



THE APPLICATION OF SOCIAL MARKETING IN SOCIAL WORK PRIMJENA SOCIJALNOG MARKETINGA U SOCIJALNOM RADU

Ljubinka Lazić^{1*}, Svetlana Terzić²

¹ Association "Psiholex" Doboj, Bosnia and Herzegovina

² University of East Sarajevo, Faculty of Transport Engineering in Doboj, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Original Scientific Article

Received: 15/04/2025

Accepted: 03/07/2025

ABSTRACT

The paper presents the practical significance and application of social marketing in social work. Aimed at improving the quality of life for individuals and communities, social marketing and social work are closely connected. Social marketing, on the one hand, uses marketing techniques to change behavior, while social work, on the other hand, focuses on providing support in addressing issues such as poverty, crime, or social exclusion. By combining marketing strategies with the approach of social work, it is possible to create and implement social programs that meet the needs of users while also having an attractive element for target groups. This paper addresses social marketing as a tool that social workers can use in their professional practice to respond to complex social problems such as social exclusion or to create conditions for desirable (re)socialization and improved lives through education, prevention, and support. The purpose of the paper is to highlight the ideas and principles of social marketing and the importance of its implementation in social work, promoting socially responsible behavior and the prevention of deviance in society.

Key words: social marketing, social work, social programs.

SAŽETAK

U radu je predstavljen praktični značaj i primjena socijalnog marketinga u socijalnom radu. Usmjereni ka težnji poboljšanja kvaliteta života pojedinaca i zajednica socijalni marketing i socijalni rad su usko povezani. Socijalni marketing, s jedne strane, za to koristi marketinške tehnike za promjenu ponašanja, a socijalni rad, s druge strane, fokusira se na pružanje podrške u suočavanju s problemima kao što su siromaštvo, kriminal ili društvena isključenost. Kombinovanjem marketinških strategija sa pristupom socijalnog rada, moguće je kreirati i provoditi socijalne programe koji odgovaraju potrebama korisnika i istovremeno posjeduju

* Correspondence author: Ljubinka Lazić, Center for Early Growth and Development, Health Center Maglaj
E-mail: l.ljub@yahoo.com

element privlačnosti za ciljane grupe. Ovaj rad se bavi socijalnim marketingom kao instrumentom koji socijalni radnici mogu da koriste u stručnom radu kako bi odgovorili na složene društvene probleme kao što je socijalna isključenost ili da bi se stvorili uslovi za poželjnu (re)socijalizaciju i život ljudi kroz obrazovanje, prevenciju i podršku. Svrha rada je upravo ukazivanje na ideje i principe socijalnog marketinga i značaja njegove implementacije za upotrebu u socijalnom radu podsticanjem društveno odgovornog ponašanja i prevencije devijacija u društvu.

Ključne riječi: marketing, socijalni marketing, socijalni rad,

INTRODUCTION

Programs of social development, improvement of people's health care system, mental health protection, prevention of behavioral disorders, basically aim to influence the perception and behavior of people, communities, and society. In the last century, social marketing was applied as a pilot in the family planning program and, proving to be effective, became a practical instrument for encouraging changes in behavior and use in the healthcare system, environmental protection, and child protection. (Kotler, Roberto, Lee, 2008). Those most important issues and challenges in society are the subject of study and practice of social work as a science and activity, and social marketing is, in this sense, an instrument of particular importance for experts in social work who use it to respond to those complex pathological phenomena, prevent deviations and advocated changes at the level of society. The basis of the action of marketing and social work is influencing behavior, and this is their overlapping point. The goal of both activities is to improve people's quality of life and social well-being, and the main way is prevention through education. Due to the focus on the study of the basic subjects of study, and at first glance the great differences, no special social and scientific attention has been paid to the study of the relationship between these two disciplines and activities. It is precisely because of such a social relationship that it is a challenge, but also a need, to point out the relationship between social marketing and social work, their common goals and application in society.

