

Social marketing in the sector of public health

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Introduction:

In the past several decades marketing has been successful in reaching out and persuading people to adopt products, services and behaviours overcoming the barriers of education and distance. Mass media components such as newspapers, radio, television, internet etc have powered the marketing revolution in all parts of the world.

Recognizing the power of sophisticated marketing strategies from the commercial sector, leaders in the development sector thought of putting these to use in the social sector. Department of Health, United Kingdom took the lead in recognizing the importance of social marketing to deal with health challenges especially those where individual behaviour was at the root of the problem or could be a contributor towards solving the problem. Social marketing has been used in fields such as public health, environment and civic involvement.

India is faced with a number of health problems and the resources at hand are meagre. Lack of education and poor socio-economic conditions are a big roadblock in the efforts to empower the communities to take charge of their health. There are so many misconception and negative attitude towards healthcare issues which are having a bad impact on the health of people. Such challenges can be overcome by skilful use of social marketing techniques. India has been one of the first countries to use social marketing in health and development sector.¹ There is still much scope of use of such approaches to improve the health of the people.

Definition of Social Marketing:

The term 'Social Marketing' was coined in 1971 by marketing pioneers Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman.²

Here are some of the definitions of Social Marketing that got mention in the seminal volume on Social Marketing by Philip Kotler and Nancy R Lee.²

1. Social marketing is a process that applies marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate and deliver value in order to influence target audience behaviours that benefit society as well as the target audience. (Philip Kotler, Nancy Lee and Michael Rothschild, 2006)
2. Social marketing is a process of creating, communicating and delivering benefits that a target audience(s) wants in exchange for audience behaviour that benefits society without financial profits to the marketer. (Bill Smith, 2006)

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3. Social marketing is the systematic application of marketing concepts and techniques to achieve specific behavioural goals relevant to a social good. (Jeff French and Clive Blair-Stevens)

So summing up we understand that social marketing is about influencing and changing behaviour of the target populations by applying the traditional marketing techniques in a systematic way in order to create change which is good for the society.

Social marketing and Behaviour change:

Just as commercial marketing intends to sell goods and services, social marketing intends to sell behaviours. Social marketing efforts are directed at influencing target audience to do one of the four things.²

1. Accept a new behaviour. E.g. Take stairs in place of elevator to ensure physical activity
2. Reject a potentially undesirable behaviour. E.g. Not to start smoking.
3. Modify a current behaviour. E.g. Increase fruit intake.
4. Abandon an old undesirable behaviour. E.g. Quit alcohol consumption.

Basics of Social Marketing:

Social Marketing as we have seen earlier is based on the application of traditional marketing principles and techniques for creating social good. So let us have a closer look at how the field of marketing has been defined.

According to American Marketing Association, “marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large”.³

According to Philip Kotler, marketing is “the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit. Marketing identifies unfulfilled needs and desires. It defines, measures and quantifies the size of the identified market and the profit potential. It pinpoints which segments the company is capable of serving best and it designs and promotes the appropriate products and services”.

Marketing Mix and the 4 Ps of Marketing:

The basic goal of any marketing exercise is putting the right product in the right place. In order to achieve this marketers use what is called as the ‘marketing mix’. This comprises of what is famously called as the 4 Ps of marketing viz. Price, Product, Promotion, and Place.

Product

At the center of any marketing exercise is either a tangible good or an intangible service that is seem to meet a specific customer need or demand. It is important to understand the problems that the product proposes to solve. Marketers need to understand in detail the benefits offered by the product as well as the unique selling proposition of the product. Apart from this the potential buyers of the product or service need to be identified and understood. E.g. In a marketing effort to control diarrhoea related death, Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) may be considered as the product. Detailed research evidence may be required about the familiarity of the target population regarding the product and the other factors that may impact the likelihood the population to use the product.

Price

We all know that how a product is priced has a direct impact on its reception by the consumer segment. We have to understand how the target population understands the benefits of the product and the pricing has to be in sync with the perceived benefit of the product. Marketers use different research techniques to assess the perceived value of any

given product. Depending on the perceived consumer value the pricing of the product is done. It also provides an important parameter on which the feasibility of the product is gauged. By efforts to promote the product we tend to make the target segment realise the potential benefits of the product. E.g As in case of ORS, since diarrhoeal deaths are more common in the lower socio-economic sections, the government made it available to the populations free of cost in order to ensure wider use. In order to make the population better realise the benefit of the product and the audience ought to be communicated about the dangers of dehydration (loss of body fluids) and how timely intake of ORS solution saves lives.

