Social Marketing-Customer Orientation (SMCO):
How Customer Orientation Differ for Social Marketing Service Employees

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Introduction:
The aim of social marketing is for individuals or organisations to change behaviours so as to produce positive social change (Kotler & Lee, 2008). To date, the social marketing literature has minimally addressed the role of service employees and their interactions with customers (Dann, Harris, Mort, Fry, & Binney, 2007). While recent thinking in social marketing calls for a customer orientation (CO) approach, there remains challenges in transferring commercial marketing concepts into social marketing practices (Hastings & Saren, 2003; Peattle & Peattle, 2003). To address this gap, this paper aims to develop a CO concept for service employees attempting to influence behavioural change in consumers. Borrowing from the sales marketing literature, this paper develops a behavioural concept termed Social Marketing-Customer Orientation (SMCO) which is founded on the Selling Orientation-Customer Orientation (SOCO) measure (Saxe & Weitz, 1982). In doing so, the paper addresses gaps in existing literature which does not understand what it means to be customer-oriented for service employees attempting to influence behavioural change and attaining societal benefits.

Literature Review:
Marketing theorists have established how market-oriented firms focusing on customer needs tend to perform better than firms focusing on sales (Kohli & Jaworkski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990). Progressively, researchers have investigated CO practiced by employees following the seminal article by Saxe and Weitz (1982) (Brown, Mowen, Donavan, & Licata, 2002; Donavan, Brown, & Mowen, 2004; Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Kelley, 1992). As with Saxe and Weitz (1982), this paper views CO as a behavioural concept and uses the SOCO measure due to its wide application. Saxe and Weitz (1982) defined CO as “the degree to which salespeople practice the marketing concept by helping customers make purchase decisions that satisfy their needs.” Examples of CO behaviours aimed at attaining long-term customer satisfaction include low pressure-selling, high concern for customers and problem-selling techniques (Saxe & Weitz, 1982). In contrast, employees who are sales-oriented view customer needs as secondary and focus on achieving more sales (Boles, Babin, Brashear, & Brooks, 2001). CO leads to positive service outcomes such as customer satisfaction (Goff & Boles, 1997; Stock & Hoyer, 2005), improved relationship quality (Huang, 2008), and perceived service quality (Kelley & Hoffman, 1997). To date, studies investigating CO have been conducted in commercial service settings which emphasise on commercial goals. Thus, the current state of research applied to a social marketing context is based on the assumption that what is good for customers is good for society (Andreasen, 2003; Bloom & Novelli, 1981). Although the social marketing literature has stress on the need to adopt customer-oriented practices (Hastings, Stead, & MacKintosh, 2002; Lefebvre & Flora, 1988; Peattie & Peattie, 2008), existing frameworks disregard how CO for service employees may differ for social marketers whose goals are to solve behavioural change issues (e.g. public and health sectors) and whose behaviours impact a variety of stakeholders which includes the organisation, consumers and the general public (Brenkert, 2002; Glenane-Antoniadis, Whitwell, Bell, & Menguc, 2003). Thus, there appears to be a lack of understanding on CO which may be more beneficial for the resolution of social problems for social marketers (Brenkert, 2002).

Conceptual Framework:
This study proposes a CO concept for social marketing termed Social Marketing-Customer Orientation (SMCO). SMCO is preliminarily defined as, “the degree to which service employees practices the social marketing concept by serving customers based on their
welfare and needs and obligations to society.” The first dimension of SMCO termed ‘**Transactional Marketing Capacity**’ is based on the negatively worded items from the selling-orientation factor of SOCO. It refers to the extent service employees serve customers based on pure economic marketing exchanges. This dimension illustrates how social marketers may be driven by self-interests in the exchange and act in ways not entirely altruistic (Hastings & Saren, 2003). These employees employ conventional marketing principals founded upon economic exchanges when they ought to act in ways that encourages voluntary exchanges between them and consumers (Lefebvre & Flora, 1988). For example, lactation nurses may engage in high pressure-selling of the idea of breastfeeding to the discomfort of new mothers or organ donor coordinators may ‘stretch the truth’ on the benefits of organ donation to increase the number of organ donors.

The second dimension is termed ‘**Social Marketing Capacity**’ and is proposed to consist of two sub-dimensions: ‘**Consideration for Wider Society**’ and ‘**Consideration for Consumer Welfare**’. A ‘**Social Marketing Capacity**’ dimension refers to the extent service employees evaluates the impact of their actions on consumer welfare or the public and wider society when servicing consumers. The two sub-dimensions are a manifestation of service employees’ aptitude for social marketing reflected in their service behaviours. Social marketing is fraught by an environment of externalities results in costly (negative externality) or beneficial (positive externality) outcomes of exchanges that may spill over to third parties (Glenane-Antoniadis, et al., 2003). Hence, this dimension acknowledges how the well-being or ‘the good’ of a group of people, institutions or society are affected by the change in behaviour of others. For example, nutritionists who provide obesity intervention for clients without considering their family members might lead to wider implications for society where parties not directly involved in the exchange may be affected (e.g. children or partners). Therefore, the ‘**Consideration for Wider Society**’ dimension involves a focus on the general public and wider society apart from the consumer and organisation (Glenane-Antoniadis, et al., 2003) and would incorporate actions which respect various recipients in the welfare exchange. The ‘**Consideration for Consumer Welfare**’ dimension is founded upon CO principles which assumes the welfare and needs of customers are prioritised above self-interests (Saxe & Weitz, 1982). While social marketing applies the 4P of marketing principles (e.g. Evans & McCormack, 2008; Grier & Bryant, 2005; Smith, 2002), less attention has been paid to the services marketing mix which comprises of 7Ps of people, processes and physical evidence (e.g. Wirtz, Lovelock, Keh, & Lu, 2004). In particular, the service marketing mix of ‘people’ is expected to differ in a social marketing context and being customer-oriented should serve different meanings for social marketing service employees (Peattie & Peattie, 2008). Therefore, it is expect that in a social marketing setting, employees who seek to move away from an intervention mentality (Hastings, et al., 2002) will act for consumers by offering superior value rather than ensuring compliance (Dann, et al., 2007), engage in relationship building of a non-commercial nature (Hastings & Saren, 2003) or seek to empower consumers (Hastings, et al., 2002). Such behaviours acknowledges the complexities of symbolic exchanges in promoting the social product (Hastings & Saren, 2003).

**Conclusion:**
In short, this paper advances current understanding of the behavioural phenomenon of CO in a social marketing setting. It addresses knowledge gaps in CO and social marketing research by proposing a two-dimensional framework of SMCO to examine social marketing customer-oriented behaviours.
References


