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Ethics of marketing communications in the digital age

Abstract. In the digital age, the ethics of marketing communications become a necessary tool to maintain the trust of consumers and the international community. The conducted research is relevant in the context of modern global conflicts, such as the state of war in Ukraine, where the use of media becomes critically important and requires an ethical approach. The aim was to consider the impact of digital technologies on ethical aspects of marketing communications, especially in the context of their use in the conditions of contemporary global conflicts and crises, in order to develop recommendations for ensuring an ethical and responsible approach to communication strategies. A systematic literature review, synthesis and generalisation of data, as well as content analysis have been used for the study. The article comprehensively reviews the ethics of marketing communications in the digital age. In particular, the peculiarities of business ethics in comparison with universal ethical standards are studied, the necessity of compliance of business practices with generally accepted moral norms is emphasised. The factors that have caused the transformation of communication methods with a special emphasis on the revolutionary role of digitalisation in marketing are analysed. The paper reviews the views of prominent scientists and marketers regarding the impact of digital communications on the formation of successful brands. The factors that determine the ethical nature of marketing communications, including personal, organisational and institutional aspects, are identified and analysed. The fundamental principles of the ethics of marketing communications, in particular, the ethical use of data, transparency in advertising practices and responsible communication with the audience have been defined. The importance of personalised approaches to communications with customers and methods of using data analytics to support them are noted. The issue of the ethical use of influencers in marketing communications is considered separately. The ethical aspect of the use of hidden advertising by influencers is studied. The peculiarities and subtleties of the use of sponsored content from the point of view of compliance with ethical norms are considered. Key problems of ethical marketing communications are systematised and highlighted. Modern innovative approaches to the evaluation of the ethical aspect of brands are studied, in particular, it is determined that the brand ethical positioning index is the optimal tool for a comprehensive evaluation of the ethics of brands. The practical value of the study lies in the systematisation and analysis of factors that determine the ethical nature of marketing communications in the digital age, including methods of their evaluation and influence on the formation of successful brands

Keywords: communication environment; digitalisation; ethical principles; ethical problems; ethical aspect of brand

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Introduction

In today's world of digital technologies, where information is transmitted instantly and has a global character, marketing communications have gained an unprecedented importance. They become an integral part of the life of every Internet user, influencing consumer behaviour, shaping their preferences and even their worldview. However, along with this, the importance of ethical aspects of marketing communications is also increasing. Responsible attitude towards the consumer, transparency, honesty and respect for privacy – these principles are gaining the increasing importance in the conditions of the digital age.

The problem of the ethics in marketing communications arises against the background of the rapid development of technologies and methods of influencing the audience. Modern tools such as Big Data, artificial intelligence, and personalisation algorithms allow companies to study user behaviour in detail and create extremely accurate advertising messages. On the one hand, it opens up new opportunities for business and increases the effectiveness of marketing strategies. On the other hand, such interference in people's private lives raises questions about the ethical use of personal data, manipulation of consumers' minds, and potential abuse. Ethical issues of marketing communications in the digital age concern not only the use of data, but also the content and form of the messages themselves. The spread of fake news, hidden advertising, the creation of illusions and promises that do not correspond to reality threaten the trust of consumers in brands and media. In response to this, society begins to increasingly demand the responsibility from companies and transparency of their activities. In this context, it is important to understand that the ethics in marketing communications is not just a set of rules or restrictions. It is a comprehensive approach that includes moral values, social responsibility and a long-term vision of business development. Ethical communications help to build trusting relationships between brands and their audiences, which is a key factor for sustained success in highly competitive environments.

The problem of the ethics in marketing communications always attracts the attention of scientists and practitioners, causing lively discussions and debates. This topic is important given the growing complexity and multifaceted nature of modern marketing, which is increasingly influencing societal norms and consumer behaviour. The ethics of marketing communications include a number of issues such as transparency, truthfulness of information, responsibility to consumers and society, as well as the impact of advertising on various social groups, including vulnerable categories of the population. In this context, a considerable number of scientific works and researches are devoted to the study of these aspects. R. Baltezarevic & I. Baltezarevic (2020) emphasise that ethical standards should guarantee transparency and honesty in the presentation of information, excluding any form of deception, exploitation of vulnerable groups, humiliation, imposition of negative emotions and displays of superiority.

