



ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at <http://www.journalijdr.com>

IJDR

International Journal of Development Research

Vol. 11, Issue, 12, pp. 53016-53019, December, 2021

<https://doi.org/10.37118/ijdr.23707.12.2021>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

COMMUNICATION THROUGH SOCIAL MARKETING IN TIMES OF COVID 19 IN THE BRAZILIAN SCENARIO

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 29th September, 2021

Received in revised form

27th October, 2021

Accepted 20th November, 2021

Published online 30th December, 2021

Key Words:

Communication,
Social Marketing,
COVID-19 Pandemic.

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ABSTRACT

The management of communication through social marketing in times of COVID-19 is an essential factor for institutions and companies that use social campaigns to fight community contagions of the disease's infection, while getting people's acceptance for related behavioral changes to socializing in public places, in the workplace and at home, in accordance with the protocols of competent public health entities. Given a high-risk pandemic scenario, with understandings still under development, the exchange and dissemination of information and knowledge is crucial to prevent and/or reduce harmful circumstances to public health. Therefore, the divulgation of simple, objective, fast and effective communication is essential in the current context, which is the justification for this study. It is an exploratory, descriptive study based on bibliographic searches in the Capes Periodicals, Google Scholar, electronic sites and IPEA Technical Notes of the descriptors: communication, social marketing and COVID-19. After considering the current literature, it is pointed as a contribution to propose the following questions for future empirical research in the Brazilian context: What is the impact of communication through social marketing on people's behavior in critical periods of COVID-19? What are the effects of social marketing communication in campaigns developed by public institutions during COVID-19? How does communication management through social marketing occur in public institutions in the COVID-19 pandemic context? What are the levels of trust of people in institutions that make use of social marketing campaigns?

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Citation: Antonella Maria das Chagas Sousa, Sílvia Augusto Minciotti, Alexandre Wallace Ramos Pereira and Edson Keyson de Miranda Kubo. "Communication through social marketing in times of Covid 19 in the Brazilian scenario", *International Journal of Development Research*, 11, (12), 53016-53019.

INTRODUCTION

The world health organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020 declared as a pandemic the disease known as COVID-19 (new Coronavirus in the SARS-CoV-2 family), which quickly reached the world and impacted all sectors of society and, expressively, the human life (BOOKS *et al.*, 2020; LIMA *et al.*, 2020; WEST *et al.*, 2020). This critical scenario has made thousands of human lives vulnerable and also the immense responsibility of governments, institutions, entities and leaders in favor of the exchange of experiences, knowledge, technologies, resources, reciprocal support, sanitary measures and protocols to face a critical situation. In the meantime, behavioral changes in everyday life and in public spaces are considered by health and sanitary authorities as essential to consider the elements that are still

unknown in the fight against the disease (BOOKS *et al.*, 2020; LOW; SMART, 2020). This new reality brings the imperative of social distancing and confronts a trait identified as peculiar to a social world by nature. Community, affective, commercial, public and private ties experience a different meaning; in other words, from a present and palpable format, they now exercise a virtual and distance form. This new social norm of physical distance already triggers anxiety, increased segregation and less tolerance (LOW; SMART, 2020). In fact, a change of behavior from the social to the virtual, accompanied by protocols from the competent health agencies to be effective strategies of informational, affective, economic and effective support, in order for people in different conditions to adjust themselves to the new ways in public and private spaces assertively (WASDANI; PRASAD, 2020). In this perspective, clarification initiatives,

actions to care for the well-being of people, economic support, co-responsibility between institutions, government and society, in general, are considered essential strategies to contain the proliferation of COVID-19 (WASDANI; PRASAD, 2020). Activities anchored in the mobilizing approaches of Marketing point to individual changes that are so necessary and urgent and require a planned intervention and effective communication management in order to sensitize the greatest number of individuals (ANDREASEN, 2002). It is argued, therefore, that Social Marketing can be this tool capable of highlighting the positive aspects of the participation of each individual in confronting the community contagion of the aforementioned disease, as it uses an approach that is applied in the intervention of any social or commercial issues, in addition to being operationalized in unique situations of social programs (ANDRAEASEN, 2002; KOTLER, 2013). When referring to an interventionist approach in the human, social and commercial fields, it is important to describe that marketing works towards recognizing what satisfies people with regard to human and social aspects (KOTLER, 2013). In this way, the American Marketing Association (AMA) establishes the definition that marketing is a comprehensive process that involves creativity, communication, delivery and exchange of various products that are of value to interested parties, such as consumers, customers, partners and society. It is understood, therefore, that marketing professionals seek to provide answers or solutions to all demands, and, fundamentally, the social and economic ones. To promote these deliveries, marketing makes use of communication channels that manifest their messages through both traditional print (newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, billboards) and digital and electronic ways (CDs, audio recordings, emails, blogs) (KOTLER, 2013). Thus, in a critical scenario of the pandemics, the communication channels managed by marketing assume considerable relevance due to their integrative capacity, breadth and speed of being accessed by the target audience. Currently, the internet has contributed intensely to enhance social marketing actions and campaigns, filling strategic communication gaps in all segments of society to help the population in the prevention and care of the disease (SIQUEIRA, 2020).

