



MARKETING AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

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***Abstract:** Social innovation offers new solutions that enhance the quality of life and societal development, addressing issues like poverty, unemployment, and climate change. Despite their benefits, some social innovations face societal resistance. Effective marketing communication strategies are crucial for acceptance. This article examines the impact of marketing communication on the acceptance of social innovation. The analysis highlights the pivotal role of marketing in promoting social innovations and achieving behavioural change.*

***Key words:** marketing, social innovation, marketing communications, behavioral change.*

Social innovation refers to novel solutions that aim to improve the welfare and development of communities by addressing systemic social issues. These innovations can range from new policies and programs to technologies and organizational structures that tackle poverty, unemployment, health disparities, and environmental sustainability. Despite their potential to create significant societal benefits, social innovations often encounter resistance from various stakeholders due to unfamiliarity, misconceptions, or entrenched interests.

Marketing communication plays a crucial role in overcoming these barriers by effectively conveying the benefits of social innovations and engaging stakeholders in a manner that fosters acceptance and adoption. This paper explores the intersection of marketing and social innovation, focusing on how strategic marketing communication can drive the acceptance and integration of social innovations in society.

The Importance of Social Innovation

Social innovations are essential for addressing some of the most pressing challenges of our time. They provide scalable and sustainable solutions that traditional methods may not effectively address. For instance, microfinance initiatives offer financial services to underserved populations, enabling them to escape poverty. Renewable energy projects contribute to climate change mitigation and energy security. Social enterprises create employment opportunities and deliver social services in innovative ways.

„The concept of social marketing is based on the traditional philosophy of modern marketing with a new, global goal - a comprehensive marketing activity aimed at satisfying the needs of the target market, taking into account the socio-ethical and environmental problems of society as a whole”¹.

Social innovation has become crucial for enhancing social value for companies and communities, aiding in socioeconomic inclusion (Weaver & Marks, 2017). According to Dobele et al. (2015), social innovation has played a significant role in helping governments and businesses promote essential structural changes in society, such as improving welfare and financial access. The authors assert that SI is a novel, sustainable, and effective strategy for addressing social issues affecting society and individuals. Governments and companies,

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as integral parts of the community, are vital stakeholders and essential participants in forming networks to tackle social challenges within the social innovation framework (Dhondt, 2016). Additionally, Dionísio and Vargas (2020) contend that SI is a primary method for companies to address social problems through innovative practices and strategies while also achieving economic outcomes.

Social innovation aims to drive social change by introducing new solutions that improve people’s quality of life and advance societal development. These improvements can occur in various areas, including poverty, unemployment, climate change, and ecology. Effective marketing communication with the public is crucial to ensure that social innovations are accepted by society. Social innovations not only introduce new solutions but also address numerous societal problems. They are studied not only by scientists but are also considered in legislation.

The European Union defines *social innovation* as a means to „empower people and lead change“, contributing to social change that fosters sustainable social inclusion (Fougère, Segercrantz & Seeck, 2017). However, there are various interpretations and definitions of social innovation. It can be understood as „a new solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or equitable than existing solutions and whose value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than to private individuals“ (Phills, Deiglmeier, & Miller, 2008). Social innovation has been a part of human history, reflecting humanity’s creative capacity and efforts to address needs and improve quality of life (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014).

The concept of social innovation is closely linked to social entrepreneurship, which strives for the common good and sustainability for both people and the planet (Muscat & Whitty, 2009). Green entrepreneurship is a significant subset of social entrepreneurship. At its core, social entrepreneurship is a form of entrepreneurship, with social entrepreneurs being a specific type of entrepreneur (Dees, 1998). Numerous works attempt to define social entrepreneurship, yet it remains a complex concept due to the difficulty in clearly delineating what constitutes and does not (Peredo & McLean, 2006).

However, the path from innovative ideas to widespread adoption is challenging. Social innovations must navigate complex social, economic, and political landscapes. They often require changes in behaviour, mindsets, and policies, which can only be possible with widespread support and understanding.

