

Conceptualising reflexivity within critical discourse of social marketing

Critical
discourse of
social
marketing

73

Rachael Millard

Westminster Business School, University of Westminster, London, UK, and

M. Bilal Akbar

Department of Marketing, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK

Received 29 November 2022
Revised 29 March 2023
2 August 2023
19 September 2023
20 October 2023
Accepted 2 November 2023

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to understand what reflexivity means and explores which types of reflexivity could be applied within social marketing practice as a critical approach to overcoming failures.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is a critical literature review.

Findings – The study proposes a typology for a reflexive approach to social marketing practice to overcome failures. The typology is built on self and critical reflexivity, simultaneously allowing social marketers to reflect on external and internal factors that may affect the individual's role and could negatively affect social marketing practice unless otherwise considered. The types of reflexivity discussed are not prescriptive; instead, the authors intend to provoke further discussion on an under-researched but vital area of social marketing.

Research limitations/implications – The proposed typology is conceptual; an empirical investigation to gain social marketer's views would further enhance the effectiveness of the applications of the typology.

Practical implications – Social marketers could use the proposed typology for future practice.

Originality/value – This is the first study that conceptualises various types of reflexivity within social marketing practice to overcome failures.

Keywords Evaluation, Reflexivity, Typology, Failure factors, Critical social marketing, Social marketers

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Social marketing successes are well-documented within the literature (Lin, 2014; Lee and Kotler, 2020; Akbar *et al.*, 2021a). More recently, there has been a shift to consider the role of failure (Akbar *et al.*, 2021b, 2023; Cook *et al.*, 2020, 2021; Deshpande, 2022). In social marketing, where success is mainly measured through behavioural change, a campaign may be considered a failure when it does not achieve its desired outcome, thus rendering it unsuccessful (Deshpande, 2022). However, failure may also be defined in relation to campaigns that do not affect behaviour, have the opposite effect (i.e. they backfire), or only partially succeed in changing behaviour (Brough *et al.*, 2020). Yet, in these three types of failure, the underlying assumption that failure is negative prevails. While the term 'failure' does have negative connotations, it has also been argued that failure can teach social marketers more than continued success (Akbar *et al.*, 2021b). Failure should, therefore, not be automatically categorised as a negative, as neglecting the importance of failure could result in repeating the same mistakes.

Literature notes many reasons for failures, such as the file drawer problem and positive results bias (Deshpande, 2022), lack of theoretical underpinning and power imbalance



(Akbar *et al.*, 2021b), mismanagement of stakeholders and weak evaluation (Cook *et al.*, 2021) and inadequate acknowledgement of failure leading to further failures (Akbar *et al.*, 2023). The overarching theme of such failures can be partially attributed to social marketer's bias, though less is known about *how* and *why* such failures can be controlled (Brough *et al.*, 2020). Addressing such biases involves adopting a critical social marketing (CSM) approach to critique social marketing and change it to a more inclusive, ethical, reflexive and representative approach to behaviour and social change (Hastings, 2009). CSM is an evolving concept and is defined as an examination of:

[...] the impact of commercial marketing and business on society and/or [critical analysis of] social marketing theories, concepts, discourses, and practice, to generate critique, conflict, and change that facilitates social good" (Gordon, 2018, p. 86).

We propose that CSM offers a lens through which to examine failure in social marketing because critical marketing involves consideration of three main elements:

[...] demystifying the ideological basis of social relations; a questioning of positivist methodology whether that be to the nature of reality, knowledge, and explanation; and the importance of self-reflexivity of the investigator and the linguistic basis of representation" (Burton, 2001, p. 726).

Given that evaluation often takes place in the later stages of the social marketing process, it has been argued that the field lacks adequate research in earlier stages to better understand what causes failure and how it can be mitigated (Akbar *et al.*, 2021b; Cook *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, evaluation in social marketing is often undertaken after implementation, which provides social marketers with relatively little scope for self-reflection. As Burton (2001) points out, this is a key element in critical marketing. Therefore, we suggest that one way to address failure in earlier stages (i.e. prior to implementation) is to introduce a more rigorous critical evaluation in a holistic yet pragmatic manner. This can be achieved by integrating different types of reflexivity into an intervention's planning, design and delivery stages. We argue that applying reflexive practice in this way allows social marketers to understand what is (and is not) successful by considering multiple viewpoints from an external and internal focus at all stages of the social marketing process. Furthermore, as "critical discourse and reflexive thinking and action are signs of a maturing discipline and can actually help to improve social marketing theory and practice" (Gordon *et al.*, 2016, p. 1067), we adopt a similar position to Kariippanon *et al.* (2020) who suggest that CSM needs to advance and further broaden its construct by advocating reflexivity, enabling a path forward for the significant stakeholders to enact and identify pertinent practical and conceptual benefits.

Ultimately, CSM encourages a more holistic view for social marketers, incorporating not only the campaign itself but its upstream and downstream components, too (Gordon, 2011). As social marketers often focus on the behavioural outcome of a campaign in defining its success, the broader context is neglected; thus, the current understanding of what constitutes failure is limited by considering only one element of the social marketing process. Engaging in critically reflexive practice is not an overarching solution to this problem; it is unlikely that social marketers can avoid failure altogether, nor is that the aim. Instead, this paper responds to calls for further exploration of the role of reflexivity within social marketing to develop a more critical approach (Gordon and Gurrieri, 2014; McHugh and Domegan, 2017; Gordon, 2018). However, what reflexive practice looks like has not yet been identified within the discipline, highlighting a significant research gap. Similarly, the calls for reflexivity in social marketing do not acknowledge *how* such reflexive practice could be approached. This could be because current conversations depict reflexivity as an

abstract construct. We suggest that it is important to recognise the different types of reflexivity and the varying definitions, approaches and strategies in the literature. As such, we seek to elucidate how social marketers can engage critically in this way when planning, implementing and examining interventions. We aim to extend current conversations within social marketing on reflexivity, thus responding to a call for more interdisciplinary, reflexive and critical approaches to social marketing practice (French and Gordon, 2020; Gordon *et al.*, 2022). We achieve this by developing a novel typology of reflexive approaches and mapping these to the stages of the social marketing process. Furthermore, we propose a series of questions social marketers should ask themselves at each stage, thus increasing our study's relevance to both research and practice.

It is important to note that our proposed application of reflexive practice is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive, and we do not suggest that all failures can be overcome by integrating reflexivity into the social marketing process. Indeed, we aim to encourage reflexive practice, which will ultimately contribute to addressing, overcoming and potentially reducing failures whilst simultaneously acknowledging that not all failures are attributable to social marketers, nor can all failures be controlled. With this in mind, we adopt a similar definition of reflexivity to Gordon and Gurrieri (2014) for this paper, where reflexive practice refers to reflecting on *all* parts of a research process to identify any potential influence of social marketers. By using this definition, our suggestion that reflexivity may be used to aid in overcoming failure applies specifically to those failures that *can* be addressed because they stem from an intervention's planning, design or implementation.

Reflexivity and social marketing

The exact definition of reflexivity is exercise-dependent (Finlay, 2002). We draw on Kleinsasser's (2000, p. 155) definition of reflexivity as "a methodical process of learning about self as a researcher, which, in turn, illuminates deeper, richer meanings about personal, theoretical, ethical, and epistemological aspects of the research question." Kleinsasser (2000, p. 160) draws on the work of Geertz (1975) to suggest that "*data [. . .] pass through the researcher's theoretical, practical, experienced, and inexperienced lenses,*" and as such, is impacted at all stages by the individual, their understandings, interpretations and experiences. As such, how one interacts with the research is central to the concept of reflexivity. Incorporating reflexivity provides further rigour to the research process (Koch and Harrington, 1998; Rossman and Rallis, 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2020), particularly as "the endpoint of reflexivity is to improve the quality of the research" (Barry *et al.*, 1999, p. 30), which speaks to a wider focus beyond social marketers and emphasises the breadth and depth of the role that reflexivity can play within social marketing.

