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## Re-thinking and re-tooling the social marketing mix

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### ABSTRACT

This article considers the role of the four Ps marketing mix model in social marketing, arguing that given reconfiguration of the marketing mix in the mainstream marketing discipline, and the characteristics of social marketing, a re-thought and re-tooled social marketing mix is required. A brief review of the four Ps marketing mix model in the mainstream marketing and social marketing fields is presented. Criticisms of the four Ps model are then examined. It is argued that the four Ps marketing mix model is outdated for application to social marketing, and an alternative approach to the social marketing mix is proposed. It is posited that an expanded approach recognizing strategies such as relational thinking, and upstream social marketing activities would offer a more suitable approach. Using a more open minded social marketing mix less reliant on the four Ps model can help guide social marketing research and practice. © 2011 Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

The 2011 World Social Marketing Conference in Dublin featured a lively debate about the role and relevance of the four Ps in social marketing. Clive Blair-Stevens, Director at Strategic Social Marketing and Sue Nelson, Social Marketing Director of Kindred (UK) argued to abandon the four Ps, stating the view that they have lost practical application as technology and social media have evolved. Nancy Lee, President of Social Marketing Services Inc. and Mark Blayney Stuart from the Chartered Institute of Marketing defended the four Ps arguing that they provide a simple, accessible and useful framework for practitioners. Following the debate a vote was taken with a majority voting in favour of keeping the four Ps. In a democratic society, one should normally respect the wishes of voters. However, this article examines the four Ps in detail, and proposes that the marketing mix in social marketing requires a re-think. The conceptual framework offered by the four Ps is examined, and its predominance in marketing thought and practice is described. Consideration is made of how social marketing has largely mirrored mainstream marketing and used the four Ps marketing mix concept to inform interventions. Scholarly debates and criticisms of the four Ps framework, particularly given the emergence of fields such as services, business to business and relational marketing are then reviewed. The article concludes by proposing that the social marketing mix should be re-thought and re-tooled, avoiding reliance on frameworks that can quickly become obsolete, or limiting.

### 2. The four Ps of marketing

Since being first formally defined (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971) social marketing has relied heavily on its mainstream marketing progenitor to inform principles and practices. This is reflected in the majority of definitions of social marketing, which identify the adaptation and adoption of commercial marketing principles and techniques to engender social good (Dann, 2010). This is particularly true when considering the techniques used to engender behaviour change for social good. Consideration of the marketing mix in social marketing to facilitate behaviour change has traditionally centred on using the four Ps of marketing: product, price, place and promotion (for example see: *Population Services International, 1977*).

The concept of the marketing mix was coined by Neil Borden in his 1953 American Marketing Association presidential address and then formalised in his article 'The Concept of the Marketing Mix' (Borden, 1964). Borden considered how his associate James Culliton (1948) described the role of a marketing manager as a mixer of ingredients who sometimes follows recipes prepared by others, sometimes prepares their own recipe as they go along, sometimes adapts a recipe using immediately available ingredients, and at other times invents ingredients that no-one else has tried.

Jerome McCarthy (1960) then proposed a four Ps classification which has seen extensive use since. The elements of the marketing mix proposed by McCarthy were:

1. Product: is a tangible object or intangible service that is produced or manufactured and offered to consumers in the market.
2. Price: is the amount a consumer pays for the product or service, normally an economic cost.

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3. Place: represents the location where a product or service can be purchased, and can often be referred to as the distribution channel. This can include physical stores as well as virtual outlets online.
4. Promotion: represents the communications that marketers use in the marketplace including advertising, public relations, personal selling and sales promotion.

Alternative models of marketing were proposed around the same time. Frey suggested that marketing variables be split into two separate components, the first concerning the offering – product, packaging, brand, price and service, and the second referring to the methods and tools used – including advertising, sales promotion, publicity, personal selling and distribution channels (Frey, 1961). However, McCarthy's four Ps model has dominated marketing thought (Grönroos, 1994), particularly in the social marketing context (Hastings, 2007).

