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A practical application of theory: using social marketing theory to develop innovative and comprehensive sun protection campaigns

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Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Life Sciences | Medicine and Health Sciences | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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A PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THEORY: USING SOCIAL MARKETING THEORY TO DEVELOP INNOVATIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE SUN PROTECTION CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract

This paper presents the background to a large-scale collaborative project between researchers at the University of Wollongong and The Cancer Council New South Wales, and outlines in detail the stages of the ongoing research project. This project provides the opportunity to synthesise and apply best evidence from research in marketing, mass media communication, and health behaviour change real-life campaigns for a leading industry partner. This project demonstrates the value of ongoing research collaborations between university researchers and industry practitioners in systematically applying, and evaluating, research findings to real-world programs.

Background

Social Marketing

Social marketing is a knowledge discipline that is of increasing relevance to health promotion practitioners. However, most health promotion practitioners have limited knowledge of what social marketing consists of and how to apply social marketing strategies to the development of effective health promotion programs. Social marketing was first defined by Kotler and Zaltman (1971) as "the design, implementation and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution and marketing research". Kotler (1975) provided an expanded version of this definition, adding more detail on the strategies of social marketing: "social marketing…utilizes market segmentation, consumer research, concept development, communications, facilitation, incentives and the exchange theory to maximize target group response". In contrast, Andreasan's (1997) definition focuses more on intent than methods: "Social marketing is 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".

Social marketing, like commercial marketing, aims to encourage people to "purchase" a product, service, idea, or behaviour. While there are many differences between social marketing and commercial marketing, there are also many similarities. The big difference between commercial marketers and social marketers, or so it is argued by Wilson and Olds (1991), is that commercial marketing focuses on the needs of the individual as identified by the individual whereas social marketing focuses on the needs of the individual as identified by the social marketer. The former tries to sell you something you know you want, and the latter tries to sell you something you don't know you want, or in many cases, you know you don't want. However, it can also be argued that many of the things we buy from commercial marketers are things we didn't know we needed until we saw their appealing ad campaigns – fashion clothing and new home entertainment technologies being prime examples. Thus, in many ways, the task facing the social marketer is much the same as that facing the commercial marketer: the success of the marketing effort largely depends on offering the right product, at the right price, in the right place, and promoting it the right way.

Social marketing has successfully borrowed many concepts and techniques from the commercial world. While there are some important caveats on the application of marketing knowledge to social marketing, a thorough understanding of the theory and practice of social marketing is an essential foundation for the development of communication campaigns aimed at changing the community's health-related behaviour. Like commercial marketing, when undertaken correctly, social marketing includes:

- consumer orientation – a focus on individual needs
- the concept of a voluntary and mutually beneficial exchange
- the use of marketing research
- consideration of internal and external environments
- undertaking market segmentation
- setting objectives (for awareness, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours)
- developing the communication messages
- distributing the campaign via media.

However, many organisations conducting health behaviour campaigns in Australia, and elsewhere in the world, do not adequately consider these factors in the development of their campaigns – thus the tendency for the campaigns to under-perform.

Ideally, the development of the message component of these social marketing campaigns (i.e., the communications materials – such as magazine ads or television ads) should also take into account the vast body of knowledge from commercial advertising. Much of what is known in commercial advertising about the most effective message strategies for encouraging attention and enhancing awareness and persuasion is equally applicable to social marketing.

Sun Protection

Australia was one of the first countries to introduce skin cancer education programs. Commencing in the 1950s, these programs focused largely on early detection of skin cancer. However, during the 1980s the programs began to focus increasingly on prevention of skin cancer (The Cancer Council NSW, 2001). Australia has the highest incidence of skin cancer in the world. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in Australia, with incidence rates outnumbering all other forms of cancer by more than 3 to 1. The Australian health system spends more money on the diagnosis and treatment of skin cancer than any other cancer, an estimated $300 million each year. The majority of skin cancers could be prevented if the public could be persuaded to adequately protect themselves from the sun.

The Project

This project will investigate the use of social marketing and advertising communications theory in social marketing practice, and demonstrate the improvement in campaign outcomes achieved by a comprehensive application of theory and research to marketing practice. The specific application that will be utilised in this project is social marketing campaigns to promote sun protection behaviours.

