Consumer Affairs Victoria

Social Marketing
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Preface

While many consumer agencies use information strategies to influence consumers' or trader behaviour, these strategies often fail to generate the behavioural changes desired. Social marketing is a comprehensive approach to policy development that targets behavioural change.

This paper discusses how social marketing is used in other social policy fields, such as environmental and health policy, and the potential for consumer agencies to learn from the experience in other areas. While not suited to all consumer problems, there appears to be scope for consumer agencies to expand their use of social marketing.

The research paper is one in a series designed to stimulate debate on consumer policy issues. It does not represent government policy and is intended as a basis for discussion only. It is informed by a related paper on *I* [illegible], which discusses the strengths and weaknesses of information strategies and how consumers use available information.

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Many consumer agencies use information campaigns and marketing to influence people's behaviour and reduce the risk of consumer detriment. Such strategies involve messages such as informing teenagers about the impact of excessive debts, encouraging householders to use licensed tradespeople or informing businesses about ethical processes for conducting real estate auctions.[1] Evaluations of these information campaigns often measure the penetration and accessibility of the information, but not its success in changing behaviour. Sometimes, the target audience is aware of the messages being delivered but does not respond by changing its behaviour.

While different commentators vary somewhat in their definition of social marketing, it can be broadly defined as:

> [illegible] (Donovan & Henley 2003, p. ix)

The objective of social marketing is to change individuals' behaviour to achieve a socially desirable goal (Donovan & Henley 2003, p. ix). The key aspects of social marketing are its approach to policy development and the way in which it applies policy tools:

- It uses policy development processes that are grounded in research and fact. Each strategy is preceded by an analysis of the problem, trialled and subject to ongoing monitoring, and evaluated for its success.
- It uses tools that encourage behavioural change and break down barriers to change, often relying on a multifaceted approach that simultaneously informs, persuades and uses incentives and deterrents.

While social marketing applies concepts, tools and techniques that are common to commercial marketing strategies, it is considerably more complex and often more ambitious in its objectives. There are four main areas of difference between commercial marketing and social marketing. First, the purpose of social marketing is to benefit the individuals who are the target of the campaign or the general community, not the organisation responsible for the campaign. It focuses on the target audience, who have a primary role in the process (Kline Weinreich 1999, pp. 4 and 9).

Second, the changes in behaviour sought through social marketing are often far more ambitious than those sought through commercial marketing. Social marketers seek fundamental, long term behavioural change; commercial marketers usually aim to induce consumers to change brands or try a new product:

> *I* [illegible]

Despite the challenges, social marketing has been used (with some success) to encourage the adoption of environmentally friendly behaviours such as composting, recycling and conserving energy. It is also used in health policy. Box 1 presents three examples of social marketing strategies.

Box 1: Social marketing examples

Immunisation

In late 1997, the Commonwealth Government adopted the Immunise Australia Program. The program involved:

- improving immunisation practice and service delivery
- establishing a National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance
- introducing requirements for immunisation before commencement of school
- providing financial incentives to doctors, parents and guardians
- undertaking a national education campaign, and
- implementing a measles control campaign.

Following the campaign, the proportion of Australian children who were fully immunised increased from 76 per cent to 85 per cent. By 2001, the level of full immunisation was 91 per cent (Donovan & Henley 2003, pp. 334–40).

Energy conservation

The Pacific Gas and Electric Company in California offered homeowners free home inspections and advice on ways to make their dwellings more energy efficient. The advice was free and financing was available to make the recommended changes. Initially, the take-up of advice was low and the program was modified to incorporate two behavioural change techniques:

- The information provided was made more vivid and personal. Rather than simply identifying cracks under doors, ‘the auditor would compare the crack to a hole the size of a basketball’ (Aronson, p. 1).
- Auditors involved customers in the inspection, getting them to take measurements, or read meters, for example.

As a result of the enhanced program, 60 per cent of homeowners made changes to improve the energy efficiency of their houses. This was more than three times the national average (Aronson, p. 1).

Public transport use

A pilot program was introduced in the United States to increase the use of urban bus services. The most effective strategy involved:

- providing participants with information on routes and schedules, and
- obtaining an agreement from participants to ride the bus twice a week.

Free bus tickets increased the number of rides per individual, but obtaining a commitment was more effective in encouraging new passengers to take the bus (Bachman, pp. 1–2).

