

The ethical behavior of the telecommunications companies in Morocco

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Abstract

Business ethics is an increasingly important theme in management research. The objective of this research is to identify the main factors that influence the ethical behavior of the salesmen in telecommunication sector in Morocco. The methodology used is qualitative one.

The most important result is that there is a conflict between the code of ethics imposed by the company and the managers who supervise the respect of them, and the values held by the salesmen in their relationship with customers. Sometimes, achieving goals seems more important than an ethical behavior.

Key words : Ethics, values, telecommunication sector, salesman,...

Introduction

Nowadays, we are exposed to common problems: ecology, economic development, pollution, economic crisis... which require the involvement of all nations.

According to Rischard (2002), three types of new issues are to be considered : the environment, the fate of human being, the insufficiency of global rules and ethics.

These new questions imply the definition of ethical rules. Ethics is more prevalent in the context where the environment becomes a global issue. Nevertheless, linking ethics and business seems difficult: how to be moral while making profits.

In a turbulent environment, companies must develop defensible competitive advantages that will enable them to win in the competition.

In this universe where the difference can be created by the image, ethical strategies can be considered as an added value (Lipovetsky, 1992). Ethical practices are in the core of the companies' interest concerned by meeting the new expectations and demands of consumers. In a competitive world where commercial battles are won on image, ethical strategies appear as instruments for extending power and adding value to the brand (Lipovetsky, 1992).

For McGuire (1963), ethics implies the awareness that the company evolves with stakeholders which are taken into account in its actions. Bergmann (1997) identifies three areas of ethical practices in companies: actions towards employees, towards customers and suppliers, and towards society.

According to Lavorata and Leroux (2004), the integration of ethics by companies is explained, first of all, by external reasons such as consumer pressure. Ethics can be a possible way to restore consumer confidence and build loyalty (Mercier, 1999).

For Siado-Martin and al. (2015), marketing, in this case, becomes the voice of the consumer in the company. If the company is honest, it adjusts its offer to the wishes of its customers ; if it isn't, it will be denounced on social media.

However, although companies are aware of the need to favour the ethical behaviour of their employees, especially salesmen (in direct contact with customers), it is not always easy to

identify the different factors that can influence the ethical behaviour of the latter. While some researchers have proposed models for understanding the ethical process of the individual at work (Jones, 1991 ; Trevino, 1986), few ones have focused specifically on the salesmen (Honeycutt and al., 2001; Babin and al., 2000). The observation of an asymmetry of information between the seller and the buyer requires the creation of ethical codes (Arrow, 1973).

Moreover, in a context of intense competition, telecommunication operators in Morocco must take into consideration the emancipation of their customers who are increasingly concerned about ethics.

After endogenous growth over the last 15 years, the sector is showing signs of slowing down with the decline of the incomes and profits due to the competition and saturation (Ministry of Finance Report). Today, telecommunication operators need to establish a real connection with consumers, in order to gain their trust.

Then, a question may arise : what are the different factors that can influence the ethical behaviour of salesmen in telecommunication sector?

The objective of our research is to identify the main factors that influence the ethical behavior of the salesmen. Logically, it can be assumed that two types of factors are involved: those related to the individual and those that depend on the company. Thus, we sought to determine to what extent the ethics of the company, conceptualized by the ethical climate, could influence the ethical behavior of the salesperson. Indeed, if managers implement policies that promote ethics within their company, it becomes necessary to question their effectiveness.

Literature review

To answer the question, we will base our work on two aspects :

- The concept of ethics : according to Grzesiuk and Wanat (2010), ethics refers to the rules and principles that define good and bad conduct. Holbrook (1999) characterizes ethics as a component of other-oriented consumer value.
- The implementation of an ethical policy: it can be a sincere reaction but also an opportunistic one allowing to prevent or to manage the risks of conflicts. According to Verna (1996), the company can promote values within the framework of a proactive ethics; as it can be satisfied to follow the law and to set up internal rules of conduct in conformity with the legislation. In this case, it is a reactive or defensive ethic whose objective is to prevent a make up actions for the victims (Verna, 1996).

First, we need to define the concept of ethics. According to the Littré, ethics is the science that determines the distinctive characteristics of good and bad in human behavior. We are in the concrete reality of human choices and not in an abstraction that would be mainly of the moral order.

This definition of ethics leads us to question the ethics in business. Indeed, we often associate the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with the corporate ethics. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (1997) defines it as the ongoing commitment of business to act ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of its employees and their families, the local community and society as a whole.

