

Using Social Marketing to Promote Handwashing with Soap for a Healthier Vietnam

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Chapter Overview

Diseases such as diarrhea, hepatitis, helminthic infections, and other infectious diseases resulting from poor personal hygiene remain prevalent worldwide. This chapter reports on Vietnam's *Wash Your Hands with Soap* campaign that encouraged young children and their mothers to wash their hands with soap. A number of challenges were identified, including the poor sanitary conditions in local schools, the misperception of the efficacy of water-only handwashing, the consideration of communication as the key tool of intervention, and health officials' red-tape practices. Yet, there were opportunities such as governmental agencies' coordination, international donors' financial support, and Unilever's substantial resources, and marketing skills. Informed by the exchange theory and social learning theory, free soap was distributed to local households and public areas in targeted regions by the Clean Hands Task Force. The Clean Hands Toolkits were also developed, and the Clean Hands Squad Game offered. The campaign raised the awareness of and engaged with not only the target audience but also the wider public in the promotion of handwashing with soap. Its scope of implementation was expanded from 18 provinces to 50, reaching 26 million people. The proportion of population who reported washing hands with soap rose from 14.6 to 66.5% in targeted areas.

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D. Z. Basil et al. (eds.), *Social Marketing in Action*,

Springer Texts in Business and Economics,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13020-6_19

Introduction and Background to the Campaign

Diseases—such as diarrhea, hepatitis, helminthic infections, and other infectious diseases related to personal hygiene, a lack of clean water, and poor sanitation—that affect the digestive and respiratory systems remain prevalent in many parts of the world. These diseases are responsible for the death of millions of children in less developed countries (World Health Organization (WHO) 2017), as many people do not have good sanitation habits in general and hand hygiene in particular. According to WHO (2017), diarrhea and pneumonia are among the five leading causes of death of children under five years. Handwashing with soap has long been considered as an important preventive measure against gastrointestinal diseases as well as hepatitis A and E, and hand, foot and, mouth disease (HFMD). This preventative measure has thus attracted increased attention from international institutions, development agencies, and governmental organizations.

In Vietnam, many problems persist with respect to awareness and practice of hand hygiene behavior, particularly the low awareness of the importance of hand cleaning with soap for the prevention of disease. A Ministry of Health study (MOH, 2016) found that between 1 and 10% of malnutrition cases in children under five could be reduced if parents regularly washed their hands with soap. According to a national hygiene survey conducted by the MOH and UNICEF (2007), just 12% of the rural populations wash their hands with soap before eating and 16% after using the toilet. Overall, 98% of rural residents are unaware that handwashing with soap and clean water is essential for preventing infectious diseases (UNICEF, 2007).

In October 2008, the first *Global Handwashing Day* was launched by UNICEF, the World Bank, and some development organizations from both the private and public sectors (World Bank, 2008). It has since become an annual campaign with the goal of raising public awareness of personal hygiene, environmental sanitation, and healthy living, as well as promoting handwashing with soap as an effective, low-cost, and easy way to prevent diseases. Although this seems a simple behavior that everyone can adopt, in Vietnam, the practice of handwashing is not engaged in as a comprehensive and self-motivated behavior among the population at large, including in medical and healthcare organizations (Curtis, 2005).

Over the period 2012–2016, the *Wash Your Hands with Soap for a Healthier Vietnam* campaign was implemented by the MOH, Ministry of Education and Training, and the Unilever Vietnam Foundation. Targeting high-risk groups such as young children and their mothers, the campaign aimed to change the handwashing behavior of these target groups and save 25 million children from contracting diseases caused by viruses and bacteria by 2020 (Unilever, 2012, 2013). The campaign encouraged people to wash their hands with soap at five critical times: after using the toilet, before breakfast, before lunch, before dinner, and while bathing. The campaign received Vietnamese Dong (VND) 50 billion (about US \$2.2 million) in grants from Unilever Vietnam, over the specified period (Unilever, 2012; Lifebuoy Vietnam, 2013a).

