

Prioritizing Ethical Concerns For The Australian Marketing Research Profession

Madhav N. Segal, Ralph W. Giacobbe

Abstract

The study describes and operationalizes a framework on how best to focus and prioritize key ethical concerns in marketing research for the Australian marketing research profession and industry. Australian marketing research professionals' perceptions of a number of ethical areas are empirically assessed both in terms of seriousness of ethical lapses/violations of ethical practices and perceived frequency of such occurrences. While empirical findings provide guidance for the Australian marketing research industry and professional trade groups by indicating key priority areas for allocation of industry attention, time and resources to address unethical conduct and associated practices, the proposed framework is applicable in the context of other nations as well.

In a progressively more global, competitively economic context, issues of marketing and marketing research ethics are increasingly receiving much deserved attention. Marketing decision makers are especially challenged as this dynamic environment poses some very difficult ethical dilemmas because their: (a) marketing operations are directed at substantially many more fragmented markets, (b) markets are becoming more interdependent and competitive, and (c) marketing is culturally more complex as a result of the globalization of their business operations. Therefore, for marketing and business operations to succeed globally, it has become essential to understand internationally shared professional values and culturally-sensitive ethical codes of conduct which impact all businesses, industry, and professions, for they are not unaffected by cultural variations (Segal *et al.*, 1993).

As marketing becomes more internationalized, one would expect a greater utilization of marketing research with a greater likelihood of its misuse and more conflicts in delivering and in its application. While the marketing research profession in the United States (U.S.) has now had extensive experience exploring these issues, it is only recently that several other countries have begun paying attention to ethics in marketing research practice. Therefore, it seems prudent to clearly understand the unique ethical issues in different nations and regions to develop culturally sensitive universal ethical codes of conduct in marketing re-

search. Toward this end, this study focuses on a strategic approach to assess and identify critical ethical issues in marketing research in the context of Australia. While the issues involved are idiosyncratic to Australia, the approach proposed here is general enough to be replicated in other regions of the world.

