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SOCIAL MARKETING, PESTER POWER and REVERSE SOCIALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Social marketing is used to popularize positive ideas and bring about attitude change through empowering people for the change. However, the role of pester power in social marketing has never been explored. Children use reverse socialization strategies to get their parents to yield to their purchase requests employing pester power. Pester power has generally been seen as a negative force, but can it be used as a positive marketing tool to initiate a social change? There is a possibility of using this pester power in a non-consumption context. The positive role of pester power is underexplored, and this research intends to provide a new insight in this regard. A case of social marketing has been identified that captures the success of a campaign, where pester power is constructively used to create awareness among mothers on self-examination and professional (medical) examination of breast cancer. Suitable modular description of the underlying processes have been brought out to indicate the role played by pester power and reverse socialization in a social marketing context.

Key words: *social marketing, pester power, reverse socialization*

INTRODUCTION

Every year, breast cancer claims about 400,000 lives (www.worldwidebreastcancer.com, accessed 19 Sep 2012)– an overwhelming figure despite all the medical advancements. Since early diagnosis increases the chance of survival, which is the reason for a higher survival rate in the Western countries (about 85% at 5 years) as compared to the low-income countries (nearly 40%) (Coleman et al., 2008), an initiative for early detection is of prime importance in order to fight the disease. Thus, creating awareness can be a major social marketing objective to bring about attitude change. The nuclear family is the first important social unit that may accept or reject any changes. Within this social unit, the two important forces would be parents and children. There is a direct relationship facilitating the exchange between these two forces, which is what has traditionally been captured as the *socialization* process. In this context, socialization plays a very directional role for the family members. However, *reverse socialization*– an emerging phenomenon in the family socialization process –has had its own growing role to play. With a change in the perspective and thinking, this phenomenon, can be used as a positive force by the children of the family, particularly when they are prone to mental, emotional and physical losses and sufferings.

It is now important to discuss, in the realm of social marketing, how children may employ pester power as a tool to influence their mothers and create awareness about preventive examination for breast cancer, leading to a positive attitude change in the minds of mothers, thereby resulting in their doing a self-examination or consulting a specialist periodically. On a consummate basis, this may evolve into a ‘social change’.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning to be effective consumers in respect to societal changes has been the focus of consumer socialization (Ekstorm,2006).Consumer socialization was first introduced by Ward (1974) as the “process by which *young people* acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their effective functioning as consumers in the marketplace” (p. 2). Moschis and Churchill’s five key variable model(1978), based on McLeod and O’Keefe’s 1972 consumer socialization perspective, posits that socialization processes– behavior modeling, daily social interaction between the agent and learners, and behavior expectations– lead to cognitive results (e.g. brand and store knowledge) and behavioral ones (e.g. shopping and demonstrating purchased products to others), with social structural variables and an individual’s life cycle position as the antecedents of these processes and content variables being impacted by them. (Lueg, Ponder, Beatty & Capella, 2006).

The consumer socialization model includes five key variables. First, *age or life-cycle position* (LCP) – the time when cognitive and behavior patterns change (Churchill & Moschis, 1979); second, *social structure constraints* which affect learning (e.g. social class, gender, and race); third, *agent or the source of influence*, which is the directly involved in socialization due to its frequent contact and primacy over the individual as well as punishment and reward control (Shin, 1996). Research indicates that parents, mothers in particular, peers and media are traditionally the most influential consumer socialization agents (Minahan & Huddleston, 2010; Moschis, 1987). The internet is also a potential strong socialization agent due to its proliferation as a communication tool (Lee, Conroy & Hii, 2003). Access to a large network of interconnected adolescent consumers through the internet and social networking allows the young users to exchange opinions, experiences, evaluations and knowledge (Dellarocas, Farag, & Zhang, 2004, cited in Shim, Serido & Barber, 2011). The fourth variable is the *learning processes*– the way children and adolescents learn how to behave in different contexts by observing and modeling their parents-acquiring specific values and behaviors from the socialization agents (Churchill & Moschis, 1979) along with the fifth variable, *content or criterion behavior*– values, attitudes, beliefs or behaviors necessary to perform a given social role (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). It is important to note that learning processes and criterion behavior are transmitted from one generation to the other.

