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# Consumers as value creators: Exploring value self-creation in social marketing

## **Abstract**

Value creation is an important part of social marketing, which attempts to create value for target audiences to induce behaviour change (Kotler & Lee, 2011). Social marketing is often concerned with voluntary behaviour change, and as such, requires a level of active consumer participation within the value creation process. The voluntary nature of many social marketing activities suggests that the experiential value of these behaviours is proactive. Holbrook (1994) distinguishes between passive and active value in commercial marketing, whereby passive value is experienced by consumers reactively in response to the consumption of an object or service, and active value is participative, which requires collaboration between the consumer and organisation. This reflects a value co-creation context as presented by Vargo and Lusch (2004) and Grönroos (2011).

## **Keywords**

value, creators, exploring, self, creation, social, consumers, marketing

## **Disciplines**

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## Consumers as value creators: Exploring value self-creation in social marketing

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<sup>1</sup> Angie McCosker completed her Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) at the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Australia. Her Honours research investigated the concept of value creation, and tested a proposed model of value self-creation in self-service activities in preventative health. She completed her dissertation with First Class Honours under the supervision of Dr Nadia Zainuddin and Associate Professor Leona Tam.

<sup>2</sup> Nadia Zainuddin is a Lecturer in Marketing at the University of Wollongong (UOW). She currently works at the Faculty of Business and is based in both Sydney and Wollongong campuses in New South Wales, Australia. She is a member of the Centre for Health Initiatives (UOW) as well as a number of professional associations, including the Australian Association of Social Marketing (AASM), where she is the Sydney Hub Lead and Editor of the association's newsletter. She is also an Academic Co-Chair of the upcoming World Social Marketing Conference scheduled for April 2015. Her research in social marketing draws primarily from services marketing and consumer behaviour, with a core focus on value theory and value creation. She has a special interest in the area of health, wellness, and wellbeing and employs mixed methods in her research.

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## Background

Value creation is an important part of social marketing, which attempts to create value for target audiences to induce behaviour change (Kotler & Lee, 2011). Social marketing is often concerned with voluntary behaviour change, and as such, requires a level of active consumer participation within the value creation process. The voluntary nature of many social marketing activities suggests that the experiential value of these behaviours is proactive. Holbrook (1994) distinguishes between passive and active value in commercial marketing, whereby passive value is experienced by consumers reactively in response to the consumption of an object or service, and active value is participative, which requires collaboration between the consumer and organisation. This reflects a value co-creation context as presented by Vargo and Lusch (2004) and Grönroos (2011).

However, a key difference between social marketing and commercial marketing is the emphasis on behaviours and ideas, rather than on goods and services (Kotler & Lee 2011). While social marketing goods and services do exist, they often act as facilitators or vehicles for socially desirable behaviour changes. In some social marketing causes, such as reducing domestic violence, and increasing exercise, an organisation may not have the opportunity to interact with the consumer through the provision of a good or service. Within these contexts, the focus is on the behaviour and well-being of individuals, rather than the use of a good or service. This represents a challenge for social marketing managers who struggle to understand how target audiences can be incentivised into desired actions, particularly in situations where there is limited use of goods and services to facilitate behaviour change.

While some studies have examined value creation within social marketing contexts (e.g., Domegan et al., 2012; 2013; Russell-Bennett et al., 2009; Zainuddin et al., 2011; Zainuddin et al., 2013), their focus has been on *services that facilitate behaviour*, rather than *actual behaviour*. What is lacking in the literature is a consideration of those social marketing instances in which no direct interaction between individuals and organisations occurs. This is important as there is an abundance of social marketing activities which involves the performing of behaviours without facilitation by goods or services. Focussing on value creation in these behaviour-only contexts provides important contributions to social marketing, as well as extends the current knowledge on value theory and value creation.

The current value creation literature focuses on interaction with an organisation (Grönroos & Voima, 2013) or integration of operant and operand resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), and as such, there are sources of value (Smith & Colgate, 2007; Zainuddin et al., 2013) external to the consumer. However, in the context of social marketing, behaviour change often occurs without this interaction, representing a gap in the literature in understanding value creation at a distance. To address this gap, this paper examines value creation within contexts in which consumers must self-create value and suggests that value self-creation can occur and proposes the concept of *value self-creation*, guided by the theoretical frameworks of value theory and value creation.

