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**ASSIGNMENT COVER SHEET**

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| PROGRAMME | : | Masters in Business Analytics | | |
| SUBJECT CODE AND TITLE | : | BAA5023 - Business Research Method | | |
| ASSIGNMENT TITLE | : | Ethical Considerations of Digital Marketing – Research Proposal | | |
|  |  |  | | |
| LECTURER | : | Dr. Aaron Aw Teik Hong | ASSIGNMENT DUE DATE: | 12th of April 2024 |

STUDENT’S DECLARATION

1. I hereby declare that this assignment is based on my own work except where acknowledgement of sources is made.
2. I also declare that this work has not been previously submitted or concurrently submitted for any other courses in Sunway University/College or other institutions.

[ Submit “Turn-it-in” report (please tick √): Yes \_\_√\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_]

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APPROVAL FOR LATE SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENT (If applicable)

IF extension is granted, what is the revised due date? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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# Abstract

Digital marketing is currently one of the most effective methods of marketing in this day in age. With the rapid advancement of technology and AI, the effectiveness of digital marketing is only becoming significantly robust. Pervasive data collection, being an effective method for businesses, may be beneficial for many businesses in competitive industries, such as e-commerce and technology, however it has also emerged as a major concern among consumers. As technology advances over time, it has become increasingly effortless for businesses to gather information about consumers such as their daily browsing activity, what they have viewed, or even their location. Rightfully so, consumers may be concerned about how companies and businesses utilize their data, which brings the ethical considerations of digital marketing into question. In this study, the aim is to understand and analyze the ethical considerations that may arise from the collection of consumer data as a method of digital marketing. This study aims to investigate current business practices regarding the collection of consumer data, explore consumers’ perceptions towards the collection of their data, and examine the transparency of businesses regarding the collection of consumer data. Preliminary quantitative research has been conducted on a sample size of 54 individuals in the form of questionnaires regarding their opinion on their trust towards digital marketing companies, ethical considerations of companies’ transparency and trustworthiness, and targeting vulnerable populations.

# Background

With the significant advancement in technology and the rapid growth in social media over the years, digital marketing has emerged as an impactful method for marketers to create consumer relationships and to make informed decisions (Vollrath & Villegas, 2022). Digital marketing may be defined as the use of technology to boost marketing activities with the intention of gaining consumer knowledge by complementing their needs; the most prominent method being Search Engine Optimization (SEO), which is a method where the main objective is to persuade search engines to recommend a company’s content (eg. websites, products, and services) to their consumers (Khan & Siddiqui, n.d.).

It may be argued that digital marketing has made a significant impact on how businesses choose their marketing strategies due to the many benefits. One benefit of the use of digital marketing is the ability to gain attention from a large audience, using various techniques, as the internet is widely and easily available globally. Additionally, digital marketing results in increased sales due to the emergence of e-commerce, which enables and facilitates the sale of goods and services online. Lastly, digital marketing is generally inexpensive compared to conventional marketing methods, as the main work is solely carried out on the online, requiring involvement from a lower number of employees (Bizhanova et al., 2019). The benefits of digital marketing make it an appealing choice as a core marketing strategy for businesses to apply, which is why companies within competitive industries such as technology, entertainment, and e-commerce, capitalize on the use of digital marketing in order to stay competitive (Danzen, n.d.).

In the modern age, companies are able to access large quantities of data related to consumer behavior and use it to their advantage. These consumer behaviors can extend to what they buy, view, their location, and their day-to-day activity. As a result of this data being easily accessible, companies are collecting large amounts of data regarding consumers and potential consumers online, social media being the most prominent platform to collect this data. This data is heavily utilized by creating unique consumer profiles and companies use these profiles to create direct marketing strategies. For example, a unique consumer may have personalized ads, products, or services promoted to them based on their profile. This is an effective marketing strategy for businesses as it produces personalized marketing to different consumers. As a result, businesses benefit financially from this method of digital marketing (do Socorro Corrêa Cruz et al., 2022).