Boatright (1997) defines it as the set of statements made by companies about their responsibilities beyond their legal and economic responsibilities.

- The difference between ethics and morality : The terms ethics and morality are derived from the same etymology, which often leads to confusion. Wunenburger (1993) indicates that the Greek root of the word ethics (ethos) finds its symmetrical form in the Latin term Mores from which the term morality is derived. According to Ricoeur (1990), morality constitutes an individual hard core which founds the notion of good and evil and its is situated upstream of decision and action.
- The difference between ethics and deontology : Deontology is a set of codes of good conduct which are specific to a profession. It is defined as "professional morality" by Nillès (1999). Following the work of Isaac (1998), deontology is defined as a set of rules that a profession, or a part of the profession, adopts through a professional organization, which becomes the authority for the elaboration, implementation, monitoring and application of these rules.

The reasons for developing ethics in business

If companies have recently become interested in the concept of ethics, it is for different reasons Lavorata (2004).

First of all, there are internal reasons. there is a need for the company to create a common cultural reference and to clarify values, but also a desire to guide or control the behavior of employees (Mercier, 1999). The company will justify any act or decision in terms of moral standards and values, which is reflected in the formalization of ethics through codes or ethics committees.

External reasons also explain the ethical approach, through the pressures of the social and political environment (Mercier, 1999). We are moving from a culture of mass consumption to a specific consumption that is aesthetically and culturally more demanding (Koslowski, 1988). The consumer takes into account not only the material aspects of products but also their symbolic and cultural quality (design, symbol...). The new attitude towards consumption is defined by the search for a social identity.

For companies, the problem is to succeed in moving from conceptualization to application of ethics by identifying the obstacles likely to prevent the ethics' implementation in business. Business ethics is therefore approached by three schools :

- The American school advocates ethics as means of increasing the company's profits. Economic development is possible by taking into account the interests of each of the stakeholders.

This is the main school in business ethics. According to this school, an implicit contract is made between the company and the society. The company can make a profit, but on the other hand, it undertakes to be responsible towards the community in view of the central role it plays.

- According to the second school (Friedman, 1962), the economy is neither moral nor immoral, its position is amoral. Business ethics is seen as a corporate culture that makes it possible to obtain complete dedication from employees. Any employee's action on the contrary to the ethical code (defined by the company) puts him or her at odds. Business ethics for companies is a way to restore their image.

- For the German school, or school of discussion, the basis is to obtain a consensus on the ethical standards that should be adopted in business by all the people involved. In this approach, the focus is on the employees within the company. While consensus-building seems to be the

best way to ensure acceptance of the rule by the people involved, it is also the best way to ensure that the rule is accepted by all.

- A fourth school sees business ethics from the point of view of the individual insofar as it is people who make decisions. The question of individual responsibility for all is emphasized for a social responsibility of the company (Lipovetski, 1992).

The challenging ethical behavior of the salesmen

As far as the sales force management is concerned, studies focus on two main areas (Lavorata, 2004):

- The link between the values of the company and those of the salesmen: stemming from the theory of the firm (Chatman, 1989), this link has been studied in the context of sales and ethics by Schwepker (1999), who has endeavoured to establish a link between ethical conflict, commitment to the company and sales turnover.

- The influence of managers in the ethical decision-making process of the salesmen has been analyzed and also the link between the philosophy of the sales managers and its influence on the salesmen (Bass and al., 1998).

Researches of individual salesmen characteristics on ethics are interested by:

- The influence of the personal characteristics such as age, education, gender (Wotruba, 1990) or behavioral characteristics on the ethical decision making process of the salesmen. the relationship between machiavellianism and marketing or selling (Bass and al., 1998).

- Ethical judgment and evaluation, with researchers identifying situations that pose an ethical dilemma for the salesperson (Dubinsky and al, 1980); others focusing on the deontological and teleological evaluation processes impact of ethical judgment on the salesmen decision making process (Hunt and VasquezParraga, 1993).

- The seller-buyer relationship by the analysis of the role of trust and integrity (Swan and Nolan 1985); the use of personal incentive methods (Kelley and Dorsch), and the ethical differences between the seller and the buyer (Dubinsky and Gwin, 1981)

Methodology

Following our literature review, it became necessary to call on an exploratory study to carry out this research. Indeed, the study of ethics in Morocco's telecoms sector is underdeveloped, so it was necessary to mobilize an exploratory study.

