



How to Encourage the Consumption of Tap Water: A Case Study on Águas do Porto

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Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyze the social marketing campaign undertaken by the Portuguese public company AdP—Águas do Porto, E.M.—since March 2015. This campaign focuses on the incentive of promoting new habits of drinking water consumption and has been a pioneer in the water distribution sector, establishing a trend followed by other public companies in the country.

The AdP case discusses the contribution of social marketing in the changing of rooted and generalized consumption habits, the benefits of consuming tap water instead of bottled water for the individual and the society, and the strategy of the campaign and its linkage to the global city brand “Porto Ponto.”

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Learning Objectives

- To discuss social marketing: concept, stages, consequences
- To verify the real benefits of tap water consumption
- To look behind scenes of the desired behavioral change
- To explain the symbiotic relationship between two brands: Porto and Águas do Porto

Introduction

AdP—Águas do Porto—is a Portuguese public company founded in October 2006 that was established to replace the Municipal Water and Sanitation Services of the Porto City Council. Nowadays, AdP focuses mainly on the treatment and supply of high-quality water to the Porto community and is one of the biggest water suppliers in the country, having more than 153,821 customers, which is the equivalent of 370,000 inhabitants (Águas do Porto 2016). Please note that the urban area of Porto has a population of less than two million people and the city itself around 240,000 people.

In the last 20 years, there has been a significant improvement in the water quality distributed to Portuguese citizens and its distribution process—more people have access to excellent tap water, which places Portugal at the same level as the most developed countries in the world (Pordata 2016).

AdP, conscious of, on one hand, the need to rethink their medium-/long-term strategy and, on the other hand, the inseparability between the organization, the society, and the environment, introduced in 2014 a new strategy with a redefined mission, vision, and values. Despite having always contributed to Porto and its community's growth, this new strategy focuses on sustainability and social responsibility, with the clear intention of contributing to the global creation of economic and social value.

As a commodity company, AdP's new strategy and marketing plan are innovative. The ultimate goal is to transform water, seen as a utility or a commodity, into a brand. In order to do this, AdP has undertaken a social marketing campaign named "Beba Água do Porto. É boa todos os dias!" (In English: Drink Porto's Water. It's good every day!) that intends to encourage the consumption of tap water through behavioral change (Lowe et al. 2015). AdP has reinforced and proved the safety conditions of tap water consumption to the Portuguese that still prefer to consume bottled water (and this is a growing consumption). Água do Porto is water of excellent quality and very healthy since it is balanced in terms of minerals and diversified, eco-friendly, and available anytime or anywhere in the Porto area (Lowe et al. 2015). As such, there are only benefits in consuming it: benefits for the individual, for the society, and for the environment.

Social Marketing

Social marketing can be considered as (Kotler and Lee 2004) “the use of marketing techniques and principles to influence a specific public that voluntarily accepts, rejects, modifies or abandons behavior for the benefit of individuals, groups or society as a whole.” Choosing the right goal for a social marketing campaign is a critical point, since there is a wide range of possible objectives. We may be trying to change people’s perspectives, values, actions, or behaviors. Also, when we are planning a social marketing campaign, it is important to follow many of the same steps used for traditional products and services (Kotler and Keller 2012). According to the same authors, the essential steps are:

1. Where are we?
 - Define the program focus.
 - Identify the campaign purpose.
 - Conduct a SWOT analysis.
 - Review past and similar efforts.
2. Where do we want to go?
 - Select target audiences.
 - Set objectives and goals.
 - Analyze target audiences and competition.
3. How will we get there?
 - Product: design the market offering.
 - Price: manage costs of behavior change.
 - Distribution: make the product available.
 - Communication: create messages and choose media.
4. How will we stay on course?
 - Develop a plan for evaluation and monitoring.
 - Establish budgets and find funding sources.
 - Complete an implementation plan.

The Real Benefits of Tap Water Consumption

Access to drinkable water is a fundamental human right, which is at the heart of a crisis of scarcity of resources that affects millions of people around the world. Water is a necessity of life. In this world there are still too many people having to trek miles every day to fetch their water from the nearest stream, but that is not the case for European countries such as Portugal, for example. Portuguese are very lucky to live in a country where clean, safe water is available at the turn of a tap.

