

Applied pro-social behaviour of companies – social marketing

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Abstract

Company, its brand, product or service gets to the customer's awareness by realization of various social campaigns. By the right choice of target market during realization of activities in area of social marketing, company can not only increase its incomes, but also strengthen its market position and its relationships with internal and external stakeholders. Pro-social behaviour is linked to compliance with social norms, which prescribe behaviour expected by a society. Complicity of companies on various socially oriented projects is required from them directly by consumers. But the question is, whether it is possible to look at social marketing as an applied pro-social behaviour of companies – while marketing activities are planned, carried out with certain goals and objectives and with purpose to reach profit, pro-social behaviour does not result from obligation and does not expect anything in return.

Keywords: *personality, company, pro-social behaviour, social marketing, corporate social responsibility*

JEL Classification: *M14, M31, M37, M51*

1. Introduction

Changes in the value system of individuals in the society result in orientation of consumers and other company stakeholders on non-material values such as abidance of human rights, protection of environment, fight against corruption, sustainability, etc. Enterprises and organizations are aware of the fact that nowadays the orientation on quality of products and services is not enough and that it is necessary to care about the impact of their activities not only in local, but also in global scale. Development in the field of marketing activities has gradually shown that economic interests do not have to be contrary to social interests, but they exist parallel next to each other (Čarnogurský & Choma, 2013, p. 104). It is therefore on the consideration of enterprises and organizations whether this concept of corporate social responsibility becomes part of their corporate philosophy and enables them to approach their customers.

Social marketing in specialized literature is explained as a form of corporate social responsibility. Although the social marketing is based on commercial marketing there are significant differences between them which are analysed by the authors Kotler and Lee (2008, In: Čihovská & Kováčová, 2011, p. 5), according to who one of the main differences between commercial and social marketing is in the **type of product** they offer. Whilst the commercial marketing is oriented on the sale of products and services – resulting in financial profit of the enterprise or organization, in case of social marketing we can speak about the "sale" of ideas, attitudes and behaviour – resulting in the benefit of the whole society. This way enterprises show not only their interest in consumer, but also in the society itself and in solving various social problems.

Within the pro-social behaviour we speak about empathizing with others, about understanding the respective situation and about subsequent provision of help which can have various forms, from emotional support to material help. It is however questionable whether *"there is such*

pro-social behaviour of individuals or groups which does not count with any profit and brings only genuine inner satisfaction" (Čarnogurský & Choma, 2013, p. 101). When we are talking about social marketing this question is appropriate. Are the activities performed by enterprises and organizations within social marketing really unselfish? And if they are not, can we say that the enterprises and organizations perform them with the real interest in problems which they help to solve by these activities?

The present study presents a plan of research within which we will analyse the communication of socially responsible activities of a selected group of enterprises in Slovakia within the social marketing. We will focus on the fact whether the enterprises and organizations, which are members of informal associations declaring corporate social responsibility, engage in activities performed within social marketing and whether these enterprises present their activities via media (e.g. television, newspapers, magazines, Internet, etc.).

1.1 Basic aspects of pro-social behaviour

Pro-social behaviour encompasses a wide category of activities which are peculiar for the selected segment in the society and are perceived by the social group of individual as beneficial for the others (Penner, 2005, In: Giles, 2012, p. 49). This term covers wide spectrum of expressions which have in common mainly the intention of helping the others - Helus (2011, p. 245) speaks about the capability of making them happy, protect them against danger, etc. This implies that it covers the relations of reciprocal help and support. However, pro-social activities within the society can also be done by e.g. murderers or thieves, not only altruistic individuals (Gentile, 2009, In: Giles, 2012, p. 49). And thus in case of corporate environment a situation can emerge that enterprises which outwardly behave pro-socially and support socially beneficial activities can in fact damage the environment by their production activity, discriminate their employees, etc.

Our behaviour has its reasons, it is a reaction to some impulse from our environment. According to Helus (2011, p. 245-246) it is possible to distinguish three main sources of pro-social behaviour:

1. ***egoistic*** – I am helping someone else, but I am in the fore, I ponder what does it bring me – I will gain respect and admiration of others for my exemplary behaviour;
2. ***pressure of social standards*** – I respect and follow social standards – I am therefore obliged to help others in need;
3. ***empathy*** – I suffer with others, I identify myself with the misery of others and this forces me to act towards the others in such a manner as I would act in case of my personal need.