Social marketing and social work: defining terms

Social marketing is a term and concept that refers to the process of applying marketing to people's attitudes and behaviors with the aim of social welfare (Kotler, Roberto, Lee, 2008). It is defined as a form of communication in society with the aim of promoting social responsibility and good deeds. Market segmentation, promotion, education, distribution are some of the commercial marketing techniques that social marketing uses to cause changes in the behavior of individuals, families and communities by influencing the formation of new, healthy lifestyle habits and patterns of behavior. The guiding idea of social marketing is that by influencing social norms and people's behavior, positive changes in lifestyles can be encouraged, such as reducing smoking. Thus, at the base of social marketing is the goal: to improve the quality of life through reflection on public behavior and social responsibility.

Social work, on the other hand, deals with providing help and support to individuals, groups and communities in dealing with difficulties and meeting needs. Through direct interventions, advocacy and protection of people's rights, social work helps people cope with psychological, economic and social difficulties (Gitterman, 2010). Methodologically acting as individual social work, group social work and community social work, social work helps people to solve situations and problems in a "help to self-help" way. In order to improve the general well-being of an individual, group or community, social work supports and empowers, educates people to face difficulties (Payne, 2014). Based on the ideas of social justice and humanity, it educates and encourages social inclusion, personal and social resilience, prevents social deviations, develops community resources and encourages social change and development. Different in approach and methodology, social marketing and social work have a common goal, which is general social welfare and well-being and improvement of people's quality of life through encouraging desirable social behavior and social responsibility.

Social Marketing and Social Work Activities

In order to achieve efficiency, social marketing relies on several things in planning campaigns. Knowing and understanding people, their specific needs, as well as the attitudes and desires of the target population, ensures better results from a social marketing campaign (Andersen, 1995). This means that social marketing is aimed at a specific audience, i.e. at users and specific needs of citizens or the system in which the campaign is being implemented. The goal is to achieve communication, i.e. adequacy and listening to the messages that are sent. For this, it is necessary to know the users to whom the messages are created and directed, and their socio-demographic characteristics. Therefore, the importance of a holistic approach in social marketing is emphasized because it is an approach that emphasizes versatility in preparing a campaign in a way that considers all aspects of people's lives, including cultural norms and economic conditions (Rothschild, 1999). It is also important that the messages emphasize the advantages of the proposed things that are being pointed out. This is done through positive messages that are inspiring, motivating and point to specific interventions that members of the target population can undertake in order to achieve the desired positive change. Emphasizing the possibility of change diverts attention from the problem, and points to behavioral changes that can achieve this change. Promoting positive change is one of the main goals of the social marketing process. According to Andreasen (1995), social marketing is a process designed to influence the behavior of target group members in order to achieve individual and social benefit. Research results show that social marketing can play an important role in reducing health risks (Mandić, Milić, 2016). An example of this is campaigns implemented in the public health system to develop healthy habits such as healthy eating and smoking cessation.

The next important element of social marketing is creating value. Concrete benefit increases the motivation to change behavior (Gordon, 2006). Campaigns are planned to be attractive to the target population, and interventions such as free health checks, educational materials, can increase motivation (McKenzie-Mohr, 2011). It is also important that the activities carried out in the campaign indicate concrete benefits for users, such as disease prevention, savings, free time.

Social marketing is also a tool for education and empowerment by sending information, organizing lectures and the like. In that way, they develop resources that empower the community that has the information people need (Wymer, 2011). Social marketing can empower communities by pointing out issues such as mental health problems, protection from infectious and communicable diseases, the problem of domestic violence. In this way, it affects the community's awareness of the magnitude of the problem and the importance of social response (Holden, 2006; Lefebvre, 2012). In this way, a targeted approach is important in order to achieve the desired behavioral changes. Also, strategies should not only be focused on the individual, but also on the broader social context, including cultural norms, institutional resources. In this context, social marketing can contribute to changes in the community by strengthening the community's readiness to respond to social problems such as poverty, social exclusion.

An important element of social marketing, as well as of any activity that is carried out, are analysis and evaluation. Monitoring, obtaining responses from users and analyzing results are key to evaluating a campaign. This is essential for gaining knowledge about the quality of the campaign, the attractiveness of the tools and methods used. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, the effectiveness of the implemented social marketing activities can be assessed and further strategies can be adjusted according to the needs of the community (Gordon, 2006). Continuous monitoring of campaigns helps in further directing resources and selecting the most effective strategies (Lefebvre, 2012). The goal of the analysis is to adapt to the needs of the target population, but also to the possibilities of implementing the tools and interventions used.