While there are many examples of social marketing strategies being used in the environmental and health fields, there are fewer instances where such approaches have been comprehensively applied to consumer issues. There appears to be scope, however, to increase the use of social marketing strategies in consumer affairs. Many consumer problems are similar to those in the environment and health fields:

- Consumers or traders need to make significant and lasting changes to overcome the identified problems.
- The provision of information alone is often ineffective in achieving change.
- The factors that inhibit change can be subtle and complex.
- There are significant barriers to change.

A key difference between the health and

“Why target consumer or trader behaviour?”

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The overall objective of consumer policy is to reduce detriment to consumers. When both the demand and supply sides of markets work well, they deliver good outcomes for consumers, but markets that fail result in behaviours by traders and/or consumers that lead to consumer detriment. Analysing the problems that result in consumer detriment requires a good understanding of the three levels shown in figure 1.[2]

Figure 1: Defining problems that affect consumers

Consumer detriment: Analyse the effect on consumers if the market is not delivering the expected economic and social outcomes.

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Problematic behaviour: Analyse the behaviours of traders, consumers and third parties that lead to consumer detriment.

↓

Causes of problematic behaviour: Identify these causes, which can be deficiencies in either the demand side or supply side of the market, resulting from market failure, regulatory failure or a failure to achieve other social policy objectives (for example, poverty or individual behaviour that is inconsistent with the community’s social or ethical standards).

Government action can target each of the three levels. The most effective tools are likely to be those that remove the causes of problematic behaviour, but such removal is not always possible. If it is not practicable to remove the causes of problematic behaviour, the policy could target the second part of the chain: that is, changing that behaviour. Then, if it is not viable to change behaviour, government could consider whether it should offset the impact of the consumer detriment.

Social marketing is a policy tool that can be used when the best policy response is to target behavioural change. It recognises the difficulties associated with true behavioural change and has a concrete focus on enabling that change and reducing the barriers to change.

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[2] The Consumer Affairs Victoria research paper **Information Provision and Education Strategies** discusses this framework in more detail.

While various disciplines advocate an information based approach to policy development, three key points distinguish the approach that is supported by social marketers from that used in most consumer affairs agencies.

First, social marketing advocates a full analysis of the problem regardless of the tools or method chosen to address the problem. In most Australian jurisdictions, formal requirements to analyse and justify policy responses are restricted, based on the regulatory instruments used to implement the policy. In Victoria, an agency is required to undertake a formal assessment (that is, prepare a business impact assessment or a regulatory impact statement) only where the agency is proposing to introduce or amend primary or subordinate legislation.[3] This does not mean that agencies do not undertake analysis in other situations, but the nature and extent of the analysis are not subject to any formal requirements or review processes.

Many of the policy responses advocated under social marketing do not involve regulation. Whether to undertake a full analysis of the nature and extent of problems, the behaviour of those involved and the range of possible solutions is thus decided at the discretion of the agency developing the policy response.

Second, existing processes require analysis of the problems that regulation is trying to resolve and the causes of those problems. These analyses usually describe the problem faced by consumers or traders and, in many cases, the market failures (such as asymmetries in access to information) that are likely to result in those problems. In the past, they have not attempted to undertake a comprehensive analysis of consumer and trader behaviour, or the benefits or barriers to behavioural change.

As noted in the preceding section, the best policy response does not always involve trying to influence behaviour directly. But those policies that do, could benefit from initial policy analysis involving greater understanding of behaviour.

Third, social marketing places considerable emphasis on trialling marketing strategies, continually monitoring and refining their effectiveness, and evaluating their performance against behavioural change indicators. The consumer policy field sometimes uses focus groups to test publications and often evaluates its programs, but the level of monitoring and continual refinement is less than that envisaged under social marketing (Andreasen 1995, pp. 91–96; McKenzie-Mohr & Smith 1999, pp. 126–30).

3.2 Current strategies used to achieve behavioural change

Consumer Affairs Victoria already uses innovative tools that target behavioural change (Box 3). Many of these tools are consistent with social marketing principles. It may be possible, however, to improve the effectiveness of consumer policy by better targeting and increasingly using these strategies, and improving the understanding of behaviours that need to be changed.

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[3] Primary legislation comprises Acts of Parliament. Subordinate legislation comprises mostly the Regulations attached to Acts.

