

Coronavirus Ethics: Pandemic Severity and Judgments of Marketing Ethics

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Abstract

COVID-19 has required major changes in behavior and created significant health and economic concerns for many individuals. While everybody is affected by a pandemic, there are differences in individual experience of pandemic severity, from vulnerability to the disease, to the circumstances of lockdown, to financial difficulties. We report a field study that explores ethical evaluations of controversial market offers in this novel context, as part of a larger project on marketing ethics. We find that participants experiencing greater pandemic severity evaluate egregious scenarios as less unethical and that the relationships between the respondents' individual circumstances and ethical evaluations are mediated by perceived vulnerability to COVID-19, likelihood of experiencing financial difficulties, and negative affect. Overall, our findings suggest that ethical judgment might be compromised under pandemic conditions, with implications for policymakers and marketing practitioners.

Keywords: *ethics; pandemic; offers*

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics