

# **Solving social problems with social marketing – Using a process-driven approach to develop a solution to Australia’s blood shortage**

## **Abstract**

The core purpose of this research piece is to apply the principles of marketing to a social problem in order to develop a solution that would help to overcome the issue. For the purpose of the research piece, the chosen social issue was Australia's blood donation shortage. The research put forth to increase blood donations within Australia leverages both social marketing and consumer behaviour theory to develop a well-rounded and thorough solution to a multifaceted problem. It is hoped that this research serves as not only a recommendation for solving the blood donation shortage, but also demonstrates the effectiveness of applying traditional marketing theory to the development of solutions to complex societal problems.

## **Analysing a social problem**

In order to properly develop a social marketing approach to a social problem, it is first worthwhile to decide on a definition of ‘Social Marketing’. The definition that forms the basis of this report is that “*Social marketing is the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning and execution, and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of society*” (Andreasen, 1995). The commercial marketing techniques that will be drawn upon throughout this report are derived from many areas, including consumer behavior theory and the marketing framework.

The chosen social problem to be analysed for the purpose of this research is the low rate of blood donations within Australia. As of 2016, only 500,000 Australians give blood annually, of the 9 million eligible to donate blood (Lyne, 2016). Currently, the average Australian blood donor will only give blood around twice a year (Robinson, 2016). This is despite the fact that most donors are able to give blood up to 4 times a year (Curro, 2016).

An undersupply of blood in the Australian health system is a common occurrence that requires the frequency of blood donations to be increased. The clinical demand for blood remains high throughout the year, requiring the collection of around 1.3 million annual donations to meet total demand (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012). Due to the short shelf-life of blood, shortages in supply are frequent and difficult to predict since they can occur during anytime of the year (Solomon, 2012). For example in late-December 2015, an additional 5,000 donations were called for in order to prevent a critical shortage (Donate Blood, 2015)

## Determining which marketing strategic approach has the best fit to delivering a solution to the problem

The product lifecycle approach has been adopted in considering how to deliver a solution to the problem of low levels of blood donations. Research has found that in the past 10 years, the number of blood donors and donations have both remained relatively static (Hetzl, 2007). This is indicative of blood donations being in the “maturity” stage of the product lifecycle, since growth is very sluggish but not yet in decline (Solomon et al, 2013). Products in their maturity stage can often benefit from efforts to increase consumption frequency, often through efforts to increase customer motivation in order to extend the product life cycle (Boone & Kurtz, 1999).

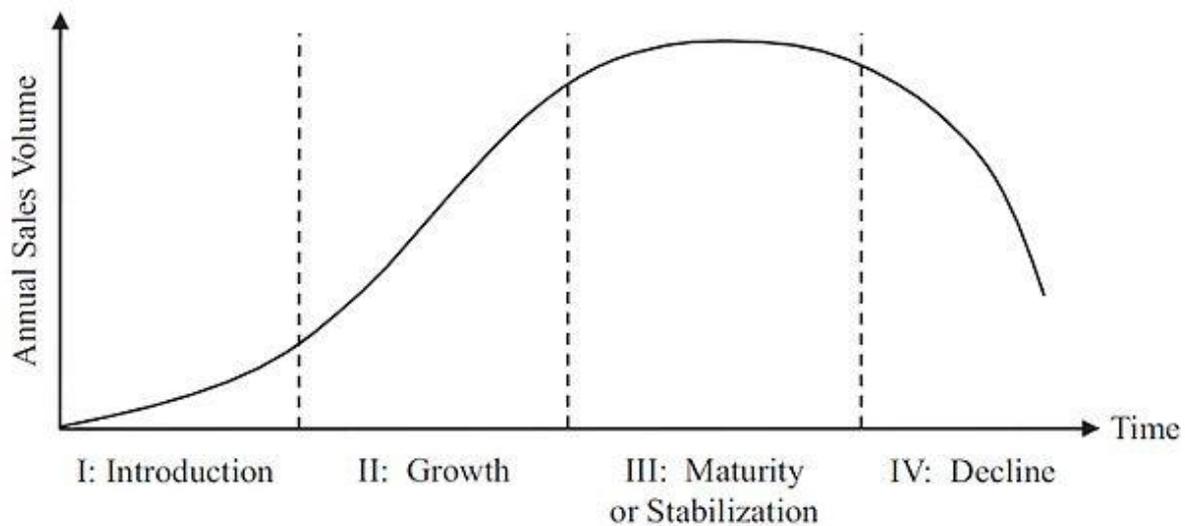


Figure 1: The product life cycle (adopted from Solomon et al, 2013)

The ‘market and organisational perception of a product’ matrix has been used to determine market penetration as the most suitable strategic approach that should be pursued (Armstrong & Kotler, 2011). It is fair to assume that the internal view of the product held by the Australian Red Cross Blood Service is “continuous”, since they will continue to be offering the same service. The external view of the product to the Australian market is best defined as “continuous”, since the core product isn’t undergoing change. If efforts are made to increase the frequency of blood donations, it would still be fair to classify the public perception as “continuous” since the same core product will still be offered (Alessandrini, 2007).

