

Research Note: Selected Factors Influencing Marketers' Deontological Norms

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This paper focuses on deontological norms of professional marketers. The data were obtained from a mail survey of American Marketing Association members. The results generally indicate that deontological norms are a function of Machiavellianism and locus of control. That is, as hypothesized, those high in Machiavellianism and with an "external" locus of control tend to be "lower" in their deontological norms than their counterparts. This study, however, found no relationship between organizational culture and deontological norms. Nevertheless, to a certain degree, an organization, by means of its codes of ethical enforcement, can affect its employees' deontological norms in a positive way. The results also indicate that business experience positively correlate with deontological norms and that there was no significant relationship between gender and deontological norms.

According to most moral philosophers, ethical theories can be classified into two major types, deontological and teleological (e.g., Beauchamp and Bowie 1979; Murphy and Laczniak 1981). As pointed out by Hunt and Vitell (1986, p. 6), "deontological theories focus on the specific actions or behaviors of an individual, whereas teleological theories focus on the consequences of the actions or behaviors." This study addresses the deontological component

of a marketer's ethical decision making. According to Hunt and Vitell's (1986) general theory of marketing ethics, deontological evaluation is the process where the marketer evaluates the inherent rightness or wrongness of an evoked set of alternatives that he/she views as possible courses of action for a given situation having ethical content. As they theorized, this evaluation process involves comparing possible behaviors with a set of predetermined *deontological norms* or predetermined guidelines that represent personal values or rules of behavior.

A comprehensive theory of marketing ethics has been proposed by Hunt and Vitell (1986) to represent the decision-making process in marketing situations that the individual perceives as having ethical content. They specify four categories of background factors for the decision making process: cultural environment, industry environment, organizational environment, and personal experiences. These groups of variables are depicted as predictors of an individual's decision-making. Of particular interest, the model postulates that these factors directly influence the *deontological norms* of marketers. It is important to emphasize that while the Hunt-Vitell model is the conceptual framework specifically adopted for this study, its similarity to the other theoretical models (e.g., Ferrell and Gresham 1985; Trevino 1986; and Ferrell, Gresham, and Fraedrich 1989) means that a test of the relationships in the Hunt-Vitell model is partially a test of the relationships in the other models as well.

BACKGROUND FACTORS AFFECTING DEONTOLOGICAL NORMS

This study examines the relative impact of an individual's *personal experiences* and *organizational environment* on an

individual's deontological norms. In particular, the background variables included in this study are: organizational culture, Machiavellianism, locus of control, and gender. These variables are selected because of their relative salience as evidenced in various empirical works in marketing ethics.

Organizational Culture

The importance of organizational culture as a background factor is generally recognized in marketing ethics. In their review, Murphy and Laczniak (1981) conclude that the "ethical behavior of marketers seems likely to improve only if the organizational climate ... changes" (p. 263). Sathe (1985, p. 2) defines organizational culture as "The culture of any corporate community" where culture is defined as "The set of important assumptions (often unstated) that members of a community share in common."

The existence of codes of ethics in an organization can tell us a great deal about the organizational culture of that organization. Intuitively, an organization's codes of ethics can also serve as a measure of that organization's "consensus" or norms regarding its ethical behavior. Previous studies point to the need to develop codes of ethics as a means to resolve ethical conflict (e.g., Dubinsky, Berkowitz, and Rudelius 1980; Rudelius and Bucholz 1979; Dubinsky 1985). Although not always explicitly stated, such a suggestion is based on the important assumption that the relationship between the availability of codes and ethical behavior does exist.

The assumed relationship between codes of ethics and ethical behavior is well supported by empirical works. For example, a study by Hegarty and Sims (1979) of graduate business students indicates that an ethics policy does influence ethical behavior. They also found informal corporate policy ("presidential philosophy") to be positively related to ethical behavior. Similarly, a survey of marketing practitioners by Weaver and Ferrell (1977) reveals that the existence and enforcement of a corporate ethics policy influences beliefs toward various ethical behaviors. The above review suggests this hypothesis:

H1: *An individual in an organization that has and that enforces codes of ethics will tend to have deontological norms that are more "ethical" than an individual in an organization that does not have codes of ethics.*

Machiavellianism

One personality variable investigated in this study is Machiavellianism (developed by Christie et al. 1968, also Christie and Geis 1970). Machiavellianism is a characteristic label reflecting "a person's general strategy for dealing with people, especially the degree to which he feels other people are manipulable in interpersonal situations" (Robinson and Shaver 1973, p. 590).

