

The only way is Ethics

Purpose of the Paper:

This paper aims to look at the landscape of who is (or should be) the custodian of ‘ethics in marketing’ and indeed if there should be such a custodian. (Custodian in this context is referred to a body that will oversee best practice). The paper also aims to examine how ethics is (and should be) delivered on undergraduate and postgraduate marketing programmes/courses. Finally, consideration needs to be assigned to student’s understanding, perception and attitudes towards ethics both in terms of delivery of content and engagement within programmes/courses. The target audience under investigation will be Students at levels 4, 5, 6, 7 and also ex-student currently working.

Theoretical background:

According to Laczniaak (1999) Marketing is generally considered to be one of the least ethical business functions and therefore particular importance should be afforded to the topics, given that ‘marketing students are our potential future marketing managers’. (Singhapakdi 2004 p.261). According to the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), ‘Business students need to understand, before they graduate to the workplace, that the cost of doing something ethical is much less than the cost of doing something questionable’. (eNEWSLINE 2009). Shannon and Berl (1997) found that students felt strongly that not only a discussion on ethics is important but also a dedicated course. This raises the issue as to whether ethics should be taught as a stand-alone course or embedded within a course(s). Brennan, et al (2010) argues that ethics cannot be seen as just an add-on to a marketing course, which would suggest a more strategic approach. However, Rozensher and Fergenson (1999) cited in Singhapakdi (2004) found that business schools favoured building ethics into existing courses with limited time dedicated to the subject. Agarwal and Malloy (2002) suggest that although ethics may be incorporated within a curriculum there is no guarantee that it is taught correctly.

The research will also consider student’s personality traits in the context of the MACH-IV, which was conceived by social psychologists Christie and Geis (1970), who concluded that ‘Machiavellianism’ exists as a distinct personality trait. Christie and Geis collected statements from Machiavelli’s writings and in turn asked people the extent to which they agreed with them. Machiavelli (1469–1527) was an Italian politician and philosopher, who is attributed for coining the phrase: "the ends justify the means", famously advocated that political ethics is more important than morality. Malinowski (2009) considered the Machiavellianism tendencies of students, using the Mach IV scale, which concluded that ‘high Machs’ are more likely than ‘low Machs’ to believe that an unethical action is appropriate. Yoo and Donthu (2002) posit that students should display higher marketing ethics if they have had more opportunity to learn marketing norms, rules and codes of behaviour. The MACH-IV test is now the standard self-assessment tool of Machiavellianism and will score respondents as either High or Low Machs. Respondents scoring above 60 out of 100 are considered high Machs, whereas those scoring below 60 out of 100 are regarded as low Machs.

Design/Methodology:

A mixed method approach will be undertaken, with focus groups and surveys targeting students’ at levels 4-7 and recently workplace graduates (However, a separate questionnaire

will be design for this group). Depth interviews with institutions will also form part of the research design.

The research project will be fundamentally quantitative in approach and has also the scope of being longitudinal to monitor any changes over the life of a degree cohort. However, there will also be a qualitative element (focus groups) looking at piloting the questionnaire to students and ex-students. Depth interviews will be undertaken with institutions to glean insight.

Questionnaire Design:

From the literature review, specific statements and assertions were selected and transposed to form part of the questionnaire.

According to Laczniak (1999) Marketing is generally considered to be one of the least ethical business functions and therefore particular importance should be afforded to the topics, given that ‘marketing students are our potential future marketing managers’. (Singhapakdi 2004 p.261).

- Q3. ‘Marketing is one of the least ethical business functions’

Agarwal and Malloy (2002) suggest that although ethics may be incorporated within a curriculum there is no guarantee that it is taught correctly.

- Q4. Do you feel that ethics is being taught appropriately within the Programme?

Yoo and Donthu (2002) posit that students should display higher marketing ethics if they have had more opportunity to learn marketing norms, rules and codes of behaviour.

- Q5. Do feel that you are given sufficient exposure to ethics within the Programme?

Shannon and Berl (1997) found that students felt strongly that not only a discussion on ethics is important but also a dedicated course. This raises the issue as to whether ethics should be taught as a stand-alone course or embedded within a course(s).

- Q6. Do you feel there should be a dedicated course on ethics?

