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Do Initiators Matter in Social Marketing?
Understanding Characteristics and Particularities of Social Marketing Campaigns Initiated by Different Agents

Aleksandra Lisinska
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Abstract

This research paper explores the concept of social marketing by discussing different definitions and characteristics of the term, and by investigating the influence of initiators on social marketing campaigns. The aim of this paper is to answer the question of whether or not the initiators matter in social marketing. In order to answer this question, an extensive literature review was conducted to gain a general understanding of the issues at hand. Furthermore, six case studies were analyzed to illustrate differences and similarities between campaigns initiated by different types of organizations, as well as to identify specificities of each initiator group. Three major initiator groups were identified: (1) government or public sector agencies, (2) non-profit organizations, and (3) private sector entities. The analysis of case studies revealed that while social marketing campaigns initiated by different agents have some commonalities, there are three main differences. First, for-profit business organizations tend to focus on issues that directly link to their area of operations, are popular and attractive, and have potential to benefit the company itself. Second, social marketing campaigns initiated by public sector agencies focus on issues significantly influencing the quality of life of the citizens. The attractiveness of an issue or potential profit for a governmental agency is negligible. Finally, non-profit organizations address issues around their mission and scope of operations. Based on these findings, it has been concluded that initiators do matter in social marketing. Nevertheless, due to considerable limitations of this research, the paper does not answer the question entirely. Therefore, further study is required in order to fully understand the effects and implications of social marketing being initiated by different agents.

Keywords: social marketing, campaign, initiators, marketing mix, marketing campaign, qualitative research
Introduction

Societies all over the globe face an increasing number of challenges. In such environments, effective resolutions of social problems have become an important subject of analysis of experts and practitioners. Increasingly, a marketing approach is used to tackle these issues. Aiming at changing public behaviors and attitudes towards a specific cause, social campaigns have been an important tool for fighting alcohol and drug abuse, drunk driving, poor nutrition, or teen pregnancy, and others. The idea of the use of a marketing approach for solving social problems was initiated in 1971, when the article by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman titled “Social Marketing: An Approach is Planned Social Change” first appeared in one of the most prestigious American marketing magazines. The authors claimed that marketing techniques used by businesses might also be successfully applied in the public sector to counteract negative social phenomena (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). Since the year of this publication, the dynamic development of social marketing has taken off.

Social marketing may be understood as the application of commercial marketing principles and techniques in order to influence the target group in such a way that it voluntarily accepts, rejects or modifies certain behaviors in favor of individuals, groups, or the whole society (Lee & Kotler, 2015). Social marketing can involve various actors such as public sector agencies, non-profit organizations, or businesses. It is believed that as long as these entities work within the scope of social marketing and aim at promoting ideas that serve the common good, their range of actions are similar.

The aim of this paper is to look deeper into the idea of social marketing by discussing the evolution of concept and its role in social change, as well as investigating the influence of initiators on social marketing campaigns. In particular, this research paper intends to examine the question of whether or not organizations that initiate the social marketing efforts can influence the character, structure, and outcomes of social marketing campaigns. In order to answer this question, an extensive literature review is conducted to gain a general understanding of definitions, characteristics, and types of initiators of social marketing. Additionally, six case studies are analyzed. Then, a conclusion is drawn concerning the research question in this paper: Do initiators matter in social marketing?
The motivation for writing this paper refers to the fact that there is a disappointingly small amount of literature explaining the initiators’ influence on social marketing campaigns. The vast majority of research articles do not address this issue. Similarly, literature concerning a typology of social marketing in terms of initiators is scarce. Therefore, this research paper intends to diminish the research gap and offers a first step to understanding how initiators groups shape their social marketing campaigns.

**Literature Review**

**Setting the context: Overview of definitions**

Economic, political, social, and cultural changes have raised the interest of scholars in the social functions of marketing. The first research devoted to the phenomenon of social marketing was published in the 1960s. It was a summary of the author’s practical experience gained through the implementation of marketing principles in family planning social programs (Simon, 1968). Nevertheless, the first proper definition of social marketing emerged three years later in an article published by Kotler and Zaltman (1971), under the title of “Social Marketing: An Approach to Planned Social Change”. By analyzing the operations of non-entrepreneurial organizations, these authors observed that these entities serve the interests of certain groups, and by offering specific services, they engage, more or less consciously, in marketing activities. Since then, most of the studies devoted to the issue of social marketing have emphasized the importance of Kotler and Zaltman’s article as providing the theoretical basis of the concept.

