

## THE VIEWS OF THE STUDENTS WHO ATTEND AND DON'T ATTEND THE ADVERTISING ETHICS COURSES: THE CASE OF FACULTY OF COMMUNICATION, UNIVERSITY OF ERCİYES

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**Abstract:** In today's world, with the advance of technology advertising is becoming an inevitable fact that diffuses every point of social life. While the effort of advertising, which has a big role in the presentation and the consumption of a product or a service, in taking part in every second of life brings forth an assortment of advertisements; due to intense competition and the efforts of the companies to become popular, advertisements emerge in unexpected times and places free from the boundaries of time and space. This situation makes the notion 'ethics' a more and more important concept in the field of advertising as it is in all the fields of communication. An advertisement without moral values may affect a very big part of the community. Therefore, when the effects of advertising on the society are considered in the context of morals and when the messages are designed in this direction, in other words when acted in consciousness of social responsibility, advertising will then be useful. In this study, in order to see whether the classes of advertising. Ethics bring about some difference in the points of views of the students or not, some questions are related with the advertising ethics are directed to the young communicators who are still in the process of education and the answers are interpreted. As a result, it is possible to say that ethics is important and worth-considering when it is adopted by the people who see advertising a profession and who are taking an education in this branch.

**Keywords:** Communication, Advertising, Advertising Ethics, Social Responsibility, University of Erciyes, The Students of Faculty of Communication

### Introduction

Advertising, which is primarily based on presentation of a product or service to a wide audience and inducing them to consume, is one of the most effective and most widely used means of communication, and it is greatly influenced by dissemination of mass media and technological development (Ay and Aytekin, 2005: 46). Technological developments lead to a new era in commercial life of companies as well as in the marketing activities of products or services, involving a wide range of activities from pre-production of such products or services to making them available to consumers, their promotion and after-sales services. In this way, advertisements are appealing to a wide audience and build a strong effect (Elden, 2009: 145). Advertisements are the product of competing economic structures, which is intended to render products or services discernable among those similar to them. It is possible to encounter advertisements while walking, resting, working or having fun (Yavuz, 2009: 7) so individuals are affected by them or affect them. Thus advertising should be addressed ethically and evaluated in a conscious way. From this perspective, it appears that advertisements should be created and presented with the sense of social responsibility.

In this study, first, information is given about the concept of ethics, then views about advertising ethics as well as social responsibility, which is an important determinant in advertising ethics, are presented, and the size and importance of professional ethics in advertising are discussed. The aim of the implementation phase was to determine the perspectives about ethics and advertising ethics of students from Erciyes University, Faculty of Communication, Public Relations and Publicity Department using a qualitative research

study and demonstrate the differences between the group which took the ethics course and the group which didn't take the ethics course.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1.1 The Concept of Advertising Ethics**

According to Cunningham, advertising ethics is defining what is right and good in the execution of advertising activities. This is not only related to what should be done legally but what should be done (cited by Drumwright & Murphy, 2009: 83). Therefore, perception of ethics in advertising is primarily a problem of conscience. Apart from being a legal rule that must be complied with, it is an internal concern incorporating social responsibility. Therefore, the idea of advertising which is devoid of ethical information, hasn't been equipped in this sense cannot be ethical.

Advertising ethics can be defined as assessments and questioning made on the basis of the actors of the advertising industry and the general public so that advertising products are generated in accordance with general ethics rules of the society, personality rights, prevention of unfair competition and the principles of protection of consumer rights (Elden and Ulukök, 2006: 2-3).

In discussions about ethics, the main topic is related to understanding the elements that make actions morally valuable or worthless and identifying what is good or bad, what is right or wrong (Aktuğlu, 2006: 7).

### **1.2. Advertising Ethics from Various Perspectives**

#### **1.2.1 In terms of Ethics**

Ethics, the subject of research (Erdoğan, 2006: 5), is defined as a system of values and purposes, recognized, specified and defined in a cultural environment as well as a group of rules and way of life which lay out how to keep these values alive and how to achieve the said objectives (Cevizci, 2008: 3), while ethics, as the name to be given to the area of research (Erdoğan, 2006: 5), is represented as reflecting on the meaning of values, investigating and discussing what the ethical concepts used really are and exceeding the normal level of being ethical. In other words, ethics is bound to be the theory of ethical action, where action is practical (Cevizci, 2008: 5). Ethical responsibility has two dimensions: individual and social. Individual dimension is related to conscience of a person, whereas social dimension is related to social life processes (Eroglu and Atabek, 2006: 2).