Brennan, et al (2010) argues that ethics cannot be seen as just an add-on to a marketing course, which would suggest a more strategic approach. However, Rozensher and Fergenson (1999) cited in Singhapakdi (2004) found that business schools favoured building ethics into existing courses with limited time dedicated to the subject.

- Q6. Do you feel ethics should be embedded within courses?

Malinowski (2009) considered the Machiavellianism tendencies of students, using the Mach IV scale, which concluded that ‘high Machs’ are more likely than ‘low Machs’ to believe that an unethical action is appropriate. Q7 (with 20 sub-elements)

- Q. See Appendix II

Questions 8 and 9 are specific questions addressing the issue of advertising to children and are aimed at gauging student's attitudes.

Q8. Do you feel that advertising to children (aged between 2 to 14) is appropriate?

Q9. Are there any specific situations in which you feel it is appropriate to advertise to children (aged between 2 to 14)?

Q10. This question is classifying respondent in terms of ethnicity and will enable the research to cross tabulate a number of variables.

For the complete questionnaire please see Appendix III

Findings:

Ethics is addressed by the AACSB as part of their business accreditation standards. However, an investigation revealed that of the 56 members only 36% are accredited of which a high percentage have no reference to ethics either as a stand-alone course or as part of the course content. Allen, et al (2005) suggests that although ethics forms part of the AACSB accredited business school's curriculum, it may be questionable whether it's being taught correctly, if indeed at all.

The Association of Business School (ABS) also offer ethical guidelines 'intended to provide advice and guidance about the ethical questions and issues that may need to be taken into account when considering a range of learning, teaching, research and enterprise issues' (p 3). However, no consultation appears to have taken place with marketing bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Marketing or the Academy of Marketing. However, when considering the CIM as a possible custodian of ethics, a cursory course content audit (within the overview, course content and learning outcomes) found reference to ethics only once in 126 courses.

The MACH IV personality test/assessment as an instrument in management is legitimate as it has been widely used in management and is often cited in the management literature. Price (1996) refers to the MACH IV in his authoritative International Encyclopaedia of Business and Management and Finlay's textbook Strategic Management (2000) discusses the Machiavellian personality.

http://www.academia.edu/2088569/Machiavelli_and_the_Machiavellian_Personality_Test

Practical Implications:

The research will help future marketing executives become more ethically and morally aware by shaping their marketing curriculum through consultation. The research will also help Universities and professional bodies to consider their marketing programmes/courses in the context of ethics and sustainability. The hope is that a 'body' will take the lead, be it the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) or the Academy of Marketing (AoM) to help shape the marketing ethics landscape.

Social Implications:

Given that Laczniak (1999) considers Marketing to be one of the most unethical business functions and the growing sentiment towards sustainability this topic has significant social implication and importance. Therefore, an approach to best practice in implementing ethics within a marketing curriculum and also increasing student's exposure to ethics and social responsibility is considered with the hope that steps can be made to help change/enhance students' moral attitudes and perspectives and equip them with a moral compass to tackle the ethical dilemmas that they will inevitably need to confront. This is particularly important given that 'marketing students are our potential future marketing managers'. (Singhapakdi 2004 p.261)

Originality/Value/Contribution of Paper:

Although considerable research has been undertaken in the area of 'ethics' taught to marketing to students this has been mainly confined to the United States. This paper is looking to make a contribution to the UK universities. The paper will aim to offer insights to decision makers at Universities and professional bodies in the hope that stronger working relationships can be forged and therefore consideration given over the custodianship of best practice and the perceived value to ethics to marketing students.

References

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AoM: <http://www.academyofmarketing.org/about/about.html> (Accessed 28/12/2013)

ASB: http://www.associationofbusinessschools.org/sites/default/files/2010_ethics_guide_agm_version.pdf (Accessed 29/12/2013)

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Appendices

Appendix I

MACH-IV (Test of Machiavellianism)

To what extent does each of the following statements accurately describe you? Please indicate the degree to which you personally agree or disagree with each of the following statements by choosing a number from the scale below that reflects your opinion.

1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

1) Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so.

1 2 3 4 5

2) The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear.

1 2 3 4 5

3) One should take action only when sure it is morally right.

