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**Article**

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# The Role of Public Awareness Campaigns in Sustainable Development

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**Abstract:** The concept of sustainable development has been present in political discourse for many years. Striving to achieve it has become a worldwide priority. Success in this field depends not only on the right government policies. It is also a matter of society engagement. There are different direct and indirect tools intended to promote and reinforce positive changes in social attitudes. Among the most important ones are public awareness campaigns. The aim of the article is to present the ways in which they can contribute to sustainable development and how their positive impact should be properly assessed.

**Keywords:** sustainable development, public awareness campaigns, social marketing

**JEL codes:** Q5, M31

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## 1. Introduction

The concept of sustainable development (SD) has been present in the socio-economic and political discourse for many years since it was first described in a report of the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 (WCED, 1987). It has many different definitions, but

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commonly it is understood as socio-economic development in which the process of integrating political, economic and social activities takes place, while preserving the natural balance and the sustainability of basic natural processes in order to guarantee the ability to meet the basic needs of individual communities or citizens of both the present and future generations (*Environmental Protection Law Act*, 2001). Sustainable development is based on three pillars: economic, social and environmental. To achieve the desired level of SD balance between all these three elements is very important as they should be integrated. In other words, it can be stated that sustainable development involves the activities that offer economic benefits in the present without negatively affecting social and environmental choices that are available to people in the future (Flint, 2013: 26). The main goal in the context of SD is to provide a multidimensional way to achieve recovery and improve the quality of life for everyone. Acting sustainably implies limiting waste and pollution, improving the opportunities for disadvantaged peoples, conserving natural resources, making valuable connections among groups, promoting cooperation and efficiency, and developing local assets to revitalize economies (Flint, 2004: 83).

Developing programs that will allow to achieve the desired level of sustainable development is a responsibility of policy makers – both globally and locally (OECD, 2001: 3). The success of such initiatives, however, depends mostly on people. Their personal approaches and opinions as well as their understanding of problems are vital to introduce positive changes. Authorities have their tools to enforce the desired behaviours (e.g. legal regulations), but in order to really engage the society in the realization of the common goal, the instruments that could change the internal attitudes are needed. For this purpose, public awareness campaigns (PACs) are widely used. Due to their reach and the message that they carry, if prepared carefully, they can bring great results. The aim of the article is to present the ways in which PACs can contribute to sustainable development. First, the concept of public awareness campaign in the context of their effectiveness is introduced and then the categories of problems within SD that are covered with PACs are distinguished. In the end some case studies of such campaigns will be presented to show their results and impact on society. Finally, a methodology to assess the effectiveness of media messages in public awareness campaigns is proposed.

The research was conducted with the use of the literature review method. It was focused mainly on publications concerning the problems of sustainable development and public awareness campaigns research. When selecting studies for the review, the Internet resources were searched

with the use of such keywords as: sustainable development, sustainability, public awareness campaign, public benefit campaign, public service announcement, public service advertisement, social campaign, social marketing. The choice of case studies of PACs was limited to specific campaigns, concerning the relevant topics, assessed (not just described) in articles published in journals and conference proceedings.

## **2. Notion of public awareness campaign and its effectiveness**

A public awareness campaign is the element of social marketing techniques (see Kotler and Zaltman, 1971: 7; Kotler et al., 2002: 17; Andreason, 2004: 56), and in accordance with the popular definition it is "a set of different activities planned for a specific time, addressed to a specific target group, whose aim is to increase knowledge, lead to change in thinking and in behaviour towards a specific social problem" (Fundacja Komunikacji Społecznej, 2010). In social campaigns tools and advertising techniques associated with commercial marketing are frequently used. They include advertising through different types of media – television, radio, internet and print. This is not usually the main component of a well-prepared social campaign (very important in this regard is also intervention), but it plays an important role in terms of its public perception and draws attention of a wide audience to the problem.

The quality of a social campaign is determined mostly on the basis of its effectiveness which is evaluated basing on impact it has had on the audience. Due to the complexity of the problem, the evaluation is most commonly made at five different levels (Donovan and Henely, 2003: 158-195):

- awareness,
- engagement,
- change in behaviour,
- social norm,
- wellbeing.