Ethical values cannot be imposed by an authority but rather arise from experiences formed, over time, by human relations and the human mind, and therefore a system of professional ethics or professional rules can only be applicable if it is a common practice of the performers of that profession, otherwise it cannot be imposed from the outside (Girgin, 2003: 146). Durkheim, one of the leading thinkers on ethics, notes that exclusion of economic life from ethics poses a threat to public life (1962: 19) and suggests that the science of ethics emerge in professional ethics at the highest level (1962: 9), and the extent of how strongly a group has been established determines the extent of ethics rules of that group and the extent of the authority of that group over the conscience of people (1962: 13). From this perspective, conformance of advertisements with existing codes of ethics is important and they will also influence emerging ethical approach and best performers of this approach will be the practitioners of the advertising profession.

### 1.2.2 In terms of Social Responsibility

Advertising, which should be a discipline that conforms to existing ethics norms, then forms its own ethical codes and can do that through practitioners within itself, reflects the existing understanding of ethics and also contributes to the formation of new understandings of ethics (Tosun, 2007: 256). The most important way to achieve this is to act with the awareness of social responsibility towards the society. Ethics is closely related to social responsibility and from time to time overlaps with it (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009: 83). Although the fact that all efforts made in the area of social responsibility would be a benefit for society is inevitable, such efforts should also be effective and efficient. What is meant by this necessity should be the assessment of the kind of change such efforts bring about in society (Ozturk, 2009: 228).

### 1.2.3 In terms of standards

Conformance of advertising with integrity and dominant ethics rules is presented as a measure of ethical standards. The real problem here is not that advertising is primarily not done according to high ethical standards, that moral / ethical standards fall, that advertising doesn't provide the right thing or that it is not honest. The real problem here is that the presence of advertising only serves groups of interest by saying "what makes advertising advertising is its its sovereign nature (Erdoğan, 2008: 382). Hartman and Desjardins suggest that an advertisement is effective in and manipulates individuals' making their own decisions (2008: 425). According to Laczniak and Murphy, the properties of advertising which are criticized are shown during the process between providing information and deception (cited by Torlak, 2007: 259);

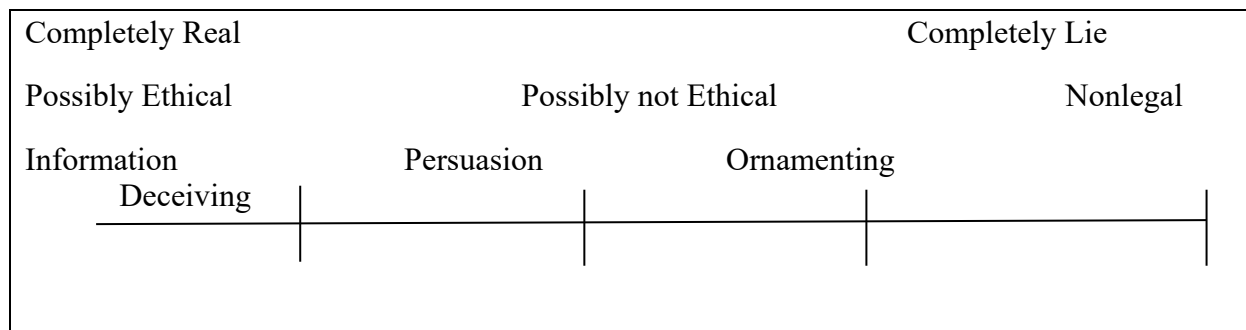


Figure1 Persuasion Process of an Advertisement and Ethical Assessment

Source: Laczniak and Murphy, 1993:154

As seen, as ornamentation and deception began to take place in advertising messages, legal problems arise and ethics is abandoned and lie is incorporated into the work done. Individuals can have ethical values but is these values are not reflected in the profession due to some concerns, both individual and professional ethical values disappear. Besides ethical concerns can only be carried out with heart-searching.

