

Reporting on Social Marketing Issues - A News Media Analysis

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Abstract

This paper explores online news media reporting through automated web content analysis to determine the prevalence and attitudes of social marketing issues across various countries. Results showed that Education and Work was the most commonly reported on category followed by Health Services, Family Planning, Environment, Crime and Justice and Road Safety. News media reporting in South Africa was particularly strong across Education and Work as well as Health Services. Canada recorded the highest reporting for Family Planning. New Zealand was the most prevalent reporter for the Environmental category. Crime and Justice and Road Safety only contributed a negligible amount to the overall term frequency counts across all categories. Social marketing stakeholders must continue to rally support from the media in order to increase awareness of specific issues facing countries and society.

Introduction

Since the inception of social marketing, its growth has been plagued largely due to a lack of understanding of what the discipline entails. Inherent to the problem are too many conflicting definitions of social marketing, a lack of clarity and inadequate differentiation from its competitors (Gray-Felder and Deane 1999). However it is now generally accepted that the underlying premise of social marketing is to improve the welfare of the target audiences and/or society (Andreason 2000) through fostering behavioural change.

The media has played a role in the application and development of social marketing (Kotler et al 2002) and acts as a vehicle for behavioural change as its ability to influence large audiences is considered fairly significant across differentiated target markets. The media communicates information in an attempt to correct misconceptions; thereby increasing acceptability of a social idea, or practice among a target group (Goren 2005). Social marketing campaigns have been used to target a wide range of unhealthy and risky behaviours including smoking, drink driving, illicit drug use and sun exposure, while encouraging healthy behaviours such as improving diet and physical activity and overcoming racism (Kotler and Andreasen 1991).

As social marketing commonly emphasises changing bad behaviours (Dann et al 2007), practitioners, policy makers as well as foundations all have a vested interest among the different types of social problems and issues that are prevalent in society today. Social marketing stakeholders compete for, among others things, media attention to help create visibility on the public agenda for the specific issue (Andreasen, 2002). Recognition of a specific social issue by the news media assists social marketers in creating awareness of the issue and assisting in any promotional campaigns in an attempt to change or refine behaviours of specified target markets. The purpose of this paper is to examine which social marketing issues do the news media most commonly report on in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, the United States and the United Kingdom.

Methodology

This study involved compiling terms (consisting of single or multiple words) from a review of published resources and websites on social marketing. The terms were then grouped together according to six social marketing categories: Education and Work, Health Services, Family Planning, Environment, Crime and Justice and Road Safety. To ensure validity, three independent coders created an initial pool of 105 terms representing the six social marketing categories and then refined the list. Terms that were considered either too general (ambiguous) or redundant were omitted if at least two of the three independent coders disagreed on the measure. There was little disagreement amongst the coders. The final list totalled six categories with 62 terms.

Context

The sample for this study comprises 154 news media websites from English speaking countries; Australia (19), Canada (17), New Zealand (8), South Africa (8), the United Kingdom (37) and the United States (60).

Attention and Attitude toward Social Marketing Issues

In order to capture news media reporting of various social marketing issues, this study used an automated Web mining toolset called “webLyzard” (www.weblyzard.com) to mirror a selection of international news media sites from the Kidon.com, ABYZNewsLink.com and NewsLink.org directories in weekly intervals (Scharl 2000). webLyzard was used to determine relative term frequencies for each of the six social marketing categories (measured as occurrences of a specific term per one million tokens). The frequency of each of the terms within the six categories serves as a proxy for the breadth and depth of social marketing reporting in the media. This assumption is based on the notion that frequency counts gauge the significance of particular concepts and ideas in the text in which they occur (Krippendorff 2004). However, frequencies are not enough to give an accurate picture of the context in which the information is presented. That is, whether the context is positive or negative. Therefore, we also measured the semantic orientation of each concept to determine the attitude, or direction of sentiment toward the concept (Scharl et al. 2003).

