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Public Policy Issues, Ethics, and Roles of Marketing Research – Concerns and Initiatives

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ABSTRACT

Companies analyze customer information to understand customers better and to generate customer insights. The objective of the study is to analyze various public policy and ethical issues associated with the process. These include intrusions on consumer privacy; misuse, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation of research findings; ethical and social dilemma in the collection and analysis of customer information; and ethical dilemma in the generation of customer insights with the application of neuromarketing. The methodology adopted is a conceptual analysis of these approaches. Companies and researchers find it easier to invade consumer privacy in the digital age. Companies strive to behave responsibly by abiding by the laws and regulations enforced to protect customers. Addressing the issues promptly and effectively will allow companies to convince customers, to build effective customer relationships, and to achieve business excellence. Policymakers may be able to appreciate customer requirements and preferences better and formulate policies, rules, and regulations accordingly.

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Classification: DDC Code: 810.8 LCC Code: Z1215

Language: English



London
Journals Press

LJP Copyright ID: 146423
Print ISSN: 2633-2299
Online ISSN: 2633-2302

London Journal of Research in Management and Business

Volume 23 | Issue 2 | Compilation 1.0



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Public Policy Issues, Ethics, and Roles of Marketing Research – Concerns and Initiatives

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Companies analyze customer information to understand customers better and to generate customer insights. The objective of the study is to analyze various public policy and ethical issues associated with the process. These include intrusions on consumer privacy; misuse, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation of research findings; ethical and social dilemma in the collection and analysis of customer information; and ethical dilemma in the generation of customer insights with the application of neuromarketing. The methodology adopted is a conceptual analysis of these approaches. Companies and researchers find it easier to invade consumer privacy in the digital age. Companies strive to behave responsibly by abiding by the laws and regulations enforced to protect customers. Addressing the issues promptly and effectively will allow companies to convince customers, to build effective customer relationships, and to achieve business excellence. Policymakers may be able to appreciate customer requirements and preferences better and formulate policies, rules, and regulations accordingly.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Companies are able to develop superior offerings and marketing programs when they have relevant information and knowledge about customers. Companies require relevant information not only about their customers but also about their competitors, resellers, and other actors and marketplace forces (Tajudeen, Jaafar, & Sulaiman, 2016). The information helps companies to gain powerful consumer and market

insights. Collection and analysis of customer information and generation of customer insights are not possible without companies maintaining a proper marketing research process (Malhotra & Dash, 2016). Companies may face a number of issues in the collection and in the analysis of information in marketing research and in the generation of customer insights. There are various public policy issues and ethical concerns. Companies should be aware about these public policy issues and ethical concerns related to marketing research (Bakardjieva & Kimmel, 2017). A company which is involved in the various activities related to marketing research and its customers benefit from the activities. However, both companies and researchers may misuse research findings for their own selfish interests. Such misuse of research findings may cause harm to customers. Customers may develop negative perceptions about companies. Relationships of customers with companies may be affected (Adediran, 2012). Two of the most important concerns in public policy issues and ethics in marketing research relate to intrusions on consumer privacy and the misuse, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation of research findings (Mandal, 2018). Even when both companies and consumers themselves may be serious about protecting consumer privacy, it may be difficult to protect consumer privacy in the digital age. Individuals, knowingly or unknowingly, share a lot of information online. The information shared might be accessed by companies. Public policy issues and ethics are involved because of the manner in which customer information is used (Mandal, 2019a). Such issues are important because these issues not only affect the customers but also affect the society at large. Various public policy issues and ethics involved in the collection and analysis of customer information in marketing research are discussed in the study. Both companies and

researchers should be aware about such issues while conducting marketing research.

The importance of public policy issues and ethics regarding collection and analysis of customer information in marketing research and generation of customer insights cannot be overemphasized. So, both marketers and academicians should study and analyze the roles of public policy and ethics in marketing research and in gaining customer insights. It is necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis about the issues. However, few studies focus on this important issue. The study aims to address this research gap.

The objective of the study is to conduct a conceptual analysis of the various public policy and ethical issues related to the collection and analysis of customer information in marketing research and generation of customer insights.

