

Farooq Ahmad*

| Syed Ali Raza Hamid†

| Muhammad Nawaz Qaisar‡

Advancing the Field of Social Marketing Through the Lens of Group Dynamics: An Overview and Research Agenda



Abstract *Social marketing is an emerging sub-discipline of marketing. Social marketing deals with attitudinal reconstruction and helps to augment behavioral changes to address various social issues. Social marketing also uses conventional elements of 4Ps to influence behavior change. In this study, a systematic literature review was examined from peer-reviewed journals on social marketing. The focus of this literature review was on important theoretical contributions and theories used in the social marketing domain. Social marketing employed the theories initially developed in psychology and social psychology to study the phenomenon of behavior change as a function of intra-individual processing, persuasive techniques, and one-way communication. Individual centered approaches have been used in this context. The role of group dynamics a strategic tool has not been explored in the domain of social marketing. The research paper has identified possible future research areas in the domain of social marketing in the context of group dynamics.*

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Introduction

Social Marketing: A Review

The dismal outcomes of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have triggered rethinking to seek new approaches for development, addressing social issues and problems, particularly in many developing countries including Pakistan to address the unmet need for development and wellbeing that have hardly been fulfilled. In this regard, Archrol and Kotler (2017) have quite convincingly argued the role of marketing, particularly social marketing that tend to provide an effective social mechanism for the

* Assistant Professor, Faculty of Management Science, SZABIST, Larkana, Sindh, Pakistan.
Email: farooqahmad@gmail.com

† Assistant Professor, Hamdard Institute of Management Sciences, Hamdard University, Islamabad Campus, Pakistan.

‡ Independent Scholar

effective functioning of social service delivery system, organization of social marketing planning, development and reform of social enterprise, product/services and new initiatives at the grassroots level. This, in turn, enhances public propensity to meet the demand to improve the social baseline of their respective constituency. This also helps support to overcome the desperation of policymakers, professionals, academicians, civil society, and the public at large to improve the capacity of their social enterprise and institutions to deliver social services, planning development, and execution of public welfare programs at the grassroots level. Social marketing is an emerging sub-discipline of marketing. It was discussed in the field of marketing by the pioneering work of [Kotler and Levy \(1969\)](#). Their article entitled "broadening the scope of marketing" opened the debate on social marketing. The article questioned whether marketing should only deal with commercial aspects of a product or it should also help to address various social issues confronting different societies. They have argued that the time has come to reorient our ways of thinking and appreciate the scope of marketing to enhance the value of public and civic services. To advance this idea after pioneer work was carried out by [Kotler and Zaltman \(1971\)](#) in their thought-provoking work titled, "*Social marketing: An approach to planned social change*". The term social marketing was first introduced in this article coined as a subfield of marketing. One of the bases to advance the idea of social marketing derived from a notion of [Wiebe \(1951\)](#), "*why can't we market brotherhood like we sell soap through marketing technique.*" The authors have quite cogently deliberated and put forward the idea that social marketing trends to provide the kind of social mechanism to sell social ideas and thoughts and may use the existing technique, currently being used in commercial marketing and evolve the concept, tools, and techniques in the years to come. This has opened a debate about how marketing can be used to address common problems of society. In this regard, they also cited a well-known work to improve maternal and child health indicators through marketing communication of family planning and reproductive awareness campaigns in the USA had also employed the concept of marketing.

[Kotler \(2011\)](#) also pointed out two concepts in the context of sustainability. De-marketing and social marketing were emerged to address the issues which had a relationship with climate change and environmental sustainability. Social marketing by using marketing tools provides support to augment behavior change that tends to improve many of society's development goals ([Hudson. & Ozanne, 1988](#); [Kotler & Zaltman 1971](#)). [Kotler and Zaltman \(1971\)](#) defined social marketing as "design, implementation of and control of programs for the acceptance of social ideas by considering product planning, pricing, marketing communication, distribution, and marketing research" ([Kotler & Zaltman 1971](#)). Social marketing also uses conventional elements of marketing i.e. product, price, place, and promotion to influence behavior change, those elements of marketing are explained in table 2-1.