Another important approach in social marketing campaigns are the tools and interventions that are used. Promotion and actions can be carried out through various social media, by organizing public meetings, forums, seminars, writing manuals, brochures. In this way, communication channels are expanded and respond to the different needs and characteristics of the target population (Andersen, 1995). Interaction and communication are an element of the evaluation of campaigns that are carried out.

In addition to all of the above, social marketing campaigns should be planned and conducted based on the principles of innovation, attractiveness and creativity because they should follow contemporary social trends, and "creativity has the power to change human behavior" (Bernardin and Tutssel, 2010). People's attention will be kept by an interesting product or campaign with a modern, improved campaign, "decorated" with some innovative details, monitored and updated by digital means, continuous, useful, applicable, adapted to target and even diverse interests. On the other hand, monitoring contemporary needs and interests of people is also an obligation of social work, which adapts techniques and methods in work in order to respond to the demands of society and practices and the needs of people who find themselves in a state of some social need. For this reason, in helping activities, creative techniques are discussed with great interest, and the application of which achieves adaptation to the changed or different needs of people of different ages, characteristics, and circumstances, and in this way, their trust is gained, cooperation is achieved, and activities are carried out with the aim of providing assistance (Drobac, P. M, 2020).

Social marketing, as explained, is the process of using marketing techniques for the purpose of social benefit through promoting (social) changes and strengthening the community (Kotler, Lee, 2008). Theorists who deal with social marketing emphasize the promotion of behavior or image that is bought through marketing activity, i.e., “people do not buy products but an image, a way of behaving, a lifestyle” (Ogilvy, 1983). Given that social work is also focused on empowerment and well-being, social marketing has been recognized as a powerful method that can be used in social work in the community. In practice, this means the use of marketing interventions such as campaigns for the prevention of domestic violence, education about rights and opportunities to access social protection services. The integration of marketing methods into social work can increase the visibility of social problems and ensure a complex social response in order to combat and solve them (Rifkin, 1990; Prochaska, DiClemente, 2005). Both approaches, social marketing and social work, put the individual and the community at the center of their activities and build resources, collect information and refer to the support system needed by citizens to achieve the positive desired change (Andreasen, 1995; Barker, 2003). Using the principles of social marketing, social workers can develop campaigns that increase community awareness of the importance of community problems and that encourage behavioral changes. Examples of this are campaigns for the prevention of violence, the problem of poverty, and the promotion of parenting styles.

Therefore, by combining marketing techniques in the work of public social systems, social problems can be more effectively influenced, contribute to greater community engagement, and ensure a better quality of life (Keller, Barach, 2010). The concept of empowerment in social work is based on the understanding and interdependence of social processes, and is implemented through support, education, and awareness-raising, which achieves social justice and equality as basic goals of social work (Lazić, 2024, according to Rees, 1991). To point out the limitations of social systems and encourage positive changes, social work uses empowerment, advocacy and social-marketing methods of promotion through campaigns and social media, thus creating an environment in which people have a sense of social security and have the support of the community to face the state of social need if in the same find.

In social work, social marketing can also be used as a tool for strengthening partnerships between institutions and organizations that deal with the same social issues. Joint projects and initiatives mobilize resources and can also provide support for vulnerable groups (Rifkin, 1990; Hastings, Saren, 2003). Networking of various public institutions and civil society organizations ensures a multidisciplinary approach and solving undesirable social phenomena. In this context, we can talk about social marketing in the promotion and development of social entrepreneurship as a way of responsible business that the state supports by providing employers with the opportunity for benefits. This is how the idea of social responsibility to contribute to the improvement of social protection in areas where state protection is not complete is realized (Cvejić, 2018). By forming social welfare companies, marginal interest groups organize work activities, and they base their success on the idea that their work and efforts are supported by the state and business community, enabling functioning, creating collaborative and business ties and relationships. Namely, in this way, the problem of lower competitiveness on the market would be solved because social enterprises often face the problems of lower working or health abilities of employees. Social marketing strategies can

contribute to increasing the awareness of employers to get involved and contribute to society and the state in the form of employing marginal groups of people, establishing business cooperation with social enterprises, socially responsible business, participating in humanitarian actions, and the like. Finally, a social enterprise is a concept that states regulate by law and in a way represents a marketing move by the state to promote and point to the idea of solidarity, helping, and social responsibility.

