

## THE SOCIAL MARKETING - A NEW PILLAR FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose-** By this paper we propose to identify, in the consecrated literature, the arguments related to the connection between concepts of the social marketing and that of sustainable development, and to highlight the role of the social marketing for the practical side of the sustainable development. The objectives are: to demonstrate that the marketing isn't promotion, to show the relevance of the new form of marketing related to the sustainable development approach - that is the social marketing, and to underline the importance of the social marketing as pillar for the practical approach of sustainability, mainly in order to achieve it.

**Methodology-** The paper is an empirical and theoretical research, based on the observation that in reality there is a confusion between notions of marketing and promotion, and de sustainable development is not yet well understood on large area or at individual level. The general evolution of the economics and society, it is marked by major problems in the resources management and real difficulties to manage the practical sustainable development that is contradictory with the over-consumption. The hypothesis of this research is: the social marketing can be applied for the equilibrium offer-demand and not to accelerate the promotional actions, or just to have monetary profit. The methodology is based on the literature incursion, because the paper is theoretical one, and the main methods used are: observation, incursion, comparison and synthesis.

**Findings-** As results, we found that the social marketing is a new face of the traditional marketing, but oriented to social and environmental performance, that is in the same goals with the sustainable development.

**Conclusion-** we consider that the sustainability concept can be understand and applied if the social marketing will be approached on the large scale, with different orientation compared to the traditional marketing. So, as a qualitative analysis, the paper will confirm the personal opinion and beliefs, based on the consecrated literature.

**Keywords:** Social marketing, sustainability, social progress.

**JEL Codes:** D10, M31, Q01

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Given the new accelerated orientation of the nowadays society to the wellbeing and, unfortunately, to a high-level of consumption, there are many issues and strategies developed to find an equilibrium between the natural resources consumption to have goods and services and the request to preserve it for the future generations. We take into consideration the interest to study a new tool which can make more practical the concept of sustainable development and this is a new form of the marketing - the social marketing. We started from the observation that in the times of the generalized consumption, is a duty to action for the equilibrium between the level of consumption and the market offer, and we consider that the social marketing can solve this unbalanced situation. As motivation to develop this research, we invoke our concerns for the sustainable development topic, and the issues that blocks the achievement of the sustainability goals. In addition, is the interest to study the marketing area in an extended approach, in a new and modern perspective. On the whole, we propose to demonstrate that the marketing is not only a mercantilist orientation to promote the offer, but is a tool useful to achieve the sustainability goals, that supposed to protect and to preserve the natural resources. In this context, we take into account that in the past 15 - 20 years it manifested the tendency to achieve the social progress at high level, to provide the development of the society and to accelerate the

economic growth. All these determine a significant impact at the community and at the individual level, or inconsistencies with the sustainable development orientation, based on goals of the social and environmental health, or the economic and human values.

By this theoretical research based on the literature incursion, we intend to highlight the ways and proposals to act for a better life, not only on the short term and as material benefits and not in contradiction with the environment and its resources.

For this theoretical-empirical paper based on the literature incursion, our main goal is the create a viable connection between the two concepts of the social marketing and the sustainable development, so the paper is an incursive qualitative analysis. The concepts approached in a correlational vision are sustainable development and social marketing. The essential factors considered to approach this topic are: relation offer-demand, equilibrated consumption, quality of life, alongside the environment conservation and care. We highlight the dissonances of over-consumption and the sustainability goals and we aim to demonstrate the need of a balanced consumption to improve the quality of life, and multidimensional wellbeing.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Through the incursion in the profile literature, international and autochthonous, we have identified some very relevant approaches for defining and analysing the sustainable development and the social marketing concepts. The over-consumption is another concept perceived as a link between the first two. For the last that is the over-consumption, the literature is large and very well represented at international level. Simon Gottschalk (2009) invokes the Lipovetsky's model (2006) to explain the over-consumption phenomenon, and Thorstein Veblen (2009) create a new specific term - the conspicuous consumption. Garcia, A.C. (2020) published a very relevant paper "High Consumers: A Literature Review" and he develop a connection with the concepts of sustainability and ecological economics. MacKinnon, J.B. (2021) approaches the same connection and is wonder about the consequences and the impact of over-consumption on the wellbeing of the people and of the planet.

About the social marketing, even can be considered a very new concept, this was in the high attention of the researches around 15-20 years ago. Nanda, A.K. (2015) made a literature incursion, to demonstrate the difference compared to the traditional marketing. But, the first authors which create and develop this concept is Philip Kotler together with Gerald Zaltman (1971). Andreasen, A. R. is another promotor of the social marketing, with great implication for the concept clarification. In 2006 he published one of the best books for this topic: "Social Marketing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", after the "Marketing Social Change" for changing behaviour to promote health, social development and the environment (1995). Craig R. Lefevre (2013) published a treaty for the "Social Marketing" as a clarification about what is and how to organize the field of this topic, after the book "Social Marketing and Social Change" (2013). He is considered a "guru" of the social marketing. As well as Andreasen, he approaches the strategies and tools for improving health, well-Being, and the environment.

