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Facilitating Civic Awareness and Social Participation as a Product: A Case Study of Formosa Salon

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Abstract

Social marketing aims to improve social welfare by changing individuals' behaviours, and deepening democracy should not be an exception. We can use social marketing to enhance civic awareness and public engagement by turning citizens who do not care about these issues into active participants in our society. However, current research has not explored how we can apply social marketing to achieve this goal. This research examines Formosa Salon from the perspectives of exchange theory, the theory of hierarchy of effects, and the framework of the social marketing mix. By gathering and analysing data from archival data, semi-structured interviews, and researchers' engagement, this study views increasing civic awareness and promoting public engagement in social issues as a product sold by Formosa Salon. The price of this product is the knowledge barrier. The organisers of Formosa Salon have marketed their product on the internet and through higher education institutions in London. The contributions of this study and key recommendations are also identified.

Keywords

social marketing – civic awareness – social participation – Formosa Salon

1 Introduction

Research on social marketing has been developed and widely applied for decades, though some areas of research have not yet been adequately explored. For example, those types of social marketing that have been researched have been predominantly related to public health and disease prevention, while other areas related to social issues/challenges (such as labour rights, gender equality, environmental protection, etc.) have not received equal amounts of attention. One of the social issues/challenges faced by humanity today which has not been profoundly examined by the researchers in this field is how to enhance the related capacities of civic awareness and public engagement in social issues. Gerard Hastings, one of the most prominent scholars in this field, has advocated that researchers should care more about how to 'mobilize and empower' citizens 'to change the world', rather than 'nudge, seduce or cajole people into behaving in line with our prescriptions' (cited by Dibb & Carrigan, 2013: 1393). Therefore, it might be worthwhile to view the capacity to increase civic awareness and public engagement in social issues as a product which social marketers could sell to the general public; further study could then show whether this product successfully changed people's behaviours, such as by changing the attitudes of those who were previously indifferent or passive to public issues in their societies.

This study uses multiple qualitative methods to conduct a case study of one organisation aiming to enhance civic awareness and social engagement in public issues in the United Kingdom: Formosa Salon. Founded in 2014, Formosa Salon has organised over 120 events to encourage the general public to understand viewpoints on various public issues (such as free trade agreements, natural resources management, human rights, inequality, etc.) and to engage participants in open and free discussions or further debates on them. Based on my more than four years of experience of participating and organising with Formosa Salon, the archival data generated by members of Formosa Salon, and semi-structured interviews conducted with some of the participants and organisers, this study analyses the product, price (including the perceived benefits and costs), place, and promotion strategies adopted by Formosa Salon. In addition, it adopts the lens of exchange theory and the hierarchy of effects to examine the organisation. Finally, it suggests some implications and raises questions for social marketers aiming to enhance civic awareness and public engagement in social issues.

2 Literature Review

Social marketing was initially defined as ‘the design, implementation and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution and marketing research’ (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971: 5). Later, Andreasen (1994: 110) defined social marketing as ‘the application of commercial marketing technologies to the programs designed to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of society of which they are a part’. After much relevant research and practice had been conducted, Kotler and Lee (2008: 7) redefined social marketing as a ‘process that applies marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate, and deliver value to influence target audience behaviours that benefit society (public health, safety, the environment and communities) as well as the target audience’. More recently, Dann (2010: 151) incorporated marketing concepts developed by the American Marketing Association and the Chartered Institute of Marketing, producing a new definition of social marketing as ‘the adaptation and adoption of commercial marketing activities, institutions and processes to induce behavioural change in a targeted audience on a temporary or permanent basis to achieve a social goal’.

While several researchers have defined social marketing in diverse terms, some essential elements can be crystallised from their definitions. The first is what must be done in social marketing. It involves the design (including analysis and planning), implementation/execution, control, and evaluation of social programmes. This view of the social marketing process leads to the second shared element: the adoption and application of commercial marketing techniques, such as the well-known ‘4P framework’ which encompasses the key concepts of product, price, place, and promotion. Contrasted to commercial marketing, which sells clearly defined products or services, social marketing sells social ideas, generally those that aim to encourage consumers to change their behaviours.

Rather than maximising revenues, which is the domain of commercial marketing, social marketing aims to achieve a social goal, such as improving personal welfare and benefiting society. While this seems to cover a diverse range of topics, research in the field of social marketing has been primarily conducted in the contexts of international development (where social marketing originated), public health, and disease prevention (Lefebvre, 2011; Truong, 2014). Other sectors driven by abstract social ideas or goals, such as labour rights, gender, race and ethnicity equality, environmental protection, and so forth, have not received equal attention to date. Social marketing should aim to encourage

more citizens to participate in public discussion and debates around particular social issues or challenges, instead of just promoting readymade solutions. The question of how to enhance public engagement and agency, therefore, should be one of the critical functions of social marketing.

If we agree that the goal of social marketing is to enhance public engagement and agency, we should consider how best to achieve this goal: that is, if we set the goal of social marketing as being to change behaviours—such as turning more citizens who do not care about social issues or challenges into active participants in our society—how should we design, implement, control, and evaluate programmes that aim to fulfil the goal of enhancing public engagement? Could we apply theoretical and conceptual frameworks widely applied in the fields of both commercial and social marketing—such as exchange theory, the hierarchy of effects, and the 4P model—to examine programmes which encourage citizens to be more voluntarily engaged in public discussions or even to debate around social issues?

