

Social Marketing Mix : A Framework for Promoting Mental Health Services

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ABSTRACT

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Aim/Purpose: The study aims to apply the social marketing concepts and framework and develop a marketing mix for reducing social stigma associated with help-seeking behaviour among individuals dealing with mental illness. The study examines perception of practitioners involved in mental well-being services on factors that influence selection of mental health services. This paper highlights the role of social marketing in promoting behavioural change and improving help-seeking behaviour to address mental illness.

Background: The discipline of social marketing can become an important driver for change in terms of bringing behavioural change. Social marketing involves adapting commercial marketing theories and practices for supporting campaigns for social change. There is a need to examine how contemporary marketing practices can help to promote mental health service.

Methodology: The study involved review of existing literature on social marketing and its role in social change. A cross-sectional study was conducted among psychologist, social workers, mental health counsellors and HR professionals using online questionnaire based on stratified sampling. The findings of the survey were integrated with the literature using to adopt a mixed method research and propose a framework for social marketing. Descriptive analysis was carried out based on the data collected.

Contribution: The study adds to the body of knowledge of social marketing by proposing a social marketing framework that can enable service providers to create awareness and reduce the stigma associated with seeking help for mental illness. The study could help community-based services in mental to Promote help-seeking behaviour.

Findings: The findings indicate that adapting the marketing mix for social marketing can create positive attitude towards mental health and its services. Emotional or interpersonal problems carries social stigma and Confidentiality and safe space for counselling can create a conducive environment for help-seeking. Social media and influencers can contribute to create awareness on the benefits of mental well-being will bring in a social change to accept counselling services.

Keywords: Social marketing, Mental, Marketing Mix.

Introduction

With increasing focus on aligning SDGs with business strategy, social marketing has gained importance in the past few years. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development made the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) focus areas to address global challenges (UN, 2015). One of the greatest challenges, faced by nations today is associated with mental health.

SDG 3 (3.4) seeks to promote mental health and well-being. Individuals fail to accept mental issues and seeking support due to socio-cultural pressure, stigma financial constraints, lack of adequate information. In India, psychiatric disorders varying from 9.5 to 370 per 1000 people. The stigma associated with mental health acts a major barrier in seeking help and support. This results in delay of treatment and further negative consequences. It is important to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness to over mental health problems in India. This stigma acts as a key barrier to subscribe to mental well-being programs, counselling services and Community-Based

Rehabilitation. Eliminating this stigma will bring in a change in behaviour among the target group to accept community-based Counselling and Psychotherapy services, reach out to helplines (McGorry et al., 2022; Meghrajani et al., 2023).

The discipline of social marketing can become an important driver for change in terms of bringing behavioural change. Social marketing helps to influence behaviours through a systematic planning process, through application of classical marketing principles and approaches with an intent to drive positive benefits for the society (Kotler and Lee, 2008).

Social marketing involves adapting commercial marketing theories and practices for supporting campaigns for social change. It increases positive behaviour and decreases negative behaviour for the benefits of individuals, groups, and society. It attempts to satisfy the same needs of the target audience that is currently satisfied through consumption of less socially desirable products. It adopts a contemporary customer orientation approach for a targeted audience that is specific, identifiable, and reachable. (Dann, 2010). Social marketing adopts a citizen centred approach for maintaining and facilitating social good by suggesting a strategic approach (French and Gordon, 2015). Social marketing techniques are not specific to health promotion and all programs must have emphasis on influencing specific behaviors and creating clusters of related behaviors, build interventions around citizen beliefs, attitudes behaviors, needs and wants; have a social offering in terms of ideas, products or service expectations and relationship building with stakeholders (French and Russell-Bennett, 2015). There are limited studies that provide a clear marketing mix in the contemporary marketing context for creating awareness on dealing with mental health issues.

The larger objective of the study is to apply the social marketing framework and develop a marketing mix for reducing social stigma associated with help-seeking behaviour among individuals dealing with mental illness. This paper highlights the role of social marketing in promoting behavioural change and improving help-seeking behaviour to address mental illness.

