

# SOCIAL MARKETING AS A STRATEGY TO FOSTER READING HABITS IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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— Abstract—

The objective of this article is to determine which Social Marketing strategies should be more appropriate in order to foster reading habits in university students. This is a quantitative, cross-sectional correlated study. Results show that university students are below the national average of books read per year, according to national surveys. They are aware of the lack of reading habits and that reading campaigns have not been successful despite the efforts. Results also show that the participants prefer printed book versions, contrary to what was expected, preferably literature related themes, and access to reading materials via social media. Specific actions are suggested according to participants' preferences so reading habits can be fostered through Social Marketing Strategies in order to make students aware of the positive impact reading has in their personal as well as in their professional life.

**Keywords**

*Reading habits; strategy; marketing mix; social marketing; social media; promotion.*

Social Marketing has taken on great importance over the years for companies and organizations. Kotler and Keller (2014:638) mention that it has been present through campaigns since 1950 in India, with family planning campaigns; 1970 in Sweden, with the No Smoking and No Drinking program; in Australia, with the Wearing a Seat Belt orientation or in Canada, with Say No to Drugs, Stop Smoking and Exercise.

In 1980 it was used by international organizations, such as the World Bank [WB], the World Health Organization [WHO] and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], which began promoting the term and encouraging interest in Social Marketing.

In the words of Paramo (2016) since the Industrial Revolution onwards, the use of Social Marketing made its way through the implementation of campaigns to abolish the imprisonment of debtors, grant women the right to vote, and the elimination of child labour.

The characteristic of Social Marketing is that the objective of the campaigns must be related to the knowledge, values, actions or behavior of people. Nowadays, it is even common to see promotional videos of companies, where instead of promoting their products or services, they show a local or global daily life issue, in order to raise awareness and sensitize the population about it.

The promotion of reading, a current problem within the university population, is also an objective of a Social Marketing campaign. In Mexico, similar campaigns have been carried out by the National Council for Culture and the Arts (CONACULTA), the Ministry of Public Education (SEP), the National Council on Science and Technology (CONACYT), the Council for Communication, among other national bodies. However, despite the efforts of the various agencies involved in this problem, there is no practice of reading, much less the habit of it, perhaps derived from the fact that illiteracy still exists today, which would explain why people do not even flip through a book (Aguilar, Cruz & Aguilar, 2014).

In the 2015 Intercensal Survey, conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), 119 million 530 thousand 753 inhabitants were counted in Mexico; of which "18 million people are potential readers, but the rest of the population does not read, does not buy books, does not go to the library often, Mexicans are indifferent to quality reading" (Aguilar, Cruz & Aguilar, 2014:110).

The objective of this article is to determine which Social Marketing strategies should be more appropriate in order to foster reading habits in university students. The study is quantitative, of correlational-causal cross-sectional design, with which preliminary information is obtained that seeks to give an answer to the hypothesis raised in the research.

## SOCIAL MARKETING STRATEGIES

The strategies that are commonly used for the sale of ideas, attitudes or behaviours, are aimed at improving the quality of life of any society (Torres & Granada, 2014). According to Forero (2009) and Góngora (2014), Social Marketing uses strategies typical of Commercial Marketing, however, other authors have considered it necessary to add others in order to provide it with a social focus.

Forero and Góngora divide them into four key elements called: product, price, place and promotion; with two additional elements: packaging and population for Forero, and presentation and population for Góngora, which together are called the *Marketing Mix*, known as the controllable variables of marketing or the 6 P's. These in turn are crossed and combined with the 6 C's or variables of analysis of Marketing: consumers, competitors, company, channels, costs and context, as shown in table 1.

For Gaitán & Ríos (2016), the *Marketing Mix* are controllable tactical tools, which an organisation integrates to obtain a desired response in the target market; it consists of the organisation capacity to influence the demand of its product.

**Table 1**  
*Social Marketing Elements*

6 "P"	6 "C"
Product: Promotion? Prevention?	Consumers: Who? How? What? Why?
Population: How to segment? Who to serve?	Competitors: How do they compete? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
Price: What is the price? What is the benefit?	Company: What are our strengths and weaknesses?
Place: Which community?	Channels: Distribution, How does it work? What are their relationships?
Presentation: Packaging, Who is involved? How? Where?	Costs: What is the cost? What is the benefit?
Promotion: Communication (publicity) What? When? How? Where?	Contexts: Which politic, economic, social and cultural variables?

Source: Adapted from Góngora (2014)

Marketers develop strategies to distribute manufactured goods, for which the terms are slightly modified as in the case of location or distribution and promotion by communication. For services, it is necessary to modify the original terminology, and instead talk about product element, place and time, price and other costs for the user, promotion and education.

