IMPERATIVES OF SOCIAL MARKETING FOR SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract
Social marketing is built on the premise of changing the behaviours of its target market to adopt life enhancing habits. This same philosophy is shared by the concept of individual sustainability which requires cognitive dissonance between their behaviours and their admirable values related to sustainability. Individual behaviour is a complex system, and a change in one system may result to an unprecedented change(s) in other systems. This article considers the imperatives of social marketing as portend force for inspiring behavioural change at both individual and organizational levels; and, linking social marketing with sustainability in the campaigns for social change. Accordingly, the article examines issues as its objectives: 1. highlights the important functions of social marketing in facilitating behavioural change for individual and society wellbeing, 2. stresses the need to apply systems thinking in the conception, management, and the implementation of social marketing campaigns especially in a developing country like Nigeria, and 3. highlights that social marketing, if properly implemented and systems thinking appropriately applied, could result in a meaningful individual and social sustainability. In addition, this article reviews the concept of systems theory and how it evolved. The authors view that if systems approach is adopted in the implementation and management of social marketing campaigns, social marketing would potentially result in individual sustainability and by extension, social sustainability. We argue that social marketing is just an inch towards individual sustainability and by extension, social sustainability and that coordinated interdisciplinary approach is needed in order to implement meaningful social marketing strategies that could lead to positive long-term behavioural changes.

Keywords: Social marketing, Sustainability, Systems thinking, Behavioural change

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**Introduction**

Since the family planning awareness program in India in 1960s (Chandy *et al.*, 1965), and the framing of and the subsequent publication of articles on social marketing by Kotler and Levy (1969a, 1969b) and Kotler and Zaltman (1971), social marketing concepts have been applied in a number of social enhancement campaigns. Social marketing involves the application of traditional marketing techniques to address social challenges that have over the years retarded the growth and development of the society (Lefebvre, 2011). Social marketing has matured from an area bedevilled with a series of criticisms in the 1960s and 1970s to an area with a wide range of acceptance among the academia, private and public institutions, marketing practitioners, and the society at large. In 1980s, the debates about the usefulness and the applicability of the concepts of social marketing have subsided and the question then was not whether it was necessary to use social marketing strategies to solve social problems but how social marketing strategies could be applied to address societal challenges. Widespread application of the social marketing concepts was recorded especially in the public health sector with notable scholars (Lefebvre & Flora 1988; Hastings & Haywood 1991; Hastings & Haywood, 1994) exposing its applicability and contributions.

Although social marketing campaigns around the world have the goal of influencing behaviours, in developing countries, social marketing has focused on products and services, while in the developed nations, it has focused much more on strategies for behavioural change (Lefebvre, 2011). This has led to different emphasis for what social marketing entails and how social marketing is practiced (Lefebvre, 2011). Thus, social marketing has passed through different stages and has been blended to cover a host of issues that challenge social development. In 2000, a Canadian environmental psychologist, In this context, McKenzie-Mohr (2000) proposed the concept of community based social marketing system that seeks to change the behaviour of the communities by making them more cautious about environmental protection. This concept has been used to foster sustainable behaviour and behavioural changes in the environmental regulations (Kennedy 2010), recycling (Haldeman & Turner, 2009) and energy conservation (Schultz, *et al.*, 2007).

In Nigeria, remarkable successes has been recorded following the adoption of social marketing concepts in the areas of family planning and child immunisation, the most obvious one being the polio immunisation campaigns. However, the intangible nature of the products of social marketing concept poses serious challenges to social marketers as they try to influence ideas, lifestyle and attitudes of their target markets. From the aforementioned, this paper has three main objectives to: highlight the important functions of social...
marketing in facilitating behavioural change for individual and society wellbeing; stress the need to apply systems thinking in the conception, management, and the implementation of social marketing campaigns especially in a developing country like Nigeria; and, ascertain that social marketing, if properly implemented and systems thinking appropriately applied, could result in a meaningful individual and social sustainability.

