

SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN - A NEW CHALLENGE FOR COMPANIES

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Abstract—In an increasingly crowded market, companies search for new competitive advantages in order to be separated by competition in the consumer's mind. Due to the fact that players in the business environment are discovering more benefits that can be gained by their own company through a social marketing campaign, this paper analyzes, based on secondary research, the social marketing concept, the benefits brought by implementing such campaign and the degree to which the Romanian firms are oriented in this direction.

Keywords—company, consumers' behavior, social campaign, social change, social marketing.

I. INTRODUCTION

SOcial marketing is a CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) program through which the company aims to change negative behavior or to persuade the public to adopt positive behavior. As a result, the problem addressed to campaign through social marketing should be one of great interest to customers.

Even if within the program are also used tactics aimed at increasing awareness and education, the main focus is to change behavior.

The choice of this topic was made as a consequence of the awareness of the importance of a relatively new phenomenon in Romania, as interesting and contemporary, namely that players in the business environment are discovering more than ever benefits that can be gained by their own companies through a social marketing campaign when there is a link between the company profile and a social problem.

Setting a problem and a behavior to be changed must take into account the company's profile and its business model.

Social marketing campaigns have become more important for companies as they understand that these campaigns can help strengthen and even build the company's brand.

There are two elements that make nowadays the social marketing campaign a formidable weapon in the construction of a brand:

- 1) consumers become more informed, more capable in expressing their opinions and more interested in topics such as health, environmental or social issues;
- 2) the market became increasingly crowded and brands were forced to find new and relevant methods in order to build an emotional relation with the consumers.

As they answer to such an emotional need, the social marketing campaigns are a valuable opportunity to communicate brand values in a memorable manner.

II. THE SOCIAL MARKETING CONCEPT – LIMITATIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS

The term of "social marketing" was introduced into scientific language in 1971 by Ph. Kotler and G. Zaltman in order to describe the application of commercial marketing in order to solve the social and public health issues.

Many social and public health problems have also behavioral causes and social marketing provides a *mechanism* to address these problems by influencing individuals towards adopting new behaviors and a new lifestyle considered to be healthier.

Social marketing can be used to influence not only the behavior of individuals seen in their role as ordinary citizens of a particular group, but also to influence the behavior of public policy-makers and those who belong to different groups of interests.

One of the first definitions of social marketing belongs to Americans, who in 1971 believed that "social marketing is the design, implementation and control of marketing programs involving the acceptance of social ideas"[1].

Later, Philip Kotler slightly reworded this definition, considering that social marketing is a "management technique of social exchanges understanding the design, implementation and control of programs aimed at increasing social acceptability of an idea or action by target groups" [2].

This point of view has prevailed in American literature, as witnessed a very similar definition given two decades later, by another known specialist, Alan R. Andreasen. He believes that "social marketing is the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to increase their personal well-being and society"[3].

The German experts Manfred Bruhn and Jorg Tilmes have proposed the following definition "Social marketing is the planning, organization, implementation and control of marketing strategies and activities of non-profit

organizations that are directly or indirectly focused to solving social problems"[4].

Analyzing the definitions presented above, we can summarize that Social marketing involves the use of strategies to identify, assess and forecast the needs of consumers, customers and subscribers, to design and optimal provision of those services that meet the needs of the target group.

Social marketing activity should, however, be distinguished from other activities through which organizations seek to influence certain target audiences, namely: advertising, publicity, public relations, public affairs, advocacy, lobbying. Social marketing is neither advertising nor publicity. Social marketing is neither advocacy nor lobbying. Social marketing should not be confused with public relations activities. Social marketing may appeal to advertisers or advertising. Social marketing can be associated with an advocacy or lobbying activities. An organization that is involved in social marketing needs the application of a public relations strategy.

Since the years 1960 - 1970 there have been numerous debates about using marketing principles and techniques maliciously against individuals or groups or entire companies. It was asked the question of differentiation between social marketing and various methods and techniques of control and manipulation of human behavior considered dangerous and incompatible with human dignity and democracy. We must draw attention to the differences between social marketing and other areas of social influence: handling behavior, persuasion, propaganda, indoctrination, and brainwashing. It should be emphasized that social marketing is not an attempt to manipulate behavior and no propaganda or brainwashing approach.

Social marketing is just one of the alternatives that exist in the field of social change.

Regarding social activities undertaken by companies, not dealing with *social marketing*, but with *social campaigns*, Philip Kotler and Roberto Eduardo identified the following areas:

- 1) *environment protection reforms*: reducing water and air pollution, natural parks and forests' maintenance;
- 2) *health area reforms*: smoking cessation, drug consumption eradication, gymnastics of maintenance
- 3) *educational environment reforms*: increasing the degree of literacy, increasing performances in awareness of mathematics or social sciences;
- 4) *economic reform*: the revival of old industrial cities, the offensive towards increasing skilled labor degree, incentives for foreign investors.

