
Editorial

Jan Mattsson* and Jacob Dahl Rendtorff

Department of Social Sciences
Roskilde University
P.O. Box 260, 4000 Roskilde, Denmark
E-mail: mattsson@ruc.dk
E-mail: jacrendt@ruc.dk
*Corresponding author

Biographical notes: Professor Jan Mattsson is Chairperson in Business Administration at Roskilde University since May 1996. He has held several professorships and visiting professorships in New Zealand, Australia and Scandinavia. He graduated with a DBA from Gothenburg University in 1982 and was promoted as Associate Professor in 1985. Professor Mattsson is currently active in service marketing and international marketing research. He serves on many editorial boards of international journals in marketing and services. He takes part in several international research projects and is a member of the Center for Service Studies at Roskilde University.

Jacob Dahl Rendtorff is Associate Professor in Business Ethics at Roskilde University. He has been a visiting scholar to several universities such as Bentley College, Santa Clara University and Stanford University in the USA. He carries out ethical research in the scientific traditions of hermeneutics, post-structuralism and critical theory. He devotes special emphasis to issues of philosophy of science. Currently his main interest is focused on business ethics and corporate social responsibility.

The current information revolution in business with many new possibilities in electronic marketing and advertising opens up great business opportunities for firms and benefits for society. However, there are many challenges and pitfalls with potential harmful consequences to the market-driven economies and the emergent role of e-business in society. Marketing and advertising have been given new leverage and immense possibilities through electronic information technology. Scholars see great possibilities for more efficient marketing and advertising by the use of internet technology. Nevertheless, few marketing and business ethicists have addressed the ethical and social consequences of the new technologies. Therefore, this special issue on *Ethical Issues in Electronic Marketing and Advertising* of this journal focuses on new and previously ignored problems and perspectives of business ethics in electronic marketing and advertising. Such perspectives on the ethics of electronic business relate to business ethics *per se* applied as electronic ethics and computer ethics, ethics codes and legal regulation of marketing and advertising professions, ethics between business and customers, ethics in business-to-business relations, ethics of public policy and

legal regulation of electronic marketing and advertising as well as general considerations of the theoretical and practical methods of addressing ethics in internet and computer technology.

In short, the contributions to this special issue give a general introduction to current ethical research themes in e-marketing. Contributions address a wide range of ethical dimensions relating to the following keywords: general ethical theory and electronic commerce, advertising ethics, marketing ethics, invasion of privacy, protection of personal information, professional ethics in electronic business, customer protection, employees and communication privacy, intellectual property rights and ethical issues of e-business, internet-related business ethical problems, trust and reciprocity in electronic commerce and ethical dimensions of information technology in global business.

Instead of elaborating ethical theory we focus on the issues of ethics application in e-marketing. Hence, each contribution is a concrete application of ethical theory to specific issues of e-marketing. The first three contributions deal with general issues of e-marketing from a methodological point of view. The four other papers present more specific case studies of particular ethical issues in internet marketing.

The first contribution presents fundamental issues and problems in e-marketing. In their article 'Ethical aspects of e-commerce: data subjects and content', Alejo José G. Sison of the Institute for Enterprise and Humanism University of Navarra in Spain and Joan Fontrodona of the Center for Business in Society, IESE Business School also in Spain, discuss the ethical challenges posed by internet commerce with special emphasis on the content and users of the information. The paper covers the main ethical issues in e-commerce such as security, privacy, identity and nonrefutability of transactions. The authors propose measures which both governments and the private sector could adopt to address these issues on different levels. Finally, the authors reflect on the creation of value by leveraging trust and they propose two universal principles to be upheld in internet commerce: online-offline consistency and technological neutrality.

On the basis of these principles we can confront the many different problems of e-marketing. In their article 'Ethical marketing in the internet era: a research agenda', Sally Rao and Pascale Quester of the School of Commerce, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide in Australia propose a comprehensive research agenda of problems and issues in this area that need to be further investigated. They emphasise that internet marketing, as many other areas of business, has been under attack by social commentators, consumer organisations and other public welfare organisations for alleged unethical practices. While e-marketing is subject to the same general criticism as marketing from the general media – mainly about issues such as consumer rights and misleading information or freedom of choice – its specific characteristics makes it a fertile ground for other, more specific ethical dilemmas than those previously experienced or identified by marketers. The paper, therefore, identifies areas of ethical concerns that are specific to e-marketing, with the aim to determine an agenda of issues that require examination by researchers and practitioners alike, based on a rating of their urgency and importance by internet users. Moreover, the article offers a critical examination and analysis of key ethical issues arising from the planning and execution of internet marketing practices. It provides a critical reflection on ethical issues spawned by specific e-marketing strategies and practices and discusses the ethical implications and consequences of strategies and practices that marketing managers may consider in their decision making. It also identifies by means of a survey of avid internet users ethical issues perceived as more relevant.

