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Exploring value destruction in social marketing services

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to draw from services marketing theory as an alternative and under-used pathway to social and behaviour change for the achievement of societal well-being. Social marketing services are an important part of social change programmes as they contribute towards service users' health, well-being, and the fulfilment of social marketing goals. However, value destruction can occur in users' service experiences, leading to a decline rather than improvement of their well-being. The purpose of this paper is to understand the nature of the value destruction process and identify the outcomes in social marketing services from a consumer's perspective.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative exploratory study using a focus group ($n = 4$) and individual depth interview ($n = 4$) methods was undertaken. The discussions were guided by a semi-structured interview guide and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Findings – Thematic analysis of the data revealed two value destruction processes: incongruent resource application and misuse of firm resources. The value destruction processes suggest three types of outcomes: reduced usage of the service, termination of service and strategic behavioural actions.

Originality/value – This study is the first to examine value destruction processes and outcomes in social marketing services from a consumer's perspective. This study contributes towards the small but growing body of research on value destruction in both commercial and social marketing by challenging the assumption that value creation is always positively valenced and responding to critique that there is currently insufficient focus on value destruction in service research and its impact on well-being.

Keywords Well-being, Consumer behaviour, Social marketing theory, User experiences, Value destruction, Social marketing services

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Services play an important role in social change programmes (Gordon *et al.*, 2016) and using service thinking in social marketing is one of many useful paths towards improving societal well-being. However, the approach is relatively under-utilised (Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2013) in comparison to other approaches such as communications. Despite this, the interest in service thinking in social marketing is growing, and this study aims to contribute towards this growing body of research. Social marketing services share similar aims with transformative services, which are those that are oriented towards the achievement of well-being outcomes for service users (Anderson *et al.*, 2013). Transformative services include those offered by commercial organisations and examples include wellness retreats or meditation courses. These service types achieve commercial (i.e. profit) outcomes for the service provider, in addition to the well-being outcomes for the service user. In contrast, social marketing services are delivered in marketing-based programmes that are designed to facilitate socially beneficial, as opposed to commercially beneficial, outcomes (Gordon *et al.*, 2016).

Therefore, social marketing services are offered by non-commercial (i.e. government or non-profit) organisations.

Despite the efficacy of providing services to help and support people (Wood, 2012), services remain a relatively untapped resource for social marketers (Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2013). A growing body of research on social marketing services is emerging in areas such as mental health (Schuster *et al.*, 2013), breastfeeding support (Gallegos *et al.*, 2014), blood donation (Chell and Mortimer, 2014) and health screening (Zainuddin *et al.*, 2013), demonstrating the growing importance of this area to social marketing scholarship. Maintaining the use of social marketing services in the long term is important given the delayed and long-term benefits of much positive social behaviour (Andreasen, 2003; Schuster *et al.*, 2013).

However, relapse of previous habitual behaviours that are negative and abandonment of positive new behaviours, including those facilitated through service use, is common (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983). We posit that this occurs due to the devaluation of consumers' services experiences, which occurs when a consumer's value judgements become more negative than positive, and when features of a good/service are denigrated (Woodruff and Flint, 2006). This describes a negative, rather than a positive, impact on consumer value creation (Grönroos, 2011), reflecting value destruction. Value destruction is described as "an interactional process between service systems that results in a decline in at least one of the system's well-being" (Plé and Cáceres, 2010, p. 431), meaning that misuse of resources by actors in a dyadic exchange can lead to value destruction. With the exception of works by Echeverri and Skålén (2011), Smith (2013) and Zainuddin *et al.* (2017), there is little understanding of value destruction in social marketing. In addition, much of the existing research on value in social marketing has focused on the creation of positive value for behaviour maintenance (Zainuddin *et al.*, 2013; Mulcahy *et al.*, 2015; Chell and Mortimer, 2014), rather than on the destruction of value and its negative impact on behaviour maintenance. Indeed, Kuppelwieser and Finsterwalder (2016) highlight that there is insufficient focus on value destruction in service research and its impact on well-being, whereas Blocker and Barrios (2015) identify that much of the existing research on value creation assumes a positive valence. In response to these criticisms, the purpose of this study was to discover the nature of the value destruction process and identify the outcomes of value destruction in social marketing services from a consumer's perspective. In doing so, we make inferences on how value destruction negatively influences well-being.

