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# Ethical Behaviors for Conducting Research based on the Perspective of Marketing Researchers

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** While prior research has identified ethical issues in marketing research, more research needs to identify specific ethical behaviors that marketing researchers should adopt. This research addresses this gap by identifying a few ethical behaviors that marketing researchers should consider. **Research design, data and methodology:** The present study has a justification to collect adequate textual data in the current literature using screening process based on the marketing ethics topics and themes, and ethical behaviors of marketing researchers. **Results:** Based on the literature analysis, a marketing ethics model, which included the principles of fairness, honesty, responsibility, and respect for stakeholders. Since the rise of e-commerce and technology, a growing demand for a method to analyze website user behavior has been growing. Researchers in the field of marketing are responding to this demand by creating innovative interactive platforms. **Conclusions:** The term "ethical practices in market research" refers to a collection of best practices that, when followed, increase the likelihood that the research carries out is ethical, fair, and accurate. Because there needs to be more theoretical work done on the topic, there should be more empirical studies on ethical behaviors in marketing research.

**Keywords :** Ethical Behavior, Marketing Research Issue, Publication Ethics

**JEL Classification Code:** C25, M31, Z33

## 1. Introduction

The term "marketing" refers to all of the commercial activities that are associated with the innovation, production, and sale of an item to a specific market, where it will provide buyers with a sense of fulfillment after they

have made a purchase. This is the traditional definition of marketing. So, marketing research includes product development, locating a suitable market, and determining an appropriate selling technique, distribution, advertising, pricing, and sales service facilities (Gottfredson et al., 2005). The role of marketing research as an advisor to marketing management is essential. Its purpose is to gather information, perform analysis on that information, and then give suggestions to management about how to manage marketing issues. Marketing is something that every modern corporation does in order to appease their customers and win their support and commitment of those customers.

According to the study (Busca & Bertrandias, 2020), some businesses maintain a strong connection with the

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people who make up their clientele. Take, for instance, the post office in a relatively small town. To a firm engaged in worldwide marketing, the maxim that the customer is king, and queen is just as applicable to other types of businesses. In addition, the information technology (IT) and communications revolutions transformed how individuals do business in the modern world. In recent years, many companies have been utilizing the internet and other forms of the electronic press in their marketing efforts. This has allowed digital commerce (a new marketing phenomenon and philosophy) to grow theatrically and dynamically. According to a recent study, implementing e-marketing strategies by small business enterprises (SBEs) worldwide can significantly alter the form and character of SBEs' commercial activities (Sarstedt et al., 2022).

Because of the rapid development of the internet, the world wide web (www), and other forms of electronic communication, a rapidly rising number of new digital networks for marketing have been created. As a result, the internet and other forms of electronic media are currently playing a very significant part in the process of marketing activities. Due to the market's one-of-a-kind characteristics, researchers are looking to add to the existing body of knowledge by researching and gaining an understanding of the procedures and procedures carried out by small businesses while carrying out a study about the effects of implementing E-marketing (Cluley et al., 2020). The ineffective implementation of marketing research and a negative attitude towards market analysis on the part of most industry stakeholders in their organizations were significant contributors to the problem caused by marketing research in most business organizations. According to the study (Cluley et al., 2020), inadequate funding for efficient marketing research was another issue that resulted in the problem. In their work, marketing researchers should consider specific ethical considerations (Yadav & Pavlou, 2020), and this paper aims to highlight those considerations.

The first part of this study is a literature review discussing prior studies on ethical behaviors in marketing research. In addition, this article includes conclusions from an assessment of existing practices in marketing research, focusing on ethical behaviors that marketing researchers should adopt. In the final section, this article explores the implications of this study for future researchers and recommends ways to conduct upcoming ethical research investigations.

While prior research has identified ethical issues in marketing research, more research needs to identify specific ethical behaviors that marketing researchers should adopt. This research addresses this gap by identifying a few ethical behaviors that marketing researchers should consider.

