

## Applying the Rossiter-Percy Model to Social Marketing Communications

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### Abstract

*"Social marketing" is the application of marketing principles and tools to the achievement of socially desirable goals (Kotler and Zaltman 1971). In spite of the obvious need for persuasive messages in social marketing campaigns, there has been insufficient theoretical work to guide the development of such messages -- apart perhaps from the literature on "fear" appeals. One reason has probably been inattention to theory development that has taken place in commercial advertising. This paper presents the Rossiter-Percy Model of how advertising works as a suitable model for developing message strategies for social marketing communications. Various social marketing applications of the model are noted, with the case of drink-driving covered in depth.*

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### Introduction

Social marketing principles have been applied to a wide range of topics. Societal rather than political applications of social marketing, such as in the promotion of political candidates and political parties' platforms and ideals, will be the focus here. Specific social marketing tools, especially paid and unpaid advertising, have been applied to a variety of health and social welfare topics (Donovan, Jason, Gibbs and Kroger 1991; Donovan and Leivers 1993; Murry, Stam and Lastovicka 1996). For example, in Australia, North America and the United Kingdom, there has been widespread application of marketing tools in the health promotion and injury prevention areas (Egger, Donovan and Spark 1993; Health and Welfare Canada 1992; Smith 1989). The AIDS pandemic has resulted in promotional and other tools derived from marketing being applied throughout the world to stem the spread of this disease (World Health Organization 1991) and road safety advertising campaigns have been prevalent in most developed countries for some years (Vingilis and Coultres 1990; Donovan, Henley, Jalleh and Slater 1995).

Several broad knowledge-attitude-behaviour (KAB) change models have provided a theoretical basis for social marketing communication strategies. Among the more widely applied KAB models are the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991), the Theory of Trying (Bagozzi and Warshaw 1994), Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers 1975), Dissonance Theory (Festinger 1957), the Health Belief Model (Becker 1974) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977). (For applications of these models, see Egger et al 1993; Elder, Geller, Hovell and Mayer 1994; Wasserheit, Aral, Holmes and Hitchcock 1991; Graeff, Elder and Booth 1993; and O'Keefe 1990.) Whereas these models provide overall guidance for social marketing communication strategies, they have limited practical implications for developing the *message content* of campaigns.

Given the obvious importance of message development in social marketing campaigns, it is perhaps surprising that relatively little attention has been paid to theories of message effectiveness. However, this is probably due to the paucity of theory development in advertising in general. Apart from Vaughn's (1980; 1986) FCB Grid and the Rossiter-Percy Model (1987; 1997), most approaches to how advertising works are essentially simple typologies of advertising appeals (Donovan et al 1995). The Rossiter-Percy Model is more comprehensive than the FCB Grid and more specific in terms of message strategy tactics and thus is favoured here. The Rossiter-Percy Model has been applied to health promotion campaigns by Donovan and colleagues (Donovan and Owen 1994; Donovan and Francas 1990; Donovan et al 1995; Donovan 1995; Donovan and Henley 1997). Here, the Rossiter-Percy Model is proposed as a guide for message development for social marketing communications in general.

**The Rossiter-Percy Model**

Rossiter and Percy (1987; 1997; see also Rossiter, Percy and Donovan 1991) propose a two-variable marketing communication model that begins from the premise of consumer decision making. The two variables (dependent variables) in the Rossiter-Percy Model are awareness and attitude. The present focus is only on the attitude part of the model. Rossiter and Percy classify attitude types in terms of two dimensions: the level of perceived risk associated with the decision (high or low), and the nature of the primary motivation driving the decision (positive or negative). Their 2 x 2 attitude framework is shown in Figure 1, with typical examples. The nature of these two dimensions is explained below, in the context of social marketing communications.

Figure 1: The 2 x 2 Attitude Framework in the Rossiter-Percy Model

		Primary Decision Motivation	
		Negative	Positive
Perceived Decision Risk	Low Risk	Taking vitamins (to reduce risk of colds)	Initiating drinking alcohol (to have fun)
	High Risk	Quitting smoking (to reduce health threats)	Undertaking an advanced exercise program (for the “adrenalin”)

