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What is This?
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a part of everyday business language. Many consumers expect a company to act responsibly, not only toward its stockholders, but also toward the entire community in which it operates. CSR is now a regular staple of most companies’ annual reports (Waller & Lanis, 2009). Accordingly, there have been notable research efforts to understand and explain CSR, ranging from defining social responsibility in business, archiving how CSR is planned and executed, and exploring factors that may influence consumer response (see Drumwright & Murphy, 2004 for a full review).

Advertising, in its role as the most visible component of the marketing mix, has placed CSR on the public agenda and helped marketers promote and reap the benefits of CSR efforts. However, it is one thing that the advertising industry helps promote the CSR activities of client organizations and another that the advertising industry itself addresses its own social responsibility as an institution. There has been very little discussion about how advertising views its own social responsibility obligations (Paek & Hove, 2010). The Advertising Council, which runs prosocial campaigns in major media, represents arguably the most visible example of the advertising industry’s social responsibility through its creative work for good causes.

Yet “social responsibility” and “advertising” do not seem compatible in the minds of many Americans and, perhaps, not to advertising professionals either. The advertising profession is frequently ranked at the bottom of the public’s list of honest occupations according to Gallup polling (Jones, 2010). In a recent survey of consumers and marketing professionals, only 35% of respondents who were marketers themselves considered marketing and advertising a valuable profession that benefits society. In response to the same question, the general public rated marketers and advertising executives below politicians and lawyers in terms of their value to society (Parekh, 2012). Perhaps these unfavorable perceptions of social value are not without merit. Norris (1983) argued that the advertising industry may exert social control over its practitioners through the reward-and-punishment system and that individuals exhibit moral

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Social Responsibility in Advertising: A Marketing Communications Student Perspective

Alice Kendrick¹, Jami A. Fullerton² and Yeo Jung Kim³

Abstract

Although advertising has played a key role in bringing corporate social responsibility (CSR) to the public agenda on behalf of agency clients, little effort has been made to define what social responsibility means in advertising. A national survey of 1,045 advertising and marketing communications students from 176 colleges and universities were asked to write their own definitions of CSR. The majority of student responses fell within Carroll’s CSR categories, with the heaviest emphasis on Ethical and Legal responsibilities, a lighter emphasis on Economic responsibility, and the lightest emphasis on discretionary responsibility. Students exhibited “message myopia” in that they largely focused their comments on the creation of advertisements and to the exclusion of environmentalism; client, vendor, and employee relations; diversity or community involvement. Implications for educators of advertising and marketing communications are discussed in terms of how their efforts could help shape the advertising business/society relationship of the future.

Keywords
ethics, skills/traits development in marketing education, marketing education issues, leadership, methodology, message myopia, advertising, course content, social issues, undergraduate education, level/type of education

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myopia once they join. Drumwright and Murphy (2004) found that advertising professionals often shied away from ethically responsible decisions. They described the prevalent attitude toward ethics in the advertising industry with moral muteness, moral myopia, and moral imagination.

In an attempt to expand the discussion of expectations of social responsibility in advertising, the current study asked a national sample of university students who were studying advertising to define social responsibility as it relates to advertising. The purpose of the study was to establish the mindset of advertising and marketing communication students regarding advertising and CSR; to examine the student views in the context of existing CSR research, theory, and practice; and to provide a basis for recommendations to advertising and marketing communication educators about their role in educating students and shaping future advertising industry CSR efforts.

Battacharya, Korschun, and Sen (2011) held that consumers and employees are the two most important stakeholder groups where corporate responsibility is concerned. While the student population does not represent advertising professionals, it is important to examine their perceptions as preprofessionals or preemployees in advertising and marketing communications. In previous studies of advertising and marketing communications majors in ad clubs, more than 80% reported a desire to work in advertising (Fullerton, Kendrick, and Frazier, 2009). By aspiration, these students desire to enter the professional world, where they will be in positions to make decisions about matters of ethics and social responsibility on a personal level as well as potentially influence corporate policies and behavior. Furthermore, student responses can be viewed as a reflection of what they may have been taught in their university coursework. Therefore, the findings herein have implications for industry practitioners as well as educators.

**Literature Review**

**Corporate Social Responsibility**

Social responsibility of a business is most often discussed in the context of marketing and management (see, e.g., Hildebrand, Sen, & Battacharya, 2011). From a classical liberalism point of view, one may argue that the one and only responsibility of a business executive is to make profits and return them to the shareholders (Friedman, 1970). In contrast, stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) posits that corporations are responsible not only for the shareholders, employees, suppliers, and customers but also for the public at large (Dean, 2004; Drumwright & Murphy, 2009; Waller & Lanis, 2009). It is assumed that there exists a “social contract” between a corporation and society, as a member of the community. By behaving in a way that meets the expectations of a variety of groups, a corporation seeks legitimacy and permission to operate within the society. Powell (2011) observed that while external stakeholders’ attitudes toward CSR have dominated the literature, the employee perspective has been “relatively underresearched” (p. 1365).

