



Social Marketing

**EVIDENCE**

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# Social Marketing

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# Social Marketing

## Introduction

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Social marketing is the use of commercial marketing techniques to help in the acquisition of a behaviour that is beneficial for the health of a target population (Weinreich, 1999). Although there is no universally agreed definition of social marketing, it is generally accepted that it is more than mass media or public education campaigns. While overlapping with public health, social marketing differs in that it involves the strategic use of marketing principles and practices. Below is a generally accepted definition:

The application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programmes designed to influence the voluntary or involuntary behaviour of target audiences in order to improve the welfare of individuals and society. (Donovan and Henley, 2003)

Social marketing applies some of the same principles used in commercial marketing for the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programmes designed to motivate voluntary behavioural change. However, the difference is that social marketing promotes products, ideas or services for a voluntary behaviour change among its target audience whereas in commercial marketing, a product or a service is traded for economic gains without any concern for healthy behaviour change in the target audience. Social marketing uses a range of techniques and approaches, commonly known as a 'marketing mix', to help change people's behaviour in a clearly defined and positive way. The main aims of alcohol social marketing are to encourage people who are drinking at increasing and higher risk levels to reduce their consumption and to provide the necessary support and information to help them to do so.

All social marketing activity needs to be evaluated at some level to identify how relevant, effective and efficient it is in meeting objectives. The benefits of evaluation include: more effective marketing interventions; more experimentation; improved efficiency by investing in the things that work best; better informed budgeting processes; more accurate forecasting of outcomes; more effective management of expectations about results; increased consumer knowledge and insight; and enhanced credibility of social marketing (Alcohol Learning Centre, 2010).





# Social Marketing

## Introduction (continued)

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Throughout the literature, a number of authors have discussed the features, theoretical principles and concepts of social marketing campaigns.

These are:

- A consumer orientation – Individuals are active participants in the social marketing process. Campaigns need to be aware of and responsive to their needs and aspirations.
- The concept of exchange – For exchange to occur, valuable benefits must be offered to individuals who must give up something valuable to gain these benefits.
- The use of market segmentation – This breaks a population of interest into groups based on lifestyle, demographic and attitudinal similarities. Groups are selected and campaigns developed to respond to the needs of different audience segments.
- Competition – This comes from the behaviours that targeted audiences prefer over the behaviours that social marketers seek to promote.
- Environmental influences – These are factors outside the control of campaign designers and include sociocultural forces and demographic trends.
- Research and evaluation – Formative research is needed to underpin a campaign's design.

Social marketing approaches have been shown to be successful in reaching population groups and improving behavioural outcomes across a range of public health areas (although failure is also not uncommon), particularly if they are multi-modal and carefully designed to engage particular groups.

## Targeting campaigns

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Targeted marketing techniques, which identify consumers who share common needs or characteristics and position products or services to appeal to and reach these consumers, are now widely used in social marketing efforts to help planners identify segments of a population to target for tailored programme interventions. Moss et al (2009) explained how they are more helpful to health communication and marketing planning than epidemiologically-defined groups because market-based segments are similar in respect to how they behave or might react to marketing and communication efforts. They found that audience segmentation can assist in identifying and describing target audience segments, which can be helpful for planning substance use prevention. They concluded that by having such information about high risk drinkers as "consumers," planners can develop interventions that have heightened salience in terms of opportunities, perceptions, and motivations.





# Social Marketing

## Targeting campaigns (continued)

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Grier and Kumanyika (2010) discuss the considerations of targeted marketing of products with proven adverse effects (e.g., tobacco and alcohol) to vulnerable individuals. They highlight the need to understand targeted marketing as a specific contextual influence on the health of children and adolescents who may benefit from public health protections.

For potentially harmful products, understanding the nature and scope of targeted marketing influences will support identification and implementation of corrective policies.

## Aspects of the campaign related to impact

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### **Message credibility**

Research has investigated the believability of social norms messages. A recent study by Glazer et al. (2010) implemented a web-based survey of 891 individuals and found that perceived norms and message believability had direct effects on alcohol consumption. Park et al have also conducted research on this issue, finding that respondents who believed an alcohol advertisement more closely estimated alcohol consumption by their peers, while advertisement believability moderated the relation between drinking behaviours and accuracy (Park et al, 2011a). They also found that of students drinking on St. Patrick's Day, those who did not believe the advertisements showed a stronger overestimation of others who drank than those who did believe the ads (Park et al, 2011b).

### **Message conflict**

Ahn et al (2011) investigated how college students deal with conflicting health messages in advertising regarding binge drinking and wine promotion by undertaking in-depth interviews with students (n = 16). The results indicated that students' understanding of the conflicting messages relied greatly upon how consistent either message was with their prior beliefs about alcohol. Additionally, not all students perceived the messages to be contradictory; these students saw the messages as being constructed for different purposes and as such incomparable. Overall, students who perceived conflict responded to the topic with apathy fuelled by advertising scepticism.





# Social Marketing

## Aspects of the campaign related to impact

(continued)

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### **Social context and environmental factors**

Research has highlighted the importance of accounting for social context when deciding on health promotion campaigns. In a similar vein, research has also indicated the need for health education to be specific with respect to not only the behaviour that needs to be changed but also the target population and the methods for change. (Whittingham et al., 2008).