Review of Literature

2.1 Social Marketing

Social marketing can be applied to various sectors namely public health and welfare, education, governance, or environmental issues. The objective of social marketing aligns with the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to improve people's lives globally. Hence the evidence links between social marketing and SDGs that can help in improving people's lives (Galan-Ladero and Alves, 2023).

Kotler and Zaltman, 1971 were the pioneers of suggesting social marketing as an effective framework for planning and implementing social change. Dann (2010) defined social marketing as 'the adaptation and adoption of commercial marketing activities, institutions and processes as a means to induce behavioural change in a targeted audience on a temporary or permanent basis to achieve a social goal (p. 151).

Social marketing involves an attempt to change knowledge, attitudes to influence individual and group behaviour. (Andreasen, 2003). Social marketing can help challenge and reduce societal stigma. Reducing the stigma against mental illness is a classic example of adopting social marketing that can help to create awareness and opt for mental health care services (Kemper and Kennedy, 2021). Kirkwood (2006) and Thackeray (2011) both highlight the potential of social marketing in addressing stigma related to mental illness and addictions, respectively. They emphasize the importance of empowering the affected individuals and using a consumer-oriented approach. Lavack (2007) further supports this, suggesting that social marketing can help de-stigmatize addictions by creating campaigns that challenge negative perceptions and encourage help-seeking behavior. These studies collectively demonstrate the potential of social marketing in overcoming societal stigma by promoting understanding, empathy, and support for marginalized groups. Social marketing is a practice-based framework guided by ethical principles, integrating "research, best practice, theory, audience, and partnership insight, to inform the delivery of competition-sensitive and segmented social change programs that are effective, efficient, equitable and sustainable".

One of the early benchmark criteria for social marketing was developed by Andreasen (2002). The uniqueness of social marketing can be assessed not just based on the advertising theme but placing behaviour change as the cornerstone. Social marketing understands target audience based on research and is customer driven, focuses on creating attractive exchanges that would motivate positive social behaviour. The six criteria serve as a benchmark to assess if the approach can be described as social marketing. Andreasen (2002) benchmark criteria for social marketing include, behaviour change, research, segmentation, motivational exchanges with target audience, application of 4Ps of traditional marketing and careful attention to competition. Identifying the appropriate

marketing mix to support social marketing was also emphasized by French and Blair-Stevens (2006) and French (2012) who revised the benchmark criteria. The meaning of a marketing mix was expanded beyond the 4ps of product, price, place and promotions. Adopting the most effective marketing mix of interventions would ensure influencing the targeted behaviour.

French and Russell-Bennett (2015) extended previous studies and identified some core techniques that can be applied to social marketing and can be applied to for-profit and not-for-profit marketing programs. He proposed the concept of 'Integrated intervention mix' that was developed based on customer insights, analysing customer segments and competition and a feasibility study to develop and effective mix to influence the target group.

2.2 Re-tooling the social marketing mix

Adopting social marketing is a firm level strategy that involves, identification of market opportunities, product design, developing partnerships, sustainability-oriented marketing strategies, and trade-offs (Voola et al., 2022)

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) provides the theoretical foundation to explain how social marketing influences behaviour. The basic assumption is that, intention to behave predicts certain behaviour that is influenced by an individual's attitude, normative beliefs and perceived behavioural control.

To implement social marketing, the traditional marketing mix needs to be revisited and re-configured. The 4Ps suggested by Jerome McCarthy (1960), namely Product, Price, Place and Promotion have dominated marketing literature and influenced by several disciplines. However, in the context of social marketing, which has a focus on behavioural change and is influenced by theory of planned behaviour, the 4Ps need to be redefined.

Based on the above the following marketing mix framework can be adopted by organisations who plan to implement social marketing. The framework integrates fields such as psychology, sociology and anthropology. Additionally, advocacy, engagement with stakeholders and building relationships need to be integrated in the social marketing mix (Gordon, 2012).