It is however questionable which of these three causes leads enterprises and organizations to the concept of social marketing and activities related to it.

Authors connect this type of behaviour with terms as attitudes, empathy, morality, conscience and the like. As an example we can state the mutual relation between morality and conscience which can be considered as complementary since the conscience "*is created in the process of interiorisation of general moral principles which become an integral part of mature personality and determine its pro-social being*" (Cakirpaloglu, 2012, p. 94-95). While ***morality*** represents the system of social and cultural standards, orders and prohibitions which initiate and regulate pro-social behaviour of individual, ***conscience*** initiates and regulates pro-social feeling, thinking and behaviour of individual via remorse and feeling of guilt (Cakirpaloglu, 2012, p. 94, p. 120). Thus, in case of conscience we can talk about some kind of "inner voice" which tells us what is right and what is wrong.

1.1.1 Pro-social behaviour versus altruism

Confusing of the term altruism with the pro-social behaviour occurs more often. It is possible to talk about certain terminological disunity which is accompanied by certain differences in meaning – some authors use the given terminology as synonymous, others strictly differentiate between the meanings of these terms; the definitions of these differences also vary (Výrost & Slaměník, 2008, p. 285). However, these are two different terms within two significant theoretical concepts, i.e. **evolutionary** (i.e. altruism, position of biological evolution – genes) and **sociological** (i.e. pro-social behaviour, position of cultural evolution – imitation) (Baštecká et al., 2013, p. 66). Barrettová, Dunbar and Lycett (2007, In: Baštecká et al., 2013) define altruism as a certain "*act which brings benefit to its recipient and causes certain costs to the donor*". Helus (2011, p. 245) defines the term altruism as specified pro-social behaviour which is characterised by unselfishness or acting for the sake of others even at the expense of oneself. Kučera (2013, p. 121) defines pro-social behaviour as attitudes and behaviour leading to the benefit of others without expecting any kind of reciprocal service or reward. On the other hand, Hubinková (2008, p. 168) defines altruism as pro-social behaviour which is performed for the benefit of others without the expectation of any reward. It is therefore not clear from the stated statements when we can talk about altruistic and when about pro-social behaviour, since both terms inosculate in many features. Nevertheless, it is possible to state that altruistic behaviour is based on self-sacrifice for the benefit of others, while in case of pro-social behaviour we talk about "doing good" which is demanded by the society and which respects social standards.

1.1.2 Personality and pro-social behaviour

Personality represents "*individualised system of psychological processes, states and qualities which result from socialization, transformation of innate inner conditions of human existence and which determine and manage subject activities of individual, his social contacts and spiritual relations*" (Smékal, 2004, In: Řičan, 2010, p. 14). Lenz (2000, In: Kosová et al., 2014, p. 121) states that **pro-social personality** is the creator of culture, human rights and social values and it is characteristic for it to remain optimistic, supporting institutions, able to offer help, empathic, able to become impersonalised and gain followers despite the complexity of problems to be resolved. Based on this characteristic of pro-social personality we can state that pro-social behaviour demands the ability to lead people towards changes and react to possible problems which can result from these changes. As we have stated at the beginning of the chapter, pro-social behaviour is a behaviour which is aimed at the benefit of others, such as donation, help or service. However, this behaviour indirectly brings also self satisfaction and growth and strengthening of the character (Nováková, 2014, In: Kosová et al., 2014, p. 121) which the individual is often aware of and therefore he repeats his behaviour.

Should we apply pro-social behaviour in marketing environment which is formed by enterprises and organizations and individual personalities working in them, we can state that it would become one of strong marketing tools of many enterprises or organisations. On one hand, it would contribute to strengthening of relation with key stakeholders; on the other hand, even the enterprise would profit from this behaviour, for it would strengthen its position on the market and earn a good reputation among consumers. It is however questionable whether this behaviour can be considered as solely pro-social in this case, since the doer of this behaviour realises that he can profit from it. And thus, can we really talk about unselfish help from the side of the enterprise or organisation?

