Social Marketing Interventions and Voter Behaviour: An analysis of Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP)

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Abstract:
This study elucidates on the Social Marketing interventions influencing Voter Behavior through an analysis of Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP). Further, this study develops a conceptual configuration that opens a possibility to explore and develop new Social Marketing strategies to address the lacunae in influencing Voter Behavior by exploiting various other disciplines of study.

This review indicates that the relationship between Social Marketing and Voter Behavior is very confined. The Social Marketing strategies applied therein were predominantly promotional in nature seeking to increase only voter turnout rather than influencing voter behavior in a comprehensive manner.

Based on the results, the study concludes that the relationship between the concepts under study requires a multi-faceted approach implementing an appropriate mix of Social Marketing strategies, drawing the relevant essence from various disciplines to address the crux of issue by imparting the necessary knowledge to the people (market segments) eventually influencing voter behavior and inculcating value change.

Keywords: Social Marketing, Voter Behavior, Voter turnout, Civic education, Voter Education, Elections.

1. Introduction:
“Democracy building is a difficult and time consuming process. It requires patience, practice and perseverance. Elections are only a facilitating instrument of Democracy. The spirit of Democracy is to be included and internalized through attitude and value change and it must evolve from within society to become a fixed part of its culture.” (Quraishi, 2014). A flourishing democracy is possible where there is ascendancy in its citizens’ participation. But, the issue of Low Voter turnout in elections has become a serious concern in many democratic countries. This paper discusses the relationship between Social Marketing and Voter Behavior. Social Marketing as a discipline has made a huge progress since its genesis. It has established its far-reaching influence on social issues in the arena of public health, energy conservation, environment, community involvement, safe-driving / injury prevention and so on.

The paper examines the case of SVEEP (Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation) (2009-2014) strategies implemented by the Election Commission of India as Social Marketing interventions to influence voter behavior. Identifying the existing research gap, the paper presents a conceptual framework having a multi-faceted approach, deriving pertinent knowledge from a fusion of diverse disciplines. It facilitates exploring possibilities to unravel and evolve a distinct mix of Social Marketing Strategies to influence Voter Behavior that uniquely appeals to each segment individually for a more efficient and effective behavior change on a large scale basis for social good.

2. Social Marketing
It can be stated well that the origin of Social Marketing emanated from Wiebe’s question in 1952 as to “Why can’t you sell brotherhood like you sell soap?” Kotler and Zaltman (1971) defined Social Marketing as “Social Marketing is the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution and marketing research.”

From the time of its origin, Social Marketing has been defined and redefined and has been as subject matter of debates by academicians and practitioners worldwide. However, for the purpose of
In this report, Andreasen’s (1995) definition of social marketing is used herein, which states “Social Marketing is the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of the society of which they are a part of.”

Social Marketing is a process that applies marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate and deliver value in order to influence target audience behaviors that benefit society as well as the target audience (Kotler, Lee and Rothschild, 2006).

2.1. Key Principles of Social Marketing:

As implied in his definition of Social Marketing, an Andreasen (1995) advocate that the bottom line of Social Marketing is to Influence Behavior. He further insists that Social Marketing is applied to programs and not campaigns; where “programs may last for decades and contain several campaigns in them”.

For a program to be categorized under Social Marketing, a program must

- Apply commercial marketing technology,
- Have as its bottom line the influencing of voluntary behavior and
- Primarily seek to benefit individuals/families or broader society and not the marketing organization itself. Andreasen (1995)

3. Voter Behavior and Attitude

It has been more than sixty years of Indian independence and the national voter turnout has not reached even seventy percent ever since. Not only India, but the entire world is noticing a lack of confidence and trust in the traditional, long established system of democracy, particularly by the youngsters.

In 2004 General Elections of India, the national average voter turnout was not more than 56 percent. In the subsequent Elections in 2009, it was 59.7 percent; which connotes that 281 million eligible voters did not exercise their voting rights for reasons unknown.

It is apparent from the voter behavior and attitude that politics may have not appealed to voters. They don’t seem to understand what difference they are capable of. They don’t seem to understand what change their vote would bring about and so the attitude of what’s the benefit in voting? The root cause for this sorry state of affairs may be attributed to a various reasons, the prime being Chosen ignorance or lack of knowledge. Apathy and low voter participation can adversely affect the quality of democracy.

Distrust or uncertainty or lack of confidence in the system is the consequence of inadequate knowledge or understanding of the same. To preserve the integrity and evenhandedness of Elections, informed citizens become imperative for which electoral literacy and citizens’ participation in public affairs becomes vital.

The then Chief Election Commissioner S.Y Quraishi (2014), in his book ‘The Undocumented Wonder’, has stated that “It is India’s poor and illiterate who create and sustain its Parliament and even now come forward in large numbers to exercise their franchise, unlike the urban educated whose electoral apathy continues to be a serious concern”. This clearly articulates the present day political state of affairs of India.

The electorate appears to be broadly divided as two groups

(1) The poor and illiterate are being instinct driven, becoming slaves of circumstances and external force. Their low economic conditions and lack of knowledge makes them more vulnerable against money power. “Desperate attempts to woo voters have led to an unhealthy war of manifestoes and a vulgar competition for freebies. While the Election Commission does everything possible to intercept bribing of voters in cash and kind, there is nothing to stop the rain of freebies through manifestoes. Even the Supreme Court found it difficult to control this, as election manifestoes are a legitimate, democratic activity”. (Quraishi, 2014).
The educated urban exhibiting complete apathy and irresponsibility towards their constitutional duty.

Further, it is imperative to make a mention here of the infallible words of the founding fathers of the Constitution of India, who had then envisaged the plight of the country in future. The literacy factor was relatively discussed with that of voter behavior and adult franchise, which was a major concern in the Constituent assembly during the drafting of the constitution.

In 1922, C. Rajagopalachari had anticipated the present state of affairs twenty five years before Independence, when he wrote in his prison diary: “Elections and their corruption, injustice and tyranny of wealth, and inefficiency of administration, will make a hell of life as soon as freedom is given to us…” (Mendiratta, 2014). KT Shah, Member of the Constituent Assembly of India, in his proposed amendment for laying down qualifications for membership of state legislatures, stated “Under the prevailing state of things, it is difficult to demand that electors shall be all literate, as we have some 85 percent of the population illiterate, and with adult franchise the voters would naturally be largely illiterate. It is, however, a misfortune which we would like to correct at the earliest opportunity, and I trust that within a measurable period of time – perhaps ten years – illiteracy would be completely abolished; and voters will all have this minimum of requirement in democratic citizenship.” (Mendiratta, 2014).

The following table elucidates the state of affairs of the Indian electorate in 1951 and recent past in 2009, with respect to population, literacy rate, electors and voter turnout.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population (in millions)</th>
<th>Literacy Rate (in percentage)</th>
<th>Registered Electors (in millions)</th>
<th>Voter Turnout (in percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>361.09</td>
<td>18.33</td>
<td>173.2</td>
<td>61.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The comparative statistics implies that

- Population has increased by 3.36 times i.e. more than 300%
- Literacy Rate has increased by 4.03 times i.e. more than 400%
- Voter Turnout has increased by 5.28% (considering 2014 elections)

Though the founding fathers of the Constitution of India believed that the rise in literacy would bring about a drastic transformation, the data above suggests that even a four times increase in literacy rate i.e four hundred percent, has no telling effect in the voter turnout or behavior.

4. Research Design

4.1 Research Objective

The research objectives are

1. To analyze Social Marketing interventions in influencing Voter Behavior and identify the existing gap.
2. To address the gap by developing a holistic framework by exploiting various disciplines of study.

4.2 Research Methodology

Case study method was adopted as a research process in this study to analyze the Social Marketing interventions to influence voter behavior. Yin (1984) defines the case study research method “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which
multiple sources of evidence are used.” Further, case study has been recognized as a vital tool and has gained increased acceptance in many social science studies. The role of case study method in research becomes more prominent when issues with regard to education (Gulsecen & Kubat, 2006), sociology (Grassel & Schirmer, 2006) and community based problems such as health, unemployment, drug addiction, illiteracy, etc are deliberated.

Yin (1994) point out that case study is the preferred strategy when “how” and “why” questions are posed. It allows the researcher to explore individuals or organizations, through complex interventions, relationships, communities, or programs (Yin, 2003). The research question in the present study is how Social Marketing interventions influence voter behavior, what are the existing gaps and why; and how the existing gap could be refurbished. The answers to these questions can be obtained by applying case study approach. Furthermore, Case study is known to be a valuable method of research to evaluate programs, develop interventions and develop theory. Therefore, Case study method was adopted for this research process through analysis of Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) (2009-2014).

The study looks into both the qualitative and quantitative perspectives of SVEEP seeking to ensure that the case is well explored. The quantitative aspect of SVEEP is analyzed by investigating the voter turnout trends along with literacy factor. The qualitative aspect of SVEEP is also analyzed exploring possibilities to develop enhanced interventions and reconstruction strategies exploiting various disciplines of study. The study strides beyond quantitative statistical results to provide a comprehensive and in-depth explanation of the social and behavioral problem through variety of relevant data sources. By including both quantitative and qualitative data, the case study helps in a holistic and in-depth understanding of the social and behavioral problem.

5. Case Study
5.1. SVEEP (2009 - 2014) : An analysis

Electoral apathy being a serious concern even among or rather predominantly among the literates in the society, mere conducting of free and fair election alone cannot be a solution to this crisis of apathy and distrust in the system of Democracy. Moreover, a thriving democracy is not possible where public participation is limited. Undoubtedly the active participation of the people, as citizens in politics and civic life is de rigueur to uphold the life force of democracy.

“It is now a universally accepted principle fact that any democratic election requires informed participation, which, in turn, calls for a huge voter outreach programs”(S.Y.Quraishi,2014). Therefore, The Election Commission of India (ECI) adopted Social Marketing principles and applied its techniques as voter outreach programs, to educate the voters and increase people’s participation in the Electoral process through target specific interventions.

The ECI defines SVEEP as “Systematic Voter’s Education and Electoral Participation is a programme of multi interventions through different modes and media designed to educate citizens, electors and voters about the electoral process in order to increase their awareness and participation in the electoral processes. SVEEP is designed according to the socio-economic, cultural and demographic profile of the state as well as history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections and learning thereof.”

Initially the Social Marketing interventions were planned as IEC (Information, Education and Communication) interventions in 2009 and subsequently carried forward in the form of SVEEP (Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation) in 2010 which was deployed to increase the voter turnout and improve dissemination of information thereby educate the voters to exercise their discretion without oversight.
SVEEP objectives are aimed at
a) Increasing electoral participation through voter registration and voter turnout.
b) Increasing Qualitative participation in terms of ethical and informed voting.
c) Continuous electoral and Democracy education. (SVEEP, India National Document, 2014)

The working of SVEEP is stated to be carried through situational analysis, Planning & Strategy, Partnerships & Collaborations, Implementation through IMF (Information-Motivation-Facilitation) and Monitoring & Evaluation. Hence, to attain the objective of high voter turnout, a situational analysis was carried out wherein the key gap areas were identified to be enrolment of first time voters, gender gap, urban apathy and youth disconnect. The identified gaps were addressed by SVEEP in two phases namely (1) the pre poll phase (registration of voters) and (2) the poll phase (turnout of voters to cast their vote) through targeted interventions. The ECI states that the targeted interventions were designed to meet gender gap, fight urban apathy and youth disconnect. Further, it also addressed to meet voter registration gaps and voter turnout gaps of left-out groups/communities with the assistance of partnership agencies.

Under the banner of SVEEP, a series of outreach measures using material and campaigns were deployed utilizing a range of media and non-media units to reach the potential voter population. Physical events and activities like competitions, marathons, rallies, processions, quiz competitions, film screening, declamation contests, street play, exhibition, hoardings, posters, pamphlets, leaflets, cinema slides, sporting events, entertainment shows were utilized with good effect.

SVEEP delivered impressive achievements as presented in the published report of ECI, SVEEP, India National Document (2009-2014). The noteworthy achievements are listed below:

1. The Turnout for LS 2014 stands at a record high of 66.4 % against 58.19% in 2009. Highest turnout was recorded earlier in 1984 at 64.01%.
2. Electorate in LS 2014 was 83.41 crore (including service electors) as against 71.69 crore in 2009.
3. 55.38 crore voters cast their vote in LS 2014. 41.73 crore votes were cast in LS 2009. This was an increase of voters by 32.71 % over voters in 2009.
4. Female turnout (a major SVEEP objective) stands at 65.63 % in current LS against 55.82% in 2009. (Male turnout at 67.09% in 2014 and 60.24% in 2009)
5. The gender gap now stands reduced at 1.46 percentage points against more than 4 percentage points in 2009.
6. Some of the leading states in terms of bridging the gender gap were Bihar, Goa, Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh.
7. 16 States/UTs recorded historic turnout while 33 among the 35 States/UTs recorded higher turnout than LS 2009 election.
8. 16 States/UTs recorded higher women turnout and among these, women voters surpassed men for the first time ever in any Lok Sabha elections in at least 9 States/UTs.
9. Urban turnout (a major SVEEP objective) recorded increase across the country over the turnout percentage in 2009 with Goa, Vadodara, Ahmedabad, Ranchi, Raipur, Jaipur, Lucknow and South Delhi.
6. Discussion On Findings

On the analysis of the SVEEP (2009-2014) strategies implemented as Social Marketing Techniques, it is inferred that

- Social Marketing has been predominantly used as a promotion tool.
- All target interventions have been seeking to only increase voter turnout and not on voter behavior.
- The strategy of Voter Education was limited to information on the registration and voting process.
- Knowledge and attitudes are recognised as significant behavioral determinants. Changes in knowledge and attitudes as a result of the interventions were not reported in detail.
- Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) Baseline survey is limited to voters’ knowledge on registration, willingness to participate and efficacy of SVEEP strategy.

The Fig 1 highlights the Voter turnout trend in India from 1951 to 2014. The average voter turnout in 1951 was 61.16% followed by a wavering trend to 58.19 in 2009 and 66.44 in 2014. Further, though voter turnout is claimed to be an all time high of 66.4% in 2014 General Elections, a closer number of 61.16% was witnessed in the first elections in 1951 and 64.02% in 1984-85 elections.

The makers of the Indian Constitution were petrified at the literacy rate of the country back in 1951, when more than 80% of the country was illiterate. Whereas, the serious concern today is that the literacy rate having increased four times more does not show a significant result on voter turnout. If literacy is unable to influence voter behavior, what else can? It further raises an alarming question on the baseline understanding of the political system. The crux of Adult Franchise is that the voter should be aware and know the worth of his vote and should also know how to use it to his benefit by being able to rationally analyze the contesting candidates, without being carried away by other trivial influencing factors like money, caste, religion etc
John Dewey (1916) warned of the “standing danger that the material of formal instruction will be merely the subject matter of the schools, isolated from the subject matter of life experience.” In his book “Democracy and Education” (1916), he sounded the call for a revolution in education, stressing growth, experience, and activity as factors that promote a democratic character in students.

Therefore mere preaching and promotion of “ethical and informed voting” will not suffice. The need of the hour or the implicit goal is to increase people’s appreciation of the existing constitutional system so that they will be motivated to preserve it and inculcate right attitude that eventually influence the behavior of the citizens resulting in not only increased voter turnout but in rational choice of voters culminating in a robust democracy.