Related to sustainable development, a concept in the attention of the researchers and practitioners, too, from more than 30 years ago, the specific literature is very reach, consistent and varied and includes theories, models and examples to support the concept in all areas of socio-economic life. Moreover, at the international level were created strategies and plans for the sustainable development of the planet, and a set of various specific indicators is in the attention of the statisticians. The United Nations developed 17 goals in "The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" covering all areas of life. The authors like Lester Brown, Herman Daly, Jeffrey Sachs, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, Dennis Meadows, Serge Latouche are the most representatives for this topic.

We consider that is a normality to find the specific literature that connect the topic of sustainability with that of marketing, because the both are about the resources, consumption, production and wellbeing.

## 3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The research for this paper is qualitative one, supported by the incursion on the specialty literature. As a theoretical and empirical approach, we develop a hypothesis and then we manage the information that can demonstrate that our supposition is just developed in another consecrated papers. The main methods used are: observation, incursion, analysis and comparison. In fact, we started from the idea that the confusion of the marketing with the promotional actions, must be clarified and highlighted. The hypothesis for this research is that the sustainability can be achieved if the social marketing will replace the traditional marketing, thus reducing the over-consumption. Then, because one of our interest for research is the sustainability concept, we consider that is possible to create a linkage between this and the "new face" of the marketing. The literature analysed is mainly of the international level and even the number of publications is so big, it was possible to identify the most representative authors and ideas. Is important to underline that this literature is recent and niche.

## 4. FINDINGS

Simon Gottschalk (2009) invokes the Lipovetsky's model (2006) with three phases of consumption:

- *Phase 1*, from the 1880s to the First World War, with the emergence of mass production and mass marketing, mainly with the consumption for itself
- *Phase 2*, from 1950s to 80s, is the 'abundant society' and 'mass consumption society'
- *Phase 3*, 1990s to today, when the consumption has colonized every other social sphere, tends to reorganize every other social behavior, including those once outside the mercantile logic (experiential and emotional consumption)

The autor find an old arguments according to "consumers seek to satisfy increasingly fragile and destabilized identity needs by purchasing commodities and services". (Gottschalk, 2009; pp. 313)

Thorstein Veblen (2009), as the first marketing and consumer behaviour theorist, with the original idea of ostentatious consumption, developed one of the most relevant theory of consumption, taking into account the social and psychological factors: conspicuous consumption. He explains in multidisciplinary approach, the psychological mechanics of a consumer society, based on the increase in the number and types of the goods and services that people consider necessary to buy, in order to achieve a high level of the wellbeing. We observe that is accentuated the idea of "considering" the need, not "existing" the need.

The issue of over-consumption is associated with consumer behavior issue, very well positioned in the sustainability context. "The education for a healthy consumption is an appropriate response that can generate a sustainable change in the current pattern of consumption, towards a more generous behavior in intergenerational vision" (Popescu & Stroe, 2010; pp.541).

The definition of sustainable development is generous, but also vague, because it does not allow the implementation of strategies that incorporate all specific issues of the socio-economic activities. [Pană, 2006]. According to Wackernagel & Rees (2000): "the poles of sustainability are the ecological stability, reducing the ecological footprint and ensuring the quality of life for all individuals". But, the essence of sustainability is given by the management mode, current and future, of resources in relation with the objectives of the economic growth and ensuring a better quality of life and environment. (Zaman & Gherasim, 2007). The sustainable development involves the equilibrium and the efficiency, taking into account that the resources of each generation are influenced by the consumption of the previous generations. (Tiezzi & Marchettini, 1999).

In 2015, the United Nations Member States adopted the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" with the main goal to have prosperity for people and planet, now and into the future. With 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this Agenda is perceived as an urgent call to finish the poverty and other deprivations by improving the health and education, reducing inequality, and maintain the economic growth and protect the environment.

But, how is possible to connect the topic of sustainability with that of the social marketing? Our question is based on the hypothesis that the social marketing is a strong pillar of sustainable development and we found a response by Jonge, Fischer & Trijp (2014) that affirm: "The contribution of marketing towards sustainable development is restricted by the fact that market demand is limited due to a number of factors, but primarily because sustainable goods and services do not necessarily serve customers' short-term self-interest". The authors consider the social marketing as a adequate pattern to extend the overall demand for sustainable products and equilibrated consumption. The approach of the sustainable development concept is positioned in connection with that of over-consumption, from the perspective of ensuring a high level of quality of life and wellbeing. In essence, the sustainable development aims the equilibrated consumption of resources and ensuring the human wellbeing. Many indicators have been developed to measure the development and well-being. Better Life Index (BLI), Human Development Index (HDI), Human Poverty Index (HPI), Unmet Basic Needs (UBN), Sustainable Development Index (SDI), Human Development Index Progress (DIP), Sustainable Welfare Index (SWI). But, only the indicators of economic growth (as GDP) are no more longer sufficient to characterize the evolution and progress of today's society.