Given the importance of considering the social context and social norms associated with consuming alcohol within a target group, it would appear that multi-dimensional approaches are needed. To illustrate, Penny and Armstrong-Jones (2010) conducted qualitative and quantitative research with UK students and concluded that student alcohol (mis)use cannot be considered in isolation from the community in which the university sits and as such necessitates a multi-level approach to dealing with alcohol (mis)use involving action at the level of the student, the university and the community to develop policy and practice designed to encourage sensible drinking and reduce alcohol associated harm. In a similar vein, Pinkleton et al. (2010) asserted that campaign planners must consider individual differences in audience members' interpretation of messages in order to increase message effectiveness even within seemingly homogeneous target groups. Carpenter et al (2008) who examined a social marketing campaign on binge drinking at a UK university found that the social context of student life impacted greatly upon students' choices to binge drink. The biggest influence was the centralisation of alcohol to student lifestyle, with it being difficult for an individual to avoid binge drinking when the surrounding culture normalises such behaviour. Thus, it was recommended that the norms, beliefs and morals governing student culture and the use of alcohol to assert identity should be considered when tailoring health promotion efforts to this target audience.

Sondhi and Turner (2011) reviewed evidence on the influence of family and friends on young people's drinking and concluded that any interventions which aim to reduce alcohol-related harm among young people need to consider how young people make decisions around alcohol consumption and the strategies that young people themselves already use to try and manage consumption. They made the following recommendations in relation to policy and practice implications:

- Prevention and harm reduction approaches need to take into account how parent-child dynamics, social contexts and socio-economic factors all vary.
- Young people's decision-making around alcohol is often based on contextual criteria, with drinking being almost entirely a social activity. Thus, harm reduction approaches that focus on individual decision making (e.g. in relation to health or personal risks) may be less effective than interventions which aim to enable young people to manage group drinking situations as well as their own consumption and alcohol-related behaviours.





# Social Marketing

## Aspects of the campaign related to impact

(continued)

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Misch (2010) recently proposed that alcohol campaigns (specifically those used on college campuses) should use models of second hand smoke campaigns to have more of an impact. He argued that the key to such a campaign is to empower college students, and to provide them with license, to confront their peers on abusive drinking resulting in second hand effects, just as second hand smoke campaigns have done with public tobacco consumption. Perhaps the most important aspects of this approach is that it is peer led, and the campaign would target harm reduction rather than consumption per se.

## Social marketing interventions

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Social marketing campaigns have become popular interventions in reducing binge drinking, and have been shown to have some effectiveness in influencing young people's beliefs and behaviours. For example, Comello and Slater (2011) found that advertisements from a field-tested drug and alcohol prevention campaign lowered willingness to play drinking games and (for males) to drive while intoxicated. Bryant et al (2011) proposed that although most evidence for social marketing's utility comes from interventions directed at adult audiences, its application with adolescents may help to address issues that have been challenging or unresponsive to health behaviour change specialists.

Previous research has outlined the most common social marketing approaches taken in relation to illegal drug campaigns (Ministry of Health, 2008). To summarise, the report outlines that prevention messages often use negative and positive consequence approaches (e.g. using fear/threat accompanied by hard hitting visual imagery, attempts to have the target group connect with a peer model who actively chooses not to take alcohol) whereas harm minimisation messages incorporate humour, social norms and empowerment approaches (e.g. it is possible to have a good time while drinking moderately).

Cismaru et al. (2008) examined social marketing programmes aimed at preventing or moderating alcohol consumption among young consumers. A qualitative review of communication materials aimed at preventing or moderating alcohol consumption among young people from web sites in five English-speaking countries (USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the UK) was conducted. The results indicated that the majority of the alcohol moderation/prevention campaigns targeting young consumers focused on the threat variables of severity and vulnerability. Some campaigns also focused on costs, as well as self-efficacy and response efficacy. The authors recommended that youth alcohol moderation/prevention initiatives should include self-efficacy messages, to increase confidence among young people that they are able to carry out the recommended actions.





# Social Marketing

## **Special Interest Article - Carpenter et al (2008)**

Carpenter et al (2008) conducted qualitative research examining the 'Unit1421' campaign, specifically from a female perspective. The social marketing campaign was launched at the University of Leeds with the aim to promote sensible drinking amongst students by raising awareness of the dangers

of binge drinking. The campaign attempted to market responsible alcohol intake as being desirable, with the target audience being 18-24 year old students. During 'Freshers' Week', flyers, bottles of water and wrist bands branded with the 'Unit 1421' website address were distributed. These were accompanied by posters and advertisements in student newspapers.

Two focus groups were conducted with female students aged 18–23 years (n = 12). However, the results indicated that there was limited awareness of the Unit 1421 campaign, with very few participants having seen the materials and having little understanding of their purpose. Although participants liked the idea of a campaign targeted at students of Leeds, they considered the wristbands to be outdated and there was also a disinterest in accessing an Internet site for more information. The participants maintained that increasing awareness about binge drinking on campus would require a more innovative approach than the usual flyer and poster, as many students do not look at these materials because of the vast quantities of flyers and posters already targeting students, particularly in Freshers' Week. A preferred means to access health promotion information was 'Facebook'. Since much communication now takes place electronically, the authors suggested that using 'Facebook' would help health promoters get their message quickly (and cheaply) to their target audience. Other suggestions included locating campaign material on public transport routes and ladies' toilets in clubs and bars.

The participants also maintained that campaigns were aimed at men rather than women, suggesting there should be female specific material reminding women about the dangers of binge drinking.







