SOCIAL MARKETING AS A VEHICLE TO COMMUNICATE ROAD SAFETY IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA: A BROAD INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

This paper serves as a first introduction to the subject and does not intend to function as an exhaustive argument on the matter.

The term “Social Marketing” refers to the selling of ideas, and in more complicated terms, it is the creation, execution and control of programmes designed to influence social change (Maibach1995.89). It uses many principles of marketing – from assessing needs to identifying audiences, developing products and measuring results. Adreansen (1994) maintains that the goal of Social Marketing is to build a long-term relationship between road safety and its various audience / consumers. It further forces the organization to think about the needs of its audience. It makes an organization more audience-centered in the search for a long-term relationship.

PRACTICAL PRIMARY FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL MARKETING

- The research function.
  Identifying and understanding the determinants of the behaviour to be changed and the barrier to the desired behaviour and segmenting distinct prospect to differentiated treatment.

- Developmental function
  Devising the product, place, and price foundation (incentive, selling proposition) for influencing people away from the current behaviour and towards desired behaviour.

- Communication function
  Creating messages and selecting delivery. Vehicles to communicate the information and arguments that will make behaviour change irresistible to as many people as possible.

In the context of this study, Social Marketing can be defined as a social change campaign organized either by an individual, communities or government departments, non-profit organizations who have as their purpose to influence a change in behaviour, ideas, attitudes and opinions to their target group.

THE HISTORY AND NATURE OF SOCIAL CAMPAIGNS

Campaigns for social change are not a new phenomenon. They have been waged from time immemorial. In England during the Industrial Revolution, campaigns were mounted to abolish debtor prisons, grant voting rights to women and abolish child labour (Elliot 1991.36).
James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and others published the Federalist Papers after the 1787 constitutional convention to win public acceptance of the new US constitution.

In recent times, social change campaigns have focused on health reform, environmental reform, educational reform and economic reform. Other countries such as Sweden, Canada and Australia have launched vigorous campaigns to reduce smoking and alcoholic consumption, encourage safe road usage and protect the environment. In some case these countries have been more effective in the social change campaign than others (Fishbein 1995.41). For example, Sweden in 1967 developed a program that aimed to change driving from the left hand side to the right hand side of the road. The program included intensive social campaigns and the use of most of commercial products including clothing and social events.

**SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL MARKETING**

1. Program managers have to understand the target audience’s needs, wants, perceptions, and present behaviour patterns before acting, in many cases through the use of formative research. Managers need not make assumptions about these characteristics.

2. Program managers segment target markets wherever feasible and devise budgets and strategies that are specifically adapted to the characteristics of each defined segment.

3. Whenever economically feasible, major elements of program strategy and tactics are pre-tested with members of the target audience.

4. Program managers conceive of the decision process by which target consumers come to undertake a target behaviour as comprising the following steps:
   a. Acquire the necessary knowledge to be aware of the options;
   b. Embrace the values that permit the behaviour to be considered for adoption;
   c. Perceive the behaviour as potentially relevant to their own circumstances, those of a member of their family or those of the broader society;
   d. Conclude that the positive consequences of the behaviour exceed the negative consequences to a degree that is superior to realistic alternatives;
   e. Believe that they have the ability to carry out the action; and
   f. Believe that others who are important to them support their action.

5. The program explicitly recognizes that it faces direct or indirect competition for the target consumer’s behavioural choices.

6. Strategies designed to effect behavioural change always comprise all four elements of the marketing mix (the four P’s):
   a. Design a product (i.e, the behaviour to be promoted) that is fully responsive to the target consumers’ needs and wants, in other words, that is easy and satisfying;
   b. Making the place at which the behaviour can be carried out convenient and accessible;
   c. Minimising to the greatest extent possible to the economic, social and psychological price of the behaviour, and
   d. Seeking to promote the desired behaviour with messages through personal or impersonal media appropriate to the target audience’s lifestyle patterns and preferences.
SOCIAL MARKETING TO PROMOTE ROAD SAFETY

Until now, the promotion of road safety has always been heavily dependent on externally imposed behavioural controls. Road accidents studies and behavioural analyses have shown that marked restriction of alcohol consumption before driving, speed reduction, the use of safety measures such as seat-belt and helmets, enforcing priority rules and traffic codes and provision of street lighting have all contributed towards reducing hazards on the road.

A consumer orientation demands that road users and organizations, which exert an influence on road safety, are regarded as potential partners in a free market. This market is “free” insofar that there is no legislation applicable to driving behaviour or to the conduct of those organizations involved.

