

Role of Successful Branding In Social Marketing

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Abstract: *The article focuses on the role and importance of branding in social marketing with the help of successful social marketing brands. Barriers for successful branding for a social product like –health, smoking or safe driving campaign, are discussed. Like the four P's required for marketing of any offering, social marketing brand involves five C's – Change-orientation, Competitive, Compatible, Caring and Culturally appropriate. The challenge of social marketing lies in complementing rather than compete with community mobilization and structural changes and in increasing the occasions and the number of times it is chosen as the 'preferred brand' for individual/societal change. For a successful branding of social marketing three main points are important – committed and extensive private sector involvement, creation of academic programs and legitimization of social marketing as a scholarly field of study.*

I. Introduction

Marketing in the 21st century is well accepted as an effective method of creating awareness and generating interest in customers to buy the organization's offerings. Andreasen and Kotler explain generic marketing in two ways – Descriptive and Prescriptive. Descriptive is a mere activity that members of society do and prescriptive is something members of a society ought to do to achieve certain results. They further stress on the point that the ultimate objective of generic marketing is to influence behavior, which is what social marketing or in that case any marketing activity strives to achieve. Social Marketing emerged as a discipline of study in 1970s when Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman highlighted that the same principles used in generic marketing were being used to market or sell ideas, attitudes and behaviors.

What differentiates social marketing from other forms of marketing is with respect to the objectives of the marketer and his/her organization. In social marketing the marketer seeks to influence social behaviors and not for any financial gains but to benefit the target audience and the society at large. Social marketing is also about creating a better place for everyone in the world – not focusing just on investors. The main advantage that social marketing has over commercial or private marketing is that it is openly accepted and even endorsed by people in general and garners a lot of public support.

Social marketing has addressed many issues like –

Social Marketing Mix

Social marketing, like commercial marketing has the consumer as its primary focus. The marketer needs to understand consumer needs to be more precise than persuade to buy products that are being produced. Planning process of marketing keeping in view consumer needs is done by focusing on the marketing mix. Along with the 'Four Ps' of marketing – Product, Price, Place and Promotion – Nedra Weinreich in her article on social marketing mentions that social marketing requires a more focused marketing mix and a few more P's are added along with the traditional four Ps.

Product – Most of the times the product of social marketing is not a physical offering and includes a combination of two or more of the following – physical product, services, practices and intangible ideas like environment protection, wildlife protection and more. Marketers in this situation attempt to understand and ascertain consumer perceptions of a situation or dilemma and based on the same take relevant action.

Price – Price in social marketing refers to what a consumer ought to do to obtain the product or offering. This may be a monetary cost or might require the consumer to renounce intangibles or to risk condemnation or embarrassment. The price is usually low or most of the times is provided free of cost. Often social marketers charge a nominal fee to retain a sense of dignity in the transaction. From the consumer's point of view the product would be adopted only if he/she considers the benefits more than the cost or if the perceived behavioral change would enhance the lifestyle or quality of life.

Place – Is the distribution system which for a physical product would involve warehousing, wholesaling, retailing and place of sale. For social marketing it would also involve places where the product is given/distributed for free or nominal price. An intangible product is more focused on practices and has either mobile places of distribution – like a medical center – or mass media for providing information or training.

Promotion – Takes a forefront for social marketing since communication is one of the key elements of social marketing. Many-a-times promotion is considered as the entirety of social marketing, which is not so. Promotion includes use of public relations (PR), advertising, personal selling, media advocacy and several other vehicles of communication. Public service announcements and utilizing the mass media vehicles are two of the main modes of communication used in social marketing.

Public – Includes different audiences to whom the program is addressed to and has both external and internal teams concerned in the program. External public contains the target audience, the policymakers, audience directly or indirectly related to target audience and gatekeepers. Internal public includes people directly and indirectly involved with approval or implementation of the social marketing program.

Policy – Sustaining Social Marketing strategies and making them successful in a long-run needs a change in way of thinking and also environmental change -especially in case of behavioral changes where the target audience need to be supported and should have a conducive environment. For an encouraging environment, often, policy change is required. For example, social issues like smoking, needs the involvement of government and some policy changes by them if the campaign has to achieve its goals. Indian government to that extent has made a policy decision to ban *pan-bidi* shops in railway stations, which sell cigarettes or tobacco products. It has also become difficult for smokers to light up in public places and also at workplaces since, most of them now are a strict no-smoking zones.

