

From Case to Insight: Teaching Societal Marketing Research Through Content Analysis

Bela Florenthal, Ph.D.

Marketing Professor, Cotsakos College of Business, William Paterson University

Teaching Societal Marketing Through Disciplined Observation

As marketing increasingly shapes how organizations engage with communities, students must learn to examine marketing through a societal—not only performance—lens. This material helps integrate purpose-driven marketing into courses by equipping students to ask deeper questions about stakeholder impact, ethics, and unintended consequences, while maintaining analytical rigor. The teaching note introduces a structured, case-based content analysis assignment designed for undergraduate marketing research courses that bridges theory, practice, and societal relevance.

What Makes Raise Craze a Strong Case for Societal Research

The *Raise Craze* case (Florenthal, 2023) provides an accessible yet analytically rich context for societal marketing research. The case documents how different schools implemented a kindness-driven fundraising platform, producing varied outcomes across participation, revenue, community engagement, and social impact.

Short Synopsis of the Raise Craze Case

The *Raise Craze* case examines how a parent-founded startup disrupted the traditional school fundraising market by replacing product sales with acts of kindness (AOKs) as the core fundraising mechanism. Designed initially for K–12 schools, the platform enables students to raise funds by performing and documenting acts of kindness, shifting the focus from transactional selling to prosocial engagement. As *Raise Craze* gained traction and media attention, schools adopted the model in diverse ways, producing variation in participation, revenue, community involvement, and social impact.

Set against a competitive landscape dominated by large, well-established fundraising platforms, the case highlights *Raise Craze*'s strategic challenges related to market positioning, growth, and resource constraints. The case provides a flexible and analytically rich context for examining marketing strategy, segmentation and positioning, and societal impact, making it particularly well suited for use across principles, marketing management, and marketing research courses.

School Scenarios in the Raise Craze Case

Across multiple school scenarios, the case presents contextual background, stakeholder roles, fundraising goals, communication strategies, participation models, and observed outcomes. These variations allow students to observe how marketing decisions operate in real settings—making the case a strong entry point into applied societal marketing research rather than hypothetical analysis.

Why This Assignment Matters for Learning Societal Marketing Research

Building on the Raise Craze case context (see Table 1), students in an undergraduate marketing research course complete a structured, case-based content analysis assignment designed to introduce societal marketing research. The emphasis is not on evaluation or advocacy, but on disciplined observation—examining how marketing activities shape outcomes for individuals, communities, and multiple stakeholders. Table 1 outlines the four sequential steps that guide this assignment, from initial case review through systematic coding, application of core marketing frameworks, and reflection on societal research biases.

Table 1. Steps to Complete the Content Analysis Assignment

Step	Assignment Stage	Description
1	<i>Read the Case</i>	Students carefully review the assigned <i>Schools</i> case study to become familiar with the context, scenarios, and key details before analysis begins.
2	<i>Categorize Data: Fundraising Framework</i>	Using predefined fundraising categories, students systematically code case content to identify purposes, participants, donor groups, strategies, and community impact.
3	<i>Categorize Data: Marketing Mix, Segmentation & Positioning</i>	Students apply core marketing frameworks to the same case, examining how prosocial initiatives function as strategic marketing efforts rather than informal goodwill activities.
4	<i>Assess Research Biases</i>	Students critically evaluate their analysis for societal research pitfalls, including bias, overgeneralization, and value-laden interpretation, using established societal research principles.

Step 1: Reading for Meaning, Not Opinion

Students begin by carefully reviewing real-world school fundraising cases associated with the *Raise Craze* model. Each scenario provides multi-dimensional detail, enabling students to identify *what the case shows* rather than *what they believe should happen*. This establishes a foundation for qualitative rigor and prepares students to interrogate their interpretations through a societal research lens.

Table 2: School-Based Fundraising Cases Using the Raise Craze Kindness-Driven Model

School	Case Title	Brief Case Description
School A	<i>Elementary School Switches from Boosterthon and Keeps \$15,000 More in Proceeds</i>	Documents a school’s transition from a traditional fun-run fundraiser to the Raise Craze kindness-based model, resulting in higher net proceeds, broad participation, and extensive community engagement through structured acts of kindness.
School B	<i>School Turns a Beloved Walk-A-Thon into a Raise Craze Kindness Walk and More Than Doubles Its Results</i>	Illustrates how an established walk-a-thon was reimaged as a Raise Craze “Kindness Walk,” blending tradition with innovation to more than double fundraising outcomes while reinforcing school–community relationships.

School C	<i>School Inspires Its Entire Community, Challenging the Mayor and Police Department to Spread Kindness</i>	Highlights a community-wide kindness campaign in which students challenged local leaders (e.g., mayor, police chief) to participate, demonstrating how visibility, partnerships, and storytelling expanded donor reach and engagement.
School D	<i>Taking the Act of Spreading Kindness to Another Level</i>	Explores a high-participation, service-oriented fundraiser emphasizing inclusivity, community response during a crisis, and long-term cultural impact beyond fundraising outcomes.
School E	<i>League Academy: Fundraising for Middle Schools</i>	Examines a developmentally appropriate fundraising approach for middle school students, showing how consolidating fundraising and emphasizing student-selected causes increased participation and reduced volunteer burnout.
School F	<i>Serving Locally, Acting Globally</i>	Presents a “serve locally, act globally” model linking local acts of kindness with global humanitarian impact, illustrating how prosocial fundraising can foster global awareness while maintaining school-wide inclusion.
School G	<i>A Team That Serves Together, Stays Together</i>	Describes a team-based, time-bound service fundraiser in which student-athletes complete acts of service in lieu of product sales, strengthening team cohesion and community engagement while meeting fundraising goals.