The methodology adopted is a conceptual analysis of the literature related to public policy and ethical issues involved in the collection and analysis of customer information in marketing research and in generation of customer insights. The latest and the relevant literature on public policy and ethical issues related to marketing research in the digital age are searched. The literature mainly consisted of research papers published in top-tier academic journals on the topics. Research papers published recently and research papers with more citations in prominent journals are studied and analyzed. The research papers published in the last five years (2016-2022) have been given higher emphasis. The research papers are collected from SCOPUS, Web of Science, Proquest, and other prominent databases. Primary data is not collected and empirical analysis is not done in the study. Also, the study is conducted mainly in the context of the United States.

The novelty and the contributions of the study lie in the fact that a thorough conceptual analysis of the literature and the issues associated with public policy and ethical issues related to collection and analysis of customer information in marketing research and generation of customer insights is done. Academicians, researchers, and marketers

will be able to appreciate what all aspects they need to keep in mind while approaching and investigating customers for collection and analysis of information. They should be ethical in all these aspects while dealing with and interacting with customers. Otherwise, the sentiments of customers might be hurt and they might be offended. Based on the discussions and the analysis done in the study, policymakers will be able to understand the actual requirements and preferences of customers. Such understanding and insights about customer requirements will help them to formulate the policies, rules, and regulations better.

The study is structured as follows:

Section 2 discusses about the intrusions on consumer privacy in the digital age. Marketing research findings may be misused, misinterpreted, and misrepresented, and these issues are discussed in section 3. Ethics related to collection and analysis of information about customers are discussed in section 4. Ethics and social dilemma related to collection and analysis of customer information are discussed in section 5. Neuromarketing is a recent development in the field of psychology. Neuromarketing is applied in the field of marketing to understand and to analyze consumer psychology. Neuromarketing, its applications, and the ethical dilemma associated with it are discussed in section 6. Responsibilities of marketers and initiatives taken by companies to protect customers are discussed in section 7. The salient points of the study are discussed in section 8 with sub-sections 8.1 and 8.2 highlighting the theoretical implications and the managerial implications of the study respectively. Section 9 concludes the study with sub-sections 9.1 and 9.2 highlighting the limitations of the study and the avenues of future research respectively.

II. INTRUSIONS ON CONSUMER PRIVACY AND SECURITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Consumers are positive about marketing research. They support collection and analysis of data by researchers. They feel that marketing research serves a useful purpose. They also enjoy being interviewed and providing their opinions

(Dauxert, 2019). However, some respondents strongly resent or even mistrust marketing research. They are suspicious about the objectives with which information is collected from customers. They worry that companies build customer databases based on the information collected. The databases contain personal and sensitive information about customers. Individuals fear that companies and researchers may analyze the stored information by applying sophisticated techniques to understand the deepest feelings, track internet and mobile device usage to understand the buying behavior of customers, and then may apply the knowledge to influence customers. Americans are suspicious about the collection, analysis, and usage of their personal information. In a recent survey, 90 percent of the respondents felt that they have lost control over the collection, analysis, and usage of their personal information. They feel that companies and researchers keep track of the information shared by them on social media and use them for satisfying their own selfish motives (O'Connor & Schmidt, 2018).

Customers were worried about the retail giant, Target when it used their buying histories to understand sensitive insights about them (Zhu, Song, Ni, Ren, & Li, 2016). Customers were worried about the intentions of Target because Target used the information to figure out details about those customers who were expecting babies. Target even tried to estimate the due date of delivery and the gender of the child. Such activities are unethical and illegal (Zhu et al., 2016). Customers felt that Target would get access to sensitive information related to customers.

Target provides its customers with a Guest ID number, credit cards, and e-mail addresses. Target uses such customer information along with demographic information from other sources to track customers' purchases in details (Zhu et al., 2016). Target studied the buying behaviour of women who had previously signed up for its baby registries. Target developed a "pregnancy prediction" score for each customer based on the information collected. The score was developed by analyzing the purchasing patterns of customers across 25 product categories. Based on the scores,

Target started sending personalized coupons for baby-related items to expectant parents at each of their pregnancy stages (Zhu et al., 2016).