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis

In a project to evaluate the effectiveness of the above-mentioned *Wash Your Hands with Soap for a Healthier Vietnam* campaign, the authors conducted a SWOT analysis identifying a number of opportunities and challenges that might have undermined/strengthened its effectiveness. The results of the SWOT analysis appear in summary form Fig. 19.1. The challenges included the poor sanitary conditions and unsafe hygiene practices in local schools; the misperception of the effectiveness of water-only handwashing; and the consideration of communication as the key tool for promoting handwashing, regardless of significant barriers to behavior change. On the other hand, there were opportunities such as the commitment and coordinated efforts from governmental agencies, and the support and financial aid from international donors. In addition, the substantial resources and marketing skills employed by Unilever Company, which has a long history of running hygiene promotion campaigns worldwide and has established collaboration with international and national organizations, were significant advantages for the campaign to be successfully implemented in Vietnam. However, the red-tape practices often observed in Vietnamese society could have been potential obstacles preventing the joint effort from achieving its goals.

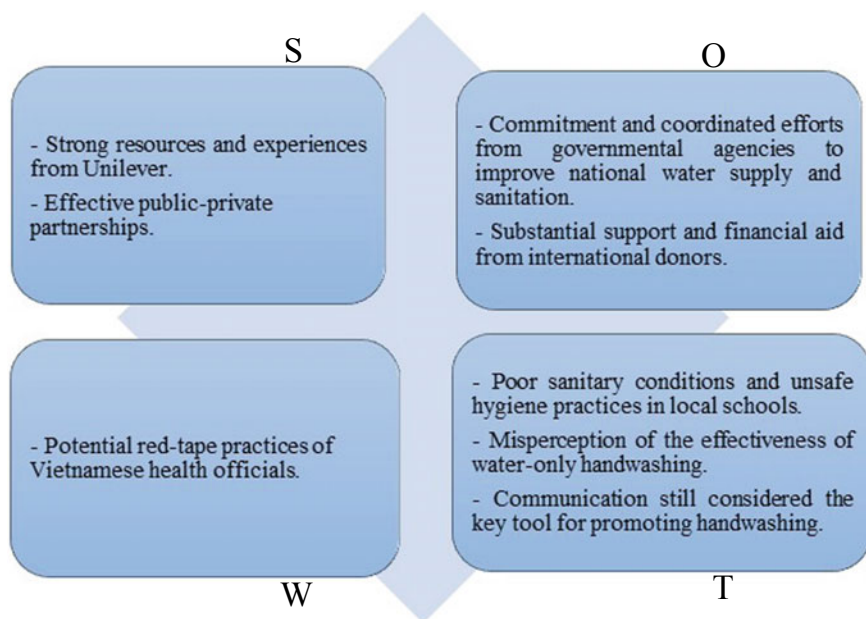


Fig. 19.1 SWOT analysis of the campaign

Strong Resources and Experiences from Unilever

Lifebuoy soap is one of Unilever's fastest-growing brands and considered the world's number one antibacterial soap brand. Thanks to its large-scale handwashing projects worldwide (29 countries with 379 million people reached over the period 2010–2016), the brand has gained substantial social marketing skills and knowledge, which allows it to deliver the opportunity for effective handwashing behavior change at a low cost. The brand's international experience (as mentioned) in running joint public–private programs was also an important asset for this campaign to be implemented effectively in Vietnam.

Effective Public–Private Partnerships

Through its extensive hand hygiene promotions in different countries, Unilever has achieved acceptance by—and the cooperation of—international and national health institutions, such as the Royal Society of Public Health and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (Unilever, 2016). Governmental health organizations, having experience in public communication and favorable access to remote communities, coupled with the marketing expertise of a private partner, significantly enhanced the campaign's effectiveness.

Potential Red-Tape Behaviors of Local Health Officials

The Vietnamese administrative system is generally known for its bureaucracy, and its public health sector still exhibits many limitations, difficulties, and challenges (Puffer, 2015). Social marketing projects, especially those that involve public–private partnerships in the health sector, are still rare. Vietnamese health officials who have insufficient social marketing experience might hinder the campaign from realizing its full potential.