Social Marketing
Social marketing is the "systematic application of marketing (along with related areas such as psychology and sociology) concepts and techniques to achieve specific behavioural goals, for a social or public good" (Eagle et al., 2016: p. 330) with the aim of fostering behavioural changes in individuals in particular and the society in general (Eagle et al., 2016). Social marketing tries to influence behaviour to move towards more beneficial life styles and overcome negative behaviours that have no benefit to the society. It is aimed at achieving social impact through the application of marketing concepts and techniques, and existing commercial infrastructure, incentives and methodologies, to social issues ranging from the prevention, detection, and treatment of diseases to environmental sustainability and social justice. It is not a theory of behaviour change but rather a systematic approach to thinking about and solving the "wicked problems our world faces" (Lefebvre, 2011 p. 5). This is due to the realisation of the fact that many of the social and health challenges of today are borne out of our behaviours (MacFadyen, Stead & Hastings, 1999). Its application has passed through various stages and has taken different shapes. Lefebvre and Flora (1988), Hastings and Haywood (1991) and Hastings and Haywood (1994) gave social marketing widespread exposure in the public health field, providing bases for extant debate on its applications and contributions.

Social marketing has been relevant in the health promotion campaigns across the globe, beginning from the Family Planning promotion campaign in India in the 1960's (Chandy et al. 1965), to the nationwide high blood pressure education campaign in the United States in the 1980's (Roccella & Ward, 1984), heart disease prevention awareness in the United States, (Lefebvre and Flora 1988), the Victoria Council campaign against tobacco in Australia in the 1985 - the Quit Victoria (Vichealth, 2015), the country-wide breast feeding campaign in Brazil in 1987, the AIDS prevention movement in Switzerland in 1987; Haiti in 1989; as well as the malaria control strategy in Tanzania in 1997 (Honeyman, 2008), and the various social marketing related programs in developing countries on social issues such as HIV prevention, malaria control, control of tuberculosis, control of diarrhoea, water treatment campaigns, and environmental sanitations. Thus, social marketing has been developed to achieve overreaching changes among populations with a view of
achieving positive impact on the health and well-being of the community (Lefebvre, 2011).

Though social marketing concepts and methods borrow heavily from the traditional marketing techniques, they are usually distinguished by the intangibility nature of their products and services, i.e. lifestyle and attitudes changes (Lefebvre & Flora, 1988). The intangible nature of products and services poses great challenges to social marketers in their inscription, implementation, maintenance, as well as implementation of their social marketing strategies (Lefebvre & Flora, 1988). However, for a meaningful sustainable behavioural and cognitive change to take into effect, social marketing campaigns must be implemented over a reasonable and substantial period of time. In Nigeria, the polio eradication campaigns span for years before otherwise-resistant parents could appreciate the importance of the polio immunisation to the sustainable growth and development of their children. The contraceptive social marketing campaigns, though still resisted in some parts of the country, is another social marketing tool that encourages the Nigerian society to embrace the habit of family planning for the wellbeing of women, children, families and communities in the country, all looking forward to the realisation of the Family Planning 2020 (FP2020) goal that aims at providing a couple-of-year-protection (CYP) to millions of Nigerians through the various contraceptive methods that would potentially result in increased contraceptives usage, decreased maternal mortality, and reduced unwanted pregnancies which increases the country's already alarming maternal mortality rate resulting from unsafe abortions.

**Evolution of Social Marketing**

Social marketing campaign can be traced to the famous question raised by a German world War II U-boat commander, Gerhard Weibe who said: "why can't you sell brotherhood and rational thinking like you sell soap?" Although Weibe did not mean his words to be a discipline in marketing, his words have been interpreted by most social marketers as the starting point that paved the way into the social marketing journey. In 1969, Philip Kotler and Sidney Levy pointed out that the marketing field was too limited to be considered an exclusively economic activity, arguing that an increasing number of organisations performed social work besides the for-profit operations (Kotler & Levy 1969b). According to them, marketing "is a pervasive societal activity that goes considerably beyond the selling of toothpaste, soap, and steel" and thus there was the need for the marketing professionals to "apply their skills to increasingly interesting range of social activity", concluding that the challenge will be for marketing to either "take on a broader social meaning or remain a narrowly defined business activities" (p. 10).
However, some early studies had criticised the attempt to broaden the scope of marketing, arguing that such an attempt was similar to taking marketing to areas that it did not belong to, stressing their fear that such an attempt may likely make the marketing field lose its identity to other disciplines like sociology or management (Luck 1969; Bartels 1974; Luck 1974). According to Luck (1969 p. 54), marketing was historically concerned with "markets" and "markets must be characterised by buying-and-selling." He added that marketing is concerned with "every customer who buys or barters for goods and services." However, Kotler and Levy maintained that marketing was about transactions, not just marketing transactions (Kotler & Levy 1969a). They stressed the fact that marketing-like activities are carried out in both business and non-business organisations (Kotler & Levy 1969a). They concluded: "to treat marketing as a proper function of only business firms denies that managers of nonbusiness organizations have marketing responsibilities, a view that is unrealistic and a new form of marketing myopia" (Kotler & Levy 1969a p. 57).

Social marketing as a concept came to the fore of the marketing field in 1971 with the coining of the term "social marketing" by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman in their book titled 'Social marketing: an approach to planned social change' and defined the concept as "the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving consideration of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research" (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971 p. 5). They also highlighted what they termed the 'requisite' conditions for effective social marketing. In 1980's social marketing as a sub-field of marketing discipline grew exponentially and the debates by scholars on its relevance or otherwise has waned overtimes, thereby underscoring the need for the treatise in this paper.

However Kotler and Zaltman's (1970) definition was not spared of the criticism of inadequacy as it limits its applicability to government and non-profit marketers, the fear that social marketing could be confused with societal marketing, and the general perception that the main objective of social marketing was to influence the acceptability of a particular idea other than influencing and or changing attitudes and behaviours (Andreasen ,1994). Building on this, Andreasen (1994) provided a new definition of social marketing which has some key elements including the adaptation of commercial marketing techniques in order to influence behaviour, the application of social marketing to programs which last for decades and contains several campaigns within it - campaigns have fixed termination point, the realisation of the fact that social marketing influence voluntary
behavioural change though it does not necessarily needs to change the behaviour, and the orientation that social marketing benefits the target audience - individual or the society as a whole, not the marketer. However, as pointed by Andreasen (1994), his definition of social marketing and the many that precede it did not involve situations where the social marketer is the ultimate beneficiary as in fundraising or political campaigns.

Features of Social Marketing

Although social marketing borrows most of its models from the commercial marketing techniques, it is important to highlight the important features that distinguish social marketing from the traditional marketing concepts. Andreasen (1994) has identified three criteria for a program to be tagged social marketing. According to him, the program must:

i. apply commercial marketing technology;

ii. have at its bottom line the influence of voluntary behaviour, and

iii. primarily seek to benefit individuals/families or the broader society and not the marketing organisation itself.

Accordingly, studies by Stead et al. (2007) and MacFadyen et al. (1999) identified the following as the key elements a good social marketing concept should possess:

(i) **A consumer orientation to voluntary behaviour change.** In any meaningful social marketing campaign, the consumer is the active participant. It is his or her behaviour that is expected to be influenced. It is not about coercion, duress or enforcement, but by power of persuasion.

(ii) **An exchange:** Here, the exchange must be made clear to allow the consumer to accept behavioural change, voluntarily (Stead, Gordon, Angus & McDermott 2007). In Nigeria for example, there were some initial resistance to the polio eradication campaign as parents were much concerned about other diseases (malaria, mizzles for example) that affect their children. To facilitate the exchange of behaviour, other immunisation programs were added and carried out together with the polio immunisation program. This helped in decreasing the resistance of, and the subsequent acceptance of, the parents towards the polio immunisation program. Thus, to facilitate voluntary exchanges social marketers have to offer people something that they really want (MacFadyen et al., 1999).

(iii) **Long term planning approach:** Social marketing should be based on a long term outlook with continued improvements and a number of smaller campaigns to achieve the desired result.

(iv) **Moving beyond the individual consumer:** Here, social marketers should seek to influence the behaviour of a group, a community and a
society, not just an individual. The target should be the improvement of the welfare of not only the individual and the society, but also the welfare of the organisation performing it (Stead et al., 2007).

**Differences between social marketing and commercial marketing**

Having identified the important features of social marketing, we now move on to highlight the main differences between social marketing and commercial marketing. MacFadyen et al. (1999) explored some important differences between social marketing and commercial marketing. These differences could be traced to the complexity in the products they offer, the variations in demand, the easiness or difficulty in reaching out the target audience, the intensity of the customer involvement, and the subtleness and variations in competition.

While traditional marketing product conceived a product as something tangible, the product in social marketing is more complex, encompassing ideas and behavioural change - features that present challenging task to social marketers as they must identify their exact product and the benefits derivable from its usage (MacFadyen et al., 1999). Secondly, while commercial marketers try to create demand for their products, social marketers must not only create demand, but must frequently deal with negative demands especially when the target customers were resisting behavioural change, preferring to maintain established attitudes and beliefs. Instead of encouraging demand, social marketers may end up discouraging demand or more technically de-marketing demand for certain unwholesome products (Shiu et al., 2009; Wall, 2007) because it has to do with individual behaviour change, the demand in social marketing tend to vary with individual, community and society.