Target was able to understand expectant parents and their requirements better when it targeted them. Target could convert such customers into loyal buyers as their families developed (Zhu et al., 2016). However, the strategy had limitations and it backfired. Customers felt that Target was intruding into the privacy of customers. An angry man visited a local Target store and complained that his high-school-aged daughter was receiving offers from Target. Coupons for strollers, cribs, and maternity clothes were offered by Target. "Are you trying to encourage her to get pregnant?", the angry father demanded. The store offered an apology to the father. It was also revealed that Target knew about the young woman's pregnancy much before her father did. Many customers also disapprove the fact that Target knew about their pregnancies even before they had told their families and close friends. Customers were also suspicious and worried about what else Target might be tracking and profiling. They were suspicious about the intentions of Target (Zhu et al., 2016). One reporter concluded, "The store's bulls-eye logo may now send a shiver.... down the closely-watched spines of some Target shoppers" (Zhu et al., 2016).

Marketers are able to intrude on consumer privacy because of the recent developments in the field of information technology in the digital age. However, marketers and researchers should ensure that they do not intrude on consumer privacy when they mine customer information (Weiss, 2020). Also, marketers and researchers find it difficult to collect and to analyze customer information and customer details without intruding on consumer privacy. For example, is it a good thing or a bad thing that some retailers use mannequins with cameras hidden in one eye to record customer demographics and buying behaviour in order to serve them better? Critics also argue whether it is ethical for marketers to keep a track of the online activities of individuals on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or Instagram in an effort to be more

responsive. Critics are worried when marketers track consumers' mobile phone usage and mobile phone locations to issue location-based information, advertisements, and offers to serve their customers better.

Companies keep a constant track of customer activities to collect information. For example, SAP's Consumer Insight 365 service helps mobile service providers to "extract data about subscribers (and their) mobile-centric lifestyles" (Farnsworth, Lawler Kennedy, & Kumar, 2016). It ingests as many as 300 mobile web surfing, phone call, text messaging, and other mobile events per day for each of 20 to 25 million mobile subscribers across multiple carriers. Marketers are able to know about their customers better from the data. As one analyst comments that by combining mobile data with other information, it can be ascertained "whether shoppers are checking out competitor prices on their phones or just emailing friends. It can tell them the age ranges and genders of people who visited a store location between 10 am and noon, and link location and demographic data with shoppers' web browsing histories. Retailers might use the information to arrange store displays to appeal to certain customer segments at different times of the day, or to help determine where to open new locations" (Huang, Fildes, & Soopramanien, 2019). Companies are able to target customers better with the help of such information. However, it becomes difficult for companies to maintain consumer privacy in the process (Palmatier & Martin, 2019a).

Consumers are worried and concerned about their own privacy. Consumer privacy is a major issue of concern now-a-days in the marketing research industry (Kumar & Reinartz, 2018). Companies should maintain a balance and they need to optimize between generating customer insights from the collected information and maintaining consumer privacy and consumer trust. Customers also want to create a balance between personalization and privacy. They prefer customization based on their needs and preferences. At the same time, customers dislike the fact that companies keep a close watch and track their information (Thomaz, Salge,

Karahanna, & Hulland, 2020). The key question remains: When does a company cross the line in gathering and using customer data?

Marketers should consider consumer privacy seriously and should try to protect it. They should be active and prompt in addressing privacy concerns of customers. Customers may be irritated and frustrated if companies are unable to address issues related to consumer privacy. Failure to address consumer privacy may also result in increased government intervention. It affects customer trust and customer relationship in the long run. The industry adopts a number of measures and takes a number of initiatives to address the issues (Yun, Lee, & Kim, 2019). One example is the Marketing Research Associations' *Your Opinion Counts and Respondent Bill of Rights* initiatives. Such initiatives instil trust and belief in the minds of customers that companies are serious about the opinions and suggestions provided by customers. Such initiatives also allow customers to understand the benefits of marketing research and to distinguish it from telephone selling and database building (Mandal, 2019b).