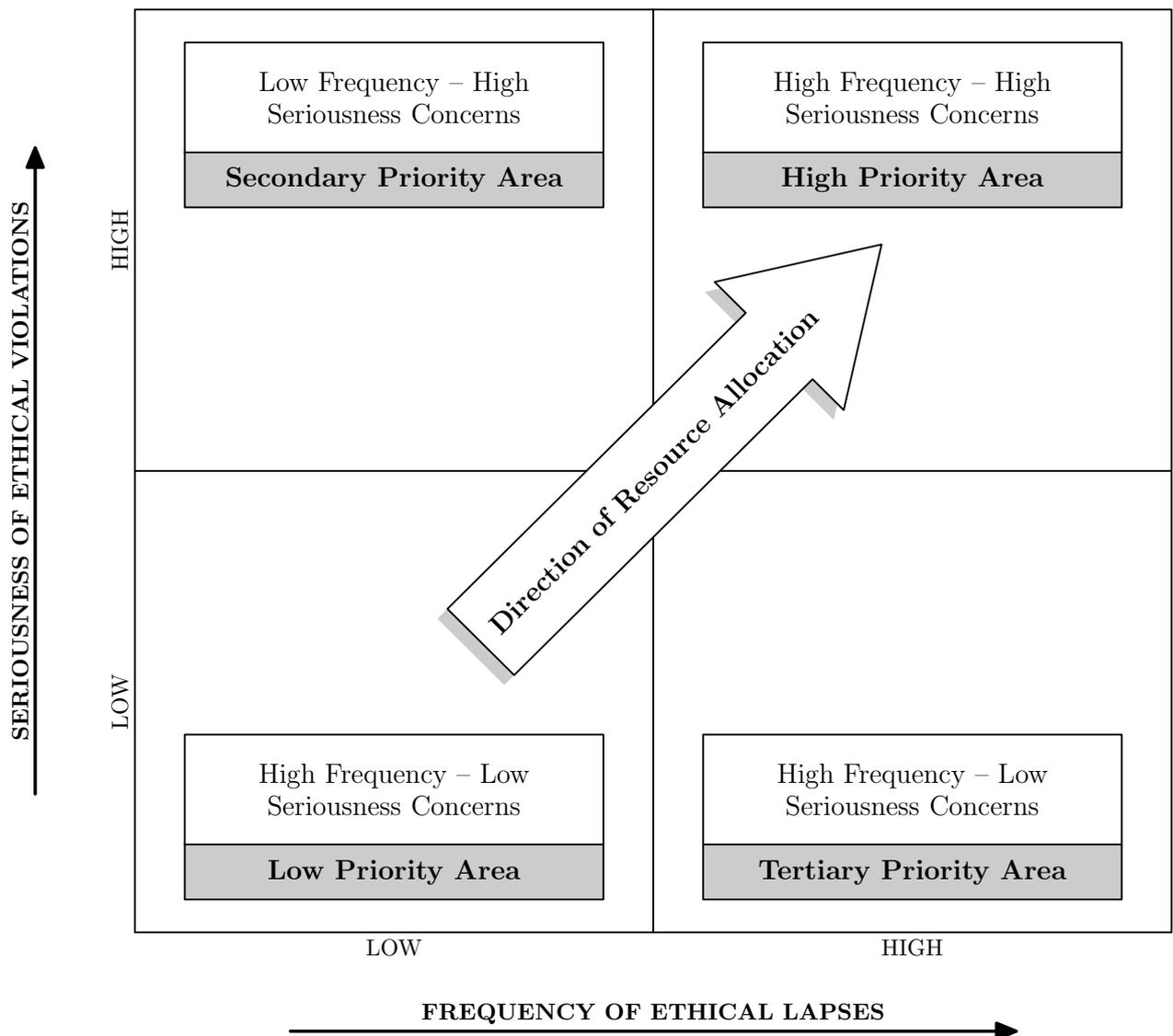
Background and Purpose

Marketing Research as a profession and as a discipline continues to gain importance as marketing decision makers realize that insufficient knowledge and lack of dependable information are the key reasons for failure in the international marketplace. Several research studies dealing with the ethics in marketing and marketing research have been reported in the marketing literature in the last two decades and have done much to enhance our understanding of various aspects of ethical conduct in the field (e.g., Akaah, 1990; Becker and Fritzsche, 1987; Giacobbe and Segal, 2000). Unfortunately, this enhanced focus on research ethics in the U.S. marketing literature is not matched by similar emphasis in research dealing with international, cross-cultural or even different country contexts. Culture's role in ethical decision making is now beginning to be recognized, and different theoretical frameworks have recently been proposed (Srnrka, 2004). Since different cultures perhaps place different degrees of emphasis on various marketing research practices that might be considered unethical by other cultures, it makes sense

to understand such variations. Indeed, a proactive approach is what might be necessary, and other professions and industry groups can assist in providing necessary guidelines. Given the emerging importance of marketing research in a variety of developing coun-

tries especially India and China, their respective trade and industry groups stand to benefit most immediately from such a proactive approach of appropriate ethicality in their operations and practices.

Figure 1
Priority Paradigm for Ethical Concerns in Marketing Research



To suggest improvements for marketing research conduct and practices in a country specific context, a number of interrelated questions may need to be raised. How should the marketing research profession estab-

lish a general framework to assess the gravity of practices that might be considered unethical? Can the quality of research conduct and its ethicality for a specific country be improved by prioritizing and focusing on a

specific set of behaviors within codes of conduct and associated violations (unethical practices in marketing research)? Are there key ethical behaviors and research practices that should receive a higher priority to provide concrete guidelines for research? It is critical to raise these and other related questions because their answers can assist the marketing research profession identify most critical ethical lapses and related marketing research practices in a specific country. This can then allow an improved allocation of the marketing research profession's scarce time, efforts, and resources by drawing attention to the most critical ethical areas to accommodate the new and emerging priorities of today's dynamic marketplace. While the research industry associations and their respective leaders must pay close attention to *all* issues related to violations of ethical practices in marketing research, a mechanism to prioritize will help channel resources in appropriate training, professional development, and education of research practitioners.

There appears to be no conceptual or empirical attempt in the literature to provide specific guidance for the marketing research profession to prioritize its concerns and challenges in the area of unethical marketing research practices. To the best of our knowledge, therefore this study is a necessary first step in developing a framework to prioritize various ethical lapses and associated industry-wide practices. The next section discusses the prioritization framework and the research methodology to make it operational in the context of the Australian marketing research industry.

