

## SOCIAL MARKETING AS AN INTERVENTION TO POVERTY MANAGEMENT AMIDST THE PANDEMIC

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IJMSSSR 2022

VOLUME 4

ISSUE 1 JANUARY - FEBRUARY

ISSN: 2582 - 0265

**Abstract:** The Novel Corona Virus, or more commonly known as Covid-19, has already devastated the global economy, needless to mention the loss of human life. Unlike the previous “once in a century” pandemics (i.e. The most recent was the Spanish Flu), this epidemic might have a drastic and longer-term effect since it has plunged every aspect of the worldwide Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Ecological (PESTLE) with less than a quarter of a year. Although mankind will surely recover and will not go silent thru the night, nonetheless, it may take years or even decades towards a complete recovery. This obviously affects the mindset of just about everyone.

In the midst of such socio-economic upset, there is a concept that is aptly called Social Marketing. This is considered as one of the most recently growing practices that are used to address the lingering problems of the society. Widely used to address public health issues, this tool serves as a very promising intervention to check societal-related predicaments.

Given such, and in line with the current economic repercussions brought about by the pandemic that further aggravated poverty, this prompted the researcher to study the effectiveness of the aforementioned tool as a new intervention to address the Median Urban Poverty Issues of the – Philippines. The still novelty of this paradigm can prove to be beneficial to address the lingering poverty effects of the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Poverty Management, Social Marketing, Median Urban Poor

### Problem Rationale

The Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) is a highly fatal and fast spreading infectious disease caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The case of this disease was identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, the capital of China's Hubei province, and has since spread globally, resulting in the ongoing 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic. Common symptoms include high fever, cough and shortness of breath. Other symptoms may include fatigue, muscle pain, diarrhea, sore throat, loss of smell and abdominal pain. The time from exposure to onset of symptoms is typically around five days, but may range from two to fourteen days, or even up to a month. While the majority of cases result in mild symptoms, some progress to acute and viral pneumonia and multi-organ failure. Since that dreadful day, millions have already been infected and have died, though the recent social awareness and the vaccines have proven to be effective in gradually “winning this generational health battle.”

Availability of medical resources and the socioeconomics of a region may also affect mortality. Estimates of the mortality from the condition vary because of those regional differences, but also because of methodological difficulties. The under-counting of mild cases can cause the mortality rate to be overestimated. However, the fact that deaths are the result of cases contracted in the past can mean the current mortality rate is underestimated (Partington and Wearden, 2020).

In the Philippines, last 30 January 2020, the Department of Health reported the first case of COVID-19 in the country with a 38-year-old female Chinese national. On 7 March, the first local transmission of COVID-19 was confirmed. WHO is working closely with the Department of Health in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The country was placed into a series of lockdowns, nationally known as community quarantine – which still lasts up to this writing – at different levels depending on the number of cases. As of this writing, all-time cases are in the six digits, but the overall active cases are down to a mere or approximately a thousand per day average. Vaccines have proven to be effective as deaths are in check with only dozens per day while active recoveries are almost equal to the active cases.

Despite of such, the overall economic impact and social instability remains prevalent as there is no clear and definitive date or manner as to how the government can achieve a new normal status.

### Poverty

Poverty is a condition or as experts say a “disease” of the society that is traditionally characterized by the lack or insufficiency of basic human needs, such as potable water, sufficient nutrition, health care, essential education, clothing and shelter, because of the incapacity to afford them. However, this term is relative, like in some developed countries; the measurement of poverty is manifested by the condition of having fewer resources or less income than others within a society or country, or compared to worldwide averages (Sachs, 2005).

About two-third of the total number of people live in absolute poverty, which is currently described by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (WB-IMF) as those whose daily income is within the \$1.27 base. As such, the formal term for this near absolute lack of resources is formally called “Extreme Poverty,” while the condition of being below the norms of developed societies is called “Relative Poverty” (e.g. a family who could be considered poor in a developed country might be a middle class in a developing one due to the high discrepancy in GDP per capita, family income and purchasing power / disposable income).

More importantly, the fundamental issue in poverty is not on the foregone issues, for these are only the effects. The most critical is the mind-set of the poor, or simply, the poor thinks that they will forever be poor, and that they are the moral and economic obligations of the taxpayers and the government (Cheung YL, Tan W, Ahn HJ, Zhang Z, 2010). Their mind-set is already conditioned to this notion, with very little hope of self-dignity and room for growth. Worse, they become parasites and over dependents. They do not believe in the society, that the latter could never help them, along with the children, and their future per se, in uplifting their social disease.

