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## Ethical Relationship Marketing is needed

Carmina S. Nunes <sup>1</sup> & Cristela Maia Bairrada <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Aveiro/GOVCOPP, [carminanunes@ua.pt](mailto:carminanunes@ua.pt)

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Economics of the University of Coimbra/CeBER; [cristela.bairrada@uc.pt](mailto:cristela.bairrada@uc.pt)

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the main concepts related to Relationship Marketing (RM), such as loyalty, customer value, customer retention, and customer satisfaction and strategy continuum. A literature review is used to characterize these elements, to establish a link between them and to reinforce the role that ethics generally plays. Overall, RM aims to study marketing through the networks and its interaction. A transition to RM was required to create new value for customers and to share it. It is important also to recognize the significance that customers have as purchasers and in describing the value they wish to reach. The ethics related to RM is part of the commercial process as it requires mutual respect to retain the customer, a long-term view to keep him satisfied, a win-win strategy to create long term value, and the recognition of the customer as a partner and co-founder of value. Applying ethics may be a differential and a key factor in developing strategies and be nearer to the customers' needs to create value. This study highlights how the application in an ethical way of RM concepts may contribute to a successful implementation that requires various perspectives to its approach.

**Keywords:** Customer retention, customer satisfaction, ethics, loyalty

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing seen as a process is a complex matter that needs valuable institutions, norms and principles adequate to all the players of the organization or stakeholders. Four components have been the updated for a proper marketing definition: the customer value concept, marketing as managing customer relationships, marketing as an organizational function and in addition, an intermediate stage between what is done and what should be achieved covering the how aspect of marketing is discussed. On the other hand, if marketing does imply the existence of customer relationships, we still do not have a universally accepted definition of what a relationship is in a commercial context, what kind of relationship exist, if the loyalty must be the fundament, how to retain the customer, etc. (Grönroos, 2006). In this context various questions related to ethical marketing arise.

The existence of ethics in marketing applying to relationships could be deferential and a key factor in developing strategies nowadays and to create value for the business. As a reflection, we can appointed that in what ethical marketing concerns it has been raised the following question regarding this domain: the good practices and the relationships itself have become less ethical, or the awareness of the business has become more morally delicate?

Whatever could be the reasons for this issue some facets are suggestive in the present. At the beginning, some moral analyses are used to the solve some problems in the marketing domain, as how to establish the right price, how to use the correct labels and to present the right advertising campaign, the right marketing practices, and how to give the feedback to any interest conflict (Bartels, 1967). Still, regarding the good practices related to the relationships, we have a long way to go.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The basic purpose of ethics is to improve the cruel usage of authority and decrease the harmful effect that may affect our lives. Business ethics has been understood as a connection between the way business objectives must be aligned with a code or mission of ethics and how that be transferred into business practices and the business ethics as a discipline faces a crisis (Robin, 2009). “New fundamentals” for business ethics should include: “ethical psychology, organizational model and behavior, motivational theory, and a unit on how society, business, and law interact” (Wines, 2008, p. 483).

In the literature, Stakeholder theory seems to ask what kind of relationships are analysing:

*“the relationships between a business and the groups and people who can influence or are affected by it then we have a better chance to deal effectively with these three problems.... And in order to understand a business it is advisable to know how these relationships work and change over time. The description of business that stakeholder theory offers has been readily accepted in the field of business ethics, but still has focused little attention on the Problem of Value Creation and Trade. The idea of separation of “good ethics” from “good business” through stakeholder theory aims to connect a concern for moral conduct with the process of value creation” (Parmar et al., 2010, p.18).*