### 3. The four Ps in social marketing

The pre-dominance of the four Ps marketing mix in social marketing perhaps relates back to Kotler and Zaltman's (1971) definition, which explicitly or indirectly mentions each component "the design, implementation and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution and marketing research" (p5). Early social marketing interventions such as sexual and reproductive health initiatives in the developing world, tended to follow this model quite closely. Much of the extant social marketing literature reflects this reliance on the marketing mix model (Kotler and Lee, 2008). In 2002 Andreasen devised a set of six benchmark criteria for what constitutes a social marketing intervention. His fifth benchmark stated that social marketing should "use all four Ps of the traditional marketing mix" (Andreasen, 2002, p7). Social marketers therefore have long sought to adapt the established marketing mix model to the social marketing domain. This is illustrated in Table 1, which describes the four Ps of the social marketing mix.

However, a systematic review of social marketing effectiveness demonstrated that many interventions that could be described as social marketing used other strategies such as training people or policy change (Stead et al., 2007). This suggests that despite the dominance of the four Ps marketing mix model, its explanatory power over the features of social marketing interventions is incomplete. As social marketing developed during the 1980s and 1990s, the field was influenced by several other disciplines and streams of thought. The application of social marketing has been predomi-

nantly in the public health sphere, and this introduced ideas from the health behavioural sciences to the field, such as the use of theories and models including the health belief model and the theory of planned behaviour (Rosenstock, 1966; Ajzen, 1991). Other fields such as psychology, sociology and anthropology also began to permeate the field. Although mainstream marketing similarly borrows ideas and concepts from other disciplines, a divergence began to develop during this period. Furthermore, many social marketing practitioners were not, and are not, marketers. People engaging in the field can come from many different perspectives and starting points including other social sciences, public health, environmental issues, community politics and social justice and international development, as well as marketing. Given the influx of ideas to inform social marketing, and the use of techniques and intervention approaches that do not fall under the four Ps marketing mix classification, the utility of the model is open to scrutiny.

This situation has been acknowledged by the UK National Social Marketing Centre (NSMC) in their definition of social marketing as "the systematic application of marketing, alongside other concepts and techniques, to achieve specific behavioural goals for a social good" (NSMC, 2007, p32). As well as recognising that social marketing is informed by more than just ideas from mainstream marketing, the NSMC also considered the issue of the social marketing mix. The expanded eight benchmark criteria devised by the NSMC employs a broader concept of the methods mix advocating use of a range of methods and intervention approaches, including the traditional marketing mix (NSMC, 2007).

Indeed, despite the apparent dominance of the use of the four Ps marketing mix in social marketing, scholars in the field have recognised some of its limitations (Hastings, 2007). Furthermore, Peattie and Peattie (2003) have guarded against the unwitting transference of the four Ps to the social marketing paradigm and trying to force-fit ideas and practices borrowed from commercial marketing. Yet, even within mainstream marketing, the predominance of the four Ps marketing mix model has been challenged.

### 4. The four Ps re-thought

For many within the marketing discipline the four Ps represent the core tools of marketing that need to be combined carefully and utilised to produce the most viable mix (Zineldin and Philipson, 2007). Yet the marketing literature has been replete with vituperative criticisms of the framework in recent years, for being too simplistic and naive for application to complex marketing problems such as service provision, business to business networking or social marketing.

One of the main weaknesses with the marketing mix model is that it encourages focus on the short term, sales and transactions, and under-values the importance of strategic, long term relational thinking and brand equity (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1995). Marketing mix models cause budgets to be focused towards efficiency and measurement of the short term effects of marketing, usually sales. Longer term effects of marketing are reflected in brand equity, but this information is not usually captured by marketing mix models. For instance, although sales of a product or service may drop due to economic or social conditions, brand equity may actually increase. This limitation of the marketing mix model is particularly relevant to social marketing, as behaviour change involves making long term commitments, and maintenance and re-lapse, and long-term relational thinking and brand equity are important concepts (Evans and Hastings, 2008).

In terms of media mix optimisation the dominant marketing mix model displays bias to time specific medial channels such as TV advertising compared to less time specific media such as

**Table 1**  
The four Ps social marketing mix.

Product	In social marketing represents the behavioural offer made to target adopters and often involves intangibles such as adoption of an idea or behaviour. Tangible product offerings such as condoms to encourage safe sex can also be present
Price	In social marketing price relates to the costs that the target audience have to pay and the barriers they have to overcome to adopt the desired behaviour, and these costs can be psychological (e.g. loss of de-stressing effect from smoking), cultural, social (e.g. peer pressure to drink), temporal, practical (e.g. cancelling the school run to reduce car use), physical and financial (e.g. cost of joining a gym to get fit)
Place	Place in social marketing are the channels by which behaviour change is promoted and the places in which change is encouraged and supported
Promotion	In the social marketing context promotion is the means by which behaviour change is promoted to the target audience, for example advertising, media relations, direct mail and interpersonal

advertising in regional newspapers. Modelling typical viewing figures across different media holds inherent problems, and given that TV holds greater precision of measurement, comparisons of effectiveness can often favour this media. Other media channels such as sponsorship, viral marketing and mobile marketing all vary in terms of time-specificity of exposure, further highlighting the limitations of quantifying effectiveness. These considerations are important to social marketing given the importance of segmentation and targeting interventions, and reaching audiences using appropriate media. Bias in favour of using TV might make outcomes easier to measure but may not tell us what the best channels to use would be (Doyle, 2000).

Other criticisms of the four Ps marketing mix include the static nature of the four Ps especially considering the emergence of new media and integrated marketing strategies. The model has also been criticised for being too simplistic and not broad enough to cover the various tools and strategies used in contemporary marketing. It has also been identified that 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 (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1995). Perhaps one of the most relevant criticism of the four Ps marketing mix to social marketing, is its internal orientation – towards the seller rather than the buyer (Constantinides, 2006). Indeed, one of the main proponents of the four Ps marketing mix, Philip Kotler, has begun to recognise this limitation (Kotler, 2003). Given the crucial role of consumer orientation in social marketing, the use of a marketing mix model utilising a seller's perspective would seem anathema.

The emergence of several streams of marketing such as services marketing, business to business marketing, relational marketing and macromarketing has witnessed reconsideration of the marketing mix model. An extended marketing mix has been proposed featuring seven Ps: product, price, promotion, place, process, physical evidence and people (Booms and Bitner, 1981). Frameworks such as the four C's in seven Cs compass model proposed by Shimizu (1973), and the four Cs (2) model offered by Lauterborn (1990) have gained some traction. Both of these systems offer a more consumer focused marketing mix. Shimizu's compass contains corporation and competitor, commodity, cost, channel, communication, consumer and circumstances. Lauterborn later offered a refined consumer oriented model more adaptable to niche marketing featuring consumer, consumer models or capable instead of product, costs replacing price, placement rather than convenience, and promotions replaced by communication.

Grönroos (1994) has discussed the importance in marketing of moving away from a focus on one-off transactions, to focusing on developing relationships with consumers which necessitates a move away from the old workhorse of the four Ps marketing mix. Grönroos pointed out how the integrative 'mixing' element proposed by Culliton and Borden had been misinterpreted by McCarthy and then subsequently lost, as a rigid managerialist four Ps model took hold. The narrow scope and myopic nature of the four Ps model has been commented on, in which methodological issues supersede matters of substance (Arndt, 1980). Alternatively, relationship marketing is a systems oriented approach, which recognises that marketing is a process involving a range of stakeholders, whose goals and objectives have to be met, and takes into account all relevant actors, structural influence and the process of marketing. This is achieved through mutual exchange and the fulfilment of promises, resulting in trust becoming an important component of the marketing process (Grönroos, 1989, 1994). The relational marketing paradigm has gained considerable traction, not only in mainstream marketing (Palmatier et al., 2006), but has generated interest within the social marketing field (Hastings, 2003). In the commercial world, relational thinking operates on the supposition that keeping loyal customers by constructing

relationships with them is more profitable than continually trying to attract new customers or enter new markets. In social marketing, the benefits of applying relational thinking are that it is more predisposed to the long-term interventions required to change behaviours.

Dev and Schultz (2005a, b) have similarly proposed a more consumer focused marketing mix entitled solutions, information, value and access (SIVA). The SIVA model is designed to more readily identify and satisfy customer's needs and wants, by developing and managing solutions rather than just products, providing information instead of only focusing on promotion, creating value instead of obsessing with price, and providing access wherever and whenever and however the customer wants to experience the solution offered to them. Consumer orientation as explained in the model proposed by Dev and Schultz has long been established as a key component of the social marketing concept (French et al., 2009). The concept of value, and co-creation of value is an interesting proposition, as recent literature has proposed that the customer relationship management techniques rooted in service logic can be applied to social marketing (Domegan, 2008). The idea is that social marketers and their customers can become active relationship partners and can engage to co-create various aspects of the marketing offering. Using this logic, social marketers can engage in customers' value-generating processes to co-create better value-in-use (Desai, 2009).

Given the evolution of the marketing mix in the progenitor discipline it is unsurprising that social marketing scholars have discussed whether the four Ps in social marketing should be expanded to include additional elements such as policy change and people – for example introducing a school substance use policy, or a component of delivering training to project implementers could form part of the marketing mix used in an intervention (Stead et al., 2007). Recognising these debates in mainstream and social marketing, it seems appropriate to reassess the social marketing mix.

## 5. Discussion: re-tooling the social marketing mix

Re-tooling the marketing mix in social marketing can offer emancipation from the narrow confines of the four Ps framework. This suggestion is not a new one, and is not as radical as it first seems. Indeed, returning to the thoughts of Borden and Culliton, we see that they recognised the role of using available ingredients, adapting the recipes of others and sometimes inventing new ingredients. They did not propose that marketers remain within the narrow confines of a deterministic marketing mix, but explore different variables and combinations. Yet as the marketing discipline developed, the dominance of the four Ps model proposed by McCarthy ensued. Recently, the marketing discipline has begun to re-consider the toolkit. Social marketing appears to have lagged behind somewhat. Furthermore, efforts to expand the four Ps have appeared simplistic, clumsy, and displaying a strange predilection towards alliteration, naming six, seven then perhaps a limitless number of Ps? (Stead et al., 2007). Undoubtedly, as Lee and Stuart identify, the four Ps do offer a useful way of thinking about resources that can be allocated and techniques that can be applied to behaviour change initiatives. It is a simple conceptual framework and is a good pedagogic tool, especially for introductory marketing. That does not mean that all social marketing efforts should and do fit round this model.

An expanded social marketing mix not only offers more tools to use in the behaviour change arena, but recognises strategies that are already being used. The various Ps of product, price, place, promotion, policy and people undoubtedly have a role to play. Other strategies such as stakeholder and community engagement, relational thinking, co-creation, advocacy, lobbying, public and

media relations, and engagement in the policy agenda are often equally as important. Considering concepts such as upstream social marketing, which uses several of the latter strategies, we can see that expanding the social marketing mix is a necessity. It should also be acknowledged that the most important consideration is identifying what can be used and what will work. This may necessitate looking outside the tool-box and using other strategies to deliver an intervention. If behaviour change is the ultimate goal, then it should be acceptable to use any of the various strategies available to us to deliver objectives.

A major component of the alternative marketing mix models that have been proposed in recent years has been the development of a more consumer-focused approach (Lauterborn, 1990; Dev and Schultz, 2005a). This consumer oriented approach is somewhat lacking in the traditional four Ps model. Given the crucial role of consumer orientation in social marketing, it would seem erroneous to continue to utilise a marketing mix model that is more predisposed towards firms, products, services and transactions, rather than alternative models that propose a focus on consumers, relationships and value. This article calls for debate, discussion and engagement with discourse around the development of a new social marketing mix. The alternative models proposed in the mainstream marketing discipline have emerged to enable the

marketing mix to be relevant and applicable to contemporary marketing management. Whilst elements of these alternative models may not transfer directly, there are useful concepts such as consumer focus and relational thinking that have application to the social marketing paradigm.

A new social marketing model that includes the other strategies employed in social marketing beyond product, price, place and promotion, and is also able to incorporate a more consumer oriented approach in which relational thinking, and a strategic and holistic approach to behaviour change, would be beneficial to the field. Whilst not claiming to provide a perfect iteration of such a model, this article calls for a debate over what form such a model may take. Fig. 1 outlines how such a new social marketing mix might encompass the features of contemporary social marketing. The model is influenced by the 7Cs model first devised by Shizumu (2003), and the consumer focus and relational thinking central to the ideas proposed by Lauterborn (1990), Grönroos (1994) and Dev and Schultz (2005a, b). This proposed model recognises the structural environment in which social marketing operates (Circumstances), and which upstream social marketing seeks to address. The role of stakeholders and the competition to desired behaviours relative to social marketing interventions is addressed (Organisation and competition). The cost of performing desired