Reflexivity in social marketing is refining and reformulating theories through observations (Lefebvre, 2011). The act of research, gaining experience through practice, and formulating theories and models through observations and acquired knowledge can all be impacted by the individual concerned. Additionally, engaging in reflexivity in the context of CSM means focusing on what happens in social marketing interventions and further highlighting how change occurs. The focus is not on critiquing or disagreeing with the already-held social interventions; instead, the real concern is improving and facilitating upward behaviour mobility and social change (Collins and Stockton, 2018). Similarly, if the desired change is not happening, reflexive practice allows for enquiry into the shortcomings of an intervention (Gordon and Gurrieri, 2014) and consideration of what to work on, who to engage with, and how small or large-scale change may occur. Reflexive practice means social marketers can explain, rather than question, how the system is surrounded by desired

behaviour change, power structures and actions (Arndt, 1985; Gordon and Gurrieri, 2014). This is particularly beneficial in the context of social marketing failures, which, though relatively commonplace, are often reframed as a lesson learned (Akbar *et al.*, 2023), which contradicts the principles of reflexive practice. Even though reflexivity is conceived as an interaction-based approach where all discourse is inherently interactional, dialogical or polyphonic, its role in enquiring about the shortcomings of interventions (*who* to question, *when* to question) is not yet clear.

Reflexivity can be expressed as assessing multiple measurement units, such as participants, social marketers and stakeholders involved in delivering interventions, rather than focusing on a single measurement group (Gordon and Gurrieri, 2014; McHugh and Domegan, 2017). Hastings and Domegan (2017) argue that the evaluation of interventions needs to progress to accurately monitor the stance of enacting social change. Therefore, through learning from the past, reflexive practice enables critical capacity for knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, improving future decision-making, actions and behaviours (Stead *et al.*, 2007; McHugh and Domegan, 2017). However, Spotswood *et al.* (2017) argue that establishing critique does not end; instead, it informs a more critically reflexive, polyvocal, ethical and inclusive social marketing theory and practice. The emphasis must be on improving rather than proving social change (Stead and McDermott, 2011).

A critique of an intervention's impact on society through reflexive practice in CSM allows for a closer analysis of the social change process and activities implemented to measure change by encouraging dialogue, inquiry, interactive learning and learning by action (Arkesteijn *et al.*, 2015). Social marketers inevitably have biases and agendas (Gordon, 2018), but adopting a CSM approach can reduce this. Indeed, Spotswood *et al.* (2017) argued that reflexivity counters the biases individuals may bring to interventions and evaluations in response to their actions. Though bias is only one source of concern within social marketing, this should be reduced as much as possible (French and Gordon, 2020). As CSM continues to evolve, reflexivity allows social marketers to analyse the current process, frameworks, methods and social structures that guide behaviour choices, actions and decisions (Arkesteijn *et al.*, 2015; Jungmann *et al.*, 2015), and to reduce their own impact on the process used to plan and deliver interventions, potentially contributing to overcoming failures.

Approaches to reflexivity

Table 1 presents five widely cited approaches to reflexivity, outlining how reflexivity is conceptualised in different disciplines: methodological literature, transformative consumer research and management. We classified each approach as linking to self-reflexivity and/or critical reflexivity, consistent with overarching themes within the literature. We also discussed these types of reflexivity in greater detail before applying them to the social marketing process.

Self-reflexivity

As an umbrella term, self-reflexivity is too broad to fully account for the intricacies of engaging in reflexive practice. We suggest that the act of self-reflexivity concerns:

- the interpretation of language as a key part of the data collection and analysis process;
- the impact of social marketers on the overall research process from a methodological perspective;
- the relationship between social marketers and the participants; and
- the role of emotions within the research process. Each of these types of reflexivity is discussed below.

Source	Reflexive themes	Conceptualisation of reflexivity applied to a social marketing context	Reflexivity types
Finlay (2002)	<i>Five approaches to reflexivity</i>		
	Introspection	Relates to the influence of an individual on the social marketing process and that of the participants	Self-reflexivity
	Intersubjective reflection	Concerns the social marketer-participant relationship and aims to understand how this may impact the campaign	Self-reflexivity
	Mutual collaboration	Pertains to the co-construction of knowledge through the social marketing process and requires reflection on the part of both the social marketer and the participant	Self-reflexivity
Pillow (2003)	Reflexivity as social critique	Refers to social marketer-participant power dynamics	Self-reflexivity
	Discursive deconstruction	Refers to the role of language in the interpretation of findings	Critical reflexivity
	<i>Four reflexive strategies</i>		Self-reflexivity
	Reflexivity as recognition of self	The social marketer adopts a reflexive view of their role within the research and their subjectivity	Self-reflexivity
	Reflexivity as recognition of others	Concerns about the relationship between the social marketer and the participants	Self-reflexivity
	Reflexivity as truth	The social marketer seeks to establish validity by engaging in reflexive practice and looking for the truth	Self-reflexivity
	Reflexivity as transcendence	The social marketer recognises their own subjectivity and can move beyond it	Self-reflexivity
			Critical reflexivity
			(continued)

Table 1.
Overview of
approaches to
reflexivity

Table 1.

Source	Reflexive themes	Conceptualisation of reflexivity applied to a social marketing context	Reflexivity types
Harley et al. (2004)	<i>Four constructions of reflexivity</i> Reflexivity as subversion	The social marketer adopts a reflexive stance from within the research and externally to more critically assess influences on the research process	Self-reflexivity
	Reflexivity as holography	Using multiple paradigms to explore a single phenomenon and, therefore, give a wider range of insights	Self-reflexivity
	Reflexivity as polyphony	The role of the research participant is also integrated into the research process to showcase perspectives beyond that of the social marketer	Self-reflexivity
	Reflexivity as scepticism	The social marketer must acknowledge wider institutions that impact the research	Critical reflexivity
Bettany and Burton (2006)	<i>Taxonomy of four different reflexivities</i> Objectivist reflexivity	The social marketer reflects on the methodology and research process	Self-reflexivity
	Experiential reflexivity	Refers to interactions between the social marketer and the research participant(s)	Self-reflexivity
	Perspectival reflexivity	The social marketer acknowledges that perspectives differ between individuals and how this can be incorporated into the research design	Self-reflexivity
	Multiplex reflexivity	How the social marketer and participants are constructed through the research process	Critical reflexivity
Palaganas et al. (2017)	<i>A journey of reflexivity that encompasses four types</i> Personal reflexivity	Concerns for the social marketer and their influence on the research as a whole	Self-reflexivity
	Epistemological reflexivity	The subjective nature of qualitative research as the social marketer cannot be detached from the research, though some degree of objectivity is needed	Self-reflexivity
	Critical reflexivity	Considers the overarching social, political and cultural context within which the research is conducted	Critical reflexivity
	Feminist reflexivity	Considers power dynamics in the social marketer–participant relationship and the research process as a whole	Self-reflexivity Critical reflexivity

Source: Authors' own work

Discursive reflexivity

Drawing on the work of [Wiley \(1994\)](#), [Pagis \(2009\)](#) defines self-reflexivity as an *internal conversation* and differentiates between two forms of self-reflexivity: discursive and embodied. Discursive reflexivity relates to language and is commonly utilised to reflect on social marketers' roles and relationships with participants. In contrast, embodied reflexivity relies on reflection on non-verbal aspects and enhanced self-awareness of the corporeal self ([Pagis, 2009](#)). Arguably, a combination of the two is involved in collecting and analysing data within social marketing. Interaction is central to the social marketer-participant exchange ([Bettany and Burton, 2006](#)). However, engaging in discursive reflexivity extends beyond this to emphasise how individuals interact with the research and their language interpretation. Evidently, this interpretation can fundamentally change the findings and future actions related to the intervention. Therefore, engaging in discursive reflexivity and focusing on language is essential to improve the quality of the research ([Cooper and Burnett, 2006](#)) and align with the overall focus of reflexive practice to achieve the scientific rigour sought in social marketing ([Barry et al., 1999](#)).

More generally, the role of language has been discussed in extant research about messaging ([Akbar et al., 2021a](#); [Kemp and Eagle, 2008](#)), methodology ([Gountas et al., 2019](#)), framing ([Cheng et al., 2011](#); [Garg et al., 2021](#); [Maibach et al., 2010](#)), reframing ([Andreasen, 2006](#)) and interpretation ([Gordon et al., 2018](#)) within social marketing. Message framing is just one example of how various groups interpret language differently, and the importance of its role is undeniable. Therefore, discursive reflexivity is highly relevant to social marketing practice, involving our understanding of language and seeking to expand it to encompass other interpretations to ultimately gauge the intended meaning.

Methodological reflexivity

An understanding of the impact social marketers may have on the research process is central to the practice of reflexivity. Methodological reflexivity may refer to positionality either within the research process or external to it ([Harley et al., 2004](#); [Marcus, 1994](#)) or a more personal focus on the individual conducting the research themselves ([Finlay, 2002](#); [Palaganas et al., 2017](#)) but also involves understanding the impact of the ontological and epistemological stance of social marketers. Engaging in reflexivity as recognition of the self means social marketers can ascertain how their own subjectivity affects the research process and then transcend beyond it ([Pillow, 2003](#)); this arguably involves a more objective approach, deviating slightly from the more relativist stance adopted by individuals conducting qualitative research in this domain. Yet this raises an important point. While social marketers must consider the subjective nature of research ([Palaganas et al., 2017](#)), engaging in self-reflexivity, including reflection on the methodology and process, requires some distance between themselves and the intervention. To fully appreciate the impact of the role of social marketers, a subjectivist ontological stance must be combined with a willingness to embrace a degree of objectivity, an idea supported by [Burkitt's \(2012\)](#) suggestion that when engaging in the reflexive practice, one must adopt both a subjective and objective position.

Yet methodological reflexivity also refers to the methods used within social marketing research. CSM requires an openness to adopting a wider range of methods, which has traditionally eluded marketers; to become more critical, social marketers should adopt different methodological approaches and, importantly, understand that facts can be

ascertained not only through a single approach (Saren, 2009). Reflexivity can, therefore, be used in this circumstance to examine how the researchers' own preferences, experiences and abilities impact the choice of methodological approach in social marketing (Gordon and Gurrieri, 2014). Furthermore, reflexive methodological practice in social marketing can be applied to all methods (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, etc.) (Gordon and Gurrieri, 2014), and an ongoing critique of which method is best aligned with the outcomes of a particular campaign is imperative.

Collaborative reflexivity

In moving from a transactional approach to relationship-focused marketing, marketers in traditional consumption settings have now involved the end consumer in the decision-making process, thus introducing the *reflexive consumer* into the marketing world (Beckett and Nayak, 2008). Where a behavioural outcome is the end goal, and a lack of change is considered a failure, social marketers would also benefit from involving the end user (i.e. the individual whose behaviour they are trying to change). Exploring the co-construction of knowledge, with social marketers and participants as co-contributors within the research process (Finlay, 2002; Pillow, 2003), lends itself to collaborative reflexivity (Pezalla *et al.*, 2012). Co-creation as a construct of evaluation of reflexive practice within social marketing is also noted by McHugh and Domegan (2017), who call for future research to explore this in greater detail. We suggest that those best placed to clarify the intended meaning are those who made the original statement, which reduces reliance on interpretation and potential failures towards which this could lead. Relatedly, critical reflection on what is said and, importantly, how it is said (Pezalla *et al.*, 2012) further highlights the essential role of language within the reflexive process and underlines the link between discursive and collaborative reflexivity (Nordentoft and Olesen, 2018).

Hastings (2003) also highlights the need for social marketers to focus on relationships, suggesting a range of partnerships (not only with participants but other parties too) is beneficial. Thus, collaborative reflexivity extends beyond the social marketer-participant relationship. Drawing on the multi-relationship model (Hastings, 2003), social marketers should maintain relationships within their teams, organisations, funders, those who control the research context, and suppliers, among others. Yet extant research on this topic is dominated by focusing on the individual nature of reflexivity (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015), which somewhat negates the collaborative co-creation of knowledge. Though referring to the use of reflexivity within a research team to enhance the rigour of the approach, Barry *et al.* (1999) highlight collaborative reflexivity exists not only between social marketers and participants but also within the research team itself. This may also be extended to methodological reflexivity; reflection on the methodological process from multiple perspectives could be an important part of social marketing, as collaborative reflexivity should involve agents that are part of the process. Rather, the co-construction of knowledge should be reflected in who participates in reflexive practice, thus offering further support for self-and collaborative reflexivity, as a collective approach "facilitates a deeper, shared understanding of the research encounter" (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015, p. 60).

Emotional reflexivity

Reflexivity is not just rational and involves rationalisation; it is also relational, dialogical, and emotional" (Burkitt, 2012, p. 471). In the same way that objectivist reflexivity (Bettany and Burton, 2006) can complement a subjectivist ontological stance, we argue that the seemingly rational approach to conducting the cognitive process of reflexivity (Pagis, 2009)

can be complemented by a focus on the role of effect. In acknowledging and accepting the embeddedness of social marketers within research, it would be difficult to completely detach emotion from a reflection on the research process. Therefore, aligned with Holmes (2010, p. 140) and Pagis (2009), the concept of reflexivity can be extended to incorporate this, defined as “an emotional, embodied and cognitive process.”

Self-reflexivity comprises multiple types of reflexive practice, but thus far, these have neglected the role of emotions. Though referring specifically to the role of reflexivity within organisational ethnographic research, Gilmore and Kenny (2015, p. 56) note that the “emotional engagement of the ethnographer with the research experience” is not included in current applications of self-reflexivity. The authors perceive a silence surrounding emotions within the research context, though often, the participant’s emotions are central to the focus of the study. Yet this is not solely applicable to ethnography and should be applied more generally to methodological practice within social marketing. However, it has been met with some resistance, including the idea that to maintain some degree of objectivity, social marketers must remain detached from a more emotionally charged discussion with the participants (Palaganas *et al.*, 2017).

Conversely, we suggest that though the relationship with participants must remain professional and consistent, such an approach may deter participants from fully sharing their perspectives due to their perceptions of the social marketers’ non-verbal cues. Adopting this position when collecting data immediately introduces potential biases that would otherwise be avoided; therefore, recognising and understanding the role of emotions is very much necessary. This is supported by Hibbert *et al.* (2019), that emotions are entrenched in the research process, on behalf of all parties involved, to the extent that they cannot be denied and must be explored as part of reflexive practice.