## Conceptual Proposal

We define *value self-creation* as the value creation process undertaken solely by an individual where there is no direct interaction with an organisation. This includes social marketing services organisations, for example, and their employees. In other words, the value creation process occurs at a distance.



Without the overlap of the organisation and customer spheres, the role of the organisation is restricted to only as a facilitator, with no capacity to actively participate in the co-creation of value.

Consequently, the individual consumer is the **sole** creator of value. Value self-creation is distinguished from self-motivation in that self-motivation is a self-driven force that causes an individual to engage in a behaviour, while value self-creation is a process that an individual undergoes once they are already engaged in a behaviour.

We suggest that value self-creation sits within an overall continuum of value creation, which highlights that different behaviours require varying degrees of resource integration from the organisation and consumer (see Appendix). Value self-creation examines the value creation processes in behaviours that require high levels of resource integration from the consumer, but negligible levels from the organisation. Some examples of self-creation in social marketing include using bowel screening kit, exercising regularly, and using reusable shopping bags for conservation. Other value creation types within the suggested value creation continuum includes varying combinations of high or low levels of resource integration from the individual and the organisation. For example, value co-creation involves high levels of resource integration from both the individual and the organisation. Table 1 summarises the suggested continuum of value creation.

While value self-creation has not been explicitly identified in the value creation literature, the concept has been somewhat explored and implied. After recognising that actors perform resource integration, Grönroos (2006) argued that consumers could be the 'sole creator of value' (p.34) to create value for themselves. This view was also supported by Baron and Harris (2006), claiming that consumers can be resources integrators through consumption and co-consumption. This highlights circumstances in which the majority of the value creation process rests on the shoulders of the consumer, and therefore, the term 'self-creator' is deemed appropriate. McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012) identify value creation through self-activities including positive thinking, reframing and sense-making, emotional labour and "psyching oneself up" (p.371) and provided empirical evidence that inputs to an individual's value creation process can come from the individual's own activities. However, as the context of this study was in a health treatment service, in which patients and carers work together, the value is still co-created and in a commercial marketing service setting.

### **Implications for Theory and Practice**

The major theoretical contribution of this paper is the theorisation of value self-creation, situated within an overall conceptualisation of value creation. This acknowledges the many social marketing instances which focus on individuals' behaviours and the resultant value that is derived from the performance of this behaviour, rather than from the use of goods or services. This allows for the examination of the efficacy of using value to achieve social marketing goals, particularly in social marketing causes that do not involve the use of goods or services. The concept of self-creation is valuable for social marketing practice as it encourages practitioners to regard individuals as value creators, empowered in their ability to determine and create value for themselves. Individuals should not be viewed as passive recipients of value, as this does not apply in all social marketing situations and contexts. It suggests that meaningful segmentation on the basis of activity levels and context should be considered and highlights the need to invest effort in consumer education and empowerment in their role in achieving social good.



As citizens are active participants in the change process, they should be consulted by social marketers to generate participant insight during the development of social change programmes.

As part of social marketing, social marketers should engage, interact, and work with participants of social change programmes, and in doing so, are able to facilitate participant empowerment through the provision of the necessary knowledge and tools to act.



## Appendix: Value creation continuum

	Value		
	Delivered	Co-created	Self-Created
<b>Primary Responsibility for Value Creation</b>	Organisation	Joint	Individual
<b>Role of Organisation</b>	Value Creator	Value Co-creator	Value Facilitator
<b>Role of Individual</b>	Value Receiver	Value Co-creator	Value Creator
<b>Interaction</b>	Direct	Direct	Indirect
<b>Theoretical Frameworks</b>	Communication Value-Chain	Services Marketing Consumer Behaviour S-D logic Services Logic	Self-Service Technology Organisational Citizenship
<b>Examples in Social Marketing</b>	Policy Communication	Breast Screening Cervical Screening Smoking Cessation	Bowel Screening Exercise Diet
<b>Source(s)</b>	Porter (1985) Sweeney and Soutar (2001)	Vargo and Lusch (2004; 2008), Grönroos and Voima (2013), Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004)	This paper



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