2.3 The 4 Ps of Social Marketing Mix

The proposed plan used the framework by Gordon (2013) and DeBate & Gatto (2021) and incorporated:

Product	Defining the product is the starting point of the marketing mix. It influences the cost and promotions. In the domain of social marketing, the product drives behavioural offer to the early adopter and involves an intangible benefit or idea Ex. Health or well-being. It could include seeking professional help from a professional. However, tangible components can exist too. Ex. Research reports and influences adopting of new behaviour.
Price	Price is the cost incurred by the target audience for the desired benefit or barriers that need to overcome to adopt the desired behaviour. These can be psychological, physical or financial costs incurred by the consumer. Ex. Cost of enforcing a law and the monetary cost associated with it.
Place	Place is the location where the target audience where the promotion of behavioural change takes place. This could include physical or virtual spaces ex. Internet that support and encourage such behaviours.
Promotion	Promotions focus on the context of promotion to achieve behavioural change. It includes the mode of communication adopted through traditional and contemporary advertising strategies including social media marketing in today's digital era. Promotions must include intrinsic motivation that would encourage adopting of new behaviours. Developing strong relationship and engagement with the target audience is key to the success of social marketing.

2.4 Overcoming Stigma against mental illness through social marketing

One of the Major health related issue, India faces is related to mental health. Mental disorders impact individual of diverse age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and regions. The existence and increase in mental health, makes it a priority area to provide support and address mental wellbeing through health service providers. The existing mental healthcare services remain unutilised due to limited awareness and social stigma associated with it. Stigma against using mental health care services is a pervasive issue this prevents individuals to access treatment and support for mental well-being. The Stigmatization of mental health problems

is also influenced by cultural and religious beliefs, with increased mental health literacy potentially helping to decrease self-stigma (Hivet and Bui, 2023). (Shidhaye, 2013; Campo-Arias, 2014). This stigma can lead to delays in seeking care, reduced service requests, and the allocation of limited resources to mental health (Campo-Arias, 2014).

The stigma associated with mental health acts as a key barrier specially the youth to take support. It impacts help-seeking behaviours among individuals. Mental health services are not integrated into primary healthcare. Addressing mental disorders, require an integrated approach involving various psychosocial interventions that would empower the individual and focus on overall well-being. The National Mental Health Program (NMHP) is a government led program to improve mental healthcare services. Private sector can play an important role in collaborating with public sector agencies to improve mental healthcare services (Bommert, 2010, Meghrajani et al., 2023).

Perceived public stigma has been identified as a significant barrier to help-seeking behavior for mental health issues, particularly among college students. This perception of stigma can be influenced by individual characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, and religiosity (Eisenberg *et al.*, 2009). The importance of stigma as a barrier to mental health care is further emphasized by Golberstein et al., (2008), who highlights the need to reduce these barriers to improve access to care. Despite these concerns, some studies have found that high anticipated stigma does not necessarily deter individuals from utilizing mental health services (Sharp, 2015).

Social marketing has been identified as a valuable tool in addressing the stigma associated with receiving psychological help. Kirkwood and Stamm (2006) and Corrigan (2011) both highlight the potential of social marketing in challenging stigma, with Kirkwood emphasizing the need for a persuasive approach and Corrigan discussing the use of protest, education, and contact. Lavack (2007) further supports this, noting the successful use of social marketing in de-stigmatizing addictions. Thackeray et al., (2011) provides a broader perspective, presenting two case studies that demonstrate the unique contributions of social marketing in reducing mental health stigma and increasing HIV testing. These studies collectively underscore the potential of social marketing in overcoming the stigma associated with seeking psychological help.

Methodology

Online Questionnaires were distributed to 150 respondents (i.e., psychologists), and 68 responses were received comprising a response rate of 45%. The respondents were collected from a population that had already experienced on mental health services.