It seems, however, that the concept of social marketing is also heavily based on the article “Broadening the Concept of Marketing” written by Kotler and Lavy in 1969, as well as the so-called “generic concept of marketing” presented by Kotler in the article under same title (Kotler, 1972). As observed by Elliott (1991), the emergence of social marketing was, at the theoretical level, primarily a logical consequence of the pursuit of broadening the marketing discipline (Elliott, 1991).

The extensive literature in the field of social marketing allows for a fairly precise understanding and definition of what social marketing is and means. The most commonly used definition of the term is the one proposed by P. Kotler and G. Zaltman in 1971. According to this definition,
social marketing is, “the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research “(Kotler & Zaltman, 1971, p. 5). However, many other prominent scientists have also attempted to define the notion of social marketing. Table 1 presents several definitions of social marketing given by various authors.
Table 1.
A selective overview of social marketing definitions, 1971-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s) and year</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kotler and Zaltman, 1971</td>
<td>“Social marketing is the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research.” (Kotler &amp; Zaltman, 1971, p.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangun and Karim, 1991</td>
<td>Social marketing “involves: (a) changing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals or organizations for a social benefit, and (b) the social change is the primary (rather than secondary) purpose of the campaign.” (Rangun &amp; Karim, 1991, p. 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andreasen, 1994</td>
<td>“Social marketing is the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of the society of which they are a part.” (Andreasen, 1994, p. 110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotler, Roberto, and Lee, 2002</td>
<td>“Social marketing is the use of marketing principles and techniques to influence a target audience to voluntarily accept, reject, modify or abandon a behavior for the benefit of individuals, groups or society as a whole.” (Kotler, Roberto, &amp; Lee, 2002, p. 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siegel and Lotenberg, 2007</td>
<td>“Application of commercial marketing principles to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs designed to directly influence the voluntary behavior of individuals or the environments in which those behaviors occur in order to improve personal and societal welfare.” (Siegel &amp; Lotenberg, 2007, p.562)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotler and Lee, 2008</td>
<td>Social marketing is “process that applies marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate, and deliver value in order to influence target audience behaviors that benefit society (public health, safety, the environment and communities) as well as the target audience” (Kotler &amp; Lee, 2008, p. 7-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dann, 2010</td>
<td>“The adaptation and adoption of commercial marketing activities, institutions and processes as a means to induce behavioral change in a targeted audience on a temporary or permanent basis to achieve a social goal.” (Dann, 2010, p. 151)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The differences in definitions result from the diverse backgrounds of the researchers and from their individual beliefs and views. Additionally, as trends and emphasis in marketing were transforming, the understanding of the concept of social marketing transformed with it. Overall, despite significant differences in the understanding of the social marketing, as well as the uncertainties relating to its theoretical basis, it is currently one of the most vividly developing areas of marketing.

**Characteristics of social marketing**

The definitions of social marketing presented in the previous section reveals several basic features of social marketing that can be distinguished. Social marketing draws extensively from traditional marketing concepts, techniques, and tools in order to promote specific behaviors and bring social issues to light. In fact, Stewart (2015) claims that social marketing is often identified as a sub-discipline of marketing. Because of that, as stated by Donovan (2011), social marketing is deeply rooted in the legacy of traditional marketing. One of the most commonly used tools in social marketing, taken from the commercial marketing, is the concept of Marketing Mix. It is composed of four concepts, the so-called four P’s: product, price, place, and promotion (Kotler, 1967). In social marketing, product is understood as a benefit that the target group receives when it follows the desired behavior (French & Gordon, 2015; Andreasen, 1994). Cheng, Kotler, and Lee (2011) distinguish three different types of products in social marketing, namely: core, actual, and augmented products. The first one refers to benefits that the target group is expected to obtain in return for aligning with the behavior promoted in the social marketing campaign (excluding sugar from a diet reduces the risk of diabetes and obesity). The actual product is “the desired behavior” that is the consequence of the core product (eating healthy and drinking water instead of soda). Finally, augmented products are all additional incentives that will be included in order to promote the desired behavior (brochures on sugar content of products or information about sugar free diet) (Cheng, Kotler, and Lee, 2011).

In the social marketing mix, a price constitutes of all costs that the target audience needs to pay for adopting the desired behavior promoted
in the campaign. These costs may include: economic, social, psychological, opportunity, time, or lifestyle change costs (French & Gordon, 2015; Andreasen, 1994; Cheng, Kotler, and Lee, 2011).

Similar to commercial marketing, place, in social marketing mix, is where and when the encouraged behavior is performed, or where and when the target group receives the product or services associated with the campaign (Cheng, Kotler, and Lee, 2011).

Finally, promotion is about maximizing the probability of success of social marketing campaigns. Determining the key message as well as appropriate communication channels is crucial in social marketing promotion strategy. Promotion through creative usage of social media and communication tactics maximizes the desired behavior (Cheng, Kotler, and Lee, 2011).

Despite the fact that marketing mix is one of the most commonly known and used tools, it is not the only instrument borrowed by social from commercial marketing. The others include: marketing research, segmentation of audience, customer orientation, branding, and evaluation strategies (Keller, 1998; Walsh et al., 1993; Lee & Kotler, 2015).

Despite of all the commonalities, social marketing significantly differs from the traditional marketing approach. The first, most striking dissimilarity between commercial and social marketing is the purpose, or a core objective, of the two approaches. The primary aim of marketing campaigns in the private sector is to sell goods or services and obtain financial gain. As much as social marketing draws from traditional marketing, its overarching goal is to create a societal gain, rather than profit (Lee & Kotler, 2015; French & Gordon, 2015). It aims at influencing desired performance, which typically includes accepting, rejecting, modifying, or abandoning a specific behavior (Lee & Kotler, 2015). The goal of social marketing is never economic profitability. Nevertheless, the entities involved in campaigns such as research agencies, advertising agencies, printers, or the media might derive a financial advantage from it. Social marketing, unlike the commercial one, cares about the well-being of the target group not only by satisfying their short-term expectations and needs, but also by fulfilling their long-term interests.

The second differentiator is the nature of competition. Despite the fact that both, commercial and social marketing recognize the need of companies to position themselves in relation to competitions, the specificity of the competition significantly differs (French & Gordon, 2015).
Commercial marketers perceive other companies that offer similar products or services as competition. For social marketers, on the other hand, it is the current behavior of the target group that is competing with them (Lee & Kotler, 2015). The social, environmental, biological, economic, and system factors that influence and encourage the current behavior can also be classified as competitors (French & Gordon, 2015). Commercial marketers perceive other companies that offer similar products or services as competition. For social marketers, on the other hand, it is the current behavior of the target group that is competing with them (Lee & Kotler, 2015). The social, environmental, biological, economic, and system factors that influence and encourage the current behavior can also be classified as competitors (French & Gordon, 2015).

The above suggests that despite significant similarities, there are many differences between commercial and social marketing. In order to precisely distinguish both concepts, Stead and Angus (2007, as cited in Hastings, Angus, & Bryant, 2011) provide criteria, or rather “flexible indicators” of “campaign’s ‘social marketingness’” (p.286). These indicators include:

- **Behavioral change** is a necessary component of social marketing campaigns, which aims at improving the well-being of a target group and achieve a social goal.
- **Consumer research** provides important and relevant insights into values, needs, and priorities of the target group.
- **Segmentation and targeting** is used to narrow down the group that is targeted by a given social marketing campaign.
- **Marketing mix** is strategically used when designing a social marketing campaign.
- An exchange of specific benefits for behavioral change is expected.
- **Competition** of the desired behavioral change is identified.

These guidelines help to decide whether the given campaign can be classified as a social marketing project or not. This is especially useful in cases when for-profit businesses are the campaign initiators, when their social marketing campaigns might be a part of a bigger project. The specificity of social marketing campaigns initiated by different actors, as well as the usage of the above-described indicators is discussed in the following section.
Initiations

Lee and Kotler (2015) distinguish three different ‘sources’ of social marketing campaigns: public sector agencies, nonprofit organizations and foundations, and professionals working in for-profit organizations. The authors believe that despite having the common ground and purpose of making the world a better place, it seems that there are different reasons, emphasis, and results of social marketing campaigns initiated by these three types of organizations.

Lee and Kotler (2015) state that public sector entities are leading in terms of frequency of initiating and financing the social marketing efforts. Nonprofits and foundations seem to support only the campaigns that are aligned with their mission and values. For-profit organizations, in turn, are believed to engage in social marketing campaigns not only to benefit communities and positively influence desired behavior, but also to create an attractive brand image, “or even increase sales” (Lee & Kotler, 2015, p.25). Similar distinctions are proposed by Andreasen (2002), who lists commercial, governmental, and nonprofit enterprises as different agents, which can “design, implement, and monitor social change programs” (p.6). He claims that these three types of entities have different approaches to social marketing; they use different tools and highlight different aspects of issues at hand. The author also mentions, however, that there are variations within the given group, and individual organizations tend to have specific and distinctive ways of running social campaigns. Raftopoulou and Hogg (2008) raise a political aspect of social marketing, arguing that the concept is fundamentally involved in politics, especially when employed by governmental organizations. This is mainly because social marketing is concerned with social welfare, which is, in turn, one of the main concerns of politicians. Analyzing social marketing practices in public health, Grier and Bryant (2005) conclude that they are mostly initiated by governmental and nonprofit organizations to promote healthy lifestyles.