Problem and aim of the research: The study is based on the following question: What is the importance of communication through social marketing in times of COVID-19 in the Brazilian scenario? Therefore, the objective is to describe the importance of communication through social marketing in the days of COVID-19 in the Brazilian scenario.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

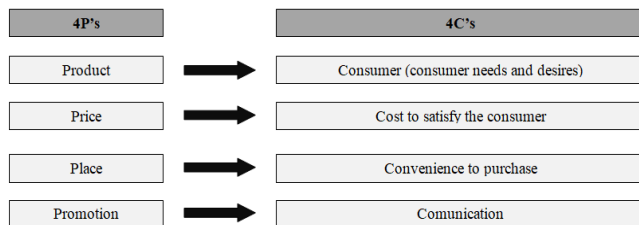
The importance of social marketing communication in times of COVID-19: Alguns teóricos do marketing acreditam que a compreensão adequada deste se torna fundamental para o usufruto de seus benefícios pelas organizações. Uma vez que uma diversidade de conceitos é elaborada pelo senso comum e, geralmente, restringindo as ações do marketing à propaganda e vendas. Some marketing theorists believe that an adequate comprehension of marketing becomes essential for organizations to enjoy its benefits. Since a diversity of concepts is elaborated by common sense, generally, restricting marketing actions to advertising and sales. To resolve this nebulosity, Kotler (2013) states that marketing is primarily intended to meet human, private or social needs, while generating a profit alternative. From this perspective, it can be deduced how much a skillful marketing management is essential to extract a profitable opportunity from satisfying the demands of a consuming public. AMA emphasizes this understanding by defining marketing as a broad process of knowledge, creativity, communication, generation of deliveries and exchanges with its strategic audience. Based on this approach,

it can be said that marketing demonstrates a strong social commitment. Presuming how important, among all the elements, the care with the outlines of communication for the effectiveness of its relationship with its audience (SIQUEIRA, 2020). In this sense, with a focus on meeting the needs of the target audience, marketing management is seen as an art and science to find answers and satisfaction for the parties involved in transactions and/or social exchanges (KOTLER, 2013; MONTEIRO, 2017). It can be deduced that, as consumers are increasingly anxious for quick responses and social relationships, especially in sensitive scenarios of pandemics and intense social changes, communication acquires a broader functionality, in addition to the sense of social exchange and claims for a more emotional and spiritual sense (SIQUEIRA, 2020).

Thus, given the context of changes that global society experiences, it is essential that the population adapts cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally. Therefore, it is believed that people need to be informed, instructed, stimulated and followed up to develop the necessary changes. Based on this understanding, it is stated that change strategies involving social issues and that individuals and governments seek solutions are part of the techniques and actions of social marketing (KLOTTER; ROBERTO, 1992; MENDES *et al.*, 2016; MORCERF; SEABRA, 2006; POPADIUK; MARCONDES, 2000). Within the aforementioned purpose of behavioral change, social marketing is outlined as an expansion of the different phases and concepts through which traditional marketing has evolved, having moved from a mercantilist and commercial purpose to a social approach. In its social focus, it is configured as an influencing strategy for behavioral changes and also for social issues in society. In this sense, it is said that social marketing is committed to generating social changes to improve people's quality of life. And this happens in a planned way and a well-defined public, usually at the initiative of the government, citizens or both (KOTLER; ROBERTO, 1992; TUNIN; MOLINA, 2010). Nowadays, in pandemic times, the space for the performance of social marketing increases and, with the use of mass communication, messages in favor of citizens' health are disseminated, part of them come from social policies and campaigns related to the conditions of health in medical recommendations and health protocols. The recent Technical Notes of the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA) provide indicators on different economic aspects, state governance, social measures and, above all, public health (LINHARES; RAMOS; MESSENBERG, 2020; SERVO; SANTOS; SILVA, 2020). This allows for the development of significant actions and campaigns and, probably, positive influences from changes in the target segment's behavior.