CSR can be implemented through a variety of activities and efforts (Drumwright & Murphy, 2004) and can be incorporated into corporate performance models. CSR contributes to the important aspects of business reputation and identity. There is both growing sentiment and corroborative case study evidence that CSR should be viewed as a business opportunity and not a cost (Grayson & Hodges, 2004; Porter & Kramer, 2006). In 2006, Porter and Kramer wrote that “the prevailing approaches to CSR are so disconnected from business as to obscure many of the greatest opportunities for companies to benefit society” (p. 80). Describing business and society as interdependent—that businesses need a healthy society in which to operate successfully and that a healthy society needs businesses to thrive—the authors argue that strategic use of CSR makes possible “new frontiers in competitive positioning” (p. 91) as well as the biggest social impact and the biggest financial rewards. Again in 2011, Porter and Kramer (2011) lamented, “Most companies remain stuck in a ‘social responsibility’ mindset in which societal issues are at the periphery, not the core.” The solution, they said, lies in the principle and the mindset they call “shared value” or “creating economic value in a way that also creates value for society by addressing its needs and challenges” (p. 64).

Corporations have invested in CSR activities for business and social reasons. For example, most traditional companies create charitable foundations and give away money to support various social causes. Since the 1980s, cause-related marketing has been used to link a particular product offering with a social cause, in which a portion of proceeds is donated to that cause (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Some corporations sponsor cultural and sporting events and in return get their names exposed to the events’ audiences and participants. Additionally, some companies encourage their employees to volunteer for nonprofit organizations (Austin, Leonard, & Quinn, 2004) while others may take measures to enhance fair treatment and diversity of their workforce. Environmental sustainability is also a widely adopted CSR area. Companies strive to minimize the environmental impact of their business by reducing the waste, reusing the resources and recycling the materials in their operations. Overall, CSR encourages corporations to behave more ethically and respectfully toward society.

**Social Responsibility Issues in Advertising**

Although advertising has been at the front line of promoting the idea of CSR on behalf of their clients and among consumers, there has been little discussion about the social responsibility of the advertising industry itself. In an effort
to create and promote prosocial public service messages, the Advertising Council pulls together creative and research talent from advertising agencies. Founded in 1942, Ad Council has created numerous campaigns, including Smokey the Bear’s *Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires*, *Friends Don’t Let Friends Drive Drunk*, and *A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste*. In 2011, the council secured $1.5 billion of donated media time and space and the pro bono services of 60 advertising agencies toward campaigns for a variety of causes with national significance (www.adcouncil.org). Ad Council’s endeavors reflect Boyd’s (1964) account that advertising is a public service and should contribute to society by producing public service advertising. However, such industry-wide collaboration to exercise social responsibility has been rare.

Notably, the social impact of advertising is often viewed as detrimental. Drumwright and Murphy (2009) hold that most discussions about advertising’s social impact or responsibility involve the message component in advertising. Pollay (1986) discussed a wide array of the harmful effects of advertising on society. The criticism ranged from promoting commercialism, intrusion and irrationality, reinforcing social stereotypes, trivializing language, and provoking negative feelings. While some of Pollay’s (1986) criticism may be considered extreme, it alerted advertising practitioners and urged them to be mindful of the social consequences of the messages they craft.

Both Hyman (2009) and Preston (2010) examined the responsibility of advertisers, though not necessarily advertising agencies, as they focused on the message component. Hyman (2009) proposed properties of responsible ads. According to his framework, responsible advertisements should (a) do no harm or unavoidable harm to any stakeholder while benefiting at least one stakeholder, (b) encourage behaviors that trustworthy evidence supports as consistent with long-run social welfare, (c) maintain viewer dignity and autonomy, and (d) respect consumers’ egos and self-esteem. Similarly, Preston (2010) discussed the legal and ethical responsibility of advertisers for protecting consumers.

Nonmessage issues also are raised in advertising, including those related to daily operations of the advertising business such as dealings with clients, suppliers, and employees, as well as the environment (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009). Waller and Lanis (2009) examined CSR disclosures in annual reports of top advertising agencies and found that the firms exercised their social responsibility through pro bono campaigns for social causes as well as nonmessage initiatives. Out of the six largest holding companies, four had a section devoted to CSR in their annual reports; three stated CSR strategy; and four stated their general CSR areas of interest. Four holding companies communicated efforts to preserve the environment in their daily business activities and four reported CSR initiatives in human resources such as diversity and training. The business case for agency workplace diversity has been advocated for many years by the American Advertising Federation ([AAF], 2012), which represents agencies, advertisers, media companies, and suppliers.

**Student and Faculty Attitudes Toward Social Responsibility**

Though dozens of studies have examined student attitudes and behavioral intentions toward advertising ethics and ethical dilemmas (see, e.g., Grant & Broom, 1988; Farling & Winston, 2001; Fullerton, Kendrick, & McKinnon, 2012; Keith, Pettijohn, & Burnett, 2003, 2008), only a few have investigated student attitudes toward the larger concept of CSR and none that could be found in this review has tried to define CSR from a student perspective.

In a recent study conducted in Australia among MBA students from 75 countries, Haski-Leventhal (2012) reported that students gave the highest importance ratings to primary CSR responsibilities of producing goods and services of high quality, complying with laws and regulations and investing in growth and the well-being of employees. The author concluded that students think positively of CSR, and that they believe it extends beyond making money for shareholders. Among business and nonbusiness students at a U.S. Midwestern university, Kucher (2012) reported that 85% of the students in the sample believed that business has broader responsibilities to society than to its shareholders, which she cited as support for the multiple-party “stakeholder” approach to CSR. Kucher also reported that business students and nonbusiness students did not differ significantly in their attitudes toward CSR.