However, emotions can be communicated in numerous ways, and emotional tone (to indicate what an individual may be alluding to) is equally relevant (Hibbert *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, Emotional reflexivity is linked with discursive reflexive practice (i.e. written language) and plays an important role in understanding spoken language tone, consistent with Holmes (2015) body language. Holmes (2010, p. 148) suggests that emotions and how they are interpreted are central to reflexive practice: “Reflexivity is emotional and comparative and relies on interpreting emotions,” further supported by the work of Burkitt (2012, p. 458): “Emotion colours reflexivity and infuses our perception of others, the world around us and our own selves.” Where emotion plays a decisive role in our interpretation of the world, it is difficult to argue against its role within the reflexive practice, particularly as emotions are central to everyday life and, therefore, cannot be reflected upon in isolation (Burkitt, 2012). Instead, emotional reflexivity is embroiled in the research process as impacting the intervention, social marketers and the participants; thus, it relates to both self- and collaborative reflexivity as “emotional relations to others form the reflexive self” (Holmes, 2010, p. 142). This further extends to the concept of intersubjective reflection (Finlay, 2002), as Holmes (2015, p. 61) defines emotional reflexivity as “the intersubjective interpretation of one’s own and other’s emotions and how they are enacted,” which inevitably encompasses the social marketers and participants (Holmes, 2015). However, reflexive practice cannot solely comprise an inward focus; we argue that a combination of both an internal and external stance is required for effective reflexivity to be used. As such, the act of conducting self-reflexivity is complemented by the implementation of critical reflexivity.

Critical reflexivity

Much research on critical reflexivity is grounded in the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990), who defines this approach as awakening consciousness. “A critically reflexive researcher

questions the assumptions underpinning knowledge claims and how they influence research design, research practice, theory generation, and how we write our research accounts” (Cunliffe, 2016, p. 745). As a practice, reflexivity can also be defined as social norms and expectations (Adkins, 2003), and it is social marketers’ responsibility to integrate an understanding of this into interpreting the findings. By engaging in this critically reflexive practice, one can understand and account for the impact of various influencing factors, including from themselves, participants and those resulting from societal constructs, which could fall outside the social marketers’ immediate control. This contributes to ensuring the rigour of the research process (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

Critical reflexivity can also be conceptualised as a spiral model where different components of the research process are interlaced with the role of the self (Mao *et al.*, 2016). The authors refer to the research’s ongoing and interactive nature and the relationship between social marketers and external influences. As Mao *et al.* (2016) write, “critical reflexivity is a constant, dynamic and infinite form of researcher critical consciousness,” which speaks to the non-linear process that characterises reflexivity (Popoveniuc, 2014) and emphasises it is an iterative process that is pertinent to embrace at all stages of the social marketing process. Additionally, social marketers must be aware that in “complex, multi-stakeholder and culturally diverse contexts, it is important to account for collective relationships and reflexive processes to understand social subjectivities and possibilities for social change” (Kariippanon *et al.*, 2020, p. 124). Therefore, this underlies our suggestion that critically reflexive practice should adopt both an internal and external focus in social marketing and incorporate multiple types of reflexivity to successfully review and revise a campaign and to aid in overcoming potential failures.

Self-reflexivity does not fully explore the idea of power dynamics between social marketers and the participants unless combined with collective reflexivity (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015). Instead, this is often proposed under *critical reflexivity*, where those involved must acknowledge the role of power (Mao *et al.*, 2016). However, power dynamics may be obscured by the seemingly abstract nature of how reflexivity is discussed within research (Ang, 1989); this is consistent with references to reflexivity within extant social marketing literature. We suggest that the role of power should be considered at a broader scale than solely between social marketers and the participants, extending to the systemic and structural characteristics of the wider context in which social marketing interventions occur, thus overlapping with the external influences that are so often the focus of emancipatory CSM themes.

Applying a reflexive approach to social marketing practice to overcome potential failures

Failures within social marketing are attributed to varying stages of the planning, design and implementation process (Cook *et al.*, 2021); therefore, different types of reflexivity are appropriate for these stages. To address this, we present a typology (Table 2) that recognises the complexities accompanying such practice and those within the wider context. It is important to highlight that the proposed typology does not suggest reflexivity solves all issues around failure. Rather, this typology aims to identify key areas where reflexivity can be integrated into practice to avoid reliance on a *one-size-fits-all* solution. Furthermore, it should be noted that we adopt a linear view to describe the social marketing process as proposed by National Social Marketing Centre (NSMC) (2010). We recognise, though, that the process is rarely linear in practice and will involve a more dynamic approach depending on the context. However, we argue that this highlights the need for reflexive practice as part of the process even more. We structured the discussion according to the stages of

Typology for reflexive social marketing practice	Types of reflexivity				
	Discursive	Collaborative	Self-reflexivity	Methodological	Emotional
<i>Social marketing planning process</i>					
Formative research		X		X	X
Segmentation and stakeholders selection		X		X	
Strategy development and material selection	X	X		X	X
Message development	X	X		X	
Monitoring	X	X		X	X
Pre- and post-evaluation	X	X		X	X
Source: Authors' own work					

Table 2.
Typology for a
reflexive approach to
social marketing
practice

NSMC's (2010) process and presented a series of testable propositions to identify where reflexivity can be applied (note that the NSMC's process adopted for this study is already well-researched and so we did not explain the process; instead, it is used to explain how reflexivity can be embedded within the process).

Formative research

Formative research is complex and often involves multiple iterations of ideas (Henley *et al.*, 2011). Despite a wealth of research emphasising its importance (Hull *et al.*, 2013), inadequate formative research continues to be cited as a reason for failures within social marketing practice (Deshpande, 2022; Cook *et al.*, 2021). As such, formative research should be emphasised as an essential part of the planning and design stage before implementation; engaging with more rigorous reflexive practice may help combat these failures. With the overarching methodological goal of creating better outcomes (Barry *et al.*, 1999), social marketers must engage in self-reflexivity from a methodological perspective by ensuring that formative research is propagated as a fundamental part of the initial planning. However, this should not be viewed as a tick-box exercise; the quality of formative research is of great significance (Lefebvre and Flora, 1988). As such, safeguards and quality control practices should be in place to ensure the scientific rigour of this early research.

It has been suggested that involving the target group in the formative research stage is advantageous (Buyucek *et al.*, 2016) to inform the development of the intervention and aid in reaching the target group. Yet, perhaps most importantly, this is vital as misunderstanding the target segment could result in intervention failure (Akbar *et al.*, 2021b). Therefore, we argue that to improve the likelihood of intervention success (at least in reaching the target group), that group should be involved during formative research. This ensures that the target group is effectively engaged and ultimately reached, thus increasing the likelihood of a successful intervention. However, the target group is not the only relevant group at this stage; the involvement of various stakeholders can lead to more favourable outcomes (Willmott *et al.*, 2022), including the message development stage (as part of the programme design), which can be linked to the concept of co-creation (Domegan *et al.*, 2013; Lefebvre, 2012; Willmott *et al.*, 2022). This deviates somewhat from the focus on collaborative reflexivity within the methodological literature, which invariably pertains to the involvement of participants (Pillow, 2003; Harley *et al.*, 2004). However, involving other stakeholders benefits the formative research process and allows for greater insight into how to reach the intended audience.

We also argue the significance of the role of emotions in effective formative research, and integrating emotional reflexivity into the process allows social marketers to understand the impact of emotions within research, thus linking this to methodological reflexivity. Not only are social marketers' emotions relevant, but as the construction of knowledge is achieved via both social marketers and the participants, all agents' emotions should also be considered, which is further connected to collaborative reflexivity (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015). Overall, our exploration of the important role of formative research within social marketing suggests a strong link between methodological, collaborative and emotional reflexivity. As such, we propose that:

- P1a.* Formative research should be conducted in conjunction with various stakeholders, considering the methods used and emotional biases of all involved, thus drawing on methodological, collaborative and emotional reflexive practice.