Since 1971, when social marketing was registered as a formal discipline by publishing Social Marketing: a planned approach to Social Change, Journal of Marketing by marketing experts Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman, this publication was oriented to social campaigns that have yielded positive results.

Thus, they argued that: „ A social change campaign is an organized effort made by a group (change agent) which attempts to persuade others (the target adopters) to accept, modify, or abandon certain ideas, attitudes , practices or behavior "[1],[5].

TABLE I
 TYPES OF SOCIAL CHANGE THAT CAN BE PRODUCED BY SOCIAL MARKETING

	Change at the individual level	Change in the group of individuals	Change in society
short-term change	Changing individual behavior	Changes to rules Administrative changes	Changes in public policy
long-term change	Changing lifestyle	Organizational changes	"Socio-Cultural Evolution"

Source: MacFadyen et al., 1999, adapted from Levy and Zaltman 1975

Following the researched and presented data, it can be concluded that although some authors equate between social marketing and social campaigns, they are not the same. It should be noted that a *social campaign is only one component of social marketing*; it is just exactly the operational part of social marketing that cannot be performed until the external environment was researched and it was formulated a marketing strategy.

III. SOCIAL MARKETING ROLE IN ROMANIA

The results of the online survey conducted by www.actionamresponsabil.ro portal regarding the most active industries in terms of social initiatives show that 27% of respondents believe that companies in the fuel industry implements most social programs; within strolling distance there are those in the telecommunications (26%), finance (24%), IT&C (23%) and energy (20%).(Fig.1)

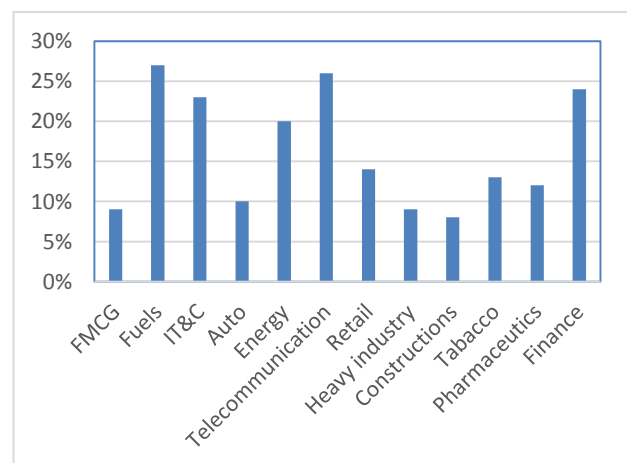


Fig.1 Social programs initiated by companies in Romania

Social marketing in Romania is an overall vision of the social aspects of business firms, the concept that enjoyed the widest audience of all those on the implications and social responsibilities of business.

It is also the first concept that seeks not only to add a new dimension to the classic social marketing, but wants to replace the classical conception as a whole, represents a new way to understand the role of marketing in business, emphasizing the need for its involvement in solving problems society.

Traditionally, social marketing has been associated with the concepts of profitability and competition. In a commercial company things are as follows: the company produces goods or services, the consumer pays to get them in their hands and the company gains from this transaction the profit.

However, there are two fundamental concepts: the idea of *customer service* and the idea of *exchange to mutual benefit*. Social marketing achieved a mutual profitable exchange between producers and consumers at large.

Each actor of social marketing (brand, agency, etc.) perceives in its own manner its own importance and role of communication in society. But joining forces they can achieve their goals and generate behavioral changes that bring social good.

Brands address to people and not to robots-consumers programmed to spend, so that also the communication must think about/to people.

Also in Romania, more and more brands chose to develop social marketing campaigns aimed at changing things for the better.

Communication must start with the brand and bring a resolution to the problem, but at the same time can achieve a real need of the people and potentiate the positive behaviors.

This is the complex role of social marketing, succeeding to obtain a positive effect 2 in 1, both on humans, modeling behaviors, attitudes and values, and on brand.

Thus, there are brands that have adopted social marketing as a profound part of their communication and others that had punctual campaigns with social component.

Latest studies have revealed that young people in Romania are the ones who interact most with brands linked on *social media*. They are enthusiastic and willing to follow and respond to companies' activity on networks such as Facebook or Twitter.

More specifically, young audience of Romania is defined by consumers aged between 16 and 34 years old. Data show that more than half of them used to interact with existing brands on social networking sites. And that's not all. One third of them admit that appreciates more brands using *social media*.

Then, a quarter of young people interact with information on the company's Facebook page at least once a day, 26.7% do so for up to six times a week, and almost 21% up to three times a month. The young audience clicks easier and often the "Like" button on the Facebook page of brands.

On the other hand, only a third of people aged between 35 and 74 years make friends among companies and only

17.4% appreciate more brands that have an account on social sites. Even when it comes to frequency of accessing information about brands, the numbers are not as high as the young; in fact, there are about half.