Consideration of the ethics in marketing communications has been studied in various contexts such as truth-telling through advertising, manipulation of vulnerable groups, presentation of groups, violation of personal privacy through direct marketing, images of women and men in advertising and stereotyping of people, culture and region, etc. (Kotler, 2019). Ukrainian scientists are also actively involved in the research of this topic. Their works cover issues of the ethical regulation of advertising, the impact of marketing communications on consumers, and the role of ethical standards in the formation of corporate social responsibility.

O. Kolomytseva *et al.* (2022) have conducted comprehensive research on the behavioural reactions of consumers to different methods and styles of presentation of marketing communications and determined that the ethical approach in this process is critical for building trust and positive brand perception. L. Vasylychenko (2019) notes that consumers, when choosing a product, are guided by a system of values, among which a special role is played by the brand values, which are revealed through the ethics in its communication system, which contributes to the formation of the consumer's desire and willingness to purchase the product.

T. Zavalii *et al.* (2022) have studied the problem of supporting the ethical behaviour in the digital communication environment, identified the principles of the digital etiquette in marketing communications and noted that the development and implementation of a general marketing code of the ethical behaviour for Ukrainian enterprises, which would cover the issue of the digital etiquette in marketing communications, similar to the Marketing Code of the International Chamber of Commerce, as well as the creation of a code of the ethical behaviour at the level of an individual enterprise, which will regulate the behaviour of enterprise representatives in the digital space, should be promising directions in the development of the digital etiquette in Ukraine.

T. Kuvaieva *et al.* (2021) focus on the ethics of the interaction between consumers and companies, including ethical aspects of the use of personal data in marketing communications, the formation of a customer-oriented enterprise strategy based on marketing ethics and social responsibility of business. In particular, the researchers note that to ensure the long-term success in today's digital communication environment, companies should integrate the ethics and social responsibility into their strategic planning, develop marketing strategies that take into account ethical risks and social consequences, and demonstrate a commitment to the ethical and socially responsible behaviour through actions of their top managers.

In general, the issue of the ethics in marketing communications is an important direction of scientific research, which contributes to the increase of transparency and responsibility of business, as well as the development of more harmonious relations between companies and consumers. The constant interest in this issue indicates its

relevance and the need for further research to ensure the sustainable development of marketing practices on a global scale. The purpose of the work was to comprehensively study ethical aspects of marketing communications in the digital age, including the analysis of the impact of digitalisation on the formation of successful brands, the assessment of the ethical positioning, the use of personalised communication strategies and influencers. The study has used the method of a systematic literature review, which makes it possible to carefully collect and analyse previous scientific studies and publications related to the ethics of marketing communications in the digital age. This method provides a comprehensive understanding of the topic and the identification of the main trends and challenges in the field. The method of the synthesis and generalisation of data, which consists in the integration of disparate data and ideas obtained from the literature review, to create a holistic vision of the problem and identify key aspects of ethical communications in marketing has also been used. In addition, the study includes the content analysis, which enables a systematic analysis of textual content and media materials related to marketing communications, in order to identify the main ethical components, behaviour patterns and strategies used in the digital environment.

Theoretical dimension of the ethics of marketing communications: Principles and factors of influence

The ethics is a branch of philosophy that studies moral principles, standards and values, which determine what is right and wrong in human behaviour in society. It includes the analysis of moral problems, the development of principles of justice, duty, responsibility and moral understanding (Velasquez *et al.*, 2010). The ethics defines moral norms that affect a person's moral decision in specific situations and interaction in society. In this context, business ethics is a sub-branch of the ethics that focuses on the application of ethical principles in the field of business. The distinction between general ethics and business ethics is critical. General ethics covers moral principles applied to human interactions and activities in general. Business ethics, in turn, examines how these general ethical principles can and should be applied in business activities. This differentiation indicates that business is not exempt from moral considerations that regulate social interactions.

Business practices and marketing communications should be subject to the same ethical standards as any other human activity. This means that businesses cannot create their own sets of moral standards separate from general ethical principles. For example, deceptive or manipulative marketing practices are ethically unacceptable, just as in other areas of human activity. As defined by R. Christy (2009): "Ethical considerations – issues of right and wrong – are an integral part of real-life marketing communications. Any part of organisation's marketing communications may, intentionally or otherwise, convey a message about its ethical position. It is important for

companies to be aware of and be attentive to ethical implications of their marketing communications".

