

BUSINESS STUDENTS LOOK HARD AT ADVERTISING AND MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

The attitudes of business students versus non-business students toward advertising and marketing are compared. Results are discussed in terms of both the institutions of advertising and marketing, and their instruments.

INTRODUCTION

Advertising and marketing have encountered many criticisms in past decades including, for example, "Advertising creates demand and persuades people to buy products that they do not need." Such criticisms have often evoked negative attitudes among the general public. However, in other instances the public's outlook toward advertising and marketing may be improving, attributable in part to increasing regulatory measures (e.g., FTC substantiation program) and businesses becoming generally more sensitive to consumers.

Undoubtedly, an important group of consumers is students, for the future decision-making responsibilities of the country will be inherited by them. The attitudes of business students are especially important, because future advertising and marketing decisions will be their responsibility. While some work has been reported in the area of college student attitudes toward advertising and marketing, very limited work has specifically focused on the attitudes of business students.

BACKGROUND

Advertising and marketing practices are being challenged today, not only in the name of the consumer, but by the consumer directly. Consumer advocacy has grown to such a powerful magnitude that politicians have responded with legislation aimed at curbing deceptive practices. With the growing number of consumer advocates, businesses cannot afford to dismiss these attacks with the idea that they will pass.

Although businesses seem to have adopted the marketing concept (i.e., need satisfaction) the public still questions whether businesses' own interests are congruent with the interests of the consumer. In a survey of 785 households, Barksdale and Darden (1972) found many consumers believed that manufacturers typically evade responsibility to the consumer and concentrate only on profit maximization. Further dissatisfactions were realized when a majority of respondents expressed a desire for minimal quality standards to be set on similar products. They also expressed a desire to regulate sales and marketing activities. It appears that the public's image of advertising and marketing has been one of dissatisfaction.

Businesses are for the most part aware of the public's negative attitude. A survey of Harvard Business Review subscribers (Greyser 1971) found strong feelings concerning the enforcement of an advertising code of ethics. These business professionals felt that the public's image of advertising had become increasingly negative. However, these same executives felt they had become more sensitive to consumers. Further, Greyser and Diamond (1974) revealed that a majority of business executives accepted consumerism as a positive force in the market place. Thus, it seems that the public's dissatisfaction has been recognized by those in business and a change might be on the way.

The attitudes of students toward advertising and marketing seem to parallel those of the general public. Not only are a large proportion of students dissatisfied with the practices of advertising and marketing, but these negative attitudes have in some instances steered students away from business careers. In a survey of students at a private liberal arts college for men, Laurie (1966) reported many academically superior students steered away from careers in business. Laurie concluded that the most significant reason for students not selecting business careers dealt with the discrepancy between student and business related values. He also found that faculty failed to guide students into the business area, and the environment of a large corporation seemed "repressive" to many students. Interestingly, students with business career intentions possessed more positive attitudes than those not interested in a business career.

Although little empirical work has been conducted to compare the attitudes of business with non-business students toward advertising and marketing, Hawkins and Cocanaugh (1972) compared each groups' attitudes toward marketing practices. They found business majors tolerated questionable marketing practices to a greater degree than non-business majors. Additionally, senior business majors tolerated such practices to a greater degree than junior business majors. It appears that increased knowledge in business related activities made students more tolerant of practices that some consider questionable.

In a study conducted by Sandage and Leckenby (1980), student attitudes toward advertising were traced from 1960 to 1978. Based on their findings, criticisms directed at advertising exist on two levels: 1. Institution (that which holds the total advertising process is neither socially nor economically justified); and 2. Instrument (that which is directed against the method of individual practitioners). They found that students believed, as did business people in the Greyser study, that advertising can serve a societal and consumer education function. Very few respondents in the Sandage and Leckenby study reported that advertising (the institution) did not contribute as a function of the economy. However, a majority felt that advertisements did not accurately represent the product. Thus, it seems that student criticisms are primarily directed at the instrument of advertising.