While there is quite a bit of literature on pedagogical practices and issues involved in the teaching of advertising ethics, few academic studies have addressed pedagogy regarding teaching advertising CSR. Drumwright and Murphy (2009) described some advertising faculty as self-conscious about teaching ethics for reasons ranging from their lack of theoretical knowledge to a concern that raising ethical issues in class might suggest that there is a “dark side” to the business. Haski-Leventhal (2012) reported that the top two pedagogical recommendations by international MBA students regarding CSR were to bring in experts and leaders on CSR topics and to encourage faculty to use appropriate case studies. Haski-Leventhal also recommended integrating social and environmental themes throughout the core curriculum and increasing the number of electives on CSR.

**Theoretical Framework**

In order to understand the social responsibility of advertising as an institution, the current study draws on the literature on CSR, the social impact of advertising and advertising ethics. The goal of this study is to get a picture of what advertising students believe social responsibility in advertising means.
While CSR can be implemented in a large number of areas, Carroll (1979, 1999) conceptualizes that a business has four fundamental types of social responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary. Economic responsibility of a business mainly concerns activities related to its financial transactions with a variety of parties. A business should return an initial investment and hopefully additional gains to investors. In addition, a business should satisfy the customer’s needs and wants in a marketing exchange. Moreover, a business has a responsibility to compensate its employees with fair wages and to respect their rights. The economic responsibility of a business toward society includes creating jobs and helping grow the overall economy. Legal responsibility of a business includes abiding by the laws and regulations of the communities in which it operates. There are numerous laws and regulations that a business should comply with, relating to taxes, environment, consumer safety, and marketing practices. Ethical responsibility for a business mainly requires doing no harm and making efforts to minimize negative externalities created by its operation. For example, using child labor in countries where the law permits may not violate legal responsibility but would be ethically irresponsible. Disposal of chemical waste without proper treatment would be unethical even though it may be legal in some developing countries where the environmental laws are not so strict. Finally, Discretionary responsibility addresses the proactive responsibilities that go beyond societal expectations. According to Carroll’s (1991) pyramid of social responsibility (see Figure 1), discretionary responsibilities are the most valuable, though they are of the lowest “relative magnitude” (p. 499).

Carroll’s (1979, 1999) four-dimensional CSR framework for business can be applied to the advertising industry. The advertising agency holds economic responsibility toward its clients as well as its shareholders. Advertisers hire ad agencies to strategize, create, and execute marketing communication campaigns. With their expertise, it is expected that agencies help their clients build brands, generate sales, manage customer relationships, and ultimately create more profits. Agencies’ economic responsibility toward major shareholders, which are often the holding companies today, appears to be ever pressing (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009). One may even argue that advertising agencies have economic responsibility for creating jobs, facilitating the competition in the free market, and thereby maintaining a healthy national economy.

Legal responsibility of advertising agencies is no simpler than that of other businesses. Although the freedom of commercial speech is protected to a large extent under the First Amendment, deceptive, misleading, and unfair advertising is subject to regulation (Arens, Weigold, & Arens, 2011). The Federal Trade Commission regulates advertisements that violate such expectations. As an example, the Federal Trade Commission in 2011 ruled that Reebok’s claim about its toning shoes’ exercise benefits was unsubstantiated and the company signed a $25 million settlement (O’Donnell, 2011). In addition to making truthful claims, advertising agencies must comply with laws and regulations regarding accounting and environmental practices like any other business (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009).

Ethical responsibility of advertising agencies covers a large number of areas. As Preston (2010) states, ethics starts where the law ends and the law ends very soon when it comes to advertising, leaving a lot of issues to ethics. Take truthfulness in advertising, for example. Although the law generally requires advertising to be truthful, it often comes down to an individual judgment whether a particular message is truthful. The omission of key facts, manipulation of the presentation order of information, and use of potentially misleading rhetoric are not overt lies but may result in deception. Thus, the truthfulness of advertising can be seen as an ethical responsibility as much as, if not more than, a legal responsibility.

In addition, the use of stereotypes in advertising is not against the law, though one may object to it on ethical grounds. The presentation of an unachievable beauty ideal, objectification of women, sex appeals, use of fear appeals, and targeting children and other vulnerable consumer segments are largely permitted by law. Refraining from using such potentially problematic tactics would represent ethical responsibility in advertising.

Another area of CSR is diversity in the workforce. It has been established that the advertising industry has underrepresented racial minorities and females in management positions (Endicott, 2002; Fullerton, Kendrick, & Reichert, 2008; Windels & Lee, 2007; Windels, Lee, & Yeh, 2010). Agencies cite the “pipeline problem” in that there are few minority students graduating from advertising schools (Drumwright & Murphy 2009; Waller & Lanis, 2009). Programs by both the AAF (Most Promising Minority Students) and the Advertising Educational Foundation (Minority Advertising Internship Program) are designed to attract more racial and ethnic minority students to the field of advertising (AAF, 2012).