For decades, marketing has been the process of selling goods and services produced by the business world. Marketing includes the processes of communicating offers to potential customers in a way that attracts attention and stimulates the intention to make a purchase. Ways of communication have changed over the decades according to scientific and technological progress, economic changes, changes in the business operating environment and, most importantly, customer expectations. Over the past decade (2013-2023), digitalisation has revolutionised marketing communications. D. Aaker (2015) notes that digital marketing communications are a powerful tool for building brands and strengthening relationships with individuals and the community by actively involving them in the marketing process. He also notes that such active participation forces the marketer to convey messages on an individual level with rich and deep content. In a sense, the digital platform has given marketers the ability to reach a wider audience with more personalised offers. According to him, communication strategies of digital marketing do not need to be considered as separate units, they can take many other forms depending on cultural differences, events, crisis, company profiles, country logistics and diversity within the country.

Personal, organisational and institutional factors play a significant role in the formation of the ethical image of marketing communications, determining their business ethics, values and standards (Cho, 2020). Personal factors include the values, beliefs, and moral standards of individuals working in the field of marketing. Values and moral principles guide marketers' choices in morally complex situations and influence their ethical decision-making. For example, personal beliefs may force a marketer to abandon aggressive marketing approaches or collection of confidential data without consumer consent.

Organisational factors include the company's mission, values, and culture. Companies that actively promote the ethics in all aspects of their operations usually have more developed ethical marketing strategies. Creation of the ethical corporate environment and support of moral principles at all levels of management may stimulate marketers to more responsible and prudent behaviour (Lasukova, 2012). For example, in 2023-2024, the phenomenon of using obscene language in order to attract the attention of consumers has become very common, but for many companies this is a prohibited move precisely for ethical reasons. For example, in social networks there are such posts:

- ◆ from Tsypa Brewery: "There is a question: how to get more followers of a small brewery from the village? Don't offer to swear, we are polite and friends from the tract will not understand" (Tsypa Brewery..., n.d.);

- ◆ from Kyivstar: "Our SMM team is looking at how brands have started to swear and communicate more aggressively on Twitter, and is thinking about what to do to keep you subscribed, because we can't do that" (Twiy Kyivstar..., n.d.).

Institutional factors include legislation, regulatory bodies, and standards that govern marketing activities as a whole. Legislative regulations and ethical standards define the framework for marketing practices and establish requirements for honesty, transparency and responsibility. All these factors – personal, organisational and institutional ones – interact and influence the ethics of marketing communications. Understanding of these relationships allows companies and marketers to develop effective and ethical strategies, helping to build long-term relationships with consumers and promoting the sustainable development of society as a whole.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, context and motives are also important in evaluating the ethics of marketing communications (Barrett-Maitland & Lynch, 2020). The ethics in marketing communications is determined not only by internal beliefs and standards, but also by a wide range of contextual factors. These factors include cultural, social, economic and technological aspects that shape the context in which marketers and companies operate. Cultural characteristics of a country or region can significantly influence ethical standards and norms in marketing communications. Differences in moral values, traditions and worldviews can lead to different perceptions and evaluations of advertising messages. Therefore, it is important for marketers to consider cultural characteristics of the audience and adapt their communication strategies according to this context. Societal norms, attitudes and demands also affect the ethicality of marketing communications. Issues of equality, diversity, environmental responsibility and the ethical use of data are becoming increasingly relevant for consumers. Companies need to consider these social factors and respond to them in their marketing communications in order to ensure positive perceptions of their brands. Economic conditions, competitive pressures, and financial constraints can affect ethical marketing practices. For example, conditions of fierce competition encourage some companies to use aggressive or manipulative methods of advertising, which do not always meet ethical standards.

Ethical issues of integrating personalisation and sponsored content into marketing

The development of technology affects the ways of communication and data collection, which has a direct impact on the ethicality of marketing practices. Issues of privacy, data protection and the use of artificial intelligence in marketing require careful attention to ethical aspects and compliance with relevant standards (Nesterenko *et al.*, 2023). When making decisions about the ethical communication, it is necessary to understand who communicates with whom, in what sense, where and when. Thus, the motives and context of communication are important. Transparency and honesty are one of the fundamental principles of the ethics of marketing communications. Marketers should ensure honesty in all aspects of communication with their audience, from advertising to social

media content. Deception schemes, even though they may lead to a temporary increase in sales, undermine consumer trust and may cause irreparable damage to a brand's reputation (Bevan-Dye & Motaung, 2023).