The program budget should also be considered for two principal reasons. Firstly, there are preconceptions that a budget should be spent in the implementation stage, resulting in the

neglect of formative research (French, 2017). Such preconceptions and biases are also impacted by external influences, including upstream components (Wymer, 2011), which may include funders and their expectations regarding how funds should be used. Therefore, how these preconceptions may impact the research should be questioned, including examining social marketer's behaviours but acknowledging that they may have relatively little influence over such components. Secondly, the much-discussed idea of power (Gordon, 2018) requires further exploration as, within the reflexivity literature, power dynamics are considered between social marketers and participants (Pillow, 2003). Though some reference has been made to the power of funders (Gordon, 2018), this could be examined further. Perceptions of power dynamics could influence how the research is conducted (Gurrieri *et al.*, 2013). As such, engaging in critical reflexivity means considering biases and what informs behaviours. We propose that critical reflexivity is also an important part of the formative research stage because the power issue can be linked with understanding and selecting stakeholders and ultimately to decision-making on the intervention (Kubacki *et al.*, 2020). It can be addressed in conjunction with stakeholder management, but the wider socio-cultural and systemic environment must also be understood (Gordon, 2018). Introducing this from the beginning of the process means social marketers are more likely to embed this understanding of the wider context and its influence into their decisions. As such, we propose that:

- P1b.* A critically reflexive stance should also be adopted at the formative research stage to consider external forces and their potentially biasing effects.

Segmentation and stakeholder selection

Segmentation is a strategy used in social marketing to divide the target audience into smaller groups based on their needs, behaviours, preferences and other socio-cultural characteristics to create more relevant and personalised interventions (Dietrich *et al.*, 2017). However, inadequate segmentation in terms of a lack of understanding of the target audience and wider stakeholders often results in poor intervention design (Akbar *et al.*, 2023). Assumptions regarding the target audience could impact segmentation techniques used in the early stages, and ongoing research is essential to understand how their needs may change over time (Akbar *et al.*, 2021c). We have also noted that interacting with the target audience is a critical element of social marketing practice (Buyucek *et al.*, 2016), as interactions are discursive (Pagis, 2009). The role of language in understanding social problems and, importantly, which strategies can be adopted to overcome these problems is central to integrating reflexivity into practice to help deal with bias and preconceptions.

Reflexivity is particularly important in identifying cognitive biases that social marketers may hold. As Greene (2014, p. 2) writes, “despite the influence of one’s theoretical and cultural viewpoints and the importance of acknowledging one’s own biases, researchers rarely address their position in their research.” This requires a self-awareness closely associated with self-reflexivity (Barry *et al.*, 1999; Pagis, 2009). Furthermore, a collaborative approach within the team (Barry *et al.*, 1999) or between social marketers and the target audience can help identify and address biases and preconceptions that any individual involved in the process may hold. The key is to be aware of them, and engaging in collaborative reflexive practice could improve the likelihood that these are then addressed, reducing their impact on the intervention. Such preconceptions are not limited to a single stage within the social marketing process; in early formative stages, biases could result in a lack of understanding (Wymer, 2011) and poor segmentation (Dietrich *et al.*, 2017) such failures can be amplified and continued as an intervention develops. We therefore suggest:

- P2. Segmenting the market to ensure the intervention effectively reaches the intended audience requires closely examining the methodology used and working in conjunction with relevant parties; therefore, the segmentation stage should involve methodological and collaborative reflexivity.

Strategy development and material selection

Strategy development aims to advance a plan that builds on formative research findings (Grier and Bryant, 2005), and it is likely less informed when formative research and segmentation are neglected (Akbar *et al.*, 2021b). Consequently, social marketers must engage in reflexive practice regarding the strategy at all stages. In developing behaviour change objectives and adopting techniques for messaging and material (Grier and Bryant, 2005), social marketers must consider their position from both an internal and external perspective.

From an internal perspective, materials pertaining to the design and language used based on segmentation (thus requiring discursive reflexivity), ongoing collaboration to ensure the strategy and material selection are aligned with all parties involved (hinting at collaborative reflexivity) and is also an iterative process that requires multiple perspectives at various timepoints (which also points to methodological reflexivity). Therefore, we propose that:

- P3a. Strategy development and the selection of materials involve discursive, collaborative and methodological reflexive practice.

Critical reflexivity involves understanding the wider context within which the research is being conducted (Harley *et al.*, 2004) and can pertain to cultural, societal and political components (Palaganas *et al.*, 2017), which can impact strategy development. The development of a strategy is inevitably impacted by upstream factors, which may affect how the social marketer approaches the process. Consequently, we suggest critically reflexive practice, where assumptions and biases based on these external factors are examined and understood, is necessary to alleviate challenges otherwise raised through poor strategy development:

- P3b. In the strategy development stage, social marketers should adopt an external focus and engage in critical reflexivity.

Message development

Similar to material selection, message development “is constituted by messages and the dynamic and iterative process of creating, disseminating, and sharing meaning” (Mattson and Basu, 2010, p. 276). Drawing on the Message Development Tool from Mattson and Basu (2010), this process involves understanding the target audience, their needs, language preferences, attitude towards the behaviour in question, etc., and understanding how the message will be delivered (which will vary according to the intended recipient) and pre-testing. This highlights the importance of language (a reference to discursive reflexivity) when designing a unique message that reaches the target audience, collaboration within the working group (a reference to collaborative reflexivity) and constantly reworking a message through pre-testing, meaning this must be integrated into the methodological approach (a reference to methodological reflexivity). Drawing on the idea of the *internal conversation* that we have when making sense of all aspects of life (Burkitt, 2012), emotions also play an important role. We argue that this is more so the case regarding language and the potentially emotionally charged topics often addressed via social marketing interventions.

Therefore, emotional reflexivity should also be considered in the message development process. The message is arguably one of the most important components as it is the culmination of the earlier stages of the process (i.e. formative research, segmentation and strategy development) and is the public-facing element of the campaign. Consequently, engaging in reflexive practice here is of utmost importance. We propose:

- P4.* Message development should involve discursive, methodological, collaborative and emotional reflexive practice.

Monitoring and pre- and post-evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are ongoing (Henley *et al.*, 2011) and must provide feedback on the process used. The aim of using reflexivity in the monitoring and evaluation stage is to improve the research process and offer new insights into how research should be conducted (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008). This awareness associated with *self-reflexivity* that the social marketers require to engage in this process refers to the idea that the research is markedly better due to reflexive practice (Barry *et al.*, 1999). As such, by engaging in methodological reflexivity as part of both monitoring and evaluation, the social marketer is arguably better equipped to envisage any issues that could result in failure. Involving the participants and other stakeholders in this process, thus engaging in collaborative reflexivity, would similarly benefit all parties and, indeed, the process itself. The participants would continue to contribute via the co-creation of knowledge (Finlay, 2002) but in the latter evaluative stages of the social marketing process.

Qualitative evaluation is inherently subjective and, therefore, subject to misinterpretation (Thomas, 2017). The evaluation process inevitably involves the social marketer's interpretation of findings (Malafarina and Loken, 1993). As interactions throughout the process are primarily discursive (Pagis, 2009), how language is understood and how meaning is derived is central to the conclusions drawn and evaluations made. Therefore, engaging in discursive reflexive practice is essential for monitoring and evaluation. Discursive reflexivity ensures social marketers can consider different possible meanings, closely linked to reflexivity as holography and understanding a single phenomenon from the perspective of multiple paradigms (Harley *et al.*, 2004). This multi-perspectival approach to language interpretation is enhanced when combined with collaborative reflexivity, and it is participants who are arguably best equipped to offer insight into the true meaning of the language they have used. Again, this highlights how varying types of reflexivity applied within the social marketing process complement each other to improve the work (Barry *et al.*, 1999). Therefore, we propose the following:

- P5a.* Ongoing monitoring of the intervention requires discursive, collaborative and methodological reflexivity.
- P5b.* Monitoring an intervention should involve a constant understanding of the influence of external factors, thus necessitating critical reflexivity.
- P6a.* As an ongoing process, the evaluation of the intervention would benefit from an internal focus on language and methodology, thus adopting the discursive, collaborative and methodological reflexive practice.
- P6b.* Evaluation of interventions should also integrate a critical perspective into the process to examine the role of external factors, and this can be achieved through critical reflexivity.