According to the market and organisational perception of a product, both of these perceptions being “continuous” is indicative of a market penetration strategy being most appropriate (Armstrong & Kotler, 2011).

The Ansoff Matrix supports the view that market penetration is the best approach to be taken (Ansoff, 1957). Blood donations are best defined as an “existing product” under the matrix, since the current blood donation system hasn’t undergone any significant changes. As well, it is also reasonable to classify the market as “existing”, since the number of blood donors and their frequency has been relatively static as has previously been mentioned (Hetzl, 2007).

Given that both market and product are “existing”, the Ansoff Matrix reinforces that market penetration is the best approach to be taken (Solomon et al, 2013).

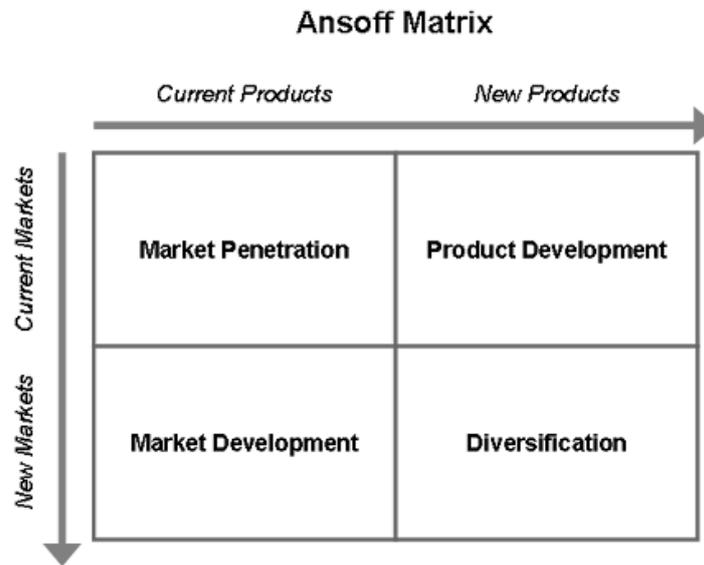


Figure 2: The Ansoff Matrix (adopted from Ansoff, 1957)

Taking the aforementioned theory into account, it is clear the marketing strategic approach should focus on market penetration. This view is supported by giving consideration to the product life cycle, the ‘market and organisational perception of a product’ matrix, and the Ansoff Matrix. This market penetration strategy has been taken into account to develop the social marketing solution of increasing the frequency current donors give blood.

### **Creating a social marketing solution to your identified social problem**

Increasing annual blood donations of existing donors should be pursued through market penetration that seeks to create ritualistic behaviour. Since the average Australian blood donor currently only donates around twice a year but is eligible to donate up to four times, the problem of low blood donations could effectively be solved through increasing the donation rate by creating a pattern of behaviour (Curro, 2016). Consumer behaviour theory substantiates the view that ritual practices can be highly motivating in inducing the desired form of behaviour (Nuckolls, 2007).

The ritualistic behaviour suggested has been adopted from similar practices that have seen success globally. For example in India, some cultures practice a ritual voluntarily in which individuals choose to donate blood as a way of paying respects to politicians who have died (Marquez, 2015). As well, the American Red Cross has in the past tried to emphasise donating blood as a “spring ritual” in order to help those in need of blood (American Red Cross, 2014).

Ritualistic behaviour can be created and promoted through encouraging blood donations as a “seasonal ritual” that should be undertaken four times a year to correspond with each season. Seasons were chosen since the requirement that each donation be 12 weeks or more apart will

be satisfactorily satisfied, and each season can be made to serve as a memorable reminder to give blood (Curro, 2016).

## **Outlining how the solution can be delivered as a market based value offering through the adaptation/adoption of elements of the AMA (2007) framework**

Elements of the American Marketing Association's definition of 'marketing' have been adapted to deliver a market-based value offering that will promote ritualistic behaviour in relation to blood donations. Marketing as defined by the American Marketing Association in 2007 "*is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large*" (Solomon et al, 2013). Key components of this definition have informed the decision to develop ritualistic behaviour around blood donations.