Results

An overall summary of the social marketing categories are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Overall Summary Counts for Social Marketing Categories

Category	No. of Terms	% of No. of Terms	Term Count Frequency	% of Term Count Frequency
Education & Work	5	8.5	2282	52
Health Services	29	46.7	930	21
Family Planning	7	11.2	573	13
Environment	8	12.9	505	11
Crime & Justice	7	11.2	103	2
Road Safety	6	9.5	28	1
TOTAL	62	100%	4421	100%

Based on the data presented in Table 1, it is evident that Education has a far greater prevalence of news media reporting than any other social marketing category. This is followed by Health Services, Family Planning, Environment, Crime and Justice and then Road Safety.

The term count frequency (TCF), the average term count frequency (AV TCF) and the semantic orientation (SO) for each of the six social marketing categories according to each of the countries are reported in Table 2. The average term count frequency has been derived from the total term count frequency for a particular category divided by the number of news media websites analysed for each country. Reported in Table 3 are the most prevalent key terms for each country across the six social marketing categories.

Table 2: Social Marketing Category Frequency Counts and Semantic Orientation by Country

Country	T.C.F.	Av. T.C.F.	S.O.	T.C.F.	Av. T.C.F.	S.O.
	Education and Work			Health Services		
Australia	208	10	1.4	60.1	3.16	0.2
Canada	317	18	0.7	72	4.24	0
New Zealand	188	23	4.3	67	8.3	-0.1
South Africa	379.8	47	33.4	368	46	6
UK	313.5	8	3.1	97	2.6	-0.3
United States	541	9	0.5	110	1.8	0.1
	Environment			Family Planning		
Australia	74.1	3.9	2.2	65.8	3.4	0.3
Canada	99.2	5.8	0.7	162	9.5	1.1
New Zealand	70.3	8.7	8.9	35.6	4.45	0
South Africa	35	4.3	0.1	35.4	4.4	0
UK	76.5	2.06	1.1	66.2	1.7	1.5
United States	53.9	0.01	0.2	73.7	1.2	0.2
	Crime and Justice			Road Safety		
Australia	11	0.5	-0.3	3.33	0.17	-0.003
Canada	5.03	0.2	0	1.27	0.07	0.02
New Zealand	13.9	1.73	1.5	7	0.83	0.03
South Africa	35.4	4.4	5.8	2.1	0.26	-0.12
UK	134.6	3.6	-0.5	1.18	0.03	-0.01
United States	66.2	0.01	-0.1	1.59	0.01	-0.02

Table 3: Top 10 Keywords across All Social Marketing Categories

Australia	school, environment, marriages, HIV, disabilities, divorce, childcare, adoption, apprentice, greenhouse
Canada	school, marriages, environment, disabilities, apprentice, divorce, childcare, greenhouse gas, adoption, obesity
New Zealand	school, environment, HIV, marriages, divorce, prison, disabilities, road safety, vaccinations, apprentice
South Africa	school, HIV, environment, marriages, domestic violence, vaccinations, prison, disabilities, divorces
United Kingdom	school, marriages, environment, divorce, HIV, obesity, childcare, disabilities, childcare, recycling

United States	school, environment, marriages, obesity, HIV, disabilities, breast cancer, divorce, apprentice, asthma
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Education - South Africa recorded the highest average term frequency counts and an exceptionally high semantic orientation (33.4). All other countries recorded much lower reporting levels for the category. “School/ing” was the highest reported term within each country (see Table 3).

Health Services - Health Services was the second most frequently reported on category for South Africa and the United States, with South Africa in particular being the most prevalent reporter on the category. Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and New Zealand ranked Health Services as either third or fourth behind Environmental Reporting or Family Planning. The semantic orientation of the Health Services category was reasonably diverse in its findings (see Table 2). South Africa displayed a very positive semantic orientation (6.0) while both the United Kingdom (-0.3) and New Zealand (0.0) comparably neutral values.

