

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MARKETING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR - A STUDY BASED IN KOLKATA

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Abstract

Social marketing means designing and implementing of programs so that social ideas may be influenced. It involves considerations such as product planning, communication, pricing. It can be said to be a purpose driven platform which aims at bringing improvement in the targeted society. It is different from other forms of marketing because herein, the social marketer seeks to influence behaviour not for his own benefit but for the benefit of the society in general. A major problem here is that often marketers are unable to keep their eye on what is called the bottom line of social marketing. They think that all they must do is provide information or change beliefs. Often, they are of the opinion that their goal is to "get the word out" or to "change attitudes" without asking whether either of these activities will actually lead to the desired behaviour. However, the goal is bigger than that. The emphasis should be on behaviour and the actual change, social marketers must move to adopt a fanatical emphasis on customer who is ultimately, the king. The emphasis on behaviour also pushes marketers to have an appropriate evaluation criterion for every decision they make. Marketers can attempt to influence behaviour through behavioral shaping or reinforcement strategies but, ultimately, consumers do have the choice not to buy. Thus, the major talent of marketers lies in influencing voluntary behaviour, and these are the talents they must also apply to social marketing. Having said this, it is also important to understand that social marketing need not necessarily involve behaviour change- the aim is to adopt, modify, abandon, or discourage a certain behaviour. This paper is an attempt to study the consumer side of the story in social marketing, to understand their attitudes and opinions and their perception of social marketing. Various tools of analysis have been used to study the impact of social marketing on consumer behaviour and the same have been represented through charts and graphs. The paper also provides recommendations that marketers today can adopt to ensure that their marketing efforts do not get misdirected.

Keywords: Social marketing, consumer behaviour, word of mouth, stimulus, social cause

Introduction

Today, as the various economies around the globe are advancing at a quick pace, the world finds itself caught in a web of social issues. Mishandling of substances, drug and liquor abuse, destitution, and practices such as these have been responsible for increasing

herateofwrongdoing, therate of illness as well as the death rate in the society while also reducing education,

increasingunemployment,andadverselyaffectingthelevelofprogressionintheeconomy.Additionally ,theworldis facinganecologicalurgencyanditislargelyaresultofourlifedecisionsandchoices.

Social marketing is a set of marketing theories which is essentially an adaptation of commercialmarketing, and its aim is not to maximize profits but to achieve an impact in the behavior of thetarget audience and influence the same for the benefit of the society. It is important to

understandthatthedefinitionattemptstoemphasizeoninfluencingbehaviourasopposedtoobtainingac hangein attitudes or an increase in knowledge. It recognizes that behavior change is voluntary andtherefore does not force the audience to act in a certain manner, as laws do. At the same time, itdoes not restrict itself to mere sharing of information as in case of education. What it seeks is to motivate behavioralchangebyeffective applicationofthe principlesofcommercialmarketing.

While businesses compete with one another in terms of profits, revenue and market share, socialmarketinghasprovedthatpublicinterestscannotbeavoided,andtheirsatisfactionistheonlywayto achieve social welfare. It has been recognized as the one way to bridge the gap of interestsbetweenbusinesses andthesociety.

Behaviour can be said to be the end point of social marketing. However, it has been noticed thatmany a times social marketers fail to keep this in mind. They often think that their work is tospread the word or provide information without considering whether their actions will lead to thedesiredbehaviour.Thisnegligencecanactuallyleadtowastageofscarceproductiveresources.

The emphasis on behaviour enables marketers to focus on their customers. It enables them tounderstandhowtheirstrategieswillaffecttheiraudience.Besides,marketersareforcedtoengagein deep and informative market research to understand their customers before they can launch a social marketing programme. The focus on consumer behaviour has the advantage of preventingmarketersfromdiverting awaytothefieldsofeducationand propagandawhich isnotthebasisofsocialmarketing.