The creation, delivery, and exchange of value referred to in the AMA framework support the development of a blood donation ritual (Solomon et al, 2013). Value will be created and added through augmenting the product with additional features such as a loyalty card program which will involve donors gaining "Seasonal Blood Donor" status. The delivery and exchange of value will be accelerated through blood donors donating more frequently, thus deriving the value from altruism on a more regular basis (Alessandrini, 2007).

It is important to consider the value offering in regards to the core product, actual product, and augmented product (Mitchel, 2013). The core product refers to the actual benefit derived from the product (Solomon et al, 2013). In the case of blood donations, this is primarily the aforementioned altruistic feelings that people derive from donating blood since they are doing it to benefit "*society at large*", rather than for any monetary gain (Alessandrini, 2007). Ritualistic behaviour is anticipated to have the power to increase the frequency of that value being derived. The actual product is the physical act of going out and donating blood, which would be motivated by communicating the "Seasonal Blood Donor" program (Solomon et al, 2013). The augmented product refers to add-on's that supplement the value offering, with an example being a Seasonal Donor Smartphone App, which could be used to promote repeat behaviour through mobile notifications (Solomon et al, 2013).

## **Evaluating a set of market segments who would be responsive to the social marketing solution**

The campaign wishes to address the low level of blood donations by promoting blood donations as a ritualistic behaviour amongst existing blood donors. The following possible markets have been identified that would likely be responsive to the social marketing solution, to varying degrees. Please note the "regular blood donors" refers to individuals who donate at least once a year, and those who don't regularly donate refers to individuals who donate less than once a year, or one-off donors (Smith & Davidson, 2014) .

- 1) Australian Blood Donors who **don't regularly** donate
- 2) Australian Blood Donors who **regularly** donate

Of these two groups, Australian Blood Donors who **regularly** donate will be pursued, since they have shown a greater commitment to giving blood and are likely to be more susceptible to giving blood more regularly. This shall now be narrowed down further:

- 2) Australian Blood Donors who regularly donate **and are eligible to donate twice a year.**
- 3) Australian Blood Donors who regularly donate **and are eligible to donate three times a year.**
- 4) Australian Blood Donors who regularly donate **and are eligible to donate four times a year.**

Of these three groups, Australian Blood Donors who regularly donate **and are eligible to donate four times a year** will be pursued, since they have the most “profit potential”. This shall now be narrowed down further.

Potential Target A: Australian Blood Donors who regularly donate and are eligible to donate four times a year **but only donate once annually.**

Potential Target B: Australian Blood Donors who regularly donate and are eligible to donate four times a year **but only donate twice annually.**

Potential Target C: Australian Blood Donors who regularly donate and are eligible to donate four times a year **but only donate three times annually.**

Of these three potential targets, Potential Target B (i.e. Australian Blood Donors who regularly donate and are eligible to donate four times a year **but only donate twice annually**),) has been selected. Justification of this target market is provided in the following sections.

## **Suggesting a single, specific target audience from a range of market segments**

Consideration has been given to describing what the target audience of “Australian Blood Donors who regularly donate and are eligible to donate four times a year **but only donate twice annually**” would look like. It is suggested that the target audience from the market segment be between the ages of 18-39. This age group has the highest uptake of Smartphone usage at 89%, while also having much more long-run profit potential than focussing on older age groups who will not remain eligible blood donors for as long (Sensis, 2015). It is worthwhile noting that people within this relatively wide age group would be at many different life stages, but it is believed all of which could be relatively similarly receptive to a market penetration approach focusing on a ritualistic approach if properly developed. The target audience market would likely also be altruistic in other ways, such as being registered as an organ donor in Australia.

## Justifying the selection of the single, specific, narrowly defined target market with the use of the relevant consumer behaviour framework

The chosen market segment and narrowly defined target market was decided with reference to the consumer behaviour framework, particularly Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" (Cherry, 2015). Donors who currently donate twice annually were chosen as they have shown a greater level of interest in deriving altruistic value than those who only donate once annually, while also having more "profit-potential" than focussing on those who currently donate three times annually. The hierarchy of needs suggests the value would derive from the self-esteem segment of the pyramid, due to the strong self-esteem boost these users derive from charitable acts (Solomon, 2007). This is the reason why it is likely the target audience would be altruistic through other means, such as being registered organ donors. Practical studies have also supported correlation between these blood donations and registered organ donors, supporting this view (Hyde et al, 2013).

