

## 14.2 CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN ASIAN/PACIFIC MARKETS

### ANALYZING THE ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING OF THAI MARKETERS

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#### ABSTRACT

Marketing ethics theories generally recognize culture as an important influencing factor for ethical decision-making (e.g., Ferrell and Gresham, 1985; Hunt and Vitell, 1986). The important role of culture in ethical decisions was further accentuated in the theoretical work of Vitell, Nwachukwu and Barnes (1993) where Hofstede's (1983) cultural typology was applied to ethical issues. Results from various inter-country studies of business people also indicate that there are variations in ethical decisions across cultures. While there has been some interest among researchers on the cross-cultural aspects of business/marketing ethics decisions, there has been relatively little interest among researchers on the ethical decision processes of marketers from different countries and cultures. The few cross-cultural ethics studies conducted tend to focus mainly on *behavior* or *intention* and not on the cognitive components or the psychosocial factors underlying ethical decision-making processes. Moreover, these cross-cultural studies are mainly limited to western advanced countries.

Southeast Asia markets can be considered as important target markets for many multinational corporations. Among the Southeast Asian countries, Thailand is reported to enjoy one of the highest economic growth rates in the region. As a result, it is appropriate to study the ethical decision-making processes of Thai marketers from different perspectives. This study examines the relative influences of professional values and ethical perceptions on the ethical judgments of Thai marketers. These factors were chosen because of their importance as evidenced in the marketing ethics literature.

A self-administered questionnaire was used as the data collection technique. The constructs "perceived ethical problem" and "ethical judgment" were measured by means of two marketing ethics scenarios. The construct "professional values" was measured by asking the respondents to rate a set of nine statements selected from the code of ethics of the American Marketing Association. The results indicate that the construct "perceptions of an ethical problem" was a significant predictor of a Thai marketer's ethical judgments. In particular, the Thai marketers who perceive a marketing situation to have an ethical problem tended to form "more ethical" judgments. This implies that sensitizing Thai marketers to ethical issues/problems by means of ethics training and explicit ethics guidelines is crucial. Furthermore, the survey results reveal that "professional values" is a significant predictor of a Thai marketer's ethical judgments, but only for one of the two marketing ethics situations tested. This somewhat weak relationship between professional values and a Thai marketer's ethical judgments implies that Thai marketing professionals' ethical judgments depend more on their perceived ethicality of the problem rather than on any professional codes of ethical conduct.

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