

Social Marketing: Its Theoretical Constraints Limit its Applied Effectiveness

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First, about me...

- Walter Wymer
- Professor of Marketing
- University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

Where in the world is Lethbridge?



Now for the Main Presentation

SM defined...

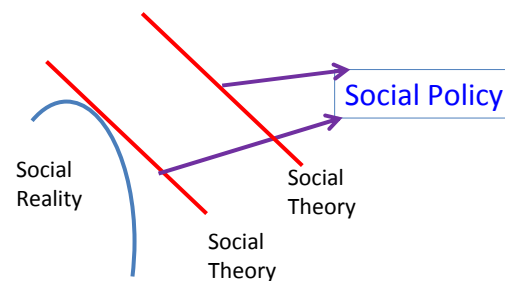
- Opel, Diekema, Lee, and Marcuse (2009) define social marketing as “...a model for behavior change, social marketing is a process that applies traditional marketing principles and techniques to influence target audience behaviors that benefit society as well as the individual”

Main Focus of SM

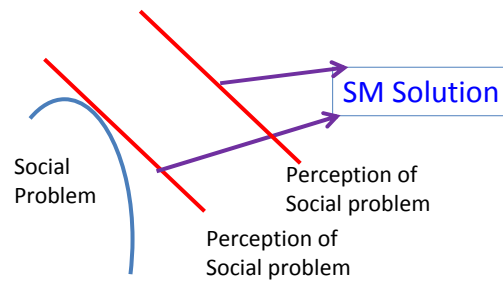
- Target: individual
- Goal: behavior change
- Framework: market exchange
- Strategy: application of 4 Ps

- Traditional SM applies commercial/corporate marketing concepts to solve social problems (typically public health problems)
- What are the implications of applying commercial marketing to solving social problems?
- Is this appropriate?
- Is this effective?

Effectiveness of SM?



Effectiveness of SM?

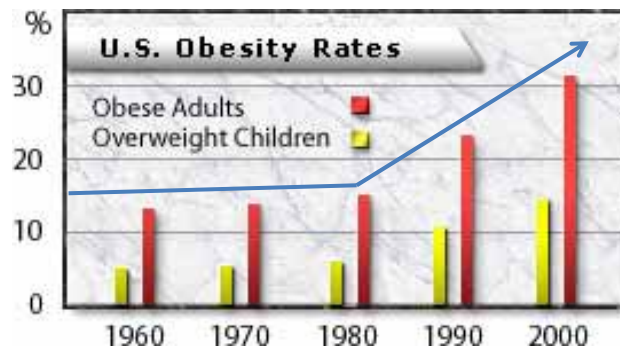


What may bias SM perception of social problem?

- Business education (neoliberalism)
- Focus on individual, looking for means of applying behavioral change model
- Framework of market exchange, application of 4 Ps
- Traditions, professional norms

Example: The Obesity Problem

- Obesity rates were relatively stable until about 1980. After 1980, the obesity rate began to rise sharply.



Obesity by country (2005 data)

Rank	Countries	Amount
# 1	United States:	30.6%
# 2	Mexico:	24.2%
# 3	United Kingdom:	23%
# 4	Slovakia:	22.4%
# 5	Greece:	21.9%
# 6	Australia:	21.7%
# 7	New Zealand:	20.9%
# 8	Hungary:	18.8%
# 9	Luxembourg:	18.4%
# 10	Czech Republic:	14.8%
# 11	Canada:	14.3%
# 12	Spain:	13.1%
# 13	Ireland:	13%

OECD Health Data 2005

Health Problems Associated with Obesity

- Heart disease and stroke
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Gallbladder disease and gallstones
- Osteoarthritis
- Gout
- Breathing problems, such as sleep apnea (when a person stops breathing for a short time during sleep) and asthma.

Consequences of higher obesity rates



Rising obesity will cost U.S. health care \$344 billion a year

It is obvious that we have an interest
in reducing obesity, but how?



What's causing the epidemic?

- eating too much and exercising too little...
- Why don't we eat less and exercise more then?



It's not working...

- Is it a knowledge problem?
 - Does the population need to be told to eat less, eat better, become more fit?



Conflicting messages

Lose 10 lbs/wk?

or

Make Candy-Bar Cookies

It's not working...

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Do we understand the cause?

- If we assume the cause is internal (will power, motivation to exercise) then our solutions will focus on these assumed causes.
- Since our solutions are not working, perhaps we don't understand the cause.
- Perhaps the problem is how people respond to the environment around them.

Contribution of external causes

- In her book *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*, Nestle argues that recommendations about healthy eating are overwhelmed by the hundreds of billions of dollars worth of advertising for junk foods that we're subjected to at home and even in public schools. And as **fast food companies and chains** compete with one another by increasing portion sizes, our waists are increasing proportionately.

- The way we eat has changed more in the past 50 years than it has in the previous 10,000



GOOD FOOD. COOL STUFF.

COMFORT JUST GOT MORE COMFORTABLE.

There are times in life when everyone could use some comfort. Fortunately the Carl's Jr. Grilled Cheese Bacon Burgers are there for you.

★ GET COMFORTED ★

FACEBOOK.COM/CARLSJR



Six Dollar Burger SHOWN

The advertisement features a central image of a Carl's Jr. Grilled Cheese Bacon Burger. The burger is a double-decker sandwich with a sesame seed bun, melted cheese, a beef patty, and strips of bacon. The text is arranged in a clean, sans-serif font, with the headline in bold. A red button with white text and stars is positioned below the introductory text. The background is a light gray gradient.