Morocco's telecommunication sector represents almost 35 billion dirhams. The market shares are divided between three operators: Maroc Telecom (38%), Orange (34%) and Inwi (28%).

The Moroccan telecommunication sector has set itself ambitious targets for 2023. The Internet customer base should reach 33 million subscribers, while the wireline broadband and ultra-broadband customer base (ADSL and FTTH) will reach 2.4 million dirhams.

The overall phone customer base in Morocco consolidated by 5.1%, to 57.2 million subscribers, at the end of September 2022 (Direction des études et des prévisions financières). This growth was driven by a 5% increase in the mobile phone customer base, which reached 54.6 million subscribers, and a 5.3% increase in the fixed-line customer base, with 2.6 million subscribers.

The aim of this research is to explore and seek an understanding of the ethical behavior. The objective is to propose new conjunctions between concepts in a given theoretical field. So, we need a qualitative approach.

In order to minimize bias in the study, we have opted for a single segment, namely the "residential" segment, also known as the "general public" segment.

We used two interview guides: one for the managers and the other one for salesmen.

- Interviews with managers: we interviewed three managers (two women and one man) at Maroc Telecom, Méditel and Inwi in Marrakesh.
- Interviews with salesmen: we administered an interview guide to a sample of three salesmen (two men and one woman) in each of the three telecom agencies.

To process the results, we chose the thematic content analysis, a technique that seeks to capture the interviewees' words as objectively as possible. Then, to gain a full understanding of the phenomenon under study, we carried out a two-stage analysis:

- Interviews with managers which are analyzed with a view to describing and understanding the procedures to ensure ethical behavior in the sales department.
- Interviews with salesmen which are analyzed from a cross-sectional perspective, with a view to describing and understanding the behavior adopted to achieve sales objectives in the face of the constraints of ethical codes.

To summarize the field access strategy, we propose the following summary table:

Table: Qualitative research strategy

Step	Aim	Approach
Qualitative survey of telecommunication operator managers	Understanding of ethical procedures to be followed	Descriptive analysis
Qualitative survey of salesmen	Understand how to deal with ethical imperatives in the pursuit of business objectives	Explanatory analysis

Author

Findings

Based on our interviews, we have noted that all three operators implement procedures aimed at establishing an ethical framework in the relationship between the company and the customers.

The operators even tend to impose practices to be respected internally. The three operators formalize the interactional process through two levels: taking charge, processing requests, which correspond to two dimensions: the interactional dimension and the procedural dimension.

- *The interactional dimension*

This is the phase when the customer comes into contact with the sales department. This interactional step is important for the customer, who expects to be listened to and well-informed. But, it is also important for the salesmen and the manager, to build customer loyalty and establish a lasting relationship with the customer, or even succeed in relational sales later.

The salesperson is obliged to inform the customer of all the elements relating to the offer in question, as well as the timescales for commissioning and handling complaints in the event of a problem. In this case, any information shared becomes a commitment to be honored by the company.

However, it should be noted that information such as commissioning time is sometimes given as a rough guide, taking into account the normal processing time, without making unrealistic promises. Some cases may require a feasibility study (as with fiber optics) and the implementation of an action plan, which may take longer.

- ***The procedural dimension***

For all three operators, the procedural dimension of selling is paramount. It begins with an evaluation of the behavior according to pre-established criteria (code of ethics).

According to interviews with managers, they ensure that their salesmen comply with their companies' codes of ethics.

All three operators have a formal code of ethics, which is communicated to all staff, including the sales agencies that interface with customers.

- Ethics at Maroc Telecom are reflected in the social policies adopted in human resources management, the promotion of ethical and transparent relations with customers and partners, and the contribution to environmental protection by optimizing the company's consumption and encouraging eco-gestures to reduce the carbon footprint. This operator is certified ISO 27001 version 2005 (information security management system) and ISO 9001 version 2008 (quality management system). Those certifications have been renewed, and several business information systems have been upgraded and new applications designed for web-based customers. Its relations with its various business partners and suppliers are selected according to a purchasing procedure that respects business ethics. The company's commitment to society has been shared with its various partners since 2010. Customer satisfaction is at the heart of the company's interests. To meet customer needs and expectations, the company is committed to offering innovative solutions.

- Orange adopts an ethical charter for data and artificial intelligence, setting out the company's ethical values when it comes to data and artificial intelligence. This charter was drawn up by the Orange Data and AI Ethics Council. By adopting it, Orange undertakes to develop a set of processes to support the company in this ethical and responsible approach, for the benefit of its customers and employees alike. The quality of the network, the quality and availability of products and services, the welcome given to customers at sales spaces, and after-sales service are all keys to achieving excellence.

