Analyzing Ethical Decision Making in Marketing

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Marketing ethics has been receiving increased research attention, particularly within the past 10 years. One area of interest in the topic has been development of models, or frameworks, for analyzing ethical decision making in marketing. Few of the models have been tested empirically. In addition, the existing frameworks suffer from certain limitations. This article presents an alternate approach for analyzing ethical decision making in marketing and discusses the results of a field test of the approach. Study results suggest that the framework has promise as a means with which to study marketers' ethical decision making.

Introduction

Ethical conduct of business has come under increasing public scrutiny over the past 20 years. The general public has developed an acute awareness of and interest in potential and actual business abuses. Collateral with this concern has been increased attention on identifying unethical business behaviors and their causes (e.g., Baumhart, 1968; Brenner and Molander, 1977; Newstrom and Ruch, 1975).

The activities of the marketing department are among the most visible to the general public. Consequently, many questionable business practices manifested in the marketplace (e.g., deceptive advertising, fictitious pricing) can be traced to the marketing function. In a review of marketing ethics literature, Murphy and Laczniak (1981, p. 251) state, "The function within business firms most often charged with ethical abuse is marketing."

Potential ethical misconduct in marketing has spawned a plethora of research in the area, particularly within the past 10 years. Topics include 1) ethical issues confronted by marketing managers (Chonko and Hunt, 1985; Ferrell and Weaver,

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1978; Trawick and Darden, 1980), marketing researchers (Akaah and Riordan, 1989; Crawford, 1970; Ferrell and Skinner, 1988; Hunt et al., 1984; Tybout and Zaltman, 1974), advertising personnel (Krugman and Ferrell, 1981; Zey-Ferrell et al., 1979), purchasing personnel (Browning and Zabriskie, 1983; Rudelius and Bucholz, 1979), field (Chonko and Burnett, 1983; Dubinsky et al., 1980) and retail (Levy and Dubinsky, 1983) salespeople, and retail store managers (Dornoff and Tankersley, 1975–1976); 2) consumers' perceptions of various marketing practices (Dornoff and Tankersley, 1975); and 3) nonbusiness professors' and marketing practitioners' beliefs about the appropriateness of applying marketing principles to social issues and ideas (Laczniak et al., 1979; Lusch et al., 1980).

Prior research has been useful in advancing knowledge about marketing ethics. Furthermore, several models, or frameworks, have been developed for analyzing ethical decision making in marketing (e.g., Bartels, 1967; Fritzsche, 1985; Laczniak, 1983; Pruden, 1971; Skinner et al., 1988; Zey-Ferrell et al., 1979; Zey-Ferrell and Ferrell, 1982). The most complete models are by Ferrell and Gresham (1985) and Hunt and Vitell (1986). Ferrell and Gresham (1985) offer a "multistage contingency model of the variables that impact on ethical decisions in an organizational environment" (p. 88); it consists of three major antecedents of ethical decision making: individual (employee) factors, significant others in the organizational setting, and opportunity for action. Hunt and Vitell (1986) have developed a model for situations in which an individual views a particular behavior as having ethical content. It contains four constructs—personal experiences, organizational norms, industry norms, and cultural norms—that affect ethical decision making through their moderating effects on perceived ethical problems, perceived alternatives, deontological and teleological evaluations, ethical judgments, and intentions.

In the present study, an alternate approach for analyzing ethical decision making in marketing was developed and tested in a field setting. (The advantages of this approach over alternative models are presented in a subsequent section of the article.) The purpose of this paper is to present the approach and demonstrate its potential value for studying marketing ethics.

Theoretical Framework

The present framework for analyzing ethical decision making in marketing has its origins in social psychology; the approach is derived from the *theory of reasoned action* (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein, 1979). This theory has received extensive research attention in marketing, particularly in consumer behavior (e.g., Sheppard et al., 1988), but it has not been applied specifically to the study of marketing ethics; its potential as a theoretical framework, though, is evident.

Overview of the Theory

The theory of reasoned action assumes that individuals are usually rational, they utilize information that is available to them when deciding to engage in a given behavior, and their behavior is under volitional control. More specifically (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980, p. 5):

> . . . the theory is based on the assumption that human beings are usually quite rational and make systematic use of information available to them. We do not subscribe to the view that human social behavior is controlled by unconscious motives or overpowering desires, nor do we believe that it can be characterized as capricious or thoughtless. Rather, we argue that people consider the implications of their actions before they decide to engage or not engage in a given behavior.

Thus, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) argue that people are rational in that they process information systematically; the behaviors that follow from this process, however, are not necessarily ethical or morally defensible.

The theory, as it applies to ethical decision making in marketing, is illustrated in Figure 1. Moving from right to left in Figure 1, the theory espouses that the immediate determinant of engaging in ethical/unethical behavior (or action) is one's intention to perform the behavior. Intention is influenced by the individual's attitude toward the behavior and/or subjective norm (i.e., perceived social influence/pressure placed on the individual to perform or not to perform the behavior). Attitude is determined by one's salient behavioral beliefs about the outcomes associated with performing the behavior and evaluations of those outcomes. Subjective norm is a function of the individual's normative beliefs about whether salient referents think he or she should engage in the behavior and motivations to comply with these referents. Because the theory of reasoned action is described in detail elsewhere (Fishbein, 1979) and is familiar to marketers (e.g., Miniard and Cohen, 1983; Ryan and Bonfield, 1975, 1980; Sheppard et al., 1988), only a brief discussion is offered here; attention will focus primarily on the theory's applicability to the study of marketing ethics.

Components of the Theory

Intention. The major goal of the theory of reasoned action is to predict and understand a person's behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980)—or in the present study, an individual's ethical/unethical behavior. According to the theory, the immediate determinant of behavior is one's *intention* to perform (or not to perform) the behavior (*BI*). Intention is defined as the individual's subjective probability that he or she will engage in the behavior.

Intention is regarded as an important component in ethical behavior but has generally been considered in a different manner than described above. For example, Ferrell and Gresham (1985) and Laczniak (1983) postulate that individuals' intentions influence ethical decision making in marketing; "intentions" in their frameworks denote the underlying purposes for engaging in ethical/unethical behavior rather than the subjective probability that a given behavior will be performed. Consistent with Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) perspective, however, Hunt and Vitell (1986) describe intention as the "likelihood that any particular alternative will be chosen."

