Journal of

Social Marketing

Why nudging is not enough

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Journal of Social Marketing, Vol. 1 No. 2, 2011,
© Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2042-6763

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at
www.emeraldinsight.com/2042-6763.htm

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to review the possible contribution of "nudging" as a tactic and "form" of exchange and suggest two new frameworks to aid in the description of four "forms" of exchange and "types" of intervention that can be used in social marketing.

Design/methodology/approach – Discursive review of the contemporary impact of liberal paternalistic thinking on policy and operational delivery of social change programmes. The paper also considers the tensions within social marketing regarding voluntary and involuntary change including the use of incentives and disincentives in social change programmes and presents a model that seeks to describe the range of options available.

Findings – It is concluded that in addition to restricted, generalised and complex exchanges, as defined by Bagozzi there are basically four basic "forms" of exchange that can be used by governments and public institutions who apply a marketing approach to brining about positive social change. These "forms" of exchange includes "nudging" but also other legitimate "forms" of exchange that can be called "shoving", " hugging" and "smacking". It is further suggested that together with these four "forms" of exchange there are five basic "types" of intervention that can be used to bring about change, these two elements can all be brought together in a proposed intervention matrix. The paper makes the case that a key advantage of adopting a marketing mind-set (i.e. one that is driven by consumer-centric thinking and based on the creation of value) in the selection of "forms" of exchange and "types" of intervention is that the selected mix will be much more likely to bring about the socially desired change because it is informed by the preferences and consent of the majority of citizens.

Research limitations/implications – This paper does not explicitly address the nature of social marketing. A position is taken that social marketing is what Gallie has defined as an "essentially contested concept " and what Peters would term a "field of study". This means that social marketing will by its nature just like many other fields of endeavour be subject to continuous debate and development. Consequently, in adopting this position, the paper tacitly accepts a broad and inclusive definition of social marketing. The proposed exchange matrix and intervention matrix, together with the deCIDES framework outlined in the paper need to be tested to discover if these models have utility in being able to accommodate existing social marketing practice and inform the selection of future social marketing programmes.

Social implications – If the models set out in this paper prove to have descriptive utility, they may prove to be a useful additional conceptual and practical planning tool for those involved in applying marketing interventions directed at social issues at the policy, strategy, tactical and operational levels of practice.

Originality/value – This paper sets out three conceptual models, two of which have not been published before. The models and the accompanying commentary will add to the debate about the scope of what legitimately constitutes the "operational territory" of social marketing both in terms of up- and down-stream activity and interventions that span both voluntary and involuntary change.

Keywords Nudge, Hug, Shove, Smack, Education, Information, Support, Design, Control, Policy, Strategy, Information exchange

Paper type Viewpoint

Journal of Social Marketing
Vol. 1 No. 2, 2011
pp. 154-162
© Emerald Group Publishing Limited
2042-6763
DOI 10.1108/20426761111141896

A vast canvas

As Sharyn Rundle-Thiele and Andrew McAuley (2011) in the inaugural edition of the *Social Marketing Journal* remarked social marketing faces unique challenges. By its very nature, social marketing is concerned with addressing social challenges that have

collectively been defined to require social effort to bring about measurable change or to maintain certain types of behaviour. The potential canvas of this work is clearly vast; health, environment, crime, parenting, social responsibility, civic engagement, etc. Given this scope, there is clearly a need to map and understand what social marketing's contribution is and how it contributes to other forms of intervention directed as bringing about social good. Two further questions are addressed by this paper: how can marketing add value to the possible broad range of interventions that will be necessary to tackle contemporary social issues? What kinds of interventions can be reasonably described as being part of a social marketing approach?