Road conduct is not merely dictated by the need to move safely from A to B. Various quality considerations play a role, of which safety is but one. Road users consider road safety to be important factor.

According to Wittink 1992a, 90 percent of road users wanted to be kept informed about the subject. When individuals do not see their behaviour as problematic, they feel no need to change (OECD Report 1993.29).

Electronic Devices

The need for safety can probably be far better exploited, and the government can even combine the need for safety with other need for safety, such as individuality, reliability and advanced technology. Considerable investments are currently being made to develop electronic speed control devices for vehicles. They can also help to standardize behaviour. However, restriction to personal freedom is meeting considerable resistance. Electronic speed devices, which automatically prevent a vehicle from traveling over a certain speed, are therefore not likely to be readily accepted. On the other hand, a system, which warns that the speed limit is about to be exceeded, stands a much better chance of gaining public approval. The need for such warning systems may well increase, particularly when systems which indicate what speed restrictions should be in force in exceptional circumstances, such as fog and rain (Rothengatter and Wittink, 1992). A differential balance between helping and increasing the comfort of road users on the one hand, and greater social “Standardization” on the other is possible, provided the government meets the needs of individuals and responds to market developments (OECD Report 1993).

By analyzing which other organizations and bodies exert an influence on behaviour on the road, e.g car manufactures, transport companies, the catering industry and education, and which interests and opinions play role in this regard, the government can ensure greater co-operation and a broader base of support for road safety. In accordance with the social control, insurance companies impose deductions on insurance payouts for accidents if motorists are found to have consumed too much alcohol or were not wearing a seat belt.

Groups of manufactures of alcoholic beverages could lend their support to campaigns against drinking and driving and act as intermediaries in contacts with café proprietors, since it is also in their interest to prevent the image of alcohol consumption from becoming too negative. The participation of social agencies would make the social message more rounded, more effective and thus more emphatic (OECD Report 1993).
Look for compromises

So, the government can try to win over other bodies, such as the car industry, to its safety policy. In a field where so many parties have an influence, it is necessary to create the greatest possible base of support.

The market must be carefully segmented, in order to involve the various sectors in the government objectives. A clash of interests cannot be ignored, that is fatal for communication with individuals and organizations.

When the gap between road safety and other needs is recognized and made visible, bridges can be built that must ensure that road safety is at least an important issue on the market. We have seen, for instance, the emergence of innovative new health care where providers use satellites and the Internet as support tools to promote healthy behaviour in remote communities. For example, South African’s Transnet-Phelophepa Health Care Train (Biddlecombe 1998) began offering customized programs to rural dwellers of a few years ago, thanks in part to wireless technology that gives physicians instant access to patient records, e-mail and diagnosis support systems. And Health Canada’s Quit4Life campaign (Controneo & Schoales 1999), which uses the World to help youth quit smoking, illustrates how the Internet is causing a proliferation of social of social marketing efforts within existing organizational structure.

A model of behavioural determinant has to be filled up with road safety subjects in order to formulate goals and strategies: that is, to know how to make allowance for needs, personal characteristics, values and lifestyle, to know what kind of information is helpful to settle attitudes, norms and perceived behaviour control, which skills have to be developed, which barriers have to be faced, how behaviour can be made easier, how to change the evaluation of costs and benefits, for example with penalties or rewards. Road conduct is not merely dictated by the need to move from safely from A to B.

Various quality considerations play a role, of which road safety is but one. Road users consider road safety to be an important factor. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) showed that 90 percent of road users wanted to be informed about road safety. However, the same promotion of road users feel that they already take adequate account of safety considerations, and occasionally (that is, once or twice a month) feel unsafe on the road (Wittink, 1992a). When individuals do not see their behaviour as problematic, they feel no need for change.

When deciding on strategy, it should not be forgotten that most behaviour on the road is born out of habit. Such behaviour is difficult to change. A strategy to change this behaviour drastically can meet with great resistance, because on the whole, people are not keen to give up current behaviour. This is regarded as a “sacrifice”. Adopting a gradual strategy of taking one small step at a time, so that behavioural change is realized in the form of behavioural adaptation may be a preferable approach (Elliott, 1991:29) and alternatives must be made attractive.

For example, a government’s policy to reduce the use of private cars in an attempt to curb pollution and congestion is meeting considerable opposition from some sections of the population, because they are used to the convenience of having a car. Simply being able to step into their car whenever they want is vital to such individuals.
Arguments about damage to the environment are either not listened to or are minimized. Consequently, negative arguments against using cars have no effect. What are therefore needed are more positive arguments in favour of using public transport or bicycles. Just as in commercial marketing, promoting an alternative by way of a temporary incentive can be a way of getting people to try out something different. Experience can show that there are unexpected advantages are less serious often, without necessarily meaning that the car is no longer used.

