Identification and Role of Ethical Consumer Behaviour in the Overall Marketing Strategy

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Abstract: *The success of a modern marketing strategy largely depends on taking into account the changes and dynamics of consumer behavior. Crucial to this reporting is identifying ethical consumer behavior and distinguishing it from unethical consumer behavior.*

Marketing managers should monitor the ever-increasing intensity of changes in consumer behavior, especially those that reflect the creation of unethical behavior. This process is two-way, and in many cases, changes in marketing strategy influence consumer choices and whether to be ethical or unethical, because companies themselves can be ethical.

1. INTRODUCTION

Realizing the goals of the modern economic world puts companies and consumers in front of many choices that reflect a number of socio-psychological and ethical problems. The influence of digital technologies also predetermines the real well-being of users in various aspects - physical and emotional. More specifically, in the optimal functioning and experience of users, social connectedness, self-esteem and empathy are threatened in the digital world through the excessive consumption of digital technologies.

The purpose of the report is to identify the role of ethical consumer behavior in the overall marketing strategy. The research methodology is related to comparative analysis and tracking the development of the various stages of ethical and unethical consumer behavior in the conditions of digitalization. The author's thesis is related to the fact that the problems of ethical consumer behavior, in general, are neglected in the formation of the marketing strategy.

The Internet is a widely used medium to interact and communicate with others and to access information, knowledge and services anytime, anywhere. Recent advances in information and communication technology (ICT) such as online social networking and mobile technology have greatly increased and expanded Internet use. While the Internet provides many benefits to individuals and societies, it also has the potential to promote and exacerbate problems (Lin et al., 2022).

For example, ethical issues easily arise through the ability of Internet users to rapidly distribute user-generated content, access online content, and anonymize their online presence (Yoon, 2011). Ethical issues and problems related to the Internet as significantly negative impacts on consumers and society from the spread of negativity targeting certain individuals or groups has attracted increasing research attention in recent years (Karim et al., 2009; Yoon, 2011).

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Market participants consider ethical behavior to be an indispensable component of mutually satisfying exchange relationships (Berry & Seiders, 2008).

Existing research, however, primarily views the market as a one-way relationship, focusing on the firm's ethics and behavior toward consumers (Aggarwal & Larrick, 2012). Or, marketing research suggests that companies have the sole power to set prices and create service policies (eg returns) with little input from consumers (Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010). Modern technology gives consumers the opportunity and greater power to create more balanced relationships. This sometimes predetermines the unethical behavior of users.

One of the main concerns in business ethics is whether the market competition brought about by globalization will lead to more shady business behavior (Brass et al., 1998; Chonko & Hunt, 1985; Stead & Gilbert, 2001; Trevino et al., 1999).

It is digital technologies that facilitate the communication process between consumers and suppliers, but this also contributes to new opportunities for creating unethical business (Babakus et al., 2004).

Electronic services themselves are online interactive services, provided to customers through the use of modern telecommunications, information and multimedia technologies (Boyer et al., 2002; Roth & Menor, 2003; Zemke & Connellan, 2000).

For the purpose of the present study, we will examine precisely the various problems of ethical and unethical consumer behavior in the conditions of digitalization.

2. ETHICAL AND UNETHICAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

In the specialized literature that is related to this issue, the emphasis in most cases is on the ethical challenges caused by the use of digital technologies, through which potential users are attracted.

Some of the major issues are related to misdirected marketing practices as well as misuse of customer transaction information or e-service by providers (Barclay, et al., 2003; Maury & Kleiner, 2002).

In a practical context, the collected information that is provided on the Internet does not always correspond to the actual one in the presentation of the products and services. In reality, in many cases, the information collected through e-commerce is not stored or used in a proper way, which in most cases leads to the violation of the confidentiality of the information. Some users simply download or transfer paid information services to other ones and in reality the latter do not pay a price, or if they do, it is minimal. In fact, this is a violation of copyright laws and thus violates the contract between customers and electronic service providers.

In the specialized literature, exchange relations are not always described in detail, especially when it comes to unethical behavior practiced by e-service providers and users, respectively.

In subordination to the investigated problem, the research hypothesis should be considered from several points of view. On the one hand, e-service providers apply unethical means when

concluding contracts with customers and are not always sympathetic to them. Due to the consistency of their behavior, these companies tend to take stricter measures to prevent possible breach of contract by customers because they have practiced unethical marketing measures.

On the other hand, some electronic service providers who have acted unethically may be very lenient in their treatment of customers who breach their contracts. This leniency is consistent with the concept of ethical reciprocity and can be seen as a form of compensation offered by e-service providers to compensate for their previous unethical behavior (Fehr & Gächter, 2003).

Most companies involved in e-commerce are focused on the possibilities of doing business on the Internet but do not always consider ethical issues towards consumers. Many researchers debate to what extent attention is paid to business ethics, and all of them are adamant that not much attention is paid to these ethics in practice (Maury & Kleiner, 2002; Stead & Gilbert, 2001).

In general, scholars agree that ethical principles in online and offline commerce are fundamentally the same, but may have different manifestations in some specific areas (Beltramini, 2003; Maury & Kleiner, 2002). These differences include issues of digital privacy, copyright, and unethical marketing practices in online commerce (Sarathy & Robertson, 2002; Stead & Gilbert, 2001).

The problem of unethical pre-contractual behavior and attitudes of e-service providers is still not receiving much attention (Cho et al., 2009). After the introduction of GDPR, the situation has changed a lot. All business actors must comply with the use of user data.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, digitalization gives free choice to both companies and consumers to be ethical or unethical. Precisely the specific situations in business it is those who challenge each party to make their decision, bearing in mind the consequences afterward.

In practice, the making of flexible management decisions by managers in companies and the most satisfying consumer decisions are those that will allow the correct and expedient application of digital technologies to help companies and consumers themselves, reaching ethical behavior that in most cases is correct and especially important for the correct implementation of marketing strategies.

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