Social marketing is a rapidly developing field in terms of both its practice and its theoretical base. For example, Hoek and Jones (2011) have recently argued in this journal that there is a need for both up- and down-stream action on many social issues. Donovan (2011) has argued that contrary to Andreasen's (1995) view there is a need to embrace social marketing strategies that are not always grounded in voluntary change. Donovan has also challenged Rothschild(1999) view that marketing efforts should be clearly delineated from education and regulation as methods for achieving desired social change or maintenance. These contributions and many others indicate that there is a lively debate about how to intervene and what kinds of intervention constitute elements of social marketing. The position taken in this paper is that social marketing, like many kinds of dynamic social endeavour, is necessarily accompanied by a lively and on-going debate about its theoretical and practical base, and what should or should not be included within its purview. In this respect, social marketing is just like many other kinds of social endeavour. Social marketing is neither an exact science or set of exclusively definable elements, what Peters (1973) would call and "field" of study rather than a form of study like physics. Social marketing is also what Gallie (1956) would describe as an "essentially contested concept". This means that the debate will not reach a fixed and final resolution but will necessarily continue, and thorough this process social marketing will develop and reflect changing circumstances.

However, authors increasingly agree that social marketing has a number of key principles and concepts and that it is an approach that can be used to shape both operational campaign or programme delivery as well as policy development. Social marketing is also widely accepted to be a systematic planning and delivery methodology, drawing on techniques developed in the commercial sector but also drawing on experience from the public and not-for-profit sectors about how to achieve and sustain positive behaviours and how to construct, deliver and evaluate effective programmes of action. By the very nature of its focus, helping to influence behaviour for social good, social marketing needs to be a multi-disciplinary, trans-theoretical field of study and practical endeavour, just like marketing. So, rather than seek to set out a definitive set of principles or find the exact and perfect definition of social marketing, this paper concentrates more on mapping some of its areas of concern, i.e. the role of rational and non-rational choice and the place of rewards and penalties in creating exchanges together with "types of intervention that are available to social marketers".

Creating value for citizens by listening to their preferences

Most commentators agree that the citizen-centric planning and the creation of value via an exchange sit's at the heart of the social marketing. Exchanges can be what Bagozzi (1975) calls restricted, generalised and complex involving one-to-one or multiple

actors and simple transactions or ones involving multiple kinds of transactions. A key factor in developing a powerful exchange proposition is the process of ensuring that what is offered is something that is valued by the target audience. This offer can have both tangible and intangible benefits and according to Vargo and Lusch (2004) increasingly it is in the field of intangible benefits and resources, together with the value that comes from the co-creation of value, and relationship building that is a powerful driver for change.

Additionally, sometimes exchanges are positive, i.e. people get a physical, social or psychological reward or benefit, sometimes exchanges can be negative, i.e. people will face a penalty, social disapproval or some other form of negative consequence if they continue to adopt a particular behaviour or fail to comply with a behaviour that is being promoted. A further feature of exchange is that in some choice situations some exchanges are "passive", i.e. they require little cognitive engagement whilst in other situations some choices involve "active" cognitive engagement and decision making.

The concept of "nudging" has recently emerged from the field of behavioural economics and represents a form of exchange that requires little cognitive engagement, i.e. it is passive and seeks to deliver a positive or only small or avoidable negative consequence if not responded to. The term "behavioural economics" is used to encapsulate this approach but in reality, thinking in this field draws on a mixture of social psychology, sociology, design and communication science as well as economics. Nudging is seen by some as a new approach to social transformation based on a philosophy labelled "liberal paternalism" popularised by Thaler and Sunstein in their best-selling book 2008 book called *Nudge*. A central tenet of their position is that many large behavioural challenges faced by society stem from a combination of personal preference or choice, and a mix of environmental, cultural and economic factors. They further argue that there is now a growing body of evidence from many disciplines that people do not always act in an economically logical/rational way, e.g. we do not always act in a way designed to maximise our own advantage or take full account of all the information at their disposal when making decisions.

Those who support the "nudging" concept maintain that most people, most of the time, do not dispassionately analyse their behavioural decisions, rather many decisions are processed by what Thaler and Sunstein (2008) call the "automatic" mental system, in a process that they term "mindless choosing". Influencing this mindless choosing is the focus of nudging tactics aimed at creating social good.