Advertisements are on one hand criticized in terms of such aspects and on the other hand, it has been suggested that advertising is an important part of economy and that its basic function is to inform people of consumer goods, encourages the sale of products, services and ideas, that when it is applied appropriately, it also contributes to upgrading consumers' quality of life and enabling them to make responsible choices in their purchase behavior. The point one should be cautious about here is the nature and adequacy of the advertising information (Uzun, 2009: 253).

### **1.2.4 In terms of control**

Control in advertising is similar to means of control in other areas of communication. The first is legal and the other is self-regulatory. Advertising law is all provisions regulating legal relations between those giving advertisements, those creating them, advertising agencies, media broadcasting ads and consumers (Türkekul, 2009: 114). According to Boddewyn, self-regulation is 1) identify and develop measures and standards of advertising; 2) ensure that these are known and recognized by the whole industry; 3) guide and provide advice to those giving advertisements and advertising agencies; 4) monitoring whether the rules are observed or not; 5) resolve complaints made by consumers, competitors or other related persons; 6) punish bad behavior, violations of the rules (cited by Inal and Baysal, 2008: 100). Ethical principles created in this framework perform important functions and they are regulated at both international and national level in the framework of countries' own cultural and social structures (Demir, 2007: 422).

## **2. STUDY**

### **2.1 Subject of the study**

The subject of this study was to assess the students' perspectives on advertising ethics of students who took and of those who didn't take advertising ethics course in the case study in Erciyes University Faculty of Communication.

In this sense, Gökdağ suggests that ethical values can be taught to students because the system of values constantly changes with emotional, behavioral or cognitive interactions and argues that what is important in ethics teaching is to ensure that students become aware of how to behave or of ethical and social dimensions of decisions they'll take in special circumstances which may have ethical implications (2009: 147). It is ensured that students who aim to work in advertising field become aware of advertising ethics during their study at the university, adopt ethical values during those years and learn the relationship of advertising to ethics in a variety of ways.

### **2.2 The aim of the study**

The aim of this study was to determine how students from faculty of communication who took advertising course grasp ethical dimension of the profession and to identify if there is any significant difference between students who took this course and those who didn't. For this purpose, answers were sought to the following questions:

- 1- They're taking an ethics course so what does ethics mean to them?
- 2- What do they want to receive from the course on ethics?
- 3- In the light of the replies on advertising ethics, is there a significant difference between the group which took the course and that which didn't?

## 2.3 Method

In this study, which was conducted in line with the specified aim, scan model was utilized. The study was conducted by consulting the views and opinions of the students from Erciyes University, Faculty of Communication, Public Relations and Publicity Department, who comprised the study population. There were 38 students who were studying at the department and took advertising-ethics course at the time of the study. Therefore, the questionnaire was applied to all of these 38 students. In order to make a comparison, 38 students were selected among second year students from the same department who hadn't taken the ethics course yet by random sampling, and 76 students, the sample of the study, was thus reached.

The survey was first subjected to a pre-test and it was determined whether there was any problem with the perception of expressions. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to calculate the statistical reliability of the survey and calculated alpha coefficient was 0.703. Therefore, it was determined that the data collection tool was reliable.

In order to measure perspectives on advertising ethics of the recruited university students, a questionnaire consisting of 16 questions was applied. The questionnaire was adapted from the work entitled "Communication ethics and Perspectives on Professional Ethics Rules of Students from Selcuk University, Faculty of Communication" in such a way as to make students understand it. The first four questions in the survey were used to measure the demographic characteristics, then one question was used to learn the impression of the concepts of ethics in students, followed by another question used to reveal the expectations of the students from advertising ethics course. Then, a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = I strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was used to reveal if there is any difference between the students who took this course and those who didn't according to the items on advertising ethics.

Field research was conducted through face to face interviews with participants from November 10 to 15, 2014. The data obtained were processed electronically using a statistics program and subjected to a number of analyses.

-A frequency analysis was performed to determine the demographic characteristics of the respondents, their thoughts about ethics and their expectations of the advertising ethics course.

- Cross-tabulation and chi-square analysis were utilized to determine the correlation between the responses to questions on to take and not to take ethics course, what they understand from ethics and their expectations from advertising ethics course.