Matched with the pandemic, the poor is more so being pushed further at the brink since the already access to scarce resources and incapability to acquire such is further aggravated by the effects of Covid-19.

### Social Marketing

Social marketing, as conceived by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman in the 1970’s is defined as the systematic application of the theories, concepts, techniques and strategies of marketing to achieve a specific goal of uplifting a distinct social good through the empowerment of behavioral goals ([www.thensmc.com](http://www.thensmc.com)). It can be applied to either promote a beneficial product, or otherwise be strategically used to constantly persuade people to refrain from using or patronizing a certain demerit or harmful product. For example, this may include asking people not to smoke in public areas, asking them to use seat belts, or prompting to make them follow speed limits. Kotler, Roberto and Lee (2002) define Social Marketing in this way:

*“Social Marketing is the use of marketing principles and techniques to influence a target audience to voluntarily accept, reject, modify or abandon a behavior for the benefit of individuals, groups, or society as a whole.”*

Quite a number of international and local organizations have already stepped up their respective advocacies to promote this rising marketing trend. The most widely used reference for the practice is from the National Social Marketing Center, a British Social Marketing organization that advocates such noble causes of this campaign.

Nevertheless, as aforementioned, the so-called “movement” is fast spreading across the globe, as many countries start to adopt this concept as part of their social responsibility or social welfare campaigns. More so, it has a two-dimensional facet – the “social parent,” which is focused on social welfare through policies and guidelines, and the “marketing parent,” or the actual application and practice of this concept (Kotler, Roberto and Lee, 2002).

More so, Social Marketing is a tool focused on providing choices to the consumers – to develop their awareness that could eventually lead to voluntary advocacy on what is beneficial or harmful. This is in direct opposition to the typical social upliftment programs of imposing and mandating policies or rules.

Or simply, Social Marketing is a multi-faceted field of practical knowledge that is aimed on improving various aspects of a certain society.

#### Social Marketing and Poverty Management

Social marketing can be used to remind the poor to save, to allot a portion of their income for their everyday and emergency needs. Just as aforementioned, they could be reminded to not just drink moderately, but also to limit their number of bottles or cigarette sticks, among all their possible vices. In addition, they could also be reminded that having too many children will definitely cause extreme poverty, with pictures and depictions of such untoward and disappointing scenario, like a couple holding nearly a dozen babies and do not have any food to eat. There are already existing campaigns on this Social Marketing, but none is predicated on poverty management. More so, the persuasion factor is low, as it lacks the needed punch and appeal. Maybe through this, they could be enlightened.

Kotler and Lee (2009) in their book emphasized that poverty goes beyond mere economic insufficiencies. The theory of social exchange (or defined as the act or practice of a person to choose alternatives or options wherein they could utterly gain) was utilized and given focus, while on the other hand, the notion of paternalism (which is based on the needs of the poor as perceived by the rich) was evidently discarded due to the lack of comparison between the attributes of the two (2) bipolar socio-economic classifications. In addition, the authors also used the traditional marketing mix to implement their claim about the exchange theory – that is, a good product or service must be “sold” to the market in order for them to advocate that certain offering – which would help them alleviate their current poverty status.

For instance, in the area of health, contraception and overpopulation, in order for the poor to graduate from the levels of poverty, they must in exchange, use certain methods such as oral rehydration, condoms or mosquito bed nets. Once they start purchasing these items, or at least receiving it, they will now have a certain leg up. Meaning, instead of getting sick due to malaria, it can be prevented since they bought a mosquito net. Instead of having more children due to unwanted pregnancies, they could limit the number, using condoms.

As a result, the poor will now start to develop a sense of purpose, and a certain feeling that they could become more productive due to the “items” that they have advocated. This, according to various studies, is one function of Social Marketing to manage poverty – as a means to encourage the target market to patronize something that will have an effect in the long run.

In addition, they could also be taught via reminding them to follow the basic social discipline practices and rules. For instance, proper crossing of the street, pedestrian lane loading and unloading, etc. These factors, no matter how trivial, also promote progress since it reflects our culture and way of life. If Filipinos could muster enough discipline in these basic laws, they could also muster even more on this complicated poverty issues.

All that is needed is a proper reminder, which is also sincere and direct to the point.

This research validated if Social Marketing if used as a tool would become an effective intervention in managing the median urban poverty level, particularly the laboring poor through vice control.

This is attributed to the fact that vices are considered as habits that aggravate poverty due to its nature of further disrupting a poor person’s already meager budget (Carr, 2008; Hoppe, *et al*, 2010). More so, as of the moment, there is no definitive study conducted to analyze the benefits of Social Marketing towards poverty management.