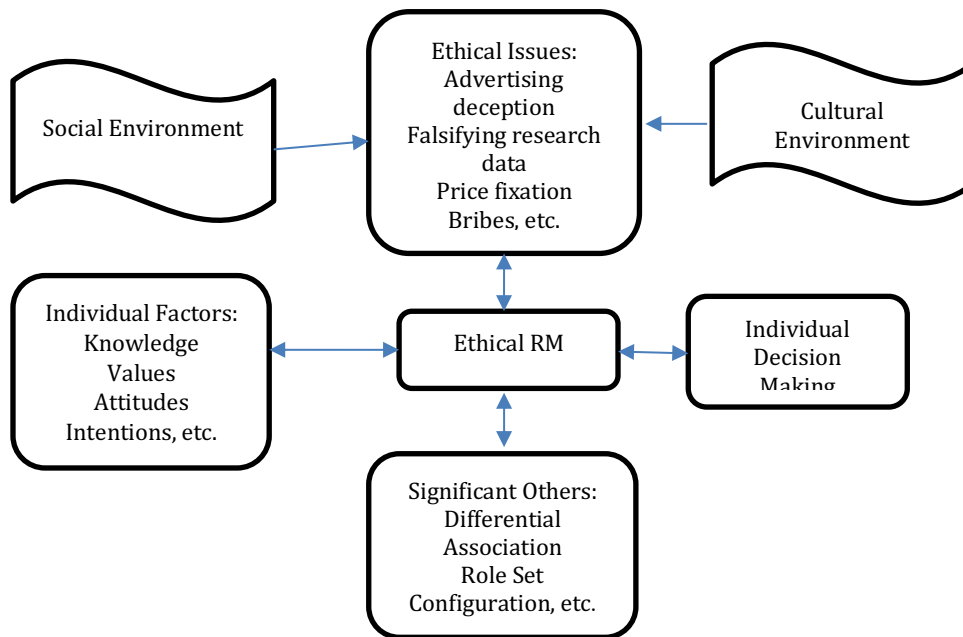
### 2.1. ETHICAL MARKETING

Marketing is perceived as an organization of community command in “reorienting a culture from a producers’ to a consumers’ culture” (Lazer, 1969, p. 3). An ethical relationship must encounter the place in this culture. The top management usually faces ethical aspects related to relationship marketing, to study the effects of their decisions (Laczniak & Murphy, 1991). As consequence a logical question rise and that is how to make an ethical decision. There exist some axioms that might guide a marketer to face an ethical dilemma:

*“The Golden Rule - behave in a manner that you would be expecting others to behave toward you.  
The Professional Ethics - take on only measures that would be considered as appropriate by an aim panel of your professional colleagues.  
Kant's Categorical Imperative - action in a way such that the performing taken under the conditions could be a universal law of behavior for everyone facing those same circumstances.*

*The TV Test - a manager should always ask, would I feel secure describing this action on TV to the general public?"* (Laczniak, 1983. p.10).

But only knowing how to deal with an ethical dilemma is not enough, that's why the top management must promote ethical marketing by implementing codes of ethics, ethics programs, and audits (Laczniak & Murphy, 1991). We argue that all these may be kept promoting an ethical marketing but from a networking perspective. A considerable disparity still exists in academic researches on marketing ethics due to an absence of an overall context that eventually can explain the numerous changeable factors which influence the ethical or unethical marketing decisions. The Figure 1 represent a model adapted and suggested with focus on Ethical Relationship Marketing (ERM):



**Figure 1 – A proposed Model of Ethical Decision Making in a Marketing Organization( adapted from Ferrell & Gresham, 1985, p.89)**

Ethical marketing is concerning both functional and organizational questions than can rise. As well we can appoint the accountability for ethics questions than can rise in marketing for top managers that are in charge to make the decisions. Because ethical marketing is part of business ethics, it is imperious to create a pattern for ethics in the marketing domain, that could represent a logical consequence for answering to the following questions: How are must be like the ethical guidelines? and how ethical decisions must be made? What items must be considered? The top management can try to identify an approach for the ethical guidelines that have to be formulated in a marketing economy? The factors that could influence the ethical decisions are appointed to be from a very large spectrum: from the general anticipations punished by the society in general to a better awareness of economic and noneconomic stimuli until the suitable attitude to be taken. However, be aware of the ethical questions is not show a resolution for the moral challenges. So, for this is necessary to create the guideline for ethics, assuming that is known the way to act. If the guidelines are known, the top management is confronted with obstacles demanding proper judgments and the procedures have not an easy, one solution to act. A crucial aspect is that generally speaking, we are not aware or agree to a generic ethics code, sometimes it is necessary to overlap the guidelines. In a society, a lot of expectations must be met, so to satisfy them we need to see which meet the most moral attendance. To the top management, it requires integrity, competences and ruling to respect the guidelines (Bartels, 1967).