At each of these levels different indicators confirming the success reached by the authors of the campaign can be distinguished. In order to obtain the relevant data at each stage different methods are also used. Summary of commonly used indicators, with appropriate ways of collecting the data, is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Indicators and methods of measurement used in five-level evaluation of social campaigns effectiveness**

	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Means of measurement</b>
<b>Awareness</b>	-percentage of recipients aware of the issue	-audience surveys
<b>Engagement</b>	-percentage of recipients involved in the deliberations and discussions about the problem -percentage of recipients taking action in order to gain additional knowledge about the problem	-audience surveys -behavioural data (i.e. website hits)
<b>Change in behaviour</b>	-percentage of recipients that self-report behaviour change -percentage of recipients, for whom changes were observed	-audience surveys -behavioural data (depending on the type of campaign, i.e. increase in the number of people undergoing medical checkup)
<b>Social norm</b>	-percentage of recipients presenting a positive attitude to the problem -percentage of newspaper articles and opinions favourable to the campaign -introduced legislation on the promoted issue	-audience surveys -observations -anecdotal feedback -media and policy tracking
<b>Wellbeing</b>	-percentage increase in social outcome -percentage increase in environmental outcome	-epidemiological data -environmental data

Source: Varcoe, 2004: 5.

All levels of effectiveness mentioned in Table 1 are very important in the context of sustainable development. However, it is difficult to create a campaign that would have impact on every level. In most cases creators of PACs focus on two or three different aspects and these elements form the basis for evaluation. The next section of the paper presents some examples of such campaigns, pointing out on which level of effectiveness they were assessed and what positive changes they have caused. As the public awareness campaigns focus mostly on the environmental aspect of sustainable development, the rest of this paper will be focused on PACs that promote the preservation of natural resources and ecological behaviours.

### **3. Public awareness campaigns for sustainable development**

The scope of topics for environmental campaigns is very wide and it concerns a variety of issues. These can be generally divided into categories concerning different matters in the ecology domain.

Such division is arbitrary, because most of the problems occurring in this scope can be assigned to more than one category. Most popular topics of the existing PACs are shown in the Table 2.

**Table 2. Examples of ecological PACs topics.**

<b>Climate change</b>	-raising awareness of climate change -reduction of CO2 emissions, -stopping deforestation, -promoting alternative sources of energy, -promoting the use of transportation other than cars.
<b>Biodiversity</b>	-protecting biodiversity, -support for endangered species, -preserving the nature.
<b>Animals</b>	-promoting responsible animal breeding, -promotion of adoption of animals from the shelter, -prevention of maltreatment of animals, -stopping tests on animals.
<b>Diet/nutrition</b>	-promoting to drink water, -promotion of vegan/vegetarian diet.
<b>Consumption of goods</b>	-promoting of saving water, -promoting of saving energy, -recycling and use of reusable items, -discouraging to buy leather products, -stopping excessive paper consumption.
<b>Waste reduction</b>	-taking care of the cleanliness of the environment (cleaning up, not littering), -waste segregation.

Source: own elaboration based on: Kampanie społeczne, n. d.

Every year there is a lot of campaigns that are created to support the issues mentioned in the Table 2. However, not all are successful in achieving their goals. The main reason of this fact is that the creators do not always conduct proper research before launching a PAC (Maison and Bruin, 2002: 148). Such kind of study is required to ensure that the design of a campaign has a chance to meet the expectations. To actually check the results that have or have not been achieved, there is also a need to examine the PAC during the intervention and after it has been finished.

Table 3 presents some examples of campaigns concerning environment protection that were carefully examined by researchers in terms of their effectiveness with the use of the acknowledged methodology. Thanks to their studies the effectiveness of PACs is proven.