Exchange theory, which is seen as the foundational theoretical tenant underlying commercial and social marketing (Luca & Suggs, 2013), clearly argues that people purchase something that they believe has value. Kotler (2000: 6–7) further states that an ‘exchange’ happens if the following five requirements are met: (a) there are at least two parties; (b) each party has something that has value to the other party; (c) each party is free to accept or reject the exchange; (d) each party is willing to deal with the other party; and (e) each party can communicate and deliver on their promises. It is also suggested that people are more likely to purchase something when the benefits are seen to outweigh the costs. It is, thus, essential for social marketers to show that the benefits outweigh the costs for voluntary behaviour so that the people they target pay the price for the product (such as behavioural changes) (Maibach, 1993).

The theory of the hierarchy of effects contends that customers’ involvement with a product or service determines the most effective delivery of information (Krugman, 1965; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). For example, when people are highly involved with a message, they are more likely to be motivated to process the information more thoroughly; when their involvement is lower, they are more likely to rely on heuristics that simplify their efforts. This theory has significant implications for both exchange theory and social marketers: for example, how and what types of messages should social marketers send to their targeted audience so that the former can highly involve the latter (or both of them exchange something valuable to each other)?

The framework of 4P—that is, a focus on looking at how something is marketed by separating it into four categories: product, price, place, and

promotion—is commonly known as the ‘marketing mix’. Although Wood (2008) has reminded researchers that the 4P scheme should be viewed as a thought process instead of a theory and stressed it is necessary to apply various well-developed theories to grasp the full complexity of human behaviours, researchers have widely applied the marketing mix as an analytical framework in social marketing (Basil, Diaz-Meneses & Basil, 2019; Lefebvre, 2011; MacFadyen, Stead & Hastings, 2003). In the following sections, I will review all four of these elements of the marketing mix as applied to practices of social marketing and incorporate insights from theories commonly used in wider studies of social marketing (such as exchange theory and the hierarchy of effects) to formulate my research question.

2.1 *Product*

The product of social marketing is not merely tangible objects or intangible services: it encompasses ideas and capacities to produce behavioural changes (Andreasen, 1994; Dann, 2010; Kotler & Lee, 2008; Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). That is, objects or services can be necessary to enhance public engagement, but people must adopt the ideas or change their behaviours to use these objects or services so that the goals of social marketing can be fulfilled (Lefebvre, 2011).

To successfully sell the product—that is, to change behaviour—the product must be relevant to people’s lives. Social marketers can ensure this relevancy by carefully examining the determinants, contexts, and consequences of current and desired behaviours from the users’ points of view (Lefebvre, 2011). By doing so, a social marketer has a higher chance of knowing how to exchange the product with, and further highly involve, those whom they target.

2.2 *Price*

The price of any product that may be subject to social marketing is associated with the costs of behaviour changes, and includes—but is not limited to—monetary and non-monetary costs, such as time, efforts, inertia, and so forth (MacFadyen et al., 2003). In addition to price, social marketers should also take the potential benefits of a product into consideration—which could be a better individual quality of life or environment or a more abstract benefit such as social equality—to better conceptualise the price of a product which is socially marketed.

As stated before, exchange theory implies that people are more likely to purchase a product (or change behaviours voluntarily) once perceived benefits outweigh perceived costs. Hence, social marketers must (a) assess the consequences of the current and desired behaviours of the users, such as the

existing and potential rewards and punishments for the users to change their behaviours (Lefebvre, 2011), and (b) demonstrate that the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived costs.

2.3 *Place*

The concept of place as applied to social marketing has to do with the distribution channels through which the targeted people could potentially access a product. Social marketers should not only fill the gaps between wanting to change behaviour and being able to do it but must also create opportunities for people to buy the products or to change their behaviours. That is, social marketers must make one product (such as a social idea or behavioural change) not only affordable in terms of price but also accessible in terms of distribution.

2.4 *Promotion*

The final element of the marketing mix as applied to social marketing is promotion, which has to do with the question, how can consumers who have already received the relevant information be finally persuaded to adopt a product? It must be noted that advertising is just one of the ways that can be used to promote social ideas or behavioural changes, and it should not be equated with and used as a synonym for social marketing. More importantly, social marketers must tackle the issue of communication inequalities: how is information about a specific product retrieved by a targeted individual, given the fact that everyone is faced with different barriers to accessing the relevant information (Lefebvre, 2011; Viswanath & Kreuter, 2007)?

Therefore, one should examine the determinants, contexts, and consequences of adopting the products from the user's point of view to successfully spread an idea or change a behaviour. This includes, but is not limited to, thinking about the costs and benefits of one idea or behavioural change, studying the distribution channels where people could most easily acquire the products, and considering the strategies that would make the relevant information as highly engaging as possible (especially given the existence of communication inequalities). In terms of exchange theory and the theory of the hierarchy of effects, social marketers must communicate and deliver the values of their products to people, so that they can have a better chance to highly involve the public with their products.

In this study I will conduct a case study of Formosa Salon from the perspective of social marketing. That is, I will examine how social marketing can enhance public engagement by integrating theories of marketing (exchange theory, hierarchy of effects, social marketing mix) to answer a set of linked research questions: what precisely is the product that Formosa Salon is selling?

How does Formosa Salon evaluate the cost and benefits of its products for users, and how does it distribute and communicate its ideas to promote civic awareness and public engagement in social issues or challenges? After I outline my methodology in the following section, I will introduce the background to my case and then present the findings.

