# MARKETING ETHICS:

# ARE THERE ANY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MARKETING AND

# NON-MARKETING MAJOR STUDENTS?

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Ethics is a branch of philosophy that can trace its roots back at least 2500 years (Brickley, Smith and Zimmerman 2000). According to Aristo, ethics is explained as the discovery of what behaviors were useful and successful in everyday life (Daly and Mattilla 2000). Marketing ethics can be defined as inquiry into the nature and grounds of moral judgments, standards and rules of conduct relating to marketing decisions and marketing situations (Vitell 1986). One aspect of business ethics that has received attention is the behavior of individuals facing ethical decisions in their work environment. Students studying marketing majors, who would be expected to become marketing professionals after their graduations, need to be equipped with the guidelines for ethical behaviors in their industries.

The main objective of this study is to determine the perceptions of the undergraduate students studying in marketing majors and non-marketing majors concerning marketing ethics. In order to find out this perception a questionnaire was used.

The ethical perceptions of students are examined and although significant differences in males and females are found there were not any significant difference between marketing and non marketing students. According to the findings of the study some implications are suggested for both industries and education institutes.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ethics has become one of the most widely discussed topics in the business and academic communities. In Accounting, Legal, Banking, Marketing, Building, and political areas, the subject has steadily risen on the agenda of critical issues. Though not surpassing, in attendance, the "profit-making" seminars for managers, workshops and training sessions in ethics are being offered more noticeably in the early nineties (Lane 1995; Gray 1992).

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that can trace its roots back at least 2500 years (Brickley, Smith and Zimmerman 2000). According to Aristo, ethics is explained as the discovery of what behaviors were useful and successful in everyday life (Daly and Mattilla 2000). The study of ethics and ethical behavior in the practice of business extends at least as far back into human history as the ancient Greeks and the writings of the Bible. Few people would deny that many of our workplace decisions are framed within the context of assessments or collective understandings of good or bad, right or wrong. As the evolution of economics, business processes, and technology has unfolded, the definitions and domains of ethical business practice have become more ambiguous and seemingly less categorical (Vermillon et.al. 2002). As Hatcher (2004) mentioned one common view of ethics is the study of right and wrong conduct within a defined environment.

The decisions of individuals depend upon individual ethical perceptions, attitudes, judgments, and behaviors. These ethical decisions, when summed across the business firm and over time, can influence the performance of the organization (Whipple and Sword 1992)

## 2. MARKETING ETHICS

Ethics has been an area of interest among researchers within the business disciplines for many years. Within the marketing discipline, researchers have studied ethics to describe, explain and predict behavior (Gegel, Inks and Avila 2006) and marketing is considered the most unethical of business functions and most marketing practices have been criticized as such (Yoo and Donthu 2002). According to Laczniak (1999) business ethics commonly has been understood as the application of moral standards including dictums of right and wrong to economic behaviors, decisions and institutions. In this sense marketing ethics can be defined as inquiry into the nature and grounds of moral judgments, standards and rules of conduct relating to marketing decisions and marketing situations (Vitell 1986).

The ethical issues in marketing can be discussed under the following titles (Torlak, 2001: 184):

1. Ethical issues in marketing research

2. Ethical issues related with product

3. Ethical issues related with price

4. Ethical issues related with place

5. Ethical issues related with retailing

6. Ethical issues related with advertisement

7. Ethical issues related with personal selling

8. Ethical issues related with promotion

9. Ethical issues related with public relations

10. Ethical issues related with international marketing

11. Ethical issues related with social marketing

12. Ethical issues related with political marketing

13. Ethical issues related with internet marketing

The study of ethical behavior in a business context has drawn a great deal of attention in academic research. In marketing ethics literature some of the scholars studied consumer ethics (Rawwas 1996, Erffmeyer, Keillor and LeClair 1990, Rawwas, Swaidan and Oyman 2005, Al-Khatip, Dobie and Vitell 1995, Fullerton, Taylor and Gosh 1997, Albers-Miller 1999, Ziad, Vitell and Rawwas 2003, Kallis, Krentier and Vanier, 1986; Moschis and Powell, 1986), some of them studied business students perception of ethics (Hawkins and Cocanougher 1972, Lysonski and Gaidis 1991, Nill and Schribrowsky 2005, Cole and Smith 1996, Shanon and Berl 1997, Lane 1995, Yoo and Donthu 2002, McDonald and Donlevy 1995) and ethical perception of sales people (Ergeneli and Arıkan 2002, Dawson 1997, Varinli and Kurtoglu 2005, Hentorne, Robin and Reidenbach 1992, Gegel- Inks-Avila 2006) and some studies investigated how demographic variables affect perceptions of ethical or unethical behavior (e.g., Muncy and Vitell, 1992; Vitell, Lumpkin and Rawwas, 1991). The main issues of the studies mentioned above are;

- The effect of a business students' perception of ethics of various marketing practices (Hawkins and Cocanougher 1972, Lyosnki and Gaidis 1991),

- How marketing students ethical decision making was influenced by their perceived moral intensity, corporate culture and reward system (Nill and Schribrowsky 2005),

- Cole and Smith (1996) assessed the perception of business studies and business practitioner regarding ethics in business,

- Examining the attitudes and perceptions of business students according to the ethics education (Shanon and Berl 1997).

- Exploration of the reactions of business students to the ethical marketing dilemmas. (Lane 1995).

- Investigation of the relationship between marketing education and individual cultural values, and college students' marketing ethics (Yoo and Donthu 2002).

- Examination of teaching of business ethics (McDonald and Donlevy (1995).

- Gender differences in ethical perceptions of sales people (Ergeneli and Arıkan 2002, Dawson 1997)

- Ethical perceptions of sales people (Varinli and Kurtoğlu 2005)

- Ethical perception differences of managers and salespersons (Hentorne, Robin and Reidenbach 1992).

- Ethical perceptions and ethical sensitivity differences between buyers and sellers (Gegel et.al 2006).

## 3. EDUCATION AND MARKETING ETHICS

The ethical behavior of a person is likely to be shaped by the entire socialization process of friends, peers, coworkers, teachers, and family members. Due to the facet most marketing theory and practice are taught at the collegiate level, it is the role of colleges of business and marketing departments to increase students' awareness and knowledge of the importance of legal, moral, and ethical behaviors in business settings (Nill and Schibrowsky, 2005)

According to Wynd and Mager (1989), the goal of ethics courses should not be to change the way students perceive *how* they should act in specific situations involving ethical dimensions at a current point in time. The more appropriate goal may be to make students *aware* of the ethical and social dimensions of business decision making, such that these dimensions may become components in their decision making process in the future (Mc Donald and Donlevy 1995) and Yoo and Donthou (2002) suggested that those who have had more opportunities to learn the marketing norms, rules or codes of behaviors should exhibit higher marketing ethics and learning marketing ethics may occur through formal marketing education (i.e., marketing major), different stages of marketing education (i.e., introductory

students versus senior students), ethics training (i.e., college-level ethics course), and employment experience.

During their education, marketing students who will become marketing executives in the future need to be equipped with guidelines for ethical conduct in marketing profession (Yoo and Donthu 2002). De George (1989) believed students need to be sensitized to the business ethics issues they will face upon graduation and entrance into the work force. Research into various aspects of ethics in the area of personal selling and sales management has been a persistent feature of the marketing ethic literature ( Mc Claren, 2000). Although it has sometimes been argued that the primary responsibility for instilling moral values and ensuring ethically acceptable behavior in our daily life as well as in business

Both early researchers and those more recently suggest that education is an important factor in the decision process and should be concern of management. ( Mc Claren, 2000) and also Sparks and Hunt (1998) suggest that students who have completed a course in marketing research are more sensitive than those who have not.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. The Objectives

Determination of sales marketing personnel impacts on buying decision process is a crucial issue and many previous researches have explored ethical problems facing various kinds of marketing personnel.  As the source of these personnel is marketing students, because of this relation the researches on marketing students are very important. Although there is many studies on marketing and ethics (Torlak et.al 2003; Varinli and Kurtoğlu 2005; Ergeneli and Arikan 2002; Gegez et.al 2006; Varinli 2004) there isn't any research on

marketing students in Turkey. Therefore the main objective of the study is to determine the marketing ethical perception differences between marketing and non marketing students.

### 4.2. The Questionnaire

Data were collected from face to face questionnaire method. The Questionnaire has two separated parts. First part consist of questions on demographic variables such as gender, geographical region, departments, mothers and fathers education levels etc.), and there are 30 statements in the second part. The second part of the questionnaire were prepared based on Varinli and Arikan (2004); Levy and Dubinsky (1983). Respondents in this study were asked to evaluate 30 potentially ethical troublesome statements in five different dimensions. These dimensions are entitled as consumer, product, peer, personal and work related. The first dimension, consumer related dimension, consist of 15 statements where the second one which is work related has 5, peer has 4, personal has 3 and product has 3 statements. For each statement, the respondents were asked *"Please think that you have just graduate from the university and working as marketing or sales clerk. Please mention the degree of appropriateness of following behaviors."* Responses to each question were recorded on a 5 Likert- type scale where 1 means "definitely not appropriate" and 5 means "definitely appropriate". The data were analyzed by using frequency, mean, standard deviation, t-test and ANOVA test.

### 4.3. The Sample

Respondents were undergraduate students of the faculty of Commerce and Tourism Education at the Gazi University and Faculty of Science at Ankara University in Ankara Turkey. Data were gathered from students at designated classes over a two week period in June 2009. As the purpose of this study is to find out whether there is a difference between marketing and non marketing major students, so 150 questionnaires were distributed to the marketing students of which 120 of them returned and 107 of the questionnaires were

analyzed. On the other hand for non marketing major two departments were determined as Tourism Management and Mathematics and in total 200 questionnaires were distributed to the students and 173 of them were analyzed. As a total 280 responses were analyzed.

### 4.4. The Findings

In addition to frequencies tabulations of responses, cross tabulations were performed against gender and course major. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 15.0. t-test was conducted on cross tabulations to test the significant differences of course major and gender. Table 1 gives the background characteristics of the sample.

**Table 1**
**Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

| VARIABLES | GROUPS | f | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **GENDER** | Male | 156 | 56,3 |
| | Female | 121 | 43,7 |
| **DEPARTMENT** | Tourism | 116 | 41,4 |
| | Marketing | 107 | 38,2 |
| | Mathematics | 57 | 20,4 |
| **MAJOR FIELD** | Marketing | 107 | 38,2 |
| | Non-marketing | 173 | 61,8 |
| **EDUCATION FIELD** | Social sciences | 223 | 79,6 |
| | Science( Fen) | 57 | 20,4 |
| **MOTHER'S EDUCATION** | Non educated | 33 | 12,1 |
| | Primary School | 145 | 53,1 |
| | High School | 57 | 20,9 |
| | University degree | 23 | 8,4 |
| | Masters-PhD | 2 | .7 |
| | Other | 12 | 4,8 |
| **FATHER'S EDUCATION** | Non educated | 18 | 6,6 |
| | Primary School | 128 | 46,7 |
| | High School | 79 | 28,8 |
| | University degree | 38 | 13,9 |
| | Masters-PhD | 5 | 1,8 |
| | Other | 6 | 2,2 |
| **GEOGRAPHICAL REGION** | Central Anatolia | 70 | 26 |
| | East Anatolia | 18 | 6,7 |
| | Black Sea | 31 | 11,5 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Mediterranean | 37 | 13,7 |
| | Aegean | 43 | 15,9 |
| | Marmara | 67 | 24,8 |
| | Southeast | 4 | 1,5 |
| **RESIDENTIAL** | City | 167 | 61,7 |
| | Town | 65 | 24,0 |
| | Rural area | 38 | 14,0 |
| | Abroad | 1 | ,4 |
| **UNIVERSITY** | Gazi | 223 | 80 |
| | Ankara | 57 | 20 |

In order to compare the marketing and non-marketing major students' perceptions about the behavior in statement means scores and t-test results are presented in table 2. The lower mean scores on table can be considered as a higher agreement on the behavior that each statement described. In other words it is understood that the statements were perceived ethical behavior by marketing and non marketing major.