# Social Marketing

## Social marketing interventions (continued)

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Marteau et al (2011) discussed the concept of nudging (of which social norms approaches are one) which is “any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people’s behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives.”

Nudging can include a wide variety of approaches to altering social or physical environments to make certain behaviours more likely, including providing information about what others are doing (“social norm feedback”) framed to make healthy behaviours more salient. However, the authors conclude that although policy makers’ use of the process of altering environments to change behaviour is to be welcomed, the evidence to support the effectiveness of nudging as a means to improve population health is weak (reflecting both the absence of evidence as well as evidence of little or no effect).

## Mass media campaigns

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In recent years, several mass media campaigns have been implemented internationally to address a range of substance use issues among young people, including alcohol consumption and illicit drug use. Such campaigns as a health promotion strategy have the capacity to reach a large and broad cross-section of the population, and are relatively inexpensive compared to other health promotion strategies. However, the evidence for behaviour change post mass media campaign interventions is mixed. Given the high level of investment associated with mass media campaigns, it is important that campaigns are evaluated to ensure that both the target group is being reached and that campaigns are effective in initiating and sustaining positive behaviour change.

Wakefield et al (2010) summarised the literature from 1998 that reported the use of mass media to change health behaviours including addictions. They concluded that mass media can directly or indirectly produce positive changes or prevent negative changes among large populations. By direct effects they refer to using mass media campaigns to influence the decision-making processes at the individual level – e.g., by targeting knowledge, beliefs, intentions, attitudes and emotional responses. They also highlight the indirect effects of mass media on health behaviours. These indirect effects include (1) setting an agenda and increasing the frequency of conversations about specific health issues within one’s social network, (2) shifting norms in one’s social network about engaging (or not) in specific health behaviours, and (3) prompting public discussions that lead to policy changes that support or discourage specific health behaviours. However, they also conclude that more habitual or ongoing behaviours are less susceptible to the influence of mass media campaigns. They suggest the use of multiple interventions to increase the effectiveness of any attempt to use mass media for health behaviour change.





# Social Marketing

## Mass media campaigns (continued)

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The article advocates policy recommendations that include the following.

- Mass media campaigns should be included as key components of comprehensive approaches to improving population health behaviours.
- Sufficient funding must be secured to enable frequent and widespread exposure to campaign message continuously over time, especially for ongoing behaviours.
- Campaign messages should be based on sound research of the target group and should be tested during campaign development.
- Information ideally required for the design of effective communication materials via a social marketing approach include clarifying the role and importance of a large number of factors that impact on alcohol consumption. It is important to recognise that not one theory or model is likely to cover all of the aspects required to inform the development of an effective social marketing approach.

Special Interest Article - Van Germet et al (2011)

Van Germet et al (2011) examined the impact of the Australian Government's 2009 mass media campaign (which aimed to raise awareness of the harms and costs associated with risky drinking among young Australians) by conducting a cross-sectional behavioural survey of young people (aged 16-29 years) attending a music festival (n = 1,072). The campaign, "Don't Turn a Night Out Into a Nightmare" targeted young people aged 15-25 years and their parents by delivering personally relevant messages to encourage, motivate and support the target groups to modify their behaviour. The campaign incorporated a range of mass media strategies and outlets that appeal to and are used by young people including television, cinema, radio, online advertising, brochures and out-of-home print advertisements such as free postcard advertising, washroom mirrors in nightclubs and street. Vignettes using shared images across the different media conveyed four different scenarios demonstrating the consequences of binge drinking. Campaign images presented scenes of young people drinking alcohol followed by a scene illustrating a serious negative consequence of intoxication for the same young people and a statistic on the harms and consequences of binge drinking relevant to the scene.

The results indicated that three-quarters of respondents recognised the key campaign message. However, those reporting frequent binge drinking (the most important group to target) had significantly lower odds of recognising the campaign message than those not reporting frequent binge drinking, whilst females had significantly greater odds of recognising the campaign message than





# Social Marketing

## Mass media campaigns (continued)

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The results indicated that three-quarters of respondents recognised the key campaign message. However, those reporting frequent binge drinking (the most important group to target) had significantly lower odds of recognising the campaign message than those not reporting frequent binge drinking, whilst females had significantly greater odds of recognising the campaign message than males.

Limitations with the study included the convenience sample which may not have been representative of young people in general (although the recruitment strategy was appropriate given that it was effective in recruiting the group of interest; that is, young people who report binge drinking) and the fact the study was conducted only two months after the launch of the campaign, and so some participants may have not had the opportunity to be exposed to the campaign.





# Social Marketing

## Mass media campaigns (continued)

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The authors concluded that whilst mass media strategies may be effective at reaching a broad cross-section of society, they may not reach the intended target group. Given how important it is that health promotion strategies reach those who report high risk behaviours, the results were said to show that health promotion campaigns need to develop more targeted and population relevant strategies to reach those most vulnerable to the risks associated with frequent binge drinking.

Ricciardelli and McCabe (2008) examined students' understanding and perceived effectiveness of an Australian alcohol campaign ("Is Getting Pissed Getting Pathetic? (Just Ask You Friends)"); designed to increase students' awareness of excessive and harmful drinking. Results were mixed with many students describing the messages as realistic and making them think about their own drinking. However, others felt that students "won't listen" or "don't care" about media campaigns, and that "they don't want to be told what to do". The findings were said to highlight how media campaigns can help individuals contemplate behavioural change but can also promote counterproductive attitudes.