1 2 3 4 5

4) Most people are basically good and kind.

1 2 3 4 5

5) It is safest to assume that all people have a vicious streak and it will come out when they are given a chance.

1 2 3 4 5

6) Honesty is the best policy in all cases.

1 2 3 4 5

7) There is no excuse for lying to someone else.

1 2 3 4 5

8) Generally speaking, people won't work hard unless they're forced to do so.

1 2 3 4 5

9) All in all, it is better to be humble and honest than to be important and dishonest.

1 2 3 4 5

10) When you ask someone to do something for you, it is best to give the real reasons for wanting it rather than giving reasons which carry more weight.

1 2 3 4 5

11) Most people who get ahead in the world lead clean, moral lives.

1 2 3 4 5

12) Anyone who completely trusts anyone else is asking for trouble.

1 2 3 4 5

13) The biggest difference between most criminals and other people is that the criminals are stupid enough to get caught.

1 2 3 4 5

14) Most people are brave.

1 2 3 4 5

15) It is wise to flatter important people.

1 2 3 4 5

16) It is possible to be good in all respects.

1 2 3 4 5

17) P.T. Barnum was wrong when he said that there's a sucker born every minute.

1 2 3 4 5

18) It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there.

1 2 3 4 5

19) People suffering from incurable diseases should have the choice of being put painlessly to death.

1 2 3 4 5

20) Most people forget more easily the death of their parents than the loss of their property.

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix II

‘Ethics’ within Marketing Programmes

This survey is designed to give you an opportunity to feedback on how you feel 'ethics' is being taught within your Programme.

- Q1 Which Programme are you on?
- BA Marketing
 - BA Marketing with Language
 - BA Advertising & Marketing Communications
 - BA Advertising & Marketing Communications with Language.....
 - MA Strategic Marketing
 - MA Strategic Marketing Communications
- Q2 What year of study are you in?
- First year.....
 - Second year
 - Third year
- Q3 'Marketing is one of the least ethical business function' (please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement.)
- Strong Disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree.....
 - Agree.....
 - Strongly Agree
- Q4 Do you feel that ethics is being taught appropriately within the Programme?
- Yes.....
 - No
 - If your answer is Yes, please briefly explain _____
why? _____
 - If you answer is No, please briefly explain _____
why? _____
- Q5 Do you feel that your currently Programme offers sufficient exposure to ethics?
- Yes.....
 - No
- Q6 Do you feel ethics should have:
- a dedicated course
 - be embedded within courses

When answering Q7, please try to do so as quickly as possible.

Q7

To what extent does each of the following statements describe you? Please indicate the degree to which you personally agree or disagree with each of the following statements by choosing a number from the scale that reflects your opinion.

	Strongly agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
One should take action only when sure it is morally right.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most people are basically good and kind.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is safest to assume that all people have a vicious streak and it will come out when they are given a chance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Honesty is the best policy in all cases.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is no excuse for lying to someone else.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally speaking, people won't work hard unless they're forced to do so.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All in all, it is better to be humble and honest than to be important and dishonest.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When you ask someone to do something for you, it is best to give the real reasons for wanting it rather than giving reasons which carry more weight.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most people who get ahead in the world lead clean, moral lives.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anyone who completely trusts anyone else is asking for trouble.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The biggest difference between most criminals and other people is that the criminals are stupid enough to get caught.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most people are brave.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
is wise to flatter important people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is possible to be good in all respects.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P.T. Barnum was wrong when he said that there's a sucker born every minute.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People suffering from incurable diseases should have the choice of being put painlessly to death.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most people forget more easily the death of their parents than the loss of their property.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q8 Do you feel that advertising to children (aged between 2 to 14) is appropriate?
 Yes.....
 No

Q9 Are there any specific situations in which you feel it is appropriate to advertise to children (aged between 2 to 14)?
 No
 Yes.....
 If No, please give a reason to support your answer. _____
 If Yes, please give a reason to support your answer. _____

- Q10 What is your ethnic group?
- White.....
 - Black British
 - Indian
 - Pakistani
 - Bangladeshi
 - Chinese
 - African
 - Caribbean
 - Arab

Other
If other, please specify _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.