In addition to the power of designing choice environments that recognise the power of "mindless choosing", Thaler and Sunstein (2008) review a number of findings from a broad scope of scientific and economic literature to set out a set of concepts that can guide people with the responsibility for designing choice situations. These "choice architects" can use concepts such as; social proof, discounting, overconfidence, the power of loss, representation, framing, the power of temptation, anchoring, etc. to craft successful "nudges". Clearly, many of these concepts are not new and many of them are the stuff of every day commercial sector marketing and public sector marketing and have been for many years. However, nudging has caught the imagination of many policy makers as they see it as a form of social intervention that is in keeping with a more citizen-directed approach to social policy and one that represents a more facilitatory role for government rather than a nannying or authoritarian approach characterised

by the use of laws and promotional campaigns aimed at hectoring or forcing people into change.

Nudging is still a paternalistic approach in that the people who are designing interventions are still experts rather than citizens. A further problem is that often this kind of liberal paternalism is focused not on tackling the determinants of issues such as obesity, or crime. Rather, the focus is on incentivising positive choices by creating the conditions, social pressure, systems or environments in which people want to make a choices for their own benefit, or have to make little effort to "choose" a personally and social desirable course of action. "Choice architecture" is the process of designing systems and services in such a way that the "good" choice is the easy and rewarding one and it does not take much effort to make.

This kind of approach locates responsibility for actions with individuals but also with providers of public services, NGOS's and private organisations, to create the choice architecture that will nudge people in the "right" direction. Thaler and Sunstein's (2008)concept of "nudging" people into different behaviours encompasses interventions that are: "easy and cheap to avoid. Nudges are not mandates. Putting fruit at eye level counts as a nudge. Banning junk food does not".

Libertarian paternalism, the philosophy that guides the nudging approach as advocated by Thaler and Sunstein (2008), seeks a middle ground between a state-dominated, paternalistic, coercive approach to creating social change and a more liberal approach that emphasises free choice and the power of the markets as key drivers for change (Sunstein and Thaler, 2003). Nudges can be characterised as:

- positive, i.e. they give positive rewards or only minor penalties;
- they are voluntary;
- they are avoidable;
- they are passive/easy, i.e. require little effort and work on mindless choosing; and
- they are low cost, to both the person targeted and to the government or organisation utilising them (consequently, they are highly cost-effective).

However, nudges are top down, they are designed by "choice architects" not by the people themselves, they are directive, and they are controlling. It is also clear that in many circumstances nudging people into better health or away from criminality will seldom be enough to result in population level improvements because in many situations, evidence and experience make it clear that there is a need for other forms of intervention that address the causes of these problems. Nudges can be seen as a helpful part of the solution but not a magic bullet.

Liberal paternalism and the modern state

Around the world, many governments are setting out new approaches to public service delivery that emphasises the power of civic society to tackle the big social challenges rather than a focusing on just the direct action of what governments and departments of state can deliver. These developments are also being driven in many parts of the world by a reassessment in the wake of the recent economic downturn of developing more cost-effective and sustainable forms of social intervention. This approach is placing more emphasis on the need to:

- realign many of the current social programmes so that they reflect the contribution of citizens, NGO's the private sector as well as government action in response to social challenges;
- develop supportive and encouraging approaches to social change rather than coercive forms of intervention;
- develop approaches that maximise both choice and responsibility among citizens;
- develop more targeted and segmented interventions aimed at specific groups for example developing special programmes for assisting the very poor; and
- develop approaches that demonstrate savings and value for money.

Why we need more than nudges

Nudging is an approach to policy development and tactical implementation is being actively considered by many governments around the world. However, rather than adopt a position that positive rewards and mindless choosing are the default intervention mode, marketers would argue that the "form"[1] of intervention should be driven by customer insight alongside evidence from past experience about what works. We know that positive rewards will not work in all situations and that reflection and judgement is also often needed when making many complex decisions to change (Grist, 2010). The crux of the matter is to discern, based on citizen insight, and evidence, what "form" of exchange will work in which situation, with which specific target audience.