The paper begins with a review of the literature by first discussing social marketing services and the important role that they play in social marketing programmes. Then, value creation and destruction of social marketing service users' experiences are discussed. This is followed by the study method and a discussion of the results following a qualitative analysis. Finally, the theoretical and managerial implications are presented, followed by an acknowledgement of the limitations of the current study and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 Social marketing services

Embracing service thinking in social marketing has grown in recent years in response to calls to increase our focus on midstream social marketing efforts, which involves working with partner organisations and community groups (Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2013). Social marketing services are services that are delivered in marketing-based programmes designed to facilitate socially beneficial outcomes (Gordon *et al.*, 2016). They share similarities with transformative services in that they are both service types that seek to improve the well-

being of individuals, communities and the ecosystem (Anderson *et al.*, 2013). However, a key feature that distinguishes social marketing services from transformative services is that social marketing services focus on socially beneficial outcomes over commercial outcomes (Gordon *et al.*, 2016) and can only be delivered by public or non-profit organisations. For example, breast cancer screening services offered by the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK (gov.uk, 2015) or by BreastScreen in Australia (BSQ, 2017) are social marketing services, as they are offered as part of government population health screening programmes in those respective countries. In contrast, transformative services can be delivered by commercial (i.e. profit) organisations and therefore are focused on achieving commercial outcomes. One example of a transformative service is health retreats, which offer holiday packages that include a range of service offerings including spa treatments, personalised exercise plans designed by fitness trainers and consultations with psychology experts to address underlying personal issues such as stress or burnout (Well-being Escapes, 2017). Many transformative services like health retreats, nutrition services or fitness services are sought by consumers as their ability to improve the health and well-being of the service user and help them achieve their goals is easily understood. In contrast, many social marketing services are unsought products (Murphy and Enis, 1986) that consumers avoid despite the known benefits of using these services (Zainuddin *et al.*, 2013). This is usually due to unpleasant features of the service experience such as embarrassment, discomfort or perceived stigma. This creates a barrier towards the uptake of these services, despite the benefits to personal health and well-being from service use. This is supported by population health trends, which show that participation rates for some services types (particularly in the health-care sector) are in decline or below programme targets (NHS, 2016; NIH, 2015; AIHW, 2016), even though people are adequately informed of the health benefits of using these services. Therefore, value destruction from "avoidance services" has the potential to create greater deleterious effects on the well-being of service users and the wider community than if it occurs in other service types. Hence, it is important for social marketers to understand how value destruction can occur to manage the service design, processes and experience to minimize the occurrence of value destruction and any negative impact on behavioural outcomes.

2.2 Value creation in social marketing
Value creation is a paradigm (Sheth and Uslay, 2007) involving multiple stakeholders who work collaboratively in a consumption process to create mutually beneficial outcomes and value. It aligns with social marketing aims as value creation can achieve satisfaction and behavioural intentions to engage in an activity again (Chell and Mortimer, 2014) and support the maintenance of positive social behaviours in the long-term (Zainuddin *et al.*, 2017). Consumer research on value originates from an economic perspective, whereby value is an outcome of a cost/benefit analysis focussed on utility gained (Payne and Holt, 1999). This perspective focuses on the exchange, and value is determined when the benefits outweigh the costs of using a service. However, the exchange represents only one aspect of the overall consumption experience (Zainuddin *et al.*, 2016), focussing on the purchase or consumption stage of the consumption experience and does not consider the pre- or post-purchase/consumption stages (Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2009). Given that many pro-social behaviours sought in social marketing are complex and multi-faceted, it is important to consider the interactions involved in the consumption experience and not just on the outcome (Holbrook, 2006). Furthermore, it has been acknowledged that the *locus* of value creation has expanded beyond the provider-customer dyad where interactions between the two actors occur (Vargo and Lush, 2008; Black and Gallan, 2015). Therefore, activities in the pre- and post-

consumption stages that can include little to no interaction between consumers and services providers (Zainuddin *et al.*, 2016) also need to be considered. Value can be created (and destroyed) throughout all the stages and phases of the consumption process, and therefore there is a need to consider the consumption process in its entirety (Cronin, 2016). However, the economic perspective adopts the view that value is a determination from a specific point-in-time (Blocker and Barrios, 2015) and does not consider the value that is realised at every stage and phase of the consumption process. Taking a holistic approach is important, as many of the pro-social behaviours sought in social marketing programmes are long-term and ongoing behaviours. There is a need for social marketers to understand individuals' experiences and interactions at all stages of the consumption experience, beyond the exchange, to provide better social marketing services and deliver better social marketing programmes. A need to consider factors beyond the exchange and beyond focussing on outcomes alone necessitates the adoption of a more contemporary approach to understanding consumer value, which is the experiential perspective.

The experiential perspective to understanding consumer value emerged in response to the limitations of the economic perspective. The experiential perspective considers value to be an interactive relativistic preference experience (Holbrook, 2006) or a relativistic construct, which is more reflective of (social) marketing contexts (Cronin, 2016). This perspective acknowledges that consumption experiences are comparative, personal and situational (Holbrook, 2006) and can vary from individual to individual, even within the same context. Assessments of benefits and sacrifices are relative and subjective (Cronin, 2016) and can vary between individuals, and therefore using the economic perspective does not allow for the consideration of these subjectivities and complexities. The experiential perspective is a more useful perspective as it acknowledges the subjectivities that are inherent in all social marketing contexts. For example, although the medical benefits of cancer screening (i.e. early detection and greater treatment options) outweigh the negatives of using screening services (e.g. fear, discomfort), for the many non-users of screening services, the costs outweigh the benefits for them and they avoid screening. Consequently, the current study adopts the experiential perspective to understanding consumer value, which is consistent with the approach adopted by the existing research on value in social marketing.