3 Research Method

This qualitative case study uses multiple qualitative methods to answer the research questions identified above. A qualitative case study is suitable for addressing a 'how' question regarding 'a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context' (Yin, 2009: 2). It also allows researchers to deal with multiple sources of evidence to triangulate the data and deeply understand the real-life phenomenon (Yin, 2009: 2). Focusing on this single case, due to the opportunities for unusual research access, also allows me to critically examine this unusually revelatory and extreme exemplar (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) since Formosa Salon has been active without a leader, command structure, formalised membership, and financial resources since 2014. Although the generalisability of a single case study is sometimes challenged, the key to this type of research is to theoretically reveal an unusual phenomenon, as explained above and further in the following section (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

First, I have myself participated in the organisation of Formosa Salon since September 2016. Initially, I attended some events organised by other co-founding and senior members of Formosa Salon without any intention to conduct research about it. With the passage of time, I was invited to participate in organising workshops, seminars, and other activities: for example, I was one of the contributors to the workshops 'Understanding the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement' (26 November 2016), 'Understanding Homelessness: International Comparison' (14 January 2017), and 'Why Overseas Students Support the Protests Against the Act of Traditional Territories' (4 August 2017). I also hosted 'Actions and Imaginations of the Taiwanese in the UK during the Post-318 Era' (18 March 2017), 'Public Theology and Social Movements in Post-1997 Hong Kong' (8 September 2019), and 'Political or Professional Concerns? Why the WHO Passively Dealt with the Health Inequality of LGBT+ People' (19 October 2019). In addition, I was the speaker at the seminar 'Why People are Protesting Against the Amendment of the Labor Standards Act' (6 January 2018). Although I did not intend to conduct a case study of Formosa Salon until late 2019, this long-time personal involvement has offered me plenty of opportunities to observe the organisation and its daily business.

After I decided to examine the case of Formosa Salon from the social marketing perspective, I began to gather and analyse data about it by using two primary sources: (a) archival data, which was stored in the Facebook group organised by Formosa Salon (for which I have been one of the administrators for over three years); and (b) two focus groups, which were conducted in October 2019. On the one hand, the archival data and the following document analysis help me to (a) ‘uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem’ (Merriam, 1988: 118) and (b) triangulate the data I collected from the focus groups, which could ‘reduce the impact of potential biases’ resulting from ‘a single method, a single source, or a single investigator’s bias’ (Bowen, 2009: 28).

On the other hand, the focus group technique enables me to produce rich qualitative data through structured discussions, facilitated by a moderator (myself, the researcher), with a small group of people with years of experience in being participants (or even organisers) of Formosa Salon (Masadeh, 2012). Although there have been concerns about groupthink when using focus groups as a method to collect data (Catterall & Maclaran, 2006: 260; MacDougall & Baum, 1997),¹ I am confident that this risk has been mitigated by the fact that each of these focus groups was intensive, and the interviewees and I have spoken freely. This is because (a) I do not have any conflicts of interests (such as conducting similar research, studying in a closely related field, or looking for similar jobs) with these interviewees, and there are no material and symbolic rewards or punishments for any of us; (b) these interviewees have known me and each other for at least two years, and this fact has helped me create ‘a supportive setting with one’s peer group which encourages self-disclosure’ (Catterall & Maclaran, 2006: 264); and (c) these interviewees have been used to being a part of critical and reflexive discussions, since the seminars and workshops held by Formosa Salon have been encouraging participants to do so (as I shall further elaborate in the section on findings). Hence, I am confident that I have boosted the reliability of the data generated from these focus groups by creating a favourable environment (a safe space and professional manners) for my interviewees to express their opinions freely.

In these focus groups I conducted semi-structured interviews: four people were invited for each focus group who were either frequent users (called ‘highly involved participants’ since they had attended and took part in the

1 Groupthink occurs when a certain group ‘develops high cohesiveness ... to maintain concurrence on important topics at the expense of ignoring realistic challenges to the consensus’ (MacDougall & Baum, 1997: 534), and this situation tends to result in some participants’ unwillingness to offer different views (Luke & Goodrich, 2019).

organisation of Formosa Salon for at least one year) or organisers of Formosa Salon. Each focus group lasted about two hours, and the details of the interviewees are listed in Table 1.

Among these interviewees, most of them have participated in Formosa Salon for more than three years. Two of them (DH and GL) co-founded Formosa Salon in 2014. The majority has at least a master's degree—one has earned his PhD, and four others are conducting their PhD research in different institutions in London. I tried to involve the same number of female and male interviewees in this study and mix them in each focus group, but given the time availability of the people I invited (I invited ten male and eight female 'highly involved participants' to take part in the focus groups), this is what I could do. Perhaps I can do more studies, either quantitatively or qualitatively, to include more participants, either frequent or infrequent ones, in the future. Nevertheless, the participants involved in these focus groups share similar socio-economic characteristics and knowledge and experience of our subject matter (Formosa Salon, in this case). This recruitment strategy not only reflects some critical demographic features of the participants of Formosa Salon in a broader sense but also helps the participants in these focus groups to be more willing to disclose information, which also reduces the risk of groupthink (Catterall & Maclaran, 2006: 263).

Before each interview began, I briefly introduced my research topics and the rights of the interviewees to my interviewees. These rights include but are

TABLE 1 List of interviewees

Focus group	Pseudonyms of interviewees	Sex	Years of participation	Occupation (when interviewed)
1 (20 Oct 2019)	DH	Male	6	Researcher
	GL	Female	6	Freelancer
	TL	Female	3	PhD student
	HY	Female	3	Freelancer
2 (27 Oct 2019)	JC	Male	4	PhD student
	LY	Male	3	PhD student
	CY	Male	2	PhD student
	GT	Male	2	White-collar worker

not limited to: the interviewee can ask research-relevant questions at any time; the data collected from the interviewee is protected and handled following the relevant laws and regulations; confidentiality and anonymity are maintained; and it will not be possible to identify any interviewee in any publications. Additionally, I also asked for their approval to audio-record each of the interviews. These recordings I managed and protected with passwords from the time they were collected until now, and only I have listened to and transcribed these recordings.