Studies evaluating the US National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign have produced mixed results. The campaign had 3 goals: educating and enabling young people to reject illegal drugs; preventing young people from initiating use of drugs, especially marijuana and inhalants; and convincing occasional drug users to stop. The campaign was designed to be comprehensive social marketing that aimed anti-drug messages at young people aged 9 to 18 years, their parents, and other influential adults. Messages were disseminated through a wide range of media channels including television, radio, websites and magazines. Additionally, the campaign established partnerships with civic, professional, and community groups and outreach programmes with the media, entertainment, and sports industries. Across its multiple media outlets, it was expected that, on average, a young person would see 2.5 targeted advertisements per week. The youth focused advertisements fell into 3 broad categories: (1) resistance skills and self-efficacy, to increase young people's skill and confidence in their ability to reject drug use; (2) normative education and positive alternatives, addressing the benefits of not using drugs; and (3) negative consequences of drug use.

Hornick et al (2008) examined the cognitive and behavioural effects of the campaign. Over a period of 4 years, young people aged 9-18 were surveyed 4 times (n ranged from 8,117 in the first to 5,126 in the fourth round). The results indicated that although the campaign was successful in achieving a high level of exposure to its message, there was no evidence to suggest this exposure affected young people's marijuana use as desired. At one round, however, more advertisement exposure predicted less intention to avoid marijuana use and weaker anti-drug social norms at the subsequent round. Thus, it was concluded that the campaign was unlikely to have had favourable effects on young people, may have had delayed unfavourable effects, with the results challenging the usefulness of the campaign.





# Social Marketing

## Mass media campaigns (continued)

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The findings of unfavourable effects were said to be particularly concerning as they were found not only for intentions but also for actual initiation of marijuana use. One explanation given for this result was that the campaign did not effectively add to the large quantity of anti-drug messages young people were already receiving, as the implicit messages of the campaign were not novel. The unfavourable influence of exposure to the campaign (sometimes called a boomerang effect) could have been as young people exposed to these anti-drug messages reacted against them by expressing pro-drug sentiments, or as anti-drug advertising conveys an implicit message that drug use is commonplace. As a result, it was hypothesised that young people who saw the campaign advertisements assumed that their peers were using marijuana, making it more likely they would initiate use themselves.

Scheier and Grenard (2010) examined age differences in the relationship between awareness (recall) of the campaign and young people's drug use. Overall early levels of campaign awareness had a limited influence on rates of growth of alcohol and drugs. When they were younger, these young people accelerated their drug use and reported increasing amounts of campaign awareness. When they were older, increasing awareness was associated with declines in binge drinking and cigarette smoking.

Carpenter and Pechmann (2011) examined the impact of the US 'Above the Influence' anti-drug campaign on adolescent marijuana and alcohol use from 2006 to 2008. Results indicated that for eighth-grade girls, greater exposure to anti-drug advertisements was associated with lower rates of past month marijuana use and lower rates of lifetime marijuana use, but not alcohol use. Associations were not significant for adolescent boys or for students in grades 10 and 12. Thus, it was concluded that anti-drug advertising may be an effective way to dissuade eighth-grade adolescent girls from initiating marijuana use.

Gosselt et al (2011) evaluated the Dutch information campaign "Under 20? Show Your ID!" on compliance with age restrictions on alcohol sales. The campaign was evaluated by comparing compliance levels pre and post the campaign (n = 458 attempts by a 15 year old mystery shopper to purchase alcohol). Although there was an increase in compliance rate from 15% to 25% after the campaign, the mass media campaign was seen as a failure given the low rate of compliance. In addition, the campaign was seen to fail as fewer than half of the 15-year-old mystery shoppers in the study were asked to show their ID when purchasing alcoholic beverages.





# Social Marketing

## Mass media campaigns (continued)

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Schmidt et al (2009) evaluated a Canadian mass media campaign on denormalising tobacco use among young people aged 12-18 years old. The mass media campaign consisted of posters for schools and other venues frequented by young people (e.g., community centres and fitness centres), posters displayed in bus shelters, print advertisements, television/radio public service announcements, an interactive community website for youth, a media launch event, promotional items, and organisational efforts to cross promote the campaign. The concept of the campaign was based on interviews, focus group testing, and other research conducted by the campaign's team and youth volunteers in order to identify the key elements of this campaign. An evaluation of the campaign included a survey of (n = 149), young people participating in prototype testing to compare this positive messaging campaign with negative toned tobacco reduction campaigns (n = 27) and qualitative interviews with stakeholders on the campaign process (n = 6). The respondents viewed the campaign positively and showed strong recall of the messages.

## Social norms campaigns

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A common form of campaign used to reduce high risk drinking among students and young people is social norms campaigns. Social norms theory (see Berkowitz, 2004) predicts that by reducing misperceptions and increasing the proportion of individuals with more accurate information about existing healthy norms, alcohol misuse will decrease. People may believe that their peers drink heavily, which influences their drinking, yet much of peer influence is the result of incorrect perceptions. Research indicates that behaviour is influenced less by knowledge than by attitude and intention (e.g. Marshall et al, 2011). Normative feedback relies on the presentation of information on these misperceptions, about personal drinking profiles, risk factors, and normative comparisons.

Social-norms theory generally distinguishes between two types of norms:

- Descriptive norms refer to the beliefs regarding the prevalence of a specific behaviour in a particular population, usually one's peers.
- Injunctive norms are the perceived level of approval of specific behaviours.