Expanding the mix by adding four elements associated with service delivery: physical environment, process, people and productivity, and quality. These eight elements altogether, denominated the 7 P's of Service Marketing, symbolize the components needed to establish workable tactics that profitably address the needs of the marketplace (Silva, 2017).

The strategies implemented must be selected according to the type of campaign to be implemented, as well as the objective to be achieved. Table 2 below shows the types of campaign and the objective that each one pursues (Kotler & Keller, 2014):

**Table 2**  
*Example of social marketing campaign objectives*

Cognitive campaigns	Explain the nutritional value of different foods. Demonstrate the importance of environmental protection.
Action campaigns	Encourage participation in mass vaccination campaigns. Motivate people to vote in favor for something in a plebiscite. Motivate people to donate blood. Motivate women to get a Pap test.
Behavioral campaigns	Discourage smoking. Discourage drug use. Discourage excessive alcohol consumption.
Campaigns about values	Changing ideas about abortion. Change the attitude of intolerant people.

Source: Adapted from Kotler & Keller (2014)

## BENEFITS OF READING

History shows that civilizations pass on their knowledge from generation to generation, through the reading of documents, either handwritten or printed. This process includes the type of reading and the amount of time allocated to that activity (Rosli *et al.*, 2017).

Walia & Sinha (2014) state that reading is a process, a way of thinking and a real experience that involves many complex skills: a) the ability to perceive printed words, b) searching for information and c) reading intensively.

Reading improves thinking skills by acquiring new concepts and ideas, enriching the lexicon, which is essential in verbal communication (Kutay, 2014). Reading habits (Dolla *et al.*, 2017) play a major role in students' academic performance.

The act of reading should be a voluntary and enjoyable activity for the individual. When it is done in this way, the person finds satisfaction (Perez, Baute, & Luque, 2018). Reading is also a process that it is developed gradually. In table 3, Palacios (2014) points out five steps in this process:

**Table 3**  
*Steps in the reading process*

1 Perception	Recognition of graphic symbols by means of a specific technique.
2 Comprehension	Through this, the meaning of the written word is recognized; it is an intellectual capacity that makes it possible to create images in the mind that are transferred from the signs that are seen.
3 Interpretation	Ability to attribute a meaning to something.
4 Reaction	Capacity to manifest an attitude towards what is read; that is, it has to do with critical capacity and understanding.
5 Integration	Ability to establish value relationships between the ideas expressed and one's own thinking.

Source: Adapted from Palacios (2014)

## READING IN UNIVERSITY

The main thing, when reading, is not only based on the content of the reading, it must be taken into account the amount that is read, of what type and the reason why this activity is carried out. In universities, reading scientific documents such as journals or articles is essential. However, when young people enroll in universities, the process of teaching and learning is complicated by the lack of reading habits. In these cases, it is necessary to work assiduously in academic life (Quintero & Vela 2016).

In the university the habit of reading is a necessity, since the young person who does not have this pleasure will find it difficult to have a successful professional education. When a person reads, he develops various intellectual skills among which is reading comprehension, which should be considered a valuable tool to obtain and store knowledge (Arista & Paca, 2014).

## READING HABIT

Over the years, habits change as technology changes. Electronic reading has expanded by presenting diverse options. Although people are in the habit of reading, reading in electronic media is slower according to Dyson & Haselgrove (2001), demonstrating a relationship between speed and familiarity while reading on a computer.

Al Shehri & Gitsaki (2010) mention that there are studies that prove that, according to exposure or frequent contact with some electronic media along with the electronic quality of reading, reading speed increases.

Karadeniz & Can (2015) in their study, mention that there is a positive correlation between reading habits and literature in media; on the other hand, they mention that there is a negative correlation between reading habits and the habits of using social media as a reading medium in

the context where their study was conducted, making use of Gömleksiz's Attitude Scale Towards Reading Habit (2004) and Korkmaz & Yeşil's (2011) Media Literature Scale.

As for the National Reading and Writing Survey conducted by SEP (2015) it was obtained, in a multiple choice question, that 44.3% of the population that reads does so for entertainment and 30.5% to study, while only 11.8% does so for information and 11.3% for work. On the other hand, the data obtained from the question "Why don't we read or wouldn't we read? 79.9% mentioned that the main reason is the lack of time, followed by apathy with 21.3%, because they do not like it with 14.6%, the preference of other activities with 12.3% and only 11.5% because of tiredness.