It can be said that the respondents have high ethical perceptions of marketing despite their major fields. The most unethical behavior that perceived by students is *"charging full price for a sale item without customer's knowledge."* On the other hand students find behavior of *"buying merchandise before it is available to the customer ($\overline{x}=2, 43$)"* more ethical in comparison to the other statements.

According the result of t-test, there is only one statistically difference between non-marketing and marketing major. This statement is *"Don't tell the complete truth to a customer about the characteristics of a product."* As these figures clarify, although not statistically significant, in every statement marketing major students' ethical perceptions had higher scores than non-marketing major students

As it is mentioned above, the statements are categorized in five dimensions. There isn't any statistically significant difference between non marketing and marketing major students. According to the mean scores of these five dimensions "product related dimension"

is the lowest score in other words that dimension is higher in ethical perception. In all dimensions marketing major students' ethical perception is higher than other. According to the results, it can be said that marketing education has positive impact on ethical perception.

**Table 2**
**Perception Differences Between Marketing and Non-Marketing Major Students On Marketing Ethics Situations (n=280)**

| | Marketing Major[**] | | Non-marketing Major[**] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\overline{X}$ | s.d. | $\overline{X}$ | s.d. |
| **Customer Related Situations** | *1,99* | *0,57* | *2,08* | *0,64* |
| Pressure customers into making a purchase | 1,50 | 0,91 | 1,42 | 089 |
| Give incorrect change to customers on purpose | 1,30 | ,76 | 1,31 | 0,90 |
| Charge full price for a sale item without customer's knowledge | 1,23 | 0,77 | 1,27 | 0,83 |
| Charge markdown price to customers for similar full-price merchandise | 1,39 | 0,83 | 1,39 | 0,91 |
| Hoard free samples that meant for customers | 1,28 | ,81 | 1,41 | 0,98 |
| Make excuses when merchandise is not ready for a customer to pick up | 3,83 | 1,37 | 4,15 | 1,50 |
| Make a promise that you cannot keep regarding the time when something will be ready | 1,74 | 0,97 | 1,90 | 1,14 |
| Refuse return by customer when you think the item should be accepted | 1,43 | ,79 | 1,50 | 1,01 |
| Don't offer information about an upcoming sale that will include merchandise the customer is planning to buy | 1,95 | 1,07 | 2,15 | 1,23 |
| Give preferential treatment to certain customers | 2,23 | 1,24 | 2,37 | 1,27 |
| Don't tell the complete truth to a customer about the characteristics of a product * | 1,73 | ,88 | 2,07 | 1,21 |
| Make excuses to customers about unavailable merchandise that is not yet in stock or is sold out | 3,95 | 1,22 | 3,92 | 1,18 |
| Buy merchandise before it is available to the customer | 2,43 | 1,12 | 2,49 | 1,32 |
| Sell a more expensive product when a less expensive one would be better for the customers | 2,03 | 1,40 | 2,05 | 1,14 |
| Don' offer information to the customers who don't know their rights. | 1,87 | 1,19 | 1,81 | 1,21 |
| **Work Related Situations** | *1,91* | *0,79* | *2,00* | *0,83* |
| Sign time sheet incorrectly for time worked | 1,68 | 0,96 | 1,61 | 1,00 |
| Perform your job with inadequate job information or training | 1,88 | ,96 | 2,09 | 1,08 |
| Hide merchandise that you want and are waiting for the store to markdown | 1,76 | 1,03 | 1,73 | 1,08 |
| Sell the product as an exclusive, when in fact it is available in other stores | 1,95 | 1,08 | 2,13 | 1,18 |
| Don't sell the last unit because you want to purchase it yourself | 2,28 | 1,31 | 2,40 | 1,29 |
| **Peer Related Situations** | *1,95* | *0,80* | *2,10* | *0,79* |
| Pressure from a friend to give him or her your employee discount | 1,93 | ,97 | 2,08 | 1,13 |
| Accusing to your peer | 1,84 | 1,01 | 1,97 | 1,04 |
| Not to say anything about your managers fault | 1,85 | 1,07 | 2,00 | 1,13 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Peer pressure not to say anything to management about other sales associates' personal problems | 2,16 | 1,13 | 2,33 | 1,15 |
| **Personal Related Situation** | *1,97* | *0,90* | *2,06* | *0,89* |
| To share information about old company to new company | 1,99 | 1,26 | 2,24 | 1,36 |
| To reflect personal problems to the customer | 1,95 | 1,16 | 1,96 | 1,15 |
| Using company tools for your personal needs. | 1,98 | 1,16 | 2,00 | 1,07 |
| **Product Related Situations** | *1,72* | *0,89* | *1,83* | *0,93* |
| Don't tell the faults of the product to the customer | 1,53 | 0,87 | 1,65 | 1,03 |
| Don't give information about complaints of the previous customers. | 1,94 | 1,14 | 2,08 | 1,14 |
| Don't tell the complete truth to a customer about the characteristics of a product | 1,69 | 0,98 | 1,76 | 1,08 |