Burkhart (2011) discussed the role of social norms in addictions. Adolescents experience changes that can result in their desire to conform to peer norms. This can help explain why, when peers are present, adolescent behaviour may not be significantly modified by what they know about risks and consequences. This finding has implications for prevention as it points to the importance of responses that actively target the environment in which substance use takes place, and where social norms are formed and supported.





# Social Marketing

## Social norms campaigns (continued)

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### Drinking and drug norms

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Much research has examined perceived drinking norms, and how this can impact on drinking behaviour. To illustrate, Park et al (2011a) conducted research with students indicating that perceptions were linked to behaviour. They examined normative perceptions for students during an everyday drinking occasion and found that students who reported having 4 or fewer drinks underestimated the percentage of other students who had this amount, while those who drank 5 or more drinks overestimated the percentage of other students who had this amount. In a similar vein, Park et al (2011b) examined estimation and accuracy of normative perceptions for students during one celebratory drinking occasion. They found that students who drank on St. Patrick's Day overestimated the percentage of others who also drank, whereas those who did not drink on St. Patrick's Day underestimated the percentage of others who also did not drink. Arbour-Nicitopoulos et al (2011) studied social norms and substance misuse among Canadian students ( $n = 1,203$ ). Results indicated that respondents generally perceived the typical student to have used alcohol, marijuana and cigarettes. Perceived norms significantly predicted use, with students more likely to use alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana if they perceived the typical student to use these substances. Thus, it was concluded that students have inaccurate perceptions of peer substance use and that these misperceptions may have potentially negative influences on actual substance use and could be a target for intervention. Gold and Nguyen (2009) found that entering students ( $n = 481$ ) significantly misperceived campus norms for marijuana use (overestimating that almost every student used it in the last 30 days) but not alcohol use.

More recently, researchers are making use of new technology to engage and conduct research with young people, and also to conduct interventions (as discussed later in the chapter). For example, Litt and Stock (2011) used Facebook to examine the impact of social descriptive norms on drinking behaviour. Descriptive norms were manipulated by having 189 young people view Facebook experimenter created profile pages, which either showed older peers drinking or not. The results provided evidence that descriptive norms for alcohol use, as portrayed by Facebook profiles, significantly impacted on willingness to use, prototypes, attitudes toward use, and perceived vulnerability. These results indicated that adolescents who perceive that alcohol use is normative are at higher risk for cognitions shown to predict alcohol use than adolescents who do not see alcohol use portrayed as frequently on Facebook.







# Social Marketing

## Special Interest Article - Labrie et al (2010)

Labrie et al (2010) conducted an online survey with students (n = 3,753) to establish whether misperceptions about marijuana existed between perceived injunctive norms of typical college students and the actual approval level of the students. Previous research has indicated that most college students overestimate the percentage of students who use

marijuana on college campuses and such overestimation of descriptive norms has been shown to predict individual marijuana use (Neighbors et al., 2008).

Results indicated that importantly, college students misperceive the extent to which their peers approve of marijuana use, believing that other students are more approving of marijuana use than they actually are. In addition, perceived approval of both close friends and parents predicted actual/self-approval, which in turn was most predictive of personal marijuana use. This suggests that parents appear to have a continued, if indirect, influence on college student marijuana use.

Findings suggest that perceived injunctive norms may function differently with respect to marijuana use than they do with respect to alcohol use, thus implying that consideration has to be given as to how to incorporate social-normative information into marijuana interventions. That is, the specificity of reference group may play an important role in the development of personal attitudes about marijuana use and for targeting in prevention and intervention programmes. Perceived typical student approval was not correlated to marijuana use, suggesting that, unlike normative interventions targeting alcohol use, an approach focusing on normative re-education of typical student injunctive norms for marijuana use may not be appropriate for college students. This partially may be because marijuana is an illicit substance and use is not as prevalent, visible, or socially acceptable as alcohol. Therefore, distal reference group norms may not be a salient source of influence to college students.

The authors made various suggestions about marijuana interventions such as exploring the inclusion of close friends' approval into college student marijuana interventions, as well as combining descriptive and injunctive norms into intervention strategies. For example, in person interventions may include components discussing the quantity or frequency of marijuana use for their friends; the extent to which their friends approve of their use; and what reductions in use might mean for their relationships with friends. Lastly, they suggested it may be worth exploring the utility of strengthening the communication between parents and college students about expectations and attitudes regarding marijuana use, particularly if parents are not approving of use.





# Social Marketing

## Drinking and drug norms (continued)

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Some research has also been conducted with non-student samples. This research is valuable and it provides insight into the cognition and drinking behaviour of samples which are less studied. The results indicate that, like student groups, other types of individuals also misperceive alcohol and drug taking norms, which is then in turn linked to their alcohol and drug consumption.

Lau-Barraco and Collins (2011) examined the social networks and alcohol use of a community-based sample of non-student emerging adults (n=59), where the educational attainment of members was diverse. Results indicated that the majority of the network consisted of household or family members. There were some associations between network drinking and personal alcohol involvement. The proportion of “drinking buddies” in one’s network was directly associated with perceived drinking norms. Perceived drinking norms were also positively associated with personal alcohol use, alcohol-related problems, and approval of drinking behaviours. Findings from this study have implications for understanding social factors in the drinking behaviour of non-student emerging adults and could inform the development of effective prevention and treatment interventions for this important, but understudied group of drinkers.