The questionnaire comprises three sections: first section was designed to extract the respondents' demographic characteristics, and second section measured Stigma Associated with seeking help for mental illness (Eisenberg et al., 2009). Third section was designed to ask respondents to rate their Attitude towards psychological and mental illness (Eisenberg et al., 2009). Fourth section to measured Most effective for promoting mental well-being services (Eisenberg et al., 2009). All instruments were designed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly agree - (5)' to 'strongly disagree - (1)', using multi-item scales. SmartPLS and SPSS analysis was conducted because it has the ability to estimate both direct and is a testable model; it also has the ability to ensure the consistency of the model with the data and to estimate the effects among the constructs. The method of estimation used was the maximum likelihood method.

Findings

To assess the stigma associated with seeking counselling services for mental well-being, a survey was conducted among psychologists. The integrated the Stigma Scale for Receiving Psychological Help (SSRPH) to assess the stigma associated with seeking help for mental well-being based on the experience of the counsellors and psychologists dealing with individuals seeking their help. The survey also assessed the attitude towards psychological and mental illness and their view on how social marketing can enable create awareness on mental health issues.

The Sample comprised of 68 respondents which comprised of 41% of Psychologist, 35% social workers, 18% mental health counsellors and 6% HR professionals supporting mental well-being.

Table 1 : Stigma Associated with seeking help for mental illness

Sr.	Behaviour	Mean Value
1	Seeing a professional for emotional or interpersonal problems carries social stigma.	3.71
2	Mental illness is a sign of personal weakness or inadequacy to see a psychologist for emotional or interpersonal problems.	3.12
3	They will be seen less favorable way if other come to know that he/she has seen a psychologist.	3.47
4	It is advisable for a person to hide from people that he/she has seen a psychologist / Mental Wellness professional	2.53

5	They will be liked less as they are seeking professional psychological help.	2.47
6	Seeking professional help for their mental well-being is a threat to their self-confidence.	2.18
7	Seeking professional help for mental well-being would make them feel less intelligent.	2.47
8	Seeking professional help makes them feel inferior.	2.41

Table 2 : Attitude towards psychological and mental illness

1	On having a mental breakdown, their first inclination would be to get professional attention.	3.18
2	They would want to get professional help if they were worried or upset for a long period of time.	3.82
3	If they experience a serious psychological problem, they would be confident to find relief in psychotherapy.	3.65
4	It would be relatively easy for them to find the time to see a professional for psychological problems in person.	3.24
5	They have a very good idea of what to do and who to talk to if they decided to seek professional help for psychological problems.	3.00
6	Would opt for professional help if confidentiality is maintained	4.29
7	Would prefer a safe and secure environment over the qualification of the professional.	4.12
8	Accessibility is a major factor in selecting mental well-being services.	4.06
9	Prefer online counselling services over face to face counselling.	3.35
10	Being part of support-group for mental well-being is a motivation to select professional help.	4.12

Table 3 : Most effective for promoting mental well-being services :

Sr. no.	Medium	% of Respondents
1.	Social media	59%
2.	T. V. Advertising	12%
3.	Public Relations	12%
4.	Word of Mouth	18%

Table 4 : Most preferred counselling in addition to face to face :

Sr. no.	Medium	% of Respondents
1.	Telephonic counselling during emergency	24%
2.	24 x 7 helpline	47%
3.	Mobile App based support	29%
4.	Email Support	0%

Based on the above findings, Table 1: indicates that seeing a professional for emotional or interpersonal problems carries social stigma. Individuals do not want to be seen approaching a psychologist or counsellor to seek professional support. Table 2, indicates that individuals will opt for professional help if confidentiality is maintained. This needs to be supported by a safe and secure environment, which is more important than the qualification of the professional. Clients have a strong preference to being part of a support-group for mental well-being. There is also a tendency to opt for professional help only if they experience mental illness for a long period of time. Table 3, shows social media to be string source of information and platform to create awareness on mental-well being. Clients have a strong preference to a 24 x 7 helpline for support services. Additionally, 94% of the respondents were of the view that Involving a celebrity to create awareness on the benefits of mental well-being will bring in a social change to accept counselling services.