Customers should have the perception and the assurance that companies care about them and are serious about protecting consumer privacy. Companies adopt a number of measures and initiatives to protect consumer privacy. A chief privacy officer (CPO) is employed by many companies like IBM, American Express, Apple, Facebook, Microsoft, and even the U.S. government. Safeguarding and protecting the interests of customers are the primary responsibilities of CPO (Kumar & Reinartz, 2018). Customers provide information gladly if they are convinced that companies are delivering value. For example, customers are open to providing information if they feel that such information will help companies provide future product recommendations. Time is saved and companies are able to provide value if customers are convinced about the intentions of companies (Campbell, Sands, Ferraro, Tsao, & Mavrommatis, 2020). Marketers and researchers should ask for only the information they need, use it responsibly to provide customer value, and should avoid

sharing information without the permission of customers.

III. MISUSE OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Findings obtained through marketing research may be employed as powerful persuasion tools. Companies use research findings to substantiate their claims in advertising and promotion. At present, however, many research studies appear to be little more than vehicles for pitching the products of sponsors (Crosswell, 2020). Companies sometimes design research surveys in a way so that they obtain the intended results. For example, a Black Flag survey once asked: "A roach disk poisons a roach slowly. The dying roach returns to the nest and after it dies is eaten by other roaches. In turn these roaches become poisoned and die. How effective do you think this type of product would be in killing roaches?" As was expected, a majority of the respondents (79 percent) responded positively.

Research designs are tampered with and research findings are misused, misinterpreted, and misrepresented by a number of marketers, research agencies, and advertisers. Most abuses tend to be mere subtle stretches (Kang, Shin, & Ponto, 2020). The interpretation, authenticity, reliability, and validity of such research findings are questioned by critics and experts. Again, research findings are interpreted, influenced, and judged based on the perceptions, interests, and knowledge of researchers combined with their individual preferences and biases.

Critics and experts recognize and accept that marketing research can be abused, misrepresented, and misinterpreted (Mandal, 2018). Several organizations and associations are involved in the development of codes of research ethics and standards of conduct. The roles of these organizations and associations are to ensure the integrity of marketing research. These include the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO), the Marketing Research Association (MRA), and the American Marketing Association (AMA). For example, the CASRO Code of Standards and Ethics for Survey Research provides guidelines about the responsibilities of

researchers towards respondents while conducting research. Regulations regarding privacy, confidentiality, and avoidance of harassment are highlighted. The manner in which results are reported to clients and to the public are of major concern. Such concerns and responsibilities are also highlighted (Smith, Pandit, Rush, Wolf, & Simon, 2016).

Major issues related to misuse of marketing research findings can be solved if researchers assume responsibility for their own actions. Companies and researchers should accept responsibility for policing the conduct and reporting of their own marketing research. The interests of customers, companies, and researchers will be protected in this manner (Vriens, Brokaw, Rademaker, & Verhulst, 2019).

IV. MARKETING ETHICS IN COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF CUSTOMER INFORMATION

It is imperative for organizations to remain ethical in their actions. Organizations should have a strong sense of ensuring ethics in business while conducting marketing research and more specifically while collecting and analyzing information from customers (Yallop & Mowatt, 2016). Ethics should form the basis of all operations performed by companies. An ethical orientation must be integrated in the marketing strategies and in the decision making of companies. The American Marketing Association stipulated the following specific guidelines for conducting marketing research: (1) It prohibits selling or fund-raising under the guise of conducting research, (2) it supports maintaining research integrity by avoiding misrepresentation or the omission of pertinent research data, and (3) it encourages the fair treatment of clients and suppliers (Eisend & Kuss, 2019; Ingram, LaForge, Schwpicker, & Williams, 2007). Various marketing research societies specify the duties and responsibilities of marketing researchers while conducting research so that the rights of subjects are protected. All rules and regulations related to marketing research are formulated so that marketing research produces unbiased and factual

information and decisions are taken based on authentic information (Malhotra & Dash, 2016).