Haug et al (2011) investigated the associations of normative misperceptions and drinking behaviours in apprentices attending vocational schools (n = 1,124) in Germany. Results indicated that drinking behaviour was positively correlated with perceived norms, both for drinking frequency and drinking quantity. In addition, alcohol use disorders were more prevalent in respondents who overestimated drinking quantity in their reference group than in those who correctly estimated or underestimated drinking quantity. Bertholet et al (2011) conducted a Swiss study investigating the relationship between perceived drinking norms and drinking behaviour. They conducted a survey with a random sample of 20 year old men who were drinkers (n = 404). Results indicated that 46% overestimated drinking by others, while 35% underestimated and 19% made an accurate estimation. However, the likelihood of overestimating increased as individual alcohol use increased. Thus, misperceptions of alcohol consumption by others (particularly the strong tendency towards overestimation) was prevalent among 20-year-old men, with there being a strong link between drinking behaviour and perceived drinking norms. Therefore, it was suggested that preventive approaches might incorporate the use of normative feedback, to counteract the misperceptions that might ‘encourage’ individuals to justify their own use of alcohol. It was also stressed that as the phenomenon of overestimating other’s alcohol consumption appears in the general population, as well as among students, preventive measures should target a broader segment of the population.





# Social Marketing

## Gender differences in social norms

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Some research has indicated gender differences in social norms, or been conducted with male or female groups to further investigate their behaviour. It should be noted however that findings do not consistently show males or females to be more affected by social norms.

For example, Yankelevitz et al (2011) found that social norms played a larger role in determining males' than females' drinking behaviour. Whereas, Neighbors et al (2011) found that perceived injunctive norms were more strongly associated with own drinking among students (N = 708) who felt more confident in their estimates of friends' approval of drinking, primarily among women.

Iwamoto et al (2011) investigated the association between masculine norms, drinking to intoxication, and alcohol-related consequences among 776 undergraduate males. Results indicated that higher perceived peer norms regarding drinking increased the risks of getting drunk and experiencing alcohol-related consequences. Specifically, the masculine norms of being a "playboy", risk-taking, and winning were risk factors of drinking to intoxication; while, being a "playboy", risk-taking, and self-reliance increased the risks of alcohol-related problems.

Wells et al (2011) conducted Canadian research on injunctive norms and male bar room aggression. Male students (n = 525) rated their own approval and perceptions of peers' approval of bar aggression, with results indicating that participants attributed greater approval to male peers than to themselves. Perceived approval by female peers was not associated with increased likelihood of aggression. The findings suggested that both perceived male peer approval and personal approval were factors associated with male bar room aggression and that addressing approval of bar room aggression is a critical direction for prevention programming.

Carpenter et al (2008) conducted qualitative research with females (n = 12) and found that women were indifferent to alcohol-related harms. Women also felt pressured to match male drinking patterns, although they were self-conscious about other people's perceptions of drunken women. Even though participants were knowledgeable about the consequences of binge drinking, they associated it as a problem affecting others but not them and viewed it as simply a phase whilst at university.





# Social Marketing

## Effectiveness of social norms campaigns

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There is mixed evidence in the literature as to the effectiveness of social norms campaigns in reducing alcohol or drug consumption, with many authors questioning whether these 'norm' changing campaigns do work in reality.

However, some of these interventions have been shown to be effective.

For example, Turner et al (2008) examined whether alcohol-related negative consequences decreased among students exposed to an educational social norms marketing intervention (n = approximately 2,500 randomly selected undergraduates participated in a web-based survey). Results indicated that first year students recalling exposure to the intervention had lower odds of negative consequences and lower alcohol consumption. Over the 6 years of the study, the odds among all participants of experiencing (a) none of 10 alcohol consequences nearly doubled and (b) multiple consequences decreased by more than half. Perkins et al (2010) evaluated the efficacy of a high-intensity social norms media marketing campaign aimed at correcting normative misperceptions and reducing the prevalence of drinking and driving among 21-to-34-year-olds. A quasi-experimental design was used, with regions being assigned to one of three experimental groups: social norms media marketing campaign, buffer, and control. Respondents were assessed at four time points over 18 months via telephone surveys. Findings suggested that the social norms media campaign was successful at exposing the targeted population to social norms messages, and that the campaign reduced normative misperceptions, increased use of designated drivers, and decreased drinking and driving among those young adults. Thus, it was concluded that social norms media marketing can be effective at changing drinking-related behaviours at the population level. Reilly and Wood (2008) found that the use of interactive small group social norms approach to influence student misperceptions may be considered as a primer for population-level preventive interventions.

Moreira et al (2009) undertook a review of social norms interventions designed to reduce alcohol misuse in students that were evaluated using randomised controlled trials. The review of 22 studies found that web/computer feedback (WF) and individual face-to-face feedback (IFF) were 'probably effective in reducing alcohol misuse'. Although there was no direct comparison of WF against IFF, WF impacted across a broader set of outcomes and was less costly so was suggested to be the preferred option. However, significant effects were more apparent for short term outcomes (up to three months). For mailed and group feedback, and social norms marketing campaigns, the results were on the whole not significant and so were not recommended.