In a world where data is considered the new gold, marketers should be especially careful with the privacy and security of consumers' personal information. The collection, storage and use of data have to meet high security standards and be carried out with appropriate consent and respect for user privacy. This principle of the ethics of marketing communications is especially closely intertwined with the modern trend of marketing communications – personalisation. Personalisation consists in creating customised approaches to communication with customers based on their unique needs and characteristics, which allows brands to effectively interact with consumers, increasing engagement, conversion and loyalty. Data collection and analysis, audience segmentation, and construction of personalised strategies are key elements of successful personalisation (Nesterenko & Olefirenko, 2023).

Collecting of relevant customer data is the first step to successful personalisation. This may include information about their purchases, web pages visited, email interactions, etc. The next step is to analyse this data in order to identify key trends and unique characteristics of customers. After collecting and analysing data, marketers can divide their audience into different segments based on their needs, interests, and behaviour. This allows for more specific and targeted marketing messages. Based on the collected data and audience segmentation, marketers can develop individualised strategies for communicating with each client. This can include personalised advertising, emails, special offers and more.

Therefore, the successful implementation of personalisation requires not only technological knowledge, but also an ethical approach to data collection and use. Customers should be informed about what data is collected, for what purpose it is used and how it affects their experience of interacting with the brand. Only in this case personalisation can be perceived as an ethical practice. Brands have to ensure that the data collected will be stored in a secure location and will not be shared with third parties without the customers' consent. Moreover, data should only be used for the purposes for which they have been collected and should not be used to manipulate customers or violate their privacy (Punj, 2019). Successful personalisation also requires consideration of ethical aspects in the context of development and implementation of marketing strategies. For example, the use of personal data to identify customer weaknesses or vulnerabilities in order to maximise profits may be against ethical standards. Instead, personalisation should focus on improving the consumers experience, providing useful information and addressing their needs.

Integration of ethical principles into the personalisation process helps brands to build customer trust and loyalty, thereby ensuring long-term success in today's competitive environment. It should also be noted that companies

have a great responsibility in shaping the cultural context through their communication strategies. They should avoid reinforcing of stereotypes and discrimination based on race, gender, orientation, age and other characteristics. Instead, it is important to create diverse, creative advertising that reflects the true diversity of society (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005). Companies are responsible for the impact that their communication strategies have on consumers' mental and emotional health. They should avoid the use of manipulative and psychological techniques to attract attention and sell goods or services. So, summarising, it is possible to single out four main principles of the ethics of marketing communications (American Marketing Association, n.d.; Cho, 2020):

- ◆ transparency and honesty;
- ◆ data privacy protection;
- ◆ fight against discrimination and stereotypes;
- ◆ responsibility for impact on consumers.

The issue of the ethics in the use of certain tools and means of the company's marketing communication policy deserves special attention. In particular, in today's digital world, influencers have become an important tool for brands in marketing communications. Influencers are individuals who have a large number of subscribers or followers on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, etc. Their posts, recommendations, and interactions with brands can have a significant impact on the behaviour and perceptions of their followers. However, along with this, there are ethical issues related to the use of influencers that need attention and resolution (Balabanis & Chatzopoulou, 2019).

The mechanism of influence of influencers on their target audience is based on the following fundamental concepts: trust and authority, social integration and imitation, emotional connection, shared values and identification, expert status (influencers who have expert knowledge or experience in a certain field can cause greater trust and influence the choice of goods or services). Followers often perceive influencers as trusted sources of information because they see them as experts in their field or simply as individuals with whom they feel an emotional connection. One of the main ethical problems consists in the authenticity and trust in influencers. Are their advertising activities a reflection of their own thoughts and beliefs, or are they simply aimed at profiting from advertisers? Many influencers can lose the trust of their audience if they are found to be promoting goods or services that do not align with their own beliefs or are false.

