



Ethics & Marketing: A Deep Connection

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ABSTRACT

Marketing ethics is the area of applied ethics which deals with the moral principles behind the operation and regulation of marketing. Some areas of marketing ethics overlap with media ethics. Advertisements as Mirrors of prevailing norms Marketers claim that advertising simply mirrors the attitudes and values of the surrounding culture. On an ethical standpoint, marketers have to exercise restraint in exploiting such social paradigms to their commercial advantage. The internet is the progeny of civil society. This means that the World Wide Web is not the wild wild Web, but instead a place where values in the broadest sense should take a part in shaping content and services. Business schools too often reduce everything to an economic entity. Now if the fundamental purpose never gets questioned, the ethics never get questioned, because the fundamental purpose of something gives you the reason for its existence.

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INTRODUCTION

Marketing ethics is the area of applied ethics which deals with the moral principles behind the operation and regulation of marketing. Some areas of marketing ethics overlap with media ethics.

In the world of business today, we are forgetting that morals and profits go hand in hand. As the 'work hard, earn more money' slogan is plaguing the world, values and ethical priorities took a back stance. Marketing theorists have for so long ignored the negative consequences of pure materialism, consumerism, and unethical practice on the development of their societies. We want young people to grow up to be balanced adults who have other values in addition to work and achievement, who make time for friends, family, recreation, community service, and spiritual growth.

Hitler is a classic case, as he managed to influence so many people during the third world war, just by using his charisma and strong personality. It goes to show that a good leader can influence both the good and the bad. Human beings tend to move in herds, just like animals. We all tend to think and act in groups. The internet is making up of many herds of people following people. It is human nature to follow what they know instead of sticking out and doing something differently. To get your own herd of followers, you will have to have something of value to offer your prospects. It is a good idea to get loads of testimonials and success stories from happy customers and followers, as this is like wildfire, and more people will follow.

ADVERTISEMENTS AS MARKETING DILEMMA

Advertisements as Mirrors of prevailing norms Marketers claim that advertising simply mirrors the attitudes and values of the surrounding culture. No doubt advertising, like the media of social communications in general, does act as a mirror. But, also like media in general, it is a mirror that helps shape the reality it reflects, and sometimes it presents a distorted image of reality. Advertisers are selective about the values and attitudes to be fostered and encouraged, promoting some while ignoring others. This selectivity does not impart credence to the notion that advertising does no more than reflect the surrounding culture. For example, the absence from advertising of certain racial and ethnic groups in some multi-racial or multi-ethnic societies can help to create problems of

image and identity, especially among those neglected, and the almost inevitable impression in commercial advertising that an abundance of possessions leads to happiness and fulfillment can be both misleading and frustrating.

Exploiting Social Paradigms: In the hopes of making a fast buck, marketers often resort to exploiting social paradigms typical to certain areas. In India, for example, a large multinational corporation ran an ad campaign that depicted a young woman who because of her dark facial complexion was unable to find jobs. But as the ad showed, as soon as the woman started using the facial whiteness cream manufactured by the corporation, she got the job of her choice. Needless to say, there was a big backlash against it and the ad campaign had to be scrapped. On an ethical standpoint, marketers have to exercise restraint in exploiting such social paradigms to their commercial advantage.

Fig. 1: Marketing Dilemma



Surrogate Advertisements: In India, alcohol and cigarette advertisements were banned outright some years back. However, alcohol and cigarette companies alike are using the avenue of surrogate advertisements to press forward their case. For the viewer though, the 'subtle' pointer towards the

real deal is enough as the surrogate advertisements leave no ambiguity in their minds.

Subliminal Advertisements: One of the most controversial and ethical issues in advertising is regarding subliminal advertisements. Inserting subliminal messages in an advertisement is an inherently misleading action. It is an attempt to manipulate a person's thinking without the person realizing that any such manipulation is occurring.

False and Misleading Advertisements: Then there is the issue of false and downright disingenuous advertisements. While in itself this is an important ethical issue, an extension of this is the question of credibility. Nowadays, newspaper columns are rife with advertisements which blatantly compare features of brands with those of their competitors. Citing the opinion of 'experts', these advertisements claim their brands to be quantitatively and qualitatively better than those of their rivals. In India a leading car manufacturer had to recall its ad campaign when it incorrectly stated that one of its car models was superior to that of its competitor's.