Technological developments allow companies and researchers to collect information easily. However, increased application of advanced technologies results in potential threats to customer information. The threats grow in number and in intensity (Mathu, 2019). The collected data can be abused and accessed without authority. Marketing researchers should act promptly to prevent these. Stored data can be abused easily and this has been proved a number of times when security breaches happened at some of the largest banks, retailers, credit-reporting services, and peer-to-peer networks of the United States (Graves, Acquisti, & Christin, 2018). Customers are concerned about preserving and ensuring their fundamental rights to privacy. Consequently, customers want to be assured that the information collected from them are kept secured.

The respondents in marketing research surveys should be informed by firms that participation is voluntary, and the information collected will not be shared with or sold to any other firm (Malhotra & Dash, 2016). Advanced marketing research tools like neuromarketing and facial recognition software are employed by firms (Stanton, Sinnott-Armstrong, & Huettel, 2017). It is ensured that companies and marketing research agencies receive consent from consumers before collecting information. For example, Coca-Cola conducts neuromarketing experiments. Facial expressions of participants are recorded when they watch advertisements or prototypes. Eye movements of the participants are tracked. Also, responses are collected only from those respondents who provide consent to having their data to be recorded (Hsu, 2017).

Facial expressions of participants are recorded and analyzed by firms with the help of facial recognition software. Demographic information of participants is predicted based on their appearances (Spivak, Krepych, Faifura, & Spivak, 2019). For example, facial recognition software identifies passers-by, analyzes their faces and then displays advertisements based on their gender,

age, and attention level (Chien, Wu, & Luor, 2019). Such analysis and prediction help companies to do targeted communication which is more interesting and captivating to the consumer walking by. Companies may sometimes be embarrassed by such initiatives. For example, a teenager with skin problems may be shown a broadcast of an acne product while he walks by.

Several organizations try to ensure that consumer privacy is protected and try to keep a close watch on the information collected from customers. These include the Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT) and the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC). A number of initiatives are also taken by different national and state governments in the United States to protect consumer privacy. Rules and regulations require that privacy policies and practices of companies be disclosed to customers on an annual basis (Berle, 2020). Stringent laws are formulated by the U.S. federal government to protect consumer privacy on the internet. Legislation is formulated by several states to protect privacy. However, it becomes difficult for companies to strictly adhere to different policy regulations across the country. Companies also find it difficult to conduct business on the internet (Peasley, 2019).

Facial detection software in Facebook allows users to tag a person only once. The same person gets tagged automatically in other photographs because of the software (Joshi, Damle, & Kumar, 2018). The software stores biometric data of users. Biometric data include one or more physical traits such as facial characteristics, iris scans, or fingerprints. Facebook users have the option of turning off facial detection. However, they cannot prevent Facebook from getting their biometric data collected. Because of all these issues, in countries like Germany and other countries within the European Union, strict privacy laws and regulations are enforced. Regulators have demanded that Facebook stop collecting any biometric data (Gerrish & Idi, 2019).

V. COLLECTION OF CUSTOMER INFORMATION AND ETHICAL AND SOCIAL DILEMMA

Information is collected from customers by retailers by capturing the attention of customers with the help of innovative ideas and techniques. Several retailers spend \$5000 to purchase an EyeSee mannequin from a provider called Almax. Retailers receive dual benefits because of the mannequin. Retailers are able to display clothing and record details of customers like genders, ages, and ethnicities (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2019).

The usage of mannequin has resulted in controversy and debate because of the implications of the innovation. Critics accuse that permission from customers is not sought when retailers collect sensitive customer information with the help of mannequins. Although Almax claims that the technology applied does not store customer information, critics argue that shoppers are surveyed without consent being taken and the technology is used for the benefit of the retailer (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2019). Information about shoppers is collected without the shoppers realizing that something is watching them. Also, the information might be collected without their knowledge and consent. Moreover, customers do not have control over what retailers do with the collected data (Palmatier & Martin, 2019b).

Retailers try to convince critics that mannequins do not record any data. Consequently, the usage of mannequins can be considered the same as that of a closed-circuit system (Enerstvedt, 2017). Some critics argue that privacy should not be expected by individuals in public places. Any employee could have recorded the details of an individual who walks through the shop doors. The electronic system only performs the job faster and more accurately (Palmatier & Martin, 2019b).