Followers may be inclined to imitate the behaviour or use of goods recommended by their favorite influencers in order to resemble them or to feel a sense of belonging to their community. In this aspect, the responsibility for the effects of advertising carried out by influencers is an ethical problem. They have a great influence on their audience, especially the younger generation, and can cause negative consequences if the advertised goods or services are harmful to health or ethically unacceptable (Suprawan

& Pojanavatee, 2022). Influencers should be aware of their responsibility to their audience and carefully select the advertisers and goods they plan to promote.

Another ethical aspect consists in the use of hidden advertising. Some influencers may intentionally not label their promotional messages as such, hiding them among their regular content. This can lead to mistrust and disappointment among their audience, who may feel cheated. In this aspect, the concept of "sponsored content" should be mentioned. Sponsored content has become an integral part of today's media landscape. This form of advertising is content created to promote a brand, product or service, but presented in a format that matches the editorial style of the media platform it is hosted on. The ability of sponsored content to organically integrate into the overall context of the platform it is hosted on is one of its main advantages. This makes possible to avoid obvious advertising aggression, which often causes negative reactions among consumers. For example, an article about a healthy lifestyle sponsored by a sports nutrition brand may provide useful information while promoting the company's products (Boerman *et al.*, 2018).

Trust building is another important aspect. Consumers are more inclined to trust information that is presented in the form of useful content, rather than intrusive advertising. It helps brands to create a positive image and strengthen connections with the audience. Despite its many advantages, sponsored content also raises important ethical problems. Transparency is the main problem. It is important for consumers to know that content is sponsored and to distinguish it from independent editorial material (Boerman *et al.*, 2018). Non-compliance with this principle can lead to a loss of trust in the media platform and brand. Ethical standards also require sponsored content to be fair and not misleading to consumers. For example, when advertising a product, it is necessary to provide truthful information about its properties and capabilities, avoid exaggerations and manipulations.

Sponsored content has a significant impact on the media industry. It opens up new sources of revenues for media platforms, which is especially important in the context of declining traditional advertising revenues. This allows the media to invest in quality content and expand their capabilities. However, there is a risk of commercialisation of editorial policy. Dependence on sponsors can affect media independence, causing them to shy away from criticising certain brands or topics (Eisend *et al.*, 2020). It is important to maintain a balance between commercial interests and editorial freedom in order to avoid conflicts of interest.

Therefore, sponsored content is a powerful tool of modern marketing that allows brands to effectively interact with their audience. However, its use requires careful adherence to ethical standards in order to maintain consumer trust and uphold high standards of journalism. The balance between commercial interests and the ethics is a key success factor in this direction. On the other hand, the problem of the ethics of marketing communications in the

“influencer – advertiser” interaction is also important. The question is which blogger is really authoritative for the advertiser’s target audience, whether he fulfills his obligations and whether his audience is not artificially inflated.

Innovation in assessing the ethics and effectiveness of influencer marketing: The role of platforms and standards in Ukraine and abroad

In 2020, a platform was created in Ukraine, which turned out to be an important tool for assessing the reputation and effectiveness of Ukrainian bloggers. This platform, developed by the Revizion company, which specialises in evaluating the quality of services of Ukrainian companies, together with the JGordienko agency, which focuses on co-operation with bloggers, turned out to be a significant step towards creating standards and criteria for evaluating the influence of bloggers in social media. The purpose of this platform is to analyse and evaluate the blogger’s reputation, as well as to analyse the results of his previous advertising campaigns. With the help of various algorithms and metrics, Revizion and JGordienko agency carry out an in-depth analysis of the content, interaction and audience reaction to the blogger’s publications, which allows for a detailed assessment of his influence and effectiveness in social media. This initiative is an important step in the development of the modern influencer industry in Ukraine and contributes to the improvement of quality and transparency in this area. The creation of a platform that

provides an objective assessment of the reputation of bloggers is an important stage in ensuring trust between bloggers, the audience and advertisers, as well as in increasing the level of professionalism and the ethics in the sphere of influence marketing (A platform has appeared..., 2020).

Organisations should develop an active awareness of ethical consequences of their marketing communications. Each company will have its own list of challenges in the context of ethical marketing communications, but it is possible to single out common problems that include (Hawkins, 2000; Kaushal, 2020):

- ◆ misleading or false advertising;
- ◆ shocking or obscene material in marketing communications;
- ◆ techniques of sales under pressure, especially when they are applied to vulnerable groups;
- ◆ telemarketing or “spam” emails that violate personal privacy;
- ◆ PR communications that distract and confuse rather than inform;
- ◆ payment of bribes to win business.