In detail, the research is focused on how could Social Marketing help manage poverty by creating a new method of instilling public and social welfare by reminding them to be disciplined enough in their respective lives as Filipinos, family members and distinct individuals. In the process, this will help them heal the social disease that affects their mindset.

For instance, the poor consider livelihood programs as dole outs, as they do not really cultivate the assistance that they receive, they even use it on their vices. This practice must be checked. And Social Marketing is the fundamental tool to achieve this goal, since it affects the audience's attention, if the method is striking and properly presented. This will be the focal point of the study – to create means to make social marketing effective in reducing median urban poverty by also reducing the vices of people.

In detail, the study provided answers on how to:

1. Profile the poor's behavioral perception / mindset about poverty (This will determine their level of optimism with regards to their current state of life).
2. Inoculate a social marketing program that emanates on discipline and creating a positive mindset and determine its effectiveness.
3. Determine the effectiveness of social marketing as a new intervention in managing the median urban poverty.

### Study Frameworks

The fundamental theory that this study is predicated to is from the types of social change paradigm by Levy and Zaltman (1975). Their model simply describes that in order to achieve a higher level of social change there should be a manifestation of initiative that is focused first on the micro level – the individuals, themselves. The following illustration details this process:

**Figure 1.5: Types of Social Change by Time and Level of Society**

	Micro Level (Individual)	Group Level (Organization)	Macro Level (Society)
Short-Term Change	Behavior Change	Change in Norms (Administrative Change)	Policy Change
Long-Term Change	Lifestyle Change	Organizational Change	Sociocultural Evolution

Source: Adapted from Sidney Levy and Gerald Zaltman. 1975. *Marketing, Society, and Conflict*. Prentice Hall.

The paradigm explains the obvious – which simply describes that even the small things, when sustained and consistently practiced - always lead to greater achievements. These include a higher self-discipline, higher valuation of self-worth and most of all, the manifestation of utmost change in the mindset of the people affected. As presented above, the slightest but consistent behavioral change could eventually lead to a longer-term turnaround – the change of lifestyle. This in turn, will definitely affect an entire organization, and even the society itself since each person is starting to set an example on how to properly think, act and behave. This is definitely a goal of Social Marketing – encouraging the target audience to change their mindset, for the better, which in turn will also affect others.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research was divided into several parts. The first part served as the pre-screening process to determine the direction and template of the study. A Focus Group Discussion on one group of respondents living within the poverty threshold was conducted. The next tier determined the psychological aspects that could influence poverty such as behavior, attitude, influence and societal influences, among other relevant factors.

To conduct this tier, a one-shot research design method using a survey was conducted on families on selected urban communities that has obvious evidences of poverty. The following examples are, among many more, considered as the psychological factors that are deemed to have at least a relatively negative contribution to the social and income status, as well as the purchasing power of the poor under study in buying basic needs. These are the most prevalent vices in the society, as exemplified by the number of people who are under influence. That is,

even at a young age, Filipinos already manifest these vices, which obviously affect them for the rest of their lives.

1. Smoking - The excessive purchase of cigarettes for a poor person is deemed to contribute to his lower capability to buy his basic needs as well as certain luxuries since instead of prioritizing the latter, that person tends to first consider satisfying his vice.
2. Alcohol Drinking – Just like the aforementioned, this disrupts the budget of an individual – or even a family – since the already meager money that should have been spent on more important necessities are wasted just being thrown away on this vice, just like the rest.
3. Gambling – Another instance where the supposed budget for necessities are used for this mischievous activity. This vice, unlike the other two (2), has the greatest potential for monetary loss since the individual is deceived to bet more, especially if he is winning at first. However, as he starts losing, the addiction enters his psyche, which now leads to an eventual vice, with the same results as aforementioned.

After the survey results and benchmarks have been analyzed and should there be any manifestations of any, or at worst all, of the aforementioned psychological factors in terms of poverty, and should any best practice be applicable, the study proceeded to the next research design level – the actual implementation of a social marketing program.

The determinants whether the program introduced unto the target group has succeeded or not were based on the following factors:

1. Increased family budget – the more money allotted for the pertinent family expenses such as allowance for the children, more food on the table and more savings are clear indicators that the program has been effective, at least during the given timeframe. It only means that their purchasing power has increased not because of an increment in wage or work earnings, but on how efficient the heads of the respective families are in planning and managing their resources.
2. Overall family satisfaction – a rather altruistic but strong determinant of an effective program. This is the descriptive and psychological result of having achieved the foregoing criterion. Or simply, it is just quite obvious that a family will be happy and satisfied each time they have more food on their table, the children's parents are not fighting over petty things caused by vices – particularly over money, per se, and they are living a healthy lifestyle.

