From transparency to invisibility: Some tantalizing questions about the scope of social marketing

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Recently...

“Colleagues... have long looked at the seemingly minor influences on people’s choices of food and on the quantity eaten (e.g., bigger plates, greater consumption). A particular interest is how school cafeterias can be better engineered to positively influence choices. It is "nudging" good behavior not directly promoting it - but it is still marketing!!"
Questions raised in this presentation*

1. Should the emphasis in the social marketing literature be on a cognitive exchange?
2. What are the tensions between customer ‘benefit’ and customer ‘value’?
3. What is the role of invisible marketing techniques in social marketing?

*(leave now if you expect a full set of answers!)

1. Should the emphasis in the social marketing literature be on a cognitive exchange?

making a deal  
offering value  
exchange  
satisfying needs  
voluntary behaviour change

(Kotler, 1972; Wood, 2008; Hastings, 2008 citing Schwartz; Smith, 2000 and 2006; McDermott, 2000; Lufebo and Flora, 1988)
Wouldn’t it be easy...

• If people wanted to stop smoking but just didn’t have an appropriate service which met their needs
• If people thought binge drinking was a rubbish way of spending a Saturday night but didn’t have an alternative
• If people wanted to eat better but didn’t know how to cook tasty nutritious meals

But it’s not that simple

WHAT IF...

• Binge drinking is ‘fun’ and meets our customer’s needs.
• Smoking is woven into the fabric of our customer’s socio-cultural existence.
• Unhealthy eating is easy, fun and popular

WHAT IF COGNITIVE EXCHANGE APPROACHES ARE NOT APPROPRIATE, CUSTOMER-ORIENTED OR MONEY WELL SPENT?
When are cognitive exchange approaches not enough?

When the target group cannot see the benefit:

“Everyone drinks round here. That’s what we do. It’s a laugh. It’s something you do with your mates” (working class male, 19, binge drinker).

When the target group’s cultural worldview makes it impossible:

“I wish I did want to exercise, but I don’t. I want to want to, if that makes sense” (working class female, 35, obese).

The transparency-invisibility spectrum

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Know they have a behavioural problem</th>
<th>Don’t agree they have a behavioural problem</th>
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Behaviour Modification Perspective

Choice architecture

The transparency-invisibility spectrum

Know they have a behavioural problem
Engaged with the marketing offer
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HARD TO REACH GROUPS

Transparent
Marketing

Invisible
Marketing

Techniques

Transparent – appeal to decision makers
- Co-created service redesign
- Incentivised behavioural offers

Invisibility – change antecedents of choice
- Reduce availability
- Change physical environment
- Set defaults
2. What are the tensions between customer ‘value’ and ‘benefit’?

3. What is the role of invisible techniques in social marketing?

Perhaps
- There are occasions when a cognitive exchange isn’t the best approach?
- We need to broaden our accepted range of techniques
Conclusion: Implications of the transparency-invisibility approach

1. Broadens the commentary on the scope of social marketing
2. Offers a set of approaches for behaviour change interventions targeting across all types of behavioural problem
3. Poses a set of questions about the ethical boundaries of the approach

Thank you!

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