Determinants of Intentions. A person's intention is determined by one *or* both of two components—a) one's attitude toward the behavior of interest and b) subjective norm—as shown below:

$$BI \sim w_1A_B + w_2SN, \qquad (1)$$

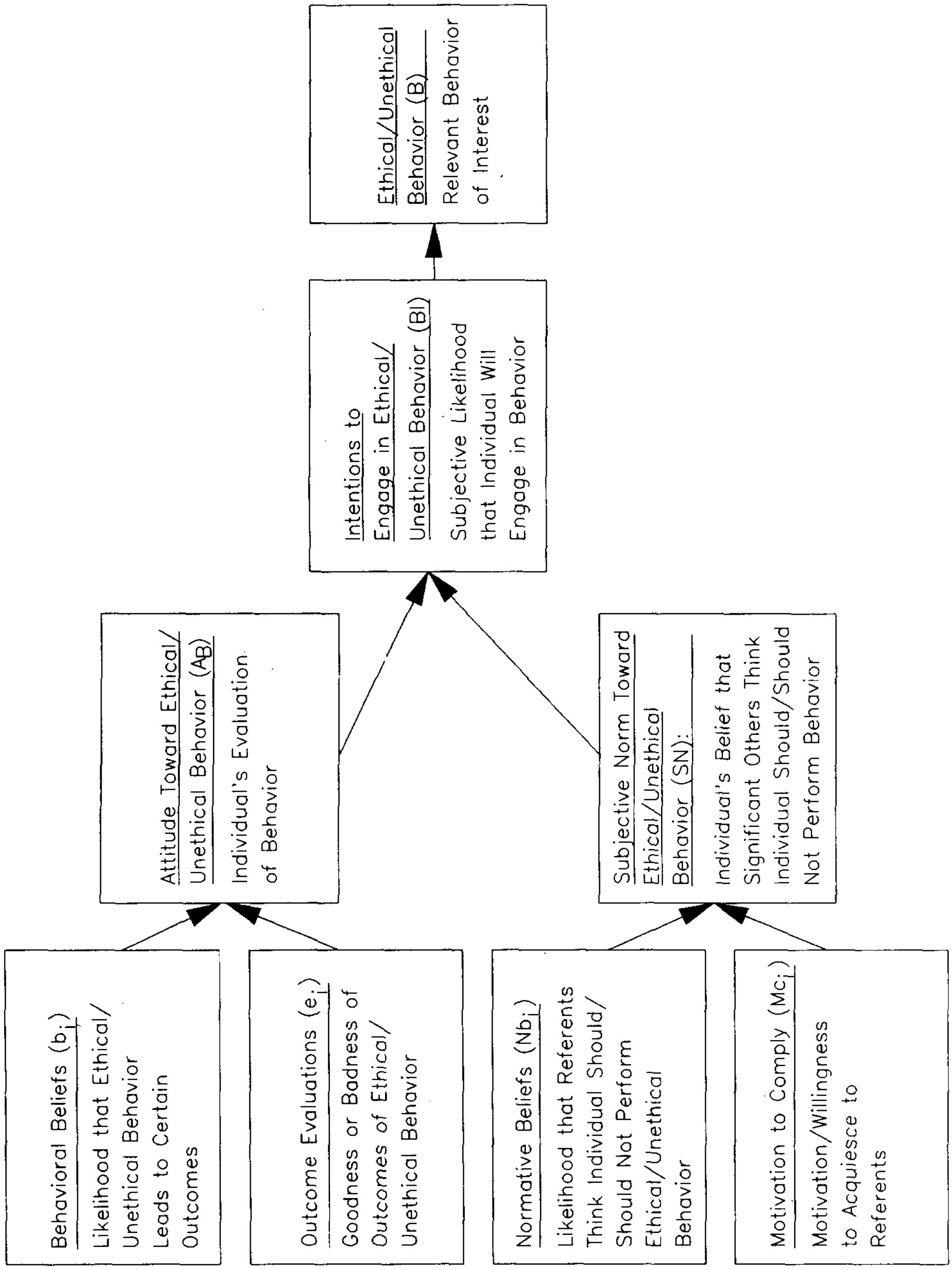

Figure 1. Model for analyzing ethical decision making in marketing.

where BI = behavioral intention; A_B = attitude toward performing the behavior; SN = subjective norm; and w_1 and w_2 = relative weights of attitudes and subjective norms (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

Attitude toward the behavior (A_B) refers to an individual's judgment concerning whether engaging in a certain behavior is good or bad. The more favorably one evaluates performing a particular behavior, the more likely the person intends to perform that behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). *Subjective norm* (SN) refers to one's perception of whether others important to the individual (such as management, coworkers, family) think he or she should or should not engage in a given behavior. The more an individual perceives that important others think he or she should engage in the behavior, the more likely the person intends to do so (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Generally, one will intend to perform a particular behavior if he or she has a favorable evaluation of performing the behavior and/or important others think the person should perform the behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The relative importance (weights) attached to attitudes and subjective norms in predicting intentions (and therefore behavior) is proposed by the theory to vary depending upon the particular ethical behavior tested or the particular subgroup or population investigated. The performance of some ethical/unethical behaviors may be primarily a function of attitudes. The performance of other ethical/unethical behaviors may be determined chiefly by subjective norms.

Conceivably, attitudes and subjective norms should be germane in an ethical decision-making context. For example, if a salesperson has a favorable attitude toward giving customers gifts (a behavior that may not be viewed as unethical by many salespeople) or perceives that important others (e.g., top management, immediate supervisor) think customers should receive gifts, then he or she may intend to offer them.

Determinants of Attitude Toward Behavior. An individual's attitude toward a given behavior is a function of his or her salient behavioral beliefs weighted by outcome evaluations, as shown in Eq. (2) below:

$$A_B = \sum_{i=1}^{n} b_i e_i, \tag{2}$$

where A_B = attitude toward performing the behavior, b_i = behavioral beliefs, e_i = outcome evaluations, and n = number of salient behavioral beliefs (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

Behavioral beliefs (b_i) are a person's salient beliefs that performing a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes (or consequences) that may be positive or negative. For example, a person may believe (i.e., have a salient belief) that using fictitious pricing increases sales volume or incurs customer ill will. *Outcome evaluations* (e_i) are an individual's assessment about whether each outcome generated from the behavior of interest is good or bad. In the preceding example, the marketer presumably would view increasing sales volume favorably but incurring ill will unfavorably. In general, an individual perceiving that a particular behavior generates mostly positive outcomes will have a favorable attitude toward the behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1983).

Attitude toward ethical/unethical behavior has not been explicitly considered in the conceptual or empirical work focusing on marketing ethics. Ferrell and Gresham (1985), though, suggest that attitudes (in general) will affect marketing decision making with respect to ethical/unethical behavior.