With the exception of a recent study by Zainuddin *et al.* (2017), much of the existing research on value in social marketing has focussed on the creation of value, as a positive process that has positive impact on desirable outcomes, such as intentions for repeat use (Chell and Mortimer, 2014). It is important to note that the absence of value creation does not equate to the diminishment of value or value destruction. For example, in a study on bowel screening self-services, Zainuddin *et al.* (2016) found that emotional value was not created from the affective contributions of self-service users; however, this does not imply that emotional value is *destroyed* by affective contributions. It is neither appropriate to presume that given our current understanding of how value creation occurs in social marketing services (Zainuddin *et al.*, 2013, 2016), that we understand through inferences how value destruction is likely to occur. It is important to avoid the assumption that concepts can directly translate across contexts (Peattie and Peattie, 2003), such as from commercial marketing to social marketing, or from value creation to value destruction. Instead, there is a need to focus on understanding how value destruction occurs in social marketing services, which is the aim of this current study. This will add to our existing knowledge on value in social marketing.

2.3 Value destruction in social marketing

The assumption that value creation is always positively valenced is slowly being challenged (Blocker and Barrios, 2015), given the growing attention and interest in value destruction. In contrast to value creation, the destruction of value leads to the cessation of positive behaviours (Zainuddin *et al.*, 2017), which is a negative outcome in social marketing. Value destruction is defined as "an interactional process between service systems that results in a decline in at least one of the system's well-being" (Plé and Cáceres, 2010, p. 431). It describes a process of devaluation whereby a consumer's value judgements of a consumption experience become more negative than positive, and features of a good/service are denigrated (Woodruff and Flint, 2006). This results in a negative impact on value creation (Grönroos, 2011). It is important to examine value destruction, as scholars such as Cronin (2016) believe that value is more important than other attributes, such as quality or satisfaction, in consumer decision-making. Given that the creation of value leads to a variety of positive outcomes for individuals, including improved well-being (Black and Gallan, 2015), the destruction of value has the potential to negatively impact individual well-being, as consumers' decisions to use services designed to improve their well-being are likely to be negatively influenced when value destruction occurs.

Studies in both commercial marketing (Plé and Cáceres, 2010; Robertson *et al.*, 2014; Grönroos, 2011) and social marketing (French and Gordon, 2015) predominantly examined value destruction conceptually. However, limited empirical examinations of value destruction have begun to emerge in both commercial marketing (Echeverri and Ska³le¨n, 2011; Smith, 2013) and social marketing (Zainuddin *et al.*, 2017) research. Despite this, our empirical understanding of value destruction remains in its infancy, representing a gap in the knowledge base. There is insufficient focus on value destruction in service research and its impact on well-being (Kuppelwieser and Finsterwalder, 2016). Thus, the current study aims to address this gap by contributing towards the growing body of empirical research on value destruction. In particular, this study seeks to examine value destruction in social marketing services from a consumer's perspective. The following research questions guides this inquiry:

RQ1. How does value destruction occur in social marketing services?

RQ2. What are the outcomes of value destruction in social marketing services?

3. Method

Given limited, existing understanding of value destruction in social marketing services, an exploratory qualitative study utilising focus group ($n = 4$) and individual-depth interview ($n = 4$) methods was conducted. Details of the participants are shown in Table I. There are no closely defined rules for sample sizes for exploratory qualitative enquiry (Patton, 2002). A small-scaled sample suits this study that is conceptually generative (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006), seeking to gain meaning and insights to build on current gaps in the literature on value destruction in social marketing from a consumer's perspective. In seeking richness of data, purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants who had experiences using social marketing services. Participants were asked to discuss support services that they had used and to describe their experiences with using the service, with some participants discussing experiences of diverse social marketing services. The focus group lasted 2 hour in a University meeting room. The individual-depth interviews lasted between 30 min and 1 hour and were conducted at locations that were convenient for participants. Participants

Method	Participant	Gender	Age	Service types
Focus group	Participant 1	Male	22	Alcohol hotline service
				Counselling services
	Participant 2	Female	44	Social services
	Participant 3	Female	50	Mental health hotline
				Suicide prevention hotline
				Health-care hotline
				Social services
	Participant 4	Female	32	Community gym
Individual-depth interview	Participant 5	Female	37	Psychology
				Health-care hotline
	Participant 6	Male	33	Men sexual health service
	Participant 7	Male	34	Alcoholic counselling
	Participant 8	Male	38	Mental health service
				Social services