Most often, the target groups in social marketing are the most neglected and hardest to reach by the commercial marketers. They are sometimes the most neglected in the society and have little access to many life supporting programmes and amenities. They tend to stick more to tradition and are not always willing to accept behavioural change and adapt to new attitudes. Because of these, commercial marketers, whose main interest is profit making, tend to side-line this group of customers. Thus, in addition to influencing or changing behaviour, social marketers must also address the challenges of reaching out to the most neglected and often hardest to reach part of the society, which constitutes the majority of their target group.

Traditional marketing divides products according to the magnitude of the involvement of the customer in its marketing and distribution. Products which are expensive, risky, and self-expressive have traditionally high consumer
involvement and are often bought less frequently. On the other hand, products which are cheap, less risky and do not require high self-expression tend to have low consumer involvement and are often bought more frequently. According to MacFadyen et al. (1999) social marketing campaigns mostly deals with products in which consumer is very highly involved (complex lifestyle changes such as changing one’s diet fall into this category). Higher involvement does motivate and encourages the customer, but on the other way may be associated with feelings of anxiety, guilt and denial, which inhibit attempts to change. Still, on the other hand, social marketers might try to stimulate change where there is low customer involvement.

Unlike the traditional commercial marketing, social marketing deals with more varied competitors. The most common competitors in social marketing are consumer's inertia and consumer's tendency to resist behavioural change and continue with their current way of living. Another common and serious form of competition comes from the commercial marketing that markets products that are unhealthy and antisocial, such as the tobacco companies. Competition may also come from other social marketers that market similar or substitute social marketing products (MacFadyen et al., 1999).

Social sustainability
Environmental and social challenges are increasingly recognised as complex systems with a lot of uncertainties on how they evolve (Conroy & Allen 2010). Increasing call for more sustainable living is becoming a central issue today (Andreasen, 2002). However, for a sustainable society to be a reality, the individuals in it must also be sustainable. This is due to the realisation of the fact that meaningful societal change begins with individual change and one cannot do for the society what one cannot do for himself. Individual sustainability has become an important element in the success or failure of any social campaign. Sustainability in individual refers to the maintenance of the human capital (e.g., health, education, skills, knowledge, leadership, and access to services) (Penzenstadler et al., 2013). For one to be sustainable in oneself, one must be sustainable in the five individual sustainability contexts of emotion, philosophy, physical (health), intellectual and social (Pappas 2012). The most important aspect of the individual sustainability is for the individual to create a cognitive dissonance between his behaviour and his admirable value related to sustainability (Pappas, 2013; Pappas, 2012).

Sustainability is a complex system (Bielefeldt, 2016), and a change in one context may have a dramatic or even undesirable change in the other (Pappas, 2013; Pappas 2012). System thinking suggests that all these individual sustainability contexts may be integrated when designing social sustainability.
and social marketing campaigns. Sustainability requires taking actions on the most important level of human endeavour, which is survival (Pappas, 2013).

**Behavioural change**

One of the difficult tasks faced by social marketers and sustainability campaigners is how to encourage behavioural change within a society that has deeply entrenched traditions and values. While most of the traditional marketing methods try to sell tangible goods and services, the product in the social marketing campaign is the human behaviour. Change campaigns, even change for the good, may be resisted by those expected to be influenced by the change initiative. When people are asked to change their behaviours, they are being asked to change their identity which ordinarily is a big question (Conroy & Allen, 2010). Behavioural change involves moving through a range of stages, from pre-contemplation to contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance (DiClemente & Prochaska, 1998). Social marketing is an effective tool for designing behavioural changes that are flexible enough to be applied in a range of behavioural change programs (Haldeman & Tumer, 2009). It is also a strategy for creating continued public engagement on social development challenges and how these challenges could be effectively avoided, mitigated or adapted (Corner & Randall, 2011).

