



## A Social Marketing Political Manifesto

**There are spectres haunting social marketing – spectres that affect human rights and the human condition.** Since Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman published their ever-remembered article, time and life did not stop. Technological innovation and the way it has been used and misused represents a major threat to human freedom, by abusively conditioning people's behaviours, and affecting social marketing, and all behaviour change fields. Simultaneously, the political environment in which social marketing was born has changed a lot for the worse. After democracy had a remarkable global run, the expansion of freedom and democracy in the world has come to a halt everywhere we can see the rise of populism, the arrogance of authoritarian regimes, and the rapid growth of rising inequality, welfare-state cutbacks, greater insecurity for the working and middle classes, and the spread of economic and social risk. One cannot also forget the waves and waves of politicians who do not know, do not pay attention, or are even interested in citizens' demands and concerns, including the rise of unelected technocracies. In view of this, social marketing must reaffirm its political and ideological groundings.

Social marketing was born in the context of the fight for civil rights in the US, and the need to tackle huge health challenges in the developing world. It was surrounded by the international uproar against Vietnam War, the student's uprising that proliferated throughout numerous developed countries, and ensuing deep cultural changes that flowed from this. Its response came from a persistent tradition of the Twentieth-Century progressive liberalism. Philip Kotler has emphasized this in his more recent interviews and books, reaffirming the need for social marketing to stick with its progressive origins.

**The essential proposition is that social marketing's most intrinsic concepts are alien to illegitimate authoritarianisms, any reduction in citizens' rights and freedoms, and manipulation by governments hostile to the people's wellbeing. We are not «hired guns» at the service of any arbitrary power. We are not value free. There is a political responsibility intrinsic to social marketing that results from its core concepts.**

Since its beginning social marketing has been applied in countries with very distinct political regimes, including non-democratic ones in low, middle and high income countries. But social marketing is defined by placing a great deal of emphasis on the dignity to self-determination of the individual, which presupposes a fundamental respect for freedom fully materialized in democratic societies. Social marketing therefore is a child of and instrument of democracy.

Freedom and democracy are our roots. In any of its forms (*nudge, bug, smack, or shove* policies, using *The Exchange Matrix*, by Jeff French, 2011), social marketing must preserve its democratic principles of free citizens' choice, or democratic mandated collective action to promote health, social, and environmental wellbeing. But social marketing is not a «neoliberal experiment». Furthermore, the so called «neoliberalism», as Noam Chomsky wrote (1999), is not new and is not liberal. Their basic assumptions are far from those that have animated the liberal tradition since the Enlightenment. «Neoliberalism» is a mix of illiberal libertarianism and conservatism that seeks to undermine collective state directed action, with consequential increases in social inequality.

In those countries, as the UK, that developed national policies on social marketing in public health, our field was not a «neoliberal experiment». It was a contribution of academics and public officers based on the 1946 World Health Organization's recommendations, in which WHO proposed that health should be considered and promoted in all its socio-economical dimensions, involving, and engaging individuals, environmental factors, and social conditions.

The use of social marketing as part of this process can above all contribute to ensuring that social policy and attempts to improve the human condition are based on a sound understanding of citizens, their lives, and the communities they are part of. Social marketing also seeks collectively to ensure that people agree when individual freedoms should be curtailed for the collective good. Social marketing was, and is a systematic tool for promoting public and social freedom, and social good, founded on true concerns about human wellbeing and respect for citizens. *For a' that an' a' that*, so be it.

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