Machiavellianism is one of the personality variables that Hegarty and Sims (1978, 1979) found significant as a covariate in their marketing ethics studies. In particular, they found subjects who were high on Machiavellianism to be-

have significantly less ethically. Rosenberg (1987) also included Machiavellianism in his study of ethical decision behavior. However, he found the Machiavellian personality to be ineffective as a predictor of ethical/unethical behavior.

This inconsistency in findings may be more apparent than real. Since ethical decision making can never occur in isolation, there will always be other pertinent factors that may operate individually and/or interactively on the decision making process. In the setting of Rosenberg's study, such factors are in the form of pressure to achieve certain sales or profit goals. In general, such factors are part of the culture of the organization within which the marketer works. Therefore, the findings from the above studies are useful in setting a tone for the second hypothesis:

H2: *A high Machiavellian individual will tend to have deontological norms that are less "ethical" than a low Machiavellian individual.*

Locus of Control

The locus of control construct evolves from Julian Rotter's (1954) social learning theory. According to Rotter (1966), locus of control can be dichotomized into "external control" and "internal control." Following his conceptualization, a high score indicates an external locus of control—as he explains "a reinforcement is perceived by the subject as following some action of his own but not being entirely contingent upon his action" (p. 1). On the other hand, the internal locus of control individual "perceives that the event is contingent upon his own behavior or his own relatively permanent characteristics" (p. 1).

Locus of control is one of the personality variables postulated by Trevino (1986, p. 610) who posited that "Managers whose locus of control is internal will exhibit more consistency between moral judgment and moral action than managers whose locus of control is external." Like Machiavellianism, marketing ethics studies using the locus of control are also scant. Hegarty and Sims (1978, 1979) found locus of control to be useful as a covariate. Specifically, they found that individuals with an external orientation are significantly less ethical than those with an internal orientation. Based on the limited conceptual and empirical literature, this hypothesis concerning locus of control is formulated:

H3: *An individual with a more "external" locus of control will tend to have deontological norms that are less "ethical" than an individual with a more "internal" locus of control.*

Gender

The respondents' gender has been incorporated in various marketing ethics studies and was also included in this study as a background factor. Gender is not always a significant factor in marketing ethics studies. As an example, Hegarty and Sims (1978), in their study using graduate business students as subjects, found gender to be unrelated to ethical behavior. Fritzsche (1988), in his survey of marketing managers, found gender to be a significant factor. However, the

direction of the relationships was mixed. In particular, it was reported that male respondents are less likely to pay a bribe than female respondents. However, he found that males are more likely to ask for a bribe than females. In a study of marketing management professionals by Chonko and Hunt (1985), it was revealed that female marketers are more likely to perceive ethical problems in their activities than male marketers. The following hypothesis has been formulated according to the somewhat clearer finding from Chonko and Hunt's study:

H4: *A female marketer will tend to have deontological norms that are more "ethical" than a male marketer.*

THE SAMPLE

This study used an American Marketing Association (AMA) mailing list as the sampling frame. A self-administered questionnaire was chosen as the data collection method. A total of 1,998 were sampled from a list of 8,592 members. Of the 1,993 delivered, 529 persons responded for a response rate of 26.54%. The response rate is comparable to those of previous marketing ethics studies that have also used AMA practitioners as a sample (i.e., Hunt and Chonko 1984 and Hunt, Chonko and Wilcox 1984). After the cut-off period of approximately six weeks, a follow-up telephone call to a random sample of 50 "non-respondents" was conducted to test for bias due to non-response. A total of 39 non-respondents were successfully contacted by telephone. A *t*-test between the "respondent" and the "non-respondent" groups with respect to selected variables (i.e., education, business experience) shows that there are no statistical differences between the two groups.