1.1.3 Basic theories explaining pro-social behaviour

To help us better understand the basis of pro-social behaviour in literature we can find theories which explain why we behave pro-socially, what makes us do that and, on the contrary, why we behave antisocially in certain situations. Kučera (2013, p. 121-122) specifies four basic theories defining pro-social behaviour. First of them is the **social exchange theory**, according to which pro-social behaviour brings a reward in the form of self-satisfaction. This concept is followed by the **cost benefit theory** which is based on pondering upon provision of help on the basis of four main criteria, namely the costs connected to the help (e.g. energy, time), costs of non-provision of help (e.g. social criticism, self-reproach), reward connected to help (e.g. appreciation by the society) and a reward of non-provision of help (e.g. benefit from own activities which do not relate to helping). The second theory is the **empathy-altruism hypothesis** based on which the principal motives of helping are egoistic, altruistic, collective or principled. The last two theories – **kin selection theory** and **reciprocal altruism theory** – are mainly connected to the evolutionary explanation of altruistic behaviour. However, their detailed theoretical definition within the matter of pro-social behaviour application into the field of social marketing is not crucial for us. Within the research we will deal with the first two theories in detail and look for the answer to the question what leads the enterprises and organisations to act pro-socially, or if it is possible to regard social marketing as unselfish from the side of enterprises or organisations, or it is only a strategy for creation of positive PR.

2. Data and methodology

By study of available literature and specialised studies, as well as research activities carried out in the past dealing with the analysed issues, it is possible to formulate the research problem, work hypotheses, as well as primary aim and partial aims. Primary aim is to find out whether the enterprises which are members of informal associations declaring corporate social responsibility carry out activities performed within social marketing by which they declare the principles of pro-social behaviour. Based on the content analysis of marketing communication and social marketing activities of the selected group of enterprises we would like to point out the growing involvement of enterprises in the field of corporate social responsibility and social marketing activities. Partial aims are to discover whether:

- the enterprises which declare principles of corporate social responsibility focus on social marketing;
- the enterprises which direct their attention to social marketing publicize their activities in media;
- the enterprises which present themselves as socially responsible are perceived by consumers rather positively or negatively.

Based on the partial aims we can formulate hypotheses by testing of which it is possible to clarify certain significant relations between the concept of social responsibility and social marketing activities which can be regarded as a form of pro-social behaviour.

1. **Hypothesis:** Enterprises which have corporate social responsibility incorporated in their business philosophy, engage in social marketing.

Justification: The concept of corporate social responsibility currently brings new perspective of the social role of enterprises and organisations which should perform their business activities in line with the economic, social and environmental level of CSR concept. Social marketing together with corporate philanthropy, corporate sponsorship and donorship, corporate foundations, matching funds, social investments and the like, create unified concept of CSR (corporate social responsibility) (Pavlík,

Bělčík et al., 2010, p. 45-48; Svoboda, 2009, p. 67; Kotler & Lee, 2004, In: Kotler & Keller, 2007, p. 60; Šmajš, Binka, & Rolný, 2012, p. 162-164). And thus marketing workers should take into consideration social, ethical and responsible aspects of business in carrying out marketing activities.

2. **Hypothesis:** Enterprises which engage in social marketing present their activities via media.

Justification: Enterprises and organisations should provide more information about their socially responsible activities via CSR reports, as well as by making the information about specific performed activities available to public (Jurová, 2011, p. 99). The information should be easy to understand, true and provide information about activities, strategies and procedures applied within socially responsible activities of the enterprise and organisation.

3. **Hypothesis:** Enterprises which present themselves as socially responsible are positively perceived by consumers.

Justification: Enterprises and organisations influence stakeholders by their activities with the aim to create and maintain positive relations with them and to achieve mutual trust between both parties (Svoboda, 2009, p. 17). Establishing positive relations subsequently helps the enterprises and organisations to strengthen positive attitude of end consumers towards the company, brand and its production, and thus to contribute to achieve company targets such as improvement of reputation and overall image of the company in the eyes of public (Srbová & Řehoř, 2010), which, besides the product offer, expects the company to behave socially responsible.