The project is innovative in that it is the first comprehensive attempt to investigate the extent to which the academic theory of social marketing and advertising communications is actually applied in practice in the development and implementation of existing social marketing campaigns. For example, we are aware of only one study which has comprehensively analysed the extent to which current social marketing campaigns are consistent with best-practice in advertising communications. This was a review of the Australian National Alcohol Campaign and National Illicit Drugs Campaign (Jones and Rossiter, 2002). This project will consider a wide range of campaigns, from several different countries, to develop a comprehensive picture of the use of marketing and advertising theory in social marketing practice. While researchers have compared the sun protection policies of various countries (e.g., Garvin and Eyles, 2001), there has been no comprehensive analysis of the types of sun protection communication campaigns conducted.

Even more innovative is the second component of the project (phase four): the development of an experimental campaign which is informed by theory, research, and best-practice evidence. Every step in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the campaign will be rigorously conducted using the best-practice guidelines developed in phase three – and the multi-disciplinary team will ensure that all campaign activities appropriately utilise the theoretical and practical underpinnings of social marketing and advertising communications.

The multi-disciplinary nature of the project is fundamental to its innovation. The Chief Investigators are experts in the areas of marketing, advertising, and health behaviour and bring a range of academic knowledge and practical experience – demonstrated by their previous research and publications in social marketing and behaviour change. The Partner Investigators include experts in marketing, communications, public relations, retail management, fundraising, and cancer control.

Research Plan

This project consists of four distinct phases, each of which will result in tangible outcomes for improving current sun protection campaigns.

Phase 1: Identification of the Use of Relevant Theory in Sun Protection Research

This phase will commence with an extensive literature search to identify all available research on the use (and potential for use) of social marketing and advertising communications strategies in the development and conduct of sun protection campaigns. The search will include literature on theoretical frameworks of protection and prevention behaviours – such as the Extended Parallel Processing Model (Witte, 1992) and the work by Rothman and colleagues (e.g., Rothman and Salovey, 1997) and Higgins and colleagues (e.g., Higgins, 1999; Crowe and Higgins, 1997) – as well as articles and textbooks on the development of public health communication campaigns (e.g., Hornik, 2002; Rice and Atkin, 2001; Maibach and Parrott, 1995). The search will gather literature on theoretical and experimental studies with an application to sun protection, whether or not these have been conducted with the intent of developing actual campaigns. Literature from a range of disciplines – such as public health, nursing, psychology, marketing, and advertising – will be included in the review. The search will not be limited to published research, but will include directly contacting organisations which are known to engage in such research to obtain unpublished studies and, where possible, industry- or government-funded studies. The resulting body of literature will be reviewed and summarised to provide a comprehensive picture of research findings on the use of social marketing and advertising theory in the development, conduct, and evaluation of sun protection campaigns.

Phase 2: Review of Existing Sun Protection Campaigns

This phase will involve a comprehensive review of current Australian, US, UK and Canadian communication campaigns aimed at increasing sun protection behaviours. Within Australia, this will include campaigns currently conducted by the Australian Cancer Society, the State and Territory Cancer Councils, government-funded organisations, other non-profit cancer organisations, charities, community groups, schools, hospitals and all other organisations providing sun protection information. An extensive list of organisations providing such information will be developed in consultation with experienced cancer education officers and by searching electronic telephone directories and the Internet. It is anticipated that there will be a large number of organisations, given that an earlier study of breast cancer screening materials alone identified over 100 different print items currently being distributed to Australian women (Jones, 2003). A similar list of overseas organisations conducting communication campaigns aimed at increasing sun protection will be developed. Wherever possible, both the communication materials themselves and the underlying marketing plans will be obtained from the relevant organisations. These materials will then be analysed to determine the extent to which they utilise social marketing theory and practice and, in the case of the communication materials themselves, advertising communications theory. The outcome of phase two will be comprehensive documentation of current practice in sun protection campaigns in Australia, the US,

UK and Canada – including comparisons of the strengths and weaknesses of the various campaigns, and the extent to which they utilise recommendations from social marketing and advertising communications theory.