**Table 3. Case studies concerning the research of PACs effectiveness.**

<b>Campaign name, citation</b>	<b>Goal(s)</b>	<b>Channels</b>	<b>Effectiveness research methods</b>	<b>Level of effectiveness</b>
CROC (Crocodile Rehabilitation, Observance, and Conservation) (van der Ploeg et al., 2011)	– mobilize broad public support for the conservation of the Philippine crocodile in the wild	billboards, wall paintings, posters, radio plugs, comic books, newsletters, school presentations, cultural show, puppet shows, school field visits, community consultations, and training workshops	post-campaign survey (with control group not exposed to the campaign), field observations (monitoring the crocodile population)	awareness, change in behaviour
The Clean Water Campaign (O'Brien, 2005)	– raise awareness of storm water pollution – provide solutions to prevent water pollution	TV ads, brochures, website, billboards, articles, promotional items (magnets), workshops	pre- and post-campaign surveys	awareness, social norm
Chesapeake Club (Landers et al., 2006)	– change personal behaviours that impact Bay water quality – heighten awareness of Bay pollution among the audience – reduce the fertilizing of lawns in order to protect the crabs population in the Bay	advertisements for TV and print media, campaign website, posters, billboards	pre-campaign telephone survey, focus groups, post-intervention telephone survey	awareness, change in behaviour
The Campaign to Protect the Sichuan Golden Snub-nosed Monkey (DeWan et al., 2013)	– inspire communities to protect forest habitat in the reserve – quickly adopt fuel-efficient stoves	posters, calendars, and a telefilm that promoted the benefits of fuel efficient stoves	pre- and post-campaign surveys, monitoring fuelwood consumption, monitoring forest destruction	awareness, change in behaviour, wellbeing
Don't Palm Us Off (Pearson et al., 2014)	– raise public awareness about what palm oil is, the many products it is contained in, and the impact on rainforests and orangutans – change the food labelling laws in Australia and New Zealand to make palm oil labelling compulsory – drive a market need for certified sustainable palm oil	video ads; radio ads; website; social networks; celebrity ambassadors	pre-, mid- and post-campaign survey	awareness, change in behaviour, social norm
TravelSmart (Ma et al., 2016)	– reduce the negative impacts of car travel through a reduction in vehicle trips and kilometres travelled	public events, meetings, articles, newsletters; guided conversations; brochure	collection of GPS data during the period of 15 days (three years in a row) providing an objective measurement of travel behaviour	change in behaviour

Source: own elaboration

The CROC campaign was conducted from 1999 to 2008. Its main message was “The Philippine crocodile; something to be proud of!”. It was a success, since the effectiveness study showed that:

- In the core area and the peripheral areas where the campaign was presented, 67% and 41% of the respondents respectively are now aware that the Philippine crocodile is protected by law, whereas in the control group 82% do not know if crocodiles are legally protected.
- Of the respondents, 79% in the core area and the peripheral area support the conservation of the Philippine crocodile in the wild, against 21% in the control group.
- When asked whether other people in the community support the conservation of crocodiles, 50% of the respondents in the core areas said yes, against 4% in the control group.
- Of the respondents, 65% in the core area think that Philippine crocodile conservation can benefit the community; in contrast with the control group, where only 11% think that is the case.

These results prove that a campaign contributed to overall awareness and change of behaviour of society. When it comes to the effectiveness similar effects can be observed regarding Chesapeake Club campaign. It was run for 2 years (2004 – 2005) and its main goal was to change people’s fertilizing habits in order to improve the quality of water in Chesapeake Bay. Messaging of this PAC was focused on waiting until fall to fertilize the lawns and would emphasize creating a healthy lawn, as opposed to a green lawn. The effectiveness research has shown that:

- Of the people surveyed, 72% were able to recall a major theme of the campaign; 37% were able to recall specifically the Chesapeake Club brand, and/or main message of the campaign.
- In the 2004 pre-campaign survey, 23% of respondents reported that they were not planning to fertilize their lawn at all that year, while 28% of those in the 2005 post-campaign survey reported that they were not planning to fertilize their lawn.

Other campaigns, apart from raising awareness and change in behaviour, aimed also at creating social norms, especially by changing the attitudes to the presented problem. Two examples of such approach are shown in the Table 3. The first is The Clean Water Campaign (2001 – 2004). Thanks to this campaign following results were achieved:

- The number of people who identified storm water runoff as the main source of water pollution over factories/industrial discharges and over landfills grew from 9.5% to 21.5% between 2001 and 2004.

- The number of people who were very likely to check their cars for leaks grew from 68% to 83.8%.
- The number of people who were very likely to pick-up after their pets to prevent water pollution grew from 32.2% to 55.8%.
- The number of people who were very likely to recycle motor oil changed from 55% to 68.2%.
- The number of people who heard about the Clean Water Campaign grew from 49% to 71%.