# Problem statement

In the context of modern age technology and digital marketing, it is comprehensible that collection of consumer data is one of the most essential procedures to conduct digital marketing. With the advancement in pervasive technology over the past few years, consumer data has never been more accessible, resulting in a major shift in the competitive landscape within marketing (Blasco-Arcas et al., 2022). Although the benefits are mostly in favor of businesses, this may have ethical implications towards the consumers’ point of view. Due to businesses gaining the ability to collect large amounts of consumer data with ease, consumers may be skeptical about the transparency of how these businesses utilize their data for their benefit.

As the exploitation and capture of consumer data has become a key competitive method of viewing their consumers, the ethical implications of this digital marketing method come into question (Blasco-Arcas et al., 2022). In a study conducted by Ping Zhang (2011), the researcher found that “consumers hold extremely negative scores on perceived values and attitude”, specifically regarding the irritation and privacy concerns of digital ads (Zhang, 2011). This further justifies consumers’ concerns regarding the mass collection of their data.

By analyzing and comprehending how businesses collect consumers’ data, the consumer perception of data collection, and the transparency of how they utilize them, the ethical considerations may be clearly defined and understood.

# Research Question and Research Objectives

What ethical considerations arise from the collection and analysis of consumers' personal information by businesses, particularly regarding issues of consent, transparency, and data security?

1. Investigate current business practices in terms of collecting and analyzing consumers' personal information, focusing on the extent to which consent, transparency, and data security are prioritized.
2. Explore consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards the collection and analysis of their personal information by businesses, particularly regarding issues of consent, transparency, and data security.
3. Examine the transparency measures implemented by businesses to inform consumers about their data collection and analysis practices, as well as the data security measures employed to protect consumers' personal information from unauthorized access or misuse.

# Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate the ethical consideration on the current practices of businesses in terms of collecting and analyzing consumer’s personal information. First the research design is addressed, then the data collection method. Next, the sampling design, research tool, and scales are also discussed. Quantitative method is used in this study as online questionnaires are used to gather primary data.

In this study, the research design is solely quantitative, meaning qualitative methods are not included. In quantitative research, measurements and analyses are made numerically. As a result, the acquired data is analyzed using statistics. Because of this, quantitative research techniques are regarded as naturally scientific. Researchers usually spend less time and effort describing the findings of their quantitative research when statistical approaches are applied to data processing. The questions in the survey are designed as fixed alternatives. This type of questions are close-ended which limits the participants response into a predictable area of answers (Eyisi, 2016).

In data collection, as mentioned, in this study we are using primary data and not secondary data. Primary data may be defined as unknown data that are collected for the first time for a specific purpose. This includes questionnaires, surveys and interviews. In this study, questionnaires are used as the main method of data collection.

The sample size is estimated to be 30 individuals as this is a suitable small sample size for an initial estimation.

## Research Instrument

The research instrument in this study is the questionnaire which are distributed online using Google forms. The questionnaire consists of a cover layout and four other sections. The first section is the demographic section, in which the aim is to obtain the target respondents’ personal information. There are six demographic questions in the questionnaire which are related to gender, age marital status, education level, occupation, and household’s monthly income.

In Section 1, 2, and 3, all constructs are measured by five-point Likert scales. It is shown that respondents are more likely to answer properly with a scale on their answer as it reduces their frustration (Babakus and Mangold, 1992). All sections contain questions that are related to ethical considerations on digital marketing but differ with types of considerations where Section 1 are about users’ trust towards digital marketing, Section 2 is about ethical considerations on transparency and trustworthiness of companies and lastly Section 3 is about ethical considerations on companies targeting vulnerable populations.

In this study, construct measurement is also required to maintain the validity of the study. There are three scales of measurement allocated in this study which are nominal scale, ordinal scale and interval scale. The sections of the questionnaire are categorized and quantified to be measured with the scales of measurement. The nominal scale allows the study to group certain subjects by giving a value to an object. The scale does not represent any quantity of the value does not have to be a number. It is also implied that there are no rankings in this scale but only different groups. The demographic section uses this scale to measure gender as there are no ranking in gender. The ordinal scale is a more complex scale than the nominals scale. The ordinal scale can be used to label variables that have a natural order, but the order does not contain any quantity difference between the ranks. This scale is used in the study to indicate age groups in the demographic section as there are no equal intervals between the age groups. The last scale is the interval scale which is the only scale that has order among measurements. This scale is used in Section 1, 2 and 3 to measure the difference between measurement points of the Likert scale.

