To be Nice or Ugly?: A Conceptual Framework of Customer Orientation for Service Providers in Social Marketing Services.

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Abstract

While the concept of customer orientation is well established in the commercial marketing literature, there is little understanding of how the concept applies to social marketing contexts. In many social marketing services, service providers within interpersonal interactions play an important role in achieving social goals. Through an amalgamation of customer orientation and social influence concepts, this paper proposes a conceptualisation and typology of customer orientation to suit these unique settings. In this paper, customer orientation is defined as, "the degree which service employees ensure the welfare of potential recipients through a balance use of concern and influence in interpersonal behaviours." By varying on a degree of concern and influence, social marketing service providers can achieve different social outcomes. The combination of behaviours presents implications for social marketing theory and practice.

Introduction

Service providers in social marketing services have distinct goals and face unique challenges distinct from commercial service settings. Service providers in social marketing may aim to achieve social goals such as cooperation, compliance, attitude or behavioural change as oppose to commercial goals such as profitability or customer satisfaction. Because these goals are distinct, commercial marketing concepts become less applicable. Although researchers in social marketing have called for a need to apply customer-oriented approaches to achieve social goals, the customer orientation concept is not directly transferrable because it is base on the sovereignty of consumers. This assumption may not apply for users of social marketing services who are required more often to comply, cooperate or co-produce with their service providers (Walsh, 1994; Alford, 2002). Service providers in these settings often have to consider how consumers are wrong rather than how 'customers are always right'. Taking into account the contextual differences, this paper introduces an adapted conceptualisation of customer orientation and a typology for social marketing settings base on customer orientation and social influence concepts.

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