Of the 483 usable questionnaires, slightly more than half (55.1%) are from men, and respondents are generally, highly educated. Consistent with their educational level, the annual compensation is also relatively high with more than half of the respondents reporting their income at \$40,000 or higher per year. The respondents are relatively, evenly scattered throughout the United States and throughout various industries. With respect to their business experience, 37.1% reported to have at least 15 years experience and 37.0% have between two and three years in their current position.

CONCEPTUALIZATION & OPERATIONALIZATION OF DEONTOLOGICAL NORMS

As discussed earlier, Hunt and Vitell (1986, p. 9) conceptualize deontological norms (DN) as predetermined guidelines representing *personal values* or *rules of behavior*. Following their explanation, deontological norms can range from very general (e.g., beliefs about honesty, stealing, and cheating) to very specific (e.g., beliefs about deceptive advertising, product safety, and sales "kickbacks"). For this study, the construct was operationalized by asking the respondents to rate a set of seven "deontological" statements developed from the American Marketing Association's (1986) codes of ethics (see Appendix for examples of DN

items and the instructions used). Seven-point scales were used for this purpose with a 7 indicating very strong agreement with the norm. It should be pointed out that the DN items included have been selected evenly from the four exhaustive topics of the AMA's codes. Therefore, the norms used in this study are representative, to a large degree, of the AMA's norms as expressed in its codes of ethics.

In order to ensure the highest quality measures possible, factor analysis was conducted on the seven DN statements. Principal components factor analysis was judged appropriate because this study is interested in the minimum number of factors (preferred single best factor) to account for the maximum amount of variance represented in the original set of items. Details of the factor analysis of the DN scale have been summarized in Table 1.

Based on the principal component analysis, only one factor was extracted and no DN items were eliminated. The DN score was computed by totalling the scores of all statements together. Therefore, a high DN value indicates that the individual is more "ethical" in a deontological sense or may be considered as higher in his/her level of belief with regard to relevant guidelines, values, or rules of behavior. Also included in Table 1 are descriptive statistics of all items used to form the deontological norms scale. As can be observed, the respondents strongly agree with all the norms as possible guiding principles in their work.

Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the DN scale was computed and is equal to .76. Although higher levels of reliability for the measure would be desirable, the result is adequate for this early stage of theoretical research (Peter 1979). Coefficient alpha for the other two composite measure constructs of the study, locus of control (LOC) and Machiavellianism (MACH), are .79 and .74 respectively. These alpha values are generally comparable to those from past studies.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Organizational Culture (OCULT). Consistent with the literature reviewed earlier, *existence* and *enforcement* of ethical codes in organizations were used to operationalize the organizational culture construct (OCULT). In particular,

TABLE 1
Principal Components Analysis and Descriptive Statistics of Deontological Norms Scale

<i>Items</i>	<i>Factor 1*</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
DN1	.54939	6.276	1.062
DN2	.82202	6.566	0.641
DN3	.80565	6.459	0.702
DN4	.59088	6.204	1.241
DN5	.61700	6.488	1.070
DN6	.61314	6.185	1.130
DN7	.67052	6.492	0.711

*Eigenvalue = 3.182, 45.5% of variance explained.

the existence of codes of ethics were measured by directly questioning each respondent whether his/her organization has a formal, written code of ethics. The enforcement of codes was measured by questioning each respondent whether his/her company strictly enforce codes of ethics (if they exist). A seven-point scale ranging from "Not strictly enforce" (value of 1) to "Very strictly enforce" (value of 7) was used. For the regression analysis, OCULT was dummy-coded to indicate either an "ethical culture" (coded as 1) or an "unethical culture" (coded as 0). An organization was considered "ethical" if it had codes of ethics and, in addition, if it enforced them at a level greater than the mean of all organizations (mean = 5.07, the value of 5 was used). On the other hand, an organization was considered "unethical" if it did not have codes of ethics or did not rigidly enforce them (i.e., if the perceived degree of enforcement was less than or equal to the mean).

Machiavellianism (MACH). Like past studies, Machiavellianism was measured via Christie et al.'s (1968) "Mach IV" scale. The Mach IV scale consists of ten items worded in the "Machiavellian" direction and the remaining ten items worded in the opposite direction. Each respondent was asked to indicate his/her extent of agreement or disagreement with each of the twenty items (via seven-point Likert type scale). Following Christie et al. (1968), a high "Mach" score indicates that the individual is more "Machiavellian" and vice versa.