Research Gap

Socialmarketinghas,foralongtime,beenanemergingfieldandhasinvolvedseveralspeculations.Yet,le ssinformationisavailableaboutconsumerinterpretationofsocialmarketing.Theprincipleofcommerci almarketinghasbeenappliedtosocialmarketingandthefocusofsocialmarketing has moved from behaviour alteration to hanging the outlook of consumers. The worldis changing rapidly, and social marketing has now entered another stage. While its efforts atachievingbehaviourchangecontinue,itisimportantthatsocialmarketersrememberthatconsumeristh eking.Thispaperstudiestheneedforsocialmarketingtobecome morecustomercentricanddo go a step forward to understand how consumers perceive social marketing and how socialprogrammes are positioned in the minds of consumers. The main concern of social marketing is toachievebehaviourchange.Alotofresearchhasgoneintoassessingthesuccessandaccomplishment of a social marketing campaign but there has been little to no emphasis on theconsumer'stakeonthesame.

It has been observed that the available research is mostly based on the scope and effectiveness of social marketing. The field has been viewed in isolation to include only the impact of social marketing on consumer behaviour and no substantial study has been conducted to determine how consumers respond to social marketing campaigns and/or perceive social marketing programs, whether they are affected by social marketing, whether such campaigns stimulate them to contribute to the society, whether their actual purchase is impacted, whether they favour social marketing over commercial marketing techniques.

This has been identified as the research gap and this paper aims to bridge this gap by throwing light on the customer side of the story to establish consumer perception as an integral part of social marketing.

Literature Review

Andreasen, (2002) in his article, "Marketing Social Marketing in the Social Change Marketplace", issued in the Journal of Public Policy and Marketing, postulates that changing to sustainable living patterns is becoming an important issue in the society and asking people to change their behaviour is in a way, asking them to change their identities. He found that in social marketing there are several barriers to growth because there is no proper understanding of the field and what role it plays in relation to other instruments of social change. However, it is possible to achieve growth by increasing the share of social marketing at subject matter, intervention, brand, and product levels. He has proposed special social marketing branding campaigns for the purpose of advancing

this field. Resnicow and Page, (2008) in his article, "Embracing Chaos and Complexity: A Quantum Change For Public Health", issued in the journal of American Public Health Association, held that in the long run, people make changes that suit them. A useful starting point would be a social system approach. Social systems are complex in nature and their outcomes depend on several factors. In order to achieve behaviour change in a planned manner, a step-by-step proceeding should be adopted. Changing the behaviour of people will thus, require more than one single approach.

Glouberman and Zimmerman, (2008) in the article, "Social marketing: Perception and Past", postulated that managing a complex adaptive socio-economic system is like raising a child. What is in our hand is raising the child and not its assured success. Just as every child is unique, every community too, is unique. The meaning is to say that the outcome always remains uncertain and interventions with the community may fail in the course of time. Hence, it is important to understand the community, the groups, and the individuals as well as their identity so as to understand the social problem clearly and to come up with a solution through social marketing. Organized behaviour change may be practiced by developing an aggressive demand. Conroy and Lee, (2006) in the article, "Social marketing: A conceptual framework", issued in the International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews, described the failure of a campaign in a rural village in New Zealand. In this village, people peacefully co-existed and were well educated and also upper middle class. Their existence was

terrorized by the introduction of ground power lines which were super-sized. The power line company offered to the people several economic incentives in order to gain their consent but did not take into account the social conditions and the local environment of the villagers. The efforts of the company ultimately failed because it failed to give regard to the identity of the villagers. Grier, and Bryant, (2005) in their article, "Social Marketing in Public Health", published in the journal, Annual review of Public Health postulated that social marketing in public health includes programmes like increasing vegetable consumption, engaging in physical activity, stopping smoking, preventing sexually transmitted diseases. According to them, social marketing may apply principles of commercial marketing as well such as the 4Ps, segmentation of audience, consumer orientation and others. There are several challenges that stand in between the effective and efficient working of social marketing and these challenges are faced by public health professionals. Public health professionals must understand the value of community-based approaches to social change and must take steps to deal with problems threatening social change. Social marketing must be adopted as a central value in organization culture. Ville Lahtinen, Timo Dietrich, and Sharyn Rundle-Thiele (2020) in their article, "Long Live The Marketing Mix-Testing The Effectiveness Of Commercial Marketing Mix In A Social Marketing Concept" published in the Journal Of Social Marketing studied whether a 4P marketing mix is more effective than a 1P marketing in relation to increasing fruit intake by children of 6-13 years. The intake was observed to have increased in the school following the 4P model, in case of the 1P model schools, the intake had increased only slightly, breakfast, lunch and dinner combined. He concluded in his research that the full marketing mix strategy proved to be more fruitful as compared to the only promotion technique.

