Social Marketing in the Indian Context: Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

Indrani Saha*
Parimal Kr. Sen**

Abstract: Like most things in life, the world of marketing is vibrant. It is something, which is going on all around us. The marketing concept is a business philosophy which believes that the customer's satisfaction is the motive for the business existence. Marketing management is an evolving, independent and formal discipline. It was developed in the USA as a form of applied capitalist economics. It is subject to continued review, redirection, and improvement. Starting from 1950s, the concept of marketing has undergone major changes. From marketing point of view this is relatively a new way of thinking which believes in newly emerged concept of 'green marketing" since early part of 1970s. Distantly related to this new concept is the area of what might be called 'social marketing' as they both have a 'social' dimension. Related developments of social marketing have attracted considerable attention from every sector. The present paper purports potential concerns with social marketing and its conceptual ideas. It also explains the planning of social marketing and its wide applications in various fields. The article concludes by addressing the unique new challenges posed by social marketing and its great opportunities in India.

Introduction:

Social marketing concept and idea evolved as an organized and formal independent discipline in 1970s. The term "Social Marketing" was first introduced by marketing management experts Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman in 1971, ("Social Marketing: An Approach to Planned Social Change", a prestigious Journal of Marketing in which they examined the social roles and dimension of marketing). Since then, social marketing has been defined in many different ways. The central theme, however, has been the application of the concepts of tools and techniques of commercial marketing to bring about the desired behavioral changes in the social context. In India, social marketing has been used as a technique to create awareness and ideas can be marketed among the people about human development, population growth, public health programmes, birth control and environment protection as an approach to planned social change in India (1989) - where a persuasion based approach was preferred over a legislative approach. The concept of public health promotion campaigns in the mid-1980s was initially started applying the idea of social marketing in practice on an international basis (World Health Organization, 1984). Notable early developments took place in Australia (Craig Lefebvre and June Flora, 1988). Public health programmes as a social marketing product in the form of slogans and campaigns like drug-abuse and anti-tobacco campaigns "Quit" (1988), and "Sun Smart" (1988) a successful campaign against skin cancer with the slogan "Slip! Slop! Slap!" - are examples of the social marketing initiative

* The author is Associate Professor at Shri Shikshayatan College, Kolkata and can be reached at is.indrani@gmail.com

**The author is Associate Professor (WBES) at Goenka College of Commerce and Business Administration, Kolkata and can be reached at parimalsen123@gmail.com

developed by Victoria Cancer Council, Australia. It was realized that the same marketing principles that were used to sell products or services could also be used to "sell" the ideas, attitudes, practices and behaviors. In the societal marketing concept holds that the organisation's task is to determine the needs, wants and interests of target markets and to deliver the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors in a way that preserves or enhances the consumer's and the society's well-being issues to carry out social responsibilities. Social marketing seeks to bring about desired social behaviors. Its objective is not to benefit the marketer i.e. dealer / seller, but to benefit the target audience and the general society as a whole. It is the systematic application of marketing principles, along with other concepts and techniques, to achieve specific behavioral outcome. The primary goal is to alter the beliefs, desires and attitudes towards the product, customer satisfaction, social values, ideas, knowledge and successful ethical relationship with the target customers. Therefore, the first important element of social marketing is communicating the ideas. For example, this may include asking people not to smoke in public places, not to spit on the walls, use car seat belts, follow speed limits etc. However, effective communication is only one part of the total task required to market a product or an idea successfully. The adoption of an idea, like the adoption of a product, requires a deep understanding of the needs, perception, preference, reference groups and behavior pattern of the target audience and tailoring the messages, media, and facilities accordingly to strengthen the case of adopting the idea. Social marketing "sells" a behavior change to a targeted audience; - Accept a new behavior – Reject a potential behavior – Modify a current behavior – Abandon an old behavior. This is a most challenging task to do, as changing a behavior pattern is very difficult and it needs to be adopted voluntarily. One cannot promise direct benefit or immediate payback for the proposed behavior change. Social marketing is different from commercial / generic marketing primarily with respect to the objectives of the

marketer and his organization (Kotler and Anderson). While for generic marketing, the ultimate goal is to satisfy the stakeholders, specially the shareholders, but for social marketing, the goal is to meet society's desire to improve the quality of life of the citizens. It implies that the business enterprise will have to adopt socially responsible marketing policies and plans so that both consumer welfare and social welfare are assured. It is concerned with environmental trends like public welfare and better quality of life. This is much more ambitious and difficult to make it clear for it seems to be vague and unclear. The products of social marketing also tend to be more complicated. Craig Lefebvre and June Flora (1988) have laid down eight fundamental mechanism of social marketing that has relevance even today. These can be listed as follows:

