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# Ethical Issues in Business Marketing Researches

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Various ethical issues arise in different stages of management and business marketing research. The current study aims to take look at practices that ensure informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, deception, and legal aspect in data management in procedures involved in marketing research. **Research design, data and methodology:** Literature content analysis was conducted for this research and the current author has investigated journal articles mostly to guarantee a high degree of content validity and to keep the advantages of qualitative content approach. The current study explores manifest topics regarding the ethical issues of business marketing research. **Results:** The current study found that ethical consideration needs to be similarly significant and learning from the previous researchers' approach to handling this issue is helpful for future research and is essential to have additional guidelines. Also, four findings (Lack of Informed Consent, Deception, Invasion of Privacy and Confidentiality, and Legal Data Management) indicate that marketing researchers need to consider before undertaking any project. **Conclusions:** Overall, the study presents practical suggestions though unexhausted. By raising these ethical marketing issues, consumer behavior disciplines will continue to expand and contribute positively towards attaining thoughts, feelings, and decisions that positively contribute to marketing research as the foundation for effective marketing practices.

**Keywords :** Business Marketing Research, Ethical Issues, Ethics Requirement for Authors

**JEL Classification Code:** C35, M31, M39

## 1. Introduction

Various ethical issues arise in different stages of management and business research. However, professional bodies have spelled out some of these issues in social sciences, with some relating directly to research integrity and the involved disciplines. Marketing is one of the professional fields in business that requires one to have the right ethical approach. As the art of manipulation and persuasion, marketing activities need researchers to adhere to moral rules to attain good convincing power to achieve

the best competitive level in every market. Company researchers mostly use influential powers to increase their competitive and conversing power. In companies, these practices are through tools relating to 4ps for markers with the ambition to earn more profit, beat their competitors, and attain more market shares to carry out unethical practices. These approaches make ethics insight a social responsibility in marketing research due to the need to reflect on these practices at a societal level.

Additionally, researchers ensure the company's marketing boundaries are keen on consumer satisfaction to earn their trust and see the company's high level of human care, not consumers. The paper reviews marketing research ethics by evaluating different works of literature via journal-based trend analysis evaluation. The current study will look at practices that ensure informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, deception, and legal aspect in data management in procedures involved in marketing research. It helps show the importance of having self-regulated disciplines and the general concerns entailing a positive

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public image for marketing researchers. Understanding these factors will be essential in handling the variables of ethical intentions and corporate moral values.

## 2. Literature Review

Conflicts Initial marketing ethics concerns and the general marketing discipline's reputation date back to the time of ancient Greece, according to Tagliamonte et al. (2020) study. Since then, many lamentations have taken place on the vociferous critics of marketing influencers. Thus improving the marketing discipline's public image is still a concern for the marketing professional, both in academia and in industry. Campbell and Brauer (2020) argue the need to improve prejudice in research by incorporating principles from different fields, mainly social principles, to develop a hybrid of problem-based and theory-based principles that would help advance the overall marketing activities.

Research ethics discussion mainly observes the element of business and management roles on values of ethics in the research process. Ethical issues emphasize how to treat people we are researching and ethics on activities requiring researchers to engage their relations. Kang and Hwang (2021) outlines that business management and marketing research ethics is a role for professional associations in helping formulate ethical codes that members must adhere to. These bodies outline guidelines that researcher needs to follow on quantitative and qualitative research when doing employee and internet research. Wallace and Sheldon (2019) indicates that personal relationships with research participants, research design, and poor conceptual dimension understanding are the primary elements that risk ethics in research. Also, differing views among writers, rehearsal of similar contexts from past to present, and reflexive process questions cultural perspectives of researchers and administrative ethics underlying these concerns.

Marketing is a manipulation and persuasion art where a marketer has to apply persuasive methods. Thus every orientation a business researcher takes in conducting their activities makes ethics insight an essential approach in ensuring the practice is socially responsible. It is because they reflect on practices that directly impact society (Bryman & Bell, 2019). The need to observe the poor research practice in marketing, mainly on the human rights subjects in fieldwork. Alsmadi (2018) has to look at elements such as informed consent (right to confidentiality and privacy), the right to protection from harm or deception as a research participant, and data management ethics in collecting and storing digital data. Thus, a keen understanding between researchers, participants, and

sponsoring organizations is eager to ensure researchers ethical responsibilities when interacting with human subjects during surveys.

Confidentiality and privacy are issues that must be critical to address sensitive topics. On the anonymous procedures for data collection, researchers need not review information or identity shared in all research contexts. One needs to assure confidentiality to participants before conducting any research. However, it becomes difficult for some researchers to maintain the confidentiality of personal information. Government legislation in Privacy Act spells out limitations for disclosing records. Sims (1992) note that non-survey research success, for instance, participants' fieldwork, observations, and interviews, mainly depends on trust between respondents and researchers.