Objectives of the Study

1. To ascertain whether consumers are responsive to social marketing.
2. To determine their attitudes and opinions towards social marketing.
3. To determine whether social marketing has an impact on consumer decision making and actual purchase.
4. To ascertain the appropriate platforms for social marketing.

Research Methodology

For the purpose of study, both descriptive and analytical study has been adopted. Subjective as well as quantitative information has been collected. Target population refers to the collection of individuals who are analyzed with reference to the factors under study. This study is based on the city of Kolkata, West Bengal, India. The sample size for the study is 200+ respondents.

The study is explorative and empirical in nature. The explorative part is based on secondary sources of information such as magazines, journals, dailies, periodicals. Information has also been extracted from special surveys, interviews, convenience sampling and available questionnaires.

The primary data has been collected through the questionnaire method which was circulated among people so as to understand the overall consumer perspective. Based on the

information collected, appropriate statistical and analytical tools has been used for interpretation and analysis of data.

Analysis

RELIABILITY TEST

As the first step, the Reliability test was carried out to measure the stability and consistency of the data collected through the questionnaire.

The value of Cronbach alpha was obtained to be .802. The value was found to be in line with the general rule of thumb value of Cronbach alpha (≥ 0.7) and based on this, the data was concluded to be reliable.

Cronbach's α	
scale	0.802

Relationship between awareness and gender

<u>Frequencies of Gender</u>			
Levels	Counts	<u>Of Total</u>	<u>Cumulative</u> %
FEMALE	129	63.2 %	63.2 %
MALE	74	36.3 %	99.5 %
OTHER	1	0.5 %	100.0 %

LINEAR REGRESSION			Model Coefficients-Awareness			
Predictor			Estimate	SE	t	p
Model Fit Measures			Intercept ^a	1.5194	0.0766	19.830 < .001
Model	R	R ²	Gender:			
1	0.122	0.0149	MALE – FEMALE	0.0617	0.1269	0.486 0.627
			OTHER – FEMALE	1.4806	0.8736	1.695 0.092

^a Represents reference level

It was observed from the above Chart of demographic data analysis that female respondents were almost double the number of male respondents. To determine whether there existed any relationship between gender and awareness, regression analysis was carried out.

The value of R, which represents correlation between the two variables (gender and awareness) was obtained as 0.122. The value obtained satisfies the mathematical measurements of correlation.

It was however seen that the value of p, which represents the level of significance was found to be >.05 with respect to gender. This showed that the result was not significant.

It was concluded that there was a weak positive correlation between awareness and gender based on the sample collected but with respect to the population, there was no sufficient evidence that the positive correlation between the two variables would hold true.

Relationship between age and impact of social advertisements/campaigns

To determine whether there was any association between age and the impact which a social marketing message has on the respondents, Chi-square test was carried out. Chi-square test is a statistical hypothesis test to show a relationship between two categorical variables. Herein, a Chi-square Test of Independence was performed.

Hypotheses:

The 'null hypotheses' might be –
 H₀ – Age is not associated with impact
 And an 'alternative hypotheses' might be –

H1–Age is associated with impact

χ^2 Tests

	Value	df	p
χ^2	162	130	0.030
N	204		

From the table above, Pearson Chi-square statistic, $X^2 = 162$ and $p < .005$ i.e., a very small probability of the observed data under the null hypothesis of no relationship.

The null hypothesis is rejected since $p < 0.005$.

It can be concluded that age and impact of social advertisements and/or campaigns are related. Majority respondents in the age group of 18-24 have been seen to fall in the category of respondents who watch and support social campaigns but do not take any action in furtherance of the same. The respondents of the age above and below this range have been seen to respond to such advertisements by taking an action towards the same. It is inferred that the young population lags in taking a conscious action towards social marketing campaigns.

Findings and Observations

To justify the first objective, it was observed that majority respondents were aware of social marketing and had come across a social advertisement at some or the other point. It was also observed that majority respondents considered social marketing to be informative because it makes the larger population more aware. A small portion of the respondents were seen to ignore social marketing advertisements, but their number was found to be insignificant. The relevant objective was thus, satisfied and it was found that consumers are responsive to social marketing which as was apparent from their awareness. An effort was also made to determine the relationship between gender and awareness to justify the disparity in number of male and female responses. It was however inferred that the correlation between the two was positive but weak and not significant enough to represent the entire population.

