The Relationship between the Quality of Life Concept and Social Marketing Development

by
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Abstract. Quality of life (QoL) can be defined as the individual’s subjective perception on objective conditions related to welfare and standard of living. This perception is at the base of most decisions that individuals make regarding consumption and purchase, therefore marketing specialists should take it into consideration when developing the product, establishing the price, design the distribution system and the communicational strategy. Although most relevant links between marketing and quality of life appear in theory only in the last two decades, the marketing activity has always been influenced by changes in the perception of individuals and society regarding the standard of living and wellbeing. Even more visible is the influence on social marketing, given that this is an area of marketing that is concerned especially with society’s problems, trying to promote a responsible behaviour for firms and citizens, in order to increase the level of satisfaction with every aspect of life. This article presents how the dimensions of quality of life influenced the development of various specializations of social marketing.

Key words: quality of life, standard of living, wellbeing, social marketing, level of satisfaction
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1 Introduction

Due to interdisciplinarity that characterizes this concept (Raphael, 1996: 149), quality of life (QoL) still lacks a universally accepted definition; most of them showing the dimensions that compose it (Keith, 2001; Mărginean, 2004a; Schalock 2004) or the approaches that define it – objective or subjective (Cummins, 1997; Costanza, 2008). Starting from this duality in QoL approach, R. Costanza defines quality of life as the degree to which the objective needs of the individual are met in relation to the subjective perception of wellbeing (Costanza, 2008: 18). This perception is at the basis of most decisions that individuals make regarding the consumption and purchase, therefore marketing specialists should take it into consideration when developing the product, establishing the price, design the distribution system and the communicational strategy. Although most relevant links between marketing and quality of life appear in theory only in the last two decades, the marketing activity has always been influenced by changes in the perception of individuals and society regarding the standard of living and wellbeing.

Ph. Kotler and K.L. Keller define marketing as a social process through which individuals and groups obtain what they want through creating and exchanging products and value (Kotler and Keller, 2008: 5). It is thus seen that by this definition, the authors assigned a social function to marketing, pointing out that is no longer only the exchange of products / services, but an exchange of value through which the organization gives back to society. Moreover, Ph. Kotler states that marketing effectiveness can be evaluated in terms of quality of life, given that the main objective of a marketing specialist is to provide value to consumers, so as to maintain or improve the wellbeing of individuals and society (Kotler and Armstrong, 2003: 20).

2 The influence of QoL theory on the development process of social marketing

Quality of life influenced to a large extent the development of social marketing, determining the way in which specific marketing techniques and tools are adapted to the needs of society. A paper that deserves to be mentioned in this regard is "Social Marketing: Improving the
Quality of Life" (Ph. Kotler, N. Roberto, N. Lee, 2002), paper that underlines the importance of this marketing specialization for the sustainable development of any society, highlighting the way in which marketing techniques can be put into community service and what social impact marketing has on quality of life.

Although specific elements of social marketing can be found since the early 50s, when India conducted a campaign of family planning (Kotler and Keller, 2008: 823), the concept gained theoretical meanings in 1971 with the publication of the article "Social marketing: an approach to planned social change", in Journal of Marketing, the article examining the applicability of marketing concepts for social causes (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971).

Since the 80s, social marketing has undergone a significant extensive development, therefore more nongovernmental organizations and state institutions were applying marketing techniques and instruments to promote various social causes. Changes in the market have led to theoretical modifications, so that social marketing is defined, two decades later, by R.C. Lefebre and J.A. Flora (1988) primarily through its intangible nature, given that through this marketing sector organizations are promoting an idea. For such situations, in which the promoted element has no physical form, experts recommend making it tangible through visual tools such as photos and videos presenting the idea, association with a personality or testimonials (satisfaction statements from real customers).