The technology used in mannequins helped retailers to reap benefits. The predominance of Asian shoppers after about 4.00pm was recognized by one retailer. Consequently, it recruited a greater number of Chinese-speaking individuals to assist the Asian shoppers (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2019). For another retailer, it was

revealed that children were visiting the stores more. So, it displayed products for children more than they displayed other products. Almax succeeded because of such initiatives based on analysis and prediction. It plans to record and to analyze conversations of shoppers to generate better customer insights and to serve their customers better (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2019).

Retailers are allowed by legislation to maintain cameras and to record customers for security purposes. However, retailers should inform customers that their activities are being recorded (Abdullaev, Al-Absi, Al-Absi, Sain, & Lee, 2020). However, it is argued by critics that retailers use mannequins for marketing and commercial gains rather than for ensuring security of customers. Also, the technology used is not revealed by retailers. For example, Almax did not disclose the names of any of its clients citing the privacy requirements of clients (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2019). Experts believe that it is difficult to believe and to convince customers that mannequin which records almost every detail of shoppers, do not intrude their privacy. In the long run, customers may start avoiding those retail stores that use this technology (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2019).

VI. APPLICATIONS OF NEUROMARKETING AND ETHICAL DILEMMA

Neuromarketing is the science of studying human minds with the help of analysis of human brains (Meyerding & Mehlhose, 2020). Now-a-days, neuromarketing is having a number of applications in marketing research. Neuromarketing helps in understanding the minds of customers and in gaining customer insights. Neuromarketing helps to recognize and to analyze facial expressions and has the ability to read minds of consumers. Neuromarketing uses wireless electroencephalogram (EEG) scanners that measure the involuntary brain waves that occur when they view a product advertisement or a brand (Jayashree & Rao, 2020). Marketers are able to read the minds of consumers and are able to understand their imminent feelings. Marketers are able to understand customer preferences from such insights. Based on the results of a series of neuromarketing studies, Campbell's modified its

logo on soup labels. The company emphasized that soup increases customers' emotional responses to the cans (Gurgu, Gurgu, & Tonis, 2020). Marketers and researchers are able to understand their customers better because of neuromarketing. However, the potential for abuses for such tools is immense. Also, consumers may not approve marketers of reading their brain waves and marketing goods and services to them in a manner that bypasses their conscious thoughts (Bayle-Tourtoulou & Badoc, 2020). Critics question whether it is ethical to read the minds of customers. It is also questionable whether it is ethical to apply brain mapping for understanding the psychology of customers (Spence, 2020). Neurofocus is a company which applied neuromarketing to collect and to analyze customer information. Such analysis would have been difficult to obtain by using traditional research methods (Gurgu et al., 2020). However, it is questionable and debatable to apply such tools for collecting and for analyzing customer information.

VII. RESPONSIBILITIES OF MARKETERS AND INITIATIVES TAKEN

Public policy and ethical issues related to marketing research are of concern and organizations should act responsibly. Some of the major issues include intrusions of consumer privacy and misuse, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation of research findings. Permission and consent should be taken from those customers whose information is being collected (Malhotra & Dash, 2016). Marketing researchers should inform and explain to customers that the information collected will not be misused and will be used only for research purposes. Information from customers should not be collected in the guise of marketing research and with the intent of using the information for marketing gains (Kolb, 2017). Marketers and researchers should take the responsibility of protecting the information collected from customers. Companies and researchers should assure customers that they really care for customers and everything is done to ensure and to protect consumer privacy.

Many companies realize the importance of consumer privacy and security. They take initiatives which ensure the welfare of customers. Companies try to place the interests of customers first when they think of collecting customer information (Melanthiou, Evripidou, Epaminoonda, & Komodromos, 2020). Several companies like Microsoft, IBM, American Express, Facebook, Citibank, and others have appointed a Chief Privacy Officer (CPO). CPO has the major responsibility of ensuring the privacy and security of customer data. CPO requires to coordinate with all other functions in the organization like technology, legal, accounting, marketing, sales, services, and communications. All the functions should work in coordination to ensure consumer privacy (Mandal, 2019b).

