

CAN THE CONCEPT OF THE COMMON GOOD BE THE FOUNDATION OF ETHICAL MARKETING?

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Abstract Marketing is currently immersed in a reconceptualization that allows it to adapt its role in an ethical and sustainable economy. From the criticisms of marketing, it is inferred the need for an ethical support for marketing that so it is clear about the ends and not confuse it with the means and that allows a new relationship with people, that transcends their dimension as consumers and treats them as citizens. In this article, we analyze both from a theoretical perspective and qualitative research with marketing professionals whether the concept of the common good is a valid ethical foundation for marketing, as well as whether it is adequate to respond to the current socioeconomic paradigm. By virtue of what was observed in our research, the common good is adequate to guide marketing at the time of change that it is experiencing to adapt to the new social demands towards the company. We believe it is appropriate because it brings together characteristics that resolve the criticisms of marketing observed by consumers and professionals, especially its short-termism that leads it to confuse means with ends and the reduction of people to the role of consumers. Consequently, we conclude this article with a definition of marketing for the common good.

Keywords:

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1 Introduction

Marketing has been criticized for prioritizing profit over the interests of consumers, despite its potential to address cultural paradoxes such as poverty, injustice, and environmental problems (Kotler et al., 2010). To address this negative perception, there is a growing need for an ethical foundation for marketing that prioritizes the common good and establishes a new relationship between companies, citizens, and consumers. This involves recognizing consumers as citizens with rights and responsibilities beyond their role as consumers (Sheth & Sisodia 2005, 160).

Marketing should represent the interests of consumers within the company, not just represent the company to consumers. To achieve this, marketing needs an ethical foundation that prioritizes the common good and fosters a sustainable relationship between companies, citizens, and consumers. This article aims to explore if the concept of the common good serves as a basis for ethical and sustainable marketing, our working hypothesis.

The article will examine the theoretical concepts related to this research question, including the concept of the common good, ethical marketing, and the relationship between marketing and the common good. By exploring these key concepts, the article seeks to provide guidance for marketers committed to ethical and sustainable practices and contribute to a deeper understanding of the role that marketing can play in promoting the common good.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 The common good

The concept of the common good has been of philosophical and political interest since antiquity, and its definition and application have varied according to the social, political, and cultural context. It is rooted in the recognition of human beings as social creatures who seek a good that extends beyond the individual realm. According to Aristotle and Aquinas, living in a community is not only necessary but also essential for human happiness (Murphy, 2018). In modern times, the concept has been linked to individual and human rights and emphasizes the political conditions in which individuals can achieve their personal ends. While the concept

has been criticized as vague and open to political manipulation (Jaede, 2017), it is currently experiencing renewed interest as it seems adequate to face global challenges.

Definitions of the common good are partial and temporary, never static or universal (Dahl & Soss, 2014). Based on the contemporary utility of the term, we can define it as the one that seeks conditions so that the members of a community can achieve their individual purposes, while generating a whole in the community through relationships or aggregates that allows us to achieve exclusive intrinsic goods of a community (Murphy, 2005). It refers to the contextual conditions that contribute to human wellbeing, such as prosperous communities and environmental sustainability (Haugh & Doherty, 2022).

We can construct a common good identifying the common interest that people have as citizens (Pettit, 2004, 169) We can also face the common good from universalism, defining it as a global concept that includes shared community values, including respect for dignity and human rights and the promotion of social, economic and environmental well-being (Melé, 2009; Kotler, 2019).

There has been a tendency to identify the common good with a value in vogue, such as social justice or sustainability today, but the common good is a concept that, paradoxically, tends to become empty of content when it is identified with a particular value or right.

As a summary of the different contemporary trends, we can say that the common good is a concept whose legitimacy arises from social co-creation and not from a higher authority; process-oriented, not merely a shared social code; actionable, looking for the application and based on the promotion of social justice, equal opportunities, the protection of human rights and citizen participation in decision-making.

2.2 Ethical marketing

Ethical marketing addresses the ethical challenges associated with relationship marketing, technology, and the globalization of companies (Nill & Schibrowsky, 2007). It involves balancing moral principles with economic considerations in the

development of marketing strategies and actions to achieve individual and social well-being and to get marketing to recognize and develop shared utilities (Kadirov & Varey 2014, 193).

The roots of the marketing concept lie in the 1970s, with a clear ethical orientation that limited corporate behaviour (Kotler, 1977; Spratlen, 1972; Dawson, 1980). However, ethical marketing has evolved over time, with various approaches proposed in the 1990s, including virtue ethics (Williams & Murphy, 1990), deontological, pluralist, dialogic ethics (Nill & Shultz, 1997), from the ethics of care. As of the economic crisis of 2008, ethical marketing experienced a new impulse and new directions emerged, such as sustainability, issues related to health and safety, or the treatment of consumers most disadvantaged (Murphy & Martin, 2016).

There are two main approaches to ethical marketing: instrumental, that examines how marketers behave in different ethical situations and normative, that identifies the ideal ethical practices that they should follow (Laczniaik & Murphy, 2014). The challenge with ethical marketing is determining what is understood by ethical (Bufalini, 2003). To address this dilemma, different positions have been taken, ranging from hyper-norms to professional self-regulation. Since the economic crisis of 2008, ethical marketing has experienced renewed interest, with sustainability, health and safety issues, and the treatment of disadvantaged consumers becoming important considerations.