# Social Marketing

## Effectiveness of social norms campaigns

(continued)

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DeJong et al. (2006) conducted an 18-site randomised trial to determine the effectiveness of social norms marketing campaigns in reducing college student drinking, which they maintained was the most rigorous evaluation of such campaigns conducted to date. Analysis revealed that students attending institutions that implemented such a campaign had a lower relative risk of alcohol consumption than students attending control group institutions. However, a subsequent 14-site randomised trial failed to replicate these findings (DeJong et al., 2009) instead finding that having a social norms marketing campaign was not significantly associated with lower perceptions of student drinking levels or lower self-reported alcohol consumption. The authors suggested that this inconsistency in results warranted the need for further research exploring whether such campaigns are less effective in campus communities with relatively high alcohol retail outlet density.

This possibility was investigated by Scriber et al (2011) who examined whether the effectiveness of social norms marketing campaigns were affected by on-premise alcohol outlet density in the surrounding community. They analysed responses from the Social Norms Marketing Research Project (SNMRP), a randomised controlled trial undertaken with students ( $n = 19,838$ ). The findings suggested that the campus alcohol environment moderated the effect of social norms marketing interventions. That is, social norms marketing interventions may be less effective on campuses with higher densities of on-sale alcohol outlets. The authors suggested that the effect of alcohol outlet density on student misperceptions may involve the physical presence of alcohol outlets near campus which may convey their own normative message to students, thereby heightening student misperceptions of peer drinking norms. A further suggested possibility was that higher off-campus alcohol outlet density serves to reduce student misperceptions of peer drinking norms, meaning easier student access to alcohol and more opportunities to drink. At the same time, it is possible that higher outlet density, by encouraging public drinking, might also give students more opportunities to observe and accurately perceive student drinking levels in that campus community.

Given the conflicting evidence supporting the use of social norms campaigns as a method for reducing alcohol misuse, Vinci et al. (2010) highlighted the need to identify cost-saving measures during the implementation of a social norms campaign while providing evidenced-based intervention strategies to address high risk drinking.





# Social Marketing

## Effectiveness of social norms campaigns

(continued)

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As much of the previous research on social norms campaigns have been conducted in the United States, and given the need to tailor campaigns to the target audience and their perceived social norms, the transferability of this research to UK undergraduates is questionable (John & Alwyn, 2010).

John & Alwyn (2010) make certain recommendations for social normative approaches undertaken in the UK:

- social normative interventions need to be rigorously evaluated for effectiveness over time in a UK context;
- interventions should not be delivered in isolation but rather should be an element in a multi-dimensional approach that has a clear evidence base for the UK population; and
- interventions need to target different levels of drinking behaviour and employ evidence based methods of delivery.

## Social norms interventions using (new) technology

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More recent research has examined the effectiveness of new technology comprising part of a social norms campaign, as it would appear that innovative approaches are needed to complement current efforts.

A study by Killos et al. (2010) compared the effectiveness of a “standard” social norms media campaign among college students for those with and without exposure to additional educational sessions using audience response technology (“clickers”). The results indicated that “clicker” technology was more effective than social norms poster media alone in reducing misperceptions of normative alcohol use for those students who attended clicker sessions.





## Social Marketing

Special Interest Articles – LaBrie et al (2009-10)

LaBrie et al conducted research examining the efficacy of using wireless technology to conduct brief, live, normative group interventions. Firstly, they used normative feedback obtained using wireless keypad technology during a live session, with student athlete groups (n = 660) to provide evidence of the use of a brief interactive intervention (LaBrie et al, 2009). Intervention data were gathered in vivo using computerised handheld keypads into which respondents entered responses to a series of alcohol-related questions. These questions assessed perceptions of normative group behaviour and attitudes as well as actual individual behaviour and attitudes. These data were then immediately presented back in graphical form to illustrate discrepancies between perceived and actual group norms. Results revealed that at 1 and 2 month post-intervention, perceived group norms, behaviour, attitudes and consequences were reduced compared with the baseline. Results also suggested that reductions in perceived norms and attitudes were associated with reductions in individual drinking behaviour and negative consequences.

LaBrie et al (2010) then evaluated the brief, live, interactive, normative group (BLING) intervention and found that it produced immediate reductions in group specific normative perceptions. This research focused on three at risk undergraduate populations: first year students (n=767), Greek-affiliated students (n=555), and student athletes (n=524). Across all groups at pre-intervention, respondents reported significantly higher perceived group specific norms than actual alcohol use, with magnitude of initial misperceptions varying by group. The BLING intervention was equally effective in immediately correcting normative misperceptions among all three groups regardless of gender or the magnitude of initial misperception.

These data were said to further validate the ability of live normative group specific data-collection and feedback to overcome issues exhibited by many existing social norms interventions.





# Social Marketing

## Social norms interventions using (new) technology (continued)

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Bewick et al (2008) conducted an English study examining the effectiveness of an electronic web-based personalised feedback intervention through the use of a randomised control trial (n = 506).

Intervention participants received electronic personalised feedback and social norms information on their drinking behaviour which they could access by logging onto the website at any time during the 12-week period. Results indicated that those in the intervention as opposed to the control condition displayed a larger decrease in alcohol consumption. The majority of intervention participants agreed that the feedback provided was useful. It was concluded that delivering an electronic personalised feedback intervention to students via the web is a feasible and potentially effective method of reducing student alcohol intake.