Locus of control (LOC). Locus of control (LOC) was measured via the Rotter's (1966) internal-external (I-E) locus of control scale. The scale consists of 23 forced-choice question pairs with an "internal" statement paired with an "external" one. The LOC score for each respondent is the total number of his/her external choices. The possible LOC scores can range from 0 (most "internal") to 23 (most "external").

Gender (SEX). The variable SEX was dummy coded to have the value of 1 for male and 0 for female.

TEST OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Preliminary Analysis

As a preliminary step, correlation analysis of all variables investigated has been conducted. The results have been summarized in Table 2. The correlation analysis reveals the significant correlation between the dependent variable deontological norms (DN) and all three independent variables, locus of control (LOC), Machiavellianism (MACH) and business experience (YRSEXP). The significant, positive correlation between MACH and LOC (indicating that those that are high in Machiavellianism are more likely to have external locus of control and vice versa) is consistent with past studies (e.g., Minton 1967, Miller and Minton 1969). YRSEXP was included as a covariate in this study even though no hypotheses concerning it were formulated. Recall that the other two independent variables of this study, gender (SEX) and organizational culture (OCULT), are cate-

TABLE 2
Correlation Matrix*

	DN	LOC	MACH	YRSEXP
DN	1.0000			
LOC	-.2342**	1.0000		
MACH	-.3294**	.3844**	1.0000	
YRSEXP	.1404**	-.1858**	-.1827**	1.0000

*All coefficients are based on the valid cases of 483
**P = .001

gorical (dummy-coded). Accordingly, they were not included in the correlation analysis.

Hypotheses Testing

All research hypotheses were simultaneously tested with the use of one multiple regression model. As summarized in Table 3, the background variables appearing in the equation are the number of years of business experience (YRSEXP), Machiavellianism (MACH), locus of control (LOC) and the two dummy-coded variables, gender (SEX) and organizational culture (OCULT). The standardized coefficients for MACH and LOC are significant at .01 level. The coefficient for YRSEXP is significant at .10 level. However, the coefficients for SEX and OCULT are not significant.

Based on the regression analysis, hypothesis **H1** concerning organizational culture, as operationalized, is not supported. There is no significant relationship between the culture of an organization and its employees' deontological norms. The premise that the culture of an organization can influence deontological norms of marketers is not supported. Apparently, the influences of organizational culture on a marketer's deontological norms is relatively weaker than the two personality dimensions, Machiavellianism and locus of control. A case can be made that organizational culture or "personality" of an individual's organization is too far removed from the deontological norms of the individual compared to his/her personality to have as much impact.

An examination of Table 3 also reveals that the relationship between MACH and DN is a reverse one. Accordingly, the hypothesis **H2** is supported. We can, consequently, conclude that the high Machiavellian individual will tend to be less "ethical" in terms of deontological norms than the low Machiavellian individual. In other words, "Machiavellian" marketers tend to agree less with those guidelines or rules of

TABLE 3
Standardized Coefficients for LOC, MACH, OCULT, SEX and YRSEXP with DN as Dependent Variable

$R^2 = .1382$ $F = 15.292$ Significant F less than .01			
VARIABLES	BETA	T	Sig. T
SEX	-.0309	-0.671	.5027
OCULT	.0243	0.567	.5709
MACH	-.2913	-6.176	.0000
YRSEXP	.0862	1.858	.0637
LOC	-.1025	-2.169	.0306

behavior as possible guiding principles in their behavior. In their study on marketing and Machiavellianism, Hunt and Chonko (1984) recommended that "training programs for new employees should include sections specifically designed to foster the realization that one does not have to be Machiavellian to succeed in marketing" (p. 40). The fact that the present study found inverse relationships between Machiavellianism and deontological norms supports their recommendations. Although business organizations are only one of many institutions that are responsible for an individual's Machiavellianism, we agree that training programs in addition to rigid enforcement of codes of ethics are some positive steps that should be taken.

