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THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIETAL MARKETING IN SERVICE BUSINESSES: ORIGINS, TRANSFORMATIONS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES (1970-2023)

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to retrace the paradigm changes in the evolution of marketing theory through four periods that led to the emergence of societal marketing, as well as the causes behind these changes. Our work is based on an in-depth literature review and theoretical analysis founded on the work of P. Kotler and G. Zaltman (1971), which contributed to the reconceptualization of the concept of societal marketing. We then examine the factors that have favored the successful implementation of societal marketing in service companies, such as closer relationships with customers, win-win strategies for all, and a focus on relational trust. This analysis is inspired by the work of Grönroos (2007) on interactive service models, where transparent communication and customer experience reinforce

consumer loyalty and commitment. Finally, we focus on future prospects that could completely revolutionize societal marketing and enable its consensual, gradual and widespread acceptance within service companies, which is not yet the case today. Despite notable advances, only a small minority of companies are implementing the principles of societal marketing. However, changing consumer behavior, the rise of artificial intelligence, increased competition and a growing number of brands for a limited demand, as well as existing regulations, have obliged many companies to prioritize customer loyalty strategies. These factors will increase the pressure on companies to meet societal marketing standards.

Keywords:

Evolution, Societal Marketing, Service Companies, Transformation

1. Introduction

Understanding the evolution and origins of societal marketing from its beginnings to the present day enables us to reflect on the role and ethics of societal marketing, and to learn from the unsatisfactory or insufficient results of traditional marketing. It also enables us to make predictions for future actions and to better understand the current and future challenges of this discipline (Pierre Volle, 2011). Societal marketing has enjoyed a meteoric rise since its inception. It has directly influenced the interaction between companies and their target audiences. Societal marketing is a marketing orientation that emerged in the 1970s-1972. It arose from the conflict between the immediate needs of individual consumers and the long-term well-being of society (Meadows: *The Limits to Growth*, 1972). The concept of societal marketing prioritizes human well-being over profit and the satisfaction of desires. As defined by Philip Kotler, the concept of societal marketing sees the company's role as identifying the needs and interests of target markets, providing the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors, thereby protecting the consumer's image and society's well-being (P. Kotler, 1971). Our study focuses on service companies because of their important role in the modern economy, on the one hand, and their proximity to consumers, on the other. Also, the increasing digitization of services means that the social actions of companies are constantly monitored by consumers who are better informed and connected in real time (HeeSoo Chin, Durga Prasad Marasini & DonHee Lee, 2023).

From this perspective, it becomes important to understand how service companies are integrating societal marketing principles into their strategies to continue meeting their social responsibility obligations, and how business and socio-economic conditions influence the evolution of marketing over time. The aim of this study is to trace the key stages in the evolution of societal marketing, from the gradual integration of the concept to the impact of digitization and new societal expectations. To this end, our analysis will focus on three main areas: the origins of the concept, the major transformations over the years, and finally an analysis of emerging trends, future challenges and innovations.

2. The Origins of Societal Marketing (1970-1990)

P. Kotler was the first author to conceptualize the term “societal marketing” in the scientific literature, in 1970. He laid the foundations of the concept by defining it as: attracting, maintaining and strengthening the relationship with the customer (Robert w. Palmatier, 2008). The first step in understanding societal marketing is to examine its origins and historical development.

Marketing has long been seen as a manipulative tool used by companies to sell their products and make money at the expense of the welfare of poor consumers. Marketing is often concerned with satisfying the immediate needs of the consumer, and does not consider the long-term benefits that a service or product can bring to society and individuals. However, in recent years, the concept of marketing has expanded the role and dimension of marketing to include social well-being and societal concerns, promoting an inclusive social marketing framework in global marketing decisions (Langan and Hill, 2014). According to Kotler and Keller (2006), societal marketing is a combination of humanistic and ecological marketing. It was first conceptualized by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman to promote a more social, responsible and ethical model of marketing (P. Kotler and G. Zaltman, 1971). It appears to be a modern, enlightened version of traditional marketing. It appears to be a modern, enlightened version of traditional marketing. Although the concept of societal marketing has attracted the attention of many researchers, the literature on societal marketing is not yet abundant.