Intergenerational influences (IGI), i.e. transmission of information, beliefs/values, consumer behaviors and resources within the family across generations (Cashmore & Goodnow, 1985; Childers & Rao, 1992; Heckler, Childers & Arunachalam, 1989; Moore & Berchmans, 1996; Whitebeck & Gecas, 1988), add a new dimension to consumer socialization. The first aspect of IGI refers to Strength of Family Relationship (SFR) (Shah & Mittal, 1997), which is the level of trust, respect, harmony of relation and communication between parents and children. The second determinant is of IGI is a person’s possession of perceived expert knowledge in a particular product category. The stronger the IGI, the more one generation is perceived as an expert by the other one (Gavish, Shoham & Ruvio, 2010). The significance of IGI is its emphasis on specific content of parent-child communication rather than focus on parents’ general communication perspective which is seen in consumer socialization.

The reciprocal nature of the parent-child interaction means that children are capable of affecting their parents’ behavior (Hawkins, Amato, & King, 2007; Roest, Dubas & Gerris, 2009). This is referred to as *reverse socialization*– a process in which a child informs and

educates parents in the context of commercial information and offerings (Chavda, Haley & Dunn, 2005; Ekström, Tansuhaj & Foxman, 1987). Reverse socialization involves children's contribution to parents' socialization by teaching them new consumption skills and sharing experience and knowledge (Gollety, 1999; Ekström et al., 1987; Ayadi, 2008). This is an under-explored body of literature which will be further discussed in this paper. The reality of reverse socialization is validated in Ayadi & Bree's 2010 study of how learning about food transfers in the family. A similar study by Palojoki & Tuomi-Grohn (2001) shows that children teach their parents, based on what they learn at school, how to consume healthier kinds of food. School education encompassing consumer-related courses increases adolescents' tendency towards discussing consumption with parents (Moschis, 1976). In another instance, children, some of whom had participated in an environmental project or discussed environmental problems at school influenced their parents in regards with environmental issues such as recycling (Ekstorm, 1995). These findings and also the fact that children tend to share the information they acquire at their school on a variety of issues such as the environment and the health problems caused by smoking (Ekström, 1995) indicate that children can act as reverse socialization agents in an attempt to encourage and persuade their parents to change their attitude or demonstrate a desired behavior. Thus, the same can be applicable to other social causes such as increasing awareness against breast cancer and encouraging and persuading mothers to go for a simple self-examination.

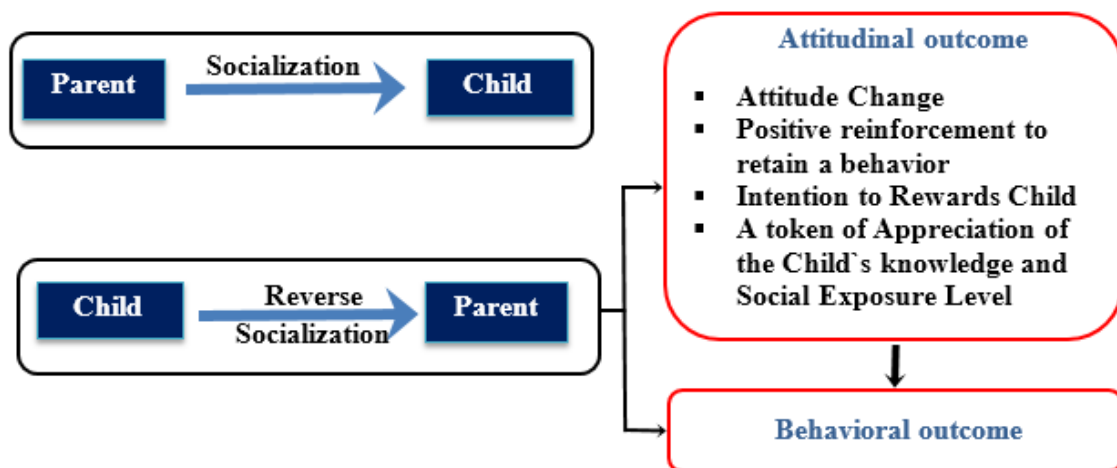
The outcomes of customer socialization can be cognitive, behavioral, or both. Hence, similar results could be expected in case of reverse socialization. This implies the chances of mere cognitive results, or in case of incorporation of children's influences and pester power, more behavioral outcomes. Today's informed children who have more influence, attention and personal power (Lindstrom, 2004), actively participate in family decisions and assert their rights and desires (Ayadi & Bree, 2010). If they could directly influence family leisure activities such as vacations, travel, entertainment, and dining out (Foxman, Tansuhaj & Ekström, 1989; Mangleburg, 1990), it wouldn't be surprising to see them—especially girls who can better influence their moms (Moore et al., 2001) – using this power in a positive way within a non-consumption-related context such as health-related family issues, and in particular, their mother's health.