Prioritization Framework

Generally, ethical issues in marketing research originate and reside in the interactions of various stakeholder groups such as clients (end users), research suppliers, and respondents (e.g., Ferrell and Skinner, 1988; Akaah and Riordan, 1988). While various aspects of ethical dilemmas dealing with these stakeholders have been extensively investigated, to the best of our knowledge, no conceptual frameworks have yet been proposed to systematically study the severity of ethical lapses. Therefore, to assist the marketing research profession and its trade associations and industry groups, we propose a "Priority Paradigm" as shown

in Figure 1.

The prioritization framework indicates how the frequency of "Ethical Lapses/Violation of Ethical Practices" can be juxtaposed across the "Seriousness of Ethical Lapses/Violation of Ethical Practices" to identify distinct areas in setting priorities for the research industry groups. The framework details how each ethical lapse/practice can be evaluated on each dimension which, in turn, is categorized in terms of degrees of frequency and seriousness (described as "high" versus "low") of these ethical lapses. This conceptualization allows identification of each practice to be categorized in one of the four following priority areas:

- Low Priority (Low Frequency-Low Seriousness) Concerns
- Tertiary Priority (High Frequency-Low Seriousness) Concerns
- Secondary Priority (Low Frequency-High Seriousness) Concerns
- High Priority (High Frequency-High Seriousness) Concerns

Figure 1 also indicates the direction of resource allocation for those involved in providing direction and leadership for the marketing research industry or trade association. Clearly, resources should move from the low priority to the high priority areas. This will involve an assessment of ethical lapses/violations of current ethical marketing research practices along the two dimensions of frequency and seriousness and will, therefore, assist in identifying priority areas of ethical concerns in marketing research in a country-specific context. It is hypothesized that these priority areas will differ from country to country as various cultures are expected to socialize individuals differently such that they will develop different ethical frameworks. A large body of ethics research supports the proposition that different ethical frameworks and ethical decision making is closely related to cultural and national diversity (e.g., McClelland, 1961; Hofstede, 1980; Becker and Fritzsche, 1987; Langlois and Schlegelmitsh, 1990; Lee, 1982; Dubinsky

et al., 1991; Tsalikis and Nwachukwu, 1991; Abratt and Sacks, 1988; Giacobbe and Segal, 2000; Mullin et al., 2004).

Research Context, Purpose and Objectives

This study is believed to not only demonstrate the application of the proposed framework but also to augment knowledge in a specific country or culture context where little or no such information exists. Australia is specifically selected as the study context because it is one of the most dynamic economies in the developed world (average growth rate of 4% over the last five years, *Business Asia*, 2004) and has a fully functioning marketing research profession and industry associations (see web site for AMRS, the Professional Society of Australian Marketing Research) which has also experienced a high growth rate in the last five years. As of 2002, there are 334 businesses providing marketing research services (*Australian Bureau of Statistics ABS*, 2003). While this application can be effective in other national contexts as well, empirical findings specifically are expected to have wider implications for the Australian research industry.

The general purpose of this study is to assess and prioritize ethical lapses through the Prioritization Paradigm in an Australian context. Given the overall purpose of the study, the following specific research objectives were formulated to provide an understanding of Australian perspectives on ethical lapses in marketing research:

- To determine the frequency of ethical lapses/violation of ethical practices as perceived by Australian marketing research professionals.
- To determine the perceptions of Australian marketing research professionals' assessment of seriousness of ethical lapses/violation of ethical practices.
- To determine the priority areas of various ethical lapses/violation of ethical practices so that

appropriate guidelines can be designed for resource allocation by the marketing research industry or trade association group.

This study is somewhat similar in spirit to the study by Segal and Giacobbe (2006) in which certain aspects of ethical issues of Australian marketing research profession are investigated.

Research Method

A questionnaire with a cover letter and pre-addressed return envelope was mailed to 900 Australian marketing research professionals listed in the national directory of the *Australian Marketing Research Society*. A total of 86 completed and usable questionnaires constituted an overall response rate of 9.6%. While quite low, this rate is considered reasonable given (a) the international scope of the study, (b) the respondent had to incur the expense of mailing, (c) no pre-post-notifications were made, (d) the sensitive nature of the subject, and (e) a lengthy time-consuming questionnaire (11 pages). Additionally, this overall response rate is well within the reported range in previous research studies (e.g. Akaah, 1990) related to ethics in marketing and marketing research

The questionnaire covered a wide variety of areas and topics including measurement of frequency and seriousness of violation of ethical practices in marketing research, importance of various ethical codes of conduct, and measurements of several respondent and organizational characteristics. Except for a few respondent characteristics and an open-ended question ("Please describe a specific unethical marketing research situation that you have encountered recently?"), all respondents were asked to respond to a set of statements or questions using either 5-point or 7-point Likert-type scales. Sample characteristics included questions related to respondents and their organizations; key summary finding pertaining to the sample characteristics are displayed in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1 Sample Characteristics