After collecting the data from the interview and archives, I transcribed the recordings and then undertook the process of thematic analysis 'reviewing, summarising, cross-checking, looking for patterns, and drawing conclusions' (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 179). Specifically, I conducted a three-phase coding process to identify themes in the texts to show the product, price (including the cost and benefits of its products), place, and promotion strategy. First, I used the open coding approach to create codes that summarise my data. Although it ended up with a significant number of codes, I reduced them into a manageable number in the next stage. Second, I adopted the axial coding approach, which involves grouping similar codes into themes in a meaningful way and further identifying relationships. I labelled these themes and considered my data in tandem with the three theories outlined earlier: marketing mix, exchange theory, and hierarchy of effects. In the last phase, I immersed myself in the data and codes again: I examined the data through the perspectives of the marketing mix, the hierarchy of effects, and exchange theory to group the codes and then identify the product, price (including the cost and benefits of its products), place, and promotion strategy of Formosa Salon. That said, during the data-theory iteration, I went back and forth between the literature reviewed in the previous section and the data I had collected. In Ragin and Amoroso's (2011) terms, I followed the retroduction approach, combining deductive and inductive manners to represent social life.

4 Background

The establishment of Formosa Salon in 2014 has to do with the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan. The movement was associated with protests against the passing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement by the ruling party Kuomintang (KMT or Chinese Nationalist Party). Those who organised this movement (mainly Taiwanese students and civic groups) argued that the trade pact with China would not only hurt Taiwan's small and medium-sized enterprises but also leave Taiwan vulnerable to political pressure from Beijing. From

18 March 2014 to 10 April 2014, crowds of protestors occupied the Legislative Yuan (the parliament of Taiwan). Thanks to the 24-day occupancy of the highest legislative organ of the state, which has never happened in the country's history, the general public in Taiwan began to be highly engaged in understanding and further discussing public issues (such as democracy, national economy, public policy, etc.) with each other (Chen & Huang, 2015).

In response to the Sunflower Movement, in March 2014 several people (mainly Taiwanese students) in the UK also gathered at Trafalgar Square in central London to demand the Taiwanese government rescind and renegotiate the Cross-Strait Agreement on Trade in Services. Later, in June 2014, they held a Civic Awareness and Political Engagement Forum to cultivate civic awareness, encourage social participation, and promote international interaction. These efforts persisted over time: those who organised these activities continued to hold events (such as workshops, seminars, or study groups) in London to discuss Taiwanese public issues, including politics, economy, and social equality.

Without a leader, command structure, formalised membership, or steady financial resources, the founding members (and later newcomers) have continued to hold activities under the name Formosa Salon for over six years. Their goal remains to cultivate civic awareness and social engagement in public issues by openly and inclusively discussing political, economic, and social issues. Its Facebook group now has over 2,300 members, and there have been over 100 events held since 2014.

Since Formosa Salon has no official statistics regarding the demographics of its participants, I will try to describe who attends these events based on my four-year engagement with the organisation. Those who participated in these seminars, workshops, study groups, or actions are usually aged between 23 to 40 (since they usually come to London for postgraduate studies), and they are predominately Han people (though some topics of these events have been Taiwanese indigenous peoples' rights).² Although these events have been predominately promoted in the online groups of associations of Taiwanese students, a small number of white-collar workers and even people from Hong Kong and mainland China occasionally show up. The ratio of the participants' sex is 50/50, and some participants identify as LGBTQ+. Even though topics regarding labour rights and agricultural development have been discussed, very few (if any) participants have been or currently are working in the manufacturing or agricultural sector. On average, 30 people come to each event, such

2 It is, however, surprising that the topic of new immigrants has not yet been discussed in Formosa Salon.

as a seminar or workshop. When special guest speakers are invited (such as Dr Petula Ho Sik-ying, Wang Dan, film director Ado Kaliting Pacidal, or singer Suming Rupi) or the events are held in different fora (such as joining London Pride to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights), the numbers of participants are much higher. For example, about 80 to 100 participants registered with Formosa Salon to attend London Pride in each year from 2016 to 2019.

5 Findings

Table 2 shows the results of the thematic analysis, and how each research question is answered by the data I collected is further demonstrated below.

For the first research question—what precisely is the product that Formosa Salon is selling?—I found that the primary social idea that Formosa Salon is spreading is civic awareness and social engagement in the political, economic, or social issues mainly in Taiwan. That is, it strives to change citizens from not caring or only passively being involved in public policies to taking more active roles in society.

For example, the first event organised by Formosa Salon was entitled ‘Civic Awareness and Political Engagement Forum’, and the official proposal for the event clearly illustrated the background: ‘for Taiwanese people, the practice of democracy is still confined in the simple understanding of election and representative democracy. The idea of civic participation has not emerged in civil society in Taiwan’. The purpose of this event was, therefore, ‘to urge deeper thinking on the responsibilities of being a citizen in modern society’, and ‘to cultivate civic awareness and encourage social participation’. This official document of 2014 indicates that Formosa Salon strives to promote the idea that democracy is not merely about casting votes at every election. To deepen democracy and foster civil society in Taiwan, citizens should change their behaviour from just voting in elections to reflecting on their roles in modern society and then actively engaging in social and political affairs.