Working directly with Indigenous communities

Consumer Affairs Victoria's Indigenous Consumers Unit works directly with communities to help educate consumers about their rights and responsibilities:

> [illegible] (CAV 2004, p. 43)

on mer St ff Challenge competition

This competition invites secondary students to create information messages for young people to improve their understanding of a consumer or financial issue.

These conclusions are reinforced by research in fields such as psychology, sociology, marketing and behavioural economics, which all note that people faced with complex decisions will not necessarily consider all of the information available to them, or respond to that information by changing their behaviour (Box 4).

Box 5: Examples of the use of commitment techniques

Recycling

Randomly selected residents in New Zealand were asked to participate in a curbside recycling trial. Before the trial, they received a letter that explained the trial, a telephone number for more information, a recycling bin and a curbside recycling kit. The kit included a bumper sticker and a mailbox sticker. There were three groups of participants. The first group was given the bins and the recycling kit. The second group was given the bins and the recycling kit, and asked for a verbal commitment. The third group was given the bins and the recycling kit, asked for a verbal commitment and asked to mail $8.00 to pay for their bins.

While there was no significant difference in recycling behaviour between those who paid for their bins and those who did not, the two verbal commitment groups recycled considerably more than did the control group (who were not asked for a verbal commitment) (Bryce).

Medical treatment

In an experiment on the effect of verbal commitment in medical treatment, parents of children with inner ear infection were asked to promise to give their children all the prescribed medication. Self-reports at follow-up visits indicated that obtaining a verbal commitment significantly increased the likelihood of all medication being administered and improved the children's recovery rates (Kulik & Carlino 1987).

Volunteering

Residents of Bloomington, Indiana, were asked by phone whether they would consider, hypothetically, working three hours as volunteers to collect money for the American Cancer Society. When a different caller contacted these individuals three days later, they were far more likely to volunteer than were another group of residents who had not been asked the initial question (31 per cent versus 4 per cent respectively) (McKenzie & Smith 1999, p. 47).

In previous social marketing campaigns, obtaining commitment has involved strategies such as:

- displaying signs or stickers that say the person is involved in recycling or water saving
- obtaining verbal commitments, for example not to litter, or to exercise
- publishing the names of people who install energy saving devices, and
- having people sign a pledge to quit smoking.

Prompts

Even when people intend to engage in a particular activity, habit or a busy lifestyle may mean they forget. Consumers may forget to read products' warning or ingredients labels, for example, even after deciding they should check this information before they buy or use products.

Prompts can thus be important memory joggers, but they work only when the consumer or trader is already committed to the behaviour. Prompts work best, therefore, when combined with other behavioural change strategies:

> [illegible] (Bloch et al. 1993, p. 28)

Prompts can be signs or stickers located near the targeted behaviour – for example, a sign on a light switch to remind people to turn it off, or next to a product that has special safety features. They may also be verbal – for example, a clinic nurse or shop assistant reminding consumers about action they need to take in relation to the product or service they are purchasing.

Norms

People often look at the behaviours of others when considering how they will behave. They do things because others believe it is the right thing to do and because the behaviour is consistent with that of their peers. Psychological experiments have illustrated the impact that others can have on decision making. One of the most renowned is an experiment on social conformity conducted by Solomon Asch in 1958 (Box 6).

Source: McKenzie-Mohr & Smith 1999, pp. 9.9–9.10.

The impact of norms means social marketing can influence behaviour by changing or emphasising community norms. In curbside recycling, for example, distinctive bins are used for the collection. As the number of people putting out recycling bins increases, others are more likely to follow as they see the increasing number of bins and are influenced by a perception that recycling is the appropriate thing to do. Strategies that influence norms include those that make desirable behaviours more obvious, prompt people to display stickers to show involvement in the activity, use demonstration projects to illustrate what others are doing, get members of the community to discuss their involvement, and advertise the proportion of the community undertaking the activity.

Communication

While the advocates of social marketing are critical of behavioural change strategies that focus too heavily on communication (particularly mass communication), they still recognise the importance of communication in a broader, multifaceted strategy. Social marketers, therefore, combine communication with other tools and look closely at the type of communication used and the way in which messages are presented and delivered.

