



# Theoretical Background: Introduction to Social Marketing

Helena M. Alves and M. Mercedes Galan-Ladero

## Abstract

Currently the importance of social marketing is unquestionable. Social marketing, also called marketing of social causes, has become a key tool for all types of organizations (public and nonprofit organizations and even companies). Since 1971, when the first definition was published, social marketing has grown in popularity and has been used in different areas.

In this theoretical chapter, some definitions and core concepts are considered, and social marketing approaches are analyzed. The main steps of a social marketing program are also explained. Finally, ethics and cultural differences are referred as key aspects in social marketing.

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H. M. Alves  
University of Beira Interior, Covilhã, Portugal  
e-mail: [halves@ubi.pt](mailto:halves@ubi.pt)

M. M. Galan-Ladero (✉)  
University of Extremadura, Badajoz, Spain  
e-mail: [mgalan@unex.es](mailto:mgalan@unex.es)

**Learning Objectives**

- To discover the importance of social marketing for all types of organizations.
- To define social marketing.
- To analyze social marketing approaches.
- To study the main steps of a successful social marketing program.
- To understand ethical dilemmas that can appear in social marketing.
- To consider the importance of cultural differences in social marketing campaigns, especially in an international context.

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**Introduction**

Currently the importance of social marketing is unquestionable. Social marketing, also called marketing of social causes, has become a key tool for all types of organizations (public and nonprofit organizations, and even for companies).

Social marketing has grown in popularity and usage (Grier and Bryant 2005) in different areas since 1971, when the first definition was published:

- In Public health
  - Promotion of healthy food consumption—fruit and vegetables—, reduction of fat and sugar consumption, promotion of physical activity, ... to avoid health problems: obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol, heart attack, etc.
  - Prenatal care, breastfeeding promotion, implementation of hygienic measures, vaccination promotion, improvement of potable water access, etc., to reduce child mortality
  - Periodic reviews, tests, mammograms, ... to prevent cancer—or detect it on an early stage
  - Promotion of blood and organ donation, to save lives
  - Awareness to prevent several diseases (such as HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases)
  - Awareness about antibiotics use, to avoid they become ineffective
  - Reduction of smoking, drinking, or drug use
- In Education
  - Promotion of road safety, to avoid traffic accidents (e.g., do not drink when driving, rest from time to time, respect speed limits, etc.)
  - Awareness of the need of accessibility for disabled people, work and social integration for vulnerable people, etc.
  - Training in socially desired values (e.g., to avoid gender violence)
  - Education to avoid harmful traditions and cultural practices, such as female genital mutilation, child marriage, etc.
  - Awareness of pet care, to avoid abandonment and mistreatment of animals

- Information about consumer rights and awareness of consumer protection
- In Environment
  - Recycling promotion, to reuse materials
  - Promotion of responsible water consumption, to avoid wasting potable water
  - Reduction of environmental pollution, to protect and preserve nature
  - Forest protection, to stop desertification and improve air quality

A common problem is that social marketing is perceived by some professionals as a predominantly promotional or, even more narrowly, a communication activity—social advertising (Grier and Bryant 2005). However, social marketing is more than simple advertising, and it includes marketing concepts and approaches adapted to the social context.

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## Definition and Core Concepts

The first definition of social marketing was proposed by Kotler and Zaltman in 1971. They defined this new concept as “the design, implementation and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptance of social ideas and implies considerations of product planning, price, communication, distribution and marketing research” (Kotler and Zaltman 1971: 5). This definition was very innovative at that time, because it meant transferring the marketing mix scheme (the 4 Ps) to the realm of ideas as a new type of product (until then, marketing had only been applied to goods and services). However, this definition also made social marketing frequently be confused with social propaganda and social communication (Andreasen 1993). This distinction has since been fully resolved (O’Shaughnessy 1996). Social propaganda deals only with the strengthening of beliefs and is entirely didactic in nature, while social marketing is based upon studies of the needs of the respective target audiences (O’Shaughnessy 1996). Indeed, social marketing involves all the 4 Ps, not just one (Fox and Kotler 1980).

A later definition describes it as “the use of marketing techniques and principles to influence an objective public that voluntarily accepts, rejects, modifies or abandons behavior for the benefit of individuals, groups or society as a whole” (Kotler and Lee 2005: 115).

Moliner (1998: 27) considers that “social marketing is an extension of marketing that studies the relation of exchange that is originated when the product is an idea or social cause.”