On 18 March 2017 the event ‘Actions and Imaginations of the Taiwanese in the UK during the Post-318 Era’ was held. Six senior members were invited to review their experiences of public engagement, which included co-founding or taking part in events organised by Formosa Salon. These senior members all viewed Formosa Salon as a public forum for facilitating discussions of ‘public issues’: by ‘public’, senior members agreed that if a group of people involved in Formosa Salon showed an interest in any topic, it was legitimate for it to be an event of Formosa Salon. It seems that the scope of the topics for discussion has been broadened since the 2014 official document stated that Formosa Salon

TABLE 2 Results of the thematic analysis

Empirical themes	Conceptual categories	Theoretical dimensions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Sunflower Movement – Trade – Neoliberalism – Social movements – Social policy – Health policy – Environmental protection – Gender and marriage equality – Labour rights – Indigenous people – Arts – History 	A variety of topics and actions	Product: civic awareness and social engagement in the political, economic, or social issues mainly in Taiwan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Seminars – Workshops – Study groups – Demonstrations – Joining parades 	Strong interactions between the participants	Price: benefits and costs of ‘consuming’ the products of Formosa Salon
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The practice of democracy: not only voting in elections but also engaging in public affairs – Engaging in discussions: having to speak up in any event in the early days of Formosa Salon 	Knowledge shared at each event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Learning new thoughts and/or practices – Keeping in touch with the issues that participants care about
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Open to different perspectives: no blaming and time limits on individuals’ expressions – Free to exchange ideas and have disagreements 	Taking part in discussions and/or acting upon public issues	

TABLE 2 Results of the thematic analysis (*cont.*).

Empirical themes	Conceptual categories	Theoretical dimensions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Some topics are hard to comprehend – The lack of ability and/or experience to join discussions on public issues 	Knowledge barrier	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – University College London – Imperial College London – School of Oriental and African Studies 	Classrooms in various academic institutions in London	Place: where Formosa Salon sells its product
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Official website – Official Facebook group – Facebook groups managed by the associations of Taiwanese students in some universities in London 	The internet	Promotion: how Formosa Salon spreads the idea of civic awareness and social engagement with public issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Friends who have previously shown interests in public issues 	Personal network	

aimed to foster civic awareness and political engagement. We can identify that topics covered by the seminars, workshops, or study groups organised by Formosa Salon in 2014 and 2015 included, but were not limited to, issues surrounding the Sunflower Movement, principally the Cross-Strait Agreement on Trade in Services and its related theoretical concepts (such as neoliberalism in the Taiwanese context). Since late 2015, more diverse topics, such as homelessness, the rights of sex workers, and the protection of historical buildings, water resources, and carbon reduction efforts in Taiwan have been discussed. After 2016, the range of the topics became much more diverse, covering topics such as health policy, social movements in Taiwan, international laws and arbitration, history, music, arts (including street art and fine art), and environmental protection.

In the eyes of the senior members, however, what really matters for Formosa Salon and its participants is not only the topics discussed in the public space but also the strong interactions fostered between the participants. One senior member clearly argued in the event 'Actions and Imaginations of the Taiwanese

in the UK during the Post-318 Era' that 'Formosa Salon has tried to break [the status quo] that citizens tend not to participate [in public discussions]. What is really hard is to engage in discussion, not acquire the relevant knowledge'. One interviewee confirms this by stating that 'in the early years of Formosa Salon, everyone was asked to say something about the topic. If anyone did not speak up, he/she would be called to say something or ask questions'.

In addition, those interviewees who are not only users but also organisers (in this study, they could be called social marketers, since they have all devoted time and effort to organising and promoting ideas and events) all mention several times that Formosa Salon is to be seen as a public place for discussion of public issues. For example:

[Formosa Salon] involves more people to engage in civil discussion ... (GL)

[Formosa Salon] is a space for discussion. This is a space for people from different standpoints to feel safe to voice and listen to others. (DH)

The existence of Formosa Salon is more like a space for public discussion. It is an existence for public engagement. (TL)

Formosa Salon continuously promotes the social idea that people should change behaviour from being indifferent or passive to national (and sometimes international) political, economic, or social issues (such as public policies) to being actively involved and engaged. From the perspective of exchange theory, social marketers (the organisers of Formosa Salon in this case) provide the space for discussion in public issues with the general public and expect that the latter could exchange their time and thoughts with them to engage in public affairs actively. Therefore, the central social idea that Formosa Salon is promoting—the main product that it is selling—is civic awareness and social engagement in national and international political, economy, and social issues such as public policies. That is, Formosa Salon aims to change citizens' behaviours from not caring or passively being involved in public affairs to actively participating in these discussions. Through building a public place that is open to everyone regardless of his/her background, participants can not only become more aware but also become actively engaged in these issues.

Apropos my second research question—how does Formosa Salon evaluate its cost and benefits of its products for the users, and how does it distribute and communicate its ideas to promote civic awareness and public engagement in social issues or challenges?—the cost of the product is the knowledge barrier that must be overcome for people to comprehend and further discuss public issues with one another. Some interviewees acknowledged that the topics

chosen by Formosa Salon are hard to comprehend for those who are not specialists in the relevant fields. For example, HY, who has been participating in the events of Formosa Salon for three years and even hosted a seminar, said the reason why she has not frequently attended these events in person is that:

It is not because I have no interest. ... I just feel that, the topic is excellent, but I cannot understand. I may end up sitting there for three hours but not understand anything, let alone discuss with others.

Some of the co-founding members of Formosa Salon also commented that they sometimes felt some topics were not understandable to them, and this led them to think twice before showing up at these events. GL, who has attended and even organised some workshops and study groups, said she once 'struggle[d] for a while to decide whether coming to the event or not' because she could not clearly comprehend what the event was about from the advertisement she had read for it. TL, who has participated in events for around three years, acknowledged that when she began to attend events she sometimes decided not to come if the topic seemed too challenging for her. She clearly used the word 'barrier' to describe those topics she deemed beyond her capability to join discussions on. DH, who is also a co-founding member, further echoed these opinions:

Like what you [HY] said just now. ... To be honest, I had the same feelings for three or four years, that I had no idea when I saw the topics of the events organised by Formosa Salon. ... Besides, before I came to Formosa Salon, I was [very] distant from public issues because I was raised in a pro-KMT family which stigmatised these public things. As a result, [when I came to Formosa Salon], it was my first time to hear about the ... labour or gender issues.