Discretionary responsibility addresses the proactive responsibility that goes beyond societal expectations. Donating money and sending out employees to volunteer for nonprofit organizations, or lend expertise and resources to tackle serious social problems. According to Carroll’s (1991) pyramid of social responsibility (see Figure 1), discretionary responsibilities are the most valuable, though they are of the lowest “relative magnitude” (p. 499).

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Discretionary responsibility addresses the proactive responsibility that goes beyond societal expectations. Donating money and sending out employees to volunteer for a social cause often fall into this category. Among advertising agencies, monetary donations do not seem to be a popular initiative (Waller & Lanis, 2009). Rather, donation of creative talent seems to be quite prevalent (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009; Waller, 2012; Waller & Lanis, 2009). Advertising agencies are quite enthusiastic about pro bono work on nonprofit accounts for a variety of reasons (Waller, 2012). Pro bono work provides copywriters and art directors...
with the opportunity to exercise creativity with fewer restrictions, which often results in winning awards and in turn enhances their résumés and the agency’s profile. Furthermore, advertising professionals report that they derive satisfaction from making a difference in the world through their work (Waller, 2012).

In addition to Carroll’s (1979, 1999) four-dimensional approach to social responsibility, the variable of message versus nonmessage-related responsibility is incorporated into the current study. As noted above, most discussions about the social impact and responsibility of advertising revolve around the message component. However, the operation and management of advertising agencies involve many activities pertinent to social responsibility (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009; Waller, 2012; Waller & Lanis, 2009). The same type of nonmessage-related responsibility that is associated with any business is still a large part of social responsibility for advertising-related companies. Notably, Drumwright and Murphy (2009) made a distinction between message ethics and nonmessage business ethics in advertising as the result of their interviews with advertising executives. Their distinction is applied in this study.

Research Questions

Research literature indicates that advertising practitioners are not held in high esteem by the general public and, when linked to CSR, their messaging efforts are the primary focus. To address a gap in the research literature regarding university students’ definitions of social responsibility in advertising, as well as to identify the implications that these student views hold for both academe and industry in terms of the advertising business/society relationship of the future, the following research questions were posed:

*Research Question 1:* How do marketing communication students define social responsibility in advertising?

*Research Question 2:* To what extent do student definitions of social responsibility emphasize message or nonmessage aspects of advertising?

Method

Data Collection

A nationwide online survey of advertising students was initiated with an e-mail invitation to an estimated 6,000 AAF student ad club members from 228 universities. AAF ad clubs are open to students who are interested in or studying advertising, and chapters are most often located in communication, journalism, or business schools or programs. Students do not have to be declared “advertising majors” to be a member of AAF ad clubs.

The survey included questions about a number of issues related to their education, career preferences, ethics, and social responsibility. The data reported in this study were generated from an open-ended item that asked students in their own words to define social responsibility as it relates to advertising. The students’ written responses were thematically content analyzed by the researchers and two trained graduate student assistants.

A total of 1,045 students from 176 colleges and universities responded to the survey for an overall response rate of 77.2% of the number of AAF college chapters and a 17.4% response rate of the estimated number of student e-mail addresses. A total of 690 students, or 66.1% of total respondents, answered the questions about social responsibility and were therefore included in this study. Females accounted for 75.9% of respondents and 24.1% were male. More than one fourth (26.2%) were between 17 and 20 years old, 67.2% were between 21 and 24 years old, and 6.4% were 25 years or older. The majority was White, non-Hispanic (80.9%), followed by Hispanic (7.0%), Asian American (5.7%), African American (3.0%), and Other (3.4%). The largest number of students was advertising majors (69.8%), followed by marketing (12.3%), communication (7.5%), and other (10.4%).

Coding

Student survey participants were asked to respond in open-ended fashion to the question: How would you define social responsibility as it relates to the advertising industry? The responses were coded according to the major categories from Carroll’s (1979, 1999) four-part typology of CSR—economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities. Responses were then further coded into subcategories that were derived from themes in the research literature and were provided by the researchers to the two graduate-student coders. After a training session, the two coders independently evaluated a sample of 100 responses to assess intercoder reliability and achieved an intercoder reliability coefficient of .75 (Holsti 1969), which is considered an acceptable level for exploratory studies and those in which a high level of interpretation is involved, such as coding textual responses (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010). The coders analyzed the remainder of the data concurrently, alleviating disagreements as each response was coded.

Two baseline characteristics were analyzed for the 690 responses. First, each response was categorized based on Carroll’s (1979, 1999) four types of social responsibility, then segmented into appropriate subcategories. Each response could be placed into a maximum of four subcategories. The second baseline characteristic was whether the response included message-related content or nonmessage-related content.

Findings

Almost all 690 respondents provided a response to the question that indicated they believed in social responsibility in advertising; only 13 respondents (0.02%) believed there was
no social responsibility in advertising. Another 61 (8.8%) wrote comments that in the coders’ judgment did not pertain to social responsibility or commented without definition, such as “It is difficult” or “Very hard.”

**Research Question 1:** How do marketing communication students define social responsibility in advertising?

Table 1 contains results of the thematic analysis of student open-ended definitions of social responsibility in advertising using Carroll’s (1979, 1999) categorization scheme of economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibility. For the purpose of reporting the findings, data are presented in two ways. The percentage of respondents is used as one base (n = 690). Because students were allowed to respond in an unlimited manner, they could have multiple aspects to their responses. Because up to four were coded, the percentages will add up to more than 100. Table 1 also includes a column that uses the total number of responses as the base (n = 1,253).