Family Planning - Canada recorded the highest average term frequency for the Family Planning category. Much lower average term frequency counts were recorded for all other countries. The rankings for the Family Planning category within the countries showed some diversity. For example, Family Planning was the second most reported on category for Canada while for the United Kingdom it was the fifth most reported on category. The semantic orientation for the Family Planning category was generally found to be positive with the United Kingdom showing the highest semantic orientation (1.59) and New Zealand and South Africa recording neutral levels (0.0) of semantic orientation.

Environment - Overall, New Zealand and Canada recorded the highest average term count frequencies with 8.7 and 5.8 counts respectively. In terms of country rankings, Environment was the second highest ranked category for Australia and New Zealand. In contrast, it was only the fifth most reported on category for South Africa. The semantic orientation of the Environmental category showed a high semantic orientation for New Zealand (8.9) relative to all other countries which also demonstrated positive semantic orientations for the category.

Crime and Justice - South Africa and the United Kingdom recorded the highest average term frequency counts for the Crime and Justice category. Once again, there was diversity in terms of rankings of the categories within the countries. For example, Crime and Justice was the second most reported on category for the United Kingdom while for Australia, Canada and New Zealand it was the fifth most reported on category. The semantic orientation of the reported countries was found to be surprisingly positive, recording an average of 0.7. South Africa was found to have an unusually positive semantic orientation of 5.8.

Road Safety - Overall the lowest term frequency count belonged to the Road Safety category, surprisingly contributing only 0.64% to the total findings. All countries recorded a last place ranking for the category. The semantic orientation for the Road Safety category was generally found to be neutral across all countries.

Implication and Conclusions

Results suggest that the most prominent issue reported on in the online news media across all countries relates to Education (52 percent), followed by Health Services (21 percent) and Family Planning (13 percent). This finding contradicts academic literature which suggests that

Health Care is the subject area in which social marketing has its deepest penetration (Andreasen 2002). While this may be true in academic research, it is not the topic area which is the most prevalent subject area within the news media.

In terms of news media reporting of social marketing issues specific to each country, South Africa was found to have the highest overall media reporting across the six categories. In particular, high frequency counts were evident for Education and Work as well as Health Services. These findings can be partially attributed to companies investing heavily in education and work to reduce unemployment and to induce national pride under the slogan “Proudly South African” (Kieser 2005). Furthermore, reporting on HIV in South Africa is commonplace and there are a number of social marketing campaigns in order to reduce the incidence of new HIV infections (Reed 2005).

In the United States, the prevalence of the key term “obesity” within the Health Services category was notable. Obesity has been recognised as an emerging danger within the United States. Calls to reduce the rate of obesity particularly in the youth have been evident through programs such as the “Impact of the California Project Lean School Board Member Social Marketing Campaign (McDermott et al 2005).

The most notable finding for Canada was the lack of reporting for Health Services. Health Services was only the fourth most reported on category for Canada, substantiating suggestions that Canada was among the countries leading the world in health promotion but has since reduced its focus on this area. Furthermore, Goulberman and Millar (2003) reported that the United Kingdom and the United States initially both disregarded the topic. However, both countries have now started focusing on the Health and Services aspect of social marketing (Goulberman and Millar 2003).

Overall, Australia and New Zealand performed reasonably well in their social marketing reporting outstripping both the United Kingdom and the United States across most of the categories. This supports Kotler et al’s (2002) suggestion that interest in social marketing in Australia and New Zealand is on the rise. In particular, New Zealand showed strong reporting for the environmental category.

Overall we can infer that practitioners, government agencies and foundations may need to rally more support from the media to further increase awareness of specific issues facing individual countries as well as society as a whole. Furthermore, regardless of the differences in reporting rates of the online news media between individual countries, the media should display more prevalence towards specific issues that countries may be facing.

Several limitations were evident within this research which paves the way for future studies. Standardising keywords across cultural borders may raise issues in relation to the differentiation and comparison of key terms. Other limitations include a focus on largely Western countries. Future research could include a wider scope of countries for analysis, particularly non-Western and emerging economies. This recommendation involves technological challenges, as it depends on the availability of highly scalable natural language processing techniques that can handle multiple languages and transform counts and sentiment values across languages into a single evaluation framework.

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