



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS AND MASS MEDIA CAMPAIGNS: GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Effective communication and mass media campaigns

Social marketing uses a blend of social psychology and marketing principles with the ultimate goal of persuading an individual to voluntarily adopt a socially desirable behaviour, by minimizing the costs and accentuating the benefits associated with that behaviour.¹ However, physical activity can not just be marketed solely from an individual perspective, taking into account intra-individual factors like personal beliefs, but must also be viewed from population-based and multi-sectoral perspectives, involving individual, physical, social, and environmental factors supporting physical activity.

Understanding the 4 P's

It is important when considering social marketing to understand four key marketing principles, namely *Product*, *Price*, *Place* and *Promotion*.

The role of the Product

In marketing physical activity, 'product' represents the desired behaviour or goal, awareness of messages and understanding of related benefits and supports. Generally speaking, parents appear to understand the key messages outlined in Canada's Physical Activity Guides for Children and for Youth, in that:

- The overwhelming majority of parents indicate that a combination of moderate and vigorous activities would help children maintain a healthy weight and health benefits. Parents who report that a combination of moderate activities was sufficient (15%) also report that children need an average of almost 90 minutes daily, whereas parents reporting vigorous (6%) intensity only was sufficient reported an average of 60 minutes was needed daily.
- 72% of Canadian parents state that engaging in physical activity for a minimum of 30 minutes at a time is a *very good* way for children to get fit and maintain a healthy weight, and almost all of the remaining individuals report that this is a *good* way.
- Nearly 60% of parents report that accumulating *several 10-minute periods of physical activity throughout the day* is a *very good* way for children to achieve health benefits. A remaining 37% of parents say that this is a *good* way for children to get fit and maintain a healthy weight.

This is promising. To assist parents to translate this understanding into practice for their children, communications efforts and strategies could emphasize the recognized health benefits of physical activity, including current awareness of its role in better self-esteem, feeling healthy, energized, revitalized, and less stressed, in addition to its longer term benefits of greater life expectancy and reduced likelihood of chronic diseases. The social benefits of physical activity could also be promoted, including the opportunity to participate in physical activity with other individuals and to enjoy the social interaction of physical activity groups.

Messaging can target which activities and what characteristics of these activities are perceived as being fun for different groups within the population. Those aspects that are universal would be appropriately marketed in broad-based campaigns, whereas more

population-specific aspects would be promoted through targeted and customized communications. For example, customize messages children and youth: for youth, focus on physical activity as “cool” and popular with other youth; for children, focus on physical activity as “fun”. An example of this type of customized messaging is found through the Centers for Disease Control’s initiatives called “Powerful Bones: Powerful Girls” directed towards girls (see http://www.cdc.gov/powerfulbones/index_content.html) or “Verb” directed towards 9 to 13 year olds or “tweens” (see <http://www.verbnow.com/>). Moreover, physical activities that are currently prevalent should be promoted to build on existing skills and self-efficacy, and build existing opportunities in the community. An overall campaign should incorporate targeted strategies to increase physical activity behaviours based on readiness to change, tailored specifically to children, especially in social marketing strategies.²

The role of Price

In the social marketing context, ‘price’ refers to the costs or barriers encountered when trying to achieve the desired behaviour. In terms of prevalence rates of key factors preventing their children from being more active, analyses in this report found the following may be barriers:

- lack of convenient facilities (21% strongly and 23% moderately agree)
- high cost (18% of parents strongly agree; 28% moderately agree)
- preference for playing video games or watching television (9% strongly agree, 25% moderately agree)
- lack of time due to homework (8% strongly agree, 26% moderately agree).
- lack of programming or opportunities at school or in the community (8% strongly agree, 24% moderately agree)
- perceived traffic danger (8% strongly agree, 20% moderately agree)
- lack of skill (4% strongly agree, 17% moderately agree).