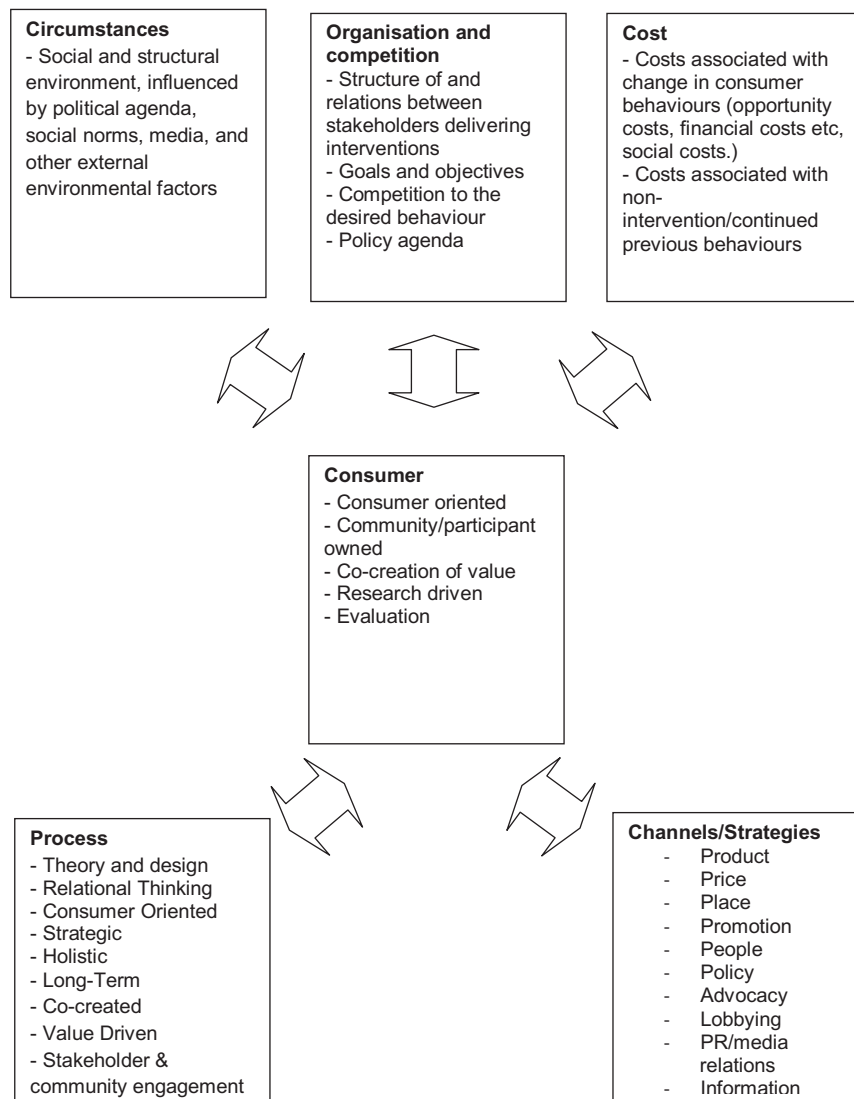


Fig. 1. Proposed social marketing mix.



behaviours and any costs associated with not continuing a previous behaviour is also encompassed in the model (Cost). Central to the proposed model, and indeed social marketing itself, are those whose behaviour we seek to influence (Consumers). The method through which social marketing is designed and delivered is also included in the model (Process). Finally the various intervention approaches that can be utilised in social marketing are integrated (Channels/Strategies).

## 6. Conclusion

This article concludes that the dominant four Ps marketing mix is no longer fit for purpose in contemporary social marketing. Mainstream marketing has identified that a focus on the firm, profits and transactions is no longer appropriate, with updated models of the marketing mix having been devised. Social marketing should also embrace change and advancement in relation to the marketing mix. Indeed, the imperative for social marketing to develop a new marketing mix is perhaps even more pronounced than commercial marketing. Consumer orientation has been identified as a central tenant of social marketing (NSMC, 2007). The range of strategies, channels and interventions used in social marketing, can no longer be located within the four Ps model. Furthermore, the importance of co-creation of value, relational thinking and longevity in social marketing is well recognised.

Therefore, the author advocates consideration of a new social marketing mix, such as the one proposed in Fig. 1. Scholars should engage and debate regarding the specifics of a social marketing mix fit for the 21st century, and pursue an open minded approach to what form this should take. Although this may introduce complexity, this is a reality in the social environment in which behaviour change approaches operate. Avoiding adherence to a limiting and pre-conceived marketing mix model seems appropriate. Such a proposal is not revolutionary; it is merely common sense (Grönroos, 1994). With the emergence of relational, services and business to business marketing, the mainstream discipline has recognised the limitations of the four Ps framework. It is important, and would be beneficial for social marketing to embrace a similar process of re-tooling the marketing mix.

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