Barriers to Acceptance of Social Innovation

Several factors contribute to the resistance against social innovations:

- Lack of Awareness and Understanding: Many social innovations are unfamiliar to the general public. People may be skeptical or indifferent to new ideas without proper knowledge and understanding.
- Cultural and Social Norms: Innovations that challenge established cultural and social norms may face resistance from communities that are reluctant to change.
- Economic and Political Interests: Existing power structures and vested interests may oppose innovations threatening their status quo.
- Perceived Risks and Uncertainty: People often fear the unknown and may perceive social innovations as risky or uncertain ventures.

The Role of Marketing Communication

Effective marketing communication is pivotal in addressing these barriers and facilitating the acceptance of social innovations. It involves crafting and delivering messages that resonate with target audiences, building awareness, and fostering positive



attitudes towards innovation. The following are key strategies in marketing communication for social innovation:

- Education and Awareness Campaigns: Informative campaigns that educate the public about the benefits and mechanisms of social innovations can dispel myths and build understanding. These campaigns should use clear, relatable, and compelling narratives.

- Stakeholder Engagement: Engaging stakeholders, including community leaders, policymakers, and potential beneficiaries, in the development and implementation of social innovations can build trust and buy-in.

- Behavioural Change Communication: Marketing strategies should address behavioural barriers by promoting the desired actions and showcasing the positive impact of adopting the innovation. Techniques such as social proof can be effective, where testimonials and case studies demonstrate success.

- Tailored Messaging: Different segments of the population may have different concerns and motivations. Tailoring messages to address various groups' specific needs and values can enhance relevance and acceptance.

- Use of Multiple Channels: Utilizing a mix of communication channels, including digital media, traditional media, and face-to-face interactions, can ensure that messages reach a broad audience and reinforce the innovation's credibility.

Examining successful case studies of social innovations can provide valuable insights into effective marketing communication strategies. For instance, the global campaign for clean cookstoves, which aimed to reduce health issues and environmental damage from traditional cooking methods, utilized a multifaceted communication strategy. This included celebrity endorsements, local champions, and evidence-based messaging to gain acceptance and drive adoption. Another example is the adoption of mobile money services in Kenya, such as M-Pesa, which revolutionized financial transactions for the unbanked population. The marketing strategy emphasized convenience, security, and the socioeconomic benefits of financial inclusion, which resonated with a broad audience and led to widespread acceptance.

Education and Awareness Campaigns

Education and awareness are foundational elements in the marketing of social innovations. For social innovations to gain traction, the target audience must comprehend what the innovation is, how it works, and the benefits it brings. Educational campaigns can take various forms, including workshops, seminars, online courses, informational websites, and social media content. The objective is to demystify and present the innovation in an accessible and engaging manner. The Clean Cookstoves Initiative aimed to replace traditional, inefficient stoves with cleaner alternatives to reduce indoor air pollution and its associated health risks. The educational campaign used multiple approaches to reach different segments of the population. It included:

- Community Workshops: These workshops provided hands-on demonstrations of the new cookstoves, allowing participants to see firsthand how they worked and their benefits.

- School Programs: Integrating information about clean cooking into school curricula helped educate children, who could then influence their families.

- Media Campaigns: Radio, television, and print media were used to broadcast the health and economic benefits of clean cookstoves, leveraging storytelling to make the message relatable.

Microfinance institutions (MFIs) such as Grameen Bank have used educational campaigns to explain the concept of micro-loans to potential borrowers. These campaigns typically involve:

- Local Meetings: MFIs hold regular meetings in villages to educate people about microloans, the repayment process, and how they can use these loans to start or expand small businesses.

- Success Stories: Sharing stories of individuals who have successfully used microloans to improve their livelihoods helps build trust and show tangible results.

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is another crucial strategy. Marketers can build trust, gain valuable insights, and create advocates for innovation by involving key stakeholders in the process. These stakeholders include community leaders, local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and potential users.

For example, renewable energy projects require substantial buy-in from local communities and authorities. Effective stakeholder engagement strategies include:

- Community Consultations: Before implementing renewable energy projects, developers often consult with local communities to understand their needs, address concerns, and incorporate local knowledge into the project design.
- Partnerships with NGOs: Collaborating with NGOs that have established relationships within the community can facilitate smoother implementation and acceptance.