- Then, due to lack of normal distribution, Mann-Whitney U test, one of nonparametric tests, was conducted in order to reveal the relationship between the responses to the items related to advertising ethics and the fact of taking and not taking the course.

## 2.4 Findings and Interpretation

This section includes the findings obtained from statistical analyses of the data collected for the purpose of resolving research questions and their interpretation.

### 2.4.1 Personal Characteristics of the Students

- Some of the results on frequency analyses of the respondents are presented in Table 1. Accordingly, 64.5% of respondents were female and 35.5% were male. Based on these

results, it is not possible to make comparisons in terms of gender. However, this result is a condition associated with sample selection. Therefore, it'd be more appropriate to look at the distribution of gender among those who selected the ethics course. When the distribution of gender among those who selected the course was considered, it was observed that 76.3% were female and 23.7% were male. Therefore, it was seen that female students showed more interest in advertising and ethics courses.

- When distribution of the respondents by the year of study is considered, 50% of the students were second year and 50% of the students were third year students. When distribution of students who took ethics course is considered, 28.9% of the students were on normal education and 71.1% were on evening education

Personal Traits		Number of Persons	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	49	64.5
	Male	27	35.5
Gender (Those who took Advertising and Ethics Course)	Female	29	76.3
	Male	9	23.7
Year of study	Ist year	0	
	IIInd Year	38	50
	IIIrd Year	38	50
	IVth Year	0	
Age Range	17-19	5	6,6
	19-21	41	53.9
	21-23	24	31.6
	23-24	6	7.9
Type of Education	Normal Education	46	60.5
	Evening Education	30	39.5
Type of Education(Those who took Advertising and Ethics Course)	Normal Education	11	28.9
	Evening Education	27	71.1

Table 1. Distribution of Students by Their Personal Traits

#### 2.4.2 Analysis of Replies To The Question "What Does Ethics Mean To You?"

- The respondents' answers to the question "What Does Ethics Mean To You?" were as follows: 51.3% said "all"; 19.7% said social ethics; , 11.8% said "social rules, manners and customs", 10.5% said "Rules about work which should be observed" and 6.6% said "integrity" (table 2). According to these results, it is considered that the concept of ethics accommodates all choices mostly stated by the students.

- Furthermore, chi-square analysis was used to measure if there is any significant difference between the group which took advertising and ethics course and that which didn't, however, there was no significant difference ( $p = .555$ ).

Replies to the question “How do you define ethics?”	Advertising and Ethics Course		Total
	Students who took the course	Students who didn’t take the course	
Social ethics	7 18.4%	8 21.1%	15 19.7%
Integrity	3 7.9%	2 5.3%	5 6.6%
Social Rules, manners and customs	4 10.5%	5 13.2%	9 11.8%
Rules about work which should be observed	2 5.3%	6 15.8%	8 10.5%
All	22 57.9%	17 44.7%	39 51.3%
Total	38 100.0%	38 100.0%	76 100.0%

Chi-Square Analysis			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.019 <sup>a</sup>	4	,555
Likelihood Ratio	3.115	4	,539
Linear-by-Linear Association	,248	1	,618
N of Valid Cases	76		

Table 2. Distribution of replies to the question “What does ethics mean to you?” by taking the ethics course and not taking the ethics course

### 2.4.3 Analysis of replies to the question "What are your expectations from advertising and ethics course?"

The respondents' answers to the question "What are your expectations from advertising and ethics course?" were as follows: 42.1% said "the course should describe how to prepare advertising messages in an ethical way", 28.9% said "the course should include international moral rules that must be observed in advertising", 10.5% said "virtue, integrity and reliability should be taught", 9.2% said "the course should include etiquette, ethical behaviors appropriate for the society" and 9.2% said "perspective on advertising and rules of law should be taught" (Table 3). As evident from the frequency analysis, what students first expect from the course was teaching ethical preparation of advertising messages. There are many different pillars of the advertising ethics course which should be taught, however, the first of these is that the advertising message should be based on ethical elements. Therefore, the students can be said to have awareness in this sense. There was no significant

difference in terms of the expectations from advertising and ethics course between the group who took advertising and ethics course and the group which didn't ( $p = .516$ ).