## **2. Literature Review**

Firstly, Gottfredson et al. (2005) define marketing research as systematically collecting, recording, and analyzing data to inform marketing decision-making. Market researchers assemble, examine, and evaluate the information for strategic business choices. However, balancing the quest for such information and other ethical considerations is essential to ensure the research is ethical. In order to get to the bottom of marketing phenomena, researchers apply the scientific method, as defined by Gottfredson et al. (2005). Sample selection, data collecting, analysis, and reporting are some points when ethical questions arise in marketing research. Philip Kotler (2007) defines marketing research as the methodical examination of problems, development of models, and collection of data to enhance marketing-related decision-making and management. Marketing research is the use of scientific approaches to solve marketing issues. Among these are identifying potential opportunities and challenges in the market, developing, and accessing potential solutions, keeping tabs on results, and learning the ins and outs of marketing. Based on these principles, it's evident that marketing research is an indispensable management tool that executives can utilize to reduce operational risks by learning about new opportunities and placing more information and resources at their disposal (Fehr et al., 2019). There appears to be little to the idea of a business; businesses create things for sale to the public. Making something of value for the customer is a difficult task.

### **2.1. The Adoption of Dishonest Procedures**

There are behavioral challenges that could arise from researching marketing. People routinely reveal private information in public forums like social media and online company databases, as well as on mobile devices. When it comes to making judgments based on such a massive amount of research data, how can businesses ensure that they do so in an ethical manner? Marketing researchers must strike a balance between the benefits of gaining access to this data and their concern for the privacy of all of the people they have the potential to influence. Whether it involves marketing research or private data, we have often been informed of the absence of ethical decision-making (Hinds et al., 2020). Businesses get hacked, disclose or sell customers' personal information, or engage in marketing activities while pretending to conduct research. Every one of these is questionable from an ethical standpoint.

Let us look at various unethical procedures utilized throughout any research. The first problem is when somebody tries to pass off a sales pitch as research when it

is an effort to advertise an item; this practice is *sugging*. *Sugging* occurs when an individual present themselves as a researcher, gathers some data, and then uses the data to advise acquisitions (Hassandoust et al., 2021). The Insights Association Code of Marketing Research Standards recommends that market researchers keep conducting research completely distinct from always selling products. Using rhetorical appeal to motivate users to select a particular answer is one example of unethical research practice (Rashid et al., 2019). Other unethical research practices include distorting research results subjectively rather than objectively while presenting the findings and padding data from the research with falsified answers in a bid to boost the number of responses or create a specific outcome.

## 2.2. Breach of Confidentiality

According to the study (Michaelidou et al., 2021), another challenge is protecting people's privacy when it involves marketing research data. Regarding research, privacy means keeping the information collected from participants covertly and guaranteeing their anonymity. Many participants are reluctant to give their identifying information out of the worry that it will leak (Nunan et al., 2020). Researchers have the option of assuring respondents that the study will be kept confidential or that they will remain anonymous to alleviate their anxieties (McDaniel & Gates, 2018). Personal data collection occurs when respondents provide the researcher with their identifying information, but the researcher does not use or disclose this information in any other way.

The research could require some identifier to pair available data with the new content in this scenario. For example, a customer identity or membership number could be necessary. According to the previous work (Tawalbeh et al., 2020), responder's responses are anonymous if they do not contain any personally identifying information, and there is no possibility that the respondent might be recognized. When dealing with personally identifiable information, researchers should always exercise extreme caution and protect the data in one of three ways: behind a firewall, behind a screen that requires a password, or in a secure location.

## 2.3. Disclosure of Sensitive Information

The idea that the information provided by respondents should be kept private is among the most significant ethical factors for market researchers to take into account. It may be necessary to collect highly personal information to access a comprehensive data set. A violation of confidentiality occurs when a researcher uses the material

in a way that violates ethical standards. Many research projects begin with a declaration of how to use the information provided by the respondent will and how the investigator will keep the respondent's information private (Bradley, 2007). Sometimes, businesses sell customers' personal information, share the participants' contact information, or link specific responses to a particular customer. All these instances constitute breaches of confidentiality for which researchers ought to be held accountable. Even though we frequently hear about unethical ways in which businesses use their consumers' information, many businesses still conduct themselves in an honorable manner.

## 3. Findings

Throughout the years since Arthur Nielsen founded marketing research as a legitimate industry, it has undergone significant development Carroll and Archie (1975), positioning itself to expand in tandem with the B2B and B2C economies. Since the inception of Ac Nielsen, when most market research occurred through face-to-face focus groups and paper questionnaires Anabo et al. (2019), the advent of the internet and the growth of business websites have altered the methods of conducting market research. A marketing ethics model, which included the principles of fairness, honesty, responsibility, and respect for stakeholders. Since the rise of e-commerce and technology, a growing demand for a method to analyze website user behavior has been growing.