By seizing the range of technical information, social marketing is considered to become an effective tool to address the social issues generated by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Faced with this critical scenario of public health promotion, essential care regarding hygienic habits, physical contacts, household organization, use of hand sanitizer, greater care with food products and other items to prevent contagion and spread of the disease are important. In addition to such public health sanitary measures, an unusual period of social isolation for people, families and groups compromises people's emotional and psychological well-being. It is, therefore, essential for social marketing to act, in this current scenario, associated with informational, educational and human-value campaigns in order to encourage voluntary acceptance of new determinations of social and public health behaviors (BOOKS *et al.*, 2020; KOTLER; ROBERTO, 1992; LINHARES; RAMOS; MESSENBERG, 2020; MORCERF; SEABRA, 2006; POPADIUK; MARCONDES, 2000; SERVO; SANTOS; SILVA, 2020; TUNIN; MOLINA, 2010). Therefore, it must make use of elements inherent to the

practice of marketing, for example, market segmentation, research to identify the profile of the target audience, means and communication channels, incentives and exchanges. The literature speaks of a marketing mix, encompassing four essential elements, namely: product (value and attributes to be delivered to the consumer), price (financial factor), place (distribution channels) and promotion (advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal sales and merchandising) (KOTLER, 2013; MONTEIRO, 2017; MORCERF; SEABRA, 2006). Figure 1 below illustrates the four elements of the marketing mix:



Source: adapted from slideplayer.com.br. Marketing Mix. Access in: 16 agosto 2021.

Figure 1. Four elements of the marketing mix

What is interesting to restrict in this study within the marketing mix shown above in Figure 1 is the p of Promotion, that is, the communication applied to sensitize and encourage individuals to adopt new behaviors. Andreasen's (2002) argument is used, when he states that social marketing has as a priority the change in behavior and, for that, it has a practice totally focused on encouraging the customer to feel benefited by the change. Therefore, communication acquires a strategic reference capable of guiding, clarifying, sensitizing and, even persuading. And when it comes to specific situations of a pandemic crisis, the acceptance of a new social behavior through planned social marketing communications has a large measure of effectiveness in achieving the desired behavior.

Covid-19, communication and social behavior change: Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19, countless questions were raised by the entire world scientific society, not only about the virus, but also about what to do to prevent the spread and contagion among people. There were several community fears and much is proposed to face the fear of infection, such as quarantine and social isolation. Insufficient, absent or inadequate information from public health managers and mass communication sectors reinforced the stressors across all segments of the population. The disorganization of health content and mismatched messages between levels of governments, health agencies and regional jurisdictions served to create a climate of insecurity, anxiety; in addition to giving rise to a series of psychological and mental illnesses such as fear of death, depression, thoughts of suicide and others (BOOKS *et al.*, 2020; LIMA *et al.*, 2020; WEST *et al.*, 2020). Studies on literature provide evidence that community behaviors are premises that contribute to the increase in COVID-19 transmission and, therefore, it is essential that physical contacts between peers be controlled and limited. In this situation, the change in social behavior needs to be practiced and guided by means and communication channels that reach the greatest number of people, mainly due to the lack of knowledge of appropriate interventions and treatments to contain the disease. It is believed that this is only possible with strategically planned communication for multiple audiences, seeking to influence new habits and collective behaviors based on an understanding of the biological, psychological, social and environmental factors surrounding the virus (BOOKS *et al.*, 2020; LIMA *et al.*, 2020; WEST *et al.*, 2020). Measures such as quarantine, physical distance and social isolation established by governments and public health authorities, unfortunately, were not provided with a

psychological preparation for a broad voluntary acceptance, which initially represented a great challenge and difficulties to be practiced by individuals (WEST *et al.*, 2020). Due to the importance of reducing the contagion of the disease with the adoption of behavioral measures, it can be said that, based on the researched literature, these practices would be better accepted and the projected results would be effectively achieved if means and channels of communication, whether global, regional or local, had been constituted on the strategic and integrated basis of institutions, competent authorities and entities in general. As human beings, the motivational factor is preponderant and social marketing knows how to turn the triggers of desires or needs for the required behaviors.

CONCLUSION/CONSIDERATION

Global society is experiencing a unique passage in history, challenged in the fields of knowledge, science, contact with peers, with the immense differences and inequalities. Unprecedented in the large-scale impact of so many human lives, it floods scholars and individuals in general with complex reflections in a critical context of technologies, speed and human fragility. Positioning the individual in facing this new reality is to help him with the offer of new products and services as a more human, supportive and affective communication. And, to that end, the means and channels of social marketing probably have a lot to contribute.

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