Social work combined with social marketing can improve the public perception of social work (McDermott, Stead, Hastings, 2005). An example of a campaign to affirm the profession of social work and the services provided by centers for social work is the campaign conducted by the OSCE in 2022. The use of the social media YouTube and the dissemination of recorded video material sought to spread information about the help and services that citizens can receive from social workers. In addition, social marketing can contribute to the quality of social protection services, and for this it is necessary for social workers to know and use marketing tools in social work in the community in order to effectively implement programs for the prevention, resocialization of behavioral disorders and encouraging the social inclusion of the marginalized. It is precisely the implementation of social marketing techniques that can help spread awareness of social work services such as assistance in crisis situations, counseling, and support for victims of violence. It can also be added that social marketing campaigns can encourage people's proactivity and community awareness to deal with social issues (Lefebvre, 2013; McDermott, Stead, Hastings, 2005). The connection between social marketing and social work lies in their common goal of improving social conditions through education and changing (social) attitudes and behaviors.

The above examples and methods of applying social marketing in social work indicate a number of facts. Social marketing is a strategy and tool that achieves effective impacts on people's awareness, and indirectly on behavior. A better understanding of social marketing, its potential and importance contributes to the field of social protection. Examples and methods of applying social marketing in social work indicate its potential to mobilize various social actors, including state, private and non-governmental organizations, in order to achieve a change in attitudes and behavior towards social problems. In addition, a better understanding of social marketing and its potential contributes to the development of strategies that not only increase awareness of social protection, but also motivate all sectors of society to become more actively involved in providing support to vulnerable groups.

It must be added that the scientific and professional practice of social work lacks the study and research of the application of social marketing in social work and social protection in general (Panajović I., 2023). This is why it is important to point out and continue research and practices that enable the application of social marketing to broader social problems, expanding its application beyond health and safety. The lack of theoretical and methodological frameworks makes it difficult to evaluate social marketing campaigns, and scientific reflections and research are needed aimed at more efficient application of social marketing in social protection, as well as improving the methodology for monitoring campaign results. It is also crucial to develop efficient information systems for monitoring the state of social protection and involving all social actors in the process of change. Only coordinated efforts can achieve long-term progress in social protection. Through a holistic

approach and the involvement of all relevant actors in joint activities, social marketing can have a long-term positive impact on reducing social inequalities and contribute to achieving the purpose of social work, i.e. the social protection system in society.

Conclusion

Social marketing and social work are linked in an effort to improve the quality of life of individuals and communities. Social marketing is a significant tool that enables social workers to effectively bring about change and influence social and personal development. User orientation, value creation, analysis and evaluation, as well as a holistic approach, are the key principles that make social marketing successful, while social work provides more direct support to people facing various social problems. Both approaches aim at social welfare and social justice, and their basic methodology is education and prevention.

By combining social marketing and social work, it is possible to develop effective social programs that not only respond to the needs of users, but also engage the community in solving social problems. Through the application of marketing techniques, social workers can create attractive campaigns that promote positive changes in behavior and social responsibility. The use of social marketing helps to increase the visibility of social problems and encourages community engagement, especially in issues such as domestic violence, mental health, and poverty. Knowing the target population and its needs is crucial for the success of these campaigns, as it allows better targeting of messages and interventions.

By introducing social marketing into social work, it is possible to create and maintain strong social cohesion, improve the quality of social protection services and strengthen community resources. Social marketing also contributes to greater engagement of institutions and organizations dealing with the same social issues, enabling the creation of partnerships and joint initiatives. In this way, support for vulnerable groups can be mobilized and a multidisciplinary approach to solving social problems can be provided. By using social media and other communication channels, social marketing increases the reach and efficiency of campaigns, providing users with the necessary information and support. In addition, social marketing can contribute to a better perception of the social work profession, thereby increasing interest in providing social services. The integration of social marketing into the everyday practice of social work allows for greater effects in prevention, resocialization and promotion of social inclusion. This synergistic approach makes it possible to achieve long-term changes in people's behavior and attitudes, which contributes to social stability and progress. In conclusion, social marketing and social work complement each other with the aim of creating a better society through education, support and encouragement of positive social changes.