**Perceived Decision Risk**

It should be noted that previous descriptions of the Rossiter-Percy Model refer to the perceived decision risk dimension as “involvement.” However, because of the varying definitions and uses that now characterise involvement, the more precise term “perceived decision risk” is used for this dimension. The degree of perceived risk – which may be financial, functional, psychological, or social – in making the decision is dichotomised as high or low. Perceived decision risk is a personal characteristic, not a product characteristic, although, for many decisions and products, most people will experience the same level of risk and thus products (or behaviours) can be loosely classified as “high risk” or “low risk.” The classification of whether a decision is high or low risk for an individual is determined primarily through *qualitative* interviews. High-risk decision making is inferred from the consumer’s efforts to reduce the likelihood of making a wrong decision; the consumer must be convinced beforehand that he or she is making the right choice. On the other hand, for low-risk decisions, the consumer can, and usually does, adopt a “try it and see” perspective, as the consequences of making the wrong choice are perceived as minor. The adoption of smoking, for example, is often a low-risk decision, or is seen to be at the time, whereas the decision to quit is high-risk, certainly for the addicted smoker.

In the Rossiter-Percy Model the level of perceived decision risk largely determines *how* message claims are *executed*, rather than what their content is. Message claims must be credible for high-risk decisions but need only arouse “curious disbelief” (i.e., “it might be true”) for low-risk decisions. Furthermore, high-risk decisions can be, and often are, supported by up to about seven message claims or pro-choice arguments, whereas low-risk decisions must be limited to two or preferably one claim, as consumers are not motivated to consider more than this when the decision is relatively easy.

The bases of perceived decision risk are reflected somewhat differently in the social marketing area. Firstly, risk is rarely perceived to be financial, a concern that predominates in high-risk product decisions. Secondly, risk is infrequently functional in that most social marketing campaign are aimed at attitudinal and behavioural changes, not perceived product or service performance, and even where a product or service is purchased, its “functionality” depends more on the individual’s attitude and behaviour than on the product’s characteristics (e.g., Quit kits; condoms; high-fibre cereals). Nevertheless, for some health and safety decisions, there are perceived financial risks (e.g., private health insurance; nicotine patches) or functional risks (e.g., immunisation; cancer screenings; smoke detectors). On the other hand, social risks certainly do apply to many social marketing areas, and not unexpectedly, for socially visible or topical issues (e.g., recycling; condom use), as do psychological risks (e.g., stress associated with nicotine withdrawal; denied pleasures in weight control). As with product decisions, perceived decision risk for these behaviours can originate from any of the bases, but they are more likely in social marketing to originate from the social and the psychological.

**Decision Motivations**

The nature of the *motivation* on which the decision is based largely determines the *content* of message claims or pro-choice arguments. Following Fennell’s (1978) analysis of motivations operating in various consumption (or product use) situations, and imposing an overall drive induction versus drive reduction framework from psychological learning theory, Rossiter and Percy (1997) proposed that motivations for behaviour can be classified as either *positive* (i.e., the goal is drive induction) or *negative* (i.e., the goal is drive reduction). For positive motivations, the goal is to (temporarily) achieve a positive experience (i.e., above “normal”); whereas for negative motivations, the goal is to remove or avoid a negative experience and return to “normal.”

Rossiter and Percy’s eight motivations, organised by the two types of goal direction, are shown in Table 1. Two positive motives have been added by Donovan et al (1995), *self-approval* and *social conformity*. The original eight motivations are described more fully in Rossiter and Percy (1987) and Rossiter, Percy and Donovan (1984; 1991) and Donovan’s additions are reasonably evident. The emotional sequences accompanying the motives are discussed later.

Table 1: Decision Motives in the Rossiter-Percy Model and Underlying Emotional Sequences

<i>Motives</i>	<i>Emotional Sequence</i>
Negative (drive reduction goal)	
Problem removal	Annoyed → relieved
Problem avoidance	Fearful → relaxed
Incomplete satisfaction	Disappointed → optimistic
Mixed approach-avoidance	Conflicted → reassured
Normal depletion	Mildly annoyed → content
Positive (drive induction goal)	
Sensory gratification	Dull (or neutral) → excited
Intellectual stimulation/mastery	Naïve (or neutral) → sense of achievement
Social approval	Apprehensive (or neutral) → flattered
Social conformity	Left out (or neutral) → belonging
Self approval	Conscience-struck (or neutral) → self-consistent