So why are Portuguese consuming more and more bottled water if the tap water is more than safe? Portuguese consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of health and well-being issues (which is positive), but it means that they consider bottled water the most natural soft drink and the ideal way to rehydrate as part of a

healthy and balanced nutrition. This trend together with signs of economic recovery has encouraged Portuguese consumers to buy bottled water instead of drinking tap water. In Porto Council, this national trend is replicated: merely 37.6% of Porto's population consumes only tap water (Universidade Católica do Porto 2015), with a low consumption of tap water opposed to a generalized increase in the consumption of bottled water. In fact, in Portugal bottled water consumption increased by 6% in off-trade volume and 4% in off-trade value to stand at sales of 898 million liters and 226 million euros in 2016 and looks set to continue to see an interesting performance over the 2016–2021 forecast period (Euromonitor International 2017).

The domestic consumption of bottled water leads us to one of the great mysteries of capitalism: the packaging and sale or purchase of products for which we already have free access—"manufactured demand" (Queiroz et al. 2012). The consumerism generalization and advertising are pointed out as the reason for the purchase, sometimes at high prices, of branded water, although this is not always synonymous with superior quality (Queiroz et al. 2012). Capitalism, marketing, fashion, and the cultural, economic, and political trends greatly encourage the consumption of bottled water (Royte 2011). Bottled water has become a status symbol, which communicates a lifestyle and conveys feelings of belonging to a real or desired group (Queiroz et al. 2012). A Portuguese family of four, for example, who consumes tap water daily, spends around 2.50 € a year, while if it consumes bottled water will spend around 590.00 € a year. Tap water is 450 times cheaper than bottled water (Queiroz et al. 2012).

However, we are not suggesting that drinking bottled water is always a bad idea. For instance, when a flood or a broken pipe interrupts the local water supply, bottled water can be a literal lifesaver. Similarly, if you are out at a concert or a ball game and you need to buy a drink, choosing a bottle of water instead of a bottle of soda is definitely the right choice for your health. However, when you have a choice between bottled water and tap water, either filtered or unfiltered, drinking from the tap is a better choice for your wallet and for the planet since there is no evidence bottled water is better for us, and it actually might be less safe than tap water. There are a lot of myths related to tap water and bottled water. Here are the top three debunked myths (Torres 2018):

1. Is bottled water better than tap water?

Thanks to decades of myth-building, the common belief is that bottled water is better than tap water. This is not true. In Western Europe about 99% of public tap water is potable (drinkable according to EU and WHO guidelines). The only drawback in some places is poor taste and smell, mainly due to hardness, minerals, and higher concentration of chlorine (used for disinfection purposes). There is no scientific proof that bottled water is healthier than tap water.

2. Is bottled water safer than tap water?

Tap water is strictly regulated. AdP, for example, is very strict regarding their tap water quality with more than 47,000 tests done every year. Porto tap water is analyzed daily in physicochemical and bacteriological terms, with results above 99.9% in compliance with the criteria. There is once again no scientific evidence

that bottled water is safer. Actually, studies show that, in 100 different brands of bottled water, 30% will have some type of problem or anomaly, just as tap water does (Queiroz et al. 2012).

3. Is it fine to drink bottled water as long as the bottles are recycled?

The issue is not just the plastic waste but the entire value chain of water bottles. From production to distribution, the process of generating bottled water in plastic is unsustainable: 3 L of water is needed on average to produce 1 L of bottled water when including production of plastic, transportation, filtering, and filling up the bottles; the plastic used in the water bottles is made of oil and natural gas, both nonrenewable resources; and the distribution of bottled water contributes to global warming, since land transport, for example, is very polluting. This situation is exacerbated when 25% of all bottled water is marketed and consumed outside the country of production (Queiroz et al. 2012).