1. A consumer point of reference is of paramount importance in order to realize organizational goals and thus realize social perspectives on a larger scale;

2. A greater importance to be given on the voluntary exchanges of goods and services between providers and consumers for the total well- being of the society;

3. A similar research in analysis and segmentation strategy can play a significant role;

4. The use of seminal research in product, message design and the pre-testing of products and services must also be taken into account;

5. An analysis of distribution or communication channels must be evolved;

6. Utilization of appropriate marketing mix: blending of 4 P's (seller's view), that is product, price, place and promotion characteristics in intervention planning, implementation and achievement;

7. A process approach system with both integrative and control functions can be introduced;

8. A management process that can involves problem analysis, planning, implementation & feedback control functions

The social marketing product need not be a physical product rather it extends to services (medical examination, etc.), practices (breast-feeding, ORS, etc.) and even intangible ideas (environmental protection, etc.)

Social Marketing Planning Processes and Practices:

Social Marketing talks to the consumer, not about the product. The planning process takes into account by addressing the elements of the "marketing mix" (i.e., a set of marketing tools). Actually it refers to decisions about what is referred to as the standard 4P'S relates to the seller's perspective of the market (Jerome Mc Carthy's four-fold classification of P'S), in relation to the concept of standard 4C'S in the consumer's view [i.e., Customer needs and elucidation – it relates to first P, Product; Cost to the customer – it relates to the second P, Price; Convenience – this aspect relates to the third P, Place and Communication includes cost, USP, method of application etc. – this aspect relates to the fourth P, Promotion of a product] of marketing mix of commercial / generic marketing: - the concept of Product, Price, and Place (Distribution), and Promotion (Robert Lauterborn). However, the modern concept of social marketing also adds six more important P'S. These additional P'S refers the following: Public (people), Process (practices), Partnership (joint venture), Policy (course of actions), Prize (honor) and Political Power (ruling government). Social marketing products can be presented as figure 1.

The complication of social marketing products makes them difficult to conceptualize. Consequently, social marketers have an intimidating task in defining exactly what their products are and the benefits associated with their use. Social marketers need not only uncover new demand, but in addition must frequently deal with negative demand, when the target group is apathetic about or strongly resistant to a proposed behavior change. Demand is easier to generate when the benefits are tangible and personally relevant. However, in social marketing benefits are intangible and relevant to society as a whole rather than to the individual. Therefore, it is very difficult to market social products as the benefits are difficult to personalize and quantify.

Figure1: Social Marketing Products
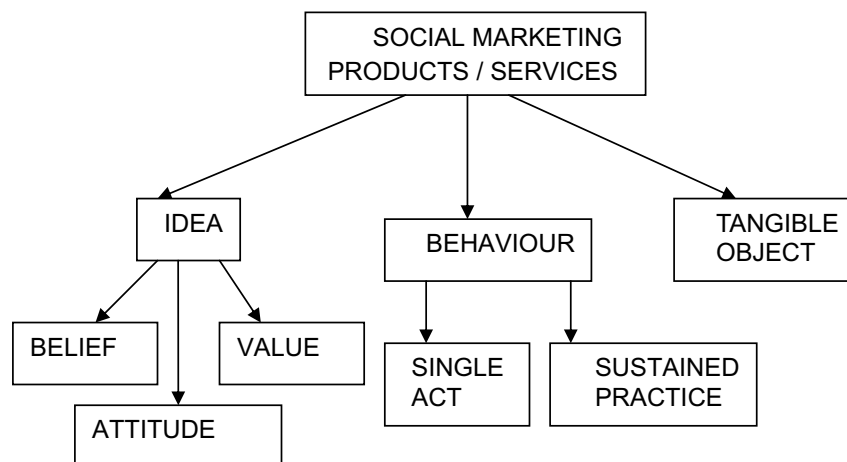
Source: Philip Kotler & Roberto (1989)