Table 1. The 4Ps of Social Marketing

Ps	Definition	Example for improving health and wellness using physical activity
Product	Benefits that can be acquired with the use of product or service.	30 minutes' daily walk can improve cardiovascular fitness and improve outlook and attitude.

Price	Cost exchanged to acquire the promised benefits as perceived by the target audience/customers.	30 Minute time spent on a walk can affect other activities, difficult for people who don't have access to parks and walking tracks.
Place	Distribution sites of goods and services from where one can acquire product.	A person can walk for 30 minutes in any approachable area.
Promotion	The communication highlights the benefits of products or services.	Posters, leaflets, groups discussion on benefits of walks, orientation sessions.

Source: Adapted from Health promotion in the workplace by Michel P. O'Donnell 2017.

Theories Used in Social Marketing

Social marketing employed the theories initially developed by the researchers of psychology and social psychology to study the phenomenon of behavior change as a function of intra-individual processing, persuasive techniques, and one-way communication. Individual centered approaches have been particularly examined. Such approaches explain how an individual's responsibility as a function of information processing as an intra-individual way. These, in turn, tend to influence the audience to interpret and react to different social marketing messages and cues. Moreover, various intervention campaigns have run in the US which used the persuasive techniques for inducing pro-social behavior change resulting in health awareness and promoting civic services. Also, such activities have helped prevent youth from subversion activities. Consequently, these intervention activities have introduced many behavior change models that have been quite instrumental in explaining behavior change as a process that considers individuals as a subject. With the invention of social media, social marketers adopted some social pioneering initiatives such as collaborative communication and social service communication ([Hamid, 2017](#)). In the field of mass communication, a model was developed by [Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield \(1949\)](#). The model is known as the Hovland Yale Model of attitude change. It highlights three determinants that are likely to bring about change in the attitude of the target audience; communication, communicator and communicate. This was the premise that had provided a valuable framework to develop an insight into external factors with few limitations to describe the notion for internal processes for attitudinal change. To overcome the limitation, the elaboration model was introduced that addressed the internal dynamic process of attitude change and helped advance the researches that effectively contributed to mass communication, social communication, social media, marketing, advertising, and social marketing programs. Since it has set the framework that implies a coherent communication process, leading from cognition to affective response (like or dislike, attitude) to behavior or action. The work of [Festinger \(1962\)](#) has also a profound impact on social psychology with the introduction of the theory of cognitive dissonance. Festinger (1962) highlighted in his work that consonance in communication is distorted by dissonance as individuals do carry in their cognition positive and negative elements that dispose of the attitude depending upon the magnitude of the pressure of negative and positive elements. The two important hypotheses that he put forward in developing the theory were:

“The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce dissonance and achieve consonance. When dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance.” ([Festinger 1962, p.3](#)).

[Festinger \(1962\)](#) considered dissonance as *no fitting elements of cognition*. This tends to produce conflicting attitudes ([Brenham & cohen, 1962](#)). Learning lesson for marketing that polio campaign in Pakistan using Cricket Icons have not brought desired results. How to resolve this predicament? In marketing communication, the model specified four stages in an individual’s change: attention, interest, desire, and action (AIDA), and the same has been expanded into six steps by [Palda \(1966\)](#) as attention, interest, comprehension, impact, attitude, and sales. This model is consonant with the diffusion of innovation developed during the 1940s & 1950s by [Ryan and Gross \(1943\)](#) and [Rogers \(1962\)](#) which includes five stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation ([Rogers, 1983, 1997](#)). However, actions of the individual most of the time occur as a part of the larger phenomenon of human collectivity.

Past Theories of Behavior Change Used in Social Marketing

Diffusion of Innovation

This refers to the process that comprises communicating new ideas through different channels of communications over time with various segments of society or community or with members of a social system. This model highlights different factors that influence the actions of people and explains the process by which a new idea is adopted by the members of the social system (Rogers, 1962, 1983; [Rayan & Gross, 1943](#))

The Input/output Persuasion Models

This theory was explored by [McGuire \(1969\)](#) which propounded how the hierarchy of communication affects and at the same time it also considers that how others affect for instant message, communication source, and channels influence behavioral outcomes of communication ([McGuire, 1969, 1986](#)).