Several existing models (e.g., Ferrell and Gresham, 1985; Hunt and Vitell, 1986; Laczniak, 1983) propose that consequences (outcomes) of ethical/unethical behavior will directly influence an individual's decision to engage or not to engage in a particular behavior. The present approach is different from others because it posits that evaluating the outcomes of a particular behavior directly affects one's attitude toward the behavior but only *indirectly* influences actual performance of the behavior. Furthermore, no previously published *empirical* research has specifically considered the outcomes (consequences) of ethical/unethical behavior on marketing decision making.

Determinants of Subjective Norm. Subjective norm is determined by a person's normative beliefs weighted by motivation to comply with specific referents, as shown below:

$$SN = \sum_{i=1}^{n} Nb_i Mc_i, \tag{3}$$

where SN = subjective norm, Nb_i = normative beliefs, Mc_i = motivation to comply, and n = number of salient referents (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

Normative beliefs (Nb_i) refer to an one's beliefs that certain individuals, groups, or institutions (i.e., salient referents or "important others") think he or she should perform a given behavior. For example, top management (a potential referent) may want an unbiased, clear presentation of the results of a research project; if a researcher writing the report believes this is what management desires, then he or she is likely to engage in behavior that will achieve this end. *Motivation to comply* (Mc_i) represents the motivation, or willingness, of an individual to adhere to what he or she believes important referents want him or her to do. For instance, if a salesperson wishes to comply with a purchaser's request to take him or her to lunch, then the salesperson may intend to do so. In many cases, then, an individual is likely to perform a certain behavior to the extent that he or she believes important referents want him or her to perform the behavior *and* the individual is motivated to comply with those referents (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980).

The influence of significant others has been considered in the extant models of marketing ethics. For example, Ferrell and Gresham (1985) propose that "significant others"—through personal contact, relative authority, and organizational distance—affect ethical decision making; Hunt and Vitell (1986) assert that the importance of an individual's stakeholder groups influences ethical decision making. Empirical research in marketing ethics also has considered the impact of significant others. Investigations have focused on ethical beliefs of top management and coworkers as well as ethical behavior of coworkers (Ferrell and Weaver, 1978; Weaver and Ferrell, 1977; Zey-Ferrell et al., 1979; Zey-Ferrell and Ferrell, 1982). Although top management and coworkers are important others that may have an effect on ethical/unethical behavior, these influences have been conceptualized differently from the present framework. That work has not explicitly examined the *perceived* influence of significant others vis-à-vis what a marketer believes his or her referents think he or she should do. In addition, motivation to comply with referents has not been specifically examined in the marketing literature.

Advantages of the Proposed Model

The proposed model has several advantages over existing frameworks that make it appropriate for testing in the present context. First, it is sufficiently similar and unique relative to other frameworks to warrant consideration as an alternative. Certain components of the theory of reasoned action are similar to those in prior models of ethical decision making (e.g., intentions [Hunt and Vitell, 1986], subjective norms [Ferrell and Gresham, 1985; Hunt and Vitell, 1986]). Others are either not explicitly considered (e.g., motivation to comply [Hunt and Vitell, 1986; Laczniak, 1983]) or different in their conceptualization (e.g., perceived consequences [Ferrell and Gresham, 1985; Hunt and Vitell, 1986; Laczniak, 1983]).

Second, the extant models generally have not been tested, so their validity remains an empirical question. Also, these frameworks often include variables that are broadly defined (e.g., cultural influences [Bartels, 1967]) and, thus, difficult to operationalize. Moreover, operationalization of model variables, or guidelines for operationalization, has been limited (Ferrell and Gresham, 1985; Zey-Ferrell et al., 1979; Zey-Ferrell and Ferrell, 1982). In contrast, the proposed model is testable and uses previously developed measures and operationalizations (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980).

Third, the theory of reasoned action has been successfully used in many content domains, such as consumer decision making (e.g., Sheppard et al., 1988); that is, model components have been shown to predict intentions (and behavior). Therefore, the model may be useful for analyzing ethical decision making in marketing.

Fourth, relative to other models of ethics, the theory of reasoned action is parsimonious. Theoretically, ethical behaviors may be understood through a relatively small number of components. Some existing frameworks have so few variables (e.g., Fritzsche, 1985; Zey-Ferrell et al., 1979; Zey-Ferrell and Ferrell, 1982) that they may not be theoretically and/or managerially useful; others contain so many variables (e.g., Bartels, 1967; Ferrell and Gresham, 1985) that model testing might be impeded.

Another advantage of the present approach is that it does *not* assume the individual perceives the behavior as having ethical content. In contrast to models that incorporate elements of deontological and/or teleological moral philosophies and require that the individual perceive the situation as having ethical content (e.g., Hunt and Vitell, 1986), the cognitive components underlying behavior in the theory of reasoned action are considered independently of whether the behavior is perceived as ethical or unethical. (For discussions of moral philosophy in the marketing literature, see, e.g., Hunt and Vitell, 1986; Lantos, 1986; Robin and Reidenbach, 1987). In fact, for many ethical behaviors in which marketers are interested, individuals may be unaware of a behavior's ethical content; that is, its "rightness" or "wrongness" may not be salient. For instance, a salesperson may have a positive attitude toward giving gifts to customers, not because the behavior is perceived as ethical, but because of the favorable consequences of giving them gifts. Even when the ethical content of a behavior is salient, it may not contribute significantly to intentions. For example, while a certain behavior may be perceived as unethical, an individual may intend to engage in it because it leads to favorable consequences that outweigh ethical considerations or because significant others (e.g., top management) condone the behavior. In the present study, we propose to understand the determinants of particular ethical/unethical behaviors for which the ethical content is not necessarily salient to respondents.

Finally, the theory of reasoned action assumes that the determinants of ethical behavior may vary from one ethical behavior to another. For example, while a person's attitude toward behaving ethically may be related to his or her overall behavior, it may not be related to any *single* ethical behavior. Prior models (e.g., Zey-Ferrell et al., 1979; Zey-Ferrell and Ferrell, 1982) often lack specificity with respect to individual marketing behaviors; that is, the models seem to imply that the relative influence of a given factor on ethical/unethical behavior will exhibit consistency across all ethical/unethical behaviors.

Research Design

To test the theory of reasoned action for its applicability in analyzing ethical decision making in marketing, a field selling context was employed. Different populations could be used to test the theory. Field sales personnel were utilized because selling is an area in marketing receiving much criticism from the general public concerning ethical conduct (Murphy and Laczniak, 1981) and contains many unanswered questions (Murphy et al., 1978). A questionnaire was designed and employed that focused on sales-related behaviors of interest, as well as standardized measures of intentions, attitudes toward the behaviors, subjective norms, behavioral beliefs, outcome evaluations, normative beliefs, and motivations to comply (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980).

Sample

The sample consisted of salespeople obtained through contact with the local chapters of two professional sales organizations located in a major metropolitan area in the Midwest: Sales and Marketing Executives Club (SME) and Professional Sales Association (PSA). In the fall of 1985, the researchers called sales managers from the field sales organizations in SME to obtain their cooperation in the study. Questionnaires were mailed to those agreeing to have their sales personnel participate in the project. Upon receipt, sales managers distributed the surveys to all of their salespeople or (using procedures prescribed by the researchers) to a random sample of salespersons who then completed and returned them directly to the researchers. Accompanying the questionnaire were cover letters from the SME president and researchers promising anonymity and confidentiality and a self-addressed return envelope. Out of 650 potential respondents, 270 returned the questionnaire. In addition, the researchers personally administered the questionnaire to members of PSA during that organization's monthly meeting. Out of a possible 38 respondents, 35 completed the survey. In total, 305 salespeople (employed in approximately 100 companies and located throughout the United States) provided usable questionnaires for an effective response rate of 44.3%.

Median age of respondents was 38.1 years. Eighty-four percent were male.

Approximately three-fifths had a college degree. Median job tenure was 4.9 years; median time spent in a selling-related position was 11.4 years; and median time spent with the sales manager was 2.5 years. Annual company sales ranged between $250,000 and $6 billion, with the median being $60 million. Sample respondents represent over 50 different industries, including those in industrial products and services (e.g., office supplies, data processing equipment, air pollution control systems, transportation services, communication services) and consumer products and services (e.g., liquor, insurance, carpeting). (Because SME and PSA respondents were from comparable industries, responses from both subsamples were pooled for data analyses.)

Questionnaire

All questionnaire items involving the components of the theory of reasoned action are based upon and adapted from standardized measures developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980).

Behaviors. Three specific sales-related behaviors were selected for investigation. The three are 1) providing free trips, free lucheons or dinners, or other free entertainment to a purchaser; 2) giving physical gifts, such as free sales promotion prizes or "purchase-volume incentive bonuses," to a purchaser; and 3) making statements to an existing purchaser that exaggerate the seriousness of his/her problem in order to obtain a bigger order or other concession. These three behaviors were used because they represent considerable variability in the perceived ethical content by the population tested (Dubinsky et al., 1980).

Intentions. A respondent's intention to perform the three behaviors was assessed using a single-item scale. Respondents were asked how likely it was that they would engage in each behavior. Salespeople responded using a 7-point scale, ranging from "extremely likely" (+3) to "extremely unlikely" (−3).

Attitude Toward Behaviors. To assess a respondent's attitude toward each behavior, three evaluative semantic differential scales were used (see Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980, for a discussion of attitude measurement). Using a 7-point scale from +3 to −3, respondents were asked whether they felt each behavior was "good"/"bad," "nice"/"awful," and "enjoyable"/"unenjoyable." To compute attitude toward each behavior, the three scales were summed. Coefficient alphas ranged from .90 to .95 for measures corresponding to the three behaviors.

Subjective Norm. To obtain a measure of a respondent's subjective norm toward each behavior, respondents were asked (using a single-item scale) whether they felt that most people who were important to them thought that they should or should not perform the behavior of interest. A 7-point scale was used with responses ranging from "definitely should" perform the behavior (+3) to "definitely should not" perform the behavior (−3).

Behavioral Beliefs. The outcomes (consequences) of each behavior were generated using an elicitation procedure outlined by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975);

salespeople were used as elicitation subjects. For each behavior, respondents in the present study were asked how likely or unlikely they believed it was that the behavior (e.g., giving gifts to a purchaser) will lead to a certain outcome (e.g., obtaining the purchaser's business). Respondents indicated their responses on a 7-point scale, ranging from "extremely likely" (+3) to "extremely unlikely" (−3). The outcomes for each of the three behaviors are shown in Tables 2–4.

Outcome Evaluations. To assess outcome evaluations, respondents were asked how good or bad they believed each outcome was. A 7-point response scale was used, where +3 = "extremely good," 0 = "neither good nor bad," and −3 = "extremely bad."

Normative Beliefs. For each behavior respondents were asked whether they believed 13 "important referents" thought they should perform the behavior of interest. A 7-point scale was used, ranging from "extremely likely" (+3) to "extremely unlikely" (−3). The 13 referents were obtained through a similar elicitation procedure used for generating outcomes of the behaviors and through a perusal of the marketing ethics literature (e.g., Ferrell and Weaver, 1978; Krugman and Ferrell, 1981; Murphy and Laczniak, 1981; Zey-Ferrell et al., 1979; Zey-Ferrell and Ferrell, 1982). The 13 referents are shown in Tables 2–4.

Motivation to Comply. To assess motivation to comply, respondents were asked for each referent: "When it comes to my job, I want to do what [referent] think(s) I should do." Respondents recorded their responses on a unipolar 7-point scale, where 7 = "very strongly agree," 4 = "neither agree nor disagree," and 1 = "very strongly disagree."

Computation of Measures

To obtain $\Sigma b_i e_i$, for each respondent the score for each behavioral belief statement was multiplied by the score for the corresponding outcome evaluation, and the resultant product was summed for all behavioral beliefs. A separate score was computed for each of the three behaviors. Similarly, for each behavior $\Sigma Nb_i Mc_i$ was obtained by multiplying the score for each normative belief by the score for the corresponding motivation to comply, and the resultant product was summed for all normative beliefs.

Results

Tests of the Model

Regression and path analyses were performed to test the relationships between and among model components (Fig. 1) for each sales-related behavior. Intentions to engage in each behavior (*BI*) were regressed on the attitudinal (A_b) and subjective norm (*SN*) components. Results, shown in Table 1, show good prediction of intentions for each of the three sales-related behaviors (adjusted R^2 ranges from .48 to .59). Regression coefficients indicate that for all three behaviors, both sales-

Table 1. Results of Regression Analyses[a,b]

Criterion Variable	Predictor Variable(s)	Behavior 1		Behavior 2		Behavior 3	
		Adjusted R^2	Standardized Regression Coefficient	Adjusted R^2	Standardized Regression Coefficient	Adjusted R^2	Standardized Regression Coefficient
BI	$A_B + SN$	.48		.59		.57	
	A_B		.37		.36		.50
	SN		.40		.46		.36
A_B	$\Sigma b_i e_i$	.24	.49	.27	.52	.28	.53
SN	$\Sigma Nb_i Mc_i$	.43	.66	.16	.41	.04	.21
BI	$A_B + SN + \Sigma b_i e_i + \Sigma Nb_i Mc_i$	.57		.61		.60	

[a]Key terms: *BI*, behavioral intention; A_B, attitude toward performing the behavior; *SN*, subjective norm; b_i, behavioral beliefs; e_i, outcome evaluations; *Nb*, normative beliefs; *Mc*, motivation to comply.