It must be noted that social marketing can overlap or can be confused in certain situations with classic marketing (used by companies for profit). For example, McDonald's promotes its products by highlighting their caloric intake and how a person can organize his or her daily alimentation. That does not mean that the marketing applied by McDonald's is a social one, as long as the ultimate goal is to make profits (by selling as many products as possible, promoting them as healthy), even if this activity contributes in some way to consumer’s quality of life.

Social marketing is based on sending an educative message, aimed at influencing positive social behaviour, leading ultimately to improvement in the quality of life both for the target audience and the society. Starting from this idea, one of the most acclaimed specialists in social marketing, Philip Kotler, defines the concept as "the use of marketing principles and techniques to influence target audiences to voluntarily accept / reject / modify / abandon a certain behaviour for the benefit of individuals, groups or society as a whole" (Kotler, Roberto and Lee, 2002: 12).

On the same principle, the American Marketing Association defines social marketing through the impact it has both on individual and society: “marketing designed to influence the behavior of a target audience in which the benefits of the behavior are intended by the marketer to accrue primarily to the audience or to the society in general and not to the marketer” (American Marketing Association Dictionary).

In the case of social marketing it can be identified a secondary effect of its application on a particular target group which can then positively influence another group. For example, a campaign to reintegrate the unemployed into the labour market may lead to increased purchasing power in a given area, which can then lead, due to the financial availability, to increased number of people involved in charitable work in this area.

3 Quality of life and social marketing specializations

Specialists in quality of life research have identified a number of dimensions for this concept, dimensions with strong influence in the process of improving quality of life: health, employment, nutrition, ecological environment, sport and recreation, public services, transport, education etc. There is no universally accepted classification for these dimensions, due to the interference that exists between them, but also due to the higher or lower importance that each country gives to these dimensions.

Considering the increasing importance that both theory and practice are giving to quality of life dimensions, in the case of social marketing
were also developed various sub-sectors such as health services marketing, environmental marketing, sports marketing, political marketing, public marketing, educational marketing, cultural marketing, etc. Due to the delimitation of increasingly advanced application fields for social marketing, it has not yet been found are universally accepted classification for its sub-sectors. There are, for example, authors that excluded from the area of social marketing "the social activities undertaken by companies, parties or politicians, ministries or government agencies, municipalities or other components of the local administration" (Zaharia, 2007: 6).

The article will continue with defining the main dimensions of social marketing application, with the understanding that they are not just divisions of social marketing, but rather the result of an extensive development in different areas of marketing activity, however correlated with the social sector, by their functions of promoting services to society and individuals and of facilitating access to various products and services for the community.

3.1 Health services marketing

The concept is defined by the American Marketing Association (AMA) as aimed to influence the behaviour of individuals, the benefits of which leads to increased physical and mental health of the target audience (AMA Dictionary).

Health services marketing can be regarded as an effective instrument for correlating research on public health services, communicational messages and public behaviour. An important role of marketing in this sector is to educate the population on preventive methods and means through which individuals can improve this quality of life dimension.

A more detailed definition is given by the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, within the Department of Health Services in the U.S.: "Health services marketing involves creating, communicating and providing health information and interventions using customer-oriented and science-based strategies, to protect and promote health in various segments of the population" (http://www.cdc.gov/healthmarketing/whatishm.htm).

The importance of this branch of social marketing derives from the direct association made by each individual between his health and wellbeing, the role of marketing being represented primarily by the activity of educating the population towards preventive behaviour regarding illness and, secondly, by facilitating access to health services (by designing a medical product adapted to the market needs and requirements, by charging affordable prices, through distribution points in proximity to consumption points, as well as through correct information of potential customers).

3.2 Environmental Marketing

R. Zaharia (2007: 3) says that environmental marketing requires adaptation to environmental demands of society. Although there are a number of laws and regulations that systematize production and trading conditions so that products meet environmental requirements, effective marketing is to go beyond environmental legislative expectations and show a proactive behaviour to protect the environment by: designing an ecological manufacturing process for products and services, minimizing the environmental impacts during product distribution and, in particular, an integrated management regarding recycling the packages of used products.