As a sample for our research we selected enterprises working in Slovakia which have the principles of corporate social responsibility incorporated in their business philosophy and are members of an informal association of enterprises, by which they commit themselves to become leaders in promotion of responsible business principles, and they focus on social marketing - namely they are the enterprises associated under the name **Business Leaders Forum (BLF)**.

Picture 1: Members of the Business Leaders Forum association



Source: Business Leaders Forum, 2015

BLF is a member of European platform CSR Europe and its role is to cultivate the society by creating and introducing standards of responsible business mainly by voluntary integration of principles taking into account social, ethical and environmental aspects of business. At present, the association has 34 members (Picture 1) working in various business spheres.

For the analysis of social marketing communication of enterprises and as a main research method we will use the content analysis with the use of which we can observe the representation of individual selected categories within social marketing campaigns, which cover principles of social marketing as a set of activities of pro-social form of behaviour. We chose the method of content analysis due to work with social facts since there is conversion of qualitative data to quantitative data (Nový & Surynek et al., 2006, p. 273), which subsequently enables us to test hypotheses and compare gained results (Jandourek, 2008, p. 47). This way we will be able to evaluate suitability of performance of individual marketing activities from the view of enterprises and organisations and point out the suitability, or inadequacy of performance of analysed activities in consideration of the business sphere in which these enterprises and organisations work. To process data gained by content analysis we will use adequate statistical methods, namely non-parametric statistical methods which work with quantities (e.g. Chi-Square Test of Independence) or with serial numbers which are assigned to original data (e.g. Kruskal-Wallis test) (Rimarčík, 2007). Disadvantage of non-parametric statistical methods in comparison to parametric methods is their lower sensitivity and relative inaccuracy (Markechová, Stehlíková, & Tírpáková, 2011, p. 293). In statistical evaluation it is therefore better to prefer parametric statistical methods. However, these are not suitable for the analysis of our selected research set, since this research set is small and we have experience with non-parametric statistical methods from research activities carried out in the past (Kubaláková, 2014). Based on ascertained data we will be able to determine relations between individual variables which subsequently enables us to verify or disprove formulated hypotheses.

3. Results and discussion

Results gained by content analysis of marketing communication of enterprises will determine the level of involvement of enterprises which claim corporate social responsibility concept, specifically in gaining resources for philanthropic purposes (e.g. financing of humanitarian projects, support of socially disadvantaged and the like) with the aim to support social programs. It is possible to state, that social marketing contains a set of methods and means which enable targeted effect on certain target groups of inhabitants - primarily on society as a whole, not only on individuals (Ambrózaiová, 2007, p. 18) – with the aim to promote, influence and change attitudes of target audience towards the social values (Čeledová & Čevela, 2010, p. 11) the creation of which is at present one of the key aims of enterprises and organisations (Džupina, 2013, p. 12). According to Lomnický (2012, p. 455) *"the pro-social dimension of communication deepens values of profound human respect, mutual respect, tolerance, understanding, politeness, courtesy and tactfulness"*. However, can we talk about these values even within business strategies of enterprises and organisations in connection to social marketing activities?

4. Conclusion

Nowadays, consumers are not willing to tolerate unethical behaviour of business entities and prefer products and services of those enterprises and organisations which are known for their socially responsible approach towards business in which they endeavour not only profit maximisation, but take into consideration interests of the whole society, for example by engaging in socially beneficial activities, putting stress on environment protection, business ethics, sustainable development and the like. Social marketing can be used to gain competitive advantage of enterprises and organisations, it helps to build good reputation of the enterprise and brand awareness, and last but not least, it increases interest of consumers in offered products and services (Chattananon et al., 2007, p. 231), since nowadays it is attractive and

demanded by consumers. Social marketing activities can distinguish enterprises and organisations from competition mainly by its emotional connection with customers. Experimental research activities point out that the level of business effort in the field of social marketing can in reality significantly influence consumers' perception of enterprises and organisations and their socially oriented initiatives (Ellen et al., 2000 & Reed et al., 2007, In: Inoue & Kent, 2014, p. 626). And this is one of the reasons why social psychologists and researchers show increased interest in social marketing, namely in the fact when and why people behave pro-socially (Penner et al., 2005, In: O'Cass & Griffin, 2015, p. 827) and why should consumers subsequently favourably reacts to social marketing campaigns.

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