Negative motivations relate to actions taken to solve current problems or to avoid future problems. These actions are therefore encouraged and maintained via negative reinforcement. In social marketing areas such as environmental protection, road safety, and public health the focuses are usually on *problem avoidance* by adopting the recommended behaviour (e.g., avoiding nuclear accidents; reducing chances of a work accident or its severity; safe sex), or *problem removal* (e.g., recycling; counselling for domestic violence). However, there are a number of instances where the more complex *mixed approach-avoidance* motive is operating (e.g., wanting the taste of certain foods but not some of the ingredients, hence low-fat, low-sugar, low-salt foods; use of clean needles by habitual drug users), or where *incomplete satisfaction* is relevant (e.g., seeking a safer vehicle, hence airbags; seeking a more effective weight loss program). Particular behaviours may have alternative negative motives, and the researcher’s task is to determine which ones are most effective for a majority of the target population. As an example, potentially applicable negative motives for avoiding drink-driving are listed in Table 2. Note that specific supporting arguments (the equivalent of benefit claims in commercial advertising appeals) are grouped under the various motives.

Positive motivations relate to actions taken to achieve an enhanced positive emotional state – positive reinforcement. Exercise, for example, can be pursued for the "high" it produces (the *sensory gratification* motive). With drug-taking, for example, positive reinforcement can be applied to encouraging the substitution of the “opposite” healthy behaviour, such as promoting the feeling of accomplishment and self-congratulation that comes with “kicking the habit” (an application of the *intellectual stimulation* or *mastery* motive). Drink-driving, for example, may be avoided not only by appealing to the negative consequences listed in Table 2 earlier, but also by positively reinforcing socially supportive opposite behaviour (using *social approval* motivation). The “Skipper” campaign praising the designated driver in social alcohol consumption settings is a good application of this.

Table 2: Potential Negative Motivators to Decrease Drink-Driving

<i>Problem Avoidance</i>	Avoidance of sanctions such as fines, loss of license, increased insurance premiums Avoidance of physical harm or death to others and the residual guilt Avoidance of disapproval of others for drinking and driving when there is such a high perceived probability of being RBT'd Avoidance of harm to self because of responsibilities to spouse and children
<i>Problem Removal</i>	Removal of anxiety about detection (when the decision is made after the anxiety is experienced) Use of self-test breathalyser, and hotel and club encouragement to travel home by taxi
<i>Mixed approach-avoidance</i>	Participating safely on social drinking occasions by drinking low-alcohol beer or by pacing drinks

**The Role of Emotions**

The Rossiter-Percy Model explicitly delineates the role of emotions in message strategy. Motivation is considered to be *goal-directed* (i.e., a cognitive component), with emotions being the energisers of action towards the goal (i.e., the affective arousal from the emotions is the source of drive). Both cognitions and emotions are required for achieving the desired behavioural result. Knowledge is usually insufficient to achieve behavioural change if this knowledge is unrelated to the relevant motive. The relationship is via emotions or more specifically via a dynamic sequence of emotions as shown in Table 1 earlier. There are two important aspects regarding the role of emotions in the Rossiter-Percy Model: firstly, each motivation has its *own* relevant emotions and it is crucial that advertising portray these authentically; secondly, it is the *sequence* of emotions, the dynamic shift from negative to normal in the case of negative motives and the dynamic shift from normal or mildly negative to positive in the case of positive motives, that is the effective energiser, not just the arousal of single emotions.

Just as the motive types encompass particular benefit claims or supporting arguments relevant to the behaviour of interest, the emotions can also be more finely delineated in connection with the behaviour. Drink-driving again provides an illustration of specific emotions found to be effective in research (Grey Advertising 1990; Donovan et al. 1995). These are described in Table 3, and each is a differentiated element of the *initial* negative emotion labelled “fear” in Table 1.

Table 3: Differentiations of the Fear Emotion Found to be Effective in Drink-Driving Campaigns

Guilt or remorse – at having unintentionally caused the loss or serious injury of a loved one or for not having heeded another’s advice that could have avoided a negative consequence
Shame or embarrassment – at being caught for a drink driving offence, an occurrence that is usually despised socially, even among young people
Shock – at the seemingly small amount of alcohol required to register a BAC of 0.05 (especially for women) or at the “dose-response” relationship between number of drinks and the probability of an accident

**Conclusion**

Although a number of KAB models exist to guide the overall purpose of social marketing communications, there has been a conspicuous lack of models to guide actual message strategies. The Rossiter-Percy Model is proposed as offering a sound theoretical rationale for message execution (depending on whether the targeted decision is high-risk or low-risk) and message content (depending on whether the primary motivation for the decision is negative or positive, and further on the specific motive classification, together with its relevant emotion-shift sequence). The Rossiter-Percy Model has already proved successful in message design in some social marketing areas in research by Donovan and colleagues. It is shown here to have general applicability for social marketing communications.

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