Another approach in defining this concept is the one in which it is defined as marketing applied by environmental organizations that use domain-specific techniques and tools to bring awareness to a case and convince more people to join that environmental cause (pollution, deforestation, recycling, etc.).

3.3 Sports Marketing

This concept involves using marketing methods, techniques and tools in the sports sector in order to meet the objectives corresponding to one of these two major dimensions (Constantinescu, 2009: 85):
- marketing through sports – using sport as a tool to promote products/services, by association with sports activities, events, clubs and personalities;
- marketing for sport – promoting sports products and services at the society level.
These two dimensions of sports marketing are overlapping in many cases, when sports companies, through their campaigns, promote their own products / services as well as general practice of sport.
Within the QoL theory, the most important role is played by marketing for sport, through which the population is informed about the benefits of practicing sport. This means designing an efficient system that facilitates the access of individuals to sports infrastructure, building a local budget for sports events organization and their promotion for a higher degree of public participation in sports.
These strategic decisions depend largely on state institutions, making it necessary to design a national strategy for promoting health through sport, a strategy that can lead to improved QoL, in collaboration with the health system, the alimentation organizations and social protection bodies.

3.4 Cultural Marketing

Cultural marketing can be defined as the application of marketing principles to the particularities of cultural services (theatre, museum, cinema, concert, etc.) and to the superior needs which they serve (social, esteem, and self-realization).
In literature, cultural marketing is most often connected with sport, because of the similarities between these types of services and because they meet the same need (leisure). The same thing happens in the case of quality of life, most theories and studies linking sports and cultural activities in one dimension - recreational activities.

3.5 Political Marketing

This area of marketing application has various definitions depending on the degree of involvement of marketers in the political area.
American Marketing Association makes a clear delineation of what is and what isn’t political marketing: "marketing designed to influence the target audience to vote for a person, party or idea. Attempts by individuals or organizations to educate and change public attitudes are not activities specific to political marketing" (American Marketing Association Dictionary). As much controversial is the political world, equal is the debate in marketing activity within this sector. Perhaps the most important issue brought into question by political marketing is ethics or, better said, the lack of it. Given that the quality of life of a nation is largely determined by political decisions taken by its leaders, the proof of an ethical management implies full transparency for those decisions.
Starting from such an approach, A. O'Cass (1996) says that the main purpose of political marketing is to facilitate making the most accurate and effective decisions for both political parties and voters. This decision is better explained by A. Lock and P. Harris (1996) who define political marketing through the use by a candidate/party of surveys and environmental analysis to produce and promote a competitive offer that will help in achieving his own goals and in satisfying groups of electors in exchange for their votes.

3.6 Educational Marketing

Considering the marketing definition given by the AMA in 2008, the entire marketing process has an educational aspect, which highlights the important role that marketers play in educating the public to purchase and use products/services adapted to new market requirements, including the ones related to improvement in quality of life. But this does not mean that any marketing activity is now included in the educational marketing area; educational marketing is focused on particular categories of services, targeting a special audience with a specific set of instruments.
Thus educational marketing may be defined as the way in which specialized institutions are actively communicating with target audience (represented mostly by students, but also by parents, teachers, staff and community) to
promote educational products, as well as ideals and values that can guide them through life (Rizvi and Khan, 2010: 39).

Education is one of the main dimensions of quality of life, so its promotion at the society level must be reflected in a government strategy for sustainable development, thereby increasing the level of certain indicators describing the quality of life, such as literacy, accessibility to education, number of students, school dropout rates, number of graduates, continuous training capacity, etc.

4. Conclusions

One of the main problems in implementing government strategies for quality of life improving concerns the lack of information at the society level, along with poor education of the public on products and services that affect their quality of life. Social marketing provides the opportunity to eliminate these problems by effective informative campaigns and by facilitating public access, both financially (charging fees consistent with customer expectations and service quality) and geographically (by bringing closer the supply to high demand points of consumption).

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