Good communication in a social marketing strategy has many of the characteristics of good communication more broadly. The US Department of

Incentives

Behavioural change can be encouraged using incentives to promote the desirable behaviours and deterrents to discourage unwanted behaviours. Incentives and deterrents can be financial and non-f

3.5 A multifaceted approach

Social marketing is multifaceted in two ways:

1. A range of tools is used simultaneously to encourage behavioural change.
2. Often, multiple organisations are involved in implementing the strategy.

Given the complexity of the behaviours that social marketing campaigns seek to change, and the range of influences that affect consumers' decisions to change their behaviour, policies that rely on a single behavioural change tool are unlikely to be successful. Appendix 1 summarises Andreasen and Robinson's views on the preconditions for behavioural change. No one policy tool can ensure all these preconditions are met:

> [illegible]
>
> (Monroe 2003, p. 118)

Similarly, given the complexity of behavioural change and the resources available to individual agencies, social marketing strategies often benefit from cooperation by organisations:

> [illegible]
>
> (Kline Weinreich 1999, p. 17)

Government agencies, in particular, can benefit from working with community groups to increase agencies' understanding of the real barriers to, and benefits of, behavioural change. In addition, messages delivered through community or business groups are more likely to be concrete and personal, and so more likely to influence consumers (see the above discussion on communication). The US Department of Health and Human Services listed the following benefits of developing strategies in partnership with other organisations:

- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]

(US Department of Health and Human Services, pp. 35–6)

“Using social marketing in consumer policy”

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As noted, Consumer Affairs Victoria already adopts strategies to influence consumers and traders to behave in ways that reduce the risk of consumer detriment improve business practices. It is continually expanding the policy tools used, improving its approach, changing delivery techniques and using long term skills development, as well as simply providing information. But even this effort is insufficient in some circumstances. Other approaches may be necessary to replace or augment existing strategies, which is where social marketing is potentially relevant.

Like all policy tools, social marketing is not a panacea for all consumer policy problems, and the costs of adopting any social marketing strategy need to be weighed against its benefits:

> [illegible]
>
> (Kline Weinreich 1999, p. 4)

But for those problems where behavioural change is necessary, social marketing can provide useful insights into ways of improving policy effectiveness. The process of identifying when to use social marketing should recognise the following:

- The detail in the analysis that underpins social marketing means this approach is best suited to problems that are generating significant costs, and where it is possible to identify specific behaviours that need to change.
- Social marketing involves identifying and engaging with individuals or communities of individuals. It is practicable for Victoria to use social marketing strategies to target only groups that it can identify and communicate with. This criterion would exclude overseas traders, for example.
- Social marketing works only when it is possible to influence people to want to change. Where there is strong opposition to change (among rogue traders, for example), strategies aimed at achieving voluntary change would be ineffective.
- In some cases, it is impossible to remove the key barriers to behavioural change. Social marketing strategies are likely to be ineffective in these cases.
- Social marketing is a long term strategy, because behavioural change takes time to initiate and become embed into people’s routine.

Thus, social marketing is most suited to changing consumer and trader behaviour in situations that meet the characteristics in Box 7.

Box 7: Problems suited to social marketing strategies

Social marketing is best suited to problems where:

- it is necessary to change behaviour or improve business practices to reduce consumer detriment
- the consumer detriment is considerable
- behaviours and people’s motivations can be identified and analysed
- it is possible to identify and target traders, individuals or communities of individuals and convince them of the desirability of change, and
- it is possible to identify and remove the key barriers to change.

A key benefit of a successful social marketing campaign is that consumer detriment is often reduced as a result of voluntary changes among consumers or traders. This reduces the need for more explicit regulation.

While social marketing has much in common with conventional consumer policy approaches, there are key differences in the process for developing and implementing the strategy, and in the policy tools considered (Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison of social marketing and traditional policy approaches

Social marketing	Traditional consumer policy responses
Policy development is preceded by a comprehensive review of the problem, behaviours in the market and the benefits of, and barriers to, behavioural change.	Policy development is not always preceded by an assessment of the problem and the possible policy responses. Often, this assessment does not focus on factors that affect behavioural change.
Strategies are trialled, continually monitored and evaluated for their impact on behaviour.	Monitoring and evaluation of programs usually focus on awareness raising and changing attitudes, not behavioural change.
Where possible, cooperative approaches among government and non-government agencies are used.	Cooperative approaches are less common.
The audience is segmented and tools are tailored to segments.	The tools are often higher level and the approach is usually less disaggregated.
Tools focus on factors known to change behaviour: generating commitment, using prompts, changing norms, using effective communication, using incentives and penalties, and increasing convenience. They seek to remove external barriers to behavioural change.	Tools focus less on behavioural change and often more on providing information. The ways of making information accessible and delivering it are becoming more sophisticated.