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There are also some questions to be made in order to better describe how organizations handle their relationship with stakeholders, as: What are the best practices that exemplify the stakeholder management? Can be build a theory around these practices connecting the objectives and values to these practices? Are some strategies updated? What are the key core elements of each relationship? How do managers think about appropriate ethical metrics for stakeholder relationships? How do conceptualize the interaction effects of stakeholders and their interests? How is the “greening” concept seen and perceived? (Parmar et al., 2010).

Considering that does exist ethical tensions in marketing theory, Abela & Murphy (2008, p.48) presents the Table 1 that tries to solve the ethical conflicts in marketing place.

**Table 1 – Resolving ethical tensions**

<b>Inherent tension within current marketing theory</b>	<b>Ethical issues arising from tension</b>	<b>Relevant shift in dominant logic</b>	<b>How shift in dominant logic reduces tension</b>
<b>Tensions between firm and consumers</b> <b>Consumer autonomy versus marketing effectiveness. For marketing to be effective, consumers need to respond to it in the way the marketer intended, but at times this can violate consumer autonomy</b>	Misleading advertising, deceptive pricing, fear appeals	Role of customer. From recipient of goods to co-producer of service (“doing to” to “doing with”)	Highlighting the collaborative dimension of marketing underscores the counter-productive nature of any effort to deceive or pressure the consumer
<b>Consumer choice vs. consumer protection. Consumers should be free to make their own decisions, but consumers are not always capable of judging/acting in their own best interests</b>	Vulnerable consumers, addictive products, promotion of materialism	Primary unit of exchange. From exchanging for goods to exchanging to acquire the benefits of specialized competences	Focusing on the benefits provided rather than on products leads firms to take responsibility for the benefit
<b>Customer satisfaction vs. incremental revenues. Additional effort by the firm to ensure satisfaction of existing customers comes at the expense of efforts spent generating new revenues</b>	Product safety, hidden changes in product quality, high pressure sales techniques	Firm–customer interaction. From customers acted upon to create transactions to customers as active participants in relational exchanges and co-creation	Recognition of the social and legal obligations of relationship reduces this tension
<b>Consumer participation vs. total system efficiency. Mass marketing is more efficient, but passivity is detrimental to consumer physical and mental development</b>	Consumer anomie, consumer manipulation, consumer fraud	Role of goods. From end products passively consumed to transmitters of embedded knowledge actively engaged with	The focus on consumer engagement means that it is no longer acceptable to view consumers as merely passive participants
<b>Consumer welfare vs. price discrimination. Price discrimination leads to increased price dispersion, which allegedly harms consumer welfare</b>	Predatory pricing, brand imagery, high-low pricing	Determination and meaning of value. From value determined by the producer to value perceived and determined by the consumer	Since consumers decide the value, it is easier to take into account other benefits beyond just low prices (such as innovation and choice)
<b>Tensions between firm and other stakeholders</b> <b>Employee satisfaction vs. cost control. Satisfied employees lead to satisfied customers, and therefore to increased profits, but satisfying employees can be costly, reducing profits</b>	Layoffs, pension plan reductions, health and safety violations	Source of economic growth. From ownership of operand resources to right to future use of operand resources	A clearer understanding that the firm’s wealth lies in the skills and knowledge of its employees serves as an incentive to maintain employee satisfaction
<b>Supplier collaboration vs. short-term profit. Collaborative supplier relationships can enhance business results, but the drive for short-term profits encourages putting pressure on suppliers</b>	Cheating, margin squeezing, uncompensated service	Firm–customer interaction. From trade partners acted upon to enable transactions to trade partners as active participants in relational exchanges and co-production	Recognition of the inherent value of supplier relationships militates against the temptation to cheat