When considering strategies to address barriers to physical activity, consider the target audience. One study has shown that common barriers among adolescents are wanting to do other things with their time, lack of interest, poor weather conditions, school work (homework), lack of physical activity opportunities or facilities, and competing obligations. Solutions to overcoming these barriers are critical to successful campaigns. Generally speaking, adolescents appear to hold similar perceptions of barriers to adults. Strategies that are used to overcome barriers for adults may also prove useful for adolescents including presenting how to incorporate many shorter bouts of activity into the day. This can be accomplished in conjunction with support from school and the local community. For example, schools can promote active commuting to school. Communities can maintain facilities such as sidewalks, trails, and paths to ensure safety. This report shows that one-quarter of parents feel that safety issues are an important barrier and earlier research reveals that over half of parents believe that having access to safe streets and other public places is important for their children’s physical activity.³ Communities can also consider reducing or eliminating user fees when possible for sports or physical activities available during or after school hours. If this is not possible due to

budgetary constraints, municipalities can coordinate with programs such as Jumpstart⁴ or encourage local businesses to sponsor children's physical activities through a financial contribution towards equipment, tournaments or funding local activity sessions (e.g., free public skating or swimming) to ensure an 'everyone can play' policy for children in the community.

Beside age-related barriers, differences also appear between girls and boys. Incorporating counselling on various aspects of physical activity targeted to young people into health promotion programs can help overcome barriers to physical activity. Counselling can include information that helps develop confidence and skills for activity. This is particularly important among girls who are more likely to have lower confidence in their physical skills and abilities.⁵

The role of Place

In the social marketing context, the term 'place' represents access to and location for desired behaviours. Results from this study reveal that children do most of their physical activity:

- outdoors (22%) or at school (22%).
- at home (17%)
- at a public facility (15%)
- at playgrounds or parks (10%)
- at private facilities (7%), and
- on walking or bicycling trails (4%).

Considering this information, the provision of more opportunities at recess to increase children's physical activity levels might be helpful for younger children. Research shows that children spend much of their recess time being inactive.⁶ This research also suggests that modifications to school policies—such as increasing the frequency of recesses, providing suitable facilities, and educating staff in ways to prompt physical activity—may contribute to higher physical activity levels. For youth, the feasibility of offering opportunities to be active during spare periods could be investigated. In addition, spaces and facilities for physical education and physical activity should be safe, clean and well lit, and playgrounds, outdoor areas and gymnasiums should meet current safety regulations. It is important to provide a variety of facilities, as a lack of facilities is considered a barrier to the participation of adolescents in physical activity. Finally, the physical activity of children is positively related to the access to convenient spaces, facilities and equipment.⁷

The role of Promotion

'Promotion' includes the marketing messages or communication messages surrounding the desired behaviour. Social marketing as a promotional tool for physical activity in Canada had its origins in ParticipAction, which is considered one of the "longest-running communication campaigns to promote physical activity in the world".⁸ Mass media

campaigns were just one tool that ParticipAction used in its communication strategies. However, it is considered an important component in a communication strategy for increasing physical activity. Social marketing and mass media campaigns are now widely used for the purposes of influencing health-related behaviours and attitudes, including smoking cessation and immunization. Generally speaking, mass media campaigns have the potential of reaching very large percentages of the population for relatively low cost, yet, although they may increase awareness of physical activity, the actual effect on population activity levels may not directly attributable.⁹ In order for policy makers to consider the campaigns successful and useful, proper evaluation of the campaigns should be incorporated.⁹

Currently, several mass media campaigns in Canada are being launched to promote physical activity among Canadian adults and children. Examples include the Children's Healthy Active Living Program's Long Live Kids campaign.¹⁰ The Long Live Kids campaign is composed of child-directed television commercials, and public service messages whose purpose is to build awareness of healthy eating and physical activity. It is part of the Concerned Children's Advertisers initiative that has been promoting health-promoting behaviours among Canadian children for the past 14 years. In addition, *Saskatchewan In Motion* has launched several short commercials promoting physical activity among it's citizens during Saskatchewan's 100th year centennial celebration.¹¹ Cities such as Winnipeg and Ottawa have launched media campaigns promoting physical activity for their residents as well. Given the widespread nature of the issue of physical inactivity, an opportunity exists for a national campaign. Key messages for parents would include: knowing how much physical activity their child is actually getting; increasing awareness of the benefits of physical activity for children; and understanding that although participation in physical education classes could contribute to total activity of a child, it in itself is insufficient as a sole source of activity.

