

# LINKING MARKETING AND PERSONAL VALUES: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' MISSION STATEMENT PAPERS

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## ABSTRACT

Personal values play a fundamental role in guiding marketing leader decision-making behaviors. Academic governing bodies (AAC&U, AACSB) have identified the need for curricula to quantify ethics and community service in student learning outcomes; the AMA identifies core values expected of its practitioners. Marketing professors have addressed ethics-based learning experientially. Literature thus far has not identified the need to begin ethical-based activities by first asking marketing students to articulate their personal values. This qualitative research study used content analysis of a structured assignment requiring undergraduate marketing students to articulate their personal values and initial development of a personal mission statement. Students do not arrive at college without values as they have been shaped by familial, cultural and societal norms, however, many students aren't fully cognizant of their values. As Wadell and Davis (2007) assert, "...moral education should begin with 'How should I live?' rather than 'What should I do?'" (p. 150). This research study's purpose was two-fold: 1. Determine what role, if any, a personal mission statement assignment in an Intro to Marketing class could play in aiding students to identify their values; and 2. Provide a platform for classroom dialogue: "Is marketing ethical?"

## LITERATURE REIEW

An individual's values serve as a platform or frame of reference (Johnson, 2009) as values are fundamental in assessing and making ethical decisions (Gao & Bradley, 2007). Two major pedagogical schools of thought, philosophical and applied, surround ethical instruction methods. Researchers agree moving from a totally theoretical framework to an applied one is important as it helps prepare students for the workplace (McDonald & Donleavy, 1995; Brinkmann & Sims, 2001; Saynal, 2000; Sims 2002; Jones 1989). Marketing professors have approached teaching ethics similarly as those in other business disciplines (Loe & Ferrell, 2001) by experientially exploring ways to increase students' awareness of their own attitudes and ethical behavior (Farrell & Gonzales, 2004; Nill & Schibrowsky, 2005; Williams & Hall, 2006) and have taken two paths: 1) Required students to

create a code of conduct for an entire class to abide by (Kidwell, 2001; Buff & Yonkers, 2005) or 2) Required student groups to create a code of conduct to ensure work is done within agreed upon standards (Solberg, et al., 1995; Buff & Yonkers, 2005). Prior researchers have established opportunities for students to engage in analysis and application of ethical discipline and marketing situations. However, none thus far have helped undergraduate marketing students reflect on and commit to paper what their personal values are; this step seems fundamental to effectively engage in situational activities with classmates or in workplace ethical dilemmas as one's personal values serve as a compass for ethical decision making. This is the identified need and rationale behind this research study.

## METHOD AND RESULTS

Personal values/mission statement papers of 50 undergraduate Intro to Marketing students were content analyzed, "...a research technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics within a text..." (Frey, Botan, Friedman & Kreps, 1991, p. 212). Results revealed 76% of the students were in the embryonic to fundamental stages of articulating their personal values while nearly 10% were fully formed and explicitly connected this self-knowledge with personal community service activities.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This assignment was the first time all participants wrote their values. Several researchers noted a step-wise progression to build ethics into curricula (Solberg, Strong & McGuire, 1995; Buff & Yonkers, 2005) yet do not identify one's personal values as fundamental. This is a missing and necessary step to scaffold subsequent marketing ethics-based assignments as students would not have done this without being required to do so. Many used this experience to better inform classroom dialogue to consider the question, "Is marketing ethical?" from both a consumer and marketers' perspective.

**References Available on Request**