Baier (1958) also argued for a moral point of view in ethics. Therefore, new methods of collecting data from the internet, such as tracking users' clicks and where they go after leaving a site, were in high demand as corporations sought to capitalize on the rising prominence of advertising. Brenner and Molander (1977) examined the changing ethics of business, while the studies (Blankenship, 1964) explored the attitudes of marketers toward ethical and professional marketing research practices. These studies provide a historical perspective on the evolution of ethical behavior in marketing research.

### 3.1. Ethical Principles

Market researchers should adhere to a set of ethical guidelines. Principles like non-maleficence and beneficence, fairness, informed consent, privacy and security, honesty and transparency, and avoiding conflicts of interest are all included here (Fulmer, 1969). Doing market research is essential to the success of any company's marketing efforts. The researchers also acknowledged the potential for harm resulting from

research and stressed the importance of minimizing this harm (Baier, 1958). Finding out how to begin ethically conducting market research might be challenging. Although there is no one-size-fits-all method for conducting ethical market research, the following guidelines can serve as a foundation: Every research must offer utmost regard for the participants' privacy and autonomy (Van Der Bles et al., 2019). The study found that marketing researchers generally adhere to ethical principles such as respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Anabo et al., 2019). Therefore, this necessitates asking for consent before collecting data and prompting researchers to think critically about the implications of their findings.

In addition, participants in market research must give their informed consent before any action that can be considered "research" is taken. This entails explaining the purpose of data collection, obtaining consent to do so, and checking that participants understand how to use their data before, during, and after the collection process. The researchers interviewed for this study emphasized the importance of obtaining informed consent from research participants and maintaining their confidentiality. Before recruiting participants for a study, it is crucial to ensure that participants understand why the information they will be providing, such as their annual spending on cosmetics and other products, would be helpful. Furthermore, the primary goal of any study should be the greater good, not the benefit of any group or individual over another. In other words, scientists should do their utmost to aid other scientists in their quest for knowledge and to improve the world. According to the study (Jefferies & Ungar, 2020), researchers should not put anyone in danger, either directly (by creating an unsafe environment) or indirectly (by creating a risk of bodily harm to participants), in their research (e.g., manipulation).

### **3.2. Data Collection**

The study found that marketing researchers face several ethical challenges when collecting data, particularly in the digital age. For example, researchers must navigate online privacy and data security issues when collecting data from social media platforms (Venkatadri et al., 2019). In addition, researchers must be aware of the potential for data exfiltration by third parties embedded on web pages (Acar et al., 2020). In addition, researchers conduct studies with participants drawn from within the same organization.

Because their participants are people, they are probably familiar with through their employment, issues of anonymity, impartiality, and similar matters are more significant to them. To address these challenges, the researchers interviewed for this study stressed the importance of obtaining ethical clearance from institutional

review boards before conducting research.

### **3.3. Data Analysis**

The study found that marketing researchers must also consider ethical issues related to data analysis. For example, researchers must ensure that data is analyzed in a way that is accurate and transparent (Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021). The most challenging ethical dilemma is only sometimes the most common one. The term "most difficult" is not meant to indicate that a difficulty happens frequently. Nonetheless, the data indicates that marketing researchers see significant issues in maintaining the credibility of their market analysis based on the tone of the responses. It is essential to properly contextualize that sustaining research integrity is the most challenging ethical challenge of marketing researchers.

Researchers must also consider the potential for bias in their analysis and take steps to minimize this bias (Valkenburg et al., 2021). These findings are expected, given that most agency research entails outsourcing tasks to another company. Therefore, according to the study (Ferrell & Weaver, 1978), the ethical treatment of respondents and other employees is a higher priority for researchers. To address these challenges, the researchers interviewed for this study emphasized the importance of following established research methods and protocols.

### **3.4. Communication of Research Findings**

Integrity describes the researcher's commitment to being truthful and ethical throughout any research. Market research that follows ethical principles entails honesty and sincerity (Dwivedi et al., 2021). No one involved in the process should be subject to manipulation or deceit. The researcher should report any past conflicts of interest and resolve them before work on the project begins. The study found that marketing researchers must also consider ethical issues in communicating research findings. For example, researchers must ensure that their findings are presented accurately and in a way that is understandable to the intended audience (Van Der Bles et al., 2019). Researchers must also consider potential unintended consequences resulting from their research findings (Kerr et al., 2020). To address these challenges, the researchers interviewed for this study emphasized the importance of transparency and open communication (Sastry, 2020). Also, if you conduct market research honestly, you can rest assured that the results will not be utilized against the participants in the future (for example, if someone wants to sue them). In addition, maintaining confidentiality requires not disclosing any personally identifiable information (PII) to any outside parties unless doing so is required by law or is

necessary for the proper operation of your business. Researchers should disclose personally identifiable information (names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses) after first getting the agreement of the individuals named or contacted.