Interestingly, some researchers do not differentiate between various groups of initiators at all. They call all individuals, regardless to the institution they come from, “social marketers” (Wymer, 2011; French, Beall, Wayman, D’Agostino, Liang, & Perellis, 2012). Some, like Kotler and Zaltman (1971), distinguish only units within the change agency.

Thomas Boysen Anker and Klemens Kappel (as cited in Hastings, Angus, & Bryant, 2011) extensively discuss and analyze the social marketing
initiatives undertaken by corporations and for-profit firms. They argue that campaigns funded by these kinds of organizations differ from the social marketing campaigns initiated by government institutions or non-profits to such extent that they should be defined separately. They propose a new, hybrid concept to describe “the application of marketing techniques to encourage behavioral or attitudinal change in a target group in order to achieve a social goal that is conducive to a more fundamental corporate goal” (Hastings, Angus & Bryant, 2011, p.284), which they call a commercial social marketing. Authors acknowledge that sometimes, through social marketing activities, businesses might want to strengthen their brand image and therefore raise profits. Despite that fact, they argue that according to the definition and understanding of social marketing, such campaigns still aim to improve well-being of people and solve social issues (Anker & Kappel, 2011). In fact, Cheng, Kotler and Lee (2011) claim that social marketing exercised by businesses is a win-win situation, where the organization pursues a social good and fulfills its own objectives at the same time. Hastings and Angus (2011) present a completely different view on this matter. They claim that social marketing campaigns founded by commercial operators “come with a large price tag” (p.50). They argue that the company’s desire to earn profits exceeds its intention to create social welfare, and therefore, social marketing campaigns performed by businesses eventually transform into commercial marketing (Hastings and Angus, 2011).

The above review reveals that the literature on social marketing initiators exists but is rather limited. Thus, more study is required in order to fully understand the effects and implications of social marketing being initiated by different agents. Knowing the preferred promotion strategies or effectiveness of campaigns launched by each of initiator types would significantly improve the understanding of each group. Nevertheless, based on the literature review, three major initiator groups were differentiated: (1) government or public sector agencies, (2) non-profit organizations, and (3) private sector entities. This finding is the basis for analyzing differences, similarities, and peculiarities of social marketing campaigns initiated by different agents, in the following parts of the paper.

This research is based on the qualitative analysis of six case studies; therefore, the multiple case study approach is adopted (Yin, 1994). Cases are used to explore the theoretical assumptions and findings within a real-life context, and to help better understand differences and similarities between
social marketing efforts initiated by different agents. This research is exploratory in nature, as it is designed to help answer the question whether types of initiators matter in social marketing (Yin, 1984).

This study can be divided into three major stages. The first investigative stage was mostly concerned with searching for, and finding appropriate case studies and useful information on social marketing campaigns. Being a qualitative study, this research is based on secondary sources, such as scientific articles, case studies, organizations’ websites, and other literature relevant to the topic. Main tools used in the first stage were databases, (such as Academic Search Premier, JSTOR, ProQuest Business Databases, Sage journals, EBSCOhost, Emerald, and ScienceDirect), as well as Google Scholar and Google search engine. The major criteria used when selecting the case studies was the “social marketing-ness” of the campaign, described earlier in the paper, as well as the availability of resources and information on specific campaigns.

During the second stage, when the case studies were chosen, the main analysis of social marketing campaigns was conducted. Each case was analyzed by looking at the social problem, general information about the campaign, four P’s of marketing mix, and tangible outcomes.

Finally, the third phase involved the comparison of selected case studies. An attempt was made to list the similarities and differences that were identified after analyzing social marketing campaign initiated by three different agent groups, leading to a set of general observations.