From the above explanations, it can be argued that societal marketing was born out of the limitations of traditional marketing, in particular its ineffective and inappropriate business strategies in the economic environment. In the context of debates where the social and environmental ethical practices of traditional marketing have reached such a critical level as to provoke an outcry from activists, trade unions and even academics, it is clear that the concept of societal marketing is an extension of the marketing concept rather than a fundamental restructuring of marketing theory (A. Crane & J. Desmond, 2002).

Yankelovich expressed alarm at consumers' perceived dissatisfaction with corporate deception and declared that “society would be nowhere if citizens were indifferent to commercial deception” (Yankelovich, 2004). Philip Kotler (1971)

declared that companies should integrate society's needs and desires into their strategic decision-making processes, thus laying the foundations for societal marketing. We can't discuss the origins of societal marketing without mentioning the Meadows Report on the Limits to Growth, published by the Club of Rome in 1972, which warned of the need to adopt responsible economic practices to ensure social and environmental sustainability. This international report played a key role in the acceptance of societal marketing by various countries (Bartenstein Kristin, 2005).

3. Major Developments in Societal Marketing (1970 -2023)

The 1970s are said to have marked the emergence of the concept of societal marketing against a backdrop of recognition of the inadequacies of economic growth and the need for a new, more balanced approach. Since then, organizations have continued to strive to ensure that their societal marketing conversions reflect stakeholder demands, regulatory standards and the impact of technological tools. Many researchers consider that this period laid the foundations for a more profound transformation, which will be analyzed in the following section (Lantos, G. P.; 2001).

It was during this period that the concept of societal marketing began to emerge. Initially focused on satisfying consumers' needs, marketing gradually moved towards a wider range of social actions. Kotler's (1971) theory, which introduced the concept of “societal marketing”, argues for a balance between companies' economic objectives and social needs. These companies are increasingly interested in the development of environmental and social initiatives, and now recognize that this is a concern, particularly in the mass consumption sectors. The Meadows Report, commissioned by the Club of Rome in 1972, called for better management of natural resources (Meadows et al., 1972). Service companies began to explore societal marketing as a way of differentiating themselves from their competitors. Financial banking products are now accessible to the most disadvantaged segments of society (Brown & Green, 1985).

Societal marketing would not be what it is today without the many institutions that help to inform customers (commercial courts, chambers of

commerce, communications agencies, media, etc.), inform companies in return (national statistical institutes, market research institutes, etc.), manage the physical flow of goods (wholesalers, specialized logistics providers, etc.), make offers to the public (retailers of all kinds), finance purchases (banks and other financial companies, etc.) (Kotler & Lee, 2005). With the rise of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the early 1990s, and then in 1991 with A. Carroll, the international standards ISO 14001 and the United Nations Global Compact were adopted, calling on companies to adopt practices respectful of human rights, labor standards and the environment (UN, 1992). Societal marketing is becoming a formalized, structured framework to guide companies in managing their social and environmental policies. Companies are under increasing pressure to integrate social practices into their global strategies. CSR is becoming an institutionalized norm in many sectors. Consumers are demanding greater transparency in corporate practices, particularly in terms of ethics, the environment and working conditions (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004). Companies have realized that respect for social values is no longer a choice, but a strategic competitive differentiator and a condition of credibility in the eyes of consumers.

The years 2000-2010 marked the emergence of digitization and the digital age, which radically changed the way companies approached societal marketing. This was a period of consolidation and development of societal marketing, with a particular focus on social communication.

During this period, the integration of societal marketing into communication strategies became increasingly important (Mangold & Faulds (2009)). In the 2000s, more and more service companies began to use societal marketing in their communication strategies. Mass communication evolved towards more targeted, even personalized, techniques, thanks to direct marketing (mail, telephone calls) and the intensive use of electronic communication technologies (e-mail, websites, cell phone marketing, etc.) as well as personal databases (Pierre Volle, 2011).