Partnership – Planning and implementing social issues is not easy and involves many levels of implementation and hence is difficult for a single entity or organization to handle it. It always involves working in partnership with one or many organizations or entities for planning implementation and acceptance by target audience. The primary organization, which initiates the activity, has to identify other organizations/ groups – government or private or NGOs or Self-Help groups - with similar goals and identify ways to work together. Partnerships could also be developed with media for promotion campaigns.

Purse Strings – Social Marketing campaigns involve huge funds similar to regular product marketing. In case of commercial marketing the organization achieves the same by selling the offerings at a profit. Social marketing does not involve any profit making strategy and needs to have a continuous flow of funds if the campaign has to reach its target audience. Since pricing-for-profit is not the agenda, organizations or groups implement social marketing function with the help of funds given by government, foundations, donations made by companies or individuals. Marketing, here therefore also involves communicating effectively to these groups to establish the need for funds and benefits to the society at large.

Branding for Social Marketing

A viable marketing strategy for any organization is branding its product or service and then marketing the brand. Worldwide organizations invest millions in branding campaigns every year. Conceptually a brand is defined as a term, name, sign, symbol, design or an individual or a combination of them. Branding not only differentiates a product from its competitors, but also creates a perception of solving customers' problem. A successful brand is one which delivers the message clearly, authenticates the credibility of the company, emotionally connects with the customers or potential target segment, motivates the buyer and focuses on maintaining and increasing customer loyalty towards the brand.

To make a brand a successful one must understand the needs, wants and demands of target group of customers and integrate the same through the brand. This should be reinforced through excellent communication strategies at every point of customer / market contact. Creating a strong brand helps the organization in being ahead of its competitors especially in the current market environment where the battle between brands intensifies with every passing day. It is also important for an organization to thoroughly research, understand, define and build a brand since, a successful and strong brand stays alive in the heart and mind of customer (market) forever.

Creating change is not often enough. Many-a-times emphasis needs to be placed on continuing a desirable behavior in social marketing. This means that the message has to be strong, clear, and repetitive and should remain in audiences' memory for a long period of time. This happens by creating a strong communication message with an equally strong branding. Social marketing even if done with a different objective also needs to create a strong brand (for the reasons discussed above) to achieve its goal. Also, the campaign need to not only focus upon the target audience but also should focus upon the secondary target audience, those who effect the immediate environment of the target audience. The behavior/ support of secondary audience plays a major role in not only influencing and implementing the change but also helps in sustaining the change.

Branding in social marketing campaign involves two important aspects – understanding the attitudes of the society in which the cause has to be addressed and, a step-by-step orderly campaign for effective results. Also, recognizing the ever-changing trends would provide the needed edge for the campaign success.

CRY – Child Relief and You was founded in 1979 and is an initiative to provide better care for deprived children and address their basic rights to food, shelter, health and education. This initiative is a government-public-private partnership where public support is enlisted through sale of greeting cards, calendars, address books, stationery and donations. They have also created a unique campaign of adopting a child and providing for his/her education. CRY currently supports various partnerships related to vocational training, street children, child labor, disaster relief, foster care and differently-abled children issues. Its branding and promotional campaigns focus on sensitizing the target audience towards the efforts of change focused on underprivileged children and the relevance or importance of their funding. Greeting cards and other promotional material developed by CRY not only helped in raising funds but also in building the brand CRY.

Help Age India – is an organization that is focusing on the social issue of better care for the elderly. With a tagline of ‘Fighting Isolation, Poverty and Neglect’ the organization founded in 1978, focuses on raising resources to safeguard the rights of elderly in India and also to provide them relief with the help of various interventions. HelpAge India’s most successful campaign includes generating funds through tie-ups with educational institutes like schools and colleges. Students are encouraged to collect funds for the aged. This is effective in two ways – one it generates funds, which help in implementation of various programs and two – it creates awareness in the young about the cause.

Lifebouy’s ‘Swasthya Chetna’ is a social marketing initiative by Hindustan Unilever Limited (initiated when it was Hindustan Lever Limited). This was a five-year health and hygiene education program. It was launched in 2002 across eight states in India to educate 200 million people in rural and urban regions about the significance of adopting and observing hygiene. It also focused on spreading awareness about germs and their effects on health and how by adopting and observing good health and hygiene practices one could avoid diseases. The program involved ‘Glo-germ demonstration’ which shows unseen germs and draws attention to importance of hygiene. Many activities were involved in implementing the same on target audience, which included interactive games, awareness programs for mothers, kids and respective target groups. This awareness campaign focused on behavioral change in target audience and touched 50767 villages and about 12 crore people.