Today's adolescents impact family purchase decision-making, exerting more power at all stages of such decisions (Wang, Holloway, Beatty & Hill, 2007). Environmental factors such as being technological savvy and family structural changes, i.e. fewer children, older parents, single parents, and blended families, which impose more responsibility on children (Serido & Barber, 2011; Flurry, 2007) increase their societal role and influence on family consumption decisions (Foxman et al., 1989; Shim et al., 2011). Previous researches on family consumption demonstrate that children had an influence on their parents' purchase decisions regarding the products consumed by the whole family or by the child alone (Foxman et al., 1989; Ekström, 2007; Thomson, Laing & McKee, 2007; Mittal & Royne, 2010). However, the importance of Ruvio, Gavish and Shohama's (2013) research finding is the fact that a parent's consumption of expressive products which are merely used by him/her are also influenced by the children. But what are the sources of children's powers? Bases of the power for family members include normative (family's values and norms), economic (monetary control of the income earner), affective (interpersonal relationships and belongingness), personal (physical appearance and role competence), and cognitive resources (the intelligence of family members) (McDonald, 1980). The importance of these resources lies in the way they are used in family decision-making. A husband or wife may use normative and economic resources in family decision-making (Moschis & Churchill,

1978), whereas a child may use affective and cognitive resources in family interactions to persuade his/her parents.

A child's power to influence family consumption patterns (Shoham & Dalakas, 2005), or more specifically asking his/her parents to buy products for him (Gunter & Furnham, 1998) is referred to as pester power. Research indicates that children exert pester power on a wide range of products from inexpensive purchases, e.g. food (Marquis, 2004) to expensive ones such as a family car (Dotson & Hyatt, 2005). According to Palan (2001), children use such strategies as informing (asking or telling parents about products), persuasion, reasoning, and negative strategies (pestering) to pose purchase requests to parents. It should be noted that influence and persuasion may have notably different meanings. Influence is affecting a person, a thing or flow of events with no evident or direct effort, whereas persuasion is influencing the mind by reasoning and arguing or anything that touches passions and mind or changes a will to a determination. Persuasion is inducing a change in the attitude (Wimalasiri, 2004), which Cialdini (1993) refers to as an attempt to win 'the heart and mind'— a phrase that well captures the essence of a child's persuasion.

Figure 1: Reverse Socialization Outcomes

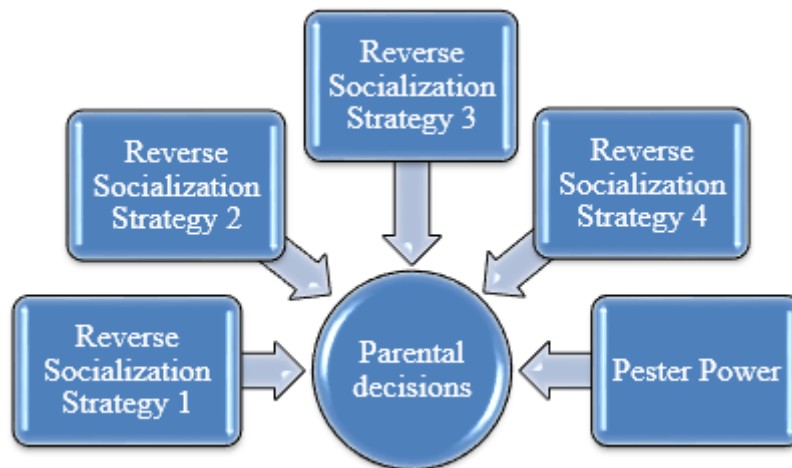


Parental responses to such attempts include agreement, denial, and/or suggestion of an alternative (Atkin, 1978; Carlson, Grossbart & Walsh, 1990). There are various perspectives on the outcome of parents' and children's interactions regarding a purchase request. One school of thought suggests negative outcomes such as unhappiness and conflict. Robertson and Rossiter (1974) reported that disappointment was young children's reaction to their purchase request refusal. McDermott, Stead, Gordon, Angus & Hastings (2006:514) argued that refusing a purchase request would cause unnecessary tension in child-parent relationships.