## Questionnaire Designing

The questionnaires contain four parts which are Demographic Section, Section 1, 2 and 3. The Demographic Section collects the personal information of the targeted respondents. There are a total of six questions in this section. Gender, marital status and occupation are measured by the nominal scale, and age, education level and total household’s monthly income are measured by the ordinal scale.

In Section 1, there are 5 questions related to the user’s trust towards digital marketing companies. Interval scales are applied as the scale of measurement for Likert scale. Respondents are required to choose their answers from the range of 1 to 5 as their perception towards the questions. The 1 to 5 in the questionnaire answers defines Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, where 1 represents “Strongly Agree”, 2 represents “Agree”, 3 represents “Neutral”, 4 represents “Disagree”, 5 represents “Strongly Disagree”.

In Section 2 and 3, there are each 5 questions related to ethical consideration of transparency and trustworthiness, and targeting vulnerable populations towards the subjective norm and ethical concerns. In these parts, interval scales are applied as the scale of measurement and the Likert scale is used to design the questions. Respondents are required to choose their answers from the range of 1 to 5 as their perception towards the questions. The 1 to 5 in the questionnaire answers defines Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, where 1 represents “Strongly Agree”, 2 represents “Agree”, 3 represents “Neutral”, 4 represents “Disagree”, 5 represents “Strongly Disagree”. After gathering data using the questionnaire, SPSS software is used to check on the reliability of the questionnaire.

## Data Analysis

After data collection, the data can be processed using Google Forms and into Microsoft Excel. The data can be examined to check if the hypotheses are accepted or rejected. In this way the research questions are also answered. Some tests are performed using SPSS software such as reliability test, multicollinearity test and normality test.

Reliability testing is used to check for the reliability of the scales, if they are reliable then random error is omitted. Internal consistency is one of the primary measures of reliability. It indicates the degree to which each item on a scale measures the same underlying characteristic. Internal consistency is determined by the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient that is always between zero and one. The value of Cronbach’s alpha is positively correlated with reliability.

Multicollinearity means that the independent variables are highly correlated with each other with is undesired as when there is multicollinearity, the accuracy of the estimation of coefficients are affected and the regression model will produce false results. To measure multicollinearity, the variance inflation factor and tolerance value are observed.

Normality testing is to ensure the distribution of data is normal or not. Normal distribution enable accurate and dependable results from the data. To assume the test is normal, the skewness and kurtosis are observed to be between the value of -2 and +2 and -7 and +7 respectively to represent normality of the data.

After the tests are applied, multiple linear regression is applied as there is only one dependent variable and more than one independent variable. There are two independent variables in this study and therefore this method is applied. The regression model is evaluated. In the results, first look at the regression coefficient or r2 value to see how much the dependent variable is affected by the independent variable. Next the F-statistic in the ANOVA table is used to determine whether the model significantly explains changes in the dependent variable. For the dependent variable to be able to work, the p-value of the F-statistic must be less than 0.1. Finally, each independent variable's impact on the dependent variable is examined using the Coefficients table. The independent and dependent variables are significantly correlated if the p-value is less than or equal to 0.1.

The equation for the multiple linear regression is:

Where = Trust towards digital marketing

= Transparency and trustworthiness

= Targeting vulnerable populations

= error term

The multiple linear regression analysis will be conducted based on the equation above. According to the hypothesis, all independent variables which are on the right side of the equation will significantly affect the dependent variable which is on the left side of the equation.

