

How Social Enterprises use Strategic Marketing and Social Marketing to Drive Sustainable Development

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The emergence of globalisation, population growth and climate change are ushering in rising societal concerns. New approaches need to continue being fostered in research, production and marketing to address sustainability. Initiatives derived by a cross-section of businesses, government and community members working in partnerships seem to offer the best chance to catalyse societal transformation.

Since social enterprises have social, economic and environmental imperatives embedded in their core objectives, they are a fertile incubator for implementing activities within society to produce commercial and social value. These organisations are historically characterised by entrepreneurship, innovation and willingness to take risks to create and exploit opportunities in the marketplace. Often they undertake projects in the face of constraints imposed by limited resources while serving numerous constituents. However, there is a dearth of empirical research on the strategic marketing and social marketing activities deployed by social enterprises to accomplish their economic, social and environmental missions.

A multiple case study method was employed to examine the strategic marketing and social marketing being applied across diverse social enterprises as mechanisms to achieve missions. Findings show the organisations' marketing functions go beyond traditional approaches to ensure viable income streams. They employ specialised tactics in their marketing mix to cater to broader target audiences such as offering two-tiered price schemes and developing products in concert with customers. Deep collaboration between the organisations and their stakeholders occasionally extends to joining forces with competitors for gaining greater capabilities. Due to their unique nature, social enterprises may influence public policy.

Results on social marketing show tailored interventions introduced by social enterprises in the pursuit of social change brings environmental benefits, teaches skills for employment, and provides a voice for marginalised members of their communities who may not otherwise have an outlet. Successful outcomes may lead to replication of business models. Overall this approach to strategic marketing and social marketing translates into powerful partnerships from collaboration and competition in both vertical and horizontal directions. Hence, the research extends theory on co-competition in the third sector using a systems framework, the social ecological model, that is underpinned by co-creation of social value.