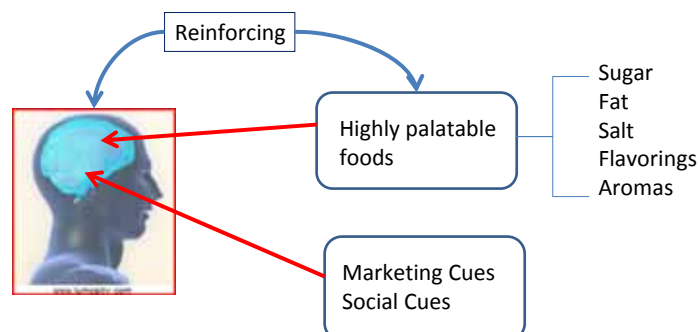


David Kessler's 7 yr research study

- Former professor at [Columbia Law School](#) and the [Albert Einstein College of Medicine](#).
- Former FDA Commissioner
- Former Dean, Yale School of Medicine.
- Former Dean, U of Cal. Medical School

Kessler concluded that the food industry is creating foods that are highly palatable. Marketing conditions us to cues. Many of us are being conditioned to hyper overeating of these foods.

The food industry has changed our eating habits and made certain foods difficult to resist.



- Food industry marketing creates an environment that stimulates obesity in the population.

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How does food marketing do this?

- Remember the 4Ps of marketing?
- **Product**
- **Price**
- **Place**
- **Promotion**

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Product

- Industrialization of our food supply.



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Price

- Industrialized food production has made processed foods inexpensive.
- Processing relies heavily on refined grains, fat, salt, flavorings, and high fructose corn syrup to make cheap foods taste good!
- And don't forget about food additives that increase shelf life and enhance flavor.
- Processed food – high calorie, low nutrition.

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Place

• Processed foods are easy to find. They're [everywhere](#).

TOUJOURS À MON GOÛT^{NC}

HAVE IT YOUR WAY[®]

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The slide features several logos and images. At the top left is the "Quickie" logo with "Dépanneur" above and "Convenience Stores" below. To its right is the word "Place" and the "Mac's" logo with a red "99" symbol. Below these is a bullet point: "• Processed foods are easy to find. They're [everywhere](#)." Below the bullet point are four images: the "BURGER KING" logo with "TOUJOURS À MON GOÛT^{NC}" above and "HAVE IT YOUR WAY[®]" below; a red Coca-Cola vending machine; a vending machine filled with various snacks; and the "FLYING J" logo.



1/4 lb Big Bite,
7-SELECT Chips
& Big Gulp®
\$2.99*
Plus tax where applicable.

Supper Big Gulp only \$2.99

7-SELECT best value

*Offer is good on any flavor of 7-SELECT chips. Available at participating 7-Eleven stores.

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Promotion

- Cradle to grave [advertising](#) and [promotion](#) of food industry brands.



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Dr. David Kessler

What has the food industry done?

They've taken fat, sugar and salt, they've put it on every corner.

They've made it available 24/7. They've made it socially acceptable to eat at any time.

They've added the emotional gloss of advertising.

They've made food into entertainment. We're living in a food carnival.



Why does America have the world's highest rate of obesity?

- **Product**—most varieties of processed foods and beverages in the world. Largest portions.
- **Price**— lowest food prices (processed foods, beverages, restaurants) among developed countries.
- **Place**—greater availability than rest of world.
- **Promotion**—most heavily advertised nation by food industry.

America experiences the most intensive food industry marketing

Social Marketing & the obesity problem...

- Our solutions are not working because we are not accurately seeing the problem.
- Our solutions are constrained by the social theories through which we perceive social realities.
- Before we can find innovative solutions to social problems, whether they be economic or public health, we must re-evaluate the assumptions of our social theories.

So. What is the answer?

- Research shows that educating consumers (**eat healthier, exercise more, eat whole foods instead of processed foods**) alone cannot compete with lifetime exposure to food industry marketing.
- 1st correct unhealthy environment.
- 2nd educate consumers.

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Solutions to Public Policy on Obesity

- If policy makers will not change the environment (remember 4Ps), then major changes are unlikely to occur.
- Will social marketers address environmental causes of social problems?
- Or will they continue to only focus on individual behavioral change solutions within the market exchange framework?

What can be done in the short-term given political realities?

- It is more politically acceptable to take actions to protect children. In the sort term...
 - Restrict industry advertising to children
 - Restrict product availability in public spaces intended primarily for children (e.g., schools)
 - In schools and child care facilities, regulate meal plans (whole foods, fruits, veggies rather than processed foods)

What can be done given political realities?

- Industry:
 - Create incentives for producing healthful products.
 - Create disincentives for producing unhealthful products.
 - (tax policies, subsidies, etc.)

What can be done given political realities?

- Consumers
 - Require packaging to clearly and simply state calorie count, fat gram count, sodium count.
 - Require menus to clearly and simply state this information beside menu items.



Outback Steakhouse—Bloomin' Onion



- 2,700 calories
- 203 grams of fat
- 6,360 mg sodium (equal to 67 strips of bacon)

Outback Steakhouse Aussie Cheese Fries with Ranch Dressing



- 2,900 calories
- 182 g fat
- 240 g carbs

Chili's Chocolate Chip Paradise Pie



- 1,600 calories
- 78 g fat
- 215 g carbs

Model for SM Planning



Recommendations for SM

- Try to accurately understand causality of social problem.
- Don't ignore environmental factors.
- Be willing to use ideas/tactics from all disciplines.
- Avoid forcing programs to comply with 4 Ps model.

SM Recommendations

- Avoid over-use of commercial marketing concepts.
- Develop concepts for SM, using what is useful from other fields (public health, social movements, political science, etc.)
- Focus should be on effectively solving social problems, not on applying commercial marketing concepts. *end*