Case studies

This section provides a concise description of six selected case studies, which are divided into three categories according to the type of organization that launched the social marketing campaign in each one: government or public sector agencies, non-profit organizations, and private sector entities. Table 2 presents the profiles of all six social marketing campaigns selected for this research.
## Profiles of selected social marketing campaigns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiator type</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Campaign Name</th>
<th>Topic area</th>
<th>Time and location</th>
<th>Target audience</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government/public sector agency</td>
<td>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)</td>
<td>VERB™ campaign</td>
<td>Health: physical activity promotion</td>
<td>June 2002 – June 2003; USA (nationwide)</td>
<td>Pre-adolescent children and their parents, teachers, guardians</td>
<td>To increase and maintain physical activity among “tweens” (youth age 9-13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government/public sector agency</td>
<td>Contra Costa County, CA; co-sponsored by First 5 Contra Costa and Healthy Active Before 5</td>
<td>Sugar Bites</td>
<td>Health: anti-obesity</td>
<td>May – October 2013; Contra Costa County, CA, USA</td>
<td>parents, of children ages 0-5, especially low-income African American and Latino parents</td>
<td>To reduce childhood obesity by lowering consumption of sugary drinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit organization</td>
<td>Truth Initiative®</td>
<td>truth® campaign</td>
<td>Health: Tobacco counter-marketing</td>
<td>February 2000 – now; USA (nationwide)</td>
<td>Adolescents and young girls</td>
<td>To reduce smoking among teenagers nationwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit organization</td>
<td>The Ad Council and the Natural Resources Defense Council</td>
<td>&quot;Save the Food&quot; Campaign</td>
<td>Enviroument: food waste counter-marketing</td>
<td>April 2016 – now; USA (nationwide)</td>
<td>Customers nationwide; Mothers and Millennials</td>
<td>To reduce food waste and spread awareness about the importance of reducing food waste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For-profit business organization</td>
<td>Unilever</td>
<td>Dove Campaign for Real Beauty</td>
<td>Beauty: self-esteem promotion</td>
<td>From 2004 - now; worldwide</td>
<td>All girls and women around the world</td>
<td>To change societal perception about beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For-profit business organization</td>
<td>AT&amp;T</td>
<td>“IT CAN WAIT” campaign</td>
<td>Lifestyle: texting-and-driving counter-marketing</td>
<td>2010 – now; USA (nationwide)</td>
<td>Drivers, especially teen drivers around the country</td>
<td>To reduce the number of car accidents caused by texting while driving, and to raise awareness that texting and driving is as dangerous as drinking and driving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Government / Public Sector Agencies

**VERB™ campaign.** VERB™ is a social marketing campaign launched in 2002 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Designed to increase and maintain physical activity among children between nine to thirteen years old, VERB™ was a response to the deteriorating health of kids and teenagers in the United States (Wong et al., 2004). Studies on youth health revealed that “five of every eight children aged nine to 13 do not participate in any organized physical activity during their non-school hours, and almost one fourth do not engage in any free-time physical activity” (p.1). Moreover, “[m]ore than one in seven children aged six to 19 years are overweight” (Wong et al., 2004, p.1). These findings, along with the marketing mix, were applied to develop the VERB™ campaign. The core product of the campaign is the long-term health benefits associated with physical activity, such as prevention of heart disease and stroke, bone health, diabetes and obesity prevention, and higher self-esteem (Huhman, et al., 2005). The actual product in the VERB™ project is increased physical activity. The price is a balance between costs and benefits that the target group is expected to bear (Wong et al., 2004). The social marketers working for the VERB™ campaign try to convince children and their parents that benefits significantly overweight the costs, and the cost is low. A place in the VERB™ is where kids can perform physical activities in a safe setting, such as schools, backyards, community-based organizations, parks, or sport organizations. Promotion is a crucial element in the VERB™s marketing mix. When designing the campaign, social marketers aimed at creating such advertising and marketing strategies that would effectively reach the target group. The examples of used tools are: youth publications, posters, print advertising, television, radio spots, events, and others (Wong et al., 2004).

According to a survey conducted a year after the launch of the campaign, the VERB™ achieved significant level of awareness, with only 25.6% of children not knowing the campaign’s objectives and goals. Additionally, the evaluation found that the free-time physical activities’ time among nine and ten-year-old increased by 34% among the kids exposed to the campaign, in comparison to those not being engaged in the VERB™. Thanks to the campaign, the gap in physical activity between girls and boys decreased, and the group of low-income children was more physically active (Huhman et al., 2005). Overall, the VERB™ campaign is perceived a success in terms of engaging children in physical activity.
Sugar Bites campaign. Sugar Bites social marketing campaign was initiated to “reduce childhood obesity by lowering consumption of sugary drinks” (Better World Advertising, 2014). Created by Contra Costa County in California, and co-sponsored by First 5 Contra Costa and Healthy and Active Before 5, Sugar Bites campaign was first launched in May 2013 as a result of growing consumption of sugary drinks among children. According to U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2017), 63% of youth drink “a sugar-sweetened beverage on a given day”, with the percentage being even higher among African American and Latino communities. Moreover, one in three children in the United States is either overweight or obese. These alarming statistics were the main reason for the launch of the campaign.

The core product in the Sugar Bites social campaign is the reduction of obesity among children living in Contra Costa County, CA. The actual product or desired behavior in this case is the reduction of consumption of sugary drinks. The main costs that constitute the price were lifestyle change and psychological costs that children would need to bear. The place where the expectant behavior is performed is difficult to clearly identify. In fact, children and their parents are encouraged to limit the consumption of sweetened drink everywhere they were. Promotion was performed through multiple channels, such as: English and Spanish websites, transit shelters advertisements, BART station ads, billboards, convenience store posters, door hangers, outreach posters, brochures, magnets and others (Better World Advertising, n.d.). One of the main goals of the campaign was to make it simple, yet memorable.