It is worth considering in more detail why telemarketing can be a problem of the ethics of marketing communications. Telemarketing is one of the most common techniques of direct marketing used by companies to promote their goods or services. However, given its aggressive nature and potential for abuse, telemarketing is often the subject of the ethical debate. Ethical issues of telemarketing are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Ethical problems of telemarketing

Problem	Description
Violation of privacy	Telemarketing often involves unsolicited calls to consumers who have not given their consent to receive such calls. This may be considered a violation of privacy. In addition, for effective telemarketing, companies collect and store personal information of consumers. If this data are used without proper consent or in violation of confidentiality, it becomes a serious ethical problem.
Manipulation and deception	Telemarketers often use aggressive sales techniques, pressuring consumers to make an immediate decision. This can lead to decisions under pressure that are not in the best interest of consumers. In some cases, telemarketers provide false or misleading information about a product or service, which violates the principles of honesty and transparency.
Work with vulnerable groups	Telemarketing is often targeted at vulnerable populations, such as the elderly or persons with disabilities, who may be more susceptible to manipulation. Ethical problems arise when such groups are exploited for profit.

Source: compiled by the authors based on S. Shirley (2021) and R. Muradia (2023)

Various regulatory measures have been introduced to reduce ethical problems associated with telemarketing. Many countries including the US and Canada have national registries, where consumers can register to avoid receiving unwanted calls from telemarketers. Companies violating these rules may be fined. Data protection laws, such as Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 2016/679 (2016), regulate how companies can collect, store and use personal information of consumers, ensuring its privacy. Telemarketing is indeed an ethical communications problem because of its tendency to violate privacy, use manipulative tactics, and exploit vulnerable consumer groups. To ensure the ethicality in telemarketing, clear

regulatory measures and compliance with ethical standards are necessary. Companies using telemarketing should strive for transparency, honesty and respect for consumers in order to maintain their trust and loyalty.

The question of taste and propriety in the context of marketing communications can also have an ethical dimension. This is not only related to the use of “pin-up” images in corporate calendars and commercial advertising, but can also refer to the use by charities, voluntary and other socially oriented organisations of particularly sad images for fundraising or the use of stereotypical images in advertising. Advertising images can carelessly stereotype people, groups, cultures and regions for narrow

commercial purposes. The issue of the use of shocking images in marketing communications is also a problem of the ethics of marketing communications. It can be said that the use of shocking images in marketing communications is a controversial issue that raises significant ethical

problems. Such images, often created to attract attention and evoke strong emotions, can have both positive and negative consequences for the brand and its consumers. The main ethical problems in the use of shocking images are shown in Figure 1.