**Source: Abela & Murphy (2008, p.48)**

## 2.2. ROLES OF SATISFACTION, LOYALTY, TRUST AND COMMITMENT IN MARKETING RELATIONSHIP

Anderson & Srinivasan (2003) argue that not only satisfaction as key factor of any relationship has impacted on loyalty when regarding digital marketing. Trying to extend the model to offline marketing as well, it is important to demonstrate that we care about the customers by identifying their individual factors, as well as business level factors. Through business level factors, we can distinguish trust, perceived, value, ethical standards and ethical decision. Altruism, purchase size, inertia and convenience motivation represent some of the individual level factors. The business level, as well as individual level factors influence the satisfaction and loyalty. Loyalty represents a state of mind (Dick and Basu, 1994, p. 99). There appear to be two main components on the essence of commercial loyalty are appointed: loyalty in behavioural terms, based on the number of purchases and loyalty in attitudinal terms, incorporating consumer preferences (Javalgi and Moberg, 1997, p. 165).

In the current economy, trust is decreasing, although it is perceived as a component for the success of any business relationships. It is in these circumstances that organisations must work on their relationship with customers in a networked society. Considering, trust of the core word for ethical relationship, it is important to find out how to regain the trust. Trust is the extent to which you dare to rely on others; our fate is dependent on others. In that way trust is a precondition. Only when there is trust commitment an organization can grow on a voluntary basis. We do not want to commit to someone we do not trust. A broad trust is based on the reliability and should answer to the question: does one do as promised? The deep trust is related to the beliefs, values and norms of a person or organization. A close customer supplier relationship is above all characterised by a psychological contract. In this mental contract, the timing and the nature of the activities one will do in return for something one has received will not be specified. In a transactional relationship, this type of mental contract is missing; there is a formal contract that specifies when and what everybody should do. (Peelen and Beltman, 2014). There are appointed various aspects related to trusting situations: probity, equity; reliability; and satisfaction (Mitchell et al., 1998, p. 160).

For a high-level type of relationship trust and commitment, rather than satisfaction, are the facilitators between attitudes and future intentions (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). So to increase customer loyalty and satisfaction, an important tool - Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is used nowadays. Boulding et al. (2005, p.162, 163, 164) argue that: CRM investigations must concentrate on the interface among subprocesses, must have the right methods to act, also must provide the results of the based on the market activities.

A lot of ethical questions: are the CRM strategies are used in an ethical way, there are moral the practices used in various organizational in order to increase the profits? How organization can prevent unethical practices? One of the answers could be release on ethical relational strategies, analysing the all subprocess and give the right approach to all moral alternative perspectives.

## 3. DISCUSSION REGARDING ETHICAL RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

Some procedures must be done to fulfill the ERM as be aware of Ethical Norms and Values for Marketers, Table 2, organize the formal discussion, develop future models for appropriate answers to face the ethical relationship marketing dilemmas (Crawford, 1970). Indeed we need to enrich the table considering the ethical aspects involved in any relationship of organization.

If we consider that relationships have a greater effect on customer loyalty when the target of the relationship is an individual person (Palmatier et al., 2006, p. 147), we must indicate that promoting an ethical relationship the organization could benefit in the future.

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**Table 2 – Ethical Norms and Values for Marketeers**