Table I.
Study participant
information

were offered a $30 gift card as an incentive for participation. The individual-depth interviews and focus group were conducted in a semi-structured format. Participants were first provided with some examples of social marketing services and, subsequently, asked to discuss their experiences with similar services. Subsequently, key interview questions that focussed on uncovering participants' broad experiences and expectations with social marketing services (e.g. Could you tell me about your experiences using a social marketing service?) were asked. Probing was conducted to provide further clarification for the specific service issues raised by respondents (e.g. Why do you feel this way?). The focus group was conducted first, followed by the individual-depth interviews. This combination and sequence allowed for some initial insights prior to gaining deeper insights on personal experiences with using social marketing services. The discussions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were manually analysed using thematic analysis technique (Boyatzis, 1998). The process of coding involved generating initial codes though the data set and some examples include knowledge, skills, disengagement and waiting. Codes were then collated into broader themes (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2013). Subsequently, the themes were reviewed in relation to the extracts. Coding also involved the assignment and refinement of labels to the themes, and this helped to establish the core categories within the data. The codes were generated based on some prior understanding of the value destruction and social marketing literature, and the process involved a deductive coding process derived from the literature and inductive coding that emerged from the data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The analysis involved cross-checking the findings between two researchers to ensure agreement in the interpretation of themes and helped to ensure the validity of the research findings (Barbour, 2001).

4. Results and discussion
RQ1 was addressed with three themes emerging. Findings from a consumer's perspective revealed two key broad value destruction processes central to social marketing services. Value destruction occurs in one of two ways through:

(1) incongruent resource application; and

(2) misuse of firm resources.

RQ2 was addressed with three emerging themes of outcomes:

(1) reduced usage of the service;
(2) termination of service; and
(3) strategic behavioural actions.

4.1 Value destruction processes

4.1.1 Incongruent resource application. We define incongruent resource application as an actor's incompatible application of resources (behavioural interactions and expertise delivery) with behavioural needs. Congruent application of resources (interactions and expertise) that match behavioural needs of consumers is important for behavioural change goals. Previous research identified organisational and consumer resources as important contributions towards value creation in social marketing services (Zainuddin *et al.*, 2013). Resources can include the ability to communicate, expertise or solutions provided by an actor (Dagger *et al.*, 2007). Based on the data, we differentiate between the application of resources in terms of behavioural interactions and the knowledge, skills and resolutions applied by the service provider. The data indicated that in social marketing services, value destruction can involve an inappropriate application of resources in terms of expertise and solutions that fail to sufficiently cater to behavioural goal needs of actors in the exchange. In these situations, service employees play a critical role facilitating value initiatives (Domegan *et al.*, 2013). Distinctively, actors may have incongruence with another actor on the behavioural contributions in the expertise, knowledge and resolutions that they provide. Below, Participant 1 describes the distinction between the use of a service that provided specialised knowledge and a service that conveyed generic information and emphasises that specific information is more useful for her behavioural goal needs. Service dominant-logic research places emphasis on operand resources such as knowledge and skills as critical to the benefit of another actor (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The data suggest that service users expect service providers in social marketing to provide them with customised information aligned with behavioural goal needs, in this case alcoholism:

> Because the counselling service here is very general, some services are obviously specific to certain situations, so Alcoholics Anonymous is dealing with one certain issue. I found they were a lot more useful because they had specialised expertise in that certain area [. . .] More specific assistance on my issues, rather than general help [. . .] (Participant 1 (Focus group), Male, 22 years old).

The participant elaborates on the practical aspects of information conveyed. His comments allude to the impracticalities and patronising nature of providing generic information incongruent to his behavioural goal needs. The need for customised information is consistent with Neghina *et al.*'s (2014) conceptualisation of individuating interactions that calls forth the need to take into account consumers' needs, resources and preferred interaction styles to deliver value. Studies in health-care contexts show the value of information. In an online self-diagnosis setting, Robertson *et al.* (2014) highlight the quality of online content as a key determinant of service operator operant resource that could potentially skew consumers' focus. Frow *et al.* (2016) offer a typology of patient centric practices that shape mental models of patients, and this includes the contributions of collaborative professional knowledge. Not surprisingly, a lack of specific information provided in social marketing services can result in a decline in well-being because service users are less able to make concrete steps meeting behavioural goals:

The part of the service that really helped were the practical steps that they advised me to take, not broad sentences like, "you're going to feel better soon", that kind of stuff, but practical steps that actually assist me in my day to day life (Participant 1 (Focus group), Male, 22 years old).

Alternatively, as demonstrated by Participant's six comments below, when professional information is perceived as invaluable, this has positive implications for service users. His comments implied that received expertise matches the needs of bisexual men in achieving behaviour goals of sexual health screening. Alves *et al.* (2016) highlight firms undertaking efforts to educate their customers by providing them information results in value creation given higher self-efficacy levels. Thus, in a social marketing service, operant resources not only need to ensure relational exchanges (Madhavaram and Hunt, 2008) but also enable consumers to effectively reach behavioural goals to be perceived as delivering value:

They have very smiley faces, they talk nicely and they explain what should be done, and what treatments should be done, if any case, what are the preventative methods. It is specifically catering to gay and bisexual men who really know they are well taken care of and it is exclusive to them. I think the labelling, the mannerisms, the setting, and the training that was given to staff make all the patients or clients comfortable (Participant 6 (Interview), Male, 33 years old).