In addition, as the number of people using the internet grows, so does the size and complexity of websites and the prospect of two-way conversations between companies and their clients (Acar et al., 2020). The market analysis industry will develop when researchers can finally communicate with their target demographic directly. As a result of technological advancements and the resulting plethora of readily available data, marketing research has evolved into what it is today (Sastry, 2020). Businesses in both the business-to-business and business-to-consumer sectors need to do more marketing research to be competitive, and they want both quantitative ("what"?) and qualitative ("why"?) methods (Esteban-Bravo & Vidal-Sanz, 2021).

According to Ziółkowska (2021), researchers in the field of marketing are responding to this demand by creating innovative interactive platforms. Two-way communications systems, such as smartphones, are a prime example of a new platform that allows companies to maintain contact with customers throughout the buying process. Companies are at the cutting edge of market research and can connect with customers at every stage of the research, evaluation, and buying process. Moreover, big data excels at identifying broad market segments but struggles to isolate the specific factors that define niche markets, the very definition of the competitive edge businesses seek in the modern, always-connected digital era (Kerr et al., 2020).

#### 4. Implications for Future Researchers

The term "ethical practices in market research" refers to a collection of best practices that, when followed, increase the likelihood that the research carries out is ethical, fair, and accurate. Because there needs to be more theoretical work done on the topic, there should be more empirical studies on ethical behaviors in marketing research (Michaelidou et al., 2021). The majority of argumentation in ethics is of the normative variety. The purpose of this kind of study is to try to give normative criteria for ethical behavior. Positive theories that profess to describe and predict ethical behavior and that, as a result, have the potential to direct empirical study are conspicuously absent. It is necessary to have a general theory that focuses on the factors that determine and impact moral beliefs and behaviors, emphasizing the role that organizational, interpersonal, and cultural variables play in forming ethical

beliefs.

The use of hypothetical situations to investigate the ethics of research points out a rather unimaginative method. It is the purest form of empiricism to ask people of different backgrounds and walks of life to rate the extent to which they think acts violate ethical standards. At the absolute least, one should alter the scenarios methodically to investigate why various groups have such divergent points of view. The research that Kohlberg (1981) conducted serves as an excellent model. To investigate what he refers to as the "stage of moral evolution," he built several different moral conundrums or scenarios, which he then altered methodically. His key finding is that people appear to progress through six distinct phases of moral growth and that these stages do not appear to be culture-dependent in any way. His methodology is helpful in ethical difficulties in marketing research, even though Kohlberg's moral dilemmas do not immediately apply to those issues. There are, according to Kohlberg, "six stages of moral judgment," beginning with an entirely egocentric point of view and progressing up to an assumption that universal standards guide one. It would be fascinating to categorize researchers according to these groups and compare these impressions to their evaluations of a complex ethical problem (Kang & Hwang, 2020).

In addition, it is shocking that many of colleagues working in marketing research are subject to significant constraints that require them to undermine the fundamental integrity of their research. There are occasions when simply bringing attention to a significant problem in a field can be a major start toward finding a solution to that problem. The team deeply desires this research to serve as that "first step." While carrying out market studies, especially for the public or larger firms, the most crucial point to remember is that all respondents ought to be respected. Therefore, participants are unique individuals who bring their viewpoints and ideas to the table and are not merely another statistic or data point to incorporate into researcher's analysis. It is essential to keep an eye out for the possibility of a conflict of interest between the person doing the market research and the people who are taking part in the study. It may be enticing if you work for a corporation to agree to participate in your own study since you are interested in their product or service; however, this could cause prejudice or mischaracterization of your results if utilized without the appropriate context.

Moreover, before commencing involvement in any study or other activity relating to market research, you need to be sure that all respondents clearly understand the compensation that will be provided to them. This includes any money paid by the companies or organizations conducting the study and any perks offered in exchange for participation, such as complimentary items or services.

When conducting market research, in addition to the practices that were just covered, there are a lot of other ethical methods that you can utilize as well. Here are some more examples: Check that the information researchers have gathered from their studies will be helpful to your audience and ensure that all of the companies you are working with are on the same page regarding your goals. In addition, if researchers are dealing with more than one organization and follow data protection rules when dealing with personally identifiable information (PII), such as giving notice before collecting it and keeping it safe.

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