Using percentage of students as the base and looking at the four major categories of responsibility, Ethical Responsibility was the most frequently mentioned response by 56.9% of students, followed by Legal Responsibility (50.6%), Economic Responsibility (27.9%), and Discretionary Responsibility (16.2%).

Using number of comments as the base, Ethical Responsibility (36.6%) and Legal Responsibility (30.0%) together accounted for the majority of responses, followed by Economic Responsibility (17.0%) and Discretionary Responsibility (10.5%). Another 5.9% offered unrelated responses, and 1% said they did not believe social responsibility in advertising was necessary or even existed.

Within Economic Responsibility, the largest subcategories were for Client Service, Building/Protecting Client or Agency Reputation, and Being Responsive to Consumer Needs. Within Legal Responsibility, Being Truthful was the largest category, accounting for more than two thirds of responses. For Ethical Responsibility, the largest subcategories were Unspecified Ethical, Unspecified Responsible, Following Personal Standards, and Helping Consumers Make Informed Choices. Within Discretionary Responsibility, the most prevalent response was related to Working for the Common Good, Giving Back to Society, and Promoting Positive Values and Lifestyles.

In terms of the composition of responses, the average number of coded statements per student was slightly greater than two. More than half of the students (56.4%) focused exclusively on a single one of Carroll’s four categories (in some cases with two or more coded comments falling within a single responsibility category). These “category exclusive” student responses were led by Legal Responsibilities (22.8%, n = 143) and Ethical Responsibilities (22.3%, n = 140), which far outpaced economic and discretionary concerns as singular foci of CSR (see Table 2). The other 44% offered more heterogeneous definitions that combined at least two of the four dimensions, though only two individuals offered aspects of all four of Carroll’s categories. By far the most common combination response was Legal + Ethical, offered by 13.7% (n = 86).

The appendix contains selected passages from student responses that illustrate each of Carroll’s four categories of corporate responsibility. In addition, Figure 1 represents an attempt to compare Carroll’s (1979) “relative magnitude” of his categories for CSR with the relative magnitude of definition and sentiment expressed by the students. It should be noted that Carroll stopped short of assigning percentages to his four categories, though he did provide a type of bar graph (replicated proportionally in Figure 1) with rectangular spaces of varying size, and presumably “weight” or frequency, for each. For our student-based graphic, results from Table 2 were used as the basis for assigning percentages across the four dimensions (n = 628), which resulted in the “Other” responses being omitted from consideration. In both Carroll’s and the students’ depiction, Discretionary Responsibility had the smallest magnitude. The magnitude of Legal Responsibility appears similar for both. The major differences lie in the much larger magnitude that students assigned to Ethical Responsibility and the considerably smaller weight afforded Economic Responsibility.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent do student definitions of social responsibility emphasize message or nonmessage aspects of advertising?

More than half (64.3%) of respondents included message-related content, compared with 21.9% that included nonmessage issues related to the process of business, including day-to-day employee functions and activities. The remainder of respondents did not include either message or nonmessage issues related specifically to business. A total of 88 students (12.8%) included both message and nonmessage elements, whereas the majority (51.5%) cited only message aspects and 9.1% mentioned only nonmessage aspects.

**Discussion**

Taking a student-as-stakeholder approach to defining CSR provides a glimpse into how the next generation of advertising industry executives views the business–society relationship. This is important because the professional mindset with which students enter the workforce will affect their performance, as well as their relationship with management, colleagues, and clients. It is also important because to the extent that student views are seen as at least a partial reflection of what they learned in their advertising and marketing communications curricula, there are implications for how educators might frame and teach CSR.
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<td><strong>Ethical responsibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonspecific ethical</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Follow personal standards</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help consumers make informed decisions</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonspecific responsible</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>No risky/unhealthy behavior</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental impact</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No social pollution (offensive, inappropriate ads)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address social issues</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect consumer</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose ethical client and products</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical corporate culture</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No promoting prejudice</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use realistic images</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agency guidelines</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do not magnify consumer fear</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect consumer privacy</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>459</td>
<td>36.6</td>
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<td><strong>Discretionary responsibility</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Working for the common good</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>7.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giving back to society (e.g., pro bono work, donations)</td>
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<td>2.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
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<td>Promoting positive values/lifestyle</td>
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<td>Making consumers feel good, happy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resign questionable clients</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>0.3</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>131</td>
<td>10.5</td>
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<td><strong>Other responses</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Response unrelated to social responsibility</td>
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<td>4.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertising social responsibility does not exist or not necessary</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,253</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
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When asked to define social responsibility as it relates to advertising, the overwhelming majority of student responses fell within Carroll’s (1979) four CSR categories, with the heaviest emphasis on ethical and legal responsibilities, a lighter emphasis on economic matters, and the lightest emphasis on discretionary efforts. Many students referred to “ethics in general” (“nonspecific ethical”) in defining social responsibility in advertising. This finding, in addition to the fact that Ethical Responsibility was the most frequently mentioned category, indicates that students closely relate social responsibility to ethics. CSR-as-ethics, however, is a somewhat narrow definition and does not embrace Carroll’s fourth and highest category of Discretionary Responsibility. In both Drumwright and Murphy’s (2004) interviews with advertising executives and in the current study among students, Discretionary Responsibility was emphasized the least. Only one student specifically mentioned pro bono work, which would qualify as an example of Carroll’s notion of discretionary responsibility. Another student summed up her view as one of ethics and beyond:

At the very least it is restricting or doing no harm to the environment or society. Above that it is helping to fight the current injustices.