Intrusive Promotions: A number of companies offer a plethora of freebies in terms of services and add-ons, however all these come with the proverbial strings attached. These are particularly true for telecom and internet services related companies. Mobile network providers in India for example are notorious for literally bombarding the users with promotional text messages. Many a times these companies share customer data with other companies without the explicit permission of the customers themselves. The issue at hand is such measures compromise the confidentiality of company-client relationships and trivialize the privacy concerns of the customers.

Copyright & trademark violations: Copyright and trademark violations are ubiquitous throughout the developing world. One of the major grouses of multinational corporations in countries like China and India is the lack of a robust legal framework that harshly penalizes violators.

ONLINE AD: A CREATIVE WEB

World Wide Web versus the Wild Wild Web: To many, the utopian concept of the internet is that of a valueless zone—a free network that is outside the purview of human control and restraint. But we feel that line of reasoning is flawed. The internet is the progeny of civil society. This means that the World Wide Web is not the wild wild Web, but instead a place where values in the broadest sense should take a part in shaping content and services. This is recognition that the Internet is not something apart from civil society, but increasingly a fundamental component of it.

There is great importance of the internet marketing or advertising ethical issues. The ethics are the cultural values of the society. It is the internet marketing in a society where legal and ethical limits are pushed to the max and how the attitude pervades those around us that if there are no rules against something then it is ok to do, why even ask about ethics and values on the Web? Because, it affects you; The Internet is a growing and a continually evolving creature that will live on in perpetuity. As such, it would be wise to ponder the e business legal and Internet marketing ethical issues.

ETHICAL CHALLENGES FOR MARKETERS

Marketers not only face challenges but they also face the dilemma what to communicate, when to communicate, where to communicate & to whom to communicate. The regulation over promotions increases the challenges for marketers.

1) Self-interest sometimes morphs into greed and selfishness, which is unchecked self-interest at the expense of someone else. This greed becomes a kind of accumulation fever. If you accumulate for the sake of accumulation, accumulation becomes the end, and if accumulation is the end, there's no place to stop. The focus shifts from the long-term

to the short-term, with a big emphasis on profit maximization.

2) Some people suffer from stunted moral development: This happens in three areas: the failure to be taught, the failure to look beyond one's own perspective, and the lack of proper mentoring.

Business schools too often reduce everything to an economic entity. They do this by saying the fundamental purpose of a business is to make money, maximize profit, or the really jazzy words 'maximize shareholder value,' or something like that. And it never gets questioned. Now if the fundamental purpose never gets questioned, the ethics never get questioned, because the fundamental purpose of something gives you the reason for its existence. It tells you whether you're doing it well or not. It's the ultimate ethical question: What's your purpose?

Your fundamentals will raise issues over what is important: Brand or Profit? Bundling or Satisfying? If you do not discuss over these the finance and economic part of the business becomes important leaving aside the major role of a real marketer.

3) Some people equate moral behavior with legal behavior, disregarding the fact that even though an action may not be illegal, it still may not be moral. We ought to remember that the reason for all laws is that the moral agreement begins to break down, and the way to get other people in line is to legislate so that we can stipulate punishments. Yet some people contend that the only requirement is to obey the law. They tend to ignore the spirit of the law in only following the letter of the law. For example, ASCI regulations repeatedly guides over adult content, vulgarity, abusing, etc.

4) Professional duty can conflict with company demands. For example, a faulty reward system can induce unethical behavior. A purely self-interested agent would choose that course of action which contains the highest returns to him or herself.



Fig. 2: Ethical Challenges

5) Individual responsibility can wither under the demands of the client. Sometimes the push to act unethically comes from the client. How many people expect their accountants to pad their expenses where possible? How many clients expect their insurance agents to falsify their applications or claims? That's the temptation—you like your client, you've gotten to know your client, you really want to help your client out—that's just another conflicting loyalty.

The industry is such where people who do business are, for the most part, highly ethical people trying to do the right thing most of the time. Most of them are trying to help their clients achieve their financial objectives. But how could this be better, because clearly, there are still a lot of issues and problems in the business.

CONCLUSION

You must always use marketing ethics in your business prac-

tices. You should be persuading a person to buy a product because they really need it, and you are certain that this product will bring value into their lives. Ethical business practice is the ability to truly give somebody the power of choice, and not forcefully loading a product onto them, which they know in the back of their minds they will never have any use for. Once you

have your list of happy followers, you need to be very careful not to abuse that trust. Never promote anything that you wouldn't use for yourself. If you promote junk, you will quickly lose credibility in the eyes of your followers, and they could in turn end up following somebody else.

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