In short, the results of the work reviewed concerning advertising and marketing have revealed somewhat negative attitudes toward advertising and marketing. However, there are indications that things may be changing. New regulations and the growing concern among businesses may actually be improving attitudes of the public. Due to the lack of recent information, and the fact that business students are an important segment of the population, the purpose of this article is to assess the attitudes of students in general toward advertising and marketing, and then to specifically compare the attitudes of business versus non-business majors.

METHODOLOGY

Arizona State University was selected as the sampling frame for this investigation of student attitudes toward advertising and marketing because of the diverse demo-

*Marketing students at Arizona State University at the time this study was conducted.

graphic characteristics among its students. Volunteer subjects within the nine colleges of the University were represented in the sample, which was proportionately balanced to correspond to the size of each college. A chi-squared test comparing the number of those sampled from each college to the population supported the stratified sample's reliability in that no significant difference ($p < .05$) existed between the sample and the population.

A total of 1000 self-administered questionnaires were distributed in classroom contexts during a one-week period. The areas included in the questionnaire encompassed the degree of knowledge, general attitudes, and reaction to various advertising and marketing techniques, as well as media habits and demographics. The confidentiality of responses was ensured. The data were coded and entered via the computer facilities at Arizona State University. The key findings are next discussed.

FINDINGS

Findings of this study are aggregated into three areas. First, overall descriptive statistics are discussed to provide a general overview of how respondents answered (i.e., positive, neutral, negative). Second, a comparison of business students' versus non-business students' responses are discussed. Finally, the institution/instrument question is discussed to assess if attitudes concerning the "institutions" of advertising and marketing differ from attitudes concerning their "instruments." As noted earlier, the criticisms of the institution hold that the total advertising or marketing process is neither socially nor economically justified, and criticisms of the instrument are directed against the methods of individual practitioners.

Table 1 illustrates the proportionate breakdown of responses to each attitudinal item, as well as the mean score for each. The median for the Likert-scale items was 3.0. Mean scores above the median inferred positive attitudes and mean scores below the median inferred negative attitudes. However, the questionnaire was designed to include neutral responses, thus, the need to establish a range of neutrality existed. This neutral area was operationalized as twenty-five percent of the total range centered around the median. The mean scores ranged from 1.990 to 3.781. Thus, mean scores 3.250 and above represented positive attitudes, mean scores between 3.250 and 2.750 represented neutral attitudes and mean scores 2.750 and below represented negative attitudes.

Only four of the 16 items (3, 11, 14, and 17) had mean scores that reflected overall positive attitudes. There were six items (2, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10) that reflected overall neutral attitudes. However, the remaining six items (6, 9, 12, 13, 15 and 16) reflected negative attitudes from the respondents.

The next step in the analysis was to compare the responses of business students versus the responses of non-business students. This was accomplished via statistical t-tests which indicated the level of significance between each groups' responses. Significant differences ($p < .05$) were found to exist between groups in 10 of the 16 items. In every case where a significant difference was found, business students indicated a higher level of positive attitude than non-business students. Items showing no significant difference were 4, 9, 11, 12, 16 and 17 (see Table 2).

At this point in the analysis, it appeared that student attitudes concerning advertising and marketing were subject to whether the item was institution- or instrument-related. In an attempt to investigate these differences, it was necessary to operationalize the items used in the evaluation of attitudes toward the institutions and instruments of advertising and marketing. Marketing's institution was represented by item 11; marketing's instruments by item 7. Advertising's institution was represented by item 14; its

instruments were represented by items 6 and 15.

The analysis began by examining the institution and instruments of marketing. Item 7 ("Businesses confuse consumers by offering too many products that do the same thing") was intended to reflect attitudes toward marketing's instruments, and item 11 ("Non-profit organizations can benefit from marketing activities") was intended to reflect attitudes toward the institution of marketing. The pattern of responses to these two items were each crosstabulated against item 2, which identified the purpose of marketing. Only those respondents who were aware of marketing's purpose were considered in these crosstabulations. Of the 651 respondents that either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the purpose of marketing, a significantly greater ($p < .05$) proportion held negative attitudes (43.6%) versus those with either neutral (24.4%) or positive (32.0%) attitudes concerning the marketing instrument.