Various policies and measures are adopted by companies to convince customers that companies really care for the welfare of consumers. Several companies have a formal written code of ethics which is shared with all the stakeholders. Ethical guidelines are followed by companies. They strive to build and to develop a culture of ethical behaviour in the organization. Employees are held responsible for observing ethical guidelines while collecting information about customers (Mandal, 2019b). Google is a company which is known for its ethical culture. It follows ethical guidelines while dealing with customers. Google has earned this reputation in the corporate world by supporting a touch-feely work environment, strong ethics, and its basic guiding principle: "Don't be evil" (Race, Randall, Rouncefield, & Slack, 2020).

The methods adopted by companies for collection of customer information may be disliked by customers. Customers may vent out their displeasure or frustrations about a company through various communication tools and techniques available to them. Previously, customers could express their opinions to a small group of individuals. However, now-a-days, with the availability and the usage of the internet, individuals may connect with anyone on the social media to express their dissatisfaction and frustration (Dimitrova & MacKay, 2017). Positive word of mouth travels fast. Negative word of

mouth travels faster. Negative word of mouth may damage the reputation and the image of companies. For example, Microsoft has attracted a number of anti-Microsoft websites. The distrust of companies among U.S. customers is evident in research showing the percentage of customers who view corporations unfavourably has reached 26 percent (Sullivan, 2009). Codes of ethics should be formulated and ethical guidelines should be devised by companies keeping all such issues in mind. Such initiatives allow companies to safeguard their customers.

Now-a-days, marketing research activities by companies are related to performance marketing. It includes understanding returns to the business from marketing activities and programs, as well as addressing broader concerns and their legal, ethical, social, and environmental effects (Riswanto, Hurriyati, Wibowo, & Hendrayati, 2020). Performance marketing has a wide scope which includes understanding not only the financial returns but also the non-financial returns to business and society from various marketing activities and programs (Ikonen, Luoma-Aho, & Bowen, 2017). The impact of marketing research on the marketing scorecard is studied and analyzed by top companies and marketing research agencies. They also consider the legal, ethical, and environmental effects of marketing research and collection and analysis of customer information (Kreutzer, 2019).

Sometimes, companies may be able to convert an admittedly deceptive stunt into a huge PR win (Trusov, Bodapati, & Bucklin, 2010). Heineken wanted to collect relevant customer information and insights. Heineken was aware that young European adult males are extremely passionate about football. Heineken understood that it would be easier to generate customer insights if it utilized the opportunity effectively. A fake musical concert was arranged during a crucial Real Madrid versus AC Milan football match. The match was shown on a big screen during the concert. The reactions of the audience were witnessed by more than 1.5 million people on live SkySport TV. More than five million visitors visited the Heineken website devoted to the event. Sufficient customer insights were generated by

Heineken from the event. The initiative resulted in a win-win situation for both Heineken and its customers. Subsequent PR and word of mouth made it a world-wide phenomenon (Barry, 2010).

VIII. DISCUSSIONS

Companies and marketing researchers collect information about customers, analyze the information, and generate customer insights. This process of collection, analysis, and generation of customer insights has pros and cons. The process of generating customer insights allows companies to understand their customers better. However, there are a number of public policy and ethical issues associated with collection and analysis of customer information in marketing research, and subsequently, with generation of customer insights. Customers worry about the privacy, safety, and security of the information shared by them with companies and marketing researchers. Companies ensure welfare of customers during the entire process. However, in many instances, companies collect and analyze information provided by customers to fulfil their selfish business motives. Companies sometimes intrude on consumer privacy in the process of collection and analysis of information from customers. In some cases, companies and research agencies modify and misuse the research findings to serve their own selfish motives. Although it is imperative for companies to collect and analyze customer information to generate customer insights, critics and experts emphasize that companies and researchers should not cause harm to customers in the process. On the contrary, they should adopt measures and initiatives which ensure welfare of customers and which build a sense of trust and belief in the minds of customers. They should adopt measures so that research findings are not abused, misinterpreted, and misrepresented. They should formulate and enforce proper rules and regulations to protect customers and to ensure their welfare. Customers prefer companies which they feel are ethical in their actions. Consequently, companies and researchers should remain ethical while collecting and analyzing customer information in marketing research. It becomes difficult to remain ethical because ethical and social dilemma are involved