# Literature Review

## Ethical framework

In order to understand the ethical consideration and application of digital marketing, it may be important to understand the ethical philosophies used in business. Generally, there are two prominent traditional ethical beliefs in marketing including consequential and deontological (Vignini & Rusconi, 2023). Both of these principles are classified as normative marketing ethical approach, where ethical behaviors are advocated based on ideal standards to ensure rigorous guidelines (Laczniak & Murphy, 2019).

Consequential is the preliminary ethical principle used by marketers due to its simplicity, as it solely relies on outcomes of the action while the inherent action characteristics are not considered (Nantel & Weeks, 1996). The most common consequential ethical theory is utilitarianism, which defined by John Stuart Mill, focuses on optimizing overall satisfaction and social utility (Kim et al., 2017). Therefore, utilitarianism principle is favored in digital marketing domain because it may allow obtain advantageous effects such as sales maximization and short-term increase in consumer satisfaction. However, as discussed on Nantel and Weeks (1996), utilitarianism paradigm may arise issues on individual rights and autonomy as its emphasis on simplified and short-term benefits has potential on unrealized ethical issues especially privacy breaches and security issues.

Inversely, deontology is another common ethical principle in normative marketing ethics which emphasizes moral duties and principles of an action (Nantel & Weeks, 1996). The most prevalent deontological ethical theory is Kantian theory, which defined by Immanuel Kant, prioritizes the universal and intolerable moral framework as well as aims to the genuine beneficence (Bowen & Prescott, 2015). The requirement of respecting individuals’ autonomy and dignity in digital marketing aligns with Kant’s paradigm, where privacy, transparency and security issues often occurred due to digital marketing activities. Unfortunately, marketers have not really resembled Kantian principle because strictly applying this may diminish company’s sales (Vignini & Rusconi, 2023).

Although normative ethical approach provides meticulous ethical standards, especially for Kantian paradigm, its implementation in digital marketing domain is debatable. The study conducted by Laczniak and Murphy (2019) shows that normative approach has been avoided by many marketing practicians and instead they prefer to utilize positive ethical approach, where ethics are perceived through data and observation, being dynamic and adaptive to situations. Another study by Hanlon (2020) also suggests that normative approaches may not be effective for digital and social media marketing. Instead, this study proposes the universal dialogic ethics approach which should be embraced by all social media platforms and online services and combined with contextual ethics for specific acknowledgement.

## Transparency, Data Privacy and Data Security

### Transparency

In the digital marketing domain, transparency principle is a fundamental concept for providing clear, appropriate and reasonable information to consumers for data collection, advertising strategies and brand communications (Dholakia, 2023). This principle is essential to provide fair information between firms and consumers in the concise and easily understandable approach for establishing trust and enhancing positive consumers perceptions.

The most prominent transparency issue in marketing related to data collection process, as discussed by Portes et al. (2019). From this study, while transparency is positively appreciated in general, it becomes inversely perceived when it comes to personalization. This finding is further supported through research conducted by Stevenson (2016) where increasing transparency in online marketing personalization will decrease consumers’ preferences of personalized advertising due to privacy fears and distrust of companies. This issue may be an instance of transparency paradox, where excessive information given arises confusion and skepticism and thus diminishes a company’s credibility (Dholakia, 2023). Consequently, many marketers choose to conceal some personalization disclosures while may resulting in privacy breaches such as well-known Cambridge Analytica cases (Hu, 2020).

Moreover, Leitch (2017) discusses that the company’s transparency context includes to avoid misleading and ensure trustworthy information on online advertisement contents as well as appropriate evidence on the company’s overview details, which strongly affects brand reputation. This study also mentions companies’ challenge to have appropriate level of transparency which benefits both firms and consumers. Some countries have regulated business transparency practices such as Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in United States (Hu, 2020).

### Data Privacy

Data privacy is a very crucial ethical consideration in digital marketing as personal information collection and utilization play a significant role for targeted advertising and consumer profiling (Portes et al., 2019). The Cambridge Analytica scandal occurred in 2018 which was related to misuse of personal data from Facebook users for targeted political advertising proofs the severity of personal data deception, not mentioning many other smaller cases (Hu, 2020; Burkhardt et al., 2022).