Phase 3: Development of Best-Practice Guidelines

In this phase, the investigators will develop a detailed set of guidelines for the development and implementation of sun protection campaigns, based on the findings from stage 1 (the use of theory in research) and stage 2 (the use of theory in practice). This stage will involve extensive consultation with experts in the fields of marketing communications and sun protection to ensure that the guidelines are consistent with best practice in social marketing while ensuring the scientific accuracy of the messages and avoiding unintended effects from the communications. The guidelines will consist of systematic 'how-to' instructions, with detailed examples, explaining each step of the development and implementation of a social marketing campaign. For example, the relevance of the 4 P's (product, price, place and promotion) to sun protection behaviours will be covered. The collaborative nature of this project will ensure that the resultant guidelines accurately reflect state of the art knowledge in marketing and advertising while ensuring that the guidelines are understandable to, and usable by, practitioners.

Phase 4: Development of a Sun Protection Intervention Campaign

In the final phase, the investigators will develop a comprehensive social marketing plan for a sun protection campaign for The Cancer Council NSW. The content of this plan will incorporate the best-practice guidelines. Additionally, the plan will extend to the development of an actual advertising/promotions campaign based on current best-practice in advertising communications – including a detailed strategy for:

- Target audience segmentation and action objectives;
- Communication objectives and positioning;
- Creative idea and execution tactics; and
- Media strategy.

<u>Stage One: Formative Research</u>: Recognising the importance to social marketing of a central focus on consumer orientation, the concept of a voluntary and mutually beneficial exchange, the use of marketing research, and consideration of internal and external environments, extensive formative research will be conducted to investigate the salient issues and important messages for the target markets. The final list of issues to be addressed in the formative research will be determined by the phase one to three findings, but likely areas of investigation include perceived susceptibility to skin damage, perceived severity of sun damage, attitudes towards tanning, and the influence of family and friends on sun protection behaviours. Consistent with the principle of market segmentation, qualitative and quantitative research will be undertaken with the major market segments within the NSW population. While the final segmentation strategy will not be decided until we have the results of stages one to three, it is anticipated that likely segmentation strategies will include demographics (e.g., gender, age), geographics (e.g., area of residence), attitudes (e.g., negative, neutral, or positive attitudes towards sun protection), occupational exposure (e.g., indoor versus outdoor workers), physiology (e.g., sun sensitivity), and current behaviours (e.g., high versus low recreational sun exposure).

An important focus of this formative stage will also be to determine the effects of previous sun protection campaigns on attitudes and behaviours. Previous sun protection campaigns have focused heavily on the protection of young children from sun exposure, with the main warning being that the majority of sun damage occurs in the first 15 years of life. Now, we wish to develop a more comprehensive strategy – to target both younger and older adults. Therefore, it is essential to determine the extent to which these earlier messages have (a) cast sun protection as a childhood issue, and thus one to be rejected by 'mature' adolescents and young adults; and (b) led to the incorrect belief that there is no value to sun protection for adults as the damage has already been done.

Stage Two: Program Development: In this stage of the research the project team will develop a comprehensive plan for the sun protection marketing campaign. This plan will focus on the four key elements of marketing campaigns:

- Product (product is defined as anything that can be offered to the market to satisfy a want or need, and can include goods, services, or ideas). In the case of sun protection campaigns, the core product is 'protecting yourself (or your family) from the sun in order to prevent or reduce skin damage'. There are a number of related tangible products (such as sunscreen, hats, protective clothing, and sunglasses) and an important intangible product, namely duration of exposure. Based on the review of existing campaigns (phases one and two), the best-practice guidelines (phase three), and the findings from the formative research, the marketing plan will determine what changes need to be made to the core and tangible products (or perceptions of these) in order to increase the likelihood of uptake of the behaviours and purchase of the products.
- Price (the full amount that customers have to pay, in both financial and effort or psychological cost terms, to purchase the product or adopt the behaviour or belief). Based on the results of the literature review and the formative research, the campaign will develop strategies for reducing the perceived or actual price of the recommended behaviours and products.
- Place (the channel of distribution, or activities the company undertakes to make the product available to the consumer). The program development stage will include the development of new distribution strategies for sun protection products and information on the importance of sun protection (such as schools and sporting clubs).
- Promotion (communications – advertising, publicity, direct marketing, sponsorship, and word of mouth). The marketing plan will include the development of comprehensive guidelines for the development and dissemination of the communications campaign – based on theory, research and best-practice in marketing communications – and will include such things as communication objectives and positioning, execution tactics, and media strategy.

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