To sum up, social marketing focuses on accepting, modifying, changing, discouraging, or abandoning ideas, beliefs, attitudes, values, practices, and behaviors (Andreasen 1994). Donovan and Henley (2010) go further and include “involuntary” behavior in these definitions. These authors propose that the goal of social marketing is not just encourage individual voluntary behavior and change the environments that facilitate such changes, but also trying to influence and change the social structures that will facilitate individual changes. This will mean targeting the individuals that have the power to change policies and legislation. To achieve that, a combination of three

approaches is advisable, namely, downstream approaches (addressing the problem by facilitating access to solutions), upstream approaches (acting upon the main causes of the problem), and midstream approaches (acting upon those that can help behavior change, like families, friends, coworkers, among others) (Donovan and Henley 2010).

In order for social marketing to become effective, four dimensions must be present (Hastings and Domegan 2014):

- **Client orientation:** identification of people’s needs, aspirations, values, and priorities
- **Creative orientation:** Finding imaginative ways to engage them
- **Collective dimension:** Recognizing that social context matters
- **Competitive orientation:** Critically addressing the competition while reducing the price for the target

Social marketing scientists and practitioners have been supporting these orientations, in their practice and research, with the useful insights of several theories and models of behavior change (Donovan and Henley 2010; Hastings and Domegan 2014), namely, the Health Belief Model, the Protection Motivation Theory, the Social Learning Theory, the Theory of Reasoned Action, the Theory of Planned Behavior, the Theory of Trying, the Theory of Interpersonal Behavior, the Exchange Theory, the Stages of Change Theory, the Social Cognitive Theory, and the Social Capital Theory, among many others. All these models and theories contribute to understand the influences on behavior and hence provide a framework to develop the strategy and campaigns to fight social problems.

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## Social Marketing Approaches

Social marketing is characterized by the coordination of different complementary approaches, to achieve the realization or modification of behaviors or ideas. Thus, Santesmases (1999) points out four main approaches:

- A legal approach (with laws, regulations, sanctions, etc.):
  - To regulate traffic, there are laws and rules that drivers must respect (failure to comply them may involve fines, withdrawal of driver’s license, and even jail sentences).
  - To avoid the consumption of tobacco, several laws have been enacted in many countries, which prohibit smoking in public places, regulate the advertising of this product, etc.
  - To prevent teenagers from consuming alcohol, the sale of this product to minors (under 18 or 21 years old, depending on the country) is prohibited by law in many nations. Also, to avoid excessive consumption of alcohol by citizens, in general, the sale and advertising of alcoholic beverages have been regulated in many countries.
  - To prevent the use of drugs, they are forbidden in many countries.

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- A technological approach (based on innovations that facilitate the desired behavior):
    - To increase driving safety, airbags, seat belts, speed limiters, breathalyzers, and drug tests have been invented.
    - To avoid the tobacco consumption, gum and nicotine patches have been manufactured.
    - To avoid excessive alcohol consumption, alcohol has been eliminated in different beverages (e.g., beer, liqueur).
  - An economic approach (reducing the cost of carrying out the desired behavior, or increasing the price to discourage unwanted behavior):
    - Fines for speeding.
    - To avoid tobacco consumption, the sale price has been increased.
  - An informational approach (focused, above all, on persuasive information):
    - To reduce and avoid traffic accidents, the administration has distributed brochures, magazines, advertisements on TV, radio and internet, talks, etc.
    - To reduce tobacco consumption, warning labels, fear-appeal messages, and images have been included in the cigarette packs.

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## The Social Marketing Program

According to Kotler and Lee (2008) in order to create a successful social marketing program to change behaviors, the planning process should comprise several steps:

**Step 1: Define the Problem, Purpose, and Focus** In this step, the social marketer needs to identify what the problem is and what causes it, as well as who is affected by it, and try to find the numbers that bring evidence of the problem. At the same time, it is important to identify who is most likely to change and who is able to change.

**Step 2: Conduct a Situation Analysis** In this step, PEST and SWOT analyses are carried out. It is important to understand how macroenvironmental forces such as political/legal, economic, social, and technological forces influence the problem or its possible solution.