The standardized coefficient for LOC is significant and negative as postulated. Accordingly, the hypothesis **H3** is supported. The empirical evidence appears to favor our thesis that an individual with a more "external" locus of control (high LOC score) will tend to be less "ethical" in his/her deontological norms. In other words, the survey results show that the individuals who believe that the outcomes are not contingent upon their own behaviors tend to be less "ethical" deontologically. As may be recalled, this finding is agreeable with that of Hegarty and Sims (1978, 1979) who found that *students* with external orientations are significantly less ethical than their counterparts.

The insignificant coefficient for SEX suggests that there is no relationship between the gender of a marketer and his/her deontological norms. Accordingly, hypothesis **H4** is not supported. We cannot conclude that the female marketers will tend to be more "ethical" in terms of their deontological norms than their male counterparts. Consistent with the findings of Hegarty and Sims (1978) who also found gender to be unrelated to ethical behavior, we found no empirical evidence to support the proposition that gender is a determinant of the deontological norms of marketers. However, the finding is inconsistent with those of Chonko and Hunt (1985) and Fritzsche (1988). Since none of these past studies actually investigated the relationship between gender and the cognitive component, deontological norms, any statement regarding the role of gender is at best inconclusive. In sum, more investigation should be encouraged.

Interestingly, the regression results reveal that YRSEXP is significant. The positive coefficient for YRSEXP indicates that marketers with more business experience will tend to be more "ethical" deontologically than those with less business experience.

CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

One major contribution of this study is its attempt to remedy a relative lack of insight in marketing ethics. Practically all studies in marketing ethics focus on the linkage between various background variables and ethics behavior itself. This study, on the contrary, investigates the relationship between selected background factors and one major cognitive component of the system of the marketing ethics decision making process—the marketer's deontological norms. As a result of this inquiry, a better understanding of

many underlying factors in marketing ethics can be realized. Moreover, since the deontological norms measure was operationalized by using statements developed from AMA's codes of ethics, this study increases our knowledge as to what extent marketing practitioners agree with AMA's codes as possible guiding principles in their work.

A major caveat of this study concerns the operationalization of the dependent variable, deontological norms. There was a high degree of "end loading" of responses to all seven DN statements as respondents tended to strongly agree with each of these. Because of this, the variance of responses to these items was greatly reduced making it difficult to obtain significant R^2 values. While LOC and MACH were statistically significant as predictors of one's deontological norms, this could have been due to the relatively large sample size used in the study. It is, therefore, recommended that future studies operationalize the DN construct using a different approach. Only after this has been accomplished and the results compared to those of the present study will it be known if the present results are substantive.

For future research, it would be interesting to look into other important background factors specified in the various theories of marketing ethics. Hunt and Vitell (1986) also include the cultural environment of society and industry environment as background factors of marketing ethics. Undeniably, the societal culture and industrial environment in which a marketer works are important determinants of his/her ethical behavior—especially with respect to his/her deontological norms. Therefore, future studies should also focus on the roles of societal culture and industrial environments on deontological norms. Unquestionably, knowledge about the deontological norms of marketers in different social environments, political environments, and competitive environments would have important implications for both public policy and private firms. Also, other organizational and personality variables, as well as the interaction between these, should be investigated.

APPENDIX DEONTOLOGICAL NORMS SCALE

Instruction Used in the Survey

Below and on the following page are some items selected from Codes of Ethics of various organizations. Please rate each one of them according to their *importance* to you, as possible guiding principles in your work. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by circling the number in front of each statement.

*DN Items**

- DN1: The marketer's professional conduct must be guided by the adherence to all applicable laws and regulations.
- DN2: Being honest in serving consumers, clients, employees, suppliers, distributors and the public.
- DN3: Communication in a manner that is truthful and forthright.
- DN4: All parties intend to discharge their obligations, financial and otherwise, in good faith.
- DN5: Rejection of high pressure selling tactics such as the use of associates to mislead or the use of bait and switch to manipulate.
- DN6: Not manipulating the availability of a product for purpose of exploitation.
- DN7: Meet their obligations and responsibilities in contracts and mutual agreements in a timely manner.

*AMA's Selected Codes of Ethics

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