The lack of mention of Carroll’s discretionary efforts, which are beyond economic, legal, and ethical behavior, suggest that the student mind-set is far from the “shared value” utopia envisioned by Porter and Kramer (2011) in which businesses create societal value through collaboration among profit and nonprofit enterprises. It was also apparent from the findings that some students are ignorant of, or struggling with, even the business case for CSR (Porter & Kramer, 2006), as illustrated in these responses that suggest they believe CSR is at odds with company success and profitability as opposed to contributing to financial success (see also Porter & Kramer, 2011), as illustrated in the comments below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Frequency of Student Responsesa Across Carroll’s (1979) Dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic + Legal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic + Ethical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic + Discretionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic + Legal + Ethical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic + Ethical + Discretionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic + Legal + Discretionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic + Legal + Ethical + Discretionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal + Ethical</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal + Discretionary</td>
</tr>
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<td>Legal + Ethical + Discretionary</td>
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<td>Ethical only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethical + Discretionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discretionary only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. n = 628. Each student response could be coded for up to four different subcategories. Numbers reflect Carroll’s four major categories of corporate social responsibility.
To be responsible to the environment. However, I feel that this doesn’t directly relate to ad agencies because they are doing work for a client, sometimes work about their social responsibility. Unless there is business-to-business advertising.

Social responsibility starts in each office from how much paper they use all the way to what message they are portraying in their ads. I think the ad industry can do great things to help our planet, but they have to forget about the money sometimes.

Further analysis of student-generated concepts of social responsibility in advertising revealed that more than half could not “see beyond” the advertising message. One student’s definition simply read, “More Ad Council.” The persistent focus on message content ignored myriad aspects of social responsibility, such as environmentalism; client, vendor and employee relations; or community involvement. This “message myopia” suggests that students harbor a fairly narrow understanding of the scope of the advertising business—society relationship.

Advertising professionals are not only at once in the message business but are also participants in the larger business community with its attendant challenges and responsibilities that do not directly involve the creation of advertising. However, only 13% of students recognized this in their responses by depicting CSR as involving both message and nonmessage areas. Those who work in advertising realize that the general public thinks of advertising almost solely in terms of advertisements—what might be termed the “tip of the iceberg” when one considers that most advertising employees work in jobs other than message creation and that the finished ad is the culmination of a number of processes that take months and even years to complete. It is interesting that students of advertising and marketing communications likewise express a stereotyped, message-centered concept of the industry when it comes to socially responsible behavior.

In contrast, Drumwright and Murphy (2004) reported that common ethics and responsibility themes among advertising executives they interviewed included such nonadvertising issues as diversity in the workforce, improving the workplace environment, and preserving the natural environment. Only 5% of students mentioned the need for advertising businesses to work to preserve the environment, despite the current emphasis on environmental sustainability. None of the students mentioned the workplace environment, and only one student mentioned issues of diversity beyond the 1% that cited the message-related theme of “Not Promoting Prejudice.” The scant mention of diversity is particularly interesting in view of the fact that the AAF, of which the students were academic component society members, has created high-profile initiatives for diversity in the workplace (AAF, 2012). In addition, despite ongoing controversies about online privacy and behavioral targeting, only one student mentioned this contentious area as an aspect of social responsibility in advertising.

Implications for Educators

In their roles as facilitators of learning and professional role models, advertising and marketing communication faculty have the opportunity to influence students’ views about how the institution of advertising as well as individual advertising businesses can operate responsibly and even proactively in society. The findings of this student survey may reflect a status quo in advertising and marketing communication education today—that CSR is primarily a matter of ethics, law, and advertising messaging. The future new normal could involve a broader consideration of the role of advertising businesses in society and how business can act on the core principle of co-creating value that contributes to the financial “bottom line” while also addressing social needs and issues. To the extent that educators promote the expanded discretionary notion that CSR, not as a campaign or fad, or something that tempers business success but rather a core way of being for a business that is interdependent with society, they will facilitate and broaden student understanding of and attitudes toward CSR. Along with their students, educators have the opportunity to help lead the advertising industry in terms of the socially integrated nature of responsible principles and practices, rather than remain in a reactive mindset of business-versus-society. Indeed, should such pedagogical and thought leadership evolve, the advertising students of tomorrow will be in a position to win back the respect of society (Porter & Kramer, 2011) for the institution of advertising.

Academics are no strangers to the evolution of concepts, terms, and practices. Veteran educators who began teaching in the 1980s or before witnessed the traditional definition of “advertising” expand to “marketing communications,” “integrated marketing communications (IMC),” and recently to “strategic communications,” among others. Changes to course titles and content were made because the original terms did not describe adequately the scope of what was being taught. Some programs may already have CSR courses. But, for those that do not, a reconsideration of the ethics class, in name and content, may be in order if material such as Carroll’s discretionary responsibilities or Porter and Kramer’s (2011) shared value proposition is to be emphasized.