Nowadays we can define ethical marketing as the one whose objective is to combine moral principles with economic principles in a balanced way in the formulation of its strategies and actions, getting marketing to recognize and develop shared utilities. It is marketing “practices that emphasize transparent, trustworthy and responsible personnel and/or organizational marketing policies and actions that exhibit integrity as well as fairness to consumers and other stakeholders” (Murphy et al, 2005, XVIII).

In practice, ethical marketing ranges from companies focused solely on economic benefit to those whose primary aim is consumer satisfaction (Smith & Quelch 1996, Sciarelli 2006). Shared values, such as honesty, responsibility, justice, respect, transparency, and citizenship, have been established as a common basis for ethical marketing professionals (AMA, 2020). Ethical marketing typically contributes to a

more culturally sensitive and socially conscious business culture (Tranver et al., 2021).

3 Methodology

To examine our research hypothesis, which states that the common good concept provides adequate philosophical support for ethical & sustainable marketing, we used qualitative conceptual analysis in this study. After presenting a theoretical framework that included concepts such as ethical marketing and the common good, we explored, based on secondary data, definitions and frameworks related to the practice of ethical marketing and the application of the common good in economics and marketing. We used content analysis to analyze various definitions and approaches to the relationship between marketing and the common good and identify relevant patterns or themes. These patterns, themes, and keywords helped us conceptualize marketing for the common good.

4 Results

The relationship between marketing and the common good is relevant because both concepts implicitly address human needs. The most accepted definitions of marketing emphasize the concept of value creation, contribution, and transmission to consumers. The common good is considered a guiding ethical principle in macro-marketing, which uses distributive justice as a tool for implementation. Critical marketing has analyzed the relationship between marketing and the common good for consumers and society to demystify ideological approaches underlying marketing practices and propose new possibilities and visions.

We analysed 13 articles published between 2000 and 2020 that establish a relationship between marketing and the common good. We compiled a table of definitions of marketing and the common good based on the key ideas of the articles (see Table 1).

In the contributions analysed we find that when related with the common good, sustainability and ethical values appear in almost all definitions. The relationship between marketing and the common good is relevant because both concepts implicitly address human needs. The most accepted definitions of marketing

emphasize the concept of value creation, contribution, and transmission to consumers.

Table 1: Summary definitions of marketing and the common good

Author	Key Idea
Mick, 2007	The maximum potential of marketing is in the good common (in addition to socio-ecological obligations and public appreciation).
Mish and Miller, 2013	A sustainable aggregate marketing system allows resources to be managed to satisfy needs and wants while being constrained by social forces and natural resource limits .
Pittz et al, 2019	Common good as a guiding ethical principle and distributive justice as a tool.
Sherry 2013, Saren 2007, Tadjewski and Brownlie 2008; Zwick and Cayla 2011	May marketing be humanized and broaden its vision.
Kotler et al, 2010 Moreno Martínez and Margounato, 2011)	Marketing must be focused on human beings and must recognize the global humanity as a subject of rights and deserving of the common good.
Kotler (in Fernandez and Seijo 2010)	Conjunction of 3 objectives: the well-being of people , the satisfaction of consumer needs and the profit of the company.
Sarkar and Kotler (2018)	Activist brands: their activity protects and serves good common.
Baptista and Suarez (2010)	Marketing and the common good implicitly satisfy human needs .
Melé (2002)	Philosophical anthropology, property rights, the nature of the company, business sense, obligations, corporate responsibilities, other responsibilities and the resolution of conflicts of interest.
Gaski and Etzel (2013)	Treat customers fairly while maintaining product quality, charging reasonable prices, providing adequate service and launching appropriate and truthful messages about their offers (Marketing Mix for the common good).
Sherry (2013)	A geocentric and econocentric orientation that seeks the systemic common good and not individual satisfaction.
Urbany (2013)	Marketing as clarity: Companies are obliged to create a better world and society, which challenges marketing to establish a relationship between the company and the client based on honesty and dignity .
Sherry (2013) Hardt and Negri (2009)	Lasting happiness (eudemonia) as a common good and a marketing utopia.

These definitions have a systemic approach and are not based on the objectives of the companies. Humanity and not only customers must be the focus of companies' marketing. Even in the most operational definitions, such as the marketing mix (Gaski & Etzel, 2013), they include ethical values and references to sustainability.

The most accepted definitions of marketing emphasize the concept of value creation, contribution, and transmission to consumers. The common good is considered a guiding ethical principle in macro-marketing, which uses distributive justice as a tool for implementation. The relationship between marketing and the common good for consumers and society help demystify ideological approaches underlying marketing practices and propose new possibilities and visions.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

When analyzing the definitions, we find that it is a contextual common good, adapted to today's society. On the one hand, they try to avoid the common criticisms of marketing regarding the generation of needs and short-termism, and on the other, they try to integrate universal values. They also include complete humanity as a subject, something that also occurs in the latest definition of marketing from the American Marketing Association (AMA, 2017).

As a conclusion, we can say that, according to the current literature, the concept of the common good can provide a philosophical basis for ethical marketing, as well as sustainable marketing.

Based on our analysis, we propose a definition of marketing for the common good: Marketing for the common good is the philosophy, processes and organizational activities that aim to cover real needs of society and facilitate collective happiness by creating value and seeking, through commitment to honesty, justice, sustainability and human dignity, a triple positive impact on the economy, society and the environment.

Due to the limitations of this work, we have had to put aside social and business dimensions that derive from an ethical and sustainable approach to marketing. In future research, both quantitative and qualitative we want to address challenges associated with the common good as the ethical support for marketing include the lack of agreement on the concept and potential tensions between ethical considerations and business objectives. Also, we will create a model that includes all this references and offer an actionable path for marketing professionals.

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