So, through social media, companies are able not only to attract the attention of consumers, but also to increase the number of fans. The fact that young people show a certain openness and greater availability to specific platforms brands gives companies the opportunity to make them loyal.

The coverage of consumer behavior widens, especially due to the development and diversification of the services sector in the non-profit activities' area. Therefore, in the current sense of social marketing in Romania, consumer behavior requires such a comprehensive approach that expresses the position of the people as such to all tangible and intangible assets arising in the final consumption.

IV. THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

The benefits of social marketing campaigns exceed those of classical marketing campaigns. Thus, we can speak of:

1) *Competitive advantage; brand differentiation; high visibility.*

Initiating social marketing campaigns can lead to better market access or entry into new markets, helping to differentiate from the competition and increase customer loyalty [6].

Competitive advantage comes through a better understanding of the needs of the communities in which they operate and their integration into business strategy that contributes to sustainable development of communities.

In this of increasingly crowded market, the companies seek new competitive advantage that they can be separate from competition in the consumer's mind. Studies conducted in European countries showed that the reputation of integrity and best practices in business is important in defining the capital image of competitive advantage. Moreover, the chances of winning funds granted by the EU for development grow considerably by observing what the Council of Europe has defined as corporate social involvement.

2) *Achieving commercial goals; profit growth.*

Several academic studies have shown a direct correlation between social marketing campaigns and positive financial performance:

- a) A study conducted in 1997 by DePaul University in Chicago found that those companies that have defined a strategy of assuming asocial involvement reached financial benefits (based on the annual sales / revenues) better than companies not engage in that direction;
- b) A 11-year study made by Harvard University came to the conclusion that those

companies that act as social partners on the market had an economic growth rate 4 times higher and 8 times higher in terms of number of employees growth when compared focused only on their own business and profit.

3) *Build up a favorable image of the company.*

Social marketing campaigns build a favorable image by focusing media and the general public on "charity" actions of the company.

4) *Increased credibility and trust in the company; the trust of the community revitalizing the company's image.*

Strategies and initiatives to help the company increase confidence and support of the community in which it operates, the authorities, the media and business partners. Authorities are always interested in identifying partners to participate in community sustainable development and contributing to lower budget financial effort to improve the living conditions of a community. The media is basic support for popularization campaign strategies.

5) *Protecting its reputation in case of crisis.*

Social marketing campaigns facilitate anticipation and social risk management, legal and environmental protection and increase the ability to cope with change. Companies that promote a permanent dialogue with the community have the ability to anticipate and respond to changing environmental, economic and social that could occur that would pose a potential risk to the business. They have a proactive rather than reactive behavior.

6) *Attracting and keeping valuable employees; increasing the motivation level of the employees.*

By creating an environment of trust and pride for the company's employees and the desire for association with a company that "cares" and is involved in solving community problems, especially if they are also involved in community impact events, social marketing campaigns can generate benefits in the recruiting and retention of employees even in a competitive market as the top specialists or managers.

7) *Distracting attention.*

Companies can use social profile marketing campaigns in an effort to divert public attention from some questions regarding their work ethic.

8) *Access to capital.*

Financial institutions increasingly integrate more economic criteria, social and equal opportunities in their assessment of new projects of companies. When funding decisions are important, they seek indicators showing effective management in social involvement.

9) *Extension of contacts at different levels and for different organizational functions.*

Also, social marketing campaigns can provide special advantages in the trading company - company, the company with the opportunity to develop connections with various partners and commitments in various networks and associations. It is clear that a company cannot live and cannot develop in an isolated world,

social engagement by giving it the opportunity to be successful.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Philip Kotler, who introduced this concept in early 70s, was referring to social marketing as representing an orientation of company management, which recognizes that its main task is to study the needs and desires of target markets and meet them in a more efficient manner than the competition, but also into a manner to maintain or improve consumer welfare.

Consumers will prefer those companies that prove a real care to their personal welfare and that of the community.

Social marketing has certain elements that must be taken into account in developing a campaign of this kind. A social marketing campaign aims to change negative behavior into a positive one. This can be achieved through proper information and education campaigns.

Another essential thing in a social marketing campaign is the gravity of the problem and the need to solve it as fast as possible [7]. Also, this type of marketing seeks profit, therefore there must be a direct link between company profits and the social issue. Following such campaigns, the company aims to increase sales, yet also increase customer awareness by trying to solve their problem. Many companies want their brands to be associated with a strong brand, so initiatives contribute major social marketing campaigns to increase brand visibility and hence its power.

Moreover, the more socially involved, the easier for the company to identify social risks arising from business decisions and so it will be able to manage risks easier.

Therefore, social marketing is a good thing, both for companies and for people to be addressed, and companies from Romania have understood the benefits of social marketing campaigns and act in this direction.

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