<b>Ethical Norms for Marketeers</b>	
Do no harm. This means consciously avoiding harmful actions or omissions by embodying high ethical standards and adhering to all applicable laws and regulations in the choices we make.	
Foster trust in the marketing system. This means striving for good faith and fair dealing so as to contribute toward the efficacy of the exchange process as well as avoiding deception in product design, pricing, communication, and delivery of distribution.	
Embrace ethical values. This means building relationships and enhancing consumer confidence in the integrity of marketing by affirming these core values: honesty, responsibility, fairness, respect, transparency and citizenship.	
<b>Ethical Values for Marketeers</b>	
Honesty – to be forthright in dealings with customers and stakeholders. To this end, we will:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strive to be truthful in all situations and at all times.</li> <li>• Offer products of value that do what we claim in our communications.</li> <li>• Stand behind our products if they fail to deliver their claimed benefits.</li> <li>• Honor our explicit and implicit commitments and promises.</li> </ul>
Responsibility – to accept the consequences of our marketing decisions and strategies. To this end, we will:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strive to serve the needs of customers.</li> <li>• Avoid using coercion with all stakeholders.</li> <li>• Acknowledge the social obligations to stakeholders that come with increased marketing and economic power.</li> <li>• Recognize our special commitments to vulnerable market segments such as children, seniors, the economically impoverished, market illiterates and others who may be substantially disadvantaged.</li> <li>• Consider environmental stewardship in our decision-making.</li> </ul>
Fairness – to balance justly the needs of the buyer with the interests of the seller. To this end, we will:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Represent products in a clear way in selling, advertising and other forms of communication; this includes the avoidance of false, misleading and deceptive promotion.</li> <li>• Reject manipulations and sales tactics that harm customer trust.</li> <li>• Refuse to engage in price fixing, predatory pricing, price gouging or “bait-and-switch” tactics.</li> <li>• Avoid knowing participation in conflicts of interest.</li> <li>• Seek to protect the private information of customers, employees and partners.</li> </ul>
Respect – to acknowledge the basic human dignity of all stakeholders. To this end, we will:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value individual differences and avoid stereotyping customers or depicting demographic groups (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation) in a negative or dehumanizing way.</li> <li>• Listen to the needs of customers and make all reasonable efforts to monitor and improve their satisfaction on an ongoing basis.</li> <li>• Make every effort to understand and respectfully treat buyers, suppliers, intermediaries and distributors from all cultures.</li> <li>• Acknowledge the contributions of others, such as consultants, employees and coworkers, to marketing endeavors.</li> <li>• Treat everyone, including our competitors, as we would wish to be treated.</li> </ul>
Transparency – to create a spirit of openness in marketing operations. To this end, we will:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strive to communicate clearly with all constituencies.</li> <li>• Accept constructive criticism from customers and other stakeholders.</li> <li>• Explain and take appropriate action regarding significant product or service risks, component substitutions or other foreseeable eventualities that could affect customers or their perception of the purchase decision.</li> <li>• Disclose list prices and terms of financing as well as available price deals and adjustments.</li> </ul>
Citizenship – to fulfill the economic, legal, philanthropic and societal responsibilities that serve stakeholders. To this end, we will:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strive to protect the ecological environment in the execution of marketing campaigns.</li> <li>• Give back to the community through volunteerism and charitable donations.</li> <li>• Contribute to the overall betterment of marketing and its reputation.</li> <li>• Urge supply chain members to ensure that trade is fair for all participants, including producers in developing countries.</li> </ul>

Source: [https://myama.force.com/s/article/Codes-of-Conduct?\\_ga=2.47647399.1282937972.1582544257-1537443319.1581436156](https://myama.force.com/s/article/Codes-of-Conduct?_ga=2.47647399.1282937972.1582544257-1537443319.1581436156) (accessed February 24, 2020)

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Relationship Marketing (RM) consists in knowing how to create, improve and keep relational connection (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Another definition of RM is:

- seeks to create new value for customers and then share it with these customers;
- recognises the key role that customers have both as purchasers and in defining the value they wish to achieve;
- businesses are seen to design and align processes, communication, technology and people in support of customer value;
- represents continuous cooperative effort between buyers and sellers;
- recognises the value of customers' purchasing lifetimes (i.e. lifetime value);
- seeks to build a chain of relationships within the organisation, to create the value customers want, and between the organisation and its main stakeholders, including suppliers, distribution channels, intermediaries and shareholders" (Gordon, 1998, p. 9).

RM appointed that relationships add quality to marketing transactions, as traditional markets are extremely powerful but they have huge limitations. Real human exchange is much richer than market exchange. Whenever people deal with people in 'relationships' or communities (rather than markets) they not only exchange money for goods, they share ideas, opinions, information and insights. They have a say and also tend to form affections, bonds, ties of loyalty, feelings of obligation and so on. They begin to share and exchange values as well as value. And the people whose values are most in tune with those around them tend to form the strongest, most supportive bonds with other people (Mitchell, 2001, p. 33).