Stages of Change Theory

This theory was given by [Prochaska \(1992\)](#) which highlights the psychological process and stages that humans undertake to move from one stage to another stage to achieve certain new behavioral goals. It explains the stages such as pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, behavior, and maintenance.

Theory of Reasoned Action

This theory highlight that to reach a new behavior a person passes through the attitude-intention-behavior pathway. The new behavior is mediated by intention as a motivator to perform a new behavior. The intention will be determined by attitude to perform or not to perform an action as well as by societal norms prevailing there ([Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975](#)).

Social Learning Theory

This theory explains that people learn from each other in a social context where they live through observing and intimating others. This also states that learning is a result

of cognitive expansion based on observing and instruction in a social context. This theory also highlights that behavior is determined by expectancies and incentives ([Bandura, 1977](#)).

Social Comparison Theories

These theories highlight that person's actions are a result of the influence of other group members to whom he or she belongs and members of one's network. This theory explains that an individual evaluates his or her action by comparing it with others to avoid uncertainty ([Festinger, 1954](#)).

Theories of Emotional Response

These theories highlight that emotional response sends signals to cognition which forms a supportive attitude towards an idea. It means that communication which is highly emotional in nature will lead to a bigger change in action as compared to those which are less emotional ([Zajonc, 1984](#)).

Cultivation Theory of Mass Media

This theory highlights that continuous and repetitive exposure to reality through mass media leads to form a positive perception towards a reality. One may say that this is a legitimate reality and this can induce behavior change ([Gerbner, 1973](#)).

Having studied these theories, it's quite evident that individual behavior change was the focus of these theories, and group-centered approaches have not been employed extensively in the domain of social marketing programs to induce sustained behavior changes.

Lessons from the Previous Research in Social Marketing

The past research on social marketing has raised a concern on how to bring sustained behavior change to improve social, economic, health, and wellbeing indicators. In addressing these social issues and problems besides marketing social products and services the concept of social marketing has gained a fair amount of recognition as important tools and techniques. It is, however, important to mention that one of the reasons that have limited the progress of social marketing is its greater emphasis on conventional approaches. The field of social marketing being practiced has extensively been used in marketing commercial products and services based on intra-individual processing, one-way communication, and persuasive techniques of behavior change. In social marketing one of the core issues is to address social issues and problems which are, by and large, not individual-focused, unlike traditional marketing. In this backdrop, all those theories, models tools, and techniques, which have been employed in marketing tend to target individual behavior change. Whereas social problems are not individual problems most of the time and need theories and techniques which are group-centered. Achrol and Kotler (2015, 2016) have extensively discussed the limitation of several theories and highlighted how marketing particularly social marketing could address this strategic gap.

The authors have questioned existing methodologies and interventions used by social scientists, which remained unsuccessful in bringing perceptible improvement. Social scientists have argued the importance of social marketing, behavior change to address social issues. The literature on social marketing has not employed an interaction

paradigm to bring sustained behavior change. The social issues which are faced by most of the developing economies are the prelude to economic progress ([Critchlow,1998](#)). The previous research in social marketing bears a strategic gap to augment sustained behavior change. It has, however, never used the interaction paradigm, a progeny of group dynamics, to bring sustained behavior change. The interactive paradigm has shown better results towards various social change programs and it is assumed that interactive paradigm supports to induce sustained behavior change.