VERB™ is a successful initiative for Youth, by Center for Disease Control Prevention (CDC) in America. With a tagline ‘It’s what you do’ the VERB campaign focused on increasing and maintaining physical activity among tweens, in the age group of 9 – 13 years. This group today has a majority of obese kids due to their eating habits, sedentary lifestyles and also due to single-kid syndrome. The VERB campaign included paid advertising and marketing strategies and various partnership efforts to reach their target audience of tweens. The campaign was also focused upon the secondary audience, which included – parents, teachers, youth leaders, health professionals, coaches, pediatricians and others. The focus on lifestyle behavioral change like increasing physical activity, is tough and to sustain the same is even more difficult. A pre-launch survey was conducted to understand the target audience and the initiative was launched in June 2002. Over a period of time timely evaluation of the campaign was done to analyze the response. The campaign was innovative and used all the modes of communication. Today VERB is a brand identified with physical activity and is hugely successful. It also highlights the relevance of branding as audience recognizes the same. Instead of ads showing or talking about importance of physical activity the innovative methods adopted in deciphering the message is excellent. Various branding and promotion campaigns of VERB are given below.

The above cases show the importance and relevance of brand and branding. As discussed by William Arruda, a brand to be successful needs to be competent, credible, clear, compelling, consistent, constant, confident, connected, committed and current. He further explains in detail about each C needed for branding. Similar to the extra Ps added to social marketing mix the branding also needs to focus on some more Cs as discussed by Weinreich. These include – Change-oriented, Competitive, Caring, Compatible and Culturally Appropriate.

Change-Oriented – The brand created ought to support and enhance the behavioral change initiated by the program. The name and logo need to focus on the cause at hand and has to express the same effectively. One would recollect the *Girl Child* Campaign – that focused on saving, adopting and educating a girl child - to be effective for the simple reasons discussed above.

Competitive – Even social marketing has a highly competitive environment. Even social marketers have tough time since they too are trying for the same purse of the audience for funding the initiatives/ cause. To stand apart from other social marketing initiatives and to highlight the relevance or importance of one’s program is very difficult. To be successful the specific brand needs to be considered as genuine and of better focus and implementation – success ratio than other initiatives in the same category. Depending upon the initiative an organization may be competing against big brands (may be corporate like McDonald’s, Infosys, Coke etc) that may have better branding and promotion strategies or deep financial pockets or can attract funds better.

Caring- Focuses on building emotional association between the brand and the target audience. This is again connecting with the audience through understanding their attitudes and requirements and focusing on the same through various communication channels. This can also be developed through various interactions with the

target audience and making them perceive your brand as the most relevant. The CRY brand discussed is one such initiative. Today the first social marketing brand in connection with children, which comes to mind, is CRY.

Compatible – The brand image ought to be compatible with the initiative or cause that is being promoted. To be compatible the brand needs to focus on the characteristics of issue or initiative, the target audience and the functional environment of the brand.

Culturally Appropriate – Some brands overcome cultural issues very comfortably since the relevance is probably the same. Again CRY can be cited as a good example since childcare initiatives and relevance remains the same. But an issue like sex-related diseases, AIDS, needs to be handled differently. In India, it is taboo to talk about sex or anything close to that and hence any initiatives related to the same have to be dealt very sensitively. How the issue is framed and depicted to target audience depends on the color of the logo (in case of AIDS this is done effectively), shape, brand name used or to some extent even who the brand ambassador is. Testing the campaign with select target audience would provide right feedback of the same.

II. Issues And Challenges

As with any other type of marketing, social marketing cannot be expected to resolve every single type of social problem or issue at hand. Social marketing is at its best when it effects and enhances socially beneficial behavioral changes. The major challenge is in getting funds for the cause-related program. Many organizations are either unwilling or unable to commit resources required to implement the program well. Many more organizations would prefer using the funds to add capacity or staff rather than use the same for developing a social marketing venture.

Competition is also huge and is a major challenge to overcome. It is however interesting to note that Vikki Spruill, mentions in *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, that Branding has negative effects on social marketing. He further mentions that instead of helping charitable groups to work as one and develop a support base consisting of activists, donors and volunteers, branding turns out to be an obstacle. It promotes unhealthy competition amongst the nonprofit organizations for increasing their awareness and visibility. Many-a-times it also encourages giving important information to gain attention and advantage over competitors which leaves the audience or donors confused about the difference their support makes. In spite of the criticism against branding social marketing, it is important to note that branding brings in effective response in terms of program implementation and in creating an awareness, interest and fund generation.

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