Apart from the delivery of specific expertise and knowledge, interaction processes between actors seem to impact on the value derived from social marketing service encounters. Service encounter processes and practices are critical for value creation opportunities (Payne *et al.*, 2008). Encounters can be categorised as emotion supporting, cognition supporting and action supporting encounters (Payne *et al.*, 2008). Communication of expertise and value-explaining messages can occur in ways that fit communication needs. Below, Participant 3 outlines how her interactions with a service provider has been coercive to the extent she felt indignant. The quote suggests incongruence with the consumer's expectations of treatment and undermines the aim of the service to achieve behavioural goals. In this situation, it appears the service provider hinder further dialogue due to the hierarchical nature of the interaction (Ballantyne, 2004). Likewise, Echeverri and Skålén (2011) outline how incongruence between practices elements during interactions can destroy value:

The lifeline was [. . .] they were like [. . .] "Well you just need to do this; you just need to do that". I was like, "Are you ordering me to do it?" (Participant 3 (Focus group), Female, 50 years old).

An interaction presents opportunities for value destruction or creation (Echeverri and Skålén, 2011). Vafeas *et al.* (2016) illustrate that power held by clients in a client–agency relationship reduced motivation due to the experience of conflict and coercion. In a social marketing context, Participant 6 provides a contrasting perspective to demonstrate how service providers need to balance the use of concern and control in their interactions in social marketing services. In doing so, the service provider fulfils a well-balanced conduct well received by the service user. This need for balance in interactional elements is consistent with Leo's (2013) proposition that service providers in social marketing services need to balance concern and influence to achieve goals. The utilisation and assessment of resources that contributes to perceptions of value seem unique (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2011) within the social structure of social marketing services. This is likely due to the lack of choice, involuntary nature and need to achieve behavioural outcomes typically associated with social marketing programmes (Baker *et al.*, 2005, French, 2011) that makes it particularly important to balance these elements (Vafeas *et al.*, 2016):

I think they are concerned but they are not forceful. I might carry on using the clinic given it is the only gay and bisexual clinic so I don't really have much of a choice (Participant 6 (Interview), Male, 33 years old).

Similarly, Participant 8 illustrates in a mental health service context, the combination of fine balance of application of resources in terms of provision of concrete opinions, a plan of action, as well as dedicating time and genuine concern is crucial:

> There are staff in there who are genuinely interested in the situation and they are the ones who actually bring you aside and sit down and talk to you, and have time to actually counsel you, give you opinions, give you alternate points of view, and suggest alternate action plans (Participant 8 (Interview), Male, 38 years old).

4.1.2 Misuse of firm resources. We define misuse of firm resources as the inappropriate organisation of resources that result in failure to meet behavioural goals by a firm's employees. The interview data suggested some social marketing services might inefficiently utilise resources resulting in suboptimal outcomes for users. Studies in value destruction emphasise how the misuse of resources by a business can create value for the misuser or destroy value for another party (Plé and Cáceres, 2010; Smith, 2013). Resource integration may be difficult due to unattainability or lack of resources from the initial interaction (Laamanen and Skålén, 2015). This corresponds with Osborne *et al.*'s (2016) observation that regardless of the state of service users being unconscious or unwilling users, the touch and fail points within public service systems can impede engagement and value creation. While social marketing services have the potential to improve the well-being of the consumer (Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2013), inactions from functions of a service can reduce well-being (Anderson *et al.*, 2013). Indeed, the data showed misuse of resources might arise from various avenues including the kind of personnel hired to provide the service. Participant 2 outlines how some employees are "clock watchers" and hired to fill in the time. When service employees are not attentive to user needs in social marketing services, this may affect users because they are likely to integrate resources effectively for behavioural goals:

> Like any particular workforce, there are some people who are just what I call "clock watchers". They are just there doing the job and they are in and out (Participant 2 (Focus group), Female, 44 years old).

Similarly, Participant 3 raises the issue of the use of volunteers who are unpaid workers, of which she believes contributes to the problem of non-response in phone service. The use of volunteers in social services is difficult to manage and these services have to dedicate human resources to deliver value (Ling *et al.*, 1992; Polonsky and Garma, 2006). The use of volunteers potentially results in non-integration of resources (Plé, 2016) due to inadequate staff and employees' low engagement, all of which can result in diminished value perceptions at the point of initiation:

> But a lot of them rely on volunteers, and if they don't have the volunteers to man the phones or whatever, they're not able to respond (Participant 3 (Focus group), Female, 50 years old).

The same participant raised the issue of being put on hold on the phone and her comments reflect a sense of personal cynicism with non-response by the suicide hotline. Her distrust is evident on her conclusion that the long waiting process was aimed to reverse her suicidal thoughts. Cynicism occurs because trust on the service serving her interests and behavioural goal needs was eroded and, subsequently, emotional and well-being needs also were not met (Berman, 1997):

> I thought they put you on hold because, if there were any thoughts of suicide you would be put on hold and stay on the line for 20 minutes and go, "That will pass" (Participant 3 (Focus group), Female, 50 years old).