Consumer policy often tries to reduce the risk of consumer detriment by informing consumers and traders about the benefit of changing their behaviour or by making it easier for consumers to access the information they need to inform their choices – for example:

- Fact sheets are produced to warn consumers not to buy unsafe products or inform consumers about how to safely use potentially dangerous products.
- Media releases, website information and publications are used to inform consumers about scams so they can identify and avoid them.
- Conferences are held to inform traders about changes to regulation.
- Guides are published on building and renovating, buying and selling property, buying cars and renting homes to encourage people to comply with their legal obligations and to empower them to protect their interests.

Consumer information and education strategies are similar to strategies that have been used for other social policy, such as those encouraging people to protect the environment or change their lifestyle to improve their health. Social marketing too is now used in environment and health policy, for example, following a recognition that information does not automatically lead to behavioural change:

> [illegible]
>
> - [illegible]
> - [illegible]
>
> [illegible]
>
> (US Department of Health and Human Services undated, pp. 21–2)

The assumption that information and education strategies encourage people to act differently is based on two theories of behavioural change: the attitude model and the rational economic model (see Costanzo et al. 1986, p. 521; CISE Task Force 2001, p. 3). The attitude model assumes that increased awareness changes people's attitudes and that an attitude shift in favour of an activity would be followed by a change in behaviour. The rational economic model assumes that people use information to inform their actions if the information is available and if the benefits of using it are greater than the costs of using it. This model holds that providing more accessible and understandable information would lead more consumers to use that information in their decision making.

Both models are inadequate, however, because they cannot fully explain what is observed about

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> [illegible] (Yates & Aronson 1983, p. 436)

These problems arise as a result of two deficiencies in the two models. First, simply providing information does not necessarily mean consumers will use it. As discussed in the Consumer Affairs Victoria research paper *I* [illegible], people faced with complex information often use proxies or shortcuts to deal with an inadequate ability to incorporate all the relevant information in their decisions. They rely on a simplified set of principles to make complex judgements. But the chosen shortcut could lead consumers to choose products or services that do not meet their expectations. Also, shortcuts in decision making may be so ingrained that consumers do not realise they are not identifying the right product for them. In these circumstances, simply providing information may have little effect on consumers' actions unless that provision is accompanied by a strategy to convince people of the relevance and importance of the information.

Yates and Aronson supported this view:

> [illegible]
> (Yates & Aronson 1983, p. 439)

People may also ignore information if they do not know they need to change their behaviour, perhaps because they think that their current behaviour is not a problem or is only a problem for other people, or that the new behaviour is inconsistent with their basic values (such as religious beliefs) (Andreasen 1995, p. 199).

Second, even if people read, understand and remember the information and agree that behavioural change is desirable, there may be other barriers to making that change (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith 1999, p. 11). Social marketing recognises that generating sustained behavioural change is more complex:

> [illegible]

Andreasen divided contemplation into two phases: early and late contemplation. He argued that social marketers should concentrate on highlighting benefits at the early stages of contemplation, because people will not consider a new behaviour further if they do not perceive it as beneficial. During the later stage, it is more important to help people overcome barriers and resistance to change. This effort could include reducing the perceived costs of change and harnessing social pressure to encourage change (Andreasen 1995, p. 168).

- – For people to move from considering a behaviour to undertaking that behaviour they must believe that the actions needed to make the change are within their power and skills, and are not constrained by external factors. External constraints might include the unavailability of necessary products or services, or a lack of cooperation from others. Social marketing tools include providing people with skills and knowledge on how to make the change, and reducing either external constraints (if real constraints are a problem) or the perception of external constraints (if this perception is unfounded) (Andreasen 1995, pp. 161–3).
- – In most cases, social marketing seeks to permanently change behaviour. Sometimes, consumers or traders trial a new behaviour but later revert to their original behaviour. The challenge is to get consumers and traders to commit to long term change. Social marketing can help reinforce consumers’ and traders’ beliefed by externb hoT(*un/QGSl616 -1en a probT5GS2 c/it ai14elong)6- S 6m g came r the actir original
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