TL also reflected that 'it takes some time to practice' to understand issues covered at events and then take part in the discussions regarding any topic. TL took as an example the fact that she was surprised at one senior member who could 'organise what others had just said five minutes ago and then comment'. She thought that this might be because the senior member had been practising law for a while and thus had the necessary skills. Nevertheless, for TL, it is challenging, because she prefers to 'ponder for a while ... and then say something'. TL believed that her lack of understanding was made worse by the fact that

the Taiwanese educational system does not encourage students to speak up in public.

These statements clearly show the cost of the product: the need to expend one's labour to understand a specific public issue in a short amount of time and then express an opinion on it. This cost can result from: (a) the topic itself, particularly if unfamiliar to the participant, and (b) the participant's background, such as whether they are familiar with or have had experience in discussing these social or political issues before. The high cost of the product that Formosa Salon provides can be said to hinder people from exchanging their time to join such events (as we have seen from some interviewees' comments) or fail to involve people with simple and clear messages. Given the fact that the participants predominately have at least a master's degree from a UK-based higher education institution (and a significant number of them have or are working towards a PhD), this barrier or cost of the product is clearly not trivial.

Although these costs were noted by participants, they also pointed out the benefits of 'consuming' the product that Formosa Salon produces. The first benefit is to obtain the knowledge shared at each event. CY, who is doing his PhD degree in London, said that through attending these events, he 'satisfies his eagerness to learn'. LY, who had already participated in several social and political activities in Taiwan before coming to London for his doctoral studies, stated that attending these events 'keeps me in touch with the public issues I care about. ... We can learn new thoughts, practices, or concepts throughout the processes [of discussion and engagement]. This is the chance for us to grow'.

However, as some members contended to me, the key benefit of the product that Formosa Salon promotes is to obtain public engagement through taking part in discussions or acting upon social or political issues. For some interviewees, this benefit of public engagement is further strengthened by the fact that the topics covered, and the participants of Formosa Salon themselves, are diverse, and that these events are all open to different perspectives.

Formosa Salon builds up a space for discussion where people with various standpoints could listen to and express their own viewpoint. (DH) Here we could see that every voice is accepted and discussed. No one would be blamed because of his or her opinions. ... I feel that everyone could [use their] voice here, and we are even fine with the fact that sometimes a certain person speaks for a long time. ... We do not stop anyone speaking out because of his or her habits or contents of the speech. This is incredibly rare because we do not see such a thing in Taiwan. (GL)

The benefits of the products Formosa Salon is selling are connected to their open and diverse nature: that is, everyone is welcome to listen to and express opinions upon any public issue. It is not only a space where people can learn or understand various issues: it is also a safe space where participants can freely exchange their ideas and disagree.

The last research question is: what are Formosa Salon's distribution and communication channels (in terms of marketing mix, where is the place Formosa Salon sells its product and how it promotes the idea: civic awareness and social engagement in national and international political, economic, and social issues)? The events have usually been held in classrooms in universities in central London (such as University College London, Imperial College London, and the School of Oriental and African Studies) on weekend afternoons when students do not have classes.

Since its inception, Formosa Salon has relied heavily on the internet, especially Facebook, to promote its events. Typically, the organisers and active participants post information about each event and then repost to various other Facebook groups—managed by the associations of Taiwanese students in some universities in London—about two weeks before the event. In addition, participants occasionally introduce Formosa Salon to their friends, so people without access to the Facebook groups can find out about these events. In my case, I was first told about Formosa Salon and that I could attend its events in late 2016 by a participant who went to the same university in London as me.

Since the participants can clearly identify the product that Formosa Salon is selling, some seem to assess members of the peer groups surrounding them and only target those who have previously shown an interest in the national and international political, economic, and social issues the Salon discusses. For example:

I feel that if you have passion for something [public issues], [then] I would invite you to come. (TL)

If I know that you care a lot about public issues in Taiwan, then I would directly tell you that we are discussing these issues. ... If I know your background, then I would tell you that we had organised some workshops and study groups related to your background. If you feel interested, then welcome. If ... I do not know if you are interested in these issues when we first meet, or I cannot ensure that we are in the same echo chamber [*laughs*], I would tell you that there is a social group called Formosa Salon, and there are some talks ... after the talks, we would then have some meals and drinks. (JC)

Normally I ask my friends: do you want to come to listen to some talks? ... Only one time when I met a new person, and I knew that he is in the same echo chamber as me, I told him [or her] that it [Formosa Salon] was founded after Sunflower Movement, and it tried to advocate for the Cross-Strait Agreements of Trades in Service at that time. [Besides, I told him that] there have been talks, gatherings, and discussions since that time. (GT)

How such frequent participants (many being organisers, some of them hosts of seminars or workshops) communicate this product should be highlighted. They segment people around them by their psychological features, especially a critical lifestyle factor: if he/she cares about public issues. When these active participants are not entirely sure if the person they are mingling with is interested in Taiwanese public affairs, they tend to promote Formosa Salon as a place where you can meet new people and listen to talks in Mandarin. Once they know that the person has some interest in these topics, they would give him/her more information about Formosa Salon, including its founding background and activities. My personal experience can also confirm this: when I introduced myself to others studying in London and said that I have some work experience in a social enterprise and the Legislative Yuan in Taiwan, one participant of Formosa Salon told me that I could attend its various events regarding social issues and public policies. Although we cannot know if this would have happened had I not introduced myself in that way at that moment, my experience nevertheless shows how participants of Formosa Salon communicate its product to potential users. From the perspective of the theory of hierarchy of effects, these organisers have tried to involve people around them with different messages via multiple channels.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