As previously discussed, the misuse of resources involves processes of waiting. However, Participant 8 outlines that service providers may handle processes through injudicious ways (e.g. accidental loss of paperwork). The provision of wrong information seems to occur from having to manage excessive paperwork. His comments imply a callous approach that can influence one's well-being. These actions are similar to Plé's (2016) reference to mis-integration whereby employees may accidently or intentionally misuse resources. In this case, the accidental loss of paperwork and submission of incorrect identification reflect accidental integration of inappropriate resources. Furthermore, because a service provider's actions, emotions and cognitions also influence resource integration (Plé, 2016), it is possible that at a sub-conscious level (Payne *et al.*, 2008), these employees mis-integrate customers' resources due to their cognitive orientation of working in a resource challenged sector (Plé, 2016):

> Well, who would not be after waiting and standing in line for three and a half hours. These people, basically would be in a position whereby they can potentially stuff you around if they feel like it. They can accidentally lose your paperwork [. . .].
>
> Even social workers who are professionals, for instance one of the social workers who was assisting me with housing and even when the social worker themselves were applying for housing for me, they got lost in the paperwork and were submitting incorrect identification (Participant 8 (Interview), Male, 38 years old).

In contrast, Participant 6 describes a provider operating within constraints in social marketing services. In his comments, he highlights how service providers send text messages in a timely and yet not excessive manner. His comments seem to imply that the quantity of resources (misuse of firm resources) conveyed through technology has implications on users' integration of the resource (acting on the informational resource). However, excessive information can result in reducing value when the amount of information is incongruent with what the consumer expects:

> If they do more constant checking, it will be kind of a nuisance. They keep their timing and send a SMS. I think they are doing the best they can with the resources they have (Participant 6 (Interview), Male, 32 years old).

4.2 Value destruction outcomes

In addition to the value destruction processes, the consumer data suggested three broad categories of behavioural outcomes:

(1) reduced usage of the service;

(2) termination of service; and

(3) strategic behavioural actions.

The first two sub-themes relate to consumers coping behaviourally through a spectrum of gradual dissociation with the service. The third sub-theme reflects how consumers may creatively seek alternative solutions to overcome the value destruction processes.

4.2.1 Reduced usage of the service. Reduced usage of the service reflects a gradual reduction of participants' usage of a social marketing service. Below, Participant 7 puts forth that his friend began a decline in use of the alcoholics anonymous group to eventual termination. His comments suggest the reduced usage occurring over a period of time results from a lack of strong relational exchanges within the group. Similarly, Participant 4 below admits reducing her use of a subsidised gym service due to not only a lack of motivation but also a due to lack of information specific to her behavioural goals. According

to the conservation of resources theory, individuals invest their resources as a means and ends that includes adaptation, well-being and coping (Hobfoll, 1989). Specifically, individuals who fail to gain resources after resource investment result in stress (Salanova *et al.*, 2006). Thus, it is possible that the resources (time and energy) put into attendance did not result in perceived resource gain (e.g. improved social support or health). A gradual termination of service use may reflect a lack of personal capacity to invest further given the vulnerable position of the user (alcoholic) and a lack of adequate gain in resources necessary for behavioural maintenance. Value destruction processes appear to increase barriers to changes and make it difficult to maintain desired social behaviours (Zainuddin *et al.*, 2013). While in stark contrast, the findings are consistent with research on value in social marketing that show positive processes have a positive impact on behavioural goals such as intentions to reuse a service (Chell and Mortimer, 2014):

> We tried [. . .] she probably went for maybe two and a half weeks, then it started dropping down to every second day and she just dropped out [. . .]. I think maybe if she developed a stronger bond, with the facilitator and maybe if she was not that skeptical of some of the people there [. . .] (Participant 7 (Interview), Male, 34 years old).
>
> On one hand, I have to admit that I cannot convince myself to go there constantly, but on the other side; I think I have not received sufficient advice or assistance from the gym [. . .] I was thinking if the coach can give me other advice that I can do something in a correct way, maybe I would go there more often than I now do (Participant 4 (Focus group), Female, 32 years old).

4.2.2 Termination of service. Termination of service reflects a complete cessation of service use. In contrast to reduced usage, termination of service seems to occur when there is not just a lack of gain but also a threatened loss in resources. A threat of a net loss of resources can produce stress (Hobfoll, 1989; Smith, 2013). Below, Participant 3 outlines her strong opinions of not using a service again. These decisions to terminate engagement with the service appear to be a conscious attempt that may either occur at the beginning of the service experience, or through a gradual decline due to perceived ineffectiveness. Assuming for Participant 3, the fear of resource loss from further interaction limited her engagement with the service. When a service fails to provide a positive outcome, it is possible that service users perceive the use of the service to result in further resource losses (e.g. loss in self-esteem or psychological health). The complete detachment of the service matches French and Gordon (2015) cautioning of how inertia in social marketing occurring through destruction of value can result in the severe outcome of stopping service use:

> Yeah, I was like, "Screw you". I was not impressed with them. I just thought, "I'll never ring you again. I won't use your service again" (Participant 3 (Focus group), Female, 50 years old).