*1: definitely not appropriate … 5: definitely appropriate*
* $p=0,0131<0,005$    **$N_{marketing} = 107$    **$N_{non-marketing} = 173$

As shown in the table 3, there is statistically difference between male and female students in all dimensions. According to the results it can be mentioned that the ethical perceptions of female students are higher than male students. This result supports the results of previous studies (Kidwell et al., 1987; Betz et al. 1989, Harris 1989, Arlow, 1991; Peterson *et al,* 1991; Poorsoltan *et al.,* 1991; Whipple and Wolf 1991; Dawson, 1992; Cole and Smith 1996; Dawson 1997; Ferrell and Skinner 1988; Ekin and Tezolmez, 1999; Ergeneli and Arikan, 2002). But on the other hand there are some studies that didn't find significant relationship. In most ethics studies socio-demographic variables were used but still the results are not conclusive. (Nill and Schribrowsky 2005)

**Table 3**
**Perception Differences Between Male and Female Students**
**On Marketing Ethics Dimensions (n=277)**

| | MALE | | | FEMALE | | | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | $\overline{X}$ | s.d. | N | $\overline{X}$ | s.d. | |
| Customer Related Situations | 156 | 2,13 | 0,69 | 121 | 1,95 | 0,49 | **0,017** |
| Work Related Situations | 156 | 2,06 | 0,89 | 121 | 1,83 | 0,72 | **0,022** |
| Peer Related Situation | 156 | 2,16 | 0,84 | 121 | 1,90 | 0,71 | **0,007** |
| Personal Related Situation | 156 | 2,20 | 0,94 | 121 | 1,82 | 0,79 | **0,000** |
| Product Related Situations | 156 | 1,94 | 1,03 | 121 | 1,60 | 0,70 | **0,002** |

*1: definitely not appropriate … 5: definitely appropriate*

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study investigates undergraduate students' marketing ethics. The findings confirm that level of marketing ethics is related to students' course major. According to the findings, the most unethical behavior that perceived by students is *"charging full price for a sale item without customer's knowledge."* On the other hand students find behavior of *"buying merchandise before it is available to the customer"* more ethical in comparison to the other statements. However, only one statement that "don't tell the complete truth to a customer about the characteristics of a product" has statistically difference between non-marketing and marketing major, in every statement marketing major students' ethical perception had higher scores than non-marketing major students. It can be said that the respondents have high ethical perceptions of marketing despite their major fields.

One of the major findings of this study, according to the answers given by students, was that there were significant gender-related differences in the evaluation of ethical statements and dimensions. In all dimensions female students the ethical perceptions of female students are higher than male students. Although some of the previous studies didn't find any differences, this study supports the most of the studies that found differences.

Additional researches and studies are needed to verify the differences between students' course majors. Future studies should include different groups of students such as business students and different universities. As Shannon and Berl (1997) mentioned "despite *the increased interest in ethics over the past years there is still much work to be done before we understand exactly what determines the behavior of people in business settings*".

## 6. LIMITATIONS

Like many other studies this study has some limitations. First of all, the main limitation is time constraints. Secondly, data collected from students who respond the questionnaire may not be represent for all students as a whole. The final limitation is problems which occur during the implementation of survey such as getting permission from the authorities.

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