Behind the Scenes of the Desired Behavioral Change

The main reason for this generalized consumption behavior has not yet been identified, but studies and research point to the gap between the perceived quality and the real quality of tap water. AdP, being aware of the quality and excellence of their tap water, decided to investigate further and launched a campaign on World Water Day 2015, to change this perception and induce the desired behavior—that is, increase the consumption of tap water. By conducting a SWOT analysis, AdP realized the following (Table 1):

Clearly, there are more strengths and opportunities than weaknesses and threats, and AdP was willing to work hard on the weaknesses and overcome the threats (Almeida et al. 2016). AdP designed a social marketing campaign to inform, educate, and induce the public to stimulate the wanted behavioral change, a change wanted not only by AdP but by the city of Porto and society in general (Almeida et al. 2016). AdP wanted first to inform the public that Porto Council tap water was safe to consume, the quality was very high, and it was trustworthy; second, to raise

Table 1 SWOT analysis

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Opportunities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Quality – Convenience – Health benefits – Economic benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Financial and economic context – Increasing concern with health and sustainability – Environmental awareness – Media
<i>Weaknesses</i>	<i>Threats</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Wrong perception of tap water quality – Taste and smell – Lack of status from consuming it – Lack of portability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Strong presence and competition of bottled water brands – Status – The increasing mobility of people – Media

Source: Dias (2015)

public awareness in order to generate a behavior change; and finally, increase tap water consumption. Challenging negative stereotypes is essential to improving the perception of reliability and credibility (Means et al. 2002).

One of the priority targets of the campaign has been the X and Y generation, the trendsetters. This target has a recognized social, economic, and cultural role in society and has generalized access to information. Their power of choice, allied to the search, creation, and dissemination of content, elevated them to the status of one of the most influential groups when we refer to consumption trends (Figueiredo 2012).

However, the other groups that are a part of Porto's population could not be forgotten, since they are the followers. They follow the trendsetters; they follow the media. Studies reveal that, for the most part, the perception of consumers can be positively influenced by communication campaigns and that the absence of information considerably impairs their perception. Thus, communication campaigns that respond directly to the expectations of consumers in relation to water have had very positive effects on the value understood by the public and consequently on the consumption of tap water (Means et al. 2002). Just like the trendsetters, the followers highly defend the environment as a way to protect not only their quality of life but of future generations as well. For the priority target, AdP developed activities that focused on tap water quality, sustainability, convenience, and finally the very cheap price.

As secondary targets, AdP singled out students, from the first grade to university. Children, as consumers, have the power to influence their parents' decisions on what to buy (Figueiredo 2012). Young people who have been born and raised during the last two decades are a constituent part of a generation that is not deceived easily and is eagerly searching for more authenticity and seriousness (van Heeswijk 2009). HORECA channel (hotels, restaurant, and café), public institutions, private companies, AdP and Porto Council's internal public, and tourists were also aimed at as secondary targets.

For the secondary targets, AdP developed activities that focused on the environment, the feelings of belonging, the sustainability, the price, the promotion of Porto City brand, and the social responsibility.

AdP included health professionals as their targets because they actually have a say regarding consumer health habits. There was a great effort from AdP on disseminating this social marketing campaign, being that their approach strategy divided into three categories: the portability, the price, and the accessibility:

- As mentioned before, one of the downsides of consuming tap water instead of bottled water is the lack of portability. So AdP designed bottles for anyone to be able to drink from and carry their “Água do Porto” anywhere. For the HORECA channel, glass bottles were designed, and for the general public, aluminum ones were designed.
- The price, the very cheap price.
- And what if you are walking in a park on a sunny day and you need water? AdP will create access points for tap water, throughout the city, making it available

outside the home. Public water fountains placed in strategic places such as parks, gyms, council schools, universities, underground and train stations, etc.

The Symbiotic Relationship Between “Porto Ponto” and Águas do Porto

With this social marketing strategy, AdP wanted to build the brand Águas do Porto. This new brand should convey an attitude, and should appeal to the consumer’s emotional side, so that it brings to the consumer feelings of belonging, emotional benefits, and status. It is not by chance that the statement “Beba Água do Porto. É boa todos os dias!” (In English: Drink Porto’s Water. It’s good every day!) was developed based on a popular expression, closely linked to the way of being shared by Porto people.

As a social marketing campaign, it is undeniable that there has been a strong informative component throughout the whole campaign, but the emotional tone is what has prevailed at all times, especially during the activities undertaken. Both merchandising (T-shirts, bottles, mugs) and offline mix (outdoors, mupis, radio, press, etc.) with Porto’s popular sayings, such as “É da Bica, por isso é que o Porto ganha ao Benfica” (in English: It is tap water, that is why Porto wins over Benfica); slogans that demonstrate feelings of belonging, like “Sou 70% Água do Porto” (in English: I am 70% of water from Porto); and stickers called “The manifesto for Águas do Porto.” We can see some of these examples in Fig. 1, e.g., one of the sayings mentioned “É da torneira, amiga do ambiente e da carteira” (in English: it is tap water, environmentally and wallet friendly).