To effect the paradigm shift within advertising and marketing communications education from CSR as ethics-and-messaging to CSR as a shared value with society, both educators and students will need resources, strategies, and pedagogical tools. Haski-Leventhal (2012) reported that MBA students valued the use of CSR experts and case studies and also recommended the integration of social and environmental themes into the core curriculum. It is beyond the scope of this article to recommend specific elements; however, future research could focus on assessing faculty interest and needs for such materials. Of potential interest would be CSR course syllabi that could not only include but also transcend ethics and law; strategies to integrate CSR into...
existing courses; strategies to create CSR-centric majors, minors, programs, or academic tracks; compendia of reading materials; shorter CSR course modules; case studies and other materials.

One explanation for the message-focused emphasis among advertising students in this study may be because many students either have not studied or have not experienced (e.g., through an internship or other work) the breadth of activities in which advertising businesses engage. Without an understanding of advertising-as-a-business, students may be ill equipped to define CSR in terms of a business–society relationship. Clearly students see ethical decisions as important in advertising, though they tend to view them in the context of the advertisement and not necessarily as related to other activities of business. Therefore, advertising courses, at all levels, could go farther in explaining how an advertising business functions within the larger business community.

Educators could include a discussion of the benefits of CSR to the agency’s financial bottom line. Evidence and case studies that demonstrate the contributions CSR makes toward corporate identity and reputation also could be part of this discussion.

Though CSR is a different subject from ethics, wider in scope and possibly considered to have more of a “halo” because of its prosocial valence, some faculty may feel their knowledge of CSR theory and practice is lacking. But as Drumwright and Murphy (2004) point out in their effort to encourage instructors not to shy away from the subject of advertising ethics, the value in discussing ethics at any level is in raising awareness among students and agenda setting (not telling them what to think, but what to think about). Based on the findings of this study, the same may hold for including material on CSR and advertising. Placing CSR on the student’s professional and academic agenda could not only expand their thinking about the subject but might also influence their career choice.

Limitations and Future Research

Although no definitive list is available of how many dedicated CSR courses are offered to students in the university-as-a-whole or in respective departments, some advertising and marketing programs do offer them. At least one master’s degree program has both dedicated courses and integrated curriculum content around the social responsibility theme (see, e.g., temerin.smu.edu). Future studies should determine to what extent social responsibility and ethics courses are offered in the marketing and advertising university curriculum in order to understand the scope and content of instruction available to students on the topic. By knowing if students are taking courses in social responsibility, which is a limitation of the current study, comparisons could be made among students in terms of their knowledge, attitudes, and intended future professional behavior. Additionally, by using the categories that were developed from the verbatim comments that formed the basis of this study, future research might ask respondents to rate the inclusion and importance of each aspect to CSR. Such quantitative treatment of student definitions could offer more options for measurement and analysis, including the creation of scales, the opportunity for subgroup comparisons, and the ability to conduct factor analyses and other tests.

This exploratory survey of how advertising students define social responsibility in advertising is limited by the content analysis method to being merely descriptive. It also examines a nonrandom, though sizeable, sample of students who are members of college ad clubs, without noting their academic home in colleges of business, communications, or liberal arts. Studies using other methods and involving other groups of marketing and advertising students, faculty, and industry executives should be pursued.

Appendix

Selected Student Verbatim Comments on Social Responsibility in Advertising

Economic Responsibility

Client Service

- They are hired by a client to fulfill the client’s needs, within perspective
- Creating ads that will satisfy the client and still achieve the morals of American society
- We do our best to do our jobs and satisfy our client’s needs
- Benefit the consumer as well as the client
- Following your own moral code while adhering to the objectives you have been given from a client
- You have the responsibility to the client to make sure you deliver a solid campaign. That’s all
- It is our responsibility to raise awareness of our clients through the best means possible

Fulfilling Consumer Needs

- The responsibility to accurately inform the consumer of new products and developments
- Relate and provide service to the consumers
- They (consumers) trust you to a point to deliver a good product
- The industry has a responsibility to put itself in the consumer’s shoes
- Agencies have the responsibility to create and produce ads based on truth and consumer needs
- Keeping the audience members’ interests in mind when creating ad campaigns they will see. Be a part of advertising that helps, not hinders society
Legal Responsibility

Truthfulness

- As far as an agency’s campaign techniques, I think it’s an issue that has been and will be around for a long time—to lie or not to lie
- Honesty. Advertising should not be manipulation
- We have a responsibility to put out the truth on everything, regardless if it hinders our goals
- Advertisers are responsible for displaying the companies in a positive but fair and honest light
- We are to tell the truth. We have a responsibility to our clients to emphasize the positive, but that doesn’t mean we lie about the negative
- I think the advertising industry has the responsibility to be honest. Puffery abounds
- There is a social responsibility to be honest
- Telling the truth as much as possible without whistle blowing

No Deception

- Being able to show the product or service clients produce without alteration
- Do not misguide or misrepresent the product just because the client wants you to
- I feel that our industry already gets a bad rap as “tricking people into buying things they don’t need or want.” This means producing . . . ads that try to eliminate as much manipulation and exaggeration as possible
- It is an advertiser’s social responsibility to inform the public of favorable ideas but not to mislead them. The average consumer might not know any better when it comes to some things, and the advertiser should not take advantage of them
- Not misleading the public