According to the study (Joyvice et al., 2019), informed consent encourages sensitive information on various topics, such as sexual behaviors and drinking, to help improve valid responses. Research shows that ensuring informed consent about the study before an interview begins and the assurance of confidentiality enhances the probability of positive evaluations of the study and the whole process. However, positive informed consent effects have exceptional. For instance, it induces bias in laboratory experiments. These include deceptive research techniques that can distract researchers and disparage the overall research field tone.

Deception is a tremendous challenge in some marketing research that impacts research ethics. In some controlled laboratory studies, continuous deceptive practices influence subject pools, affecting the overall research results. Joy vice et al. (2019) deceptive researches and marketing communications negatively impact brand equity. According to many who never participated in the research, these are more concerned with honesty. The study outlines that previous experiences with research practices with deceptive approaches lead to participants in subsequent research being less willing to be honest. American Anthropological Association outlines that the role of every researcher is ensuring they protect their participants against psychological, social, and physical harm and respect and honor their privacy and dignity (Tannenbaum & Spradley, 2020). In any phenomenological study, a researcher needs to mentally reverse roles and imagine how a respondent in any research feels in case of deception. These will help understand how such behaviors affect subjects' behaviors, especially among customers as they shop. These might change them and end up causing embarrassment, inconvenience, and discomfort.

Legal data management ethical routines in storing and collecting digital data have raised new concerns on confidentiality. It revolves around the extent of information

use legitimacy on the research purpose that could be different from the study's original intent. The overall issue observes who owns data and at what level other persons are entitled to use these data. In most cases, obtaining the correct consent from participants must include the span of preservation and the overall sharing plans. These consents, in most cases, lack explicit aspects, and most researchers do not outline them. The decision has to be made before any project starts. Floridi (2018) notes that ease in storing, disseminating, and accessibility to the digital data to secondary users on the internet indicates that most researchers share research data to enhance the visibility of their research.

### 3. Results Based on Literature Datasets

The early days of marketing philosophy changed its perspectives on consumer rights by emphasizing more on ethical concerns. Earlier focus in marketing ethics observed on protecting the rights and image of a marketer. The current concerns have shifted towards the privacy and rights of respondents. These studies from various disciplines outline that each research project needs to observe ethical concerns in its daily publications. With empirical researchers taking a keen understanding of their publication values, the importance of research results and ethical consideration needs to be similarly significant. Learning from the previous researchers' approach to handling this issue is helpful for future research and is essential to have additional guidelines. The following are some of the findings and practical recommendations that marketing researchers need to consider before undertaking any project.

#### 3.1. Lack of Informed Consent

The principle notes that any participant in any future research needs to have the necessary information to help them decide whether to participate in a study or not. Using undercover observation is an unethical approach since it denies participants an opportunity to decide on whether to participate in research or not. The principle of an informed concept implies that it should inform any person being asked to participate in the study. Alsmadi (2018) outlines that all academy members must protect and preserve all research respondents' well-being, freedom, privacy, and dignity. These, however, have to observe with informed consent for participants and the best research design. Informed consent aims to explain to participants the nature and purpose of the research. It thus gives them room to choose if or not to get involved. Explanations involve outlining possible harms and outlining space to refuse to

participate in the interview or terminate at any given point.

Similarly, the MRS (2019) Code of Conduct outlines that in informed consent, participants must be told at the start of every interview the recording or observation method the study will take. The study indicates that ensuring informed consent is challenging. It isn't easy to secure a prospective participant where all information about the research is provided to help make informed decisions on their involvement. Minor challenges, for instance, underestimating interviewing time and thus not providing a participant with all necessary information due to fear of contaminating answers, always occur. Also, a researcher is more likely to interact with a large spectrum of people, and ensuring everyone has an absolute understanding of informed consent could be challenging. These could also result from a lack of knowledge among participants, language barriers, and challenges in academic terms or literacy level. These show the primary difficulty of a researcher in fully explaining the nature and purpose of the study, compromising research understanding. Harcourt and Conroy (2011) notes that every researcher must seek all possible ways to ensure participants achieve informed consent. These will help a researcher from haring participants or the recipient of this information. Marketing includes the consumers or the most venerable, for instance, children.