Behavior 1 = providing free trips, free luncheons or dinners, or other free entertainment to a purchaser; behavior 2 = giving physical gifts, such as free sales promotion prizes or "purchase-volume incentive bonuses," to a purchaser; behavior 3 = making statements to an existing purchaser that exaggerate the seriousness of his/her problem in order to obtain a bigger order or other concession; [b]All R^2s and regression coefficients are significant at $p < 0.001$

people's attitudes and subjective norms are significant predictors ($p < 0.001$) of intentions.

As proposed in the model (Fig. 1), for each sales-related behavior attitudes (A_b) were regressed on the behavioral beliefs–outcome evaluations component ($\Sigma b_i e_i$), and subjective norms (*SN*) were regressed on the normative beliefs-motivations to comply component ($\Sigma Nb_i Mc_i$). The beliefs–evaluations component is significantly related ($p < 0.001$) to attitude for all three behaviors (Table 1). Across the three behaviors, between 24% and 28% of the variance in attitude is accounted for by its underlying components. Similarly, the normative beliefs–motivations to comply component is significantly related ($p < 0.001$) to subjective norm for all three behaviors (Table 1). The underlying components of subjective norm account for between 4% and 43% of the variance across the three behaviors.

The model was also tested to determine whether for each behavior the *components* of attitude ($\Sigma b_i e_i$) and subjective norm ($\Sigma Nb_i Mc_i$) contribute to the prediction of salesperson intentions over and above the contribution provided by attitude and subjective norm. Path analysis coefficients, shown in Figure 2, were computed between $\Sigma b_i e_i$ and *BI* and between $\Sigma Nb_i Mc_i$ and *BI*, for each behavior, by partialing out from the correlation between these two variables the effects of both A_B and *SN*. (Consistent with Fishbein and Ajzen [1975], A_B and *SN* were allowed to covary.) In contrast to theory predictions, the partial-correlation coefficient for the path between $\Sigma b_i e_i$ and *BI* is significant for all three behaviors. Therefore, the beliefs–evaluations multiplicative component contributes additional variance to behavioral intentions over and above attitudes and subjective norms. The partial-correlation coefficient for the path between $\Sigma Nb_i Mc_i$ and *BI* is significant for only behavior no. 1. In this case, the path is equal to the direct path between *SN* and *BI*.

The total variance in intentions accounted for by all four components—$\Sigma b_i e_i$, $\Sigma Nb_i Mc_i$, A_B, and *SN*—is reported in Table 1 for each behavior. For all three sales-related behaviors, the percentage of variance explained by a more general model that includes all four components is significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) than the percentage accounted for by attitudes (A_B) and subjective norms (*SN*) alone. These findings suggest that behavioral beliefs, outcome evaluations, normative beliefs, and motivations to comply explain additional variance in intentions over and above that explained by attitudes and subjective norms. For two of the three behaviors (behaviors no. 2 and no. 3), however, the incremental variance explained, while significant, is minimal from a practical perspective (the adjusted R^2 increases from .59 to .61 and from .57 to .60, respectively).

Analysis of Individual Model Components

Because relationships between components of the model were generally consistent with predictions, the underlying components of attitudes and subjective norms were analyzed to obtain descriptive information on the underlying determinants of the three sales-related behaviors. Using Hotelling's T^2 analyses, comparisons were made between respondents who were above (intenders) and below the median (nonintenders) *intention* for each behavior on each of the four components (behavioral beliefs, outcome evaluations, normative beliefs, motivations to comply). Of the 12 analyses (4 types of components $\times$ 3 behaviors), all but one (motivation

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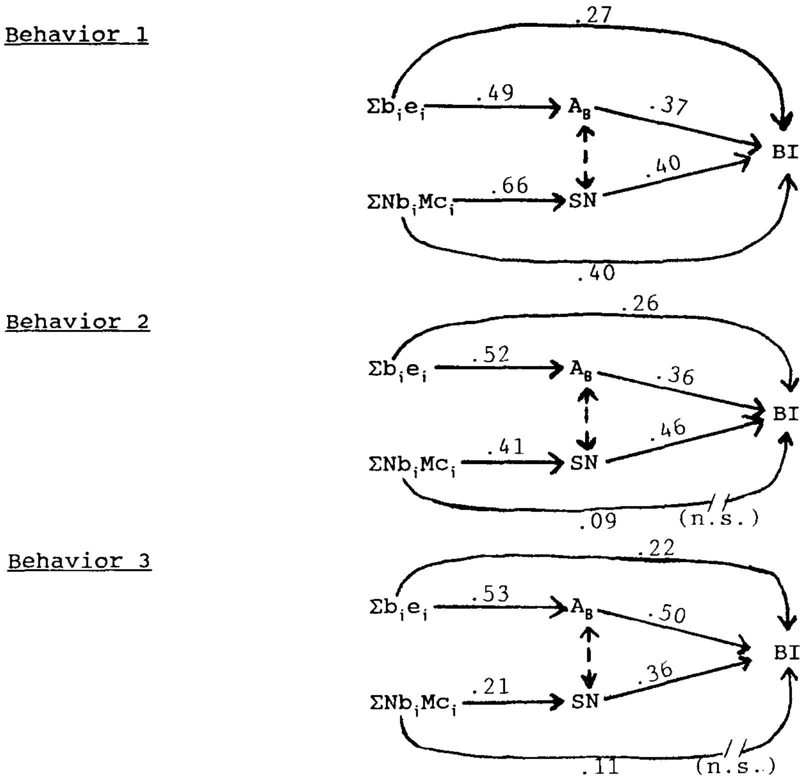

Figure 2. Path analysis results. Key terms: *BI*, behavioral intention; A_B, attitude toward performing the behavior; *SN*, subjective norm; b_i, behavioral beliefs; e_i, outcome evaluations; Nb_i, normative beliefs; Mc_i, motivation to comply; n.s. = not significant. Behavior 1 = providing free trips, free luncheons or dinners, or other free entertainment to a purchaser; behavior 2 = giving physical gifts, such as free sales promotion prizes or "purchase-volume incentive bonuses," to a purchaser; behavior 3 = exaggerating the seriousness of a purchaser's problem in order to obtain a bigger order or other concession.

to comply for behavior no. 2) yielded a statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) multivariate T^2. The multivariate analyses that yielded significant findings were followed by analyses involving univariate *t*-tests of the individual components. The results of the univariate analysis are presented in Tables 2–4. (For completeness, Table 3 also includes univariate *t*-tests results for the motivations to comply for behavior no. 2.)