in the process. Nevertheless, to ensure that they remain ethical, companies and researchers should be truthful to themselves and should abide by marketing research agencies to understand consumer psychology by analyzing their brains. Critics worry that companies and researchers may know more than they are supposed to know about customers. Companies and researchers apply new and innovative techniques to know about customers. Neuromarketing is a process which allows researchers to understand and to interpret the innermost feelings of individuals. Critics worry that companies and researchers may take undue advantage of those feelings. Companies and research agencies should act responsibly to protect the interests of customers. They should respect consumer privacy, should not misuse research findings, should abide by the rules and regulations formulated to protect customers, and should be proactive in assuring their customers that customer welfare is of prime importance.

8.1 Theoretical Implications

Academics and researchers will have a proper understanding of the public policy and ethical issues related to the collection and analysis of customer information, and the generation of customer insights. They will be able to appreciate the importance of such issues based on the discussions done in the study. They might conduct an in-depth analysis of the issues. They might analyze the existing rules and regulations and then suggest rules and regulations which will be more effective in providing better privacy and security for customers, in reducing misuse, misrepresentation, and misinterpretation of research findings, and in creating stronger bondage between customers and companies. The discussions might also help academics in developing theoretical models which will help in understanding the issues and in suggesting better solutions. Overall, the discussions might help policymakers to understand customer requirements and customer concerns better. This in turn will help policymakers to formulate policies, rules, and regulations which will protect the interests of customers effectively.

8.2 Managerial Implications

Managers will understand and realize the importance of consumer privacy, safety, and security. Consumer privacy should be ensured to win customer trust and to develop long-term customer relationships. Managers collect and analyze customer information to generate customer insights. In the process, research findings may be tampered with. However, managers should ensure that the research findings are not misused, misinterpreted, and misrepresented to serve the selfish motives of companies. Managers should remain ethical in the collection and analysis of customer information and in the generation of customer insights. They should respect and should abide by the rules and regulations formulated for ensuring consumer privacy and for protecting customers. Strategies should be formulated and initiatives should be taken keeping all these aspects in mind. Companies might also provide valuable inputs for policy formulations to protect customers. Policymakers may receive assistance from managers in devising the policies, rules, and regulations. Overall, companies should be aware about their roles and responsibilities towards ensuring consumer welfare and the welfare of the society at large.

IX. CONCLUSIONS

Marketers and researchers collect and analyze customer information to generate better customer insights. Various aspects related to collection and analysis of customer information and generation of customer insights are highlighted and discussed in the study. The major public policy and ethical issues in the process are related to intrusions on consumer safety, security, and privacy in the digital age; misuse, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation of marketing research findings; ethics and social dilemma involved in the collection and analysis of customer information; and ethical dilemma involved in the application of neuromarketing in understanding consumer psychology. Companies should be responsible and should ensure welfare of customers and welfare of the society at large. They should adopt strategies and undertake

initiatives to fulfil those responsibilities. All such activities will develop trust and belief in the minds of customers, will help in developing effective customer relationships, and will result in a win-win situation for both customers and companies.

9.1 Limitations

The study conducted a conceptual analysis of the literature on various public policy and ethical issues in the collection and analysis of customer information and in the generation of customer insights. Primary data is not collected and empirical analysis is not done. Empirical analysis might have provided results which are actionable. Also, the discussions done in the study focused mainly on the issues related to the United States. The public policy and ethical issues might be different in other markets and in other countries.

9.2 Avenues of Future Research

Researchers may study and analyze the various public policy and ethical issues in connection with the collection and analysis of customer information and the generation of customer insights. They might study and analyze the existing laws and regulations and suggest laws and regulations which are more effective. Researchers might collect primary data and might conduct empirical analysis. Such analysis will allow researchers to suggest measures which are actionable and implementable. The study is conducted in the context of the United States. Other than the United States, researchers may conduct research to extend the discussions in the context of countries where different rules and regulations might be applicable. Researchers might investigate how the measures and initiatives will apply or differ and the set of measures and initiatives which might be applicable in the context of different markets and countries.

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