Costello et al. (2009) argued that lack of knowledge or information deficit is a barrier to sustained behavioural change. However, while information provision is a good starting point for encouraging behavioural changes, it is not a sufficient strategy to achieve meaningful behavioural changes (Miller et al., 2010). Furthermore the attitude of an individual is argued to be linked to the knowledge he possess and that attitudinal change alone is unlikely to encourage sustained behavioural changes (Eagle et al., 2016). Education and legislation may help stimulate behavioural change. However, legislation has not been always practicable in stimulating behaviour change especially in a social marketing and sustainability campaigns in which the main essence is stimulating intentional behavioural change. Education on the other hand, though necessary, is not in itself sufficient to drive behavioural change. Thus, social marketing and individual/social sustainability, together with legislation and education are effective tools for stimulating behavioural changes.

In some situations, the change in behaviour may require an individual to adopt subtractive habits instead of additive habits, i.e., not performing specific, undesirable actions - a 'negabehaviour' concept proposed by Ross and Tomlinson (2011). A negabehaviour is a "manner of conducting oneself that supplants undesirable actions—that is, the behaviour of not performing specific, undesirable actions" (Ross & Tomlinson, 2011 p. 1). According to them, if people decide to stop undesirable actions, they would be able to live
more sustainable lives. The success of any social marketing strategy lies in first changing individuals. Without individual change, there would be no societal change. This is corroborated by Black and Gregersen (2008 p. 1) who opined that success lies in first, changing the individual before striving towards organisational change.

**Systems Thinking Approach**

The *Aristotle's Holism*, the publication of *Holism and Evolution* by the South African statesman, Jan Smuts, and especially the *Tektology* theory of the Russian philosopher, Alexander Bogdanov, set the foundation for other scholars to formulate what is today known as the *system theory*, an interdisciplinary field of study postulated by an Austrian biologist and philosopher, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, in his book, *General System Theory: Foundation, Development, Applications*, in 1968, which sees a system as a combination of interdependent and interrelated parts and when looking at the system, the entire parts of the system must be taken into consideration. System thinking is an interdisciplinary approach to every system in nature, society, science, technology and every aspect of human endeavour (Mele et al., 2010). It is an approach that looks at the whole instead of the part of a system, believing that the parts of a system are indistinct of each other and must not be taken in isolation when considering the phenomena of the system.

System theory or system thinking is built on the premise that human brain acquires knowledge as a whole and organisational teams and subsystems cannot operate in isolation. It is not a one-for-all-cases prescription but each case is observed based on its specific features and circumstances. One of the many challenges faced by the social marketers is their inability to take into account the bigger system as a whole when designing social marketing campaigns thus addressing issues that are in fact symptoms of the deeper changes in the direction of the society (Conroy & Allen, 2010). Managers and designers of social marketing campaigns have the responsibility to consider the entire societal norms such as culture, traditions, behaviours, and values as a complex system and a complex system requires different array of responses.

However, looking at the fact that social marketing tries to influence behavioural change towards a specific issue (e.g., discouraging over-speeding and encouraging immunisation), and sustainability requires an individual to move toward a more sustainable living by creating cognitive dissonance between his behaviour and his value, and since it is the collective individual behaviours that make up the behaviour of the society, social marketing will potentially results in individual sustainability and when an individual adopt sustainable lifestyles, he is most likely going to transfer same to the society. This will potentially result in a more sustainable society.
Conclusion
Social marketing has been implemented around the world with varying degree of focus and attention, mostly in the health related sector. Its successes have been recorded around the world to the extent that discussions about the feasibility of its application, an issue that has taken a centre stage in the 1960s through to 1970s, has turned to discussions about how it could be implemented. The success of any social marketing strategy lies in first changing individuals. Without individual change, there would be no societal change. Social marketers need to take a look at the interactions and the interdependences between and among parts of the society they want to influence and how the results of their campaigns will reshape the society and give rise to the desired social change. Effective social marketing campaign will require understanding the complexity of a social setting and the type of intervention that will be suited to the society. Social marketers must be well equipped to be able to identify the ‘whole’ in a society and devise holistic strategies that cover the entire constituents of the society.

Implementing social marketing campaigns require the application of systems thinking that takes a holistic approach to the entire aspects of the society expected to be influenced by the social marketing campaigns. This is a challenge facing social marketers. Social marketers have important role to play in instilling sustainable habits both at individual and societal levels. A coordinated interdisciplinary approach is needed in order to implement meaningful social marketing strategies that could lead to positive long-term behavioural changes, only then individual sustainability and by extension social sustainability will remain elusive. Thus, we argue, if social marketers take a systems view in the social marketing campaigns, individual and social sustainability will be ensued.

References


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