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Professional Ethics - Comprehensive Exam 11/12

First Semester - 2020-2021; Professional Ethics - HSS F343; Comprehensive Examination (Open Book); Max Marks: 30.0; Date: 11.12.2020; Duration: 2 Hours (10 am - 12 noon); Attempt All Three Questions.; All Questions Carry Equal Marks.

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Top of Form

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1. Describe and critically evaluate the issues of deceptive advertising, irrational persuasion and impact of advertising in advertising ethics. Conclude the answer with your own assessment.

Advertising is a critical part of business in the modern day world, which can be defined as the paid non-personal communication about the organization as well as the products that they sell. This information is communicated through a mass medium to a target audience as a sort of promotion for the product. To clinch a sale, a salesperson from a company should be skilled at arousing customers' interests. Sometimes, it has been observed that there may be some exaggerated praise for the product, but when it crosses a certain line and becomes false, deceptive or manipulative, then it becomes necessary to ethically evaluate the impact of such practices. Some general criticisms of advertising which may cause ethical concerns include falsehoods, irritating repetition offensive or immoral nature, promoting a culture of consumerism etc. Delving deeper into the ethical concerns of advertising we can talk about deceptive advertising, where advertisers aim to take advantage of a false belief or even create one, in order to promote the product more than its actual value, thereby interfering with the rational choices that consumers make. For example, we can consider the famous Volkswagen case, wherein the company promoted the claim that their cars were environmentally friendly. It was found that they had been cheating emission tests, so their advertising was blatant deception, inhibiting the rational choice of customers who wished to drive environmentally safe cars. Irrational persuasion is another key concern, where advertisers may rely on a variety of morally questionable tactics to sell their goods. Subliminal communication is a common trick, wherein the advertisement plays in the background, such as logos displayed during sports matches, which bypasses the attention of viewers (who would be focusing on the main event), hence leaving them unable to critically evaluate what is being advertised to them. Similarly, product placement where consumers cannot effectively judge the product, can also be an objectionable practice. Buzz marketing, where companies rely on promotion of their product through word-of-mouth and everyday conversation (through online mediums as well) to spread word of the goods. The advertisements themselves may contain 'relatable' persons in an effort to attract the target audience. Organizations may also se use the dependence effect, where the consumers are imbued with the feeling of wanting the product, regardless of whether or not they really need the product. The third area of concern is the impact of advertising. Regarding the mass population, advertising has the effect of promoting a culture of consumerism, as seen in many places, where the roads are filled with endless posters and billboards promoting hundreds of products. In fact, such a state could imply to people that to live is to consume. Regarding society, advertisements may have immoral, offensive or discriminatory nature, which can lead to stereotyping (example: portrayal of elderly people, women or other minority groups), poor eating habits (which can severely effect youths who are impressionable) financial problems among the poor and other catastrophic socio-economic effects. From my point of view, it becomes very necessary for people, especially advertisers to take a minute to morally evaluate how they are promoting some product. Definitely, marketing and advertisements are a crucial part of todays world, and many company's can ill-afford to go without some sort of promotion to the public. So in my view, since this act of advertising is a necessity, it must be done morally, in the sense that those who view the advertisement, must be able to come a rational decision about it, thereby being capable of making a well informed choice.

2. State and discuss the health and safety issue of right to a safe and healthy workplace. Do you think voluntary assumption of risk can be correctly assessed and ethically justified? Discuss.

In the workplace, professionals should have the right to be protected against dangers that the work entails. Both the health (pertaining to long term effects such as loss of hearing or development of cancer through casual connection with the job) and safety (pertaining to injuries as a result of sudden, violent instances involving the physical environment) should be taken into consideration at the workplace. One of the issues of health and safety is the right to a safe and healthy workplace. We can take a Kantian stance on this issue, wherein employers must treat their employees as ends rather than means. This implies treating them as individual people rather than the means to produce some product that the company sells, thereby promoting their right to work in an environment that is free from job-related diseases and injury. In other words, the employees should be given the right to protect themselves from these intending to use them as means, by valuing their own health and safety in the workplace. The employers must take care that it was not their own actions or negligence that resulted in a workplace injury, and can defend themselves with the concept of direct cause. This concept states that the employer may not necessarily be at fault if the death or injury were not directly caused by the actions of the employer. There are a multitude of factors that can result in a hazard to workplace safety, and sometimes it may the actions of workers themselves which is the direct cause. for example, the lack of care that and employee takes, even when warned of the dangers of the workplace. This could result not inly in personal harm, but this sort of negligence could potentially harm co-workers as well. In interesting point is that is that, in a workplace, it is not easy or sometimes even impractical to reduce the probability of harm to a worker. Employers may argue that in trying to avoid each and every single source of potential harm in the workplace, would indefinitely raise costs, making it impractical to even run the business. If the risks may be very slight, with alternates being an infeasible option, then, with stringent safeguards the work may be carried forward. However, when it comes to safety concerns that are avoidable, a company should necessarily go out of their way to ensure that this does not cause any unfortunate workplace incidents, especially if there is some industry standard of health and safety to be maintained. Another point is the voluntary assumption of risk. If the workplace contains some sort of safety hazard that employees may meet with during the course of the work ,then they should be infirmed of any and all such instances. In fact, before taking up the work itself, the employers must take it upon themselves to provide adequate information. We see, that in may daily jobs, such as coal-mining or lumberjacks where there are always potential threats to the safety of workers, people still take up these jobs. One reason could be the allure of the wage they will obtain rather than some low-paying, low-risk job and also the fact that they are well-informed of the dangers, hence they may be assured that they can be well-equipped to handle these dangers, if they encounter them. This information must be present at the time of making the choice of whether to accept the job. Further, the employees choice must truly be free, in the sense that there must be no threat of losing a prior job if the new high risk job is not accepted. This form of coercion from the employer can be viewed as morally unacceptable, since it tarnishes the standards of health and safety that the employee expects. In my opinion, voluntary assumption of risk can be ethically justified, mainly when all the right information about the dangers of the job is provided before the actual assumption of the job, as well the fact that there must not be any imminent threat to the employee, which would make the employee worse off if he or she does not choose the more high risk alternative. In all, the health and safety of employees is very important in the workplace, and due considerations must be taken in order to uphold the standards of health and safety.