Commitment and Coordinated Efforts from Governmental Agencies to Improve National Water Supply and Sanitation

In 1998, Vietnam released a rural water supply and sanitation strategy, while the National Target Program on Rural Water Supply and Sanitation had been in place for years (UNICEF, 2007). In addition, the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Partnership, made up of relevant ministries and nearly 20 international organizations, has been active since 2006 to strengthen the coordination of efforts to improve the national water and sanitation situation in Vietnam (UNICEF, 2007).

Substantial Support and Financial Aid from International Donors

A number of donors, including UNICEF, WHO, and the World Bank, strengthened their support for sanitation, hygiene, and water supply improvements in Vietnam. This included technical and managerial assistance for policy making as well as capacity building at the local level. Investment in Vietnam's water and sanitation was estimated at about US\$10 million per year, including government and external sources. The key financial partners also included the Asian Development Bank, the French AFD, Danida, AusAID, JICA, and Finida (UNICEF, 2008).

Poor Sanitary Conditions and Unsafe Hygiene Practices in Local Schools

The sanitary conditions in rural Vietnamese schools were poor. UNICEF's (2007) national survey on sanitation and hygiene showed that the quality of sanitary facilities in households, schools, and public areas and the lack of safe hygienic behaviors remained issues of great concern. About 88% of schools in rural regions did not possess adequate toilet facilities, and more than a quarter did not have toilets. As a result, students had to relieve themselves in forests, gardens, fields, or on riverbanks (UNICEF, 2007). Although personal hygiene education was included in school curricula, the survey showed that just 36% of schools had handwashing areas, while a mere 5% had soap available for handwashing (UNICEF, 2007). Research suggests that the availability of a water supply and the condition of household sanitary facilities greatly influence handwashing behavior. Thus, difficult living conditions may limit people's response to sanitation interventions (Rheinländer et al., 2010).

Misperception of the Effectiveness of Water-Only Handwashing, Making Behavior Change Difficult

Some misconceptions were identified among the target audience as critical obstacles to campaign interventions, including their belief and behavior with respect to hand rinsing using just water, low awareness of the importance of using soap for handwashing, high rates of forgetting to wash hands before and after contact with feces (Nguyen et al., 2011). For example, while 92% of mothers reported rinsing hands at critical times, 60% of those who rinsed their hands with water did not feel that soap was important or necessary and many mothers stated that "soap was too expensive" (Nguyen et al., 2011).

Communication Remains the Key Tool for Promoting Handwashing

Although the local government has employed a range of state propaganda instruments and mass media to promote hygienic behaviors, the achieved results seem stronger in terms of awareness than in actual behavior change (PSI Vietnam, 2016). This also holds true with foreign-funded campaigns aimed at promoting handwashing with soap. For example, the *Vietnam Handwashing Initiative* (HWI), launched by the MOH and funded by the Danish Embassy in Vietnam, combined mass media with interpersonal communications to disseminate information about the threat of diseases associated with water-only handwashing (Nguyen et al., 2011).

Target Audience

The campaign targeted elementary school children and their parents countrywide. It found that the audience's belief that washing hands with water alone was sufficient was a major barrier to behavior change (Curtis, 2005). Indochina Research's (2007) survey indicated that both the children and their parents perceived cleaning hands with soap as time-consuming; that in some rural areas, the cost of buying soap was reported as a reason for not using it when washing hands; that parents also perceived the time required to teach their children how to wash their hands properly as an additional cost; that children of this age are vulnerable to infectious viruses, but are not aware of the risk of diseases related to unhygienic behaviors; and that they tend to be hasty and hence reluctant to wash their hands, and if they do, it is just with water.

Campaign Objectives

The campaign's objective was that, over the specified period (2012–2016), the target audience understand the importance of personal hygienic behaviors for disease prevention and practice handwashing with soap at five critical times, as noted: after using the toilet, before breakfast, before lunch, before dinner, and while bathing (Unilever, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016).