About the most important concept of this paper, the social marketing, this has been in the literature since the 1960s and the evolution of the practical part of the social marketing is very visible in all areas that consider the personal wellbeing of the individual. For example: to promote traffic safety, tobacco control, drug prevention, improved nutrition and diet, environmental behavior, as well as to reduce infant mortality. (Smith, 2006). Also, is visible as a strategy to achieve a fundamental positive social change and to reduce social, economic and health inequality. (Wood, 2019)

The social marketing is designed to create an overall social change, not only benefits for brands. Using the traditional marketing techniques, it aims to convince an audience to change their behaviors against undesirable thoughts, behaviors, or actions. (Huhn, 2019).

The social marketing uses the marketing techniques to improve the welfare of people and the physical, social and economic environment in which they live. It is a carefully planned, long-term approach to changing human behaviour. "Social marketing uses the same collection of tools to "sell" healthy behaviours that are used to sell jeans." (Martinez, 2019).

According to Andreassen (1995), the social marketing "must be able to modify behaviours in search of a higher good, individual and social.

The paradigm of social marketing has evolved gradually in the past 10 years and there was found proposals for a new strategy able to change the vision of the social marketing. This is: reorientation to spend more resources in education, to create new attitude and behaviour related to consumption of goods, services and information.

Using the idea proposed by Evans & Berman, Barry (1984), is possible to identify and understand the orientation of the social marketing, compared to traditional marketing.

**Table 1: The Differences between Traditional Marketing and Social Marketing**

Social Marketing	Traditional Marketing
For the organizations, individuals, places, ideas, goods and services	Applicable mainly for the goods and less for the ideas and values
The exchanges are not only financial	The exchanges are mainly financial
The finality of the interaction demand/client-offer is not strictly measured in financial terms	The finality of interaction demand-offer is measured by the growth of profit and sales

The benefits of the target groups are not correlated only with the payments of consumer	The benefits are correlated almost exclusively with payments made by the consumer
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Source: Evans, Joel R.; Berman, Barry - „Essentials of Marketing”, Macmillan Inc., New York, 1984, p. 465

We identify multiple links between the social marketing and the objectives of sustainable development, which converge in the same direction, appreciated as being against the irrational consumption. The social responsibility can prove to be a fundamental common element of the practical application of these two concepts, so the involvement of economic and social actors is necessary to change the attitudes and behaviours towards consumption.

The social marketing focuses on changing the behaviours towards consumption, as well as sustainable development is focused, among other things, on sustainable production and consumption, recycling and reducing the volume of waste resulted from over consumption.

We found in the literature approached the many same opinion as our hypothesis, that the social marketing is different to the traditional marketing, in the sense that it does not stimulate the consumption beyond the real needs, but emphasizes the satisfaction of personal needs, as individual, not only related to material wellbeing. Also, the sustainability aims to reduce the over-consumption of resources and goods, and to support the wellbeing of the humanity, not only in material sense.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The issue of sustainable development is associated with that of the environmental resources management and is reduced, in fact, to a balanced consumption of resources and a rational production of goods. The social marketing, a relatively new concept that we identified it as being treated in the same direction with the objectives of sustainable development, is mainly focused on the rational and balanced consumption. We perceive the social marketing as a strong link between mitigating the consequences of over-consumption and achieving the sustainable development goals. Among the 17 objectives of sustainable development, the most significant for the proposed conceptual association are: good health and well-being, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production.

In addition, we point the references related to all areas where the social marketing is very well involved, with visible actions and results, as real reforms: health, protection of environment, education, economics.

A modern concept, perceived as a new step in the evolution of the marketing theories, the social marketing is a representation of the supply-demand ratio, but which is repositioned from the profitability to a balanced consumption, currently the supply-demand ratio being altered by the behaviour of consumer society, based on buy more and more and more, without a basis of the real need. The social marketing aims to change the consumption behaviour and to convince the consumers to buy or to consume in a sustainable manner. As a mediator between the problems generated by over-consumption and the objectives pursued by sustainable development, the social marketing aims to achieve the wellbeing of whole human society, beyond material wellbeing, that seems to be a fake.

The research from this paper was based on specialty studies and articles, that clearly showed how currently people are more and more inclined to the material consumption, compared with the real needs: psychological, educational, relations, wellbeing. We remark the big interest of the new and modern literature for the topic of social marketing and, at the same time, we can conclude that our hypothesis is not a utopia, being treated by another representative authors.

We underline, too, some limitations of the paper: subjectivism, limited approaches of literature, lack of concluding data etc., but we intend to continue the research in order to repairs these weaknesses. To the end, we consider that the topic of social marketing can be developed with real applicative valences.

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