs are to limit the size of families and hence slogans like "Hum Do Hamare Do" came in handy. Hence it is suggested that in the context of social marketing 'proposition' is a better terminology to use than 'product' (Peattle and Peattle, 2008).

2. **Price**: - Only a few social marketing products have a monetary price (e.g. condoms) but there is always cost associated with behaviour change which acts as obstacles to social marketing. These costs may be related to time, finance, embarrassment, effort, inertia, pain, perceived social exclusion etc. (Marteau, 1990). Hence Peattie and Peattie prefer to use the phrase 'cost of involvement' instead of 'price' (Peattie and Peattie, 2008).

3. **Place**: - Since most social marketing programs are not based on physical products the use of terms like 'distribution' or 'place' is less preferred. In social marketing the key issue is accessibility. Hence it would be more advantageous to use the term 'accessibility' than 'place' (Peattie and Peattie 2008). The success of any social marketing program depends upon its ability to make accessible the suggested alternate behavioural pattern. Thus if the family planning program suggests increased use of condoms to limit family size, then for the program to be successful, condoms should be easily accessible to the target population.

4. **Promotion**: - Of the four marketing mix tools, promotion has received the most attention. Initially most social marketing programs relied on one communication of dissemination of information primarily through the media. However today, social marketing prefers to employ the two way communication strategy that commercial marketing uses. Social marketers today use two way communication strategies to interact with the target audience so as to encourage the acceptance, adoption and maintenance of a particular social proposition of behaviour. In fact, feedback from the target audience will be taken at every stage of the program so as to enhance its efficiency. Consequently the use of term 'social communication' is preferred to 'promotion' (Peattie and Peattie 2008).

6. THE SOCIAL MARKETING PROCESS

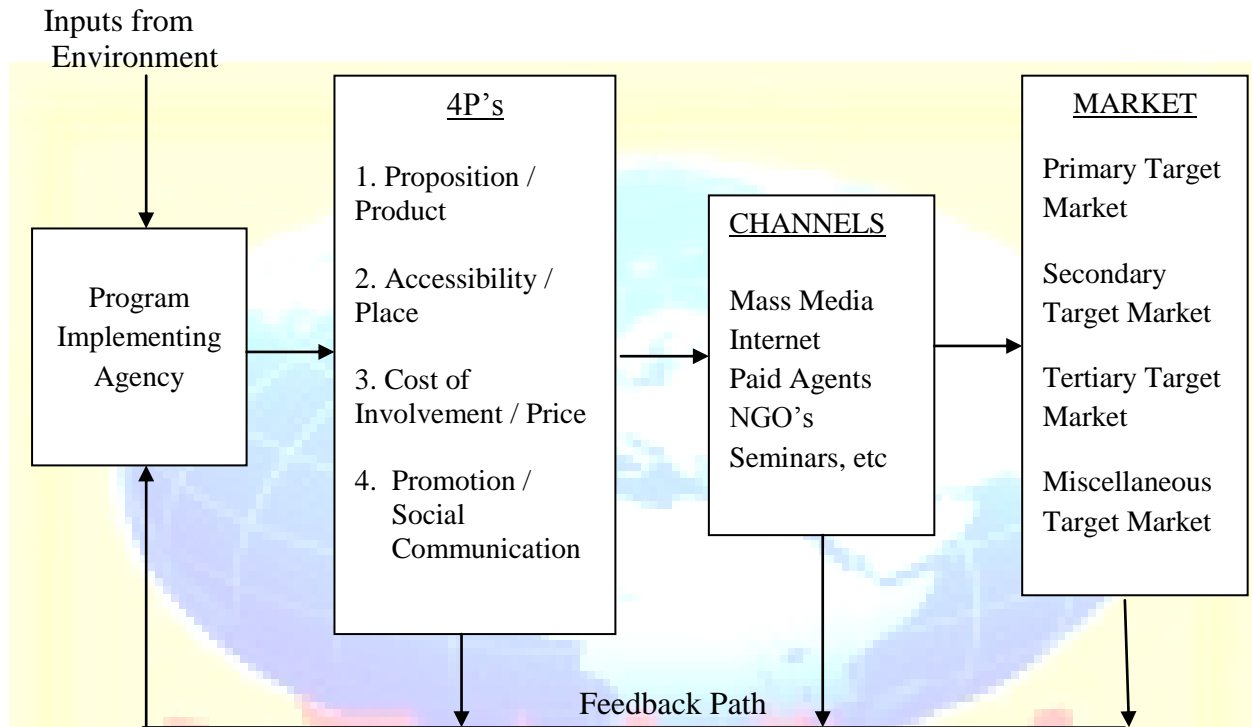Every social marketing program must incorporate the 4P's into its administrative framework as shown in the Figure 1.

Inputs from Environment

4P's
1. Proposition / Product
2. Accessibility / Place
3. Cost of Involvement / Price
4. Promotion / Social Communication

Program Implementing Agency

CHANNELS

Mass Media
Internet
Paid Agents
NGO's
Seminars, etc

MARKET

Primary Target Market

Secondary Target Market

Tertiary Target Market

Miscellaneous Target Market

Feedback Path

Figure 1

The program implementing agency based on available inputs formulates short term and long term social marketing plans. For example, the agency implementing a program to prevent the spread of AIDS would first collect data regarding AIDS patients, the vulnerable groups, the available preventive methods, the available cure / medicine etc. This forms the input data for formulating short term and long term plans. For e.g., the agency may first classify the target audience into say persons more vulnerable to AIDS and persons less vulnerable to AIDS. For such a simple classification, persons vulnerable to AIDS will form the primary target market and the persons less vulnerable to AIDS will be the secondary target market. The agency would then identify the various methods available for preventing the spread of AIDS with respect to each of the segmented group. It would also identify the ways to make each of these methods accessible to

the target group. The agency would also identify the ways and means of overcoming the various cost barriers like embrassement, inertia, stigma etc. associated with a program for preventing the spread of AIDS. The agency would identify the various promotional methods. It will also identify the major channels of communication and distribution necessary for the proper implementation of an AIDS prevention program. Subsequently when the program is operationized, the agency would continuously gather feedback relating to the effectiveness of the program for the purpose of recycling its planning.

7. CONCLUSION

Social marketing has come a long way both in the theoretical and practical sense ever since its modest beginnings in the mid-to-late 1960's. The development of theoretical foundation of social marketing has enabled it to establish itself as a distinct discipline within the field of marketing. Further, academic writings have helped delineate the merits and advantages of social marketing as a technique of influencing individual and social behaviour. Consequently social marketing has found wide acceptance. Today social marketing is adopted in the promotion of wide range of social causes ranging from health promotion issues to environmental protection issues.

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