3. Yesterday’s PastryThe Nobles bakery, owned by Ritesh Deshmukh, makes a variety of pastries to serve the community in Mumbai. The product is good, and Ritesh Deshmukh’s business has grown rapidly. He is justly proud of the quality of his products and their fair prices.But success has its own problems. Ritesh Deshmukh finds it increasingly difficult to handle both the financial aspects of the business and the bakery operation. He has decided to concentrate on baking and delegate the financial responsibilities to Jatin, a recent graduate from the College of Business Administration at a local university. Jatin joined the Nobles bakery with great expectations of improving the business operation and increasing its profitability. Upon setting up a paper accounting system, he found that the profitability of the operation was not very good and somewhat erratic. Part of the problem stemmed from increasing competition. But Nobles also lost money because of the large amounts of left over pastries in the stock that were simply thrown away. Jatin decided to solve this problem by mixing the left over pastries in the stock with fresh ones and then selling the whole lot at a slightly reduced price. While this eliminated the waste and also benefited the customer by lowering the overall price, it also lowered the quality because some of the items bought by the customer were not as fresh as the others. Still, Jatin reasoned that the lower prices would attract new customers while eliminating the profit draining waste. Is there an ethical problem here? What is it? Should Jatin recommend that Nobles tell its customers that some of its product is not fresh? Assume Ritesh Deshmukh rejects Jatin’s proposal. What should Jatin recommend to deal with the waste problem?[Use theoretical details of the ethical issue of Efficiency and Effectiveness in Management Ethics and an ethical theory of your choice to discuss the case and answer the questions posed at the end of the case.]

In this case, Jatin has assumed a managerial role, since he now coordinates the work activities so that they are completed efficiently and effectively with and through other people. In essence, his managerial role, involves planning and handling resposibilies regarding the business side of the company. As manager, he holds the duty of accomplishing the organizational goals. However, he also must act ethically as well as ensure the organization has an ethical environment. In this circumstance, the idea proposed by Jatin, which is to mix the left over pastries in the stock with fresh ones and then selling the whole lot at a slightly reduced price, is morally objectionable. Let us assume the viewpoint of efficiency and effectiveness. Jatin could argue in the favor of efficiency, by saying that he is maximizing resource usage, along with the minimum waste, in order to gain more profits, thereby utilizing all the means efficiently to get the most output. The effectivity of this approach is that Jatin would gain more profits for the organization which, after all is the ends that Ritesh hired him to achieve. However, we must also take into consideration the Higher attainment of goals of the company as well as the ethical dimensions of the choices that Jatin has considered. If this choice is carried out, we know that they will be sold, then the quality of the pastries sold will be poorer than if they were fresh. Although, as Jatin argues, it would lower the price of the product, it brings into view the health and safety of the consumers. Definitely, the consumers are more at risk if they eat the products that are not fresh, which Jatin did not take into consideration at all. If Jatin is still adamant and wishes to go forward with it, the least he can do is inform the customers, what they are consuming, otherwise customers may be falsely lured to paying for products that they believe are fresh, when in reality, they are not. In fact, this may dissuade the customers from purchasing from the store, thereby actually reducing profits and leaving them worse off. This is also a point of issue intensity, because now the store may attract an even greater number of customers, but in fact, they may be putting a greater number of people at risk. The higher attainment that Jatin should consider is that of the welfare of society. By focusing n the profits, Jatin has ignored the potential harm it could have on the community, instead he should view this profit simply as a means to build a better business and serve society. Jatin would also promote a poor organizational culture, wherein the goal would be maximizing profits, by doing whatever it takes, which is ethically questionable. Immanuel Kant proposed (by the second formulation of categorical imperative) that one should not use a person as mere means, but as an end. In this situation, Jatin, would be treating the community and the customers of the store merely as means to accomplish the organizational benefit of higher profits. Instead, the company must treat those in the society as ends, thereby considering their well-being, which would not allow them to partake in such an act. Regardless of whether one wants to be moral or not, the moral law is binding on all of us. Even though there is an economic burden on the company, Kant would say that Jatin should not be worried about the outcomes or consequences while performing moral duty, but rather simply act in a way that is universalizable and with complete respect for the moral law. Surely, Jatin, or anyone would not will that the product they receive are not fresh, and s he also must not do so, especially since his ends are profits and not the people of the society. Jatin should find other alternatives to handle the waste problem rather than by relying on people as means to accomplish more profit and serve society in a better way. This can by done, by some ethical advertising, improving the quality of the products themselves or other approaches that would not directly put the customers at harm. Jatin should act in a more principled manner, in which he values and upholds the rights and values of others. To summarize this analysis, the idea put forward by Jatin can be viewed as unethical, since it ignores the health and safety of customers and treats them as means to attain a monetary ends.

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Bottom of Form