According to the evaluation report, thanks to the campaign, approximately 65% of individuals in the target group were “more likely to serve their children more water or milk”. Sugar Bites is believed to be even more successful among Latina mothers (Better World Advertising, 2014). In summary, Sugar Bites social marketing campaign is considered a success.

Non-profit Organizations

Truth® Campaign. Truth® campaign is one of the longest running, most successful and well-known anti-smoking and tobacco prevention campaigns in the country (Truth Initiative, n.d.). Initiated by the American Legacy Foundation in 2000, Truth® campaign aims at encouraging young adults to quit smoking and persuade others to do so. Its mission is to
“achiev[e] a culture where all youth and young adults reject tobacco” (Truth Initiative, n.d.). The nationwide Truth® campaign was developed on the basis of the Florida Tobacco Pilot Program that took place from 1998 to 2003 (Farrelly, Nonnemaker, Davis & Hussin, 2009).

Truth® campaign’s core product is to reduce the short- and long-term consequences of smoking tobacco, such as: breathing issues, cancer, heart diseases, chronic diseases, and eventually shorter lifespan. In order to eliminate the mentioned consequences, the actual product of the campaign is not only to reduce the number smoking young adults in the country, but also to create an anti-tobacco culture in the United States. The price in the campaign involves non-monetary costs of potential anxiety, significant lifestyle change, and possible weight gain. Nevertheless, Truth® strives to lower the perceived costs in order to achieve the desirable effects. Due to the character of the campaign, the place strategy seems less relevant. The place is not determined in the campaign, as the target group is encouraged to change its general behavior.

Unlike most of the anti-smoking campaigns, Truth® focuses on emphasizing the consequences of smoking and facts about tobacco products and industry, without using the “life or death” tone. The campaign aims to encourage teenagers and young adults to create positive, tobacco-free environment around them. Main tools used within the promotion strategy are: Web site (www.thetruth.com), TV and print commercials, promotional items, and street advertisement (Farrelly, Healton, Davis, Messeri, Hersey & Haviland, 2002).

When Truth® campaign was first initiated, 23 percent of American teens smoked. In 2016, the figure was estimated to be as low as six percent. Robin Koval, CEO of the Truth Initiative said that it is “the most dramatic successes in public-health history, ever” (Frederick, 2017).

“Save the Food” Campaign. According to research, as much as forty percent of food in the United States is wasted, which is estimated to make up around $162 billion dollars annually (AdCouncil, n.d.). It is believed that consumers waste more food than grocery stores, restaurants, and farms all together. Therefore, in April 2017, the Ad Council and the Natural Resources Defense Council launched the Save the Food Campaign, which hoped to reduce the amount of food wasted by consumers as well as aims to help save water, energy, and money.
Numerous benefits constitute the core product of the campaign. The major benefits that the target group is expected to obtain are cost savings, diminished climate pollution, and decreased water consumption. The price is perceived to be very low, as benefits significantly overweight the costs. Place can be defined as all locations where families purchase their food. It is where target group is encouraged to buy less or only that is needed. Finally, the main promotion strategies of the “Save the Food” Campaign are: TV ad, print and web advertising, radio tips and “to do” brochures, new social media, and the website SaveTheFood.com (AdCouncil, n.d). Because of the fact that the campaign was launched last year (2017), there are no statistics or estimates of the effectiveness of the initiative.

For-profit Business Organizations

Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. In the early 2000s, in order to revive its brand image, Dove, one of Unilever’s largest beauty brands, conducted a study that looked at women’s priorities, interests, and well-being. The study revealed that only two percent of interviewed women considered themselves beautiful (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott & Agostino, 2004). Dove saw an opportunity in these findings. As a result, in 2004, the ‘Dove campaign for real beauty’ was launched. Its main aim was to redefine the way in which the society views beauty as well as to make more women in the world feel pretty, making beauty a source of confidence rather than anxiety (Kotler, Armstrong, Wong, & Saunders, 2008).

The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty included all four elements of the marketing mix. The core product is the improved woman’s perception about beauty, and a creation of increased self-esteem among woman. Despite the monetary costs not being included in the marketing strategy, the campaign involves possible social and psychological costs. Place is of less importance in this campaign, due to the general character of the message. Multiple channels promote the product/social change, such as: TV ads, broadcasts and publications, print advertisements, billboards, events, Youtube vital clips, and many others (Anker & Kappel, 2011).