Bauman (2004) suggests 15 guiding principles that are useful in evaluating mass media campaigns to ensure their success and effect:¹²

- (1) Media campaigns can be combinations of print media, electronic mass media, advertising on billboards or buses, or Web.
- (2) Message development can be evaluated through focus groups and other qualitative techniques.
- (3) Process monitoring or evaluation provides an indication of whether the program reached the target, whether it was distributed as intended, and whether it elicited a response.
- (4) Measurement of outcomes is measured at the last stage of evaluation to assess the program impacts or outcomes.
- (5) Development of appropriate outcomes could be measured at the individual, environment and policy level, and be identified during campaign development.

- (6) Research designs should be used to assess the effects of campaigns.
- (7) A hierarchy of effects matrix can be used as a conceptual framework for understanding campaign effects. The outcomes should be identifiable.
- (8) Roles of media campaigns can be described based on the hierarchy described above. Bauman states that “campaigns should try to increase community awareness of an issue, to set the public health agenda, to help form beliefs and attitudes, to stimulate individuals to seek help or engage with a service or the health system (Flora, Maibach 1989). For more complex issues, media set the agenda and longer term monitoring is required to assess change.”
- (9) Net sum gain examines the change in the characteristic over years of monitoring and is used to determine overall progress for the strategy.
- (10) Non useful campaigns (media only) Media messages require other health and community supports to be effective.
- (11) Social marketing includes the use of marketing principles for health campaigns.
- (12) Evaluation budgets are an important part of a campaign.
- (13) Evaluation politics should not impact on evaluation objectives.
- (14) Dissemination of findings from a campaign is useful for other campaigns.
- (15) Political campaigns can sometimes be confused with health related physical activity campaigns and they could devalue a health issue.¹²

A national and comprehensive strategy to promote physical activity would be wise to take these guiding principles into account in the development of a communications strategy and public education campaign. The investment of significant funds would be required to establish a comprehensive strategy for increasing physical activity. A dollar figure in the order of \$500 million (similar to that invested for public education of tobacco cessation) has been recommended by the Coalition for Active Living and includes a mass communications strategy.¹³

A strategy should build on existing components to create an integrated research and surveillance system to understand effective strategies and Canadian trends in physical activity. This will assist in the incorporation of successful elements into policy, plans and practice that aim to increase physical activity. These types of monitoring, along with other types of qualitative research, would be valuable for evaluating whether the strategy is reaching its intended targets, and to evaluate the effect of the strategy through measurable outcomes.

Messages should be appropriate to specific populations (i.e., gender-, cultural-, age-, geographic-based, individual risk factors, attitudes, stage of change and interests or media usage). Tailoring to particular target segments and using appropriate media can also be useful.⁹ Community wide campaigns can be promoted through television, radio, newspaper, or movie trailers.¹⁴ The use of technology could be considered when implementing physical activity interventions. This may be particularly relevant for national and provincial governments and organizations promoting population-based interventions, as this method can be used to communicate cost effectively to a population.¹⁵ An effective strategy for communicating with the population, especially those who are insufficiently active, may be to use a “proactive” approach directly contacting individuals and offering a particular service, through the Internet.¹⁶

In addition, a multi-component strategy that includes the generation of, or increased access to, suitable places for physical activity combined with educational outreach activities is recommended.¹⁷ This may involve changes to the environment that do not require children to make “active” decisions.¹⁸ Passive (point-of-decision) interventions can include making stairs or pathways accessible, attractive, and convenient. Finally, the accessibility and convenience of programs is important. Reducing fees, auditing programs and facilities to ensure safety and access, providing outreach opportunities and offering family-oriented scheduling are a few ways to address these issues.

In sum, social marketing strategies can be a useful tool in promoting physical activity to children, youth and their families. The price, product, place and promotion need to be considered when broadcasting common messages to the population as a whole and target-casting specific messages tailored to specific segments. Although the fifteen guiding principles for mass media campaigns should be incorporated into promotional strategies to increase their success and document effectiveness, many of these principles may be applied to social marketing efforts more broadly.

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