As part of societal marketing, water and energy-saving programs in service companies came into being during this period. In the hospitality industry, service

companies are taking part in programs to reduce water and energy consumption. Companies such as The Body Shop, Levi's, Starbucks and Procter & Gamble are actively contributing to the protection and development of the environment and society by adopting the concept of societal marketing (Bhattacharya, C. B., & Korschun, D. (2008) Initiatives such as Tata Steel's "The Healing Touch", which aims to care for and empower people with disabilities, the American company Ford's commitment to limiting water wastage and Wockhardt's blood donation campaign demonstrate the growing importance and adoption of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities (Carroll, A. B., & Shabana, K. M., 2010).

One of the most important changes of this period is the significant impact of social networks on the visibility of companies' social actions. This new era has made it possible to integrate the consumer into the innovation process and the development of the different variables in the marketing mix (product, price, communication and distribution) (Smith, A. N., Fischer, E., & Yongjian, C.; 2012). The emergence of digital technology has altered societal marketing practices, the main consequences of which are the disappearance of the intermediary between customer and supplier, online purchasing, the revision of the concept of exchange and the reassessment of the role of the community. The customer has gone from servant to king in the service industry (Raef Abdennadher, March 2012). More and more companies are using slogans such as "the customer is king here" or "the customer is always right". Today, thanks to digital devices, customers can efficiently search for information online, which has many advantages such as convenience, variety of options and greater efficiency. Service providers offer a variety of services taking into account these digital advantages that enable the co-creation of value with customers (Lee and Lee, 2020c).

According to marketers, technological tools such as mobile apps are a powerful way of communicating with customers and being close to them at all times, as well as providing personalized, real-time and geolocated offers. The variety and richness of online data offers customers numerous benefits in the form of personalized services, individualized content, relevant messages and offers (Martin & Murphy, 2017). With the emergence of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter,

Instagram and Tiktok, companies can now communicate with their customers in real time and demonstrate their commitment to social and environmental responsibility. Used for advertising, communication and even sales purposes, these platforms provide a space where companies must not only promote responsible actions, but also prove their authenticity to an informed public with the help of governments. Societal marketing is thus becoming an increasingly sophisticated communication tool, using storytelling and the participation of online communities to create an authentic brand image (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

While social networks are a platform for transparency, they are no guarantee against greenwashing practices.

Some companies play it smart. They practice greenwashing and try to deceive consumers through misleading advertising. For example, they run false marketing campaigns claiming to sell recyclable products while continuing to pollute the environment. This growing risk of greenwashing aims to create a false ecological image to attract consumers (Delmas, M. A., & Burbano, V. C.; 2011). To put an end to this, consumers and NGO as well as government regulations are using available means to increase pressure on these organizations to align more transparent and consistent communication with their actual actions. The use of third-party eco-labels and certifications has become commonplace to avoid any suspicion of greenwashing (Everarts de Velp, S & Barette, K 2023). Brands must prove that their actions are concrete and measurable through ecological and quality certifications.

Service companies now have no choice but to commit to improving people's quality of life by becoming more involved in socially responsible practices. Indeed, societal marketing is the obligation for an organization to maximize its positive impact on society and minimize its negative impact (Pride & Ferrell, 2008). It analyzes the overall impact of marketing decisions on society and formulates guidelines for adjusting them. It must improve the customer experience and relationship (by constantly seeking to adapt products and services to the current needs of society and individuals) and, above all, inform consumers in a transparent

way. These strategies help to improve companies' triple bottom line performance: economic, social and environmental (J. Elkington, 1998). To ensure their long-term success, companies need to develop a marketing strategy that aims to bring added value to customers in order to protect and improve the well-being of customers and society better than their competitors. According to Ganesan, long-term commitment is closely linked to the concept of trust, as the theory of commitment and trust is central to marketing research insofar as it enables us to better understand and explain the operating principle of relationships between companies and customers (Ganesan, 1994).

4. Future Prospects and Development Levers for Societal Marketing

In the early 2020s, service companies are facing a series of challenges and opportunities that are redefining societal marketing. In today's market structure, on the one hand, the supply of services far exceeds demand. On the other, consumer behavior is highly volatile and difficult to control (Kotler, P., & Lee, N. (2005). Given the current economic climate, the proliferation of global crises (war, climate, social and health crises) and the rapid pace of technological innovation, societal marketing expectations are being shaped by ethics, inclusion and technological innovation (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102168>). Societal and sustainable marketing is becoming socially and environmentally responsible marketing that meets the current needs of consumers and businesses while maintaining or improving the ability of future generations to meet their needs Elkington, J. (1997).

Societal marketing is constantly evolving. It informs companies of the importance of building consumer trust rather than focusing on immediate profits. In the short term, companies will continue to strengthen their commitment to individuals, particularly in a context where ecological and social awareness is at its peak. In the medium term, sustainability initiatives, employee well-being and ethical governance will become key elements of corporate identity. Finally, consumer influence will force companies to redouble their efforts to convince customers of their authenticity and real impact (Kanter, R. M., 2011).

One of the key dynamics for companies in the future will be to strike a balance between the expectations of different stakeholder groups. Consumers are increasingly demanding authenticity in companies' social commitments. According to the McKinsey Report (2020), 63% of global consumers say they prefer to buy from brands that align with their social and environmental values. Employees expect a corporate culture that values ethics and responsibility, and whose practices are fair and inclusive. Finally, investors demand measurable, high-performance social results. The question is whether societal marketing can respond positively and simultaneously to the triple demand of stakeholders (consumers, employees and investors) (Nielsen, 2015).

To meet these expectations simultaneously, companies will need to strengthen their transparency mechanisms by reporting regularly and in detail on their social initiatives and backing them up with measurable performance indicators (Bansal & Roth, 2000). These include not only financial indicators, but also environmental, social and governance impacts.

Key trends to watch include the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and big data on societal marketing. AI can facilitate the personalization of consumer experiences, enabling companies to target specific actions based on consumer preferences (Harvard Business Review.; 2020). For example, predictive analytics tools can help companies anticipate consumer behavior and adjust future strategies. This also includes the use of algorithms to evaluate the effectiveness of societal marketing campaigns. The use of blockchain will enable more reliable traceability of supply chains and guarantee consumers the transparency of corporate practices in terms of sustainability and ethics. These tools will facilitate management control across different departments and limit waste and irresponsible behavior (Harvard Business Review., 2017). The future of societal marketing lies in a holistic vision where the company engages on all fronts: social, environmental and economic. This approach will not only generate short-term profits, but also contribute to long-term sustainable performance (Raef Abdennadher, 2012).

Consumers are no longer satisfied with the quality of the products and services they receive, they demand that companies respect their wishes and be closer and more proactive. Social networks are a formidable weapon that these consumers

can use to report any fraudulent behavior. In this situation, companies are forced to take responsibility for their actions, whether positive or negative (France Télévisions, 2018). Similarly, the growing influence of pressure groups has put the spotlight on corporate social responsibility, i.e. the way they take into account the social, societal and environmental impacts of their activities, encouraging companies to play an active role in solving the problems of the societies in which they operate (Belot L., 2003). Recent studies have shown that consumers are willing to boycott brands they deem unrealistic or misleading in terms of social practices (Cone Communications, 2017). For example, Nike products were boycotted because of the poor working conditions observed or witnessed at some of its subcontractors. This boycott damaged the company's reputation, leading it to carry out more and more audits of its suppliers and to communicate on its responsibility in this area (Patricia Thiery, 2005).