Although this qualitative single case study focuses only on Formosa Salon, a group of mainly Taiwanese people (most of them with at least a postgraduate degrees) in the UK, this research has demonstrated how an unusual revelatory and extreme exemplar (given that Formosa Salon has been active without a leader, command structure, formalised membership, and financial resources since 2014) has been organising to promote civic awareness and social engagement in public issues for such a long time without stable resources. This paper is, therefore, able to recognise the central constructs (i.e. marketing mix, exchange theory, and hierarchy of effects) by theoretically examining an

unusual phenomenon, which is one of the aims of conducting a single case study (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Table 3 shows how my findings corroborate with the theories that I have reviewed in this paper, and I shall discuss them in detail in this section.

This study finds that facilitating civic awareness and social engagement in public issues is the main product sold by Formosa Salon. The cost of the product is the knowledge barrier that people must overcome to comprehend and discuss these issues with one another. Conversely, the benefits of the products include acquiring the knowledge shared in each event, broadening participants' horizons thanks to the diversity of the topics covered, and enjoying the sense of openness that emerges when discussing issues as a group. These events have been communicated and distributed in higher education institutions in central London, and participants can gain relevant information from the internet.

Although researchers and practitioners in various fields might find Formosa Salon a unique case due to what the marketing mix has demonstrated above, this research is still generalisable to a certain level because the case study has examined Formosa Salon from a social marketing perspective, which has not been widely applied to settings other than international development, public health, and disease prevention (Lefebvre, 2011; Truong, 2014). Specifically, this perspective enables researchers and practitioners with a variety of interests to examine the social actions or ideas that they aim to 'sell' to whom (for Formosa Salon, promoting the idea of civil awareness and social engagement in public issues to the general public), what the benefits and costs embedded within such products are (in this case, the knowledge barrier that participants and the general public have encountered), and the possibility that the values identified by the social marketers themselves (the organisers of Formosa Salon) might not necessarily be appealing to a broader base of audience. In short, the theoretical perspectives and implications of this study should not be limited to Formosa Salon. Various social actions and ideas that promote labour rights, gender, race and ethnicity equality, environmental protection, and so forth, might also find this case study helpful to think about more effectively 'mobiliz[ing] and empower[ing] citizens to change the world' (cited by Dibb & Carrigan, 2013: 1393).

To be more specific, this study, first, reminds both researchers and practitioners in social marketing that benefits should be seen from the perspective of the people involved. In this study, the interviewees, who are both users and social marketers of the product, state that the benefits of the product are that everyone is welcome to listen to and express opinions about public issues. However, does this necessarily mean that other people also care about the

TABLE 3 Underlying theories and study findings

Theories	Study findings
Marketing mix: product, price, place, and promotion (Basil et al., 2019; Lefebvre, 2011; MacFadyen et al., 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Product: civic awareness and social engagement in the political, economic, and social issues mainly in Taiwan – Price: benefits and costs of ‘consuming’ the products of Formosa Salon, including gaining knowledge shared at each event, taking part in discussions and/or acting upon public issues, and the knowledge barrier because of the complexity of topics or abilities and/or backgrounds of participants to join such public discussions – Place: classrooms in various academic institutions in London – Promotion: relying on the internet and participants’ personal networks
Exchange theory (Kotler, 2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Social marketers (i.e., the organisers of Formosa Salon) and consumers (i.e., the general public) are two parties both with something valuable to each other: the former offers space for the latter to discuss public issues, and the latter have time, effort, and various ideas and perspectives to enrich these discussions – Both social marketers and consumers are free to accept the exchange (the latter could reject it as well by not participating) – Once accepted, both parties are willing to deal with the other via intensive communication (i.e., sharing different opinions on a wide variety of public issues)
Hierarchy of effects (Krugman, 1965; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Social marketers have tried to involve people by different messages via various channels – Some consumers (i.e., participants of Formosa Salon) are highly involved with the products of Formosa Salon, but others (i.e., those who refuse their participating friends’ invitations to join the events held by Formosa Salon) are not

benefits identified by the interviewees of this study? That is, is 'enhancing civic awareness and social engagement in public issues' necessarily a high-involvement product for the general public? One interviewee illustrates one clear example: although Formosa Salon's product seems to be attractive to some of its users—since participants come from various disciplines or professions in different schools or workplaces—others find the topics are not interesting at all. For example, TL shared her experience when she tried to promote Formosa Salon to one of her friends:

I have a friend ... he said he had read some of [the advertisements] of the events of Formosa Salon, and he felt that they [the events] are too left wing and analogous. But, he has never come [to any of the events]. I told him that you could come, and you would find that people are willing to discuss something.

Hence, not only the users and social marketers of Formosa Salon but also like-minded people who strive to promote their social actions and ideas should be reminded of the importance of insights gained using exchange theory. As reviewed earlier, an exchange happens if the five requirements are met (Kolter, 2000). Suppose we portray social marketers (who strive to enhance civic awareness and public engagement) and the general public (who are targeted to spend time and effort engaging in public issues) as two parties. In that case, we can see that both have something valuable to each other: the social marketers, on the one hand, provide chances for the general public to learn about what is going on in their society and offer them a space to debate the issue with which they are concerned. On the other hand, the general public has the potential to share various opinions and perspectives to enrich the public discussions, given that they come from all walks of lives.