However, another school posits that conflict is not always the outcome. A study shows that the more children requested a product, the higher was the likelihood of obtaining it (Ward & Wackman, 1972). Mothers agree to purchase products requested by their older children due to a maternal perception that they are more informed and competent consumers than younger ones (Ward et al., 1972). Another study found that parents' willingness to buy the requested product was to treat or reward children, and appropriateness of the product was another factor to encourage the parents to respond positively (Isler, Popper & Ward, 1987).

In addition, as time passes by, parents' willingness to purchase the food item for which their child has a strong desire makes it unnecessary for a child to negotiate with a parent (Marquis, 2004). Other factors that parents tend to take into consideration before agreeing to a purchase request are their financial ability to purchase, the cost of the product, and its perceived suitability for the child as well as the child's age (Lawlor & Prothero, 2011). Based on the perspectives discussed, pester power seems to be a mixed blessing, which raises the question of possibility of using pesters power more constructively in a non-commercial environment using social marketing.

Figure2:Factors Impacting Parents' Decisions



Social marketing is defined by Andreasen (1995:7) 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.” It is an attempt to change the health behavior using a variety of communication strategies and marketing techniques (Evans,2006; Hastings & McDermott,2006) which has a long and robust history in public health and health education (Andreasen, 2002; Ling, Franklin, Lindsteadt & Gearon, 1992). With its distinctive techniques that provide the opportunity to reach a large spectrum of individuals beyond the conventional health education reach (Talbert, 2008), it uses different strategies to promote desired behaviors in health issues of high priority such as breast cancer screening (Bryant et al., 1996), breastfeeding (Lindenberger & Bryant, 2000), physical activity and nutrition (Neiger, Thackeray, Merrill, Larsen, Chalkley & Miner, 2001), condom use (Cohen et al.,1999),nutrition education (Young, Anderson, Beckstrom, Bellows & Johnson, 2004), fruit and vegetable consumption (Foerster et al., 1998), physical activity among teens (Wong et al., 2004), cancer prevention, family planning, prevention of cardiovascular disease, and infection control (Andreasen, 2002; Walsh, Rudd, Moeykens & Moloney, 1993). Social marketing looks for new ways of message and program development in order to promote health, bring about new innovative ideas and employ behavior change (Talbert, 2008).

Since the effectiveness of social marketing depends on the interventions offered, it is crucial to tailor interventions to influence the target audience in a way that will lead to a favorable result. Social marketing theory suggests segmentation of population into homogenous subgroups on basis of the attitudes or behaviors that are most relevant to the behavior of interest (Diehr, Hannon, Pizacani, Forehand, Meischke, Curry, Martin, Weaver & Harris, 2011). This approach allows tailoring interventions to match the segments' needs (Grier & Bryant, 2004; Kotler & Lee, 2008; Siegel & Lotenberg, 2007) and in case of cancer prevention specifically, will lead to a decrease in the probability of becoming sick

or dying. Social marketing interventions have been used in order to promote cancer symptom awareness and/or early presentation (Austoker et al., 2009). For instance, promoting the importance of early detection of breast cancer by a simple examination to find lumps, or prevention of lung cancer by doing an x-ray will consequently increase the cancer survival rate considering the fact that prognosis depends on the cancer stage at diagnosis (Atheyet al., 2011)

To date, social marketing practices have generally targeted cancer patients or groups at risk (Gimbel, Ledford & Stephens, 2012). An emerging opportunity for social marketing is to target an undiscovered influential consumer market which can trigger a social change. Given that children have some influence on consumption related purchases, pester power can be used to induce positive social change such as cancer prevention through creating awareness and getting mothers to go for early detection of breast cancer. The following case explains how social marketing was used in targeting children to pester their mothers for early breast cancer detection and prevention.