Behavioural Change Communication

Behavioural change communication aims to influence the attitudes and behaviours of the target audience towards adopting social innovation. This involves understanding the psychological and social factors that drive behaviour and designing messages that motivate change.

Public health campaigns, such as those promoting handwashing to prevent disease, use behavioural change communication strategies, including:

- Health Messaging: Clear and concise messages about the health benefits of handwashing, often delivered through posters, flyers, and public service announcements.
- Demonstrations and Workshops: Practical demonstrations of proper handwashing techniques in schools and community centres.
- Role Models: Using respected community members or celebrities to endorse the behaviour, making it more aspirational.

Campaigns aimed at reducing plastic use and promoting recycling often employ:

- Visual Storytelling Images and videos that highlight the impact of plastic pollution on wildlife and ecosystems to evoke emotional responses and drive behaviour change.
- Incentives: Programs that offer incentives, such as discounts or rewards for using reusable bags or participating in recycling programs.

Tailored Messaging

Tailoring messages to specific population segments ensures the communication resonates with their unique values, concerns, and lifestyles. This approach requires a deep understanding of the target audience through market research and segmentation.

Financial inclusion programs targeting different demographics, such as rural women or urban youth, tailor their messaging to address specific barriers and motivations:

- Rural Women: Messages emphasize how financial services can empower women economically, improve their families' livelihoods, and provide education opportunities for their children.

- Urban Youth: Campaigns focus on the convenience and modernity of mobile banking services, highlighting how they can facilitate entrepreneurship and financial independence.

Health initiatives, such as those promoting vaccination, adjust their messaging based on the audience's characteristics:

- Parents of Young Children: Emphasize the safety and efficacy of vaccines in protecting children from diseases, often using testimonials from other parents.



- Elderly Population: Highlight the importance of vaccines in maintaining health and independence in later years, using statistics and endorsements from healthcare professionals.

Use of Multiple Channels

A multi-channel approach ensures the message reaches a broad audience and reinforces its credibility. Different channels have varying strengths in terms of reach, engagement, and influence.

Anti-smoking campaigns use a combination of channels to maximize their impact:

Mass Media: Television, radio, and print advertisements to reach a broad audience.

- Social Media: Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and X to engage younger demographics with interactive content.

- Community Events: Health fairs, school programs, and local workshops to provide face-to-face education and support.

Climate action initiatives employ various channels to advocate for environmental sustainability:

- Documentaries and Films: Visual storytelling to raise awareness and inspire action.

- Online Platforms: Websites and social media are used to share information, mobilize supporters, and organize events.

- Public Demonstrations: Rallies, marches, and other public demonstrations to draw media attention and build a sense of collective action.

Challenges

Despite the strategic use of marketing communication, there are inherent challenges in marketing social innovations. Many social innovations face resource constraints, as they often operate on limited budgets, making it difficult to compete with commercial products with substantial marketing funds. Measuring social innovations' impact and marketing efforts can also be challenging, especially when addressing long-term social change. Resistance to change is another significant hurdle, as deeply ingrained habits and beliefs can be hard to shift, even with well-crafted marketing messages. Additionally, marketing social innovations requires sensitivity to the ethical implications of messaging and the risk of perceived manipulation.

Addressing these challenges involves strategic planning and innovative approaches:

- Leveraging Partnerships: Collaborating with governments, NGOs, and private sector partners can amplify resources and reach.

- Utilizing Low-Cost Digital Marketing: Digital platforms offer cost-effective ways to reach large audiences and engage with them interactively.

- Impact Evaluation: Implementing robust impact evaluation methods to measure and demonstrate the effectiveness of social innovations and their marketing.

- Ethical Marketing Practices: Ensuring transparency, honesty, and respect in all marketing communications to build trust and avoid backlash.

The successful adoption of social innovations hinges on their inherent value and the effectiveness of marketing communication strategies employed to promote them. By addressing barriers to acceptance and leveraging strategic communication, marketers can play a crucial role in facilitating societal change and enhancing the impact of social innovations. As the world continues to face complex social challenges, the intersection of marketing and social innovation will remain a critical area for research and practice, driving progress towards a more equitable and sustainable future. The examples and strategies discussed in this article illustrate the power of marketing communication in transforming innovative ideas into widely accepted solutions that contribute to societal well-being.

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