The second campaign targeted to effectively change the social norm was using the message: “Don't Palm Us Off” (2009 – 2011). Its main goal was to inform the public (in this case these were mainly the visitors of the local zoo) about the environmental costs of obtaining palm oil and its impact on rainforests and orangutans. Using especially the mass media channels the creators of this PAC were able to obtain quite significant outcomes. The most important ones were:

- The percentage of visitors responded they would be willing to change their behaviour to support orangutan conservation grew from 60.9% to 84.3%.
- Only 18.7% of visitors reported avoiding palm oil products at baseline, compared with 38.9% 6 months after campaign.
- Visitor perceptions that friends and family felt orangutan conservation to be highly important increased from 28% at baseline to 54% at the end of the campaign.

Another very interesting example is The Campaign to Protect the Sichuan Golden Snub-nosed Monkey. For this campaign the effort to measure its impact on the wellbeing of the environment was made. From 2008 to 2010, using different channels, the creators of the campaign tried to convince the local community to adopt fuel-efficient stoves and reduce the consumption of fuel wood in order to protect the habitat of golden snub-nosed monkeys. The results of this study show a significant increase in knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal communication pre- and post-campaign (16 – 49 percentage points). Post-campaign results (within 1 year) concluded that 28.0% and 43.1% of those surveyed within 1 year and 2.5 years adopted the new technology of stoves. For those households that adopted fuel-efficient stoves, the consumption and gathering time of wood were reduced by 40.1% and 38.2% respectively. Finally, preliminary research suggests that adoption of fuel-efficient stoves also led to a reduction in forest destruction.

The last campaign mentioned in the table – TravelSmart – is focused on a change of behaviour. In this case the effectiveness study was specifically designed to check whether the PAC

was successful. GPS measurements conducted before, during and just after the campaign showed that:

- The number of car trips decreased by 11 %;
- TravelSmart participants reduced their time spent on car travel by about 5.89 min per day;
- TravelSmart increased the walking time by about 3.18 min.

The analysis of exemplary campaigns which are presented in the Table 3 shows that generally the results of effectiveness studies allow to evaluate the usefulness of public awareness campaigns in promoting sustainable development, especially when it comes to increasing awareness and changing behaviour. This can be clearly seen after the campaign end. Using this methodology, the success of undertaken actions can be assessed only when they have been finished. Taking into account that preparing and launching a campaign is expensive, it would be advised to evaluate the effectiveness of campaign before its start. This applies specifically when media communication is involved. They are very important for the PACs, as they can reach a larger number of potential customers and initiate a number of positive changes. Due to the cost of their emissions, however, before they can be shared with the audience, they should be evaluated in terms of accomplishing the expectations. The next section of the article presents a proposal of a methodology that aims to provide the evaluation framework for media messages in public awareness campaigns promoting sustainable development.

#### **4. Evaluation of media message effectiveness**

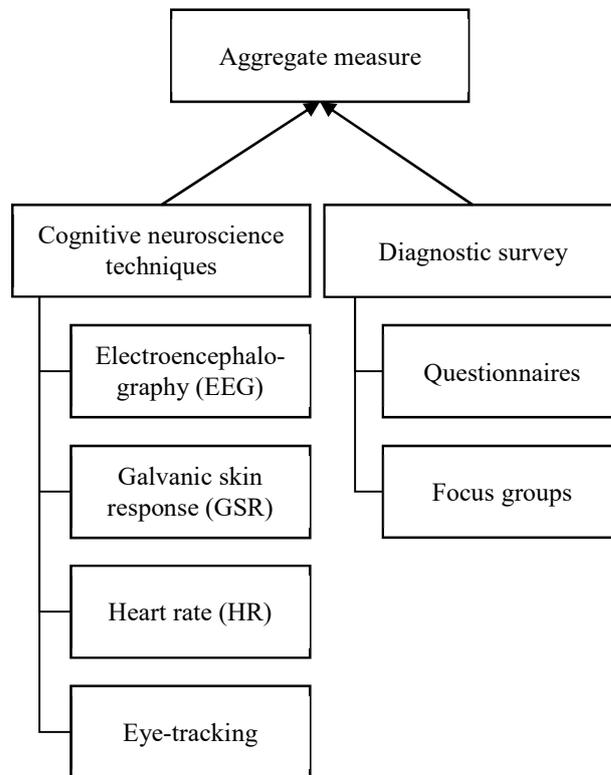
The assessment of media messages is done with slightly different methods than the general assessment of public awareness campaigns. In this respect the most commonly used methods are based on questionnaires (e.g. Gibson et al., 2014) and focus groups (e.g. Freimuth, 2000). It is increasingly recognized, however, that the results obtained with the use of such methods are not quite reliable because the study subjects are not always able to evaluate media messages in accordance with their true feelings (Zaltman, 2003). In recent years, however, in the field of marketing it is becoming increasingly common to use the tools of cognitive neuroscience in order to know the unconscious opinions of recipients (Lindstrom, 2008; Ohme et al., 2010). Methods of this kind offer access to data that cannot be obtained as a result of the survey. This is the reason why the tools of neuroscience are becoming increasingly popular in commercial marketing. This