Stages of NSMC's (2010) process	Questions for social marketers	Additional guidance
Formative research	• How are all stakeholders engaged in the formative research? • How are methodological decisions made? • Has the implication of such methodological decisions been considered? • How are the emotions of involved stakeholders considered? • How are the power dynamics and biases of internal and external stakeholders considered?	• Reflect on the process (initial discussion, communication, data collection, etc.) used to involve various stakeholders in the formative research • Reflect on the role and power of each stakeholder and how it influences the intervention • Reflect on how the biasing effects are controlled
Segmentation and stakeholders selection	• How is the right approach to methodology used to choose the most appropriate segment? • How are the biases and preconceptions about behaviour that need changing controlled?	• Reflect on the target audiences, their needs, behaviours and biases/barriers (of target audience and social marketers) that may affect the intervention
Strategy development and material selection	• Is the language used for the intervention's material suitable for the chosen segment? • How can the implication(s) of the language used for the intervention's material be assessed? • Is the material used for the intervention appropriate for the chosen segment? • Is the approach used for methodological decisions in strategy and material development suitable for the chosen segment? • How is the role of external factors that may impact the intervention considered?	• Reflect on the language used for the material development and whether it is aligned with the target audience's needs, backgrounds, etc.
Message development	• Which process is used to develop the messages for the intervention, and is the language of messaging the method used for testing the messages, and the sensitivity of the messaging considered?	• Reflect on the language used for messaging/communication/marketing/promotion of the intervention and whether it is aligned with the target audiences' needs, backgrounds, etc.

Table 3.
Questions for social
marketers

(continued)

Table 3.

Stages of NSMC's (2010) process	Questions for social marketers	Additional guidance
Monitoring and pre- and post-evaluation	• How are the internal factors (such as language, biases, preconceptions, sensitivity of the subject under scrutiny, etc.) considered and assessed? • How are the external factors, such as the power of funders, considered and assessed?	• Reflect on how biasing effects are controlled during monitoring and evaluation

Source: Authors' own work

The types of reflexivity presented in [Table 2](#) are interconnected, and a synergy between these types can offer a strong combination to overcome some failures in practice or reduce their likelihood. We argue that different types of reflexivity should be deployed to overcome some failures in social marketing practice; however, the proposed typology should not be seen as exhaustive. Similarly, no claims are made that any types of reflexivity presented in the typology are superior to the others, only that such reflexive approaches would be appropriate for practice, and they are, in fact, complementary. To aid social marketers, we present a series of questions in [Table 3](#) that should be considered at various stages of the process. These questions require social marketers to adopt a reflexive approach and a holistic view of the social marketing process.

Conclusion

This paper presents a new typology for a reflexive approach towards social marketing to aid in overcoming failures. The proposed typology is the first of its kind in social marketing and opens the dialogue on conceptualising reflexivity in the field. More specifically, it would allow social marketers to reflect on their power, authority, personal biases, interpretation of language and perception of the target audiences and the undesired behaviour under scrutiny. We also present a series of questions that social marketers should ask themselves to engage in reflexive practice as they progress through the social marketing process. These questions refer to the multiple types of reflexivity that our typology proposes are relevant to each stage, thus highlighting our paper's theoretical and practical contributions.

Limitations

The proposed typology is limited to only two major umbrella types of reflexivity (i.e. self- and critical reflexivity). Future research could extend our typology by conducting a thorough and systematic literature review to find additional reflexive approaches that may be integrated into this typology. Such a literature review would benefit from a focus on empirical evidence as this typology was developed based on conceptual papers, thus, to an extent, limiting its application to a practical setting. Consequently, the practical social marketing implications and relevance can be further enhanced by expanding the search for other forms of reflexivity and combining this with a focus on actual data collection. This could also be explored in greater depth in a practical setting to better understand the application of reflexive practice at different stages of the social marketing process.

References

- Adkins, L. (2003), "Reflexivity: Freedom or habit of gender?", *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 20 No. 6, pp. 21-42, doi: [10.1177/0263276403206002](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276403206002).
- Akbar, M.B., Foote, L. and Lawson, A. (2023), "Conceptualising, embracing, and measuring failure in social marketing practice", *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 29 No. 3, doi: [10.1177/15245004231187134](https://doi.org/10.1177/15245004231187134).
- Akbar, M.B., Ndupu, L.B., French, J. and Lawson, A. (2021c), "Social marketing: advancing a new planning framework to guide programmes", *RAUSP Management Journal*, Vol. 56 No. 3, pp. 266-281, doi: [10.1108/RAUSP-08-2020-0186](https://doi.org/10.1108/RAUSP-08-2020-0186).
- Akbar, M.B., Foote, L., Soraghan, C., Millard, R. and Spotswood, F. (2021b), "What causes social marketing programs to fail? A qualitative study", *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 1-18, doi: [10.1177/15245004211010202](https://doi.org/10.1177/15245004211010202).
- Akbar, M.B., Garnelo-Gomez, I., Ndupu, L., Barnes, E. and Foster, C. (2021a), "An analysis of social marketing practice: factors associated with success", *Health Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 356-376, doi: [10.1080/07359683.2021.1997525](https://doi.org/10.1080/07359683.2021.1997525).
- Alvesson, M., Hardy, C. and Harley, B. (2008), "Reflecting on reflexivity: reflexive textual practices in organisation and management theory", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 45 No. 3, pp. 480-501.
- Andreasen, A.R. (ed.) (2006), *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, Sage, London.
- Ang, I. (1989), "Beyond Self-Reflexivity", *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 27-29, doi: [10.1177/019685998901300205](https://doi.org/10.1177/019685998901300205).
- Arkesteijn, M., van Mierlo, B. and Leeuwis, C. (2015), "The need for reflexive evaluation approaches in development cooperation", *Evaluation*, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 99-115.
- Barry, C.A., Britten, N., Barber, N., Bradley, C. and Stevenson, F. (1999), "Using reflexivity to optimise teamwork in qualitative research", *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 26-44.
- Beckett, A. and Nayak, A. (2008), "The reflexive consumer", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 299-317.
- Bettany, S. and Burton, W.H. (2006), "Steps towards transformative consumer research practice: a taxonomy of possible reflexivities", in Connie Pechmann and Linda Price (Eds), *NA – Advances in Consumer Research*, 33, Association for Consumer Research, Pages, Duluth, MN, pp. 227-234.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984), Routledge, *Distinction*, London.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990), *In Other Words: Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, Cambridge, Polity.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2020), "One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis?", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 1-25, doi: [10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238](https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238).
- Brough, A.R., Donnelly, G.E., Griskevicius, V., Markowitz, E.M., Raimi, K.T., Reeck, C., Trudel, R., Waldman, K.B., Winterich, K.P. and Wolske, K.S. (2020), "Understanding how sustainability initiatives fail: a framework to aid design of effective interventions", *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 309-324.
- Burkitt, I. (2012), "Emotional reflexivity: feeling, emotion and imagination in reflexive dialogues", *Sociology*, Vol. 46 No. 3, pp. 458-472.
- Burton, D. (2001), "Critical marketing theory: the blueprint?", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 35 Nos 5/6, pp. 722-743, doi: [10.1108/03090560110388187](https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560110388187).
- Buyucek, N., Kubacki, K., Rundle-Thiele, S. and Pang, B. (2016), "A systematic review of stakeholder involvement in social marketing interventions", *Australasian Marketing Journal*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 8-19.
- Cheng, T., Woon, D.K. and Lynes, J.K. (2011), "The use of message framing in the promotion of environmentally sustainable behaviors", *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 48-62.