Due to the specificity of the Dove social marketing campaign, it is difficult to clearly determine its effectiveness and the effects it had on women. Undoubtedly, however, the campaign was a success for the brand itself. The awareness and recognition of the brand increased significantly. The Campaign for Real Beauty’s success in terms of social change is not
as obvious. Nevertheless, the campaign draws attention to the unrealistic picture of beauty; it also started the conversation about women self-esteem and perception of beauty.

“IT CAN WAIT” Campaign. AT&T’s “It Can Wait” campaign was designed and launched in order to discourage people, especially young adults, from texting while driving. According to the National Safety Council (2012, as cited in AT&T’s It Can Wait® Campaign, 2014), over 200,000 vehicle crashes in 2012 were caused by using a cellular phone while driving, and far more were likely not reported. Additionally, around seventy percent of drivers admit that they use a cell phone while driving (National Safety Council, n.d.).

The core product offered by the campaign is the decreased probability of car crashes resulting from cell phone usage while driving. Desired and promoted behavior is, therefore, refraining from texting while driving. The price that the targeted group bears seems low, as it includes only a minor lifestyle change. Unlike in previously discussed cases, place plays an important role in “It Can Wait” campaign. A car is the place where the discouraged behavior is performed. The campaign is promoted through multiple channels such as: print advertisements, on-the-ground events, the campaign’s website, a virtual reality simulator and Public Service Announcements. The campaign relies heavily on the third-party support when it comes to the promotion of the initiative (Governors Highway Safety Association, 2017).

Unfortunately, there is no report available that would analyze the effectiveness of the campaign. Neither are there new statistics concerning vehicle crashes caused by texting while driving. Therefore, the campaign’s success has yet to be evaluated.

**Results and discussion**

The case studies show that social marketing campaigns employed by governmental agencies, nonprofits, and businesses have both, commonalities and differences. The following three observations represent main similarities found across all three groups.
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Observation 1: Keeping the “price” as low as possible is a priority for all initiator groups.

Due to the fact that high price of adopting an expectant behavior might discourage the target group from adopting the “product”, the general approach in social marketing is to reduce the costs as much as possible. Therefore, regardless of initiator type, social marketers frame the campaign in such a way that the perceived value balance is appealing to the target group.

Observation 2: “Place” seems to be the least important marketing strategy for most initiator groups.

The ‘place’ strategy in social marketing campaigns was generally the least meaningful for the success of the initiatives. This is mainly because social marketing aims to change behavior, which is far more general than product and, in most of the cases, can be exercised in multiple locations. Moreover, the importance of spatial limitations of the traditional concept of ‘place’ is diminishing in a social context, due to high dependence on internet and media outlets. Nevertheless, it needs to be noted that significance of “place” strategies might vary significantly between specific campaigns.

Observation 3: Partnership is an important aspect of social marketing in all three groups.

Partnership building is equally important for all initiators as it can create awareness and increase the coverage of the campaign. Moreover, issues that social marketing campaigns try to address are mostly too big to handle for a single entity. Therefore, collaborating with trusted partners can not only facilitate the adoption of social marketing campaign, but also make it significantly more successful.

Case analysis also revealed a number of differences that occurred between the groups.

Observation 4: For-profit business organizations tend to focus on issues that directly link to their area of operations, are popular and attractive, and have potential to benefit the company itself.
Social marketing campaigns of Dove and AT&T promote behavioral change around issues that are connected to the companies’ business. In fact, this rule can be observed among all social marketing projects initiated by businesses. Such observations allow for an assumption that businesses, which engage in social marketing, have a twofold objective: to benefit the target group and the company’s bottom-line. The second interesting aspect concerns logo placement on promotional materials of social campaigns initiated by for-profit organizations. Brochures, billboards, and promotional videos of the “Dove Campaign for Real Beauty” as well as AT&T’s “IT CAN WAIT” campaign did include the firm’s logo. This can be seen as creating a subliminal message and building the brand awareness among the target group, which can eventually influence the group to purchase the product/service. Such a strategy can generate profits for the for-profit organization.

*Observation 5: Social marketing initiated by government / public sector agencies focuses on issues significantly influencing the quality of life of citizens.*

When initiating a social marketing campaign, government agencies tend to focus on issues that are considerably diminishing the standard of living of a population. The issues are not necessarily pleasant or widely spoken about. Health-related behavior change is a popular topic around which the campaigns are designed. In fact, both of the analyzed cases of projects launched by governmental agencies tackled health issues. However, social marketing is also used by public sector agencies as a way to promote safety or lawful behavior. The ultimate aim of social campaigns initiated by public sector agencies is to bring about a “social” good, not to benefit the organization.