'E-marketing ethics: a theory of value priorities', by Jan Mattsson and Jacob Dahl Rendtorff of the Roskilde University, Denmark, suggests a formal framework for treating ethical issues in e-marketing. Business ethics applied to e-marketing reflects many of the general ethical concerns of marketing. The article starts by recalling some of the ethical problems that confront the marketing profession. The authors argue for more emphasis on basic ethical principles to protect the autonomy, dignity, integrity and vulnerability of human persons and of different stakeholder groups. However, such general concerns should be managed by using a framework to support daily decision-making by marketers. The authors propose a formal theory of values for such a framework. Covering the entire human value realm, it can be used to make an overview of different kinds of ethical challenges firms face when implementing e-marketing and e-advertising. Eighteen value types and nine value levels, it is argued, can be used with the intent to illustrate dilemmas and prioritise the search for solution to these problems in e-business.

In their contribution 'Cyber-rigging click-through rates: exploring the ethical dimensions', Josie Fisher and Ravi Pappu of New England Business School, Faculty of Economics, Business and Law, University of New England in Australia provide an analysis of the ethics of click-through rates. A Click-through rate is considered a very important metric and a key performance indicator of the success of online advertising and is the most frequently used measure to gauge the effectiveness of banner advertising. Marketers also use click-through rates to arrive at performance measurement activities such as the calculation of 'customer lifetime value' and 'customer acquisition cost'. Click-through is the second most frequently used banner ad pricing method after cost per thousand impressions. Online advertising is facing a new form of challenge – the artificial inflation of click-through rates. The authors call this practice 'cyber-rigging.' The article explores the ethical dimensions of cyber-rigging through an application of ethical principles and theories.

The following article, 'A world-wide window: intelligent agents in e-world adverts', by Susan E. George of the School of Computer and Information Science, University of South Australia discusses the ethical problems of spam and the possible moral implication of advertising related to spam mail. She argues that spam has become a problem serious enough to warrant national legislation against it in most countries. Companies find that they are losing a significant amount of time and resources just dealing with spam. The paper reviews some morals underlying commercial advertising. Finding that there are many issues that need to be adequately attended to in advertising – advertising as such, however, cannot be considered as intrinsically immoral – a world-wide window is proposed as an electronic 'shop front' where intelligent agents browse and post adverts according to a user profile. Information is retrieved and summarised more intelligently than via a search engine ensuring a maximised return of relevant information. The intelligent agent also has the potential to stimulate reflective thinking about the product – challenging the potential consumer about why they want the product. Ultimately this leads to ethical advertising and ensures that information helps a buyer in making a rational choice.

In 'A study of neutralisation theory's application to global consumer ethics: P2P file-trading of musical intellectual property on the internet', Deborah Y. Cohn of the Sy Syms School of Business, Yeshiva University and Valerie L. Vaccaro of the School of Business, State University of New York address the problem of consumer perceptions for justifying unethical distribution and acquisition of unauthorised free digital music on the

internet. They apply neutralisation theory to carry out a two-stage multi-method qualitative study. One qualitative data set with a sample of consumers from nine nations was developed with written protocols in 2000 at the beginning of the Napster phenomenon. The second research phase was conducted in 2004 with a netnographic approach to studying weblogs. The authors interpret the results in the perspective of a general theory of marketing ethics and in a framework of ethically questionable consumption behaviour.

Relations between ethics and culture are at issue in 'What drives online information disclosure of eTailers? A cross-cultural study' by Daekwan Kim of Florida State University and S. Tamer Cavusgil of the Michigan State University, USA. The authors investigate the ethical position and role of eTailers in the electronic retailing industry. The online information, disclosed by electronic retailers to avoid any possible misuse or flaws, is expected to play an important role in building ongoing relationships with customers. However, the level of online information disclosure relies solely on the eTailers' discretion while unethical online information disclosure practices, such as low information disclosure or disclosure of misleading information, may harm the entire electronic retailing industry. The authors address similarities and differences in transaction-related information disclosed by US and Korean eTailers. The authors also investigate the effect of such factors as availability of international shipping, company type, breadth of payment method, and price level, on online information disclosure. The results suggest that information disclosure is explained by the country in which an eTailer is located – whether the business is confined to the internet – and by the number of payment methods. However, no substantial information is found for the price level of the major product line and whether products are shipped to international customers.

Finally, the special issue editors would like to thank the authors, reviewers and the journal editor. We appreciate the authors for their interest in the topical issue of the ethics of e-marketing and for their diligent work along this area. Thanks to the reviewers for their help in improving and clarifying the ethical content as applied to the e-marketing contexts. Finally, we would like to thank the editor of the *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising* for his interest in ethical issues, and for encouraging us to put together this special issue. We hope that this special issue on ethical challenges in e-marketing will help advance ethical concerns to the top of the e-marketing research agenda.