Step 2: Categorizing Societal Fundraising Practices

Using predefined fundraising categories (e.g., purpose, participants, donor groups, strategies, and community impact), students extract verbatim excerpts from the case and link them to fundraising elements inspired by Umashankar (n.d.). This step emphasizes systematic coding and guards against superficial interpretation by anchoring insights in textual evidence.

Table 2: Fundraiser Elements Used for Societal Marketing Content Analysis

Fundraiser Element	Focus	Description
Fundraising Purpose and Goals	<i>What the fundraiser seeks to achieve</i>	Captures the stated or implied goals of the fundraiser, including the amount to be raised, the intended use of funds, and how goals are shaped by contextual factors such as community needs or broader social issues.
Fundraising Participants and Roles	<i>Who is involved</i>	Identifies key actors involved in planning and execution (e.g., students, teachers, administrators, parents, staff) and describes how responsibilities are distributed across groups.
Target Donor Group	<i>Who is asked to give</i>	Specifies the donor pool described in the case (e.g., parents, families, local businesses, community members) and highlights observable characteristics or motivations inferred from the fundraising approach.

Fundraising Activities and Events	<i>How donations are solicited</i>	Includes events, activities, or actions used to encourage donations, such as acts of kindness, school events, online campaigns, or community-based engagement efforts.
Fundraising Strategies and Tools	<i>What supports effectiveness</i>	Captures strategies, tactics, or tools that appear to enhance fundraising outcomes, including digital platforms, ease of participation, storytelling, and multiple donation options.
Community and Societal Impact	<i>Who benefits and how</i>	Describes the broader effects of the fundraiser on the school, local community, or social causes, including beneficiaries and any social outcomes highlighted in the case.

Step 3: Applying Core Marketing Frameworks

Students then analyze the same cases through the marketing mix, segmentation, and positioning, learning how prosocial initiatives function as deliberate strategic marketing efforts rather than informal goodwill activities (Hair et al., 2021). This step helps students recognize how values-driven initiatives align with broader marketing strategy and stakeholder engagement.

Table 3: Marketing Mix, Segmentation, and Positioning Elements Used for Case Analysis

Element	Focus	Description
Product	<i>What is offered</i>	Captures the acts of kindness, experiences, or symbolic offerings associated with the fundraiser, including what participants are asked to do or engage in.
Price	<i>What is required</i>	Includes both monetary and non-monetary costs, such as donations, time, effort, or participation required from students, families, or donors.
Place	<i>Where it occurs</i>	Refers to the physical or digital locations where fundraising activities take place, including schools, communities, homes, or online platforms.
Promotion	<i>How it is communicated</i>	Encompasses messaging, communication channels, events, and materials used to promote the fundraiser or associated cause.
Segmentation	<i>Who it is designed for</i>	Identifies targeted audiences (e.g., parents, families, businesses, community members) and evidence of differentiated outreach across groups.
Positioning	<i>How it is framed</i>	Focuses on how the fundraiser is presented in the minds of the target audience, including language, framing, and values emphasized in the case.

Step 4: Confronting Research Pitfalls

A defining feature of the assignment is **structured reflection on societal research pitfalls**, adapted from Harmeling (n.d.). Students explicitly identify how pitfalls—such as researcher bias, confirmation bias, value-laden language, and overgeneralization—could emerge in their analyses and document strategies used to mitigate them.

Table 4: Societal Research Pitfalls and Objectivity Practices

Pitfall / Practice	Focus	Description
Rigor: Observation, Not Advocacy	<i>Separating evidence from judgment</i>	Emphasizes distinguishing what the data show from interpretive or normative claims to maintain analytical rigor.
Researcher Reflexivity	<i>Examining one's perspective</i>	Encourages researchers to pause, reflect on personal assumptions, and challenge how their position may shape interpretation.
Leaving the Comfort Zone	<i>Broadening perspectives</i>	Involves considering how multiple stakeholders influence and experience the observed phenomenon.
Multiple Working Hypotheses	<i>Avoiding confirmation bias</i>	Requires actively seeking evidence that could challenge initial expectations or favored explanations.
Form-storming Toward Root Causes	<i>Moving beyond symptoms</i>	Focuses on identifying structural, institutional, and systemic drivers rather than surface-level explanations.
Diverse Research Teams	<i>Surfacing blind spots</i>	Uses diversity of perspectives to challenge assumptions and improve the quality of interpretation.
Finding the Exceptions	<i>Preventing overgeneralization</i>	Examines outliers and exceptions to refine explanations and strengthen analytical nuance.
Language Matters	<i>Avoiding value-laden language</i>	Highlights how word choice can shape meaning and interpretation, influencing perceived relevance and credibility.
Available Data ≠ Appropriate Data	<i>Assessing data adequacy</i>	Encourages critical evaluation of whether data sources exclude voices or distort lived experiences.
Considering Risks of Recommendations	<i>Anticipating long-term impact</i>	Recognizes that research findings may become institutionalized and have enduring societal consequences.

What Students Learn

By integrating structured coding, core marketing frameworks, and reflexive analysis, this assignment helps students ground insights in evidence, separate observation from evaluation, and systematically consider alternative explanations. Students develop analytical rigor, reflexivity, and societal sensitivity—core competencies for conducting responsible and credible marketing research.

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