-
- Collins, C.S. and Stockton, C.M. (2018), "The Central role of theory in qualitative research", *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 17 No. 1, doi: [10.1177/1609406918797475](https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918797475).
- Cook, J., Fries, S. and Lynes, J. (2020), "Checking our blind spots: the most common mistakes made by social marketers", *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 14-27.
- Cook, J., Lynes, J. and Fries, S. (2021), "Exploring mistakes and failures in social marketing: the inside story", *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 13-31.
- Cooper, N. and Burnett, S. (2006), "Using discursive reflexivity to enhance the qualitative research process: an example from accounts of teenage conception", *Qualitative Social Work*, Vol. 5 No. 1, p. 111e129, doi: [10.1177/1473325006061541](https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325006061541).
- Cunliffe, A.L. (2016), "On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner, redux: what does it mean to be reflexive?", *Journal of Management Education*, Vol. 40 No. 6, pp. 740-746.
- Deshpande, S. (2022), "Celebrating lessons learned from 'unsuccessful' social marketing interventions", *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 3-7.
- Dietrich, T., Rundle-Thiele, S. and Kubacki, K. (2017), *Segmentation in Social Marketing*, Springer, Gateway.
- Domegan, C., Collins, K., Stead, M., McHugh, P. and Hughes, T. (2013), "Value co-creation in social marketing: functional or fanciful?", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 3 No. 3, pp. 239-256.
- Finlay, L. (2002), "Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice", *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 209-230.
- French, J. (2017), "The importance of segmentation in social marketing strategy", *Segmentation in Social Marketing*, Springer, Singapore.
- French, J. and Gordon, R. (2020), *Strategic Social Marketing for Behaviour and Social Change*, 2nd ed., Sage Publications Inc.
- Garg, N., Govind, R. and Nagpal, A. (2021), "Message framing effects on food consumption: a social marketing perspective", *Australian Journal of Management*, Vol. 46 No. 4, p. 0312896221989398.
- Geertz, C. (1975), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Chicago University Press, Chicago.
- Gilmore, S. and Kenny, K. (2015), "Work-worlds colliding: self-reflexivity, power and emotion in organisational ethnography", *Human Relations*, Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 55-78.
- Gordon, R. (2011), "Critical social marketing: definition, application and domain", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 82-99.
- Gordon, R. (2018), "Critical social marketing: Reflections, introspections, and future directions", in Tadjewski, M., Higgins, M., Dholakia, N., Denegri-Knott J. and Varman, R. (Eds), *The Routledge Companion to Critical Marketing*, Routledge, pp. 83-97.
- Gordon, R. and Gurrieri, L. (2014), "Towards a reflexive turn: social marketing assemblages", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 261-278.
- Gordon, R., Butler, K., Cooper, P., Waitt, G. and Magee, C. (2018), "Look before you LIEEP: practicalities of using ecological systems social", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 99-119, doi: [10.1108/JSOCM-04-2016-0017](https://doi.org/10.1108/JSOCM-04-2016-0017).
- Gordon, R., Russell-Bennett, R. and Lefebvre, R.C. (2016), "Social marketing: the state of play and brokering the way forward", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 32 No. 11-12, pp. 1059-1082, doi: [10.1080/0267257X.2016.1199156](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2016.1199156).
- Gordon, R., Spotswood, F. and Dibb, S. (2022), "Critical social marketing: towards emancipation?", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 38 No. 11-12, pp. 1043-1071, doi: [10.1080/0267257X.2022.2131058](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2022.2131058).
- Gountas, J., Gountas, S., Ciorciari, J. and Sharma, P. (2019), "Looking beyond traditional measures of advertising impact: using neuroscientific methods to evaluate social marketing messages", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 105, pp. 121-135.
- Greene, M.J. (2014), "On the inside looking in: Methodological insights and challenges in conducting qualitative insider research", *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 19 No. 29, pp. 1-13.

- Grier, S. and Bryant, C.A. (2005), "Social marketing in public health", *Annual Review of Public Health*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 319-339.
- Guillemin, M. and Gillam, L. (2004), "Ethics, reflexivity, and 'ethically important moments' in research", *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 261-280.
- Gurrieri, L., Previte, J. and Brace-Govan, J. (2013), "Women's bodies as sites of control: inadvertent stigma and exclusion in social marketing", *Journal of Macromarketing*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 128-143.
- Harley, M., Hardy, C. and Alvesson, M. (2004), "Reflecting on reflexivity", *Academy of Management Best Conference Paper CMS*.
- Hastings, G. (2003), "Relational paradigms in social marketing", *Journal of Macromarketing*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 6-15.
- Hastings, G. (2009), *Critical Social Marketing. Social Marketing and Public Health: Theory and Practice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Hastings, G. and Domegan, C. (2017), *Social Marketing: Rebels with a Cause*, Routledge.
- Henley, N., Raffin, S. and Caemmerer, B. (2011), "The application of marketing principles to a social marketing campaign", *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, Vol. 29 No. 7, pp. 697-706, doi: [10.1108/02634501111178712](https://doi.org/10.1108/02634501111178712).
- Hibbert, P., Callagher, L., Siedlok, F., Windahl, C. and Kim, H.S. (2019), "(Engaging or avoiding) change through reflexive practices", *Journal of Management Inquiry*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 187-203.
- Holmes, M. (2010), "The emotionalisation of reflexivity", *Sociology*, Vol. 44 No. 1, pp. 139-154.
- Holmes, M. (2015), "Researching emotional reflexivity", *Emotion Review*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 61-66.
- Hull, S.J., Gasiorowicz, M., Hollander, G. and Short, K. (2013), "Using theory to inform practice: the role of formative research in the construction and implementation of the acceptance journeys social marketing campaign to reduce homophobia", *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 19 No. 3, pp. 139-155.
- Jungmann, R., Baur, N. and Ametowobla, D. (2015), "Grasping processes of innovation empirically – a call for expanding the methodological toolkit: an introduction", *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 7-29.
- Kariippanon, K., Gordon, R., Jayasinghe, L. and Gurruwiwi, G. (2020), "Collective reflexivity in social marketing through ethnographic filmmaking: the Yolngu story of tobacco in Yirrkala, Australia", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 123-143.
- Kemp, G. and Eagle, L. (2008), "Shared meanings or missed opportunities? The implications of functional health literacy for social marketing interventions", *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 117-128.
- Kleinsasser, A.M. (2000), "Researchers, reflexivity, and good data: writing to unlearn", *Theory into Practice*, Vol. 39 No. 3, pp. 155-162.
- Koch, T. and Harrington, A. (1998), "Reconceptualising rigour: the case for reflexivity", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 28 No. 4, pp. 882-890.
- Kubacki, K., Szablewska, N. and Siemieniako, D. (2020), "Ethical tension in working with stakeholders", *Stakeholder Involvement in Social Marketing*, Routledge, pp. 25-38.
- Lee, N.R. and Kotler, P. (2020), *Social Marketing: Behavior Change for Social Good*, 6th ed., Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lefebvre, R.C. (2011), "An integrative model for social marketing", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 54-72.
- Lefebvre, R.C. (2012), "Transformative social marketing: co-creating the social marketing discipline and brand", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 118-129.
- Lefebvre, R.C. and Flora, J.A. (1988), "Social marketing and public health intervention", *Health Education Quarterly*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 299-315.