When item 11 (marketing institution) was crosstabulated against item 2 (the purpose of marketing), results indicating positive attitudes were uncovered. Of those who "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the purpose of marketing, over 76 percent had positive attitudes concerning marketing's role in non-profit organizations. In this case, the number of positive attitudes was greater ($p < .05$) than either the number of neutral or negative attitudes. These results show that many of the students with knowledge of the purpose of marketing held negative attitudes toward marketing's instruments; yet, many of these same students held positive attitudes concerning the institution of marketing.

The next step in the analysis was to examine attitudes toward the institution and instruments of advertising. In this case, item 17 ("Individuals put more trust in advertised products than unadvertised products") was crosstabulated against various instrument items (6 and 15) along with an institution item (14). This was done to ascertain if students responded in a positive manner to one type of item and then responded in a negative manner to the other (institution/instrument).

Because of their content, item 6 ("Advertising persuades people to buy products they don't really need") and item 15 ("Advertisements are used to manipulate the consumer"), were selected as the most representative of attitudes toward the advertising instrument. The results gathered from comparing each of these items to item 17 were very similar ($X^2 = 2.23$; $\alpha = .05$). In the first case (item 6 against item 17), 49.2% held positive attitudes concerning the institution of advertising but also held negative attitudes concerning the instruments of advertising. The second crosstabulation (item 15 against item 17) yielded 51.0% with positive institution attitudes, but negative instrument attitudes.

However, when item 15 ("Advertising is valuable to the consumer"), an institution item, was crosstabulated against item 17, the greatest number of respondents (40.8%) held positive attitudes toward both items. As was the case with marketing, it appears that students hold significantly ($p < .05$) more positive attitudes toward advertising's institution than they do toward advertising's instruments.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, it appears that business students' attitudes differ from non-business students; and on the whole, attitudes toward advertising and marketing are still relatively negative among students. In every case where significant differences resulted, business students indicated a higher level of positive attitudes than non-business students. Thus, it appears that business students' attitudes not only differ from non-business students, but their attitudes are more favorable toward advertising and marketing. This conclusion seems consistent with the findings of Hawkins and Cocanougher (1972), who found that

business students accepted questionable marketing practices to a greater degree than non-business students.

A greater proportion of items reflected negative attitudes; thus, it appears logical to conclude that overall attitudes are still negative. However, in comparison to the findings of Barksdale and Darden (1972), it seems that attitudes are perhaps somewhat less negative. The content of item 10 (the social responsibility of business) seemed to compare most specifically to the content of the Barksdale and Darden study. While Barksdale and Darden revealed primarily negative findings, item 10 in the current study reflected an overall neutral attitude (mean score = 2.981).

Laurie (1966) reported that attitudes were negative and many students steered away from business careers because of a discrepancy between student and business-related values. However, enrollment in business colleges have shown a noticeable increase. For example, Arizona State University's College of Business Administration has grown from 17% of the University's total enrollment in 1968 to 30% in 1981. Evidently students are choosing business careers, but results from this study show that attitudes are still negative overall. It appears that the reason may not be because of the discrepancy between student and business-related values.

Perhaps, the reason can be traced to the instrument/institution question. As Sandage and Lockenby (1980) noted, the criticism of the instruments of advertising were much more negative than of the institution. This study uncovered similar results. Items pertaining to advertising and marketing instruments yielded more negative results than items pertaining to their institutions. It is conceivable that students' negative attitudes are due to greater exposure to the instruments of advertising and marketing.