Promotion

Promotion is the communication aspect of the whole marketing mix. By promotion we reach out to the target segment with information about the product. This is used to inform the populations about the product as well communicate the value of the product to the prospective consumers. Advertising comprises a major share of the promotion exercise and it also includes promotions and special offers as well as public relations. In the earlier example regarding ORS, the promotion efforts may include communicating about the benefit of the product. There might be some misconceptions in the minds of the people which may form a barrier to the use of the product. These may be countered by using effective promotion strategies.

Place

Place or placement has to do with how the product will be provided to the customer. Distribution is a key element of placement. The placement strategy will help assess what channel is the most suited to a product. Discussing the ORS example further, the government supplies ample amount of ORS packets to peripheral health centers. Any person having diarrhoea presenting at a health center is provided with ORS irrespective ones paying capacity. Also subsidised rate ORS were made available at drug shops and general stores for ease of availability and affordability.

Relevance of Social Marketing in the Indian Context:

If we study the health and development parameters across different states of India we find that Kerala performs much better than even the states that have a significantly higher per capita income. The important reason cited for this difference is the higher literacy status in Kerala. Better education provides people with access to information and empowers them to adopt healthy behaviours. It also makes the health providers more equipped as well as more accountable for the services they provide resulting in better outcomes for the different state funded programs. It is desirable that more of the populations are empowered by providing them with better access to educational services. But we know that achieving higher level of literacy and education on a population scale is a long-term goal and there is an interplay of a number of socio-economic factors. But in the meantime, the gaps in knowledge, attitudes and practices that are affecting the health of the people and causing much disease, disability and death need to be addressed urgently. That is where social marketing campaigns can play a very important role in filling the gaps in the knowledge of people, replacing the practices that are affecting their health adversely and empowering them to seek appropriate healthcare as required.

As we know diseases have been broadly classified as communicable and non-communicable (NCDs) based on the mechanism of causation. Communicable diseases are the ones which are caused by infectious agent eg. malaria, AIDS, hepatitis B etc. The other category in which there is no important role of such infectious agent (apart from some exceptions) are termed as NCDs eg. cancers, coronary heart disease, diabetes etc. Though there has been a reduction in the burden of communicable diseases in India there are many

such diseases that still pose a challenge to the society's health. This notwithstanding there has been a surge in NCDs in the recent past. NCDs have been also labelled as life-style diseases because they have linked to various lifestyle factors such as unhealthy dietary habits, lack of physical activity, stressful life etc. Researches have found that healthy living can drastically reduce such diseases. Government agencies and the voluntary organizations are imparting such messages to the masses using various means.

A study by Ezzati et al (2007) has enumerated top ten factors that are responsible for mortality and increase burden of disease viz. high blood pressure, tobacco use, high cholesterol, childhood and maternal underweight, unsafe sex, low fruit and vegetable consumption etc.⁴ These risk factors have been found to be significantly reduced in populations by helping the populations adopt suitable measures promoted through effective use of social marketing. Social marketing has been used in India to promote causes such as small family norm, use of oral rehydration salts, safe delivery practices, healthy infant feeding etc. Oral rehydration salts (ORS) packets are being provided free of cost to populations to prevent diarrhoea related deaths. It is by the effective use of social marketing strategy that this was popularised leading to a significant drop in diarrhoeal deaths. People were informed about the new product (ORS) as also taught about how to prepare the solution using the sachet provided by the medical facilities or available from chemist shop. One cultural roadblock was the misconception amongst people that patients of diarrhoea should not be given anything to eat or drink. This was proving dangerous for diarrhoea patients many of whom use to die because of the dehydration and lack of nutrition. This practice was changed by effective use of communication methods.

Social Marketing and Applied Anthropology:

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines Anthropology as the comparative study of human societies and cultures and their development. We know that there is a lot of variation in how people think and communicate in different populations. Social marketing has much to do with generating messages which lead people towards solutions.³ One important reason we need to have an anthropological approach is that social cause marketing is in most of the cases required for populations which are neglected and not connected to the mainstream in one way or the other. Hence, there might be gaps in the understanding of their culture and practices amongst the people designing or implementing the social marketing plan. It is not easy to make people adopt a new behaviour especially if the change is not going to have much impact to show in the immediate future. Hence, understanding the motivations and barriers assumes a lot of importance for social marketers in order to influence the target population make changes in their practices for their own good.

Knowledge of anthropology guides the marketer in designing effective messages by using the most appropriate content and images. Anthropology also helps in understanding the ethos of the target populations which helps in building a better rapport.