Behavior No. 1. As shown in Table 2, those salespeople intending to provide free trips, luncheons, dinners, or other entertainment to purchasers are significantly more likely than nonintenders to believe that providing these free "perks" leads to positive outcomes (e.g., helps get the purchaser's business, is a sign of going an "extra mile") except for one (eliminating interruptions in the customer's office), and they are less likely than nonintenders to believe that doing so leads to negative outcomes (e.g., suggesting bribery). Intenders are also more likely than nonintenders to value highly several of the positive outcomes (e.g., expressing gratitude to purchasers, getting to know the purchaser better). The normative component re-

Table 2. Behavior 1:[a] Mean Scores for Behavioral Beliefs, Outcome Evaluations, Normative Beliefs, and Motivations to Comply of Intenders and Nonintenders[b]

	Behavioral Beliefs			Outcome Evaluations		
Outcomes	Nonintenders	Intenders	*F*-Value	Nonintenders	Intenders	*F*-Value
Is cost efficient (i.e., it is a waste of money)	−.33	−1.46	27.69	−1.36	−1.37	.00[c]
Helps me get the purchaser's business	.47	1.53	33.82	2.60	2.63	.14[c]
Gets me to know the purchaser better as a person	1.79	2.55	22.28	2.20	2.54	12.64
Is a sign to purchaser that I am willing to go an "extra mile" for the purchaser	.63	1.64	29.35	2.12	2.65	19.37
Does not allow my products/services to be sold on their own merits	−.45	−1.52	27.08	−1.19	−.89	2.42[c]
Is suggestive of bribery	−.71	−1.93	32.71	−2.53	−2.36	2.05[c]
Eliminates interruptions in the purchaser's office	1.42	1.69	2.00[c]	2.05	2.03	.00[c]
Is hypocritical if I don't want to spend time with the purchaser	.43	−.38	14.88	−.08	.34	6.31
Is an expression of gratitude for the buyer's past business	1.49	2.04	11.44	2.24	2.64	18.02
Results in the purchaser's expecting free "perks" in the future or else he/she won't buy from me	−.06	−.82	13.99	−2.13	−2.04	.41[c]
Allows me to get more information from the buyer	1.71	2.29	18.40	2.44	2.63	5.78
May offend the purchaser	−.58	−1.42	21.09	−2.24	−2.38	.77[c]
Overall χ^2	75.00, *df* = 12			44.02, *df* = 12		

(continued)

Table 2 (*continued*)

Referents	Normative Beliefs			Motivations to Comply		
	Nonintenders	Intenders	*F*-Value	Nonintenders	Intenders	*F*-Value
My customers	.32	1.38	40.59	4.69	4.99	3.07[c]
My friends	−.18	.56	17.49	3.49	3.21	3.26[c]
My competitors	−.12	.22	2.53[c]	2.59	2.44	.94[c]
The legal system	−.69	.09	17.12	5.26	5.18	.25[c]
I	.30	1.97	86.61	6.49	6.64	2.61[c]
Society	.30	.94	12.62	4.35	4.30	.01[c]
Company policy in my firm	.12	1.63	70.45	5.90	6.11	3.44[c]
My family	−.27	.82	36.21	5.03	4.94	.31[c]
Top management in my company	.24	1.88	90.90	5.75	6.12	11.04
Professional selling clubs/organizations	.34	1.62	58.48	4.55	4.61	.15[c]
My immediate sales supervisor	.37	1.93	77.22	5.66	5.95	5.59
Management in the buyer's company	−.02	1.04	33.33	4.83	5.14	4.12
Other salespeople in my company	.38	1.88	75.94	4.13	4.35	.01[c]
Overall χ^2	103.93, $df = 13$			29.62, $df = 13$		

[a]Behavior 1: My providing free trips, free luncheons or dinners, or other free entertainment to a purchaser.
[b]Behavioral belief mean scores are based on a scale from "extremely likely" (+3) to "extremely unlikely" (−3); outcome evaluation mean scores, from "extremely good" (+3) to "extremely bad" (−3); normative belief mean scores, from "extremely likely" (+3) to "extremely unlikely" (−3); and motivations to comply, from "very strongly agree" (7) to "very strongly disagree" (1).
[c]$p > 0.05$; all other values are statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$).

Table 3. Behavior 2:[a] Mean Scores for Behavioral Beliefs, Outcome Evaluations, Normative Beliefs, and Motivations to Comply of Intenders and Nonintenders[b]

	Behavioral Beliefs			Outcome Evaluations		
Outcomes	Nonintenders	Intenders	*F*-Value	Nonintenders	Intenders	*F*-Value
Shows favoritism toward certain buyers	.99	.28	13.25	−.86	−.15	19.51
Reminds customers that my products/services are available	.41	1.30	27.69	2.57	2.59	.10[c]
May be viewed as a bribe by the buyer	.81	−.20	29.37	−2.77	−2.29	20.36
Helps me get the purchaser's business	.12	1.20	46.43	2.62	2.60	.08[c]
May be viewed as being unnecessary or excessive by the purchaser	.91	.16	20.96	−1.76	−1.62	1.04[c]
Is an expression of gratitude for the buyer's business	.51	1.34	22.94	2.27	2.52	6.83
May result in my losing a buyer's business	−.40	−1.27	21.76	−2.27	−2.31	.12[c]
Leaves a reminder to the customer to get his/her future business	.59	1.41	34.14	2.14	2.43	6.64
Reduces the value of my products/services in the eyes of the customer	−.27	−1.20	24.55	−2.46	−2.26	2.42[c]
Represents cost efficient "freebies" to obtain a purchaser's business	−.13	.66	23.13	−.09	1.31	60.34
May offend the purchaser	.30	−.93	46.52	−2.22	−2.38	1.15[c]
Overall χ^2	78.63, *df* = 11			81.58, *df* = 11		

(continued)

Table 3 (*continued*)

Referents	Normative Beliefs			Motivations to Comply		
	Nonintenders	Intenders	*F*-Value	Nonintenders	Intenders	*F*-Value
My customers	.86	.14	21.64	4.74	4.87	.56[c]
My friends	−1.08	−.23	21.76	3.40	3.37	.03[c]
My competitors	−.85	−.65	.94[c]	2.57	2.48	.38[c]
The legal system	−1.41	−.90	8.58	5.24	5.22	.01[c]
I	−1.35	.13	49.00	6.48	6.63	3.01[c]
Society	−.88	−.21	10.56	4.41	4.24	1.32[c]
Company policy in my firm	−1.33	.03	44.62	5.91	6.06	1.93[c]
My family	−1.50	−.45	33.90	4.94	5.05	.47[c]
Top management in my company	−1.30	.20	51.12	5.78	6.01	4.59
Professional selling clubs/organizations	−.95	.09	25.81	4.52	4.63	.69[c]
My immediate sales supervisor	−1.19	.34	54.74	5.64	5.91	5.12
Management in the buyer's company	−1.40	−.09	38.19	4.79	5.12	4.84
Other salespeople in my company	−1.07	.34	45.33	4.33	4.32	.07[c]
Overall χ^2	62.22, df = 13			17.17[b], df = 13		

[a]Behavior 2: My giving physical gifts, such as free sales promotion prizes or "purchase-volume incentive bonuses," to a purchaser.
[b]Behavioral belief mean scores are based on a scale from "extremely likely" (+3) to "extremely unlikely" (−3); outcome evaluation mean scores, from "extremely good" (+3) to "extremely bad" (−3); normative belief mean scores, from "extremely likely" (+3) to "extremely unlikely" (−3); and motivations to comply, from "very strongly agree" (7) to "very strongly disagree" (1).
[c]$p > 0.05$; all other values are statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$).