Company/Respondent Characteristics	Percentage	Graphical Representation
a. Type of business		
Research Agency	68.60	68.60%
Client Organization	17.40	17.40%
Other	14.00	14.00%
b. Management Position		
Top Management	49.40	49.40%
Upper Management	22.40	22.40%
Middle Management	22.40	22.40%
Lower Management	2.40	2.40%
Non Management	3.50	3.50%
c. Marketing Research Experience ($\mu = 14.23$ years)		
1 to 10	44.70	44.70%
11 to 20	31.80	31.80%
21 to 30	20.00	20.00%
31 or More	3.50	3.50%
d. Full-Time Employees ($\mu = 24$)		
Below 6	46.50	46.50%
6 to 10	14.00	14.00%
11 to 20	9.30	9.30%
21 to 50	12.80	12.80%
51 and over	17.40	17.40%
e. Part-Time Employees ($\mu = 172$)		
Below 6	30.20	30.20%
6-10	7.00n	7.00%
21-50	5.80	5.80%
51-100	5.80	5.80%
101 and More	51.20	51.20%
f. Age ($\mu = 40.68$ years)		
20 to 30	19.80	19.80%
31 to 40	32.60	32.60%
41 to 50	25.60	25.60%
51 to 60	18.60	18.60%
61 and Older	3.50	3.50%
g. Gender		
Male	59.30	59.30%
Female	40.70	40.70%

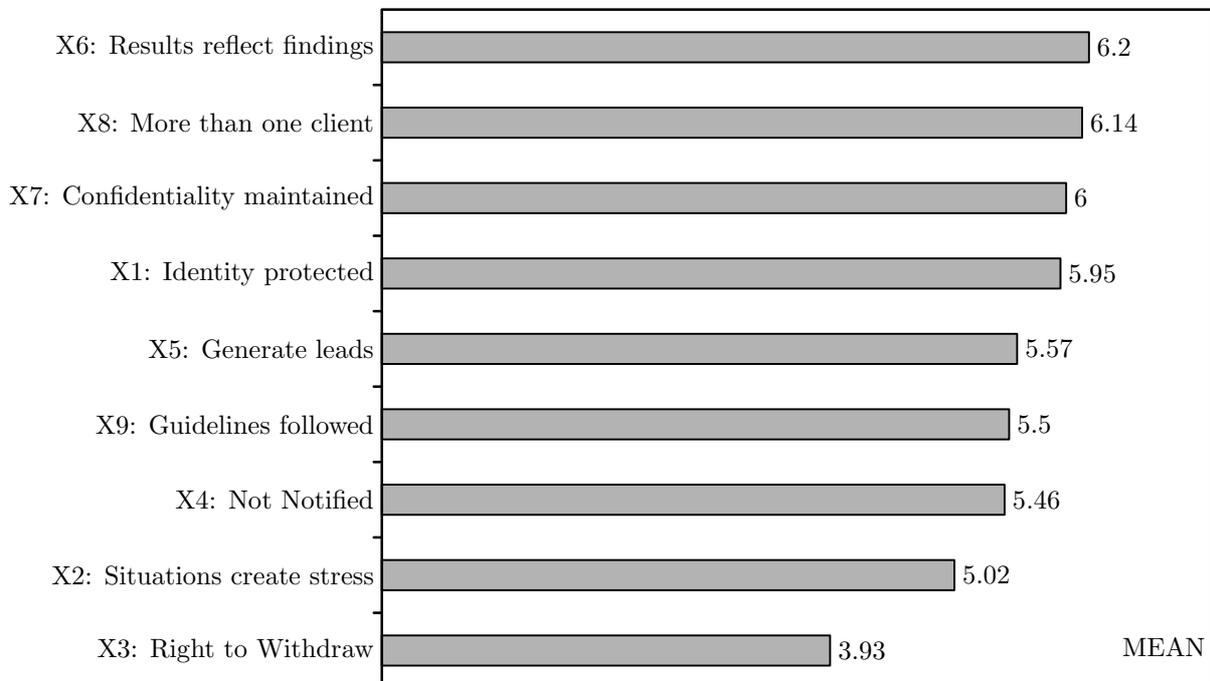
Exhibit 1 indicates that the Australian marketing research professionals as respondents had diverse organizational and demographic backgrounds. Sample characteristics indicate that a fairly good cross-section of qualified Australian marketing researchers from various research industry segments was tapped

through the mail survey. In terms of organizational characteristics (a) a large majority of respondents (69%) are from Australian marketing research agencies, (b) a small proportion (17%) are from client corporations' marketing research departments, and (c) the remainder (14%) is from other organizations such as

university affiliated research centers.