*Observation 6: Non-profit organizations address issues around their mission and scope of operations.*

It has been observed that social marketing campaigns started and financed by nonprofits tackle issues connected to the scope of operation of a given organization. In principal, non-profit organizations exist to influence the community and make a positive difference in the lives of the people the organization exists to serve. More and more often, social marketing is implemented in order to increase the effectiveness of a nonprofit’s activities.
and programs. Therefore, unlike governmental agencies, non-profit organizations are highly unlikely to engage in social marketing campaigns that do not promote the behavior closely connected to organization’s mission, values, and scope of operations.

Apart from all similarities and differences, one general observation has been made.

**Observation 7:** Social marketing campaigns initiated by government/public sector agencies and non-profit organizations are more similar to each other that the campaigns started by for-profit business organizations.

The analysis of six case studies as well as the review of literature on other social campaigns shows that projects started by public sector agencies and non-profit organizations tend be similarly in terms of structure or chosen issues. On the other hand, social marketing campaigns initiated by businesses have more strings attached and seem to be conditional.

Overall, based on the literature review and the analysis of the case studies, it can be concluded that the main difference between social marketing campaigns initiated by different agents concerns the choice of issues and topics. Government and public sector agencies are believed to be the most flexible when it comes to topic choice. Non-profit organizations, in turn, typically use social marketing to increase the effectiveness of their programs and to draw attention to the issue that is connected to their sector. Social marketing campaigns initiated by for-profit business organizations are unlikely to tackle the most burning issues in society. They rather focus on matters connected to the sector and topic around which the firm is working, and are attractive for a wider audience. Businesses do not want to be associated with highly persuasive or even aggressive campaigns, as it could potentially harm their brand image.

**Limitations and Further Research**

Despite the fact that social marketing literature is reasonably voluminous, literature related to campaigns’ initiators is rather limited. This research paper contributes to the social marketing literature by providing the first attempt to identify the similarities and differences between social marketing campaigns initiated by different groups of agents.
Presented case studies help to understand specificities of social marketing initiated by different agents, and provide broad indications about the issue at hand. The similarities and differences found in this paper are general in nature and do not focus on details; they mainly focus on topic-related differences and similarities of campaigns initiated by different agents. Technical and structure related similarities and differences were difficult to determine, due to insufficient information and data about the campaigns. Due to the character of the case study design itself, as well as limited number of analyzed cases, it was not viable to analyze all aspects of each campaign in great detail. Moreover, the selected cases do not represent the whole population, and therefore, the outcomes should not be generalized. The findings should be interpreted with due care. Nevertheless, the findings constitute valuable grounds for the additional analysis of this topic. Finally, as this research paper does not answer the question entirely, further elaboration on the topic is necessary. Research remains to be done on technical and structure related aspects of social marketing campaigns. Conducting primary research among social marketing initiators would provide valuable insights. Moreover, it would be valuable to look deeper into the topic of effectiveness and outcomes of campaigns launched by governmental organizations, non-profits, and businesses. Finally, the social marketing field would greatly benefit from having a better understanding of partnerships and collaboration practices between organizations from different initiator groups.

**Conclusion**

More organizations are reaping the benefits of promoting behaviors and socially desirable attitudes. There is also an increasing trend for public sector agencies, nonprofit organizations, and even businesses to employ social marketing strategies in order to obtain a desired behavior within a target group.

This research paper aimed to investigate the influence of initiator groups on social marketing campaigns. The literature review as well as the case study analysis revealed that the type of organization that is launching and running a campaign affects how the social marketing effort is developed and constructed. The major difference between actors is visible in the choice of topics and issues. It can be expected that public agencies focus on the most burning issues in the community, nonprofits address problems closely connected to their vision and mission, and businesses initiate social
campaigns that would not harm their brand image and can be potentially profitable for the organization.

All things considered, the long-term effectiveness of social marketing campaigns highly depends on the cooperation of entities from all three sectors of the economy. Having different characteristics, issue preferences, and general approaches to building campaigns, agents from all sectors need to work together to meaningfully benefit society. It is crucial to acknowledge that social marketing campaigns should be designed in cooperation with various entities and should be carried out with a long term perspective. In today’s turbulent times, when societies struggle with an increasing number of social issues, the social marketing approach should be used more frequently by public agencies, non-profits, and businesses.
References


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About the Author

Aleksandra Lisinska is a 2018 graduate of Grand Valley State University’s Master of Public Administration program. Before starting graduate school in the United States, she earned a Master of Arts degree from the University of Applied Sciences in Muenster, Germany, majoring in International Marketing and Sales, and a Master of Arts degree in International Business from Cracow University of Economics, Poland. Her academic work focused on investigating the use of typically private-sector tools in the public and nonprofit environment. Aleksandra now lives and works in Krakow, Poland. Outside of work, her biggest passion is travelling.