Table 4. Behavior 3:[a] Mean Scores for Behavioral Beliefs, Outcome Evaluations, Normative Beliefs, and Motivations to Comply of Intenders and Nonintenders[b]

	Behavioral Beliefs			Outcome Evaluations		
Outcomes	Nonintenders	Intenders	*F*-Value	Nonintenders	Intenders	*F*-Value
Helps me get the purchaser's business	−1.77	−.54	52.52	2.77	2.47	15.83
Runs the risk of making promises that my firm (or I) can't keep	1.65	1.04	10.65	−2.70	−2.38	6.32
Gets the buyer to make a buying decision	−.80	.18	28.84	2.65	2.41	7.31
Is not professional	2.41	1.38	34.93	−2.39	−2.29	.31[c]
Demonstrates my concern to the buyer about his/her problem	−1.60	−.10	66.18	2.76	2.51	9.29
Lacks integrity	2.31	1.21	39.19	−2.71	−2.52	1.99[c]
May result in the customer's no longer trusting me	2.33	1.32	40.96	−2.67	−2.65	.00[c]
May reduce the customer's buying interest because his/her problem appears to be overwhelming	.53	.23	2.69[c]	−1.97	−1.56	6.50
May result in my losing the customer's business for good	1.77	.65	38.69	−2.67	−2.49	2.33[c]
May offend the buyer	2.10	.96	55.24	−2.40	−2.19	1.99[c]
Overall χ^2	92.67, *df* = 10			26.73, *df* = 10		

(*continued*)

Table 4 (*continued*)

Referents	Normative Beliefs			Motivations to Comply		
	Nonintenders	Intenders	*F*-Value	Nonintenders	Intenders	*F*-Value
My customers	−1.71	−.92	13.37	4.76	4.84	.19[c]
My friends	−1.73	−.80	27.75	3.14	3.61	10.65
My competitors	.76	−.46	1.77[c]	2.41	2.65	2.59[c]
The legal system	−1.80	−1.15	14.63	5.32	5.15	1.24[c]
I	−1.93	−.86	24.88	6.63	6.47	2.90[c]
Society	−1.39	−.80	8.80	4.16	4.48	4.70
Company policy in my firm	−1.69	−.92	13.94	6.12	5.85	6.11
My family	−1.94	−1.22	15.54	4.93	5.06	.76[c]
Top management in my company	−1.62	−.65	20.81	6.00	5.78	3.81[c]
Professional selling clubs/organizations	−1.52	−.63	18.15	4.59	4.56	.08[c]
My immediate sales supervisor	−1.54	−.58	18.74	5.74	5.79	.17[c]
Management in the buyer's company	−1.77	−1.22	7.06	4.91	4.97	.18[c]
Other salespeople in my company	−1.54	−.59	19.81	4.24	4.41	1.49[c]
Overall χ^2	45.19, $df = 13$			35.49, $df = 13$		

[a]Behavior 3: My exaggerating the seriousness of a purchaser's problem in order to obtain a bigger order or other concession.

[b]Behavioral belief mean scores are based on a scale from "extremely likely" (+3) to "extremely unlikely" (−3); outcome evaluation mean scores, from "extremely good" (+3) to "extremely bad" (−3); normative belief mean scores, from "extremely likely" (+3) to "extremely unlikely" (−3); and motivations to comply, from "very strongly agree" (7) to "very strongly disagree" (1).

[c]$p > 0.05$; all other values are statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$).

veals further differences. Intenders are more likely than nonintenders to feel pressure from all referents (with the exception of competitors) to provide free trips, luncheons, dinners, or other entertainment to purchasers. In addition, intenders are more motivated than nonintenders to comply with certain of these referents, namely, their top management, their immediate supervisor, and management in the buyer's company.

Behavior No. 2. Analysis of the gift-giving behavior yields relatively similar results to those obtained for behavior no. 1 (see Table 3). All behavioral beliefs show significant differences between those who intend to give gifts to purchasers and those who do not. Specifically, intenders are significantly more likely than nonintenders to believe that giving gifts to customers will lead to positive outcomes (e.g., reminds customers about the salesperson's products) and significantly less likely to believe that giving gifts will result in negative consequences (e.g., lose the customer's business). Also, relative to nonintenders, intenders evaluate three of eleven outcomes significantly more favorably—expressions of gratitude for past business, reminders to customers for future business, and cost-efficient "freebies" to get business—and two outcomes significantly less unfavorably—favoritism toward certain buyers and use of bribes. With the exception of competitors and customers, intenders are more likely than nonintenders to feel pressure from referents to give gifts to customers. Moreover, as in behavior no. 1, intenders are more motivated than nonintenders to comply with these three referents: their top management, their immediate supervisor, and top management in the buyer's company.

Behavior No. 3. Those who intend to exaggerate the seriousness of a buyer's problem view all but one of the outcomes (reducing the buyer's interest) significantly more likely to occur than nonintenders (see Table 4). Intenders are more likely than nonintenders to believe that exaggerating the seriousness of a purchaser's problem leads to positive outcomes (e.g., gets the buyer to make a decision) and are less likely than nonintenders to believe that doing so produces adverse consequences (e.g., offends the purchaser). Nonintenders view three outcomes more favorably than intenders: getting the purchaser's business, speeding up the decision-making process, and demonstrating concern to the buyer about his or her problem. Two outcomes—running the risk of making unfulfilled promises and reducing the buyer's interest—are rated significantly less unfavorably by intenders. Intenders are more likely than nonintenders to feel pressure from all referents (with the exception of competitors) to exaggerate the seriousness of a buyer's problem. Furthermore, intenders are more motivated than nonintenders to comply with their company's policy, friends, and society.