Pressure tools include laws and international standards. In Europe, for example, in the social field, there are standards such as SA 8000, ESC 2000, Investors in People, etc., which aim to guarantee fair trade; in the environmental field, there are standards such as ISO 14000, EMAS (<https://sa-intl.org/sa8000/>). In addition, the World Trade Organization (WTO) plays an arbitration role within the international community, and deals with the rules of world trade. Its main objective is to promote the well-being of people throughout the world, and to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible. International initiatives are so numerous that the State cannot limit progress in this field to the national level alone. International organizations such as the OECD, the ILO (International Labour Organization), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the subcommittee of the UN Human Rights Committee are the forces that formulate sustainability and social responsibility (CSR) recommendations for companies (<https://www.oecd.org/daf/inv/mne/>). All these pressures have an impact on companies already facing a complex and highly competitive international environment. The introduction of products that are environmentally sensitive, advocate fairer trade rules, respect human rights and children's rights in the workplace, or contribute to a humanitarian cause, shows that companies are becoming more aware of their responsibilities to society (Patricia Thiery, 2005).

Finally, societal marketing must become a strategic lever for the overall performance of service companies, whether financial, operational or social. According to Archie B. Carroll, companies need to strike a balance between the pursuit of profit and their ethical obligations to their various stakeholders. A. Carroll introduced the concept of the stakeholder responsibility pyramid to analyze the different types of responsibility (economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic) in his model. He is highly critical of the priority given to shareholder profit at the expense of wider stakeholder interests, and argues for a more holistic approach. In his view, social responsibility should involve moral management, where ethical standards guide corporate behavior beyond mere compliance with the law, ensuring justice and fairness in interactions with stakeholders (Archie B. Carroll, 1991a).

A company committed to CSR must strive to be profitable, law-abiding, ethical and a good corporate citizen" (Carroll, 1999b). Companies must assume four responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic.

- ⇒ Economic responsibility means being profitable by providing consumers with quality products at a fair price.
- ⇒ Legal responsibilities: this involves complying with applicable laws and standards.
- ⇒ Ethical responsibilities: this involves acting morally, doing what is right, avoiding harm to members of society while respecting the moral rights of individuals.
- ⇒ Philanthropic responsibilities: services encourage community volunteering in the form of support and donations to organizations. These four responsibilities form the base of Carroll's pyramid of corporate social responsibility. Companies have a responsibility to integrate sustainable practices into their day-to-day operations, from supply chain to production and distribution.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Societal marketing has evolved from a concept that emerged in the 1970s to become a strategic pillar of service companies over the decades. Initially seen as an extension of traditional marketing, it has gradually evolved into a win-win system

between entrepreneurs and beneficiaries. This revolution began in the 1990s with the institutionalization of CSR standards, and continued in the 2000s with the rise of social communications. Today, it's the impact of artificial intelligence. To adapt to these changes and meet the needs of versatile consumers, companies have had to integrate these practices into their business models in a consistent and tangible way.

Service companies need to take real, measurable account of societal expectations in order to maintain their competitiveness and ensure sustainable performance in a fast-changing environment. They must also anticipate the impact of new technologies and changes in consumer behavior in order to regularly adjust their marketing strategies. What's more, companies need to prove their authenticity and commitment to communication. For example, listening to and involving consumers enables them to gather valuable feedback and adapt future offers. Finally, companies must regularly evaluate their performance and adjust their strategies in line with stakeholder feedback.

However, the outlook for the future suggests that this evolution is far from over. In its November 15, 2022 blog, "Entreprise consciente" believes that the concept's revolution is still in its infancy, as very few companies have successfully applied the principles of societal marketing (<https://solutionera.com/articles/entreprise-consciente/marketing-societal-changer-monde/>). The impact of new technologies on visibility, greater control over social commitments and the emergence of new issues are all challenges facing service companies. Everything points to the fact that social marketing will continue to evolve and develop in the general interest of the community. Assessing the real, tangible impact of societal marketing on business performance could be an avenue for future research. Analyzing the direct impact of societal marketing practices on the performance of service companies could also enrich the body of knowledge in this field, particularly in specific sectors such as fast food or banking.

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