Analysis

Promoting mental health through social marketing: Proposed marketing mix

Existing literature on social marketing provides evidence of wide application specially in public health domain. It has been established as an effective mechanism for dissemination of information and influence positive behaviour. A social marketing mix for promoting counselling and psychotherapy services can be developed by adopting the proposed marketing mix.

Our empirical findings and literature review are the basis of proposing a social marketing framework that can enable service providers to create awareness and reduce the stigma associated with seeking help for mental illness.

The following framework can help private service providers offering community-based services for mental health to achieve their marketing objectives and increase help-seeking behaviour :

4 Ps	Operationalization	Description
Product	Promote help-seeking behaviour	Uniqueness in the service of providing a safe and compassionate space for individuals seeking support and guidance on their mental health. These would include a wide range of wellness services, workplace employee assistance programs, support groups, and online counselling services or telephone helpline. The focus must be safety, confidentiality, accessibility and convenient. The product must demonstrate social value creation through reduction of social problems ex. anxiety, panic disorder, bipolar disorder, depression, schizophrenia, and stress
Price	Reducing Stigma Social	Refers to action that the target audience must undertake to utilise the product. It can involve an individual's time and effort. The cumulative psychological, physical or financial costs incurred by the consumer to deal with perception of the society with regards to the stigma associated with seeking support and guidance. While many of these services may be sponsored as CSR initiative and explicit cost must be made clear for adoption.
Place	Mental Wellness Centre & Online Counselling	Conveniently and accessible safe space to encourage chances of participation. These spaces could be in wellness centres, counselling centres, workplace, or community spaces where the target audience would feel psychologically safe. Physical or online spaces where the target audience can act, eliminate barriers focus on behaviour change, receive accurate and reliable information and support.
Promotion	Reach the audience	Use promotion to reach the audience and draw attention to social marketing initiatives. It can include traditional and social media marketing campaigns with PR activities. The focus would be to promote community-based Counselling and Psychotherapy services, promote safe spaces and support groups, promote helpline services for remote support. The activities can involve, press releases, events and talks, TV spots, social media posts, use of celebrity influences, free sessions. These activities will enhance motivation for adopting new behaviours. Conducting market research is key as it will enable the marketer to understand how the target audience will receive the information.

Discussion

Social marketing has been successfully employed to address various health behaviour change including vaccine hesitancy. Behaviour change involves making long term commitments, an maintenance and re-lapse, and long-term relational thinking and brand equity are important concepts (DeBate and Gatto, 2021; Evans and Hastings, 2008). the four Ps cannot be easily applied to services marketing, a lack of connection and integration between the variables, and people, participants and processes are omitted.

The social marketing mix provides offer more than behaviour change. It enables forms to engage with stakeholders and communities, build relationships by co-creating marketing collaterals through research. It includes advocacy, building media and public relations to adopt an integrated approach for change in attitudes and behaviours. With changing technology, social marketing must adopt the change and use an integrated and innovative approach for promotions and place.

Fear of any stigma often results in not seeking help. Social marketing can help in de-stigmatise and bring normalcy around mental health issues (Lavack, 2009). The propose social marketing mix will enable community-based service providers to create awareness on mental health issues and create a psychological safe environment for individuals to subscribe to their services. Based on the theory of planned behaviour, if will positively influence, attitude towards seeking help and perceived control. Promotion programs will influence subjective norms towards these services.

Conclusion

Adapting the marketing mix for social marketing can create positive attitude towards mental health and its services. To effectively promote community-based services to deal with mental health there is need to Promote help-seeking behaviour, provide a wide range of face to face and a 24 x 7 help line with internet based mental wellness services to reach the target audience and focus on overcoming the stigma associated with mental illness. Providing a safe and secure environment is very important along with maintaining confidentiality. Market research is key to implement social marketing for segmentation and targeting. In the age of social media marketing, firms can integrate digital platforms and social influencers to impact perception of the target audience. Social media can play a significant role in reducing stigma around mental illness by providing a platform for individuals to share their experiences and challenge stereotypes. Future researchers can test the proposed framework empirically based on a particular campaign aimed at creating awareness on mental well-being and promoting counselling services.

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