#### Sample Size and Sampling Design

A total of 200 respondents were used as the sample profile for the actual implementation of the program under this study. More so, to further add substance to the study, a modified cluster sampling method was used on the respondents. They were divided into groups in order to determine a more extensive and comparable progress of the program.

For the first part – in identifying whether the causes of poverty are influenced by the behavioral, attitude, societal and psychological factors of an individual or group - a structured questionnaire obtained the needed information. The questionnaire composed mostly of structured questions in two forms - dichotomous and multiple categories. Some of the questions offered a fixed number of variables while some were open-ended; thus, enabling the respondents to express personal preferences.

For the second part – in determining the progress of the sample under study, the same format of questionnaire was used. Only in this part, a follow-up rating scale was added, as with a corresponding data analysis / statistical treatment methodology to determine the actual improvement of an individual or family that has been exposed under the social marketing programs. The results were then interpreted to answer the hypothesis presented on the first chapter.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Objective One Responses

This area of the study refers to the mindset and impression of the respondents towards poverty. And from the given survey conducted, it is determined that poverty is indeed a multi-faceted predicament, with many anchors and predilections that linger across the society and the economy.

La Vina (2011) on his lecture during the International Convention of Social Protection held at the University of Santo Tomas created a metaphor comparing poverty to a monster that has many hearts. And in order to defeat his so-called social tyrant, every heart must be stabbed simultaneously using all possible poverty alleviation means (e.g. microfinance, micro enterprising and social enterprising, among many more). Given such, it is now concluded that his metaphor is valid, for according to the respondents' mindset, they believe that it has many areas to consider.

Going further, based on multiple responses of the participants, they have utterly indicated that poverty is indeed a social disease, with majority (60%) attesting to this claim. This answer further reinforces the idea of Hoppe, *et al* (2010) that poverty is like an ailment that affects the mentality of an individual – that is, pushing him to think that the structure of the society is definitely unequal and unfair.

The results were unanimous: they simply stated that corruption is just the offshoot of a long-running malpractice that they reasonably phrased as *“unequal levels and unequal distribution of wealth among the people of the society or government since time immemorial and has been carried out until up to this point”* or social inequality, in short. Thus, social disease and structural inevitability, as what experts suggest, could indeed qualify as the mindset and perception of the poor about their current dismal standard of living.

Perception about Poverty	
Base: Number of Respondents	Percentage
Social disease with lack of financial discipline	60
Inevitable life situation	55
Curse	20
Others (including corruption)	15

### Relation to Vices

The respondents who answered lack of financial discipline, upon further probing, revealed that vices do indeed play a part on their current status in life – which according to them is degrading and vicious.

Hence, this further proves two things:

1. Vices can be identified as a form or effect of the lack of financial discipline – which directly attributes to the reasons of poverty; and
2. The social disease aspect of negatively affecting the poor's mindset – which comprises multi-faceted characteristics and attributes - is truly valid, as what the respondents claim.

### Outlook on Poverty Alleviation

This aspect solicited their honest opinions whether they still believe that their current standard of living could be resolved and uplifted.

Clearly, nearly nine-out-of-ten (89%) still have faith among themselves and the system. They also emphasized that prayers still work wonders in addressing one's life problems. And matched with discipline and some people or

organizations who are willing to sincerely assist them, they ardently believe that they could still find a way to become more productive citizens by alleviating their current poverty status.

However, there are still people who remain pessimistic on their current standard of living, as they said that they will die in that way – poor – and they will just let their children believe and work harder. This somehow proves the study of Najman, *et al* (2009) that some poor people are indeed manifesting a sense of hopelessness. Fortunately for these Filipinos under study, majority are still nurturing a sense of optimism.

#### Objective Two: Social Marketing Program

The social marketing program that targeted respondents who have vices was conducted using the conventional one-on-one marketing strategy. That is, the researcher and the assistants gave a program attached to the questionnaire, and explained how they could achieve their desire to somehow limit their vices and use their saved money for more important priorities. Just as what Carr (2008) and Sahoo (2001) studied, social marketing could serve as an integral part of poverty alleviation. The paradigm has worked abroad, so it could also have a possibility of success locally.