Applications of Social Marketing in India:

S.K.Swami, CMD, Indian Marketing Congress (IMC) said that social marketing is going to be an immense issue in the times to come in India. The power of social media is overwhelming. The message is circulated through friends, family, colleagues etc., in very short time, across continents. Blogs (social marketing site), e-mails etc. is being leveraged by greater and cheaper worldwide web and Internet technologies, offer huge potential to address the social marketing problems. In recent times, companies also are entering into the social networking space. Previously, Government and NGOs were the main sponsors for social marketing. In the year 1996, UNAIDS had promoted and supported social marketing, especially to fight back HIV / AIDS, and also encourage Government and NGOs to support, develop and implement programmes for prevention of HIV / AIDS. Campaigns for educating the people against smoking, abuse alcohol and drug, campaign for prevention and cure of malaria, leprosy, tuberculosis etc., campaign for family planning, human body organ donation, blood donation etc., campaign for awareness of H1N1 Flu Vaccine, have been taken up by the Government and many NGOs. However, social and health issues are often complex and require large amount of funds, so the Government and NGOs alone cannot make an impact by themselves. It should team up with the corporate sector and other organizations to be effective.

Tata Tea's effective 'Jago Re Grahok' campaign regarding youth's responsibility to cast vote, voice against corruption had seen more than 2.8 million registrations on their website. "Idea", which spoke about social causes like literacy and environment protection, changed the rule of the game. A social message is also adopted for successful commercial advertising campaign. Lifebuoy Soap 'Tandurasti ki raksha karta hi Lifebuoy' was Hindustan Unilever's social marketing campaign along with commercial campaign. "We care for you" - social campaign for Kolkata Police. Nokia's advertisement talking about recycling and Aircel's 'Save Our Tiger' campaign are all social advertisements. Social marketing ads are now emerging issues in India. Consumers are now also looking beyond a transactional connects with a brand. Combined advertisement is using larger causes or issues as a platform to communicate brand attitudes. The Times of India's – 'Lead India', 'Teach India', 'Aman ki Asha' are taking up social issues for various target groups. 'Incredible India' and 'Atithi Devo Bhavo' campaigns convey a clear message on the importance of properly treating the international visitors to our country (Ministry of Tourism, GoI). The Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA) campaign carries an emotional appeal from son to father regarding the proper use of petroleum fuels (Ministry of Petroleum and Gas, GoI). 'Stop Ragging on Campuses – Join Hands to make the Campus Ragging Free', Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, GoI. All of these are notable examples of social marketing.

Opportunities and Challenges:

There are many challenges that confront social marketing in relation to commercial marketing. Since the objectives of social marketing are different, we may cite the following instances:

1. How does one organization deal with commercial advertising whose marketing campaigns sometimes contradict social marketing messages?
2. Should corporate be asked to spend a fixed portion of their advertising budgets towards social advertising?
3. Should social marketers increasingly take on the role of social activists and bring about policy changes in corporate advertising?

Social marketers often target those groups which are very difficult to penetrate and also very difficult to bring about a behavioral changes. This poses considerable challenges for segmenting and targeting as well as funding. There is therefore a need to involve private participation, especially from the corporate sector. Government support is also required for the success of social marketing programmes. These could be developed in close collaboration with NGOs or similar organizations. Policy change can be an effective complement to social marketing issues. There is also a need to create awareness of social marketing concept amongst the managers. Moreover, there are a few relevant literatures and books (both text and reference) or courses in India that might make the people aware the topic of social marketing till today.