also leads to the emergence of a new field of science referred to as neuromarketing (Fischer et al., 2010; Zurawicki, 2010; Morin, 2011; Agarwal and Dutta, 2015). In social marketing, apart from a few exceptions not concerning the environmental issues (e.g. Zelinková et al., 2014 Mauri et al., 2014, Falk et al., 2015) such methods have not been commonly used so far for the purpose of evaluating the role of media messaging in social campaigns. What is more, no attempts to obtain valuable information on the basis of merging data from different sources (neuroscientific tools and questionnaires) have been made as well.

To run such assessment, a methodological framework should be developed for creating the measures of media message effectiveness in such campaigns. These measurements should take into account the activation of conscious thinking among customers on the one hand - and on the other - the durability of social consciousness. The proposed methodological framework must indicate methods to measure factors relevant to public awareness campaigns and to combine data gathered during their evaluation. This could be achieved by using triangulation of cognitive neuroscience methods and diagnostic survey to create an aggregate measure. The concept of such framework is shown in Figure 1.

The effect of the research will be the determination of the relationship of the advertising message with the activation of conscious thinking process and the formation of social consciousness. the methodological framework of this kind is currently being developed at the University of Szczecin under the project “The impact of media messages on the effectiveness of social campaign”.

**Figure 1. Methodological framework of PACs effectiveness assessment.**



Source: own elaboration

## 5. Conclusion

Public awareness campaigns are an important element of shaping people's attitudes. They promote environmental actions, positive changes in behaviour and general awareness of ecological issues, etc. The costs of campaigns reaching all citizens are huge and their effectiveness and the durability of their effects can sometimes vary. The development of a methodological framework to create measures of such campaigns' effectiveness will facilitate the creation of the effectiveness measures of individual campaigns, and will allow to increase their social impact. As a result, new knowledge will be acquired about the relationship between the form of communication and its influence on the process of thinking and awareness. This will expand the current knowledge of the evolution of human behaviour and provide tools to measure the effectiveness of campaigns. The proposed methodology will be an important contribution to the research in the field of behavioural sciences. Once the rules for creating effective campaigns are developed, we will be able to design campaigns

which will have a significant influence on the development of civilization.

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## ***Rola kampanii społecznych w rozwoju zrównoważonym***

### ***Streszczenie***

Koncepcja zrównoważonego rozwoju już od wielu lat jest obecna w dyskursie politycznym. Dążenie do osiągnięcia tego celu stało się priorytetem na całym świecie. Sukces w tej dziedzinie zależy nie tylko od prowadzenia odpowiedniej polityki. Jest to również kwestia zaangażowania społeczeństwa. Istnieją różne bezpośrednie i pośrednie narzędzia mające promować i wzmacniać pozytywne zmiany postaw społecznych. Do najważniejszych z nich należą kampanie społeczne. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie, w jaki sposób mogą one przyczynić się do osiągnięcia zrównoważonego rozwoju i w jaki sposób powinna być oceniana ich efektywność.

***Słowa kluczowe:*** rozwój zrównoważony, kampanie społeczne, marketing społeczny

***Kody JEL:*** Q5, M31

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