



Introduction to Social Marketing

What is “Social Marketing”?

A number of definitions of the social marketing construct have been offered (Lefebvre & Flora, 1988). Kotler (1975), for instance, defines social marketing as “the design, implementation, and control of programs seeking to increase the acceptability of a social idea or practice in a target group(s). It utilizes concepts of market segmentation, consumer research, idea configuration, communication, facilitation, incentives, and exchange theory to maximize target group response.” Andreasen (1995) defines social marketing as “the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of their society.”

These and other definitions share more commonalities than distinctions. First, the “social marketing” label is typically applied to causes judged by persons in positions of power and authority to be beneficial to both individuals and society. Second, unlike commercial marketing, the agent of change does not profit financially from a campaign’s success. Third, the ultimate goal is to change behaviors believed to place the individual at risk, not simply increase awareness or alter attitudes. Fourth, the optimal social marketing campaign is tailored to the unique perspective, needs, and experiences of the target audience, hopefully with input from representative members of this group. Fifth, social marketing strives to create conditions in the social structure that facilitate the behavioral changes promoted. Sixth and most fundamentally, however, is reliance upon commercial marketing concepts. It is often said that there is poetic justice in using the very marketing concepts employed by such “disease peddlers” as the tobacco and fast food industries to combat their negative influences.

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