In a developing country like India, there are vast areas where the quality of life can be improved, such as waste reduction, refraining from using toxic food (i.e., colourings and additives), water preservation, proper disposal of garbage, litter-free public places, no-smoking public places, pollution free from noise etc. Another noticeable fact is that in India, rural market is huge and not yet explored fully. The rising rural prosperity and non-farming working class contribute to rise in consumption levels. Business houses should take up many more social marketing projects – in the line of Hindustan Unilever's Life Buoy 'Swasthya Chetna', ITC's 'Chaupal' etc. to reap the benefit as well as serve the society.

Social marketing is mainly based on four strong pillars, which can be listed as follows:

1. Mission to make satisfied and healthy customers and give to quality of life
2. Product presented to consumers must be in their best concentration and awareness
3. Organization will offer long-run consumer's welfare and the whole social well-beings, and
4. Marketing plans and programmes shall be formulated considering consumer needs and awareness, social welfare and corporate needs for development, growth, continued existence and profitability

Concluding Thoughts and Future Perspective:

Social marketing, as a very important discipline, has a profound positive impact on social issues in the area of public health programmes, safety measures, environment protection and so on. In the case of social marketing, the marketing process is used to sell a desired behaviour. Yet, the principles and techniques to influence this are the same. In the commercial sector, the primary objective is financial gain, whereas in social marketing, the basic

objective is societal gain.

Social marketing can be effective not only where the larger community is involved, but also with small target segments. In a developing country like India, opportunities exist in many areas, which are of growing concern from the protection of the environment, conservation of scarce resources, to fight against grafts/corruption, responsible voting, etc. which calls for serious behavioral change and where the contribution of each and every member of our society will count. One of the largest social marketing initiatives in India under National Population Register (NPR) Project, Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), Government of India, as a national test of new scheme to provide 12 digit Unique Identification Number (UID) [renamed as 'AADHAAR' (brand name) on 29th September, 2010] to every citizen of India containing very simple biometric data that can be verified and authenticated in an online, cost-effective manner, which is robust enough to eliminate duplicate and fake identities. This initiative once completed (expected December, 2012) would give a clear picture of the country's demography, help in conducting fair elections, prevent the extensive misuse of subsidies, make poverty related programmes, etc. in more appropriate way.

Association of voluntary organizations and non-profit service agencies in the implementation of government programmes in India is a long established practice. Public-Private-Partnership (PPP or P3) may bring greater professionalism in the implementation of State sponsored programmers. PPP is also a suitable method of delivering services commonly provided by the Government. The types of services will vary from one local government to another based on their needs and priorities. The UN's Millennium Development Goals, of which India is a signatory, aims at:

1. Elimination of severe poverty and hunger;
2. Accomplishment of basic primary education;
3. Promoting gender equality;
4. Minimizing child death;
5. Development of maternal well-being;
6. Struggle against HIV/AIDS, malaria, chicken pox, and other diseases;
7. Ensuring environmental sustainability, and
8. Developing global partnership for development, including partnership with private sectors and public sector (civil society) (i.e., PPP model) in technological and infrastructural development in core sectors.

All these objectives are to be achieved by 2015. That should be our national mission and vision. To achieve these visions we have to emphasize on social change through awareness programmes, government initiative and corporate sector participation. Social networks such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter etc. would emerge as very powerful media in social marketing. Marketing has come of age and many institutions and organizations within our modern society have only recently discovered its social dimension. In 2005, University of Stirling, Scotland, UK was the first university to open a dedicated research institute to Social Marketing, while in 2007, Middlesex University, London became the first university to offer a specialized post-graduate programme in 'Health and Social Marketing'. Perhaps the academic courses in social marketing can be made compulsory in the Graduate / Post-Graduate level and in Business Schools in India also. They can even consider offering specialization in this area - which would focus more attention on this subject.

References:

Geoff Lancaster & Pull Reynolds, "Introduction to Marketing – A Step-by-Step Guide to all the Tools of Marketing", Kogan Page Ltd., (1999), London

Karunakaran K, "Marketing Management [Text and Cases in Indian Context]", HPH, (2008 Ed.) New Delhi.

Weinrecich N. K., "Hands on Social Marketing: A Step-by-Step Guide to Designing Change for Good" (2nd Ed.).

www.turningpointprogramme.org