-
- Lin, M.M. (2014), "Key success factors in enterprises practicing social marketing", *Revista Internacional de Sociologia*, Vol. 72 No. Extra_2, pp. 33-41, doi: [10.3989/ris.2013.08.07](https://doi.org/10.3989/ris.2013.08.07).
- McHugh, P. and Domegan, C. (2017), "Evaluate development! develop evaluation! answering the call for a reflexive turn in social marketing", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 135-155, doi: [10.1108/JSOCM-10-2016-0063](https://doi.org/10.1108/JSOCM-10-2016-0063).
- Maibach, E.W., Nisbet, M., Baldwin, P., Akerlof, K. and Diao, G. (2010), "Reframing climate change as a public health issue: an exploratory study of public reactions", *BMC Public Health*, Vol. 10 No. 1.
- Malafarina, K. and Loken, B. (1993), "Progress and limitations of social marketing: a review of empirical literature on the consumption of social ideas", in Leigh McAlister and Michael, L. (Eds), *NA – Advances in Consumer Research*, 20, Association for Consumer Research, Pages, Rothschild, Provo, UT, pp. 397-404.
- Mao, L., Mian Akram, A., Chovanec, D. and Underwood, M.L. (2016), "Embracing the spiral: Researcher reflexivity in diverse critical methodologies", *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 15 No. 1, doi: [1609406916681005](https://doi.org/10.1609406916681005).
- Marcus, G.E. (1994), "What comes (just) after 'post': the case of ethnography", in NK. Denzin and YS. Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Mattson, M. and Basu, A. (2010), "The message development tool: a case for effective operationalisation of messaging in social marketing practice", *Health Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 275-290.
- National Social Marketing Centre (NSMC) (2010), *Social Marketing Planning Guide and Toolbox*, NSMC, London.
- Nordentoft, H.M. and Olesen, B.R. (2018), "A critical reflexive perspective on othering in collaborative knowledge production", *Qualitative Research Journal*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 55-66, doi: [10.1108/QRJ-D-17-00007](https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-D-17-00007).
- Pagis, M. (2009), "Embodied self-reflexivity", *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 72 No. 3, pp. 265-283.
- Palaganas, E.C., Sanchez, M.C., Molintas, V.P. and Caricativo, R.D. (2017), "Reflexivity in qualitative research: a journey of learning", *Qualitative Report*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 426-438.
- Pezalla, A.E., Pettigrew, J. and Miller-Day, M. (2012), "Researching the researcher-as-instrument: an exercise in interviewer self-reflexivity", *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 165-185.
- Pillow, W. (2003), "Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research", *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 175-196.
- Popoveniuc, B. (2014), "Self-reflexivity", *The Ultimate End of Knowledge. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 163, pp. 204-213.
- Rossmann, G.B. and Rallis, S.F. (2017), *An Introduction to Qualitative Research: Learning in the Field*, 4th Ed, Sage Publications, Inc.
- Saren, M. (2009), "Modes of engagement for critical marketing: oppositional, revivalist and therapeutic", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 25 Nos 7/8, pp. 843-848, doi: [10.1362/026725709X471686](https://doi.org/10.1362/026725709X471686).
- Spotswood, F., Chatterton, T., Morey, Y. and Spear, S. (2017), "Practice-theoretical possibilities for social marketing: two fields learning from each other", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 156-171, doi: [10.1108/JSOCM-10-2016-0057](https://doi.org/10.1108/JSOCM-10-2016-0057).
- Stead, M. and McDermott, R. (2011), "Evaluation in social marketing", in Hastings, G., Angus, K. and Bryant, C. (Eds), *The Sage Handbook of Social Marketing*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 193-207.
- Stead, M., Gordon, R., Angus, K. and McDermott, L. (2007), "A systematic review of social marketing effectiveness", *Health Education*, Vol. 107 No. 2, pp. 126-140.
- Thomas, D.R. (2017), "Feedback from research participants: are member checks useful in qualitative research?", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 23-41.
- Wiley, N. (1994), *The Semiotic Self*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.

- Willmott, T.J., Mathew, A., Luck, E., Rundle-Thiele, S., Carins, J., Vincze, L., Williams, L. and Ball, L. (2022), "Participatory design application in obesity prevention targeting young adults and adolescents: a mixed-methods systematic scoping review protocol", *Syst Rev*, Vol. 11 No. 1, p. 51.
- Wymer, W. (2011), "Developing more effective social marketing strategies", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 17-31, doi: [10.1108/20426761111104400](https://doi.org/10.1108/20426761111104400).

Further reading

- Day, S. (2012), "A reflexive lens: exploring dilemmas of qualitative methodology through the concept of reflexivity", *Qualitative Sociology Review*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 60-85.
- Badejo, F.A., Rundle-Thiele, S. and Kubacki, K. (2019), "Taking a wider view: a formative multi-stream social", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 467-484, doi: [10.1108/JSOCM-10-2017-0062](https://doi.org/10.1108/JSOCM-10-2017-0062).
- Bourdieu, P. (2007), *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Duke University Press, pp. 189-198.
- Brace-Govan, J. (2015), "Faces of power, ethical decision-making and moral intensity: reflections on the need for critical social marketing", in Wymer, W. (Ed.), *Innovations in Social Marketing and Public Health Communication: Improving the Quality of Life for Individuals and Communities*, Springer International Publishing, pp. 107-132.
- Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, D.J. (2018), *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed., Sage Publications, Inc.
- Gordon, R., McDermott, L., Stead, M. and Angus, K. (2006), "The effectiveness of social marketing interventions for health improvement: what's the evidence?", *Public Health*, Vol. 120 No. 12, pp. 1133-1139.
- Gurrieri, L., Gordon, R., Barraket, J., Joyce, A. and Green, C. (2018), "Social marketing and social movements: creating inclusive social change coalitions", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 8 No. 4, pp. 354-377, doi: [10.1108/JSOCM-12-2016-0078](https://doi.org/10.1108/JSOCM-12-2016-0078).
- International Social Marketing Association (2017), "Global consensus on social marketing principles, concepts and techniques".
- Kotler, P. and Armstrong, G. (2006), *Principles of Marketing: 11E*, Prentice-Hall Video Gallery.
- Martam, I. (2016), "Commentary: Strategic social marketing to foster gender equality in Indonesia", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 32 Nos 11/12, pp. 1174-1182.
- McHugh, P., Domegan, C. and Duane, S. (2018), "Protocols for stakeholder participation in social marketing systems", *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 164-193.
- Peattie, K., Peattie, S. and Newcombe, R. (2016), "Unintended consequences in demarketing antisocial behaviour: project Bernie", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 32 Nos 17/18, pp. 1588-1618.
- Rundle-Thiele, S.R., Dietrich, T. and Carins, J. (2021), "CBE: a framework to guide the application of marketing to behavior change", *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 1-20, doi: [10.1177/15245004211021643](https://doi.org/10.1177/15245004211021643).
- Spotswood, F., French, J., Tapp, A. and Stead, M. (2012), "Some reasonable but uncomfortable questions about social marketing", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 2 No. 3, pp. 163-175, doi: [10.1108/20426761211265168](https://doi.org/10.1108/20426761211265168).
- Weick, K.E. (1999), "Theory construction as disciplined reflexivity: Tradeoffs in the 90s", *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 24 No. 4, pp. 797-806.

Corresponding author

M. Bilal Akbar can be contacted at: m.akbar@ntu.ac.uk

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com