#### 3.2. Deception

Deceptive research in marketing influences subject pools and finally affects results. It brings about dishonesty. Deception occurs when a researcher intends to limit participants' knowledge and understanding of research to make them respond naturally to an experimental study. However, ethical codes ensure no use of deception to preserve the naturalness of data. According to the MRS (2019) code of conduct, respondents have the right to informed consent. A participant need to be informed on observational techniques of the presence of recording equipment in place. The researcher feels that telling a participant of the presence of such equipment biases their subsequent behaviors. They need to be told of the existence of the recording after the interview. Here they have an opportunity to hear or see the relevant parts of the records and consent to either retaining or deleting. However, the researcher who deceives his participants for professional gains adversely affects the image marketing researchers and would have challenges with financial support and cooperation with future participants.

In considering deception use in research, a researcher has to consider various issues. First are the subject's needs and risks as their study's primary concerns. They should look for ways to protect their respondents from social,

physical, and psychological welfare. They also need to ensure they honor their privacy and dignity. Researchers must also consider the subject's behavior in their field of study. These include ensuring the recipient of this information goes through embarrassment and discomfort or causes any inconveniences in their daily work.

### 3.3. Invasion of Privacy and Confidentiality

The right to privacy and confidentiality is an ethical area that holds on the transgression of the rights to ensure research is acceptable. MRS's (2019) study outlines that the objective of every survey is not to grant researchers any right to intrude on participants' privacy or abandon respect for individual values. Similarly, the informed consent notion has to be in place to ensure the participant has a detailed understanding of what entails the participants' involvement in research. Thus, it gives a sense of knowledge of his privacy rights in the limited domains. Even with informed consent, participants do not obligate entirely on privacy rights. They have the right to choose questions they need to answer based on grounds they feel justified. These refusals result from participants' specific questions that concern their private life or are on sensitive issues they do not wish to make public, even when these interviews occur in public. MRS (2019) outlines that with some of these topics being termed as sensitive due to subject nature, no researcher can categorize these topics before as sensitive for a particular participant. It thus recommends that a researcher in any field should treat everything as individually liable to help give every participant a genuine opportunity to choose what to answer or not.

Undercover methods of research approach violate privacy principles since participants do not have a chance of refusing what seems to be invading their privacy. This method is unethical since participants believed they could not have revealed some information if they understood the confidant's status as a researcher. Privacy issues always link to confidentiality and anonymity issues. Husband (2020) notes that BSA Statement indicates the kind of relationship that should exist between a researcher and a participant. A researcher must respect the privacy and anonymity of their participants, and their personal information should be kept confidential. It makes it necessary to decide when and where to record sensitive information. In marketing research, it is thus essential to observe confidentiality and anonymity in information recording when carrying out research.

### 3.4. Legal Data Management

This study indicates that technological innovations

mainly pose challenges in digital data governance. The increased commonality of research has brought data security and the need to protect authorized access, especially on data containing personal information such as individual addresses, names, pictures, or addresses. Floridi (2018) notes the importance of having data protection Regulations ensure soft ethics that help shape and ensure good digital technology and innovation governance. These imply legal compliance, for instance, with data protection regulations. The paper recommends ensuring the marketing researcher understands the whole process of operations, including electronic processing involved in data, before processing to provide the best understanding of legality. These will ensure no potential unlawful processing involving administrative or criminal sanctions.

## 4. Implications

Overall, the study presents practical suggestions though unexhausted. By raising these ethical marketing issues, consumer behavior disciplines will continue to expand and contribute positively towards attaining thoughts, feelings, and decisions that positively contribute to marketing research as the foundation for effective marketing practices. Thus, it would be ironic when striving to make a positive contribution to marketing research while ethically violating the level of privacy, confidentiality deception, lack of informed consent, and poor adherence to the legal aspect of data management. Therefore, as a social scientist, there is a need to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines in research careers. Institutions and relevant bodies need to ensure mandatory compliance with ethical procedures in research to avoid ethics crises in all fields. These will help the necessary trust in marketing-related studies and ensure research attains mutual benefit to the related field and participants continue to be free and have collaborative partnerships essential to build effective research in our societies.

It thus ensures researchers view the whole process as an activity with mutual benefit to both the participant and the researcher. It helps see each other as a mutual being and ensures all of them adapt to the agreed set of reciprocal norms. It helps develop qualitative research that aims to conceptualize the subject relationships of every researcher. Also, it will help avoid the aspect of consciousness and the potential element of credibility on the sources that enabled in making these publications effective. Researchers adhering to all these ethical aspects will make recipients of this information easy to understand overall compliance, hence having fewer challenges in making ethical decisions. These will ensure self-regulated disciplines and portray a positive public image for marketing researchers. They help

eliminate variables of ethical intentions, perceived ethical problems, and corporate ethical values from marketing research fields.

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