Group Dynamics as a Strategic tool for Social Marketing

The “group dynamics” theory propounded by Kurt Lewin, a legend social scientist. The theory provides a comprehensive theoretical base that is likely to add incremental value towards advancing the core purpose of social marketing. The study assumes that the conceptual advancement of social marketing can be enhanced using group-centered approaches. It also mitigates the potential biases of conventional approaches/ theories used in marketing that disregard the majority (Hill & Martin, 2014) of public concerns by promoting humanistic and democratic norms to advance consumer/ public welfare that not only helps inaptly appreciate the context which is prerequisite to take appropriate modalities to counter social undesired social habits that may tend to indulge the community members to trap in unhealthy lifestyles. Hill and Martin quite forcefully argued that there is need to broaden the perspective of the marketing field, the authors argued, most theories and practices strip away people’s heterogeneity in favor of simplistic ways of measuring success.” (Hill & Martin, 2014). Surprisingly a recent article by Wiener et.al (2018) trying to promote prosocial behavior preferring to use individual-centered approaches. Whereas Hill and Martin (2014) making effort to advance the frontier of researches of marketing with kind of scholarship that provides a better understanding as conventional approaches could hardly be successful keeping in view the changing reality of the modern world of communication that reinforces respect and responsibility. In brief, these kinds of intellectual resistance could only be offloaded if marketing particularly social marketing harness a comprehensive theoretical base that helps provide a prudent process to explain the social phenomenon and address desired behavior change and reconstruction of attitude as a function of interaction. For this, the process of group dynamics offers a quite effective social mechanism to achieve the strategic perspective of social marketing. This, in turn, helps counter such negative social habits by engaging people through continuous discourse and discussions that make them realize how these activities undermine their quality of life in the long run. And they may end up with physical and psychological disorders. Besides, it becomes a victim of a dreaded disease like cancer. As a result, if they keep up those bad social habits. This realization process provides the opportunity to initiate some healthy activities. In the gradual process continuation of these activities reinforce the social habits as a counter. In other words, poor social habits cannot be countered through conventional promotional techniques. They can only be broken by offering a counter habit. In other words, group dynamics is a comprehensive theoretical framework that not only helps in identifying the underline forces that impede to improve quality of life of the community members but at the same time, they seek possible solutions amicably resolve modalities to implement in a befitting manner (Kotler, 2015, 2016).

The group dynamics help in cognitive reconstruction. This, in turn, leads to sustained behavior change. The interaction paradigm will tend to create space to continue the meaningful dialogue among study group members. This will help to bring new insights among study participants to think for some better lifestyles that could make them a healthy, effective, and productive entity. Therefore, free and fair discussions tend to result in a cognitive expansion that rationalizes the existing goals and modalities to exercise meaningful actions.

Conclusion

From this review, it is quite evident that group dynamics can be an effective mechanism and a strategic tool for social marketing to enhance the efficacy of the behavior change to achieve desired healthy lifestyle outcomes in the target community. Conventionally, social marketing did bring change but the target audience has barely internalized the change as mentioned in various studies. Group dynamics can be an effective tool to internalize in the process through group interaction. In other words, target audiences believe in changing their unhealthy lifestyle as they start believing in a healthy lifestyle. This change is from within rather outside. Therefore, group dynamics need to be considered as a pre-emptive tool while developing social marketing strategies. Though conventional techniques have generated a good amount of awareness but had hardly helped in translating knowledge into desired activities as the change has been considered imposing. Therefore, group dynamics need to be considered for social change programs. To address social issues in developing countries like Pakistan, some important issues have been identified; The Interactive paradigm, using group dynamics, is one of the valuable tools not only to bring about desired behavior change as well as to sustain that change (Khan, 2005). In other words, from the perspective of socio-economic development of Pakistan, social marketing provides good insight to address several social problems particularly to achieve our social and economic development goals for enhancing people social safety net of impoverished and disadvantageous community, besides to achieve sustainable development goals 2030 this way we may align our development with perspective to national development and in-line with global imperatives for socioeconomic development. One of the important issues that social marketing deals with that it is quite predisposed to individual behavior change. This perspective has not brought sustained behavior and ignored the core issue that social problems are not individual problems. This needs to be tackled with a group-centered approach rather than an individual-centered approach. To address this issue, a good number of researchers have empirically proved that social marketing using group-centered approaches have convincingly brought change and tend to provide sustenance of desired behavior change (Khan, 2007). In this regard, several theories imply that a group-centered approach is beneficial; the subject is achieving its goals as a function of tools which is interaction in the backdrop of the community.

An Agenda for Future Research

Social marketing is an emerging area of inquiry. Developing countries like Pakistan where social and economic indicators are a matter of great concern. On the other hand, questions related to sustained behavior changes could hardly be answered through conventional approaches to scientific inquiry. In the case of social marketing, it needs a holistic approach to discharge its function in a befitting manner in a society like

Pakistan. Future researchers need to put group dynamics as a strategic tool in the domain of social marketing to bring about sustained behavior changes using group-centered approaches; as one-way communication in social marketing hardly able to bring sustained behavior changes.

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