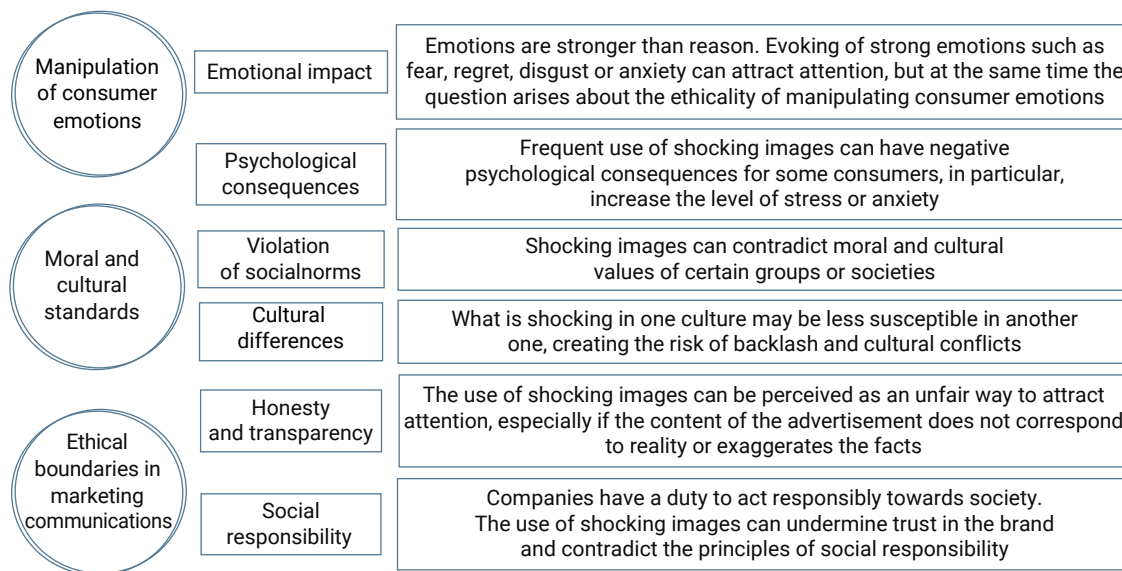


Figure 1. Ethical problems in the use of shocking images

Source: compiled by the authors based on P. Calain (2013), MSF International President... (2022) and E. Fumagalli & L.J. Shrum (2024)

In some cases, shocking images may be justified, for example, in social campaigns aimed at raising awareness of social issues (smoking, road safety, animal protection, violence, etc.). Such images can effectively draw attention to important issues and stimulate action (Nicholas *et al.*, 2020). Shocking images can make advertising messages more memorable, which increases their effectiveness in the short term. However, there are many examples in the world where the use of shocking images has caused a wide public debate. For example, anti-smoking campaigns that use images of diseased lungs or the effects of smoking often face criticism for being overly violent. Similarly, advertising campaigns that highlight violence or other taboo topics can lead to significant controversy and protests from the public.

The use of shocking images in marketing communications is an ethically complex issue. While such images can be effective in attracting attention and raising awareness, they also carry significant ethical risks, including manipulation of consumer emotions, violation of moral and cultural standards, as well as undermining of trust in the brand. In order to maintain the ethicality of marketing communications, companies need to carefully weigh possible consequences of using shocking images and act with social responsibility and respect for consumers. Therefore, ethical issues in marketing communications are becoming increasingly important, especially for today's reputable brands. By incorporating ethical elements in their positioning, brands can not only appeal to consumers who value the ethics, but also foster greater loyalty and trust. That

is, it is possible to use the ethics as a product difference and accordingly form a strategic advantage.

The Ethical Positioning Index (EPI), proposed by researchers M. Sagar *et al.* (2011), is one of innovative approaches to evaluating the ethical aspect of brands. This index combines traditional elements of brand positioning with ethical principles, which allows creating a comprehensive system for evaluating brand ethics. According to the researchers, EPI is based on five main elements of brand positioning: brand identification (identification of unique brand characteristics); brand image (brand perception by consumers); brand individuality (features and values that distinguish the brand from competitors); brand awareness (level of consumer awareness of the brand); brand communications (ways of brand interaction with the audience). These elements are complemented by basic ethical components: beliefs, values, symbols and customs. This approach allows for the integration of ethical considerations into the brand positioning process, creating a strategic advantage.

The EPI methodology involves conducting surveys of consumers who evaluate the specified elements on a scale from 1 to 5. The obtained results are weighted and combined, which allows for determination of the overall evaluation of the ethical positioning of the brand. This approach provides transparency and objectivity in evaluating brand ethicality, taking into account both marketing indicators and ethical principles. The implementation of EPI in marketing practices can have a significant impact on brands and their strategy. EPI can change the ideology of brands,

forcing them to adopt more ethical views in their branding, which will be highly welcomed by consumers and society. EBI emphasises the importance of integrating the ethics into brand strategy, especially in an era when consumers are increasingly aware of corporate social responsibility and ethical behaviour. By prioritising ethical considerations, brands can achieve a more sustainable and respected market presence. Thus, the implementation of the system for calculating the Ethical Positioning Index (EPI) will allow not only to measure the effectiveness of the brand from the point of view of consumers, but also to integrate ethical considerations into the branding strategy. The implementation of EPI can significantly influence corporate ideology, contributing to increased trust and loyalty on the part of consumers.

Conclusions

Morals and ethics of communication are important for building trust and authority, as well as for maintaining good social relations. Ethical communications are based on honesty, truthfulness, validity and transparency. The combination of these principles in communication helps to build trust, prevent misunderstandings, and ensure effective and reliable communication. In addition, these principles provide a framework to ensure that communications are ethical, reliable and effective, thus playing an important role in maintaining positive relationships between individuals and organisations.