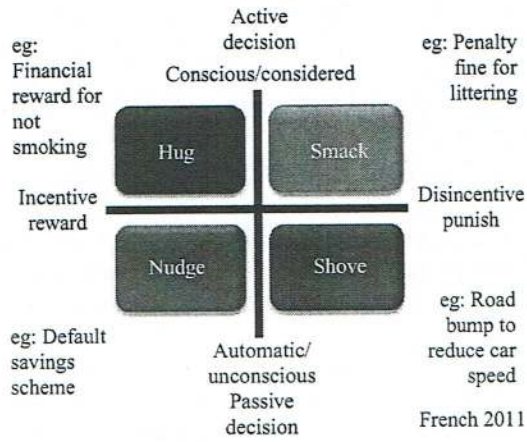
As stated above, some exchanges are positive, i.e. the target audience will get a physical, social or psychological reward or benefit, and some are negative, i.e. people will face a penalty if they continue to adopt a socially and individually harmful behaviour, however even these exchanges are designed to have a net positive social effect, fining individuals for driving too fast reduces the overall impact of road deaths on society as a whole as well as saving individual lives. A key factor is to ensure whatever is offered is based on something that is valued positively or seen as a meaningful deterrent or cost by the specific target audience. For example, imposing a penalty fine that is set at a rate that the audience does not consider high enough or when they believe that there is little chance of being caught, will probably not bring about change.

In addition, some exchanges are "active" and some are "passive". Nudges are ideally passive exchanges. An active exchange is one where people engage in a rational assessment of the exchange, weighing up the pros and cons of the benefits and costs. This process has the added benefit of developing critical judgement capacity and in so doing can assist in many other life choice situations. A passive exchange is one where people make a decision to act based on more intuitive responses, such as environmental prompts, or by accepting a default option such as being part of a scheme unless they actively opt out.

Figure 1 shows "exchange matrix is a way to represent four 'forms' of exchange that can be offered".

The exchange matrix

The exchange matrix is a conceptual device to represent four different "forms" of exchange that can be designed to promote change in individuals and groups. The assumption is that whilst "nudges" can be effective in promoting some behaviours



Note: Four forms of exchange

Figure 1.
Exchange matrix

in some situations they do not represent a full toolbox. As well as nudges, governments and other organisations can also use: shoves, hugs and smacks. Most successful social interventions will use a combination of all four. It should also be noted that the four "forms" are not absolutely distinct categories rather they represent more of a continuum of options. The matrix is constructed using two axes, the first: active and passive choosing, and the second: positive and negative rewarding or penalising.

The selection of which "form" of exchange or combination of them should always be driven by evidence of effectiveness and target audience insight. Whichever combination is selected, there will be an on-going need to evaluate the impact they are having in terms of behaviour change and how they are perceived by the intended target audiences if the impact is to be sustained.

The exchange matrix is ideologically neutral, it depends on input from experts and target audiences to define the nature of rewards or penalties. These in most countries will be developed through existing legal and representative systems of public engagement for example the level of fines that might be applied to penalise driving too fast will be informed by due legal and economic considerations. The matrix indicates the importance of "mindful choosing" as well as "mindless choosing" as being an important option for tackling some behavioural challenges and as a mechanism for a many long-term social attitudinal and behavioural change programmes.

The exchange matrix can be used to map a variety of "forms" of intervention it can also be used as a device to communicate the range of interventions deployed in a project or programme as a model to help review the comprehensiveness of social programmes.

Whilst the exchange matrix can help to describe the variety of "forms" of exchange that can be used as part of social marketing programmes or other kinds of social intervention it is not intended to represent the full range of "types"[2] of intervention that can be employed by organisations wishing to bring about social good. A key principle of social marketing is to apply tailored evidence and insight informed mix of intervention to bring about the desired behavioural goal. In most cases, a single intervention is less likely to be effective than multi-component interventions. For example, just "informing"

someone of something may have some limited effect, but if this is combined with practical support and a chance to critically consider it with guidance (education) it is more likely to be effective. A key task in social marketing then, is to establish the right mix of interventions given the available resources and time.

The de-CIDEDS framework (French and Blair-Stevens, 2010) sets out five "types" of intervention that can be used to encourage and foster social good (Table I).

If the exchange matrix is combined with the de-CIDEDS framework it is possible to construct an intervention matrix that combines "forms" and "types" of intervention that is capable of representing the vast majority of possibilities available to governments and public organisations when they are developing social interventions (Figure 2).

Those who seek to apply marketing principles to assist with social issues could or may be able to use this intervention matrix to reflect on and analyse the range of intervention types and forms of exchange they might develop to achieve their goals. The matrix also has descriptive utility in that it may be used to describe the range of forms and types of intervention that may be necessary in any programme. As stated above, those who use a marketing approach can also help inform and shape broader social interventions that may use a combination of forms and types of intervention by ensuring that the form of exchange and type of interventions that are selected are based on user understanding and insight.

Table I.
The de-CIDEDS framework

The five de-CIDEDS intervention domains	
Inform/communicate	Inform/communicate/prompt/trigger/remind/reinforce/awareness/explain
Educate/engage	Enable/engage/train/skill development/inspire/encourage/motivate
Support/service	Service provision/practically assist/promote access/social networking/Social mobilisation
Design/context	Alter: physical, product, social, organisational, systems, and technology
Control/regulate	Control/rules/require/constrain/restrict/police/enforce/regulate/legislate/incentivise

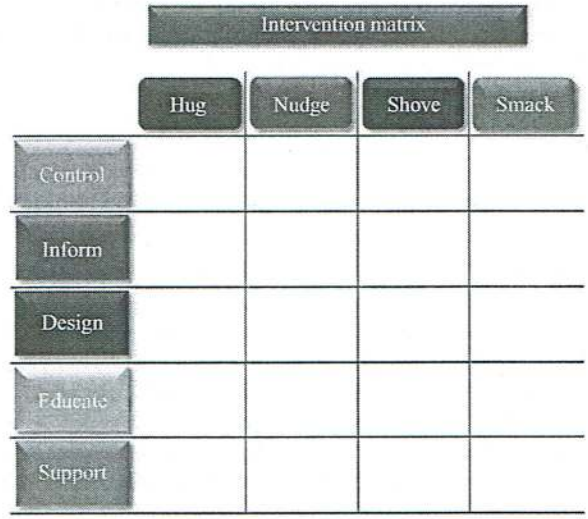


Figure 2.
Intervention matrix

Conclusions

This paper has not attempted to set out definitive statements about what social marketing is or is not, not because this debate is without real value rather because that it is recognised that this debate will never be concluded. This paper instead, has sought to set out some possible conceptual tools that may add some further understanding about the nature of exchange and how it might be applied alongside five main types of intervention open to governments and other organisations who wish to bring about social change. The link between forms of exchange and the selection of types of intervention when adopting a marketing orientation to the solution to a social issue has been also been discussed. It has been suggested that marketing in the social sphere, i.e. "social marketing" has a great deal to offer in the selection and development of both Forms of exchange and how they are delivered.

One final point is that on an on-going basis there should clearly be a focus on the effectiveness of interventions regardless of what mix is implemented. This will provide not only insight into effectiveness that can be fed into future programme planning but also value for money and cost-effectiveness information that can help determine the most effective investment patterns for the future. This will, over time, provide the information necessary to ensure that the most efficient and effective combination of approaches can be put on place and that ineffective and more costly forms of intervention are weeded out. It is not enough that nudges, smacks, shoves or hugs work; there is also a need to demonstrate that they are good value for money.

Notes

1. The word "form" in this context means the extent to which an exchange is framed as a rewards or punishments to motivate compliance and create social value, or uses cost to the citizen and the extent to which it requires the active cognitive engagement of citizens in a choice situation or not.
2. The word "type" of intervention is used in this context to mean different approaches that governments and public sector institutions can use to bring about social change or maintaining social benefits. The five types of intervention open to these organisations are considered to be: education, support services provision, design interventions, information provision and control systems including the law.

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ISSN 2042-6763
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