**Priority to development of behaviour**

Another consequence of habit is to give high priority to influence behaviour when this is still in a stage of development. Through education at schools and by parents and through driver training, people should learn behavioural patterns with which they can anticipate problems and evade risks. This gives the opportunity to instill good habits. Besides, each occasion that leads to a break up location, people may change their way of transport, the purchase of a new car may stimulate the search for electronic devices and safety standards.

**Adaptation to involvement**

The degree to which people involved in a subject strongly determines the way in which they can best be approached. The first step for behavioural change can vary in this regard. However, a strategy will have to devote attention to both the operational and the cognitive and subjective aspects. In general, people must regard the behaviour as attractive, feasible and important and be able to implement it. Only then will the change to an alternative become structural.

Even at that stage, reinforcement of the desired behaviour is necessary, because the competition of other needs cannot always be neutralized and new needs may be created in time.

**Consequences for programs**

The previous discussion provides points of application for various behaviour – influencing measures, such as information, education and training, driving instruction, police supervision and road and vehicle engineering. Information will be more positively formulated and it will be more to the point and relevant as a consequence of market analysis.

Education can be more oriented to motives and evaluations of pupils. Linked to that, social consequences of behaviour have to be discussed and evaluated. Then the pupils have to make up their minds and seek a balance between individual and social goals. Driver institution may be better directed to life and driving styles in order to compromise individual and social goals. Legislation and supervision have to be balanced with social control and individual freedom and responsibility. Road and vehicle engineering should be devised in a way that takes account of both the needs of drivers and social goals, in a way that makes safe behaviour more attractive and risk behaviour unattractive (OECD Report 1992.34)
A different orientation in addition to existing measures

Social marketing follows a different orientation when compared to existing approaches in road safety, but it is not in contradiction with these approaches. It extends the potential to influence behaviour. It differs in its approach from a large proportion of traditional road safety policies in that it does not prescribe what people should do. Instead, it tries to identify the best ways to promote the right kind of behaviour.

In other words, it points out obstruction, indicates what knowledge and skills are lacking, shows how the right behaviour can be made more attractive, indicates whether needs can be met more successfully, suggests what competition there may be among various needs and what can be done to harmonise or neutralise them, states whether a point of application can be found in the lifestyles of groups of road users and suggests to what degree behavioural standardization can provide a solution. Road users need to be presented with good arguments before they will change their behaviour.

Social marketing can be interpreted as an addition to existing policy. Safe road conduct remains the ultimate goal and all the traditional measures for achieving this aim are still needed. However, a consumer-orientated approach and market analysis will provide more specific information about the role which can be played by information campaigns, education and training, driving instruction, legislation and police supervision. In other words, it aims to maximize the motivation of the road user himself to contribute to road safety.

Marketers generally offer something people want. By studying the problems, beliefs, need and aspirations of a specific target group, marketers are able to make attractive offers to that group. Their aim is to persuade people to choose their offering instead of others or none at all. In social marketing, the “consumer” is often not as keen to co-operate as in the commercial sector. Accordingly, it is particularly important that the marketers’ offering is as attractive as possible, and that every effort is made to ensure that compliance is easy.

In other words, they should minimize the “psychological price” (time, effort, status, convenience, costs, etc.) of their offering. However, the offering will never be ideal. There will always be a mismatch between what the consumer wants and what the marketer can provide. Marketing is the process of compromise, of value exchange, that must then take place if progress is to be made.

In commercial marketing the manufactures want to sell cars. To succeed they must design and produce cars that meet their consumers’ needs. If the consumer wants an environmentally safe car, the manufactures should try to provide one within the confines of what is practical and profitable. The result will not be perfect.

The manufacturers will expend time, effort and resources in attempting to build a “green” car, but will probably only produce one that is less environmentally harmful. Nonetheless, the more effort they make towards meeting this consumer need, the more likely they are to sell their cars. In the health sector, the social marketers want to sell “non-smoking”. To do this, they too must attempt to satisfy their target group’s needs. In the case of young smokers, there may be a need for social status and sophistication, which cigarette smoking is felt to offer. In response, the social marketers can change their messages from one which, for example, emphasizes the carcinogenic properties of tobacco to one stressing the maturity and strong-mindedness of the non smoker. In the same way as the car manufacturer, the social marketers will increase their chances of a sale, of success.
Similarly, in the case of road safety, the social markers want to eliminate drunk-driving (OECD Report 1993.355). To make progress, they too must examine, and respond to, their consumers’ needs. For example, in Australia young people are very dependent on their cars for mobility. This led road safety advocates to make a compromise, and to change their initial intention of imposing a curfew on young drivers to one promoting **zero blood alcohol levels**. This movement towards their consumers again increases the chance of success.