- Inwi also aims to be a good corporate citizen. It has its own code of ethics. The company ensures the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data. For any direct marketing operation, whatever the media used, carried out by Wana Corporate to inform the customer of its offers and services, once the customer has given his consent. The user expressly and unreservedly acknowledges having been fully informed in advance.

According to interviews with the managers, they ensure and supervise the compliance with institutional responsibilities by following fundamental and basic ethical principles such as honesty. Not forgetting the law governing the sector, such as Law 09-08, and all the information that must be communicated in advance, in accordance with the law.

They ensure also the compliance with organizational responsibilities. In fact, they constantly check that salesmen provide accurate and complete information to customers. The code of ethics must be respected during the sales meeting, especially with regard to the information to be shared: "We have a procedure that requires to print out a summary of all the information that the customer must have about the offer to which he has subscribed".

But the most important issue for the managers is to be able to supervise the individual responsibilities of salesmen when it comes to developing specific information for certain customers. Ethical behavior on the part of the salesperson remains difficult to control "I was once shocked by an offer made to a customer that was going to cost her a lot of money, when there was an offer that could satisfy her need... I had to intervene during the sales meeting".

It's a challenge for the managers. They say that it is difficult to achieve :

- Total consistency between the company's values and those of the salesmen. The question that constantly arises is whether it is possible to simultaneously manage sales and ethics. There are indeed ethical conflicts on the part of the salesmen, when they deal with the ethics' management within the company.

- A real influence in the salesperson's ethical decision-making process "we can not be by their side all the time". There is a sense of dichotomy between the ethical perspective of managers and salesmen one, as pressures differ.

In our interviews with salesmen, we found that they are faced to a dilemma: they have sales objectives to achieve due to tough competition. They are very concerned about sales achievements, as these influence the rewarding (an important motivation in this job).

However, on the other hand, salesmen feel being under pressure because they are informed about the ethical code and the need to respect it. This pressure is internal, as it is linked to compliance with procedures "there are sanctions for non-compliance with the charter" ; but it is also external, coming from customers "I try to behave ethically, as I'd rather not make a sale than have to deal with complaints afterwards".

However, it proves the difficulty to integrate the company's code of ethics while selling, as the constant pressure leads to omissions "sometimes, there's information that may seem obvious to me but not to the customer" "when there's a long queue, we try to shorten the time allotted to each customer".

Ethical decision-making by salesmen seems to be influenced by their own personal values, their relationship with the manager, and the sales situation in which they find themselves. The competitive profile doesn't prioritize the ethical code, his success seems more important "I have objectives to achieve and why not exceed them and get a commission rewarding".

The sales situation is a specific one. It can be a breeding ground for unethical acts. The salesmen are pulled by "ethical dilemma" (Wotruba, 1990). Salesmen are not always followed by their managers. They are more governed by their personal and individual values, and may be more inclined to develop unethical behavior.

Conclusion

Research on ethics has focused mainly on salesmen as intermediaries between company and customers. The main focus has been on role conflict and ambiguity. They were drawn from sales, marketing and management literature (Chonko, 1982).

The aim of our research is to identify the main factors influencing ethical behaviour in sales agencies in the telecommunications sector in Morocco. Logically, it can be assumed that two types of factors are involved: those linked to the individual and those dependent on the company. We, therefore, sought to determine the extent to which the company's ethics could influence the ethical behavior of the salesmen. Indeed, if the managers implement policies that promote ethics within their companies, it becomes necessary to question their effectiveness.

We concluded that regulations in the sector oblige operators to question their codes of ethics. There is a real need to create a common reference point and clarify values, but also a desire to guide or control the behaviour of employees, including the salesmen, who are the staff in contact with customers (Mercier, 1999). Through a top-down approach, telecommunication operators ask every commercial act in term of moral standards and values, which translates into the formalization of ethics through codes.

Furthermore, the complexity lies in the fact that managers are responsible for constantly monitoring compliance with ethical codes, and sometimes for implementing punishment systems. The aim is to achieve a relationship with customers based on trust (Beverland, 2001).

Two main factors are involved in the relationship between the operator and his customers: ethics policies within the company and personal characteristics. A balance between the two seems essential to succeed in competition and to establish a lasting relationship with the customer.

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