The most prevalent framework related to consumer attitudes and data privacy concerns is privacy calculus theory, whether personal information disclosure is considered through cost-benefit analysis (Gutierrez et al., 2019). It can be said that people will share their personal information if the perceived benefits outweigh the risks of privacy infringements. Inversely, another theory called as privacy paradox describes anomalies in individuals’ expressed privacy concerns with their actual behaviors online (Cloarec et al., 2024). Hanlon (2020) mentions that most younger people overwhelmingly share their personal information in social media while they are usually highly concerned with online privacy.

Therefore, analysis regarding data privacy in digital platforms is complex. The study conducted by Burkhardt et al. (2022) indicates a proliferation in public cynicism regarding personal data collection although online informed consents have been implemented. The distrust of data privacy in digital marketing has been generally increased after the Cambridge Analytica scandal, while informed consents are often seen as politely unethical permissions. Additionally, social media platforms generally require acknowledgement of many personal data for users’ operation, which is unavoidable considering social media importance (Hanlon, 2020).

Some legal frameworks have been established to tackle data privacy concerns in digital marketing, most notably is the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in European Union (EU) which forces strict requirement for concise and transparent privacy notices, explicit consent for data processing and robust security systems for protecting consumer data (Mbanaso, 2018). Australia and China also have their own regulatory standards, while United States utilizes state-based data protection frameworks (Hanlon, 2020).

Furthermore, Edenberg and Jones (2019) explains challenges on regulatory enforcement and compliance in jurisdictions based on different cultures, which are rights-based approaches such as GDPR and consumer-based approaches like in the United States. This study also mentions consent management, data practice transparency and the accountability of businesses for data violations. Additionally, there are some technical suggestions related to data privacy in digital marketing such as data anonymization, pseudonymization and minimization as well as blockchain (Nguyen & Tran, 2023).

### Data Security

Extensive consumer data collection and processing in digital marketing activities also contributes to security concerns, while the rise in cybersecurity cases is contributing to individual data breaches (Gupta & Saraf, 2023). Although legal frameworks such as GDPR strictly mandate security practices in handling personal data, its misemployment may still occur such as data theft, DOS (Denial-of-Service) attacks, malware, broken authentication and identify spooring (Nguyen & Tran, 2023).

According to Ferdousi (2022), consumers’ trust in technology as well as perceived risks and attitude towards the company affects perception on data security. The prevalence of data security incidents such as Target in 2013 (Steinberg et al., 2021) and Equifax in 2017 (Srinivas & Liang, 2022) fostered by external cyberattacks has cynically affected these companies such as financial losses as well as damage in both reputation and trust. It is notably that data security practice is related to organizational culture and governance, emphasizing on accountability, transparency and innovation at all organizational levels (Dholakia, 2023). Furthermore, companies are expected to communicate their commitment to consumer data protection and adhere industry best practices on data security, including security certifications (Srinivas & Liang, 2022).

Moreover, technological considerations are really important to foster data privacy in digital marketing. Some common approaches to protect sensitive information from unauthorized access or interception include encryption, access controls, Data Leakage Prevention Systems (DLPS) software and cybersecurity protocols (Kuye, 2023). Srinivas and Liang (2022) also suggest firms to consider higher budget for security development, establish specialized security plan as well as balance functional aspects with security.

## Business Practices & Compliance

As more people use the internet, the number of personal information being shared on the internet has drastically increased (Petrescu et al., 2020). This allows the digital marketer to track consumers’ online activity and gathering information on their liking and preferences (Schwaig et al., 2006). However, there are a lot of instances where companies misuse the users’ personal data by sharing it to the third parties. One prominent instance was involving Facebook in 2018 where it had shared the data from millions of user accounts with Cambridge Analytica during the United State elections (Eagle et al., n.d.-a).

The issues about companies sharing the user’s data with other parties has make many people questioning about the business practices and compliance towards their personal information (Malgieri, 2023). Many countries have taken into action by introducing laws that protect users’ personal data such as General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in European Union (EU). The law requires that all companies that are established in the EU or provide services in EU or monitor people’s behavior in EU must comply with the GDPR. Failing to do so, will result in administrative fine of 20 million euros and up to 4% of the total worldwide annual turnover (Malgieri, 2023).

