

IMPROVING ETHICAL BEHAVIOR OF MARKETING STUDENTS: EMPATHY ENRICHMENT THROUGH THE USE OF VISUAL IMAGERY IN AN INTRODUCTORY MARKETING COURSE

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ABSTRACT

In addition to cognitively-oriented pedagogies, business ethics education needs to tap further into the affective domain to improve business ethics, to help re-humanize business. Business ethics education needs to find ways to close the interpersonal distance between business decision-makers and their various stakeholders.

Marketing educators have an important window of opportunity to capitalize on the heightened social justice sensitivity of the current generation of students; on the importance of relationships with consumers, supply-chain partners, etc. that are inherent in the marketing discipline; on marketing's comprehension of the power of empathy in those relationships; and on the affective potency of visual imagery. This paper explores the usefulness of visual images to evoke empathy in a principles of marketing class.

BACKGROUND

Moral development is one of the many factors that contribute to ethical behavior. This life-long process involves cognitive and affective aspects. The cognitive aspect has been a strong focus of business ethics education. Kohlberg's cognitive moral development framework has been the basis of much of the ethical reasoning process taught in business ethics, for example.

Affectively, behaving ethically has long been associated with the virtues. Virtue ethics focus on the character of the decision maker. Ethical decisions and actions arise out of behavioral consistency with values that align with the "good." Trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship, integrity, and empathy have been identified as critical values underlying business ethics.

According to many, business needs to be re-humanized, to emphasize emotional and moral commitment to others. Business decision-makers need to reduce their interpersonal distance from

others. Empathy appears to be a core affectively-oriented element in doing so.

Several pedagogical strategies have been suggested as useful for improving ethical decision-making and behavior. Case studies and moral dilemmas are probably the most widely used, but are more cognitively oriented. In particular, empathy development is more associated with affective approaches including novels and films, personal stories, visual images, poetry, drama, reflection, service-learning, and the critical incident technique. In thinking about which of these pedagogical approaches to pursue, marketing educators should consider their effectiveness in fostering empathy, their ability to be contextualized to the business decision-making role, and their ease of use for both instructors and students. Among these, visual images stand out as potentially compelling, contextual, and easy to employ.

STUDY

Students in a marketing principles class were exposed to visual images that were integrated into the lecture slides throughout the term. Pre- and post-measures of an empathy index and ratings of the ethicality of their responses to a moral dilemma were collected. The study is on-going and preliminary results will be presented at the conference.

CONCLUSION

The use of visual images as a pedagogical approach appears to have promise as means to foster empathy among business students which should positively affect their decision-making in terms of making more ethical decisions. The proposed empathy enrichment strategy of integrating visual images in marketing courses is a reasonable supplement to the other business ethics education efforts already employed in business schools.

References and Exhibits Available on Request