RM that it encourages customer retention marketing first and acquisition marketing second (Gummesson, 1999, p. 9). The double benefits of customer retention can be prevailing, as: existing customers are less expensive to retain than to recruit and securing a customer's loyalty over time produces superior profits (Buttle, 1996, p. 5). Considering the ethical aspects, it can be increasing the organizational success. An important type of RM it seems to be a commercial friendship that it is building between products and services providers and clients/ consumers (Price & Arnould, 1999). We argue that this type of network will be stronger if the ethics exist as a special bound along all the process.

An ERM in our perspective could be defined as the art to create, improve and keep alive trustful, transparent, loyal and moral connections with all stakeholders. From this perspective, we present the Trust, Loyalty, Morality, and Transparency based Model:

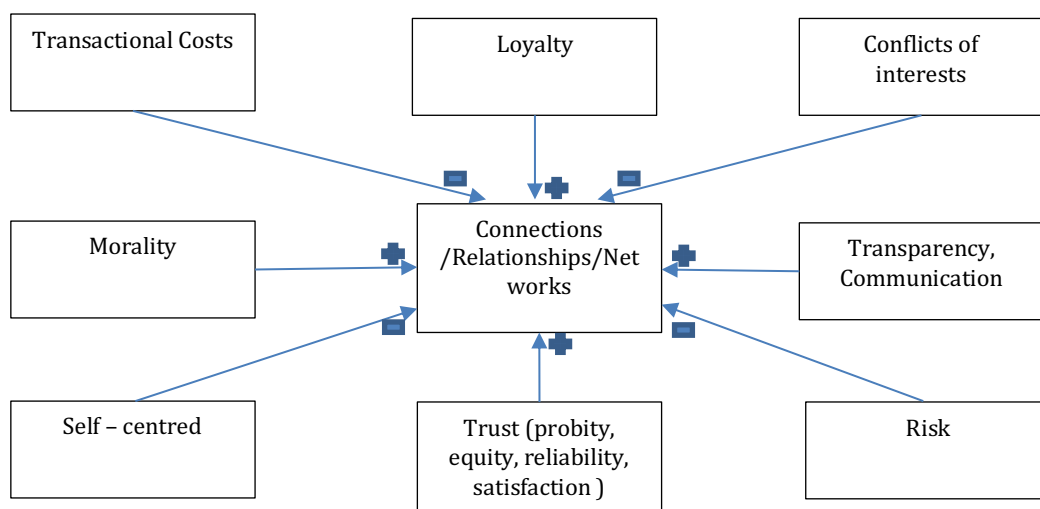


Figure 2 – Trust, Loyalty, Morality, and Transparency based Model

A code of marketing (Laczniak and Murphy, 1985), from the relationship perspective, must act to prevent ambiguity and to pay special attention to the area where does exist a visible an ethical violence, they must be implemented and updated with true examples of real marketing life of the organization.

Strengthening ethical conduct is important to increase, perform and reach achieving success in the global marketplace (Gundlach & Murphy, 1993). Also the organizations must create an ethical climate to get stakeholders to act responsibly, the “value” must prevail for any kind of relationship, the right ethical metrics must be applied for a sustainable relationship, the way to address the ethical issue to relevant relationships: customer, supplier, shareholder, etc must be consider, the concepts as: equity, fairness, in the organization have to exist in any relationship( Parmar et al., 2010).

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The top managers must identify, improve, appraise, communicate and update the ethical principles (Hunt et al., 1989) of any organization, according to its goals, mission, and vision. A special focus must pay attention to the existing relationship of the organization with the others and itself considering the various levels. It also depends on the domain the organization must consider developing commitment, loyalty, ethical customer retention, ethical CRM, trust and values indexes that can supervise alerting relationship signals. Identifying some factors which affect ethical assessment, as sociodemographic variables could also impact ethical relationship marketing (Agag et al., 2016). The organization to provide an ERM should provide policies not too exhaustive to avoid the uncertainty, the top management must supervise the success of these, and can also lead by example (Dubinsky & Levy, 1985).

A marketing manager’s option of the target market is linked to an ethical decision. The research appoints that when there “is perceived harm associated with a product, there is some likelihood for ethical concern and controversy to occur, especially if the target consumers are viewed as vulnerable” (Smith & Cooper-Martin, 1997). In a future investigation, we will try to demonstrate that existing an unethical relationship practice will affect the organization.

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