In the digital age, the ethics of marketing communications are more important than ever before. Marketers should be guided by high standards of transparency, truthfulness, privacy protection, non-discrimination and responsible influence. Only then they will be able to build consumer trust and create marketing campaigns that not only promote products, but also contribute to positive changes in society.

Just as there are no specific ethical rules for business in general, the ethics in marketing communications are a matter of applying normal ethical principles to the practice

of marketing communications. Some of the difficulties in business associated with deciding between general duty-based and consequence-based ethical systems can be avoided by adopting a teleological or goal-based approach in trying to identify actions that will have the effect of maximising the long-term interests of the firm and its owners, always within important constraints of common decency and fairness.

Limitations of the study include the subjectivity of assessments of the ethics of marketing communications, since many conclusions are based on the perception and interpretation of individual scientists and respondents, which can affect the objectivity of the results. In addition, cultural and regional differences in approaches to the ethics can limit the generalisability of findings, as different countries and cultures can have specific marketing norms and practices. This can become an obstacle to the application of research results in a global context.

For further research, it is promising to study the impact of new digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain on ethical aspects of marketing communications and methods of their integration. The analysis of international practices of the ethics in marketing communications, which can help to identify general trends and local features, is also of great interest. Evaluation of the effectiveness of various ethical strategies and practices, as well as their impact on consumer trust and brand reputation, is also important for the development of new tools and methods for the ethicality assessment. Research of consumer perceptions of the ethicality of marketing communications can provide valuable information to create strategies that meet the expectations and demands of target audiences.

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Етика маркетингових комунікацій у цифрову епоху

Анотація. У цифрову епоху етика маркетингових комунікацій стає необхідним інструментом для збереження довіри споживачів та міжнародної спільноти. Проведене дослідження актуальне в контексті сучасних глобальних конфліктів, таких як воєнний стан в Україні, де використання медіа стає критично важливим і вимагає етичного підходу. Метою було розглянути вплив цифрових технологій на етичні аспекти маркетингових комунікацій, особливо в контексті їхнього використання в умовах сучасних глобальних конфліктів та криз, щоб розробити рекомендації щодо забезпечення етичного та відповідального підходу до комунікаційних стратегій. Для дослідження було використано систематичний огляд літератури, синтез і узагальнення даних, а також контент-аналіз. У статті всебічно розглянуто етику маркетингових комунікацій у цифрову епоху. Зокрема, досліджено особливості ділової етики порівняно з загальнолюдськими етичними стандартами, підкреслено необхідність відповідності бізнесових практик загальноприйнятим моральним нормам. Проаналізовано чинники, що спричинили трансформацію комунікаційних методів, з особливим акцентом на революційну роль цифровізації у маркетингу. У роботі проведено огляд поглядів видатних науковців і маркетологів щодо впливу цифрових комунікацій на формування успішних брендів. Виявлено та проаналізовано фактори, які визначають етичний характер маркетингових комунікацій, включаючи особисті, організаційні та інституційні аспекти. Визначено фундаментальні принципи етики маркетингових комунікацій, зокрема, етичне використання даних, прозорість у рекламних практиках та відповідальне спілкування з аудиторією. Відзначено значення персоналізованих підходів до комунікацій з клієнтами та методи використання аналітики даних для їх підтримки. Окремо розглянуто питання етичного використання інфлюенсерів у маркетингових комунікаціях. Досліджено етичний аспект використання інфлюенсерами прихованої реклами. Розглянуто особливості і тонкощі застосування спонсорованого контенту з погляду дотримання етичних норм. Систематизовано та виділено ключові проблеми етичних маркетингових комунікацій. Досліджено сучасні інноваційні підходи до оцінки етичного аспекту брендів, зокрема, визначено, що індекс етичного позиціонування бренду є оптимальним інструментом для комплексної оцінки етичності брендів. Практична цінність дослідження полягає у систематизації та аналізі факторів, що визначають етичний характер маркетингових комунікацій у цифрову епоху, включаючи методи їх оцінки та вплив на формування успішних брендів

Ключові слова: комунікаційне середовище; цифровізація; етичні принципи; етичні проблеми; етичний аспект бренду