	Replies to the question "What are your expectations from advertising and ethics course?"	Advertising and Ethics Course		Total
		Students who took the course	Students who didn't take the course	
Subjects of Virtue, Integrity and Reliability should be taught		5	3	8
		6.6%	3.9%	10.5%
The course should include etiquette, ethical behaviors appropriate for the society		2	5	7
		2.6%	6.6%	9.2%
The course should include international moral rules that must be observed in advertising		10	12	22
		13.2%	15.8%	28.9%
The course should describe how to prepare advertising messages in an ethical way		16	16	32
		21.1%	21.1%	42.1%
Perspective on advertising and rules of law should be taught		5	2	7
		6.6%	2.6%	9.2%
Total		38	38	76
		50.0%	50.0%	100.0%

Ki- Kare analizi

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.253 <sup>a</sup>	4	.516
Likelihood Ratio	3.344	4	.502
Linear-by-Linear Association	.268	1	.605
N of Valid Cases	76		

Table 3. Assessment of the fact of taking or not taking the course by the question "What are your expectations from advertising and ethics course?"

#### 2.4.4 Analysis of The Students' Replies To Items About Advertising Ethics

-When the students' replies to items about advertising ethics is considered, a comparison of the replies of students who took advertising and ethics course and of those who didn't revealed that there was a significant difference in the replies to the question "there should be ethical elements in advertising messages" ( $p = 0.47$ ) and the replies to the question "ethical



problems in advertising messages may affect the community" ( $p = 0.11$ ). The number of students who didn't take advertising and ethics course and who selected the item "the course should describe how to prepare advertising messages in an ethical way" and the number of students who took that course and who selected the same item were equal, however, such equality was not the case for the item "advertising messages should include ethical elements". Therefore, it was observed that there was a confusion of ideas on the fact that "advertising messages should be ethical" due to the fact that the group which didn't take the course consisted of students from an earlier year of study. However, this is eliminated in the next year of study and the group which took the course seems much clearer in terms of expectations from advertising and ethics course and the statements about advertising ethics.

-In the case of the other item "ethical problems in advertising messages may affect the community", there was a significant difference between the group which took the course and the group which didn't. This suggests that the students who took the course were more aware and had increased awareness on ethics.

<b>Variables related to the students' perceptions of advertising and ethics</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>P</b>
Advertising and ethics education is important in communication education	76	703.000	,829
Ethics is just as important as professional knowledge and skills in determination of a successful publicist	76	695.000	,765
Advertisement messages should include ethical elements	76	542.000	<b>,047</b>
Advertising ethics is part of communication ethics	76	666.500	,544
Ethical problems in advertisement messages may influence the society	76	510.500	<b>,017</b>
What is important is the power of advertisement to make people buy	76	693.500	,761
Employees in advertising industry should act in accordance with ethical principles	76	688.000	,708
All students from Department of Public Relations should take advertising and ethics course	76	654.500	,452
Advertisement message should be in line with virtue, integrity, reliability and social responsibility principles.	76	712.000	,911
Advertising ethics should accord with social ethics	76	573.000	,096

Table 4. Analysis of the replies to items related to advertising ethics of the students who took and of those who didn't take advertising and ethics course

## RESULTS

An ethical value is a gain that starts with in-family education and is shaped throughout years. This process affects implementation of professional ethics rules, however, learning these rules in terms of ethical values while receiving education about a future profession would influence professional life and provide maximum social benefit. Advertising education in schools should involve ethical codes. The study conducted on the students from Erciyes University, Faculty of Communication, Public Relations and Publicity Department revealed that ethics education should be provided and the students' expectations were to that effect.

The provision of ethics in the advertising profession can no doubt be ascribed to education during study at the university and individual characteristics of practitioners. This will be possible by the industry's internal dynamics, i.e. by policies of those giving advertisements or of agencies and by observation of ethical rules by organization which will publish the advertisement.

This study revealed the perspectives on advertising ethics and their necessity of the students from Erciyes University, however, the study should be extended to other faculties of communication. Then, to what extent our graduates working in this sector implement ethical teachings should be determined in order to better reveal the importance of ethics education and the breaking points, if any.

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