**Enforcement**

Existing laws form part of the external environment of the marketing organization whether social or commercial. Thus, a marketing approach suggests that they should be taken into account during the situation analysis. They may either offer opportunities or act as constraints, and initiatives should be adapted accordingly. For example, speed restrictions may or may not be considered to be sufficient as a core element of a road safety activity. A mass media campaign, then, could strengthen their effectiveness asking people to obey the limits. Marketing also has a role to play where new laws are felt to be necessary.

“Good” laws need marketing addressing at least three groups of people: legislators, to get them passed in the first place; the legal and enforcement profession, to make certain they are properly enforced; and the public, to ensure they are both accepted and obeyed.

When considering the public response to laws, it is worth recalling the discussion at the beginning of this paper about the exchange processes in marketing, which should be voluntary. Consumers can choose whether or not to accept a social marketing offering. Legal sanctions, unless they are enforced with extreme severity, still allow the public the freedom to obey them or not. This is why legal sanctions such as penalties for drinking and driving are often supported by publicity campaigns. In essence, when laws are used to encourage road safety, the only result is that the balance in favour of compliance with a particular initiative is improved. In marketing terms, the appeal of the product is increased. It is worth remembering that this is not the exclusive result of social marketing. Commerce is equally keen on bringing about favourable legislation: witness the efforts of the tobacco industry to stave off an EC ban on advertising.

**Engineering**

This covers issues such as the physical infrastructure and car design. Marketing has a role here just as it has with law enforcement. The infrastructure forms part of the safety organization’s environment and should be taken into account in the design of initiatives. Furthermore, proposed engineering changes may require marketing to decision-makers and public. **Take, for example, a proposal to build a new, safer road system. The government, the local authorities and the public all need to be convinced of its benefits.** Hard data on cost savings, the improved public safety and the popularity (and hence the vote winning potential) of the project are likely to interest the first two groups. Whereas the public may be more interested in its impact on quality of life in general terms and its effects on housing, local services and traffic conditions, for example.
Educational approaches can also gain by a form of marketing, and indeed are often based on marketing style practices. Teaching materials can be developed and pre-tested with children before use, teachers’ needs can be assessed and catered for to encourage the teaching of road safety, and marketing to the relevant decision makers can ensure the inclusion of road safety in curriculum guidelines.

In summary, social marketing can enhance all these conventional approaches to road safety. Furthermore, the pragmatism of marketing the idea that all acceptable and available means should be used to achieve objectives, suggests that these should not be seen as alternatives either to each other or marketing.

OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS TO SOCIAL MARKETING

Some readers may feel that social marketing is not appropriate for their organization and that the social marketing approach as outlined cannot be always applied. In the following section, likely objections and constraints are anticipated and dealt with.

Limited budgets

Social marketing suggests sizeable budgets to cover all aspects of the marketing mix and integrated research. A fully-fledged social marketing approach is likely to be more expensive than simply implementing a media plan only. Whilst social marketing does involve a comprehensive integrated framework, it also incorporates an essential well-proven philosophy of persuasion customer orientation.

No matter how small the available road safety budget, the strategy and tasks to be completed can be based on customer orientation. This does not have to involve much research, but it will require "listening" to some road users who are to be the target of any initiative. If, for example, the social marketing initiative were to use only pamphlets as the media, then a social marketing approach would ensure that one begins by listening to what road users want and are likely to do with the pamphlets, and where they want to obtain them. Research should be devoted to qualitative exploration as to content, tone, likely reactions to suggestions, as well as how the pamphlets will be obtained and used. If money is not available to listen to customers, then the initiative ought to be seriously questioned since the odds of a successful outcome are quite low.

Limited budgets usually impact on media choices. Television and Radio are accepted as the most influential media but a letterbox drop or a direct mail campaign could be considered and still involve social marketing. When budgets are small, Television and Radio are unlikely to be used. However, a social marketing approach would seek to maximize public relations news worthiness. Arousing controversy is a very effective way of gaining much greater coverage.

Lack of expertise/people

Most road safety authorities do not have experienced marketers on their staff. They do have well trained scientists and, sometimes, experienced mass communicators. Marketing experts are readily available either as paid consultants or as invited unpaid members of a committee with other expects. The Anti-Cancer Council, the National Heart Foundation and some road safety authorities or foundations often have committees, which involve outside professionals who give free advice. One source of consultants can be found among recently retired professionals.
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