7. **Suggestion**

Through this study, it is established that the relationship between Social Marketing and Voter Behavior can be fostered with the blend of information from the six broadly identified disciplines, namely Civic Education, Political Science, Marketing, Behavioral Science/Psychology, Election Laws and Socio-demographic factors, each contributing in different ways to behavioral factors.

Drawing on these findings a new pattern is put forward that attempts to illuminate the strengths identified through this review. A mix of these strategies should be developed such that each homogenized strategy distinctly captivates the interest of the respective target segment.
Figure 2. A conceptual framework for developing Social marketing strategies from a diverse blend of disciplines to influence Voter behavior.

The conceptual framework highlights on a multi-faceted approach, deriving pertinent knowledge from a fusion of diverse disciplines exploring possibilities to unravel and evolve distinct mix of Social Marketing Strategies to influence Voter Behavior that uniquely appeals to each segment individually for a more efficient and effective behavior change.

Exploiting the six major disciplines, on the relationship between Social Marketing and Voter Behavior, it is suggested that Social Marketing strategies may be considered under three major heads or more as per requirement,

1. Promotional Strategies
2. Educational Strategies
3. Normative Strategies
Promotional Strategies must be imbued with facts which should stride beyond mere advertising, public service announcements and persuasive communication, not only creating awareness but also carrying forward information influencing desired behavior.

Educational Strategies, as information-infused programs/activities, captivate attention and create interest in all learners when offered in a new perspective. “...the implication is that the primary benefit of education is economic. For this reason, skills which are not specifically related to knowledge are frequently overvalued, often at the expense of fields of knowledge that are considered abstract and useless. This trend is a movement away from...the concept of education, not only which includes profitability but which first and foremost prepares every individual to participate in civic life and shape his or her society.”(UN Chronicle, 2010).

UNESCO’s Global citizenship education (GCE) ‘highlights essential functions of education related to the formation of citizenship [in relation] with globalization. It is a concern with the relevance of knowledge, skills and values for the participation of citizens in, and their contribution to, dimensions of societal development which are linked at local and global levels. It is directly related to the civic, social and political socialization function of education, and ultimately to the contribution of education in preparing children and young people to deal with the challenges of today’s increasingly interconnected and interdependent world’ (UNESCO, 2014). Such Educational strategies, when imparted to people specifically to children and youth, inculcates deep-rooted values for social good.

Normative strategies are intended for the upstream target of the society - the ‘policy makers’ who are responsible for Regulatory reforms. “Regulations also seek to influence behavior for the benefit of society. Social Marketers also have role to play in influencing policy makers to adopt regulations that complement and accelerate behavior changes among large scale audience and to increase compliance with existing regulations (Lee and Kotler, 2011). Normative strategies are likely to be particularly effective where people are being asked to change their behavior (McKenzie-Mohr, 2011). Therefore, reforms in educational policies (for example, to eradicate apathy) and electoral reforms (for example, to tackle money power/freebies and criminalization of politics) can assist in making a significant contribution in the Social Marketing efforts.

In a free-choice society there are always alternative options available. Competition can be described in terms of choice offerings available in the environment that lead to alternative behaviors. Social Marketing strategies lead to a unique exchange offering that is perceived by the audience to have greater value than that of any other available option (Lee and Kotler, 2011). The issues of money power / freebies, caste, religion and so on, pose as a huge competition (threat) against the concept of ethical and rational voting, leading to alternative behaviors. Electoral reforms can no more be treated as one of those ‘nice’ things concerned citizens keep asking for as a favor from the government. They are central to the restoration of the credibility of the politicians, the legislature and the government (Quraishi, 2014).

8. Conclusion

It might be rational to assume that depending on type of Government, the socio-demographic factors, the human development of the society as well as technological advances within a given nation, the influence of Social Marketing on Voter Behavior could differ. While the conceptual framework appears to be muti-faceted or multi-disciplinary, the relationship of the new framework presented here may have been investigated and established previously albeit within the respective parent disciplines of research. Therefore, the intricacies here lie in the ability to draw relevant knowledge from each of the discipline.
References


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