From another perspective, Participant 8 offers his opinion that value destruction processes make it challenging for admission into social services such as mental health service, resulting in individuals not using the service from the onset, thus denying themselves treatment. The negative experiences of using the service (value destruction processes) appear to compromise his physical well-being. This perspective highlights how resource constraints can affect service use at the initiation stage and have severe implications on users' well-being:

> It becomes blatantly obvious to me that for some, even speaking of myself, there may become a point whereby the admission stress becomes so great that you deny yourself that level of treatment (Participant 8 (Interview), Male, 38 years old).

4.2.3 Strategic behavioural actions. Strategic behavioural actions describe service users' tendencies to find alternative solutions independently that may involve them engaging in dysfunctional ways to overcome value destruction processes. Below, Participant 8 describes how he triple photocopies his documents to overcome the lack of service. It seems the user's experiences with the service shaped his low expectation and anticipation of potential problems to the extent he devised alternative solution. Environmental circumstances signify a potential of resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989). The participant offset the potential of resource loss through an additional investment of energy. He executes this strategic action to achieve his goal of obtaining a desired level of service. His actions, learnt from previous experiences, are intentional to counteract the potential of resource loss. Similarly, Smith (2013) highlight consumers undertake coping strategies to regain control following resource loss in destruction processes:

> [. . .] If you did not happen to be mindful enough to make double, triple photocopies of everything (Participant 8 (Interview), Male, 38 years old).

Again, the same participant elaborates on how he utilises his personal skills in technology to circumvent the situation, such that the service provider had no choice but to deliver the service according to his needs. This strategic action on his part seems to reflect a learned resourcefulness (Rosenbaum, 1989), acquired with the experience of multiple value destruction incidents. Learned resourcefulness includes behavioural repertoire such as the self-regulation of emotional and cognitive responses and the use of problem solving skills. Indeed, the participant's actions reflect him utilising his skills in an adaptive way to receive the resources he needs. These actions suggest domination and contestation of power in service interactions (Laamanen and Skålén, 2015):

> Luckily, thanks to cloud computing and the internet, I was able to reproduce my lost paperwork literally in front of their eyes, thereby forcing their hand and making them follow on with delivering their particular level of service (Participant 8 (Interview), Male, 38 years old).

Below, Participant 5 admits that she will hang up and then repeatedly ring a health support service whenever she speaks to someone she is dissatisfied with. Her extensive professional health knowledge creates high expectations on health support. While her deliberate and strategic actions of ringing multiple times is likely to provide her with the precise information she desires, they reflect misbehaviour that potentially disrupts functional service for the organisation or other customers (Daunt and Harris, 2014). Such behaviours are in line with consumer misbehaviour incidents occurring from structural issues (Kashif and Zarkada, 2015). In contrast with commercial motives typically discussed in the literature (e.g. financial and ego motives) (Daunt and Harris, 2012), in the case of social marketing services, users seek to satisfy utilitarian motives that should help achieve behavioural goals:

> If they are not friendly, I would hang up and call again and get someone else. If someone cannot understand what you are asking, and give you some other answers that you are asking, that means they don't understand you and you don't understand them or what they are talking about is not fitting to what you are wanting to know, so I would say, "I am sorry, but I don't think we are on the same wavelength, I will call back (Participant 5 (Interview), Female, 37 years old).

In another instance, Participant 7 describes how a stereotypical perception of a specific suburb negatively influence a decision to use a social marketing service despite positive recommendations. In this case, the participant wanted alternatives that better fits the needs of him and his friend. Stigma theories highlight that negative stereotype perceptions generate prejudice and negative reactions (Kirkwood and Stamm, 2006). In light of the incongruent

resource applied (solution) by the employee, the service user who perceived a lack of social acceptance of the service appears to devalue the benefits to the extent he tried to strategically seek alternatives more aligned to his personal needs, even if they may not be as effective:

> Look, I was a bit sceptical; maybe I was a bit judgmental as well. I said, "Maybe we shouldn't go to this particular suburb even though they recommended it as the best support group". I said, "Maybe we should go to the one in Claremount" (Participant 7 (Interview), Male, 34 years old).