**Exhibit 2:
Frequency of Violation of Ethical Practices in Marketing Research: Summary Measure**

Variables	Ethical Practices*	Mean	Standard Deviation
X ₆	Reported results accurately reflect report findings.	6.20	0.88
X ₈	Clients are notified if the research is being conducted for more than one client.	6.14	1.43
X ₇	Client confidentiality is strictly maintained.	6.00	1.21
X ₁	When promised, the respondent's identity is protected against disclosure.	5.95	1.71
X ₅	Marketing Research is used to generate promotional or sales leads.	5.57	1.73
X ₉	Industry guidelines are followed in generating and reporting research results.	5.50	1.48
X ₄	Respondents are not notified if recording devices are being used during the interviews.	5.46	2.13
X ₂	Respondents are placed in situations which create unnecessary stress.	5.02	1.44
X ₃	Respondents are told that they have the right to withdraw at any point in the interview.	3.93	1.96



(* Measured on a 7-point scale: 7 means 'Always' and 1 means 'Never')

The organizations participating in the survey include a good mix of several large (17%), medium (36%) and small (46%) size firms, as assessed in terms of full-time employees. These firms also employed a large number of part-time employees (51% with over 100 employees). This cross section of marketing research staff mirrors well that of the research industry in many other developed economies including the U.S.

The respondents occupied different levels of management positions: top management (49%), upper management (22%), middle management (22%) and lower and non-management positions (6%). Clearly, the sample is heavily overrepresented in terms of the upper and top management positions (over 70%). A large majority (59%) of respondents is male. Given the relative newness of the profession in Australia, not surprisingly, about 52% of all respondents are rather young (40 years and younger) with an average age of about 41 years, and about 45% of all respondents have less than 10 years of marketing research experience. It is also noteworthy that there are several (about 20%) well experienced (over 20 years of marketing research experience) and knowledgeable research professionals in Australia who responded to this survey.

Results

Major findings are organized and discussed by the research objectives of the study.

Frequency of Violation of Ethical Marketing Research Practices

Australian marketing research professionals provided their perceptions of current frequency of violation of nine ethical practices as reported in their firms or marketing research profession or industry. A seven-point scale was used to address this research objective (1 = never, 7 = always). It is interesting to note that these research professionals perceive the following client-related violation of ethical practices as occurring most often: “Reported results accurately reflect report findings,” “Clients are notified if the research is being conducted for more than two clients,” and “Client confidentiality is strictly maintained” (mean value 6.20, 6.14 and 6.00, respectively). However, the same research professionals believe that violation

of the ethical practice of “Respondents are told that they have the right to withdraw at any point in the interview” is not very frequent and is ranked the lowest of all possible violations (mean value of 3.93). However, perceived frequency for violation of ethical lapses related to other practices (“Respondent identity protected,” “Generating sales or promotional leads,” “Industry guidelines followed,” “Respondents not notified when recording devices used,” and “Putting respondents in stressful situations”) occupy a mid to high level frequency of occurrence (mean value range of 5.02–5.95). These findings are summarized in Exhibit 2.

Seriousness of Violation of Ethical Marketing Research Practices. Australian marketing research professionals also provided their perceptions of the seriousness of violations of ethical practices as reported in their firms or marketing research profession/industry. A seven-point scale (1 = not serious at all, 7 = extremely serious) was used to address this research objective to measure perceived seriousness of ethical lapses. Exhibit 3 summarizes the results pertaining to this issue as perceived by Australian marketing research professionals.