Positioning

The campaign positioned itself as being among the few in Vietnam that focused exclusively on young children and their parents. Handwashing with soap was positioned as a fun and easy behavior that helped prevent diseases and in this way

contributed to building a healthier Vietnam. Since children like to become heroes, the act of handwashing with soap was associated with a brave man fighting against bad enemies (harmful infectious germs) to save the Earth.

The campaign also approached handwashing behavior change by emphasizing five core principles of all Lifebuoy-sponsored campaigns in other countries: disgust (germ contamination), nurture (mother and child interaction), affiliation (group of heroes fighting against bad enemies), habit (mothers and children to repeat proper handwashing until they stick), and pledging (mothers and children taking pledges publicly).

4Ps and Implementation

The design and implementation of the campaign interventions were based on the exchange theory from commercial marketing and the social learning theory from behavior psychology. The 4Ps (product, price, place, and promotion) are summarized in Table 19.1.

Table 19.1 Summary of 4Ps

Product	Price	Place	Promotion
Soap	Free	<1600 communities in 18 provinces	Members of the Clean Hands Task Force distributed free soap to local households and at public areas; 5-min films are made as reality shows and broadcasted on HTV3 channel; fun music videos demonstrated handwashing with soap behavior
Clean Hands Toolkits consisting of Lifebuoy disinfectant, a handwashing comic handbook, a 3D ruler, and a pledge bracelet	VND45,000 (about US \$2)	A Web site (http://biet-doi-tay-sach.muare.vn/) was created so that the toolkits could be purchased	Members of the Clean Hands Task Force travelled to schools nationwide to raise school children's awareness of handwashing with soap and the toolkits in particular
Clean Hands Squad Game	Free registration and participation	Schools in different provinces nationwide	Annual <i>Global Handwashing Day</i>

The Clean Hands Task Force in Action Reality Shows

A key driver of the campaign, the Clean Hands Task Force (Fig. 19.2) whose members included candidates of *The Voice Kids Vietnam 2013* was formed. From December 2013 to May 2014, the said Task Force travelled to more than 1600 communes in 18 provinces nationwide to promote handwashing with soap and daily cleaning among children, establish the habit of hand hygiene, and urge people to join the team to communicate the message to the wider public. Free soap was distributed to local households and provided at public places, which helped encourage people to practice handwashing with soap at home (i.e., free soap in exchange for handwashing behavior). At each of the Task Force's destinations, a five-minute film was recorded and developed as a reality show. A total of ten films were broadcast in Sunday primetime on the HTV3 television channel. Fun music videos also demonstrated the five critical times and six proper steps of handwashing with soap to assist schoolteachers and parents in teaching children (Lifebuoy Vietnam, 2013b). The Task Force organization not only helped to disseminate the campaign message to the target audience (children) and made them more responsible for protecting their health (by washing hands with soap) but also allowed local parents to learn from practical experience and act as role models for their children. In addition, the sending of the Task Force to local destinations suggests the importance of establishing rapport and partnership with community members in disseminating the message and encouraging handwashing behavior.



Fig. 19.2 Members of the Clean Hands Task Force. *Source* Photograph from trailer Clean Hands Task Force, Lifebuoy Vietnam YouTube Channel, 2013

The Clean Hands Toolkit

The Clean Hands Toolkit (Fig. 19.3) consisted of Lifebuoy disinfectant, a hand-washing comic handbook, a 3D ruler, and a pledge bracelet. Released in October 2014, the toolkit was intended to make handwashing more enjoyable for children and also to support parents in teaching hand hygiene to their children (Unilever, 2014). Every step of handwashing was associated with an interesting adventure. Through each “challenge,” children discovered new things without being aware that they were learning. Finally, like “adults,” the children were asked to sign a commitment to wash their hands properly. The toolkits were available for purchase at <http://biet-doi-tay-sach.muare.vn/>, at VND45,000 each (about US\$2). Members of the Clean Hands Task Force travelled to local schools nationwide to raise school children’s awareness of the importance of handwashing with soap as well as of the toolkits in particular. For each toolkit sold, Lifebuoy donated two soap bars to the Young People’s Charity Journey in support of medical treatment and housing for children in remote areas. The objective was to distribute 200,000 soap bars to rural children and communicate proper handwashing practices to over 100,000 people in 50 provinces and cities (Muare, 2014).

The Clean Hands Squad Game

In October 2015, the fun and exciting Clean Hands Squad Game (Fig. 19.4) was released, which attracted substantial attention among young children and their parents countrywide. The game was promoted in schools throughout the country on the occasion of the annual *Global Handwashing Day*, where registration for participation was free. In this game, children played the role of space heroes of the



Fig. 19.3 Clean Hands Toolkit. Source Muare (2014)



Fig. 19.4 Clean Hands Squad Game. *Source* Photograph from trailer Clean Hands Squad Game, Lifebuoy Vietnam YouTube Channel, 2015

Clean Hands Squads, who fought against and killed ten harmful bacteria from enemy planets in the galaxy, helping the lifeboat land safely in Vietnam on a journey to protect the health of 25 million children by 2020. In each round, children learned about common pathogens that cause infections such as the flu as well as red eyes and boils and got to understand the importance of washing their hands and body with antibacterial soap. Designed to be simple and fun with useful content, this game served to assist parents in teaching their children how to protect themselves. For every successful registration in the game, Lifebuoy donated five health toolkits to children in rural and remote areas (Giadinhvatreem, 2015).

Campaign Evaluation

The campaign's progress was tracked annually over the five-year period. Its scope of implementation was expanded from 1600 communes in 18 provinces at the beginning, as indicated, to reach six million people by 2014 and 26 million in 2015 (Unilever, 2015). The campaign not only engaged its target audience (i.e., children and parents) but also members of private and public sectors (e.g., members of the Youth Union and government organizations) as well as the wider public in the promotion of handwashing with soap behavior, as evidenced by their participation in campaign activities organized. The Unilever Vietnam Foundation provided funding for the organization of the annual *Global Handwashing Day*. PSI Vietnam's (2016) survey of 1200 rural households in Tien Giang and Dong Thap provinces indicated that 74.5% reported handwashing with soap and about 84% of rural residents were aware that handwashing with soap is important after defecating,

compared to 68% of those who stated that this practice is important after eating. Overall, the proportion of population who reported washing hands with soap rose from 14.6 to 66.5% in targeted areas (Unilever, 2015). Details of specific behavioral change outcomes are not available, given that Unilever Vietnam has not released its campaign reports. As part of its Sustainable Development Plan, Unilever Vietnam is committed to helping improve the health and well-being of more than one million people, in which handwashing with soap remains a critical component that will not only be sustained in previously targeted areas but also expanded to cover many others countrywide (Unilever, 2018).

Lessons Learned

A number of lessons were learned from this campaign. Firstly, the campaign had targeted regions with high levels of digestive infections and poor hygienic conditions, particularly rural and remote ones. Embracing both elementary school children and their parents helped address the targeted behavior change more comprehensively. Secondly, a five-year roadmap with a specific focus for each period made the changes and outcomes significant enough to sustain. Thirdly, the campaign had created a range of tools and activities for children that were enjoyable and easy to understand. Fourthly, well-organized and managed partnerships from two governmental agencies (MOH and Ministry of Education and Training) and a corporate entity (Unilever's Lifebuoy) secured the necessary resources and facilities to implement the campaign effectively. Fifth, although the product element was well developed, with a variety of tools and activities (reality shows, fun music videos, a game, and Clean Hands Toolkits), some products might not be easily accessible to those in rural areas, such as computer games. Finally, it was not possible to compare behavioral change in the target audience before and after the campaign, given that information about the campaign's formative research and outcome measurement was not available (Unilever, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016).

Discussion Questions

1. Evaluate the campaign's targeting and positioning strategy.
2. How were the barriers to behavior change in the target audience addressed? How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the price element in this campaign?
3. What would you recommend to enhance the campaign's effectiveness?

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