Palacios (2014) classifies people who read depending on their reasons and purposes as follows in table 4:

**Table 4**  
*Readers' classification*

1 Extensive reader	Reads not only for utilitarian reasons, but also for fun and aesthetic pleasure. Likes to explore a wide variety of texts, and this preference increases his curiosity and need to know, as well as his selective ability and interest in increasingly complex texts. All this leads him to read not only in traditional media, but also on the Internet and in digital media.
2 Literary reader	It could be said that he has many of the characteristics of the extensive reader, such as his motivation for aesthetic enjoyment and his selective capacity.
3 Intensive reader	Spends less time reading, compared to extensive and literary readers, and focuses on newspapers and magazines rather than books. Usually specializes in some content related to their work or hobbies.
4 School reader	This category includes two subtypes. The first is made up of those whose reading activity is mainly directed at texts related to their studies, while the second subtype includes diversified school readers, who not only read texts for school, but also others related to extracurricular themes or hobbies.
5 Sporadic reader	Has little reading activity; reads books very occasionally, sometimes out of obligation. Does not read newspapers nor magazines, and almost never uses the Internet.
6 No reader	Never reads claims to have difficulty in understanding the content of texts. He never goes to libraries or bookstores.

Source: Adapted from Palacios (2014).

## PUBLISHING PREFERENCE

Publications are defined as all those documents that are read and contribute knowledge, they can be periodicals such as magazines, articles, manuscripts, newspapers, gazettes, among others, that have constant publication dates, and not periodicals such as books.

They can be catalogued, in turn, as academic, scientific, popular and entertainment documents, and in this technological era, they can be accessed

physically, that is, in print or digitally, as well as by so-called electronic. means. Today, blogs and social media are also considered as reading platforms.

For Jiménez (2011:93) "a manuscript is a document written by the authors of the study with the results of the research, which will become the original scientific article, unedited or unpublished version". He also mentions that the publication of a research in a scientific journal, brings new knowledge that has not been previously published.

Collado (2006), mentions that the first scientific journals date back to the 17th century and that at first they only did descriptive work, but as the centuries passed they became more specific, with the aim of presenting enough information so that the research can be replicated by other academic peers and compare the results obtained.

Today, electronic or digital publications are available in addition to printed ones, facilitating people's access to books, magazines, newspapers, among others, by moving the paper page to the screen (Palacios, 2014).

A printed publication is a "written material that uses primarily paper as a carrier, that exposes its content in a linear fashion, that assumes mainly the form of a magazine, book, pamphlet or newspaper, that is distributed partially or totally by means of copies and that intrinsically fulfils three pairs of functions: communication and dissemination, legitimization and authority, and archiving and memory" (Travieso, 2003:1).

According to the National Reading and Writing Survey (2015) carried out by the SEP, there is a diversification in reading materials and formats. Digital platforms and formats are increasingly preferred for reading, for example, in the case of comics, blogs and social media.

As a result, what do people read? (multiple answer), in first place are books with 57.3%, followed by newspapers with 55%, with 44.9% social media which indicates the impact that these have on the population over 12 years (age of respondents), continuing with magazines with 38%, websites with 25.2%, comics with 16.6% and finally blogs with 13.4%.

## METHODOLOGY

Based on the data obtained by the SEP and understanding the population's reading preferences, a data collection instrument was designed in electronic format, using the Google Forms platform. Through this collection and its statistical analysis, we sought to verify the hypothesis raised in the work.

The research was carried out in a non-experimental manner, with a correlational-causal cross-sectional design. The sample was taken from 3,816 university students from the Economic and Administrative Sciences Division (DACEA) of the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco (UJAT),



with a 95% confidence level. As a result, a sample of 94 participants was obtained, applying Aguilar Barojas' finite population formula (2005).

The instrument was applied in the second semester of the year 2018, in the school period from August to December. It consists of 11 multiple-choice items and was administered to students in administration, accounting, economics, and marketing at DACEA-UJAT. Table 5 below shows the relationship of the dimensions of the variables that are sought to be correlated:

**Table 5**  
*Variables' dimensions relation*

Marketing strategies	Reading habit
- Awareness	- Social problem
- Reading as social product	- Quantity
	- Publishings
	- Formats
	- Reasons
	- Benefits
- Communication	- Social problem
- Low cost benefit	
- Book vending machines	- Motivation
- Book fair	

Source: Own elaboration

The results were automatically coded by Google Forms, platform on which the surveys were conducted and managed.

## RESULTS

Data from INEGI and SEP agree that the average number of books read annually in the country per citizen is 3.5 books. According to the data obtained in the study, 39.4% of those surveyed read an average of one to two books per year, which places them below the index of national surveys.