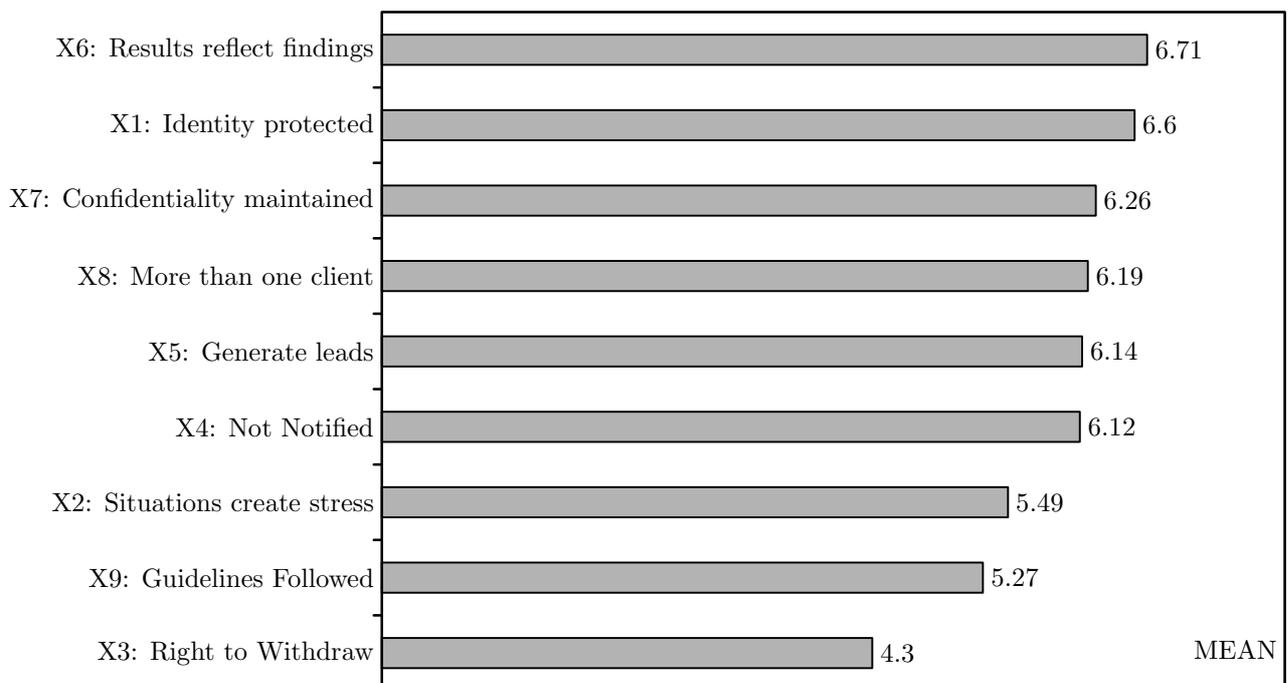
It is interesting to note that Australian marketing research professionals perceive the seriousness of the following two violations of ethical practices (client and respondent-related each) as being extremely high: “Reported results accurately reflect report findings,” and “Respondent identity is protected” (mean values of 6.71 and 6.60 respectively). The two other client-related practices, “Client confidentiality is strictly maintained” and “Clients are notified if the research is being conducted for more than two clients,” are ethical lapses that receive the next level of seriousness ratings (mean values of 6.26 and 6.19 respectively). “Marketing research is used to generate promotional or sales leads,” and “Respondents not notified when recording devices used,” also receive ratings that are quite high (mean values of 6.14 and 6.12 respectively). “Respondent is placed in stressful situations,” and “Industry guidelines are followed in generating and reporting research results” receive moderate ratings on perceived seriousness (mean value 5.49 and 5.27 respectively). As before, “Respondents’ right to withdraw” receives

the lowest seriousness rating (mean value of 4.30). It is noteworthy that the top and bottom four of these ethical lapses (based on the overall average evaluation ratings) are the same for both the perceived frequency

and seriousness measures. However, the individual ranked positions (based on average ratings) and the associated magnitude of assigned ratings differ quite significantly across the two constructs.

Exhibit 3:
Seriousness of Violation of Ethical Practices in Marketing Research: Summary Measure

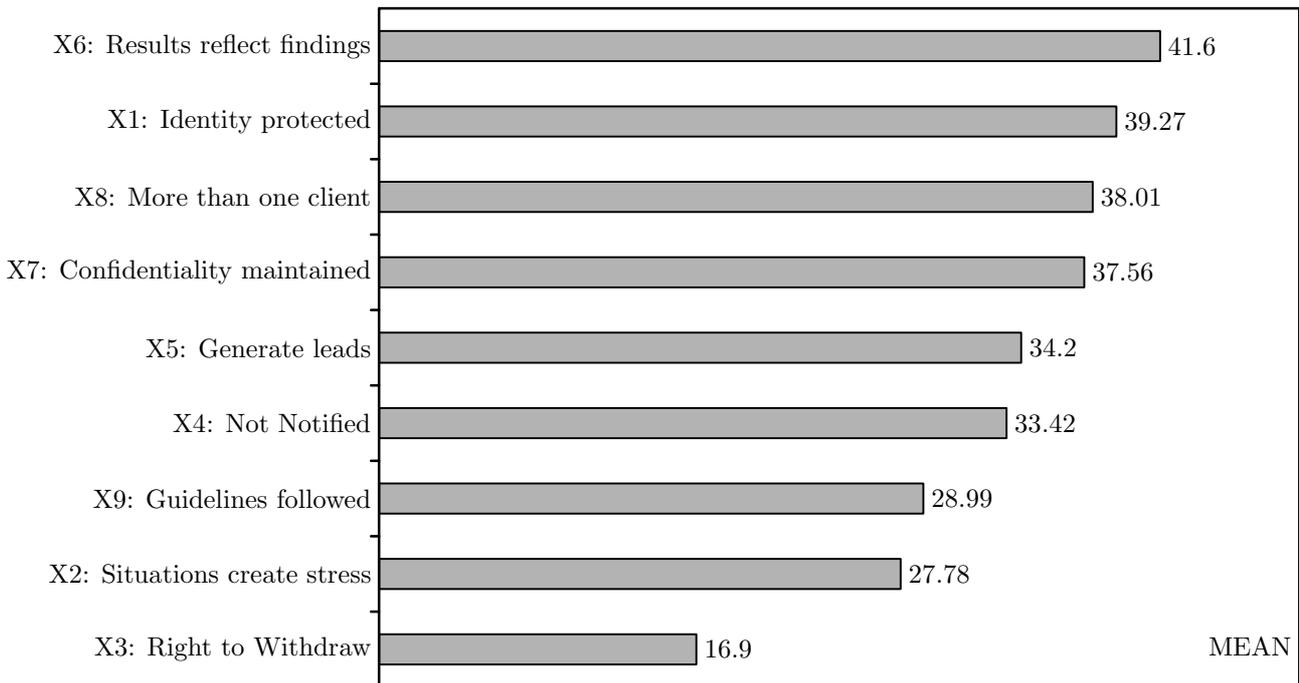
Variables	Ethical Practices*	Mean	Standard Deviation
X ₆	Reported results accurately reflect report findings.	6.71	0.81
X ₁	When promised, the respondent’s identity is protected against disclosure.	6.60	0.86
X ₇	Client confidentiality is strictly maintained.	6.26	1.33
X ₈	Clients are notified if the research is being conducted for more than one client.	6.19	1.42
X ₅	Marketing Research is used to generate promotional or sales leads.	6.14	1.51
X ₄	Respondents are not notified if recording devices are being used during the interviews.	6.12	1.26
X ₂	Respondents are placed in situations which create unnecessary stress.	5.49	1.47
X ₉	Industry guidelines are followed in generating and reporting research results.	5.27	1.83
X ₃	Respondents are told that they have the right to withdraw at any point in the interview.	4.30	1.67



(* Measured on a 7-point scale: 7 means 'Extremely Serious' and 1 means 'Not Serious at all')

Exhibit 4:
Priority Index - Frequency times Seriousness: Summary Measure

Variables	Ethical Practices	Mean	Rank
X ₆	Reported results accurately reflect report findings.	41.60	1
X ₁	When promised, the respondent's identity is protected against disclosure.	39.27	2
X ₈	Clients are notified if the research is being conducted for more than one client.	38.01	3
X ₇	Client confidentiality is strictly maintained.	37.56	4
X ₅	Marketing Research is used to generate promotional or sales leads.	34.20	5
X ₄	Respondents are not notified if recording devices are being used during the interviews.	33.42	6
X ₉	Industry guidelines are followed in generating and reporting research results.	28.99	7
X ₂	Respondents are placed in situations which create unnecessary stress.	27.78	8
X ₃	Respondents are told that they have the right to withdraw at any point in the interview.	16.90	9



Determination of Priority Areas of Various Ethical Lapses/Violation of Ethical Practices

As illustrated in the “Prioritization Paradigm,” both the frequency and seriousness measures of ethical lapses/violations of ethical practices are examined simultaneously. Indeed, a priority index of “impor-

