



Fostering Curiosity about Social Responsibility and Marketing Ethics

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ABSTRACT

This Special Issue of The Australasian Accounting Business and Finance Journal showcases student posters presented at the University of Wollongong's 2009 forum on marketing ethics.

The aim of publishing these works is to disseminate how approximately 500 commerce students were encouraged and enabled to display their work and to give examples of this work so that other educators might be empowered to hold similar forums.

Keywords: student; marketing ethics, advertising; poster display.

INTRODUCTION – THE LECTURER'S NARRATIVE

Last year, I was strolling through my local veggie shop after visiting the supermarket, and I noticed that the prices of avocados and apples were the same at both the retailers.

Later that week, a news item on current affairs confirmed my suspicion that the supermarket was engaged in squeezing smaller grocery operators out of the market by adopting aggressive pricing tactics amongst many other unethical practices including selling some products at weights substantially less than those marked on the package and subsidising fuel discount by charging more at the checkout. Yet, this supermarket was involved in a broad range of community and environmental initiatives.

These observations made me wonder if students ever assess the total impact of all marketing decisions.

Society is increasingly insisting that social responsibility and ethical concerns be considered in planning and implementing marketing activities. So this year, I started teaching students early in their degree the importance of social responsibility and marketing ethics.

I also wanted students to engage in this topic; so, I included a team-based assessment that required students to evaluate the extent to which companies (1) maximise their positive impact and minimise their negative impact on society, and (2) fulfil their economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic social responsibilities that their stakeholders expect of them.

The outcome of this engagement was a poster display event, where students presented their review of the impact of marketing practices of real businesses, and found examples from good, to bad and controversial. They saw how swiftly one controversial action undermined all the positive perception a company had built just like my experience of shopping for avocados at the supermarket.

As a lecturer in Marketing I am able to play a role in fostering intellectual curiosity on social responsibility.

By caring about the impact of marketing on society, an individual and a company can protect the interests of the general public and the environment.