**Step 3: Select Target Audiences** This step comprises the identification of the target audience by identifying the segments most affected by the problems and the ones the organization can have access to. In order to achieve it, several criteria can be taken into consideration (Santesmases 1999; Andreasen and Kotler 2008; Hastings and Domengan 2014):

- Demographic criteria: age (children, teenagers, youth, adults, seniors), sex (males vs. females), ethnicity, etc.
- Psychographic criteria: lifestyle, values, and personality characteristics

- Behavior criteria: current behavior (heavy vs. light users; users vs. non-users), future intentions (new users vs. non-users), readiness to change (people willing to change vs. people not willing to change), and product loyalty (loyal users vs. not loyal users)

**Step 4: Set Marketing Objectives and Goals** On this stage, the social marketer needs to establish the main objectives and goals of the program, that is, to specify desired behaviors and changes in knowledge, attitudes, and/or beliefs. According to Santesmases (1999), four main strategies that can be followed in social marketing are the following:

- **A reinforcement strategy:** When attitudes are positive and behaviors are consistent (they are realized). In this case, the objective of the strategy would be to reinforce this situation. The actions to develop this strategy can be very varied (e.g., awards, rewards, economic or noneconomic incentives, legal norms, etc.):
  - Blood donations: Social recognition and awards for people with the highest number of blood donations; or gifts, every time a donation is made (e.g., a sandwich with a soft drink, a key chain, a beach ball, a pen, etc.).
  - Discounts on garbage collection taxes, if it is properly separated to be recycled. Or not to pick up garbage, or even give fines, if it is not properly separated and classified.
- **An induction strategy:** When attitudes are positive but socially desired behavior is not carried out. The objective of this strategy is to try to induce toward the accomplishment of that behavior. Actions are also very diverse (e.g., establishing social controls, facilitating material and human resources to carry out desired behavior, providing incentives, etc.):
  - Blood donation: To approach blood collection points to potential donors (work centers, universities, central areas, etc.).
  - Recycling: It can be facilitated by putting collection points close to homes. Or even picking up the product from home (e.g., used oil).
  - Many people know that they should eat fruit and vegetables, but they do not do it for the time it takes their preparation and the cost that they have. Making fruits and vegetables cheaper to purchase, easier to prepare them, or more available (in grocery stores and supermarkets, but also in all types of restaurants) can increase the attractiveness for them.
- **A rationalization strategy:** When a desirable social behavior is put into practice, but the attitude toward such behavior is negative. The goal of the strategy is to generate a change in attitude that is consistent with behavior, through actions such as persuasion, controls, etc.:
  - Speeding: To inform drivers about the reasons why they should not exceed speed limits and make them aware of being prudent on the road (and not just to avoid fines).
  - There are parents who send their children to school only to avoid be imprisoned (in countries like Spain, basic education is compulsory and,

according to the law, parents must take their children to school): To make them aware of the advantages their children will have in the future, if they receive an educational training.

- **A confrontation strategy:** When attitude and behavior are consistent but contrary to socially desired behavior. The goal of the strategy is to generate a change of behavior and attitude (this is the most difficult situation to change). For this strategy, economic sanctions, coercive actions, threat of punishment, or persuasive information can be used:
  - Parking in double row or in prohibited areas: To educate drivers so that they do not carry out this behavior, due to the traffic problems caused (fines are a common way to avoid this behavior).
  - Drunk driving—there are people who drink and drive, because “they always control”: It is necessary to make them aware of the problem and show them that alcohol always affects driving.

**Step 5: Identify Factors Influencing Behavior Adoption** Before defining the marketing mix, it is important to identify the barriers that prevent the audience of adopting the new behavior; the benefits they may realize when adopting the new behavior; the competitors’ behavior, that is, the other more pleasant or convenient behaviors that prevent the target audience from adopting the new behavior; and the influencers of the desired behavior (who can help the persistence of the current behavior or help to change it).

**Step 6: Craft a Positioning Statement** The positioning statement should translate what the target audience feels when performing the desired behavior. This definition will help to design the marketing mix needed to achieve these feelings and differentiate this behavior from other unwanted ones.

For example, citizens want to believe that, when a victim of domestic violence calls the help line, a trustable person will help her/him and provide solutions.

### **Step 7 Develop Marketing Mix Strategies: The 4 Ps**

#### ***First P: Product***

The core product is intangible in social marketing: a desired idea, attitude, or behavior. But it can have a support (a tangible support, such as a good or even another intangible support, such as a service).

- For example, blood donation: To achieve this behavior, it is necessary to have medical services (to extract blood) and a physical space (such as a hospital ward).

Consumer orientation (orientation toward target audience) is desirable. Social marketers should offer the product with a social marketing program focused on the benefits the target audience values most (Grier and Bryant 2005). Marketing research is essential to understand the wants, needs, values, and motivations of these groups and to provide them with the best appeals to the target audience.

***Second P: Price***

Price can be monetary or non-monetary in social marketing:

- Monetary price: the cost for the promised benefits
- Non-monetary price: waste of time, effort, sacrifice, embarrassment, diminished pleasure, psychological hassle or psychic discomfort, etc. (Grier and Bryant 2005) for achieving the wanted behavior or changing the behavior.

In any case, the required considerations must be reduced to the maximum, so that the desired attitude or behavior is carried out.

A common characteristic in social marketing is that there is rarely an immediate, explicit payback to target audiences in return for their adoption of the desired behavior (Grier and Bryant 2005).

***Third P: Place***

Place focuses on providing appropriate distribution and response channels to transform motivations into actions (e.g., physical location where achieving the desired behavior: to consider its accessibility, comfort, operating days and hours, among others).

Channels can be direct or indirect (if intermediaries are needed to facilitate the behavior change).

***Fourth P: Promotion***

It is the most visible part of the marketing mix. Social advertising (similar to commercial advertising) is emphasized, above all. But the other elements of the communication mix should be considered, too (such as public relations, promotional activities, personal [face-to-face] attendance, and direct marketing, among others). Internet and social networks can help to achieve larger audiences, sharing the social marketing campaigns quickly.

Messages used to change behaviors can be persuasive, but they also can include fear, humor, irony, or emotional appeals.

**Step 8 Outline a Plan for Monitoring and Evaluation** This step defines how the program will be monitored and how the outputs will be evaluated. Therefore, it needs to identify which processes and outcomes will be measured, what methods will be used to measure them, when the measurements will take place, and the costs involved in carrying out the measurements.

**Step 9 Establish Budgets and Find Funding Sources** Here, the total costs of the program are identified, including the costs to implement the program as well as the costs to control and evaluate it. It is also important to identify the funding sources that will support the costs.

**Step 10 Complete the Plan for Campaign Implementation and Management** At this step, the outline of the division of tasks is conceptualized: who will perform them, how much it will cost, and when they should be carried out, including the partners' roles.



## Ethical Considerations

Social marketing can sometimes offer ethical dilemmas, especially for two reasons:

1. **For the behavior sought:** It may be an idea or conduct that is controversial according to a certain culture or religion and even contrary to traditional practices strongly rooted in a certain society. Thus, the proposed changes of behavior may influence and affect community traditions and also its cultural, social, and moral values.

For example, topics such as family planning and promotion of contraceptives, organ donation, vaccination, eradication of child marriage or female genital mutilation, etc. can be very controversial in some cultures or religions.

2. **Because of the way in which the social marketing program has been designed, developed, and implemented.**

For example:

The language used in the campaign (political [in] correctness): For example, some terms and linguistic uses to refer to a person with a disability are not politically correct, and they should not be used in a social marketing campaign (e.g., subnormal, deficient, invalid person).

Messages used to create sense of guilt, fear emotions, and fear appeals (or even panic): They can create anxiety and alarm, especially in sensitive people (and the improvements in the desired behavior are not significant, compared to other styles). For example, “Yellow fever kills!” and “Yellow fever arrived!!!!” campaigns, in Brazil; “Flu is here!”, in Spain.

Images used to recreate real situations (e.g., traffic accidents, sequelae of cancer): They may be disturbing to some viewers.

In addition, possible interests and interference of business lobbies should be sometimes avoided. Thus, for example, when it was discovered that tobacco consumption could cause lung or throat cancer, anti-smoking campaigns were not initially carried out because of the importance and power of the tobacco companies.

Or, for example, it has taken a long time for campaigns to reduce the consumption of soft drinks to be launched (and only in some countries), even though the high levels of sugar that carbonated beverages contain and their effects on health have been known for a long time.

To conclude, two main aspects should be highlighted:

1. Cultural differences should be taken into careful consideration in social marketing campaigns, especially in an international context. The success of a social marketing program will depend on the correct analysis of each situation and its adaptation to each society.
2. The end does not justify the means in social marketing. Not everything is valid to achieve a certain desired behavior.

Ethics is a key aspect in social marketing.

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