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# Guest editorial: Socially responsible marketing: a transformative agenda

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In a world fenced by social issues (i.e. poverty, over-consumption, terrorism, domestic violence, the outflow of various diseases, pollution and ill-mannerism observed among members of society), we need responsible marketing actions and programs to rescue society, gearing it towards a sustainable living on this planet. This special issue is an effort to present some workable marketing actions and programs to encounter the social issues facing individuals living in contemporary societies. From an epistemological perspective, managerialism has remained the dominant lens to inform marketing theory and practice. In a way, it has benefited the organizations to strengthen their profitability but the social issues kept on mounting.

A special characteristic of this special issue is a purposive focus on the social implications of marketing practices to deal with issues such as poverty, health and well-being, education for all, social equality, responsible consumption, global peace, environmental sustainability, and minimizing divorce rates among partners and hunger. Moreover, this special issue is unique in a way to highlight the social contributions of marketing theory and practice (as social action) to counter these problems. Finally, since a dominant ontology in marketing theory and practice is the managerial mindset that is too narrow a conception. This issue tends to stretch the existing positioning of marketing as social action.

The daily life problems such as drug addiction, over-eating, divorce rates, social inequality, materialism, domestic violence and trafficking issues are on the rise. Unfortunately, marketers are criticized upon presenting a myopic view of life, i.e. success via opting for materialistic motives (Kashif *et al.*, 2014, 2018). Furthermore, marketing action is regarded as a trigger to weird social practices such as an individual's pursuit of materialism resulting in aggressive consumption behaviors (Moschis, 2017); frustrated and violent consumers (Heath *et al.*, 2017); targeting to under-age consumer groups (Yu, 2012); marketing manipulation and deception to exploit on consumer decision making (Osborne and Ballantyne, 2012); causing social imbalance, i.e. *customer is the king* mentality that frustrates employees in a service system (Kashif and Zarkada, 2015); stereotypical advertisements that spread offensive advertising behavior (Huhmann and Limbu, 2016) and the television programs that trigger aggression and hedonism among its viewers (Ghilzai *et al.*, 2017; Riddle *et al.*, 2018); and spreading hedonic values among members of a society (del Mar Alonso-Almeida *et al.*, 2020) such as the wave of colorism (Veresiu, 2019) i.e. white skin color as a sign of beauty in parts of Asia.

Apart from these blames, in general, there are a number of malpractices in societies. For instance, one-wheeling and over speeding among bikers is causing a number of deaths per year (Akhtar, 2017; Batool *et al.*, 2018). Other issues are also common, such as friends exciting others to start using drug consumption and getting addicted (Patrick *et al.*, 2016); people intentionally damaging the property of others for the sake of fun and pleasure (Pfathheicher *et al.*, 2019) and a general careless attitude. These practices damage the spirit to establish societal well-being and we believe marketing has the potential to transform societies via various marketing actions and programs to bring about a positive social change. In addition to these, the role of marketing is criticized for its narrow focus on meeting the needs of a particular target market while ignoring the society at large. Still, we observe an increase in



crime rates, drug addiction and divorce rates as few to name. Idealistically, marketing practices should guide policymakers to counter these social challenges because it has the potential to contribute to societal welfare (Mittelstaedt *et al.*, 2015).

Few efforts are made to stretch the epistemological boundary of marketing as social action. For example, by highlighting its transformative role to contribute to the development of a welfare society (Heath and Chatzidakis, 2012; Kashif *et al.*, 2018; Marino *et al.*, 2020). But these are not enough and there is more to be done. This is attributed to rising concerns over food wastage (Calvo-Porrall *et al.*, 2017; do Carmo Stangherlin and de Barcellos, 2018), environmental pollution caused by product packaging, a lack of mannerism among consumers (Raggiotto *et al.*, 2018; Rhein and Schmid, 2020), food addiction and obesity due to overconsumption of food (Farah and Shahzad, 2020), and excessive consumption products such as technological devices to damage the mental health of its users (Handa and Ahuja, 2020). Conclusively, all these issues are attributed to marketing practices that are micro in scope which is just one side of the story.

Over the years, marketers have contributed to the development of society by large. However, this contribution is shadowed by the criticism faced by marketers. Also, another reason that contribution of marketing practices is thin is the managerialist epistemology which is employed to advance marketing theory (Tadajewski, 2018). The marketing initiatives can result in several positive outcomes for society, such as to cause peace among nations while bringing them closer to each other through global product consumption (Cateora *et al.*, 2020); poverty alleviation (Sridharan *et al.*, 2017); health awareness through various advertising campaigns (Fletcher-Brown *et al.*, 2018) and to strengthen awareness of global cultures among members of a society (Torelli *et al.*, 2020).

We are very happy to present some useful research articles as part of this special issue. One of the observations based on our interaction with potential authors and the publication experiences, over the years, is that marketing researchers by large are still myopic in thinking – we refer to conceptual dogmatism. Much of the thinking is towards strictly functional issues faced by marketing managers while ignoring the interdisciplinary focus to advance marketing theory. But, still, we believe, the research questions narrated below can inform potential researchers to contribute to a sustainable society:

- (1) What marketing programs can be designed to ensure familial well-being? How partners – the husband and wife – can be educated to spend a happy life that leaves a positive impact on their children? Moreover, what is the positive/negative impact of various advertising campaigns on strengthening/weakening familial relationships? While addressing these questions, one can imagine an extended role of wedding planners, family psychologists and brands to educated individuals for a happy living.
- (2) Which anti-consumption campaign was useful to control drug-addiction? Which marketing actions and programs can help the drug addicts to bring back to life while strengthening their self-control? Which marketing and advertising programs can help drug rehabilitation centers/organizations to educate people for a better living – minimizing the chances to engage in drug addiction? Which consumer behavior models explain the impact of reference group to positively trigger drugs and which marketing actions/programs can motivate users to avoid using drugs?
- (3) Which marketing frameworks/models can be used to motivate drivers to follow traffic rules? How mannerism can be spread via advertising campaigns while using social media and other digital platforms? What are the various noise pollution control programs and campaigns that can be used to convince different generational cohorts to avoid disturbing others while on the roads? Moreover,

why people violate traffic rules – the motivations (as well as the strategies as solutions) behind ugly practices such as horn pumping, one-wheeling, spitting on roads, teasing others and alike?

- (4) What is the adverse influence of various advertisements, movies, songs and TV programs on the viewer's thought and behavioral patterns towards life – how such programs can be regulated – the control mechanisms? Which marketing and advertising programs spread violence, sexism and social imbalance – how familial and parental education programs can be designed and executed in a family setting?

This special issue constitutes five papers. First paper, "Fear vs humor appeals: a comparative study of children's responses to anti-smoking advertisements", authored by Valentina and Fabio aims to examine the effects of humor and fear appeals in anti-smoking advertisements for children. In a qualitative exploration conducted in Italy, the researchers found humor appeals were more useful to influence children in developing their anti-smoking attitude. The study is an original contribution in the field of advertising to children where fear-based appeals and its impact on anti-smoking attitude among children have been scantily examined.

Second research paper, "Impact of OTT media on the society: insights from path analysis", authored by Shyam explores the impact of over-the-top (OTT) media on society, family and the individuals. With data collected by means of an online questionnaire, the researcher found OTT media usage significantly influences the life of individuals. The study contributes to limited body of knowledge in the study of OTT media and its impact on individual and families.

Third article, "A bibliometric analysis of peer-reviewed literature on smartphone addiction and future research agenda", authored by Khan and Naved is a literature review concerning smartphone addiction research by identifying current state of research in this field. Based on a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of 652 articles, the researchers contribute to the extant literature in the field of smartphone addiction research.

Fourth research paper, "Influence of perceived environmental knowledge and environmental concern on customers' green hotel visit intention: mediating role of green trust", authored by Nafia and colleagues investigate customers' intention to stay in green hotels. In this regard, the authors position green trust as an important intervention to explore the proposed relationship. In a survey conducted among 213 customers of green hotels, the study makes an important contribution to the study of green consumer behavior.

Fifth article, "Efforts are made but food wastage still going on: a study of motivation factors for food waste reduction among household consumers", authored by Manita and colleagues, explores the elements which inspire people to minimize household waste. Using content analysis in a survey-based approach, authors identified 12 motivating factors. The study uniquely presents an Indian context and a methodological innovation where a decision-making trial and evaluation laboratory (DEMATEL) approach is used to analyze the causal relationships.

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