REFERENCE

1. Andreasen, A. R. (1995). *Marketing social change: Changing behavior to promote health, social development, and the environment*. Jossey-Bass.

2. Barker, R. L. (2003). *The Social Work Dictionary* (5th ed.). Washington, D.C.: NASW Press
3. Gordon, R. (2006). *Health promotion and behavior change: A critical review*. Sage Publications.
4. Bernardin, T., Tutssel, M., Kind, H. (2010). *HumanKind*, Brooklyn, New York: PowerHouse
5. Cvejić, S. (2018). Socijalna preduzeća u Srbiji. U: A. Kostić (ur.). *Ekonomija, zaposlenost i rad u Srbiji u XXI veku*. Beograd: SANU, dostupno na https://solidarnaekonomija.rs/wpcontent/uploads/2018/11/Socijalna-preduzeca-u-Srbiji-2018_Cvejic.pdf (9.11.2020.)
6. Drobac, P.M (2020). *Šta je zapravo kreativnost?*, Banja Luka: Imprimatur d.o.o. Filozofski fakultet Banja Luka
7. Gitterman, A. (2001). *Handbook of social work practice with vulnerable and resilient populations*, (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
8. Hastings, G., Saren, M. (2003). The Application of Social Marketing in the Social Services Sector: Lessons Learned and New Opportunities. *Journal of Social Marketing*, 1(1), 29-45.
9. Holden, K. (2006). *The Social Marketing Handbook*. Sage Publications.
10. Keller, K. L., & Barach, J. (2010). *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
11. Kotler, P., Lee, N. R. (2008). *Social marketing: Influencing behaviors for good* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
12. Lazić, Lj. (2024). Empowerment as an Approach in Social Work with People with Disabilities. In: Kokhan, S. T., Osmuk, L. A., Pavlović, S. (Eds.), *Inclusive Society and Inclusive Education: International Experiences in Addressing Disability* (pp. 22-50). Zagreb: Didaktikon savjetovanje, d.o.o.
13. Lefebvre, R. C. (2000). Theories and Models in Social Marketing. In: P. N. Bloom, G. T. Gundlach (eds.), *Handbook of Marketing and Society* (pp. 506–518). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
14. Lefebvre, R. C. (2012). An Integrative Model for Social Marketing. *Journal of Social Marketing*, 2(1), 10-34.
15. Lefebvre, R. C. (2013). An integrative model for social marketing. *Journal of Social Marketing*, 3(2), 153-187.
16. Mandić, J., & Milić, D. (2016). Uticaj socijalnog marketinga na zdravlje zajednice. *Zdravstveni sistem*, 15(2), 45-56.
17. McDermott, L., Stead, M., Hastings, G. (2005). What Is and What Is Not Social Marketing: The Challenge of Reviewing the Evidence. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 21(5-6), 549-554
18. Ogilvy, D. (1983). *Ogilvy on Advertising*. New York :Crown,
19. Obilježavanje svjetskog dana socijalnog rada, Youtube: <https://youtu.be/uQAc5cmOV9M>, FB post: <https://www.facebook.com/oscebih/posts/587915363377299>, Twitter: <https://twitter.com/OSCEBiH/status/1638093093109919744>

20. Prochaska, J. O., DiClemente, C. C. (2005). The Transtheoretical Model and Stages of Change. In C. E. Nieder & L. J. Brown (Eds.), *Handbook of Health Behavior Research Volume 2: Evidence for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention* (pp. 211-227). New York: Plenum.
21. Payne, M. (2014). *Modern Social Work Theory*. Macmillan International Higher Education.
22. Panjatović, I. T. (2023). *Strategije socijalnog marketinga u povećanju svesti o socijalnoj zaštiti*, Doktorska disertacija, Beograd: Univerzitet u Beogradu, Fakultet organizacionih nauka.
23. Rothschild, M. L. (1999). *Carrots, Sticks and Prompts*: Effects of a New Environmental
24. Rifkin, S. B. (1990). Community participation in maternal and child health/family planning programs: an analysis based on experience in six countries. *International Journal of Health Services*, 20(3), 421-444.
25. Wymer, W. (2011). Developing More Effective Social Marketing Strategies. *Social Marketing Quarterly*, 17(2), 3-20.