Despite the introduction of many laws and regulations that protect the users’ personal information, there are still a lot of loopholes that the companies have breached that results in their users’ data being use by other parties (Eagle et al., n.d.-b). Government must actively participate in tightening the laws and regulations as it would help the companies to comply with the laws and regulations or they will have to be charged with hefty penalties (Petrescu et al., 2020).

The study conducted by Malgieri (2023) for GDPR highlighted that many companies that operating in EU have comply with the GDPR. However, there are some improvements that need to be addressed by the EU such as the law for protecting vulnerable populations and also to strengthen the regulations in sharing the users’ data to third parties.

For the company compliance towards the law and regulations, Edenberg and Jones (2019) had explained the challenges on regulatory enforcement and compliance in jurisdictions based on different regions or countries. One of the examples that they had given is the GDPR is only regulated in EU, and it cannot be used in other regions. Nonetheless, many countries have started to introduce their own law and regulations to protect the users’ data privacy such as Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) in United States which strictly prohibits online data collection and targeted advertisement for children under 13 years old (World Health Organization, 2016).

## Consumers Perception & Attitude Towards Digital Marketing

Digital marketing brings convenience to the people nowadays especially during the COVID-19 where the whole world had to stay at the house and online shopping had helped the people to get their goods (Petrescu et al., 2020). According to Sánchez-Amboage et al., (2024), there is a change in trend in people do shopping where they are buying things on the internet as it reduces the effort of travelling to a physical store, makes price comparison easier and provides a lot of options in choosing the goods. This has significantly enhanced peoples’ perceptions of purchasing goods using digital marketing, aiding a notably positive outlook.

However, there are some cultural factors that impact the people in perceiving digital marketing such as values, beliefs, and communication style (Eagle et al., n.d.-a). in the study conducted by Petrescu et al. (2020), some cultural may perceive that direct and assertive advertising as intrusive and disrespectful and in some cultures, it may be more acceptable. Understanding the differences in culture nuances is vital for digital marketers to tailor their digital marketing messages effectively and resonate with different types of people (Schwaig et al., 2006).

In the context of data privacy, there exist a notable dearth positive largely due to the consumers perceive that the digital marketers are abusing their data privacy (Shanthi & Kannaiah, 2015). This can be seen clearly when the government must introduce laws and regulations to protect the users, personal data as the people raised concern on how the digital marketers have misused their information (Eagle et al., n.d.-a). This can be notably bee seen during the Facebook scandal in 2018 where they had shared the data from millions of user accounts with Cambridge Analytica during the United State elections. However, there are some positive outlook and perception in digital marketing when many countries started to implement the laws and regulations which protect the users’ data privacy (Petrescu et al., 2020).

## Targeting Vulnerable Population

Data-driven and personalized marketing in the digital era has raised essential concerns about targeting vulnerable population (World Health Organization, 2016). Vulnerable populations are individuals who may be harmed or negatively impacted from marketing exposures (Thompson et al., 2020).

The most prevalent theory related to vulnerability considerations in marketing practice is Brenkert’s principles, which justify the need of special protections and considerations for vulnerable populations (Palmer & Hedberg, 2012). This theory involves some vulnerability identifications, such as cognitive vulnerability for children who are still immature to understand advertisements appropriately (World Health Organization, 2016). Elderly individuals may also suffer from cognitive vulnerability by deceptive digital advertising or online scams (Almeida, 2020). Individuals facing financial insecurity including drop-out children, homeless persons, sex workers and apprentices as categorized by Obukoadata et al. (2020) may be considered as social and/or motivational vulnerable. Additionally, physical vulnerability is often suffered by disability individuals (Lazić et al., 2023).

Some regulatory frameworks for protecting vulnerable population already existed, most notably the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) in United States which strictly prohibits online data collection and targeted advertisement for children under 13 years old (World Health Organization, 2016). Similarly, the United States’ Customer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) framework governs digital financial services to avoid predatory lending practices and ensure fair practice for economically vulnerable populations (Hunton Andrews Kurth, 2022).

