

Chapter 95

Ethical Research Methods and Practice in the Twenty-First Century

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ABSTRACT

The growing record of unethical and socially irresponsible behavior among people of all ages and in all walks of life is a major concern for society at large. With advancements in technology and globalization these concerns have intensified, become more diverse and complex, and transcended national borders. This introductory chapter examines both the philosophical views of ethics and the contemporary issues surrounding research methods and practice. The chapter explores and summaries major contemporary issues in research methods and practice such as media research, cyber ethics, patents/trademark violations, collaborations, privacy issues, as well as the implications for both the micro and macro levels of the society. In addition to identifying the existing ethical concerns in research and practice, the final section sets the scene for discussions from the contributing authors and proposes recommendations and the need to address these ethical issues at all levels including research institutions, for-profit/not-for-profit organizations such as the United Nations and professional organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Advances in technology are major drivers of both globalization and telecommunication and thus, have created new challenges and complexities in ethical research methods and practice. Trends at both micro (individual) and macro (society) can be associated with advancement in nano-sciences, nanotechnology, bioethics, biotechnology, intellectual properties, social media research, and big data analysis. These innovative research methods

practices have created additional questionable research conduct. Social media problems for example, include but not limited to privacy, security and intellectual property violations that come with hacking, open source, data sharing, and credibility issues. The conduct of the Stanford and Dartmouth political scientists that sent mails featuring the state's official seal and offered information about candidates' political leaning as an experiment to determine if the information will alter how Montana voters' act has been condemned by researchers

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who see the experiment as unwise and unethical. Krosnick, a political scientist who commented in this article called it an attempt to manipulate politics and also stated that “it crosses an ethical line to create fictitious people and use government resources for people who don’t exist” (Bartlett, 2014). However, John Palfrey’s comment (2010) on social media opportunities for researchers said that “to ignore social media in research is like ignoring a man on fire”. Many organizations use social media for recruitment despite the problems of confidentiality and potential identity thefts. Michael Zimmer (2010) added his concern for IRB issues for social media research. His concerns include potential harms to human subjects and the fact that this may encourage fabrication of data as well as compromise integrity and honesty.

These trends are the result of new technological advancements and the potential implications of these actions in business, medicine, manufacturing, energy and many others are yet to emerge. Other contemporary ethical issues which were of little concern in the last two decades include cyber-attacks, terrorism, internet, privacy violations, health care, stem cells issues, and other major environmental disasters such as tsunamis, pollution, global warming, and the need for sustainable ecosystem.

Although debate on ethical and moral issues goes back to the 15th and 16th century, technology and globalization in the 21st century has enhanced the challenges and driven the debate into global regulatory organizations such as the United Nations and its agencies. The UN Global Compact with a focus on Human Rights issues, labor, environment, and anti-corruption issues in the societies (www.unglobalcompact.org) has become a major voice in issues of national and international conflicts especially where evidence of genocide and human rights violation exist. Although the UN principles may be seen as a focus on organizational and government practices (Governance and Corruptions), the media reports on many other contemporary ethical issues on re-

search mishaps and fraud, for example, the recent report from the center for diseases control (CDC) on employees “accidental” exposure to Anthrax, the federal organization’s retention of unsecured small pox vials which were supposed to be safely destroyed years ago (ABC, NBC, CBS News June/July 2014). And yet, the most recent verdict on the death of a researcher in a UCLA Chemistry Laboratory is a verdict for poorly trained lab assistants and a wakeup call for universities and corporate research centers (Chronicle of Higher Education: Research, July 2014).

Although ethical debates have since advanced from the days of philosophical principals and theories to debates on how to minimize ethical misconducts and character development issues, most of the training and education approaches and materials on ethics still focus on assessment of compliance with regulations and codes of ethics. Institutions of higher education, professional organizations, government, and business organizations have ethics code of Conduct which is designed to guide researchers and employees on how to comply and maintain respective organization’s value system. However, developing a comprehensive and effective ethics education program have been of major challenge to all. Ethical practice has implications for several audiences at both micro and macro levels, including higher education institutions, scientists, engineers, behavioral researchers, businesses, consumers, employees governments, government agencies, and many more. Specific challenges exist for audiences such as research institutions, which are mandated to show evidence of comprehensive research ethics training in the prospective grant proposals. Business organizations are also targets since it is imperative that Research and Development (R&D) divisions and leadership have moral obligation for quality goods and services, environmental sustenance, consumer and employee protection, and many other social responsibility issues. A major problem is that most of the emerging ethical issues (nano technologies, nano sciences, bioengineering, robotic medicine,

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