The 'Model of the Motivation Process' has been used to reinforce the choice of market segment and target market (Schiffman, 2005). In applying the model, it is clear that unfulfilled desires in the form of an aspiration to help others results in tension forming amongst regular blood donors. This drives blood donors to take action and achieve goal fulfilment through going out and giving blood. Tension subsides until such a point where it slowly arises again and the process repeats (Schiffman, 2005). The decision to focus on 18-39 year olds is not only because they have the greatest long-term profit potential, but also because the high uptake of smart-phones by this age group presents as a powerful tool to regulate the tension reduction and ritualistic behaviour across the seasons.

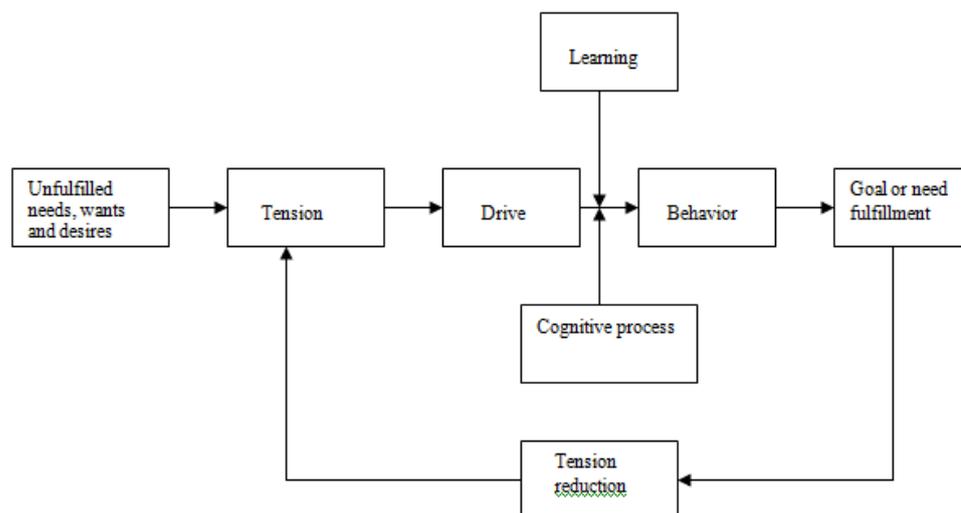


Figure 3: The Model of the Motivation Process (adopted from Schiffman, 2005)

## **Determining the possible roles of consumer behaviour, and related marketing theory in presenting a solution to this social problem**

In addition to the wide array of consumer behaviour theory mentioned thus far, it is also worthwhile emphasising the power of rituals as a motivator within the consumer behaviour field (Solomon, 2007). Rituals have long been held as having the ability to possess individuals to engage in behaviour that they would not ordinarily, and have also been shown to have the ability to add value by performing the ritual alone (Schiffman, 2005). For example, it has been found that birthday cakes are perceived to taste better and provide a better experience when 'birthday rituals' such as singing are conducted (Vohs et al, 2013). It is for this reason that it is strongly argued that ritualistic behaviour in relation to blood donations would be highly motivating in increasing donation frequency amongst the target market.

## **Identify the current behaviour / attitude that the audience is using that your solution intends to modify/replace**

The behaviour that is sought to be changed is the amount of times that the target market donates blood. Namely, the solution seeks to double the rate at which this group gives blood, by increasing it to four times a year from the current rate of only two times a year (Robinson, 2016). This is in accordance with the maximum frequency for blood donations, and is anticipated to greatly increase the availability of blood within the Australian health system (Curro, 2016).

## **Outline the benefits of the competition**

In order to outline the benefits of the competition, it's first important to determine the competition in this instance. As previously discussed, one of the primary reasons that people donate blood is because they derive value from the feelings of altruism and selflessness associated with giving blood. "The competition" is therefore essentially the current pattern of behaviour involving choosing to continue to donate only two times a year individuals feel this is a satisfactory rate rendering sufficient feelings of altruism.

There are several benefits of the alternate behaviour that is sought to be changed. One benefit of the competition is the target market having more spare time due to not having to visit the blood donation centre more frequently. Another benefit of continuing the same behaviour is the fact that the sense of fulfilment associated with donating blood is presumably already being sufficiently met by their current rate of donation.