The implications of these findings indicate that the primary area for improvement by businesses and educators is in the instruments of advertising and marketing. They both need image building. Perhaps this can be achieved through various social marketing programs aimed specifically at curbing negative attitudes. As noted earlier, students are an important consumer segment. According to the findings of this study, the attitudes of students toward advertising and marketing are relatively negative. Although in most cases, the attitudes of business students toward advertising and marketing were significantly more positive than those of non-business students, their attitudes were still basically somewhat negative. It would behoove businesses and educators to improve upon the images of advertising and marketing in the minds of students, especially business students, as they will assume the responsibilities of advertising and marketing in the future.

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE STATISTICS

Please indicate the amount of Agreement/Disagreement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
2. The principle purpose of advertising is to provide the consumer with the needed information to make a logical decision.	7.0%	29.3%	16.6%	33.8%	13.4%	2.828
3. The principle purpose of marketing is to identify consumer wants and needs, and to provide products to satisfy these wants and needs.	18.5	50.7	13.7	13.8	3.2	3.676
4. Advertising influences college students less than other people.	4.8	19.8	22.0	42.9	10.5	3.346
5. Over the past few years, the informative nature of advertising has improved.	7.9	39.7	19.3	24.8	8.4	3.138
6. Advertising persuades people to buy things they don't really need.	23.3	48.0	15.1	11.6	1.9	2.208
7. Businesses confuse consumers by offering too many products that do the same thing.	13.9	34.0	24.2	23.9	3.9	2.699
8. Comparing two or more products in an advertisement aids the consumer in making sound decisions.	5.5	26.6	24.2	34.9	8.7	2.853
9. When products are compared in an advertisement, the competitor's products are shown in an inferior manner.	27.5	53.7	11.2	5.6	1.4	1.990
10. American businesses have recently shown a more socially responsible attitude toward consumers.	4.8	34.0	25.9	25.1	10.2	2.981
11. Non-profit organizations (medical foundations, churches, etc.) can benefit from marketing activities, such as advertising and marketing research.	22.0	50.8	14.3	8.5	4.3	3.781
12. Higher prices result from advertising.	23.2	41.9	17.0	14.5	3.4	2.330
13. Advertisements contain adequate information about products.	.09	13.3	24.8	45.8	15.0	2.394
14. Advertising is valuable to the consumer.	8.5	49.4	27.2	10.5	4.5	3.408
15. Advertisements are used to manipulate the consumer.	21.3	51.0	17.5	7.8	1.4	2.161
16. Consumers need to be protected from advertisers by regulatory measures.	26.7	43.7	13.2	10.5	5.9	2.250
17. Individuals put more trust in advertised products than unadvertised products.	15.0	52.3	16.3	13.3	3.0	3.631

In items 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, 15 and 16

1 = Strongly Agree

5 = Strongly Disagree

In items 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14 and 17

1 = Strongly Disagree

5 = Strongly Agree

N = 943

TABLE 2

STATISTICAL COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES
BUSINESS VERSUS NON-BUSINESS STUDENTS

ITEM	BUSINESS STUDENTS		NON-BUSINESS STUDENTS		t-scores
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
2	2.99	1.08	2.75	1.24	2.96*
3	3.93	0.92	3.54	1.06	5.60*
4	3.32	1.06	3.37	1.06	0.66
5	3.35	1.03	3.04	1.16	4.03*
6	2.40	0.97	2.10	0.98	4.45*
7	3.02	1.04	2.52	1.34	5.86*
8	2.98	1.05	2.79	1.09	2.38*
9	2.00	0.83	1.98	0.90	0.33
10	3.39	1.01	2.83	1.07	7.74*
11	3.79	1.15	3.78	0.94	0.14
12	2.28	1.06	2.35	1.10	0.94
13	2.53	0.90	2.32	0.93	3.32*
14	3.66	0.83	3.38	0.98	4.37*
15	2.33	0.89	2.08	0.90	4.07*
16	2.35	1.18	2.21	1.11	1.79
17	3.57	0.97	3.66	1.00	1.33

*p < .05

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