They are aware that the lack of the reading habit is a problem in the country that has been tried to improve through time with the help of different government programs that encourage the reading habit. This means that they are within an essential point where Social Marketing can work through campaigns and programs, since the consumer is involved with the situation.

In order to carry out the reading activity, the result shows that the preference of university students is for books, specifically literature. Followed by social media that are currently considered another reading format for them.

Despite the technological advances and the reading formats available, 60% of those surveyed prefer to read the physical book as such. This means that printed publications continue to be the preference among consumers.

According to the National Reading and Writing Survey conducted by SEP in 2015, half the population reads for entertaining reasons, information that is confirmed by the results obtained. This data can also be interpreted in reading as a leisure or pleasure activity, which is an advantage when applying a Social Marketing campaign or program, since the audience conceives the situation in a positive way and is eager to read.

To combat the problem of the lack of reading habits in the country, different public and private organizations have carried out different campaigns in recent years to promote reading. The means used to communicate these messages have been television and social media. In the future, if other types of campaigns or programs aimed at young university students are to be implemented, social media may be chosen as an effective means of transmitting the desired message.

As a measure of motivation for the acquisition of reading material, activities of exchange or sale of second-hand books can be carried out, since the response to this proposal had an acceptance of 87.2%, which can be achieved through adequate promotion.

In previous years, the UJAT put into operation book vending machines in strategic points of the DACEA, but for internal reasons that are unknown, these were removed. When asked if they would be used again, 85% of respondents said they would, and some said they had not had the opportunity to use them while they were in operation.

Every year in November, the UJAT holds the International University Book Fair, with the exception of 2018 due to an austerity measure. During this event, different activities related to books and the promotion of reading are carried out. Despite the fact that the vast majority of those surveyed say they only go to and observe the fair's stands, this leads to the acquisition of material related to reading and specifically to the purchase of books. This activity is significant for the university and of great promotion of reading because it seeks to emphasize the importance of carrying it out.

## PROPOSALS

To raise the low reading level, the different strategies of Social Marketing within universities are proposed to be applied, in order to encourage the habit of reading.

As a communication strategy, it is proposed to provide information on the subject of Reading Habit, through attractive printed advertising within the university facilities: posters, banners and images that invite the student to

carry out this activity, as well as to attend talks, join reading clubs, provide literary recommendations or simply with interesting data on the subject that draw the attention of the university student.

Within this type of communication and propaganda strategy, it is proposed to make use of the university's official social media, since they are an effective and far-reaching means of reaching the objective audience, in this case, the students, since interaction is a mechanism that many users opt for. In these digital spaces information on the subject can be provided, as well as everything mentioned in the previous point.

In the Social Product part, it is proposed to resume the operation of book vending machines previously used by the UJAT, since many of the students of the division did not have the opportunity to use them. For this strategy to be successful when it is taken up again, it will be necessary to place publications that are of interest to the student, since most of them read for entertainment.

Exchange or sell used books at a lower cost than commercial ones, so that the acquisition of these is motivating for the young people. This activity can be done on set dates so that the student can prepare to participate. This strategy of low-cost pricing, in addition to encouraging the promotion of books, would also promote coexistence among the university community.

Similarly, the university is encouraged not to lose the tradition of the university book fair held every year, because it is a strategy of place within the Social Marketing that, through various activities, promotes the culture of reading, not simply by selling books, but also by the presentations, joint readings and sale items related to the subject. It is important to rescue this activity that has had a great impact on many young university students.

Reading habit concerns us all, if priority is given to activities that stimulate it, great results can be obtained that will gradually improve our development as people and as a country.

## CONCLUSIONS

Education and training is provided in Higher Education institutions, a responsibility shared with university students. Likewise, the promotion and stimulation of the reading habit should be a priority.

To do so, it is necessary that someone initiate it, in order to spread the taste for reading and explain the rules, or provide the strategies, to achieve it. Accompanying is needed for the student to appreciate the benefits that this activity entails.

The authors Walia & Sinha (2014), Kutay (2014) and Dolla, *et al.* (2017) confirm that with the habit of reading, people acquire different intellectual skills that help them in their academic, professional and social development.

University students in the habit of reading indicate that oral expression is the skill they have developed most, followed by good spelling, ultimately leaving argumentation as the least acquired skill despite being of great importance in all of the above areas.

It should be mentioned that promoting reading is a collaborative strategy, since it is achieved when two parties work together. In this case, it is the responsibility of the institution and the student to achieve that understanding of how meaningful and constructive the habit of reading is, and that will undoubtedly be reflected in their written expression, but mainly in their personal and professional growth.

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