To justify the second objective, it was observed that majority of the respondents considered social marketing to be useful. A very small segment of the respondents was indifferent to the relevant question and only a negligible number considered it as wasteful. Majority respondents were seen to believe in the common good and those that disbelieved in the same vary only a negligible number.

The response of the respondents on a certain social advertisement propagating small business was found to be highly supportive and the number of those who felt there was no need for the same was, in fact, very small. On a similar note, the responses obtained on a certain advertisement propagating sustainability was obtained in favor and only a negligible number of respondents voted against the same. It was thus, concluded that the attitudes and opinions of consumers towards social marketing was supportive, positive, and favorable.

To justify the third objective, It was observed that the respondents were divided into two categories namely those who take conscious action to support social marketing campaigns and those who, though supportive of such campaigns, do not take a conscious action to support the same. The two categories were almost equally divided with a small proportion of those who chose to ignore it. Furthermore, there were only a handful of respondents who were greatly influenced by any social endeavor and the majority respondents could be covered under an average 'degree 3' level of influence. It was also noticed that the number of respondents that actually purchased a product and/or adopted a certain habit influenced by a social advertisement and/or to support a social cause was considerably lower than those who did not. It thus, was clear that while the respondents stood ahead in supporting and embracing social marketing efforts, there existed a wide gap between their thoughts and purchase decision making, as was apparent from their refrainment from executing actual purchase. Efforts were also made to determine if there was any association between age and impact and if the two were found to be associated. To justify the fourth objective, It was observed that most respondents had come across social marketing through social media platforms and through word-of-mouth publicity. There were very few such respondents who had looked up or searched about social marketing driven by personal stimulus.

This meant that consumers do not generally take an interest in making themselves aware about social marketing and here, social networking platforms have played an indispensable role in transporting the idea of social marketing to the audience. Hence it could be concluded that the most appropriate platform for social marketing was social media. Further, the power of word-of-mouth publicity could be used to disseminate the idea of social marketing far and wide.

Recommendations

- Marketers should conduct more real-life campaigns and organize programs in comparison to simply focusing on advertisements, wherein consumers can participate to be a part of and support a social cause. Consumers who participate in social issues and have a close eye view of them will be more likely to take a conscious action upon watching a social advertisement in future.

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Since social media has been found to be the most appropriate platform for social marketing, marketers should focus all their energy in using social media efficiently to communicate social marketing messages and to capture a larger audience. Further, word of mouth publicity could prove to be a strong driving force in determining the fate of social marketing. Hence marketers should be careful about the type of message they want to bring out as this could have both positive and negative consequences and this would almost wholly depend on the consumers who pass ahead their experience.

- A large number of consumers have been seen to be positively impacted by social advertisements and some have even shown behaviour change based on the same. Hence, the number and frequency of such advertisements should be increased to widen consumer exposure.
- The overall focus on social marketing should be increased to bring a lot more people under its ambit.
- Social marketing should be made a universal business policy and its observance in part or in full must be mandated and made into an umbrella legislation so as to bring businesses and marketers of all types under its cover.

Conclusion

Social marketing has been an ever-growing discipline and yet it has not been established fully. Social marketing requires better assimilation of the theories of commercial marketing in its own way and develops its own matters. This will enable social marketers to distinguish themselves from other different forms of marketing such as CSR.

Social marketing must prove that it is capable of better outcomes than what is visible. The key challenge here is for marketers to develop a program that enables them to deliver its message to the target group.

Along with its thrust on the promotional aspect, social marketers should also concentrate on the product pricing and place.

Bringing behaviour change is the toughest job involved in social marketing and this is accompanied by a huge cost, both financial and psychological. Hence, the promotional campaign should be so built as to help the target group understand that the benefits of changing behaviour are greater than the costs. This exchange, only, can bring the desired behavioural change.

It is now the role of social marketers which will ascertain what the future of social marketing will be and if they are able to play a constructive role, it will be possible to establish social marketing as the most potent tool which will bring about social change.

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