Research has also indicated the potential effectiveness of using social networking sites. For example, studies have shown that adolescents share a large amount of personal information, references to mental health, and risk behaviours such as substance use on such sites (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Moreno, Parks, Zimmerman, Brito, & Christakis, 2009). The average college student uses Facebook for 30 minutes each day and as many as 98% of college students maintain active Facebook profiles (Compete.com, 2009; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Egan and Moreno (2011) highlighted how Facebook provides a unique view of college students' lives and disclosures of alcohol consumption in an accessible online setting, and so Facebook has the potential to influence peer behaviour and the development of social norms in college students. Facebook was said to be unique in its potential use as a risk identification tool because it not only allows the viewer to see disclosures of alcohol use but also allows one to see the frequency of alcohol use that the user chooses to display and to observe changes in displays of alcohol references over a period of time without relying on personal recollection.

Egan and Moreno (2011) undertook content analysis of college males' Facebook profiles which identified references to alcohol. The average age of the 225 identified profiles was 19.9 years and alcohol references were present on 85% of the profiles. The average number of alcohol references per profile was 8.5 but increased with undergraduate year. Students who were of legal drinking age referenced alcohol 4.5 times more than underage students, and an increase in number of Facebook friends was associated with an increase in displayed alcohol references (with it being suggested that displaying alcohol references could be a mechanism used in friendship development and peer acceptance by male students). The authors concluded that given the high prevalence of alcohol use displayed on Facebook and the popularity of social networking sites among college students, these displays might serve to influence behaviour. Thus, it was hypothesised that Facebook may present a novel way of assessing intervention needs on a college campus (Pujazon-Zazik & Park, 2010) and screening individuals for alcohol misuse conditions. Overall, the utility of Facebook as a means of approaching students in their natural online environment in a nonthreatening way was highlighted.







# Social Marketing

## Social norms interventions using (new) technology (continued)

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Lord et al (2011) provided further evidence to support the potential of online social networks to serve as powerful vehicles to connect with college-aged populations about their drug use. They conducted a survey of motives and attitudes associated with patterns of non-medical prescription opioid medication use among college students on Facebook. Response metrics for a 2-week random advertisement post, targeting students who had misused prescription medications, surpassed typical benchmarks for online marketing campaigns and yielded 527 valid surveys. Respondent characteristics, substance use patterns, and use motives were consistent with other surveys of prescription opioid use among college populations.

## Implications for Practice

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### **Campaigns need to be tailored to the target group**

It is crucial that campaigns are aware of and responsive to the needs of the target group, using market segmentation. Such campaigns and prevention initiatives have to reach the intended target group, and given how important prevention work is for those who report high risk behaviours, they have to be targeted to reach those most vulnerable to the risks associated with substance misuse. It is also important to utilise communication approaches that relate specifically to the target group and to also consider audience interpretation of messages.

### **Research and evaluation**

Effective social marketing requires evaluation which ultimately makes interventions more effective and ensures that there is investment in things that work best. There is also a need for formative research to underpin the campaign design. Those campaigns deemed to be the most successful are likely to have a clear goal, be multi-modal, use research as the first step, and be carefully designed to engage particular groups.

### **To increase the likelihood of success, campaigns have to be believable and credible**

Research has shown that message believability has direct effects on alcohol consumption.

### **Consideration of social context and environmental factors should be taken into account**

It is important to note that both campaigns and prevention work are not undertaken in a vacuum, and as such, it is important to consider environmental and social factors. These are factors outside the control of campaign designers and include sociocultural forces and demographic trends. Thus, prevention and marketing attempts should actively target the environment in which substance use takes place, and where social norms are formed and supported.





# Social Marketing

## Implications for Practice (continued)

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### **Multi-dimensional approaches are needed**

Given the range of factors that have to be considered (see point above) and that fact that substance misuse cannot be considered in isolation from the community in which it occurs, this necessitates a multi-level approach to dealing with substance misuse involving action at the level of the individual, relevant others and the community. Multiple interventions will increase the effectiveness of any attempt to use social marketing for behaviour change.

### **Harm reduction approaches**

Social marketing approaches should consider harm reduction as well as consumption per se. Common harm reduction approaches have been shown to incorporate humour, social norms and empowerment approaches.

### **Consideration of different and innovative approaches**

Research has indicated the effectiveness of a range of approaches including those which are peer led and which use new technologies such as Facebook. It has been suggested that previous campaigns have not worked as they did not effectively add to the large quantity of anti-substance use messages young people already receive, as the implicit messages and modes of the campaign were not novel. As such, innovative approaches are required.

### **Interventions should include self-efficacy messages**

It is recommended that prevention approaches involving young people should include self-efficacy messages, to increase confidence among young people so that they are able to carry out the recommended actions highlighted in the campaign.

### **Consideration should be given to gender differences**

Research has shown that females can be more responsive to campaign messages than males, particularly younger females for which campaign messages may dissuade or delay substance use. Thus, prevention initiatives and campaigns may prove to be more effective when targeted to young female adolescents.

### **Social norm approaches should target the whole population**

Research has indicated the potential value of social norms approaches for different groups other than students (who are traditionally the focus of such work). That is, the phenomenon of overestimating other's alcohol consumption appears in the general population, as well as among students, suggesting that preventive measures should target a broader segment of the population.

However, given the mixed results in terms of effectiveness of social norms campaigns, any such campaign should be tailored to the target group and consideration should be given to a range of factors which impact on the effectiveness of the campaign (e.g. the density of surrounding on-sale alcohol outlets).





# Social Marketing

## Links to other Core Elements

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Environmental Strategies

Community Approaches

Education

Harm Reduction - Alcohol

Harm Reduction - Drugs