Segmentation as we know is one of the important concepts in marketing. By segmentation we are able to delineate populations into more homogenous groups. This helps in tailoring the message to have the maximum impact on the target group. India is a diverse country with several religious and linguistic groups as well as subdivisions along caste and income lines. Things have become more complex in the past decade with greater penetration of mass media especially television. Hence, a more detailed analysis into the various psychological factors has become pertinent. Racial and cultural factors form an important determinant of the psychological make-up across populations and hence anthropology assumes a lot of importance.

As we shall later in this chapter there are number of theories that serve as a basis for the practice of social marketing. The parameters outlined in these theories as we shall see need an anthropological approach to be understood and put to use.

There are some practices prevalent in different parts of India which are detrimental to health. We have already discussed the practice of not giving food and drinks to people suffering from diarrhoea. There is this practice of putting cow dung on the stump of the new born after birth. This is a dangerous practice which has many a times cause neonatal tetanus. Through adept use of social marketing clean delivery practices were advocated and safe delivery kits were provided to pregnant mothers. This has led to a decrease in maternal and child mortality. In many parts of India it is a practice to reject the initial milk of the mother and feed the new born with some mix of jiggery, coconut etc. Massive campaigns have been undertaken to end this practice and ensure that every child gets exclusive breast feeding till six months of age.

Theories and Models in Social Marketing:

The proponents of Social Marketing have put forward a number of theories and models on which form the basis of the current understanding of the field of social marketing and on which practitioners of social marketing find it convenient to build up their campaigns.

TransTheoretical Model or Stage of Change Model:

This is the widely used theoretical model in health care social marketing.⁵

This has been used in Social Marketing since 1990's to increase physical activity amongst residents. This theory proposed that any individual has to go through a series of distinct stages before one adopts the desired behaviour. Based on an assessment of the target population appropriate interventions could be devised to achieve the desired objectives. There are six stages in which the process of adoption of a new beneficial behaviour is categorized.⁶

- I) Precontemplation: People in this stage are not intending to take action in the foreseeable future, which has been taken arbitrarily as six months.
- II) Contemplation: People in this stage are planning to take action in the foreseeable future.
- III) Preparation: In this stage the target populations has a plan of action and is likely to take action in month's duration.
- IV) Action: In the action stage the target population makes specific changes towards adopting the new behaviour. This may continue for a few months.
- V) Maintenance: People in this stage have adopted the new behaviour and are working to prevent relapse. Depending on the situation this stage may last for 6 months to 3 years.
- VI) Termination: People who achieve this stage are least likely to revert back to their old ways.

Health Belief Model (HBM)

This model has also found wide application in the field of social marketing. The important feature of this model is that it provides explanation as to why people participate differently in health programs.

The core components of this model are:

- I) Perceived susceptibility: the subjective perception of risk of developing a particular health condition.
- II) Perceived severity: feelings about the seriousness of the consequences of developing a specific health problem.

- III) Perceived benefits: beliefs about the effectiveness of various actions that might reduce susceptibility and severity (the latter two taken together are labeled 'threat').
- IV) Perceived barriers: potential negative aspects of taking specific actions.
- V) Cues to action: bodily or environmental events that trigger action.

Example: Some people do not feel inclined to quit smoking because of their perception that they would not be affected by any tobacco-use related hazard or they have doubts about the seriousness of the problem. Still others may be not inclined to participate in a tobacco cessation program because they think would not be helpful in making them quit smoking. Some may be put off by the withdrawal symptoms that occur in the initial stages of quitting while others may be still waiting for the right time to take a positive step towards quitting tobacco. A social marketer has to consider these points in order to make the campaign more effective.

Social Cognitive Theory: Social Cognitive Theory states that any individual behaviour is a product of personal traits, cognitive and other interpersonal factors as well as environmental events. Hence this model lays emphasis on the environmental aspects of behaviour change.

Scope of Social Marketing:

Many countries in the world have utilised mass communication and social marketing approaches to solve a number of social and health issues. Different avenues ranging from folk media to mass media especially television have been put to effective use to inform, train and empower people to take better care of themselves. Mexico and other Latin American countries have adopted what is popularly called as the Sabido methodology (after Miguel Sabido) to promote family planning, literacy and other social and developmental goals⁷. In this unique approach relevant messages were incorporated into soap operas aired during prime time. They were entertaining and educating and generated huge response from the populations. In India we have myriad issues related to health and other social problems which could be tackled by effective use of social marketing communication strategies. In the earlier sections we discussed about many of the detrimental practices that have been changed by effective use of such channels. In a low resource country like India it is important empower people to take care of their own health. All avenues need to be utilised to inculcate to promote desired social and health related values in the population.

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