Another distinctive factor is the timing and social context of this whole campaign. Porto has been known by its port wine for centuries; however, more recently, it has also been recognized by its city brand. “Porto Ponto” came to life after the realization of the need to represent Porto as a global city. The success of “Porto Ponto” is indisputable, incomparable, and unforgettable (Aires 2017).

AdP, aware of the strength, popularity, and reputation that Porto enjoys as a city and a brand (winner of the Best European Destination Award in 2012, 2014, and 2017), replicates this vitality and quality in their campaign, incorporating the values underlying the “Porto Ponto” brand, trying to create a coherent brand, perceived as



Fig. 1 Examples of merchandising and offline mix. Source: authors

reliable, trendy, and cool, in order to facilitate and promote the desired behavioral change—that is, increase tap water consumption.

Thus, conditions are created for a symbiotic relationship in which both parties benefit—AdP and Porto City. The entire campaign has involved many sectors and especially the participation of all the partners and public of Porto. The goal has been to engage them in different ways, inviting them to be the brand ambassadors and information vehicles themselves, ultimately promoting the image that Porto wants to convey. The involvement between citizens and public companies (developing a relationship and creating familiarity with their roles) has been important for building trust (Means et al. 2002). Therefore, in return, AdP gets to be represented in Porto public entities, social, and tourist structures, thus providing a clear leverage to disseminate their message of acceptance and behavioral change.

Conclusion

This AdP campaign has revealed an innovative and creative spirit in adding value to a product that had only been seen as a commodity for decades. Now consumers of “Água do Porto” have a chance to better understand the benefit that comes with the consumption of tap water not only for themselves but for the environment and for the world. This is in addition to perceiving it as a distinctive product of excellent quality that can compete with bottled water brands.

As a social marketing campaign, it has applied concepts and marketing strategies in order to change people’s behavior that would ultimately result in benefits not only for the individuals but the whole community, thus conducing to a generalized social well-being. Since the whole plan has followed the steps that have been proved effective and efficient in past social marketing programs, it is expected that the desired results will be achieved.

Discussion Questions

Considering the specific characteristics inherent to this case, it seems adequate and suitable for a deeper and detailed discussion about social marketing, namely, some essential concepts associated with social marketing such as campaign purpose or marketing mix. The case also allows us to discuss and present how a social marketing plan can be formulated.

1. What are the main impacts/consequences of this campaign?

There are still no results to assess the real impact of this social marketing campaign, which has turned out to be for us the main point of discussion. According to AdP, there is an inquiry planned for the campaign follow-up, but the current absence of monitoring and control has prevented any comparison with the figures presented by Universidade Católica do Porto in March 2015 before the start of the program. In this diagnosis, 73% of the respondents already recognized

the high quality of tap water, 37.6% affirmed to always drink tap water at home, while 12.1% affirmed to never drink it. In the same study, 70% of the 1853 respondents referred that they would drink or drink more tap water, if they had the assurance from the supplier that the excellent quality was guaranteed. As to the preferred water to drink, 33% affirmed that they preferred tap water, 30% preferred bottled water, and 36% showed indifference when choosing a type of water to drink. Also, 64% of the respondents argued that they would start consuming more tap water to protect the environment.

2. Are the results of the campaign in line with the planned strategy?

The new evaluation is planned to be done with a similar inquiry, with identical questions, in order to be able to compare results. Looking at the strategy of the marketing campaign, it would be expectable that the spread of the information and the efforts done to create awareness about the quality of tap water would lead to an increased percentage of people that recognize the excellent quality of the product and consequently would choose to consume it. As the figures show, the target audience is already aware of Água do Porto's quality of excellence, but does this awareness necessarily mean that the desired behavior change will occur? Were the promotional efforts adequate to achieve the established goals?

In our point of view, statistically speaking, the inquired sample used in the study of 2015 is not a representative of a community of more than 300,000 people. How can AdP, a local public company, even backed up by the well-known Porto City brand, induce and change a behavior that is spread all over the country and generalized in Europe and most of the developed countries? Will any social marketing campaign be powerful enough to beat bottled water marketing campaigns?

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