4.3 Theoretical implications

This study sought to draw from services marketing theory as an alternative pathway to social and behavioural change for the achievement of societal well-being by exploring value destruction in social marketing services. *RQ1* and *RQ2* were addressed using an exploratory qualitative approach from the perspective of consumers. The current study contributes to the academic literature in three ways. First, it provides empirical insights into how value destruction processes occur in services and identifies the behavioural outcomes that occur because of value destruction. Consequently, this study responds to Kuppelwieser and Finsterwalder's (2016) criticism that that there is currently insufficient focus on value destruction in service research and its impact on well-being. Second, in directly examining value destruction, this study responds to criticisms that much of the research on value creation is predominantly positively valenced (Blocker and Barrios, 2015). This provides us with the foundation for a more balanced understanding of how value creation and destruction occurs. Third, this study adds to our existing knowledge of value destruction in social marketing, which to date, has focussed on non-service contexts (Zainuddin *et al.*, 2017). Providing insights to value destruction in service contexts allows social marketers, particularly at the midstream, to understand the challenges facing value creation efforts in social marketing programmes and acknowledges the complexities of creating value for individuals and societies. Incongruent resource application and misuse of firm resources highlight the importance of systemic processes in the sense that resource poor agencies widely adopt activities that not only do not add value but also could reduce value for service users. Findings of this study are consistent with work by Kashif and Zarkada (2015) who investigate the influence of system failures that result in customer misbehaviour and destruction of value. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of finer behavioural interaction and expertise elements encapsulated in the incongruent application of resources. This perspective is consistent with emerging studies that focus on the interaction as reducing value outcomes (Stieler *et al.*, 2014; Plé and Cáceres, 2010) and contributes to understanding finer-grained value destruction processes particularly relevant to social marketing services. The two value destruction processes uncovered in this study highlight the importance of considering how systemic misuse of firm resources and interpersonal level application of resources can hinder resource integration. As such, these perspectives correspond and contribute to emerging research in social marketing that emphasize the need to incorporate midstream influences including firms and employees to influence change (Gordon, 2013; Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2013; Leo, 2013) in more effective ways. These service provider value destruction processes derived from a consumer's perspective also highlight the potential of multiple actors engaging in the destruction of value.

4.4 Managerial implications

This study highlights the realities of social marketing services operating in resource constraint environments. The first practical implication of resource constraints resulting in value destruction suggests these service operators need to optimize their resources to support behavioural goals. This may mean dedicating resources to particular stages of the service

(Alvaro *et al.*, 2010), for instance, by providing more resources at the initiation stage of service use (e.g. more counsellors on the phone) and at certain time periods (e.g. ensure responsiveness to answering and promptness in returning calls). Because resources are likely to have different value at different points of the service use (Hobfoll and Jackson, 1991), optimisation of resource allocation should counter negative impacts of value destruction. Second, this study highlights the micro-level importance of interactions between social marketing service providers and users. In particular, the study suggests high value placed on individualised processes. This finding highlights the potential for service providers to scrutinise their actions and activities to achieve positive effects on behavioural goals. For example, employees could examine and apply micro-level detail of interactions that might include providing specific content in interactions and seeking to relate (Neghina *et al.*, 2014) to increase perceptions of customisation.

Third, the outcomes of value destruction processes indicate the importance of efforts to recover consumers at risks of terminating or reducing service use. Social marketers can develop strategies from a customer churn and retention perspective. For those who reduce service use, social marketers can actively anticipate and integrate resources congruent with consumers' behavioural needs. In contrast, for consumers who terminate service use, regaining defectors may require re-engagement strategies that involve communicating fundamental changes in service functions. Finally, the self-initiated outcome of consumers' strategic behavioural actions may not always represent the most appropriate solution. While service users may seek to correct value destruction processes through these actions, their involvement, if not properly managed, could potentially result in further decline of their well-being due to the informal and nonconforming nature of these actions. To manage, service providers can allocate resources and develop skills to prevent, identify and influence service users to act in constructive ways in the face of value destruction processes. Such actions could help prevent consumers from devising strategies that may arise from mindsets of failure anticipation.

4.5 Limitations and suggestions for further research

There are several caveats associated with this paper. First, due to the exploratory nature of this study and its small sample, the findings are not generalisable or representative to all social marketing services. However, the current study represents a preliminary step to elaborate on gaps in the literature on value destruction in social marketing from a consumer's perspective. The study findings do not aim to produce generalisable frameworks to describe and measure these concepts. Further studies can aim to replicate this study using larger sample sizes and draw comparisons across other service settings. Second, this study focused on and uncovered limited antecedents and outcomes. One of the findings is that value destruction in social marketing contexts can result in termination of service use. Yet, the non-usage of any service is potentially harmful for social marketing service users due to their behavioural goal needs. Future research could explore the behavioural patterns of users after they terminate service use. Third, this study focused on service users and the insights reflect the perspective of only one actor type (i.e. consumer) and firm-focused value destruction. Future studies can seek to triangulate the results from the perspectives of other actors. Finally, this study did not measure individual well-being in the current study. Instead, the study focused on understanding the value destruction processes and outcomes of value destruction. Thus, the findings only infer that if individuals were to reduce their service usage, terminate their use of the service or engage in strategic behavioural actions that are dysfunctional; this can lead to a decline in their well-being. Consequently, further studies can investigate from a well-being perspective.

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