The concept may seem trivial and simple – with the projected savings to be small – but the bottomline remains that even the smallest cent could start a greater mindset and ignite the passion to become more disciplined in life to alleviate one's standard of living. Indeed, discipline is already inoculated in many poverty management programs such as microfinance and micro enterprise. But these programs come in the form of penal policies, such that only disciplined recipients – most likely the women, as in the case of some well-known micro enterprise institutions – could benefit.

This is the gray area that this research attempted to fill out, for this study will not use discipline as policy, but as a “marketable” initiative to help people, and social marketing has the capability to provide a “social advertising” jumpstart for this.

Going further, the respondents who have vices and are willing to give the program a try were given the program. Each cluster, as explained on Chapter 3, were given periods of time to implement the schemes, which were as follows:

1. Cluster 1 – one month
2. Cluster 2 – two months
3. Cluster 3 – three months
4. Cluster 4 – four months
5. Cluster 5 – five months

The clusters that underwent a specific period of exposure were randomly determined by the researcher. In between, they were visited to ask for their progress, until the final results were gathered after the given periods of time.

Significantly, the results of the program revealed that majority (65%) of the respondents have indeed controlled their vices, and statistically, changes are evident in terms of the following:

1. They were able to save a little more money to allocate for more important priorities such as food and medicine. Some were even planning to accumulate more savings to be deposited on banks.
2. Parallel studies to health and wellness were manifested, as some respondents stated that they feel better physically. For instance, one chain smoker proclaimed that due to his control of his vices, he could now feel more energy to work, more so, he said that he became more optimistic in his mindset and outlook.

**Vice Control****Base: Number of Respondents with Vices**

Able to control 65%	Not able to control 35%
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**Objective Three: Social Marketing Program Effectiveness**

In detail, the respondents who have changed their filthy habits are scattered across the five-tier social marketing program. That is, it simply means that there is progress from each period covered. This evidently shows the potential of the program. The summary from each period covered are as follows:

1. The respondents who were under the one-month period had a success rate of 70%
2. Majority (55%) of the respondents who were under the two-month program also showed progress
3. Less than 10% respondents who were exposed to the three-month social marketing scheme failed to control his vice.
4. The four-month program was able to kindle positive changes on over 50% respondents.
5. Nearly half of the people under the longest scheme – five (5) months, per se – still have shown potential to control their respective vices despite the relatively longer period of time.

Taking a cue from the data above, it clearly means that, indeed, given the opportunity to progress and matched with the fact that tangible (financial) results could be expected by the respondents. They should just muster enough discipline to change. This is the sole prerequisite, and if they could just exhibit even a little of such, the potential to progress could be nurtured.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In general, this study provided a new method to address the ever-perennial issue of poverty. Based on the respondents' immediate responses, it could be concluded that inoculating Social Marketing as an intervention to poverty management is indeed feasible. The Philippine milieu manifested, through its respondents, a promising set of results, as they stated that they still believe that with proper discipline, mindset and intervention, their standard of living will be improved. It was also validated by their exposure to the program, wherein majority of them showed potential for sustainable improvement.

Since this is a pilot study, despite the depth of research that it covered, there are still critical concerns that need to be covered by future research. Further studies on the following criteria should be conducted in order to fully reinforce the potential of this scheme:

1. A study that has a bigger scope of respondents.

Perhaps, a future research could target, given resources, a wider scope of sample groups, with more diversified profiles. Doing this would further strengthen the purpose of this research, and will further attest that Social Marketing indeed has a future as a poverty intervention.

2. A study on both the rural and urban poor.

Regardless of country to be studied in the future, both poverty classifications according to its geographic profile should also be given focus. This is attributed to the fact that rural and urban poor may have different lifestyles and attitudes.



3. A research that will target the four fundamental types of poverty.

This study targeted the laboring poor under the median poverty classification. Future studies could scope more than one – or preferably all – poverty types, so as to make a detailed comparison of the respective profiles.

4. Comparison of all the existing poverty management initiatives with social marketing.

Poverty can be managed through a multi-faceted approach. For one, there is micro finance and micro enterprising, then there is social enterprising, among others. Another study could present the parallel benefits and correlations among some of these existing multi-pronged approaches.

5. Comparison of existing foreign social marketing efforts, and selection of the ideal program that would suit best for the Philippine environment.

Benchmarking other foreign practices, which could go beyond the confines of the ASEAN consortium could present a very detailed follow up research. Surely, as what the related literatures suggested, there are quite a number of existing Social Marketing practices to intervene against poverty existing and being practiced from other nations. If these could be analyzed in a more in-depth manner, then it could further reinforce the value of Social Marketing in addressing poverty.

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