Ethical Responsibility

Maintain Personal Standards

- Following your own moral code while adhering to the objectives you have been given from a client
- I believe that social responsibility in the advertising industry means that as a company, each individual must be responsible for their actions and do these in an ethical manner
- The act of choosing to be moral in given situations that might prove to be unethical
- Social responsibility has to happen on both the personal level and the agency level. Agencies and people should be very open about their policies and integrity
- Responsibility to portray the truth, or to make a difference in the industry by the individual choices we make on a daily basis
- Following the duty of a moral citizen
- Having ethics and moral values, knowing when to say no

Do Not Promote Risky/Unhealthy Behavior

- Nonmaleficence and Beneficence—do no harm and promote good and well-being
- The advertising industry has a social responsibility to the public to only promote safe items
- The advertising agency has a social responsibility to represent their clients in an accurate way that prevents harm from coming to consumers. That being said, advertising is an industry that is based on molding the perceptions of consumers so manipulation of brand image is an absolute necessity
- Social responsibility requires advertisers to act in the best interest of most individuals. Not harming their self-image, message control is also key. Advertising for illicit products should not target children
- Social responsibility as it relates to advertising could be defined as limitations that will not affect the culture negatively. For example, it would be socially irresponsible for an advertiser to create a provocative image that would be viewed by a very young audience
- If I’m not mistaken, I believe social responsibility is addressing the major issues concerning clients’ specific services or products, that is, smoking and alcohol ads should always contain messages that address the harm that can be caused by using these products

Minimize Environmental Impact

- In relation to advertising, I view social responsibility as informing the public about the company and its practices, both good and bad. I would also include environmental concerns, and what the company is doing to protect the environment, as social responsibility
- If the agency wants a “green” personality they should be sure to act that way in all aspects, such as waste management and ads that don’t do anything harmful
- Social responsibility relates to the advertising industry today in how we conduct business—being environmentally friendly with our practices . . . For instance—the agency I work at uses a lot of paper that just gets wasted. So I am now working on getting everyone a recycling bin for their desks
Social responsibility should relate to any industry. All companies should be socially responsible for the harm they cause the environment.

Social responsibility is the industry not being associated with habits that are negative for the environment. Do not suggest direct mailings that will just be thrown away, do not suggest campaigns with excessive waste and so on.

Discretionary Responsibility

Contribute to the Common Good

- Because the advertising industry has so much power over consumer’s perceptions of each other and themselves, I think we should use the industry to promote positive change.
- Doing good for the company as well as society.
- Not lying, sending positive messages, causing greater good for the world.
- Simply doing what is good and right to help better society.
- Social responsibility is the way in which companies use their monetary, networking, and corporate resources in order to better themselves, while also working toward a greater goal for society.
- I would define social responsibility as the obligation to better serve the public. The advertising industry has a duty to use its influence for our common good.
- It’s really easy to cross a line from doing what you need to do when advertising, to outright cheating consumers and society. The advertising industry will always look at things from the perspective of helping themselves, but MUST keep in mind what’s better for society, too.
- Social responsibility is thinking in the bigger sense of how the company’s actions will affect society as a whole and doing what is right for not just the company but for others as well.
- Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is about how companies manage the business processes to produce an overall positive impact on society. Ad companies have a large influence on all ages of the population, so when corporations are not setting a good example, it strongly effects everyone, not just their target market.

Partnering With/Encouraging Socially Responsible Clients

- One large step is to accept clients whose values coincide with your own. Encourage clients to take the actions they claim.

- We must all do our part and be socially active. Advertising can lead this movement with conscientious employees and clients who seek a higher calling. Like the U. S. Constitution says, those with the power to act, have the responsibility to act.
- Promoting businesses to help their community.

Other: Skepticism/Denial of Social Responsibility in Advertising

- It’s not important. It’s not the agency’s job.
- A ploy to get people to buy products under false pretenses.
- I think that advertisers are there to sell a product. It’s the audience that needs to filter the advertisement.
- I don’t think many agencies believe in social responsibility, they have to do what the client wants.
- Everybody wants advertising to be PG13 and we have surpassed that many, many, years ago. Sadly, we can’t turn the hands of time back. It’s hard to say what is right or what is wrong. It would be nice to promote a healthy environment with all natural products and services, and a clean and healthy world. It just doesn’t work that way though, things are beyond control.
- I do not think it is up to advertisers to educate the population on how to be responsible.
- I don’t think it is up to the advertising industry to exploit certain companies and their inability to be completely honest with their products/services. Most ads are created to be attractive in some way and initiate a response. If the ad does that, then the agency did its job. If the consumer complains about the product or service, I would encourage them to do a little research to draw their own conclusions before making an advertising agency responsible for making a dog look like its enjoying Brand X dog food when there is really a steak underneath.
- Social responsibility shouldn’t be placed on the media, as much as it should be on the people. You will come across ads, news, and stories that are fabricated, and it is up to the viewers to be more skeptical.
- Social responsibility now seems to be a trend to sway consumers that a company is invested in its customers when it may not necessarily be true. I feel for certain companies, it is a tactic to increase the credibility and general favor of their customers even though the information presented may not be entirely accurate.

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