Despite these acknowledges and regulations, the awareness regarding vulnerable population in marketing is still lacking. The study conducted by Dearlove et al. (2021) highlights that digital advertisement has massively affected children’s consumption which leads to consumptive and unhealthy behaviors. However, this study along with findings from World Health Organization (2016) reveals that parents and even governments practically ignore this practice and the risk of this susceptibility. In addition, Clendennen et al. (2021) finds overwhelming smokeless tobacco advertisement in digital platform has significantly increased number of young adults who were previously non-smokers to use smokeless tobacco.

Furthermore, Palmer and Hedberg (2012) criticizes Brenkert’s principles for inability to provide appropriate solutions for unintended marketing to vulnerable population. This study suggests considering both consequentialist and deontological approaches for benefiting both vulnerable population and marketers as well as avoid deceptive, coercive and manipulative tactics. Thompson et al. (2020) recommends transparency, informed consent and sensitivity as the essential foundation of vulnerability avoidance in digital marketing practices, such as age-appropriate content and clear disclosures. Moreover, governments should be actively taking attention to digital marketing vulnerability through sufficient education as well as regulation control and improvement (Obukoadata et al., 2020).

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Questionnaires

**Ethical Considerations in Digital Marketing Questionnaire**

**Dear Participant,**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our survey on Ethical Considerations in Digital Marketing. Your valuable insights will contribute to our understanding of the ethical challenges and responsibilities faced by marketers in the digital age.

**Purpose of the Survey**

This survey aims to explore various ethical dimensions of digital marketing practices, including data privacy, transparency, targeting vulnerable populations, combatting misinformation, and responsible advertising practices. By examining these issues, we seek to identify areas where improvements can be made to ensure ethical conduct in digital marketing.

**Confidentiality and Privacy**

Your responses will remain strictly confidential and will only be used for research purposes. Your identity will be kept anonymous, and no personally identifiable information will be collected. Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time.

**Instructions**

Please read each question carefully and select the response that best reflects your opinion or experience. The Likert scale provided ranges from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" or other relevant options. There are no right or wrong answers, and we value your honest feedback.

Thank you once again for your participation. Your input is invaluable, and we look forward to analyzing the results of this survey to gain valuable insights into ethical considerations in digital marketing.

**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Gender** | |
| Male |  |
| Female |  |
|  | |
| **Age** | |
| Below 20 years old |  |
| 20 - 29 years old |  |
| 30 - 39 years old |  |
| 40 - 49 years old |  |
| 50 - 59 years old |  |
| 60 years old and above |  |
|  | |
| **Martial Status** | |
| Single |  |
| Married |  |
| Other |  |
|  | |
| **Education Level** | |
| No Formal Education |  |
| Primary Education |  |
| Secondary education |  |
| Diploma |  |
| Bachelor |  |
| Postgraduate |  |
| Other |  |
|  | |
| **Occupation** | |
| Public Sector |  |
| Private Sector |  |
| Self-employed |  |
| Retired |  |
| Student |  |
| Other |  |
|  | |
| **Total household's monthly income** | |
| Less than RM2500 |  |
| RM 2501 - RM3170 |  |
| RM 3171 - RM 3970 |  |
| RM 3971 - RM 4850 |  |
| RM 4851 - RM 5880 |  |
| RM 5881 and above |  |

**Section 1: Trust towards Digital Marketing**

**Instruction**: By using the scale below, please indicate your answer by ticking on every item that best describes your opinion.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **How well you trust companies handle your data responsibly?** | | | | | |
| Strongly Trust | | | Strongly Distrust | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |
|  | | | | | |
| **Is it important that companies obtain explicit consent before collecting and using personal data for marketing purposes?** | | | | | |
| Extremely Important | | | Not Important | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |
|  | | | | | |
| **Are you confident that your personal data adequately protected from unauthorized access or misuse by companies?** | | | | | |
| Very Confident | | | Not Confident | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |
|  | | | | | |
| **Do you believe companies should be transparent about the types of data they collect about you for marketing purposes?** | | | | | |
| Strongly Agree | | | Strongly Disagree | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |
|  | | | | | |
| **Do you concern about the potential misuse of your personal data by companies for targeted advertising?** | | | | | |
| Very Concerned | | | Not Concerned At All | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |

**Section 2: Transparency and Trustworthiness**

**Instruction**: By using the scale below, please indicate your answer by ticking on every item that best describes your opinion

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Do you believe that companies are transparent about how they use consumer data for advertising purposes?** | | | | | |
| Completely Transparent | | | Completely Not Transparent | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |
|  | | | | | |
| **How likely are you to trust companies that have been transparent about their data collection and usage practices?** | | | | | |
| Very Likely | | | Very Unlikely | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |
|  | | | | | |
| **Is it important for companies to disclose when content is sponsored or paid for by advertisers?** | | | | | |
| Extremely Important | | | Not Important | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |
|  | | | | | |
| **Do you think companies should disclose the specific data points used to target you with personalized advertisements?** | | | | | |
| Strongly Agree | | | Strongly Disagree | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |
|  | | | | | |
| **How much do you value honesty and transparency in digital marketing communications?** | | | | | |
| Extremely Valuable | | | Not Valuable | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |

**Section 3: Targeting Vulnerable Populations**

**Instruction**: By using the scale below, please indicate your answer by ticking on every item that best describes your opinion.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Do you believe companies should be restricted from targeting vulnerable populations, such as children or elderly individuals, with personalized advertisements?** | | | | | |
| Strongly Agree | | | Strongly Disagree | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |
|  | | | | | |
| **How comfortable are you with the idea of companies using personalized advertising to target vulnerable populations?** | | | | | |
| Very Comfortable | | | Very Uncomfortable | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |
|  | | | | | |
| **To what extent do you think targeting vulnerable populations with personalized advertisements can be exploitative?** | | | | | |
| Strongly Agree | | | Strongly Disagree | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |
|  | | | | | |
| **Should there be stricter regulations governing the use of personalized advertising aimed at vulnerable populations?** | | | | | |
| Strongly Agree | | | Strongly Disagree | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |
|  | | | | | |
| **How important is it for companies to consider the potential impact of their marketing efforts on vulnerable populations?** | | | | | |
| Extremely Important | | | Not Important | | |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
|  |  |  | |  |  |

## Appendix 2 – Responses

|  |
| --- |
| **DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION** |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Gender. Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Age. Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Martial Status. Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Education Level. Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Occupation. Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Total household&apos;s monthly income. Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| **Section 1: Trust towards Digital Marketing** |
| Forms response chart. Question title: How well you trust companies handle your data responsibly? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Is it important that companies obtain  explicit consent before collecting and using personal data for marketing purposes? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Are you confident that your personal data  adequately protected from unauthorized access or misuse by companies? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Do you believe companies should be transparent about the types of data they collect about you for marketing purposes?  . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Do you concerned about the potential misuse of your personal data by companies for targeted advertising? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| **Section 2: Transparency and Trustworthiness** |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Do you believe that companies are transparent about how they use consumer data for advertising purposes? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: How likely are you to trust companies that have been transparent about their data collection and usage practices? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Is it important for companies to disclose when content is sponsored or paid for by advertisers? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Do you think companies should disclose the specific data points used to target you with personalized advertisements? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: How much do you value honesty and transparency in digital marketing communications? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| **Section 3: Targeting Vulnerable Populations** |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Do you believe companies should be restricted from targeting vulnerable populations, such as children or elderly individuals, with personalized advertisements? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: How comfortable are you with the idea of companies using personalized advertising to target vulnerable populations? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: To what extent do you think targeting vulnerable populations with personalized advertisements can be exploitative? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: Should there be stricter regulations governing the use of personalized advertising aimed at vulnerable populations? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |
| Forms response chart. Question title: How important is it for companies to consider the potential impact of their marketing efforts on vulnerable populations? . Number of responses: 54 responses. |

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