For social marketers, it is critical to persuade the general public to exchange. However, it depends on whether they have resolved the following issues which lead an exchange to happen: (a) How does one persuade those who have not engaged in social issues to exchange their time and effort with Formosa Salon or similar initiatives, that is, to engage in public discussions or even debates? (b) Specifically, do the organisers of Formosa Salon or like-minded social marketers identify the values that appeal to the people whom they want to involve in public discussion? (c) How can social marketers more effectively communicate and deliver these values to the people they want to engage? These are challenging issues and providing solutions to any one of them is far beyond the scope of this paper. However, I would like to highlight that for social marketers who aim to engage more people in public discussions, one should always speak

for others' interests by using their language (Yang, 2003). Although examined in a specific context, Yang's (2003) case study reminds us of the importance of standing in the users' shoes to frame the product, especially its benefits.

Secondly, what Kolter's argument (2000) also implies in this case is that social marketers must demonstrate that the perceived benefits of engaging in public discussions outweigh the perceived costs, such as the knowledge barriers identified by some of our interviewees. The organisers of Formosa Salon—or more generally, social marketers promoting civic awareness and public engagement in public issues—must help the people they target lower the barrier to using their products (that is, participating in public discussions). Social marketers may tackle the problem of high perceived costs by conducting research to understand better the people whom they want to involve (especially focusing on the determinants and contexts holding them back from using the products) or changing the distribution and communication strategies, such as the places where people could potentially access the product (for example, by using schools as a distribution point). What else should social marketers provide for the people to make the products more accessible? How about the name of the product and the content of the advertisements?

Third, in addition to exchange theory, which is based more on classical economic thought (particularly on assumptions that people are rational actors and make decisions primarily on the cost and benefit basis), social marketers who aim to enhance civic awareness and public engagement in public issues should also examine the determinants and contexts of using one product from different perspectives, factoring in social norms: what non-economic factors facilitate or hinder people from engaging in discussions and debates in public issues? As some of our interviewees mention, their family and educational backgrounds have influenced their public engagement behaviours. For example, DH noted he was raised in a pro-KMT family and that this affected his attitude and capability to join public discussions at first. TL stated that her experiences of being taught in Taiwanese schools—where students are not encouraged to ask questions and make comments—has influenced her ability to speak up in public events.

Besides, the case that TL brought to us—one of her friends thought the topics that Formosa Salon had been choosing tended to be 'too left wing and analogous'—could also be a societal factor that hinders some of the general public from engaging in public discussions. Although people might have different ideas of what constitutes 'left wing' and 'right wing', the topics discussed in the seminars, workshops, and reading groups facilitated by Formosa Salon since its establishment seem to be critical of the dominant economic framework (i.e., free trade and the underlying neoliberalism) and political power in Taiwan.

For example, Formosa Salon has long been discussing and supporting social movements in Taiwan and Hong Kong, labour rights (some members organised 'Overwork International' to stand against the amendments of the Labor Standards Act in Taiwan in 2018), indigenous rights (some members held several workshops and sent 22 letters to the Taiwanese media to argue that the 'Regulations on Land or Tribal Land Allocation for Indigenous' is unlawful), and gender equality (some members organised photo-shoot events for many years in support of the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan). Although these events did not speak for nor stand in line with any particular political party or ideology in Taiwan, some of those who decided to not join the discussions may see Formosa Salon as a 'left-wing' political activist group that they might view negatively. Together with family and educational backgrounds, social marketers should examine the broader contexts, such as cultural, political, and societal dimensions of one product and its potential users, to enhance civic participation and public engagement.

This study contributes to the field of social marketing in a theoretical manner too, in contrast to commonly examined cases of social marketing where users rarely become social marketers themselves—for example, users who are targeted by social marketing programmes aiming to prevent disease or promote healthy behaviours are hardly ever also the social marketers. Besides, it is very challenging for these users to become social marketers in those cases—people who have been organising events for Formosa Salon have double identities. That is, they are both frequent and heavy users of the product (since they continue attending events and taking part in these discussions, debates, and social actions), and they are also social marketers who run the daily business of the Salon (since they sell the ideas of facilitating civic engagement and public discussions of public issues). It may be interesting to study further what difference is made when social marketers are also users of the product they sell. Are there any theoretical and practical implications: for example, can we enrich the field of social marketing by incorporating relevant concepts of co-creation and co-production, which involve the users of a product or service in the production process? By doing so, we could not only examine some of the cases of social marketing use in a more practical way but also see the relationships among the users and the social marketers in a more equal and democratic way.

Practically, for social marketers who strive to enhance civic awareness and public engagement, the case of Formosa Salon raises a question: is it suitable to segment people by one critical lifestyle factor—that is, caring about public issues—and use this as a basis for an invitation to attend, as some of the interviewees do? Since some of the participants of Formosa Salon state that they segment the people around them (who may be viewed as potential

participants) by whether they care about public issues or not, does this mean efforts to enhance public awareness and civic engagement are necessarily limited? Or even worse, does it mean that selling a product, such as one intended to enhance public awareness and civic engagement, may not reach the people who show no or low interest in public issues, who are the most important to reach? As one senior member of Formosa Salon has stated, 'Formosa Salon has tried to break [the status quo] that citizens tend not to participate [in public discussions]'; as a result, how active users, as well as social marketers, of Formosa Salon (or other programmes with similar objectives) involve more people in civil engagement becomes critical not only for selling their products to more people but also for fulfilling the founding purpose of the initiative itself: to enhance civic awareness and public engagement.

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