Discussion

The purpose of this article is to present an alternate approach for analyzing ethical decision making in marketing and to determine its applicability for marketers (i.e., anyone in a marketing capacity). Results from this test of the theory of reasoned action are consistent with prior research in marketing (e.g., Ryan and Bonfield, 1975). For example, a review of 37 tests in consumer behavior and marketing of the Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) model revealed that the average multiple correlation between attitudes and subjective norms, on one hand, and intentions, on the other, was .709 (Farley et al., 1981). The present findings are compatible with previous work; that is, attitudes and subjective norms accounted for an average of 55% of the variance in intentions for the three sales-related behaviors tested versus 50% of the variance in prior tests of the model.

The approach explored here includes certain variables that generally have not been *specifically* included in other models of marketing ethics. Based upon the findings of the present study, the following factors may influence ethical decision making and, thus, should be considered when analyzing marketing ethics: the marketer's 1) behavioral intention to perform the ethical/unethical behavior, 2) attitude toward the behavior, 3) perceived social influence placed on the marketer to perform the behavior, 4) salient behavioral beliefs about the outcomes associated with performing the behavior, 5) evaluations of those outcomes, 6) normative beliefs about whether salient referents think he or she should engage in the behavior, and 7) motivations to comply with the referents.

Limitations of Study

One limitation of the study is that while the model performed well for the behaviors tested, a substantial amount of the variance in ethical decision making was not explained. One possibility to account for this loss in prediction is that other variables not included in the model influence intentions to engage in the behaviors. These variables (such as a person's prior experience, norms, culture, or environment) may operate on intentions directly rather than through their effects on behavioral beliefs, outcome evaluations, normative beliefs, and motivations to comply. Future research might explore whether other variables in addition to the model components contribute to intentions to perform ethical/unethical behaviors.

Previous research investigating structural paths of the model has generally supported the model's assumptions, although past work has revealed that additional paths are also supported (e.g., direct paths between attitudes and behavior or between past and present behavior [Bentler and Speckart, 1979]). The results reported here also suggest that direct, unpredicted paths were supported. In this case, the behavioral beliefs–outcome evaluations multiplicative component of the model contributed variance to intentions over and above attitudes and subjective norms. Thus, in the present study, support for *both* indirect effects of $\Sigma b_i e_i$ on intention (through attitudes) and direct effects of $\Sigma b_i e_i$ on intentions, for all three sales-related behaviors, was found. At least two possibilities account for this unanticipated direct effect. First, structural relations described by the theory of reasoned action may not be sufficient to describe the empirical data. Perhaps for certain unethical/ethical behaviors, beliefs contribute both directly and indirectly to intentions rather than indirectly through attitudes and norms. A second possibility is that the measures used for attitudes and/or norms include a greater degree of unreliability (and, hence, yield attenuated correlations with other variables) than the measures used for $\Sigma b_i e_i$. Since the $\Sigma b_i e_i$ component incorporates more than a single measure, the reliability of this measure is conceivably higher. The extent to which the problems noted are structural or measurement issues, however, is not clear from the data.

A second limitation of the present test of the theory is that validation of the model relied upon correlation data. The theory of reasoned action assumes causal relationships among the variables tested.

A third limitation of the study pertains to operationalization of the components in the theory. The three behaviors utilized may not be considered extreme in nature; alternate behaviors that may be more extreme (e.g., continued selling of the hazardous Ford Pinto) might have produced different results from those obtained here. Also, the lists of outcomes and referents generated for the present sample may not generalize to other samples. For example, in another sample other outcomes (e.g., enhanced salesperson image) or referents (e.g., religion) may have been salient.

Another limitation of the study is that the SME sales managers distributed questionnaires to their salespeople. Receiving the survey from their managers may have sensitized respondents to the nature of the study and, thus, influenced their responses. Despite these limitations, the study has implications for both practitioners and researchers.

Implications for Practitioners

If subsequent empirical testing demonstrates that the model is useful for analyzing ethical decision making in marketing, the model should be valuable for examining ethical issues within an organization. Of particular relevance to management would be the underlying components of attitude toward performing an ethical/unethical behavior (behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations) *and* subjective norm (normative beliefs and motivations to comply). Management could conceivably enhance the ethical position of marketers by influencing (to some extent) marketers' attitudes and subjective norms through attempts at affecting the antecedents of these two components.

The theory of reasoned action involves identification of potential outcomes of performing a given behavior, beliefs about the likelihood that performing the behavior will lead to the outcomes, as well as an evaluation of the outcomes. Management can communicate to marketers potential consequences of engaging in various ethical/unethical behaviors. For example, offering a bribe to a customer might lead to salespeople's being terminated, censured, or placed on probation. Although management may be unable to affect directly the evaluations marketers would have of the various outcomes, it clearly should be able to influence their behavioral beliefs. To do so would require management to articulate to marketers specific contingencies between performing a given behavior and likely consequences of that performance.

The theory of reasoned action also involves identification of salient referents, beliefs about the likelihood that the referents think a particular behavior should be performed, as well as motivations to comply with the referents. Management could assist marketers in identifying important referents, as well as the referents' expectations. More specifically, management could make salient to marketers certain "important others" (e.g., role-set members), as well as what these referents expect from marketers. For example, management may indicate to sales personnel that one of their salient referents is top management and that one of top management's expectations of the salespeople is not to give gifts to buyers. Management probably would have minimal direct influence, however, over marketers' motivations to comply.

Implications for Researchers

The theory of reasoned action provides an alternate (and complementary) approach for analyzing ethical decision making in marketing. This alternative is particularly appealing because it considers each ethical/unethical behavior *individually* and, thus, recognizes that the determinants (and their respective relative weights) of engaging in a given activity may vary depending upon the behavior of interest. Thus, the model recognizes that the decision to engage or not to engage in a particular marketing behavior must be analyzed in light of seven major factors: behavioral intentions, attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, behavioral beliefs, outcome evaluations, normative beliefs, and motivations to comply. Moreover, the model is attractive because procedures for operationalizing its components are available (see Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

As an alternate approach, interest in further testing the model in marketing ethics will hopefully be kindled. Several avenues for future research appear promising. First, subsequent investigations could employ samples from a variety of marketing positions (in addition to sales personnel) to test further the applicability of the model in a marketing ethics context. Second, empirical work may investigate the behavioral intentions/behavior linkage. This relationship was not explored in the present effort because of data collection time constraints but is hypothesized in the theory of reasoned action and has received empirical support (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Third, variables in future studies might include the model's components along with other factors (e.g., perceived peer behavior) that have been determined to affect ethical decisions making in marketing; such studies would assist in determining how compatible the "competing" frameworks are with one another. Finally, further efforts could be directed at discerning whether external factors (e.g., level of competition, economic conditions) impinge upon the components of the model relative to ethical decision making in marketing.

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