

# Limits to the Price-Tag Society: Ethical Evaluations of Controversial Market Offers

**Craig Smith**  
INSEAD  
**Yvetta Simonyan**  
University of Bath

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## **Abstract**

Today, almost everything and anything is for sale. The ever-increasing reach of the market, facilitated by marketing, brings many benefits, but also drawbacks. It may be that a better world is only possible without marketing in some contexts, because some things people might want to buy should not be for sale (e.g., the right to shoot an endangered black rhino, space on a forehead to display advertising using a permanent tattoo). We explore lay-person judgements of such controversial market offers and find they are generally aligned with the philosophical critique (Sandel, 2012). In three studies, we identify the underlying ethical theories that inform these judgements, as well as people's assumptions about effects on stakeholders other than buyers and sellers. We also show that these judgements change when evaluated deliberately versus intuitively, raising the possibility that marketers and policymakers might mislead themselves and the public about the acceptability of such offers.

**Subject Areas:** *Consumer Behaviour, Public Policy, Theory and Philosophy of Marketing*

**Track:** Social Responsibility & Ethics