## **Briefly outlining how your consumer focused solution is a superior alternative to the current behaviour / attitude**

Turning the act of donating blood into a "seasonal ritual" to be undertaken four times a year to correspond with each season will essentially "shift the goalposts" and create a new norm amongst altruistic individuals. Members of the target market who had previously felt

donating twice a year was sufficient will now feel compelled to donate more frequently to attain a greater sense of fulfilment once the ritualistic behaviour is established, and this is reinforced by research finding rituals enhance consumption (Vohs et al, 2013). Furthermore, value will be created and added through augmenting the product with additional features such as a loyalty card program which will involve people gaining “Seasonal Blood Donor” status. The delivery and exchange of value will also be accelerated through blood donors donating more often and thus deriving value from their altruism on a more regular basis. Furthermore, the solution will better satisfy the two upper tiers of Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs”, by better meeting self-esteem needs through an improved sense of accomplishment, and better meeting self-actualisation needs through adding to a sense of purpose and morality (Cherry, 2015).

## **Applying the whole of the marketing mix to the development of the superior alternative offer**

In presenting a detailed marketing solution to the changing the behaviour of the target market, this section relies heavily on applying theory found within services marketing. This is because the act of giving blood can essentially be viewed as a service in which altruistic benefits are attained (Alessandrini, 2007). Taking this view has allowed for the use of ‘the 7 P’s of Services Marketing’ to be applied in developing and presenting ritualistic behaviour as a viable method of increasing the blood donation rate amongst the target market (Lovelock et al, 2015). The somewhat unusual order in which each element of the services marketing mix is applied was chosen because it allows for the most logical flow of discussion.

### **Promotion**

Promoting the new ritualistic behaviour surrounding blood donations is central to disseminating the idea amongst the target market in order for behavioural uptake to occur. Promotion in marketing theory is defined as the complete array of intentional communication between an organisation and its customers, partners, or society through the promotional mix (Waterschoot & Bulte, 1992). In this instance, the organisation would be the Australian Red Cross and its customers being promoted would be the previously discussed target market.

A number of ways of communicating and promoting the message of ritualistic “seasonal blood donor” behaviour are proposed. For example, pamphlets with information about the seasonal blood donor initiative can be given to people who go to clinics and state that they currently give blood twice annually when asked. As well, a “seasonal blood donor” Smartphone app can be developed, and a mobile number database collected, that sends notifications to users about the initiative and alerts the target market each season when they’re next eligible to donate blood. Similar notification-based initiatives have proved successful for increasing donation rates in countries such as Sweden (Stone, 2016). Taking advantage of existing networks in order to create meaningful alliances for the purposes of cross-promotion is another method of raising awareness which is supported by relevant marketing theory (Achrol & Kotler, 1999). For example, since it has been identified that a key characteristic of the target market is that they are likely altruistic in other ways, the

campaign will seek to partner with the Organ Donor registry to promote the initiative to the corresponding age range.

## **Product**

The product and value offering can be considered in terms of the core product, actual product, and augmented product (Mitchel, 2013). The core product refers to the central benefit derived from the product (Solomon et al, 2013). In the case of blood donations, the core benefit is essentially the philanthropic feelings that people derive from engaging in the ritual and donating regularly blood since individuals donate to benefit society, rather than for any monetary gain (Alessandrini, 2007). The actual product is the physical act of going out and donating blood, which would be motivated through effectively promoting the “Seasonal Blood Donor” program (Solomon et al, 2013). The augmented product refers to add-ons that supplement the value offering, with an example being a Red Cross feedback and customer support helpline for correspondence after the delivery of the service (Solomon et al, 2013).

## **Place**

Traditionally the place in marketing theory refers to all mechanisms involved in coordinating a product from the point of production to the point of consumption, however for the purposes of this report we will only consider place in terms of donation locations (Poel & Leunis, 1999). Blood donations as a service suffer from the “curse of perishability” since services are inherently perishable and unlike goods they cannot be stored to be sold later (Sandhusen, 2000). In order to further improve accessibility and thus minimise the perishability cost, ritualised “Seasonal Blood Donors” will have access to priority scheduling for the Red Cross Mobile Blood Donor Van to attend their workplace or event. This should improve accessibility and access for seasonal blood donors, while also having the added benefit of encouraging the target market to join the program. Furthermore, it is also suggested that proposed clinics in the future place a greater emphasis on ensuring that they are in locations where the median age is relatively young in order to better cater to the target market. This is consistent with modern conventional marketing theory relating to place which emphasises giving consideration to the demographic features of proposed locations (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010).

## **People**

It is important that people administering the blood donation process are knowledgeable about the “Seasonal Blood Donor” program, because human actors play a part in service delivery and influence the target markets perceptions (Booms & Bitner, 1981). It is likely that additional training will need to take place to inform staff about the new program so that they can answer any questions that may arise, and also to help promote the ritual. For example, the personnel will follow a basic script during blood donations in which they ask how many times a year the individual donates, and recommend the ritual if it is suitable. The personnel should also be able to know how to alleviate common concerns that may arise, such as from individuals within the target market that are wary of the health implications of donating more frequently since this is a common concern (Harding, 2008).

One of the defining characteristics of blood donations is that the delivery of the service will never be exactly the same for any individual, and thus it is incredibly important for the Red cross staff involved with withdrawing blood attempt to deliver the services as consistently and homogenously as possible every time (Lovelock & Patterson & Wirtz, 2015). The Red Cross Staff that administer the blood donations should undergo a homogenous training program to make sure that they follow the correct service procedure in relation to the service script to be applied to “Seasonal Blood Donors”, the process to be followed, as well as having a suitable demeanour. Role theory is also important in relation to the service script as the front-stage staff and donor must have strong role congruence in order to maximise the effectiveness and smoothness of the blood donation process (Broderick, 1998).

## Process

The process for becoming a seasonal blood donor will be streamlined and simple for the target market, and “Seasonal Blood Donors” will have access to additional process features that add value. The actual procedures, mechanisms, and flow of activities by which the service is delivered is the focus of this element of the marketing mix (Booms & Bitner, 1981). The procedure for becoming a seasonal blood donor for existing donors will only require a signature, and can use the credentials that the blood service already has for the individual for onboarding due to the power of internal networks (Achrol & Kotler, 1999). Seasonal Blood Donors will have their blood donation process improved through being able to book a time at their clinic in advance using the app, and have a “blood-red-carpet quick check-in line” similar to airlines and certain cinemas such as Hoyts in Australia (Sheftalovich, 2014). This will be an improvement to the process because consumers place significant value on the time saved by being able to skip waiting around in queues. This is reinforced by ‘the psychology of waiting’ which has found that unoccupied time that is spent waiting in queues is perceived to be much longer than it actually and consumers have a desire to evade this (Lovelock & Patterson & Wirtz, 2015).

## Physical Evidence

The roll-out of the Seasonal Blood Donor program will make use of the physical evidence component of the marketing mix which remains after the service is consumed (Sandhusen, 2000). A loyalty or membership card will be issued to all Seasonal Blood Donors to facilitate the quick check-in process. As well, evidence has shown that membership cards act as an effective tool in marketing due to their presumed exclusivity and perks, and this should encourage users to stay members (Allaway et al, 2006). Additional physical evidence of Seasonal Blood Donor status will be in the form of the bandage applied after the donation. Instead of the standard red bandage commonly applied, seasonal blood donors will a different colour bandage and small drawing based on the season. For example, a blue bandage with a snowflake will be issued for winter, a green bandage with a flower will be issued for spring, a yellow bandage will be issued with a sun for summer, and an orange bandage with a leaf will be issued for autumn. This form of physical evidence will further add to the exclusivity associated with being a seasonal blood donor, and acts as a lasting physical reminder each season of the philanthropic efforts of the individual associated with engaging in the ritual behaviour and donating blood (Lovelock & Patterson & Wirtz, 2015).

## Price

When considering the price of the offering, it is worthwhile to consider price in terms of the total cost that consumers must bear in order to acquire, access, or use the product including non-financial costs (Morris & Joyce, 1988) and financial factors (Fine, 1990). All of the elements of the marketing mix have been applied with the goal of decreasing the costs involved with taking part in the ritual, and maximise the value delivered. For example, improving accessibility for seasonal blood donors lowers the non-financial cost involved with giving blood, and other benefits like quick check-in and exclusive bandages are designed in order to add value. The net effect of this is essentially increasing the price at which the target market is willing to pay, while at the same time lowering the price the target market actually must incur and thereby making the offering more attractive to the target market (Sandhusen, 2000).

## Conclusion

It is clear that the application of marketing principles can be highly effective in the development of a solution to social problems. The solution to Australia's blood donation shortage that has been constructed throughout the course of this research has many merits grounded in social marketing and consumer behaviour theory, and it is recommended that the proposed set of measures be investigated further, potentially through a controlled study. It is also hoped that this research demonstrates the ability for the principles of social marketing to be used as a lens or set of tools for analysing societal issues more broadly.

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