PYM CAMPAIGN TO BEAT THE BREAST CANCER-An Overview

In 2010, 'Protect Your Mom' (PYM) was only a concept, a dream, and the founder's personal war against the cancer. But it soon made it to the headlines of virtually all UAE newspapers and was nominated one of the top five ADCB Emirates Woman awards 2011. The idea was first conceived when cancer hit the founder's family but the patient survived the disease thanks to diagnosis at stage 2. Then PYM started off as a mother-daughter fight against breast cancer, a campaign to warn every woman about lumps and other signs of breast cancer, emphasizing that early detection can protect women from the fatal spread of disease. The evil that claims 400,000 lives annually could be defeated by creating awareness about the early detection of breast cancer (www.worldwidebreastcancer.com, accessed 19 Sep 2012). PYM's objective was to create awareness about breast cancer by targeting students and making them pester their mothers to do a simple examination. Using social marketing tools such as music, dance and artistic creations to sell breast cancer awareness, the youth was targeted in their common language, which was a key factor for the success of PYM.

1. Background

With very few women going for regular check-ups or even knowing that a simple self-exam may save their lives, PYM used a new way of getting mothers to go for a breast examination—incorporation of pester power, a strategy borrowed from famous companies such as Maggie and McDonald's. If children can pester their parents for iPhones and Blackberries, why not make them pester their moms to do a self-exam? Women are usually too busy to take care of their own health, and this can be the reason to ignore a simple breast examination (self-examination or mammography). However, if pestered by their children, they are more likely to do so, and this was how PYM wanted to beat breast cancer. Why should women still be victims of breast cancer in this era of great medical advancements while the disease is only fatal if the symptoms are not recognized in time and when early detection increases the chance of survival? The perception that breast cancer is something that happens only to others, that it is hereditary, and that only old people get it is common, yet almost everyone still comes across breast cancer patients among their relatives, friends and acquaintances. It is time to be prepared and to fight back when necessary, and that was what PMY was determined to do.

2. Unique features of the campaign

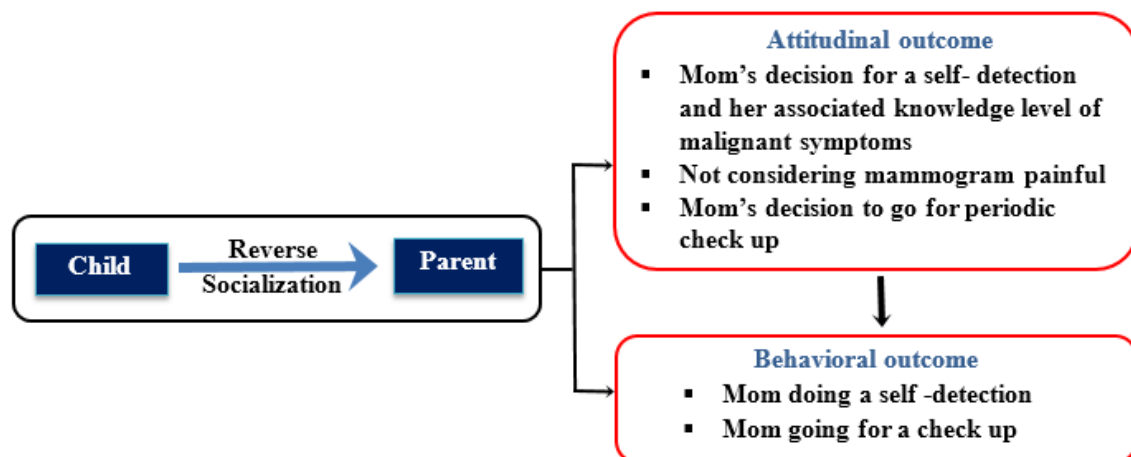
The PYM campaign used social marketing in a very effective manner by accurately targeting the right segment. Instead of targeting those who already had breast cancer or had a risk of getting it, the campaign targeted the youth who would subsequently use their pester power to influence their mothers into going for a self-exam or check-up. Since the emphasis of public health is prevention, PYM was determined to decrease the rate of breast cancer deaths by creating awareness and getting mothers to go for an examination. Using an unconventional approach, i.e. utilizing social media to reach its target audience at zero cost was one of the important features of this campaign.

Considering the fact that many people, especially younger users, are attracted to the internet not just for access to information but for the social environment where they could build new relationships and go beyond their existing social networks (Spears, Lea & Postmes, 2001; Walther & Parks, 2002), social media was the best option to target this audience. According to research, membership in online social network sites in UAE was forty-six percent, which ranked it second in the world (Menon, 2008). Relevance and prominence of computer usage in the users' everyday lives due the deep embedment of technology in the UAE's consumer culture was a major reason for adopting social media such as Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn.

Since development of effective and efficient strategies based on appropriate segmentation can enhance the social marketing intervention (Slater, 1996; Slater & Flora, 1991), it was important to segment the PYM target audience accurately. Based on the fact that PYM primarily relied on pester power, the segmentation criteria included demographic: age (14-22), geographic: Dubai and psychographic: value (importance of mother's presence in the family), and attitude (caring about mother's health).

Influencing behaviour change necessitates an understanding of the audience's preference and the benefits received among the target population (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 1999). Therefore, PYM needed to create a strategy which would make the desired behaviour, i.e. breast examination seem more attractive with greater benefits than the competition, which is the behaviours the audience has been demonstrating for a long time—mothers ignoring their health and caring about themselves last. PYM amplified the benefits of early detection such as avoiding chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery and moms' being there for the family.

Figure 3: Outcome of Reverse Socialization in



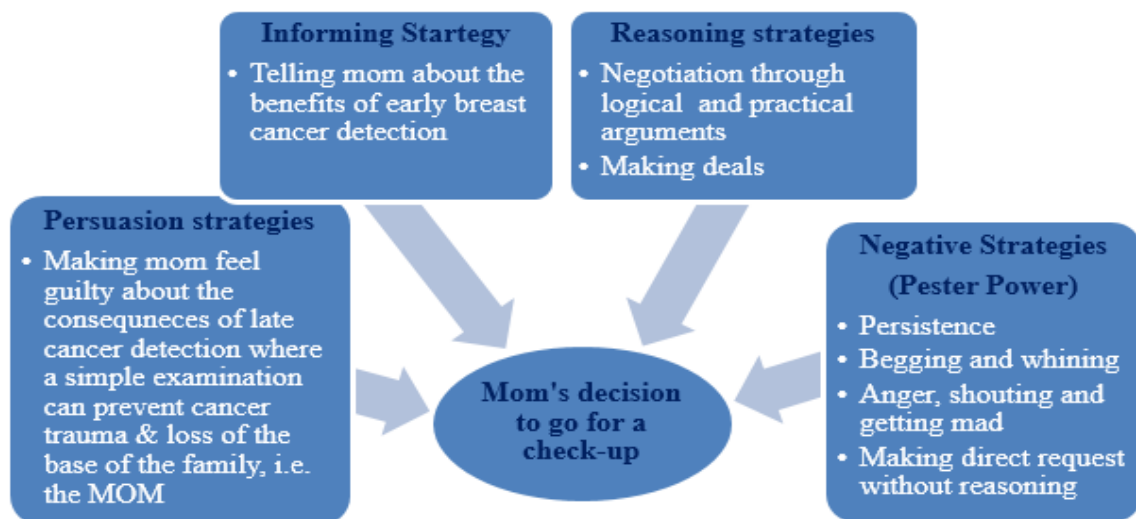
3. Why target the Youth?

Several factors were considered in selecting youth as the PYM target audience. First, generation Y is more technology-savvy compared to their earlier generations and that explosion in the usage of social media has made it an important interface in exchanging opinions among students—a fact that allows reaching them at zero cost. Secondly, pester power has gained a bigger role with parents yielding to many requests and suggestions from their children. It is possible that students use their pester power to influence their mothers to do a self-exam. Thirdly, the interventions created such as dances, skits, Design-and-Win contests’ etc., appeal to students as they happen to be the common language of the youth. The fourth reason was that students are likely to listen to their friends rather than official sources due to the reference group effect.

4. Reverse socialization strategies

Apart from serving its basic objective of creating awareness towards breast cancer, the campaign had benefits beyond students’ mere participation in the campaign. Creating entries made the students do a lot of research which eventually led to some learning outcomes. The importance of this research was giving the students sufficient knowledge to act as reverse socialization agents. They could use several reverse socialization strategies such as informing their mothers about the importance of early detection in order to get them to go for a breast examination (Figure 4). Detection of a lump by a 20-year-old student who designed a poster is an example of effectiveness of the breast cancer social marketing. The impact of reference groups and word of mouth reduces the likelihood of screening out dances and songs from friends, which they were likely to do with official messages and those of doctors’.

Figure 4: Application of Reverse Socialization Strategies on non-purchase decisions



Exchange theory or the transfer or trade of something of value between two parties (Flora, Schooler, & Pierson, 1997) emphasizes on voluntary exchange (versus coercion) and highlights the benefits of participating in the exchange (Lefebvre & Flora, 1988). The basic idea of this theory posits that the benefits offered to the target audience in return for adopting the desired behavior has to be greater than the price it costs. PYM highlighted the

fact that early detection of breast cancer translates to avoiding unnecessary drama and trauma for the family.

Audience segmentation to target the groups that share the same characteristics and qualities is done based on factors such as psychographics (e.g., values, lifestyle), current behavior, intentions, and readiness to change (Thackeray & Brown, 2005). Since the development of effective and efficient strategies based on appropriate segmentation can enhance the social marketing intervention (Slater, 1996; Slater & Flora, 1991), it was important to segment the PYM target audience accurately. Based on the fact that the PYM campaign primarily relied on the pester power, the segmentation criteria included demographic: Age (14-22), geographic: Dubai and psychographic: value (Importance of mom's presence in the family) and attitude (carrying about mom's health). The target audience chosen by PYM was the youth due to their influence and life cycle position.

Consumer Orientation involves understanding customers and their perspective and having them in mind at all levels of social marketing process. Knowing customers, their wants and aspirations, what matters to them, what influences their behavior and what could engage them in the desired behavior can be a guideline for the development of the intervention strategy. Knowing that mothers would usually procrastinate their health related issues and that they would do a breast examination if it is what their children want them to do, and being there for their kids at the moments when they need them were some of the concerns that would get moms to go for an examination. Notably, the fact that a child is in the center of all mom's wants and desires would make mothers surrender to the child's request. These attitudes and values were the points on which the campaign relied on.

Competition between the benefits of the desired behavior and the behaviors shown for a long time poses a challenge in creating an effective strategy. Moreover, influencing behaviour change necessitates understanding the audience's preference and the benefits received among the target population (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 1999, cited in Kotler et al., 2000). In order to achieve this objective, PYM had to create a strategy which would make the desired behaviour (pestering mom for breast examination) seem more attractive and with greater benefits than the competition (mothers ignoring their health and caring about themselves last). PYM amplified the benefits of early detection such as avoiding chemotherapy, radiotherapy & surgery and moms' being there for the family.

Integrated Marketing mix based on the consumers' preferences is another essential factor in developing strategies to influence behavior (McCormack Brown et al., 2000). The product that was offered through PYM Campaign was breast cancer awareness, which was promoted through such marketing communication tools as social media and print media in Dubai, UAE. Using social media as the main communication channel was in direct relation to segmentation. The students were in middle school, high school or college/university in an age bracket of 14-22. This age group is internet-savvy and has great interest in using social media as a communication platform – a factor that was a great contributor to the success of the campaign.

Finally, *Continuous Monitoring* of the success of the programs ensures that interventions still meet the needs, wants and desires of the target audience. The PYM founder has been making great effort to ensure that the campaign goes beyond a small local one by expanding the network of its agents.

CONCLUSION

Pester power's negative connotation can be seen differently by looking through the spectrum of social marketing. Social marketing campaigns can anticipate a different outcome using this new tool. Based on the case discussed, pester power can be used in a social marketing context to contribute to a social change when parents are unwilling to initiate a voluntary change. In health-related concerns of prime importance, targeting the influencing agents– the children of the high risk groups/victims rather than the victims themselves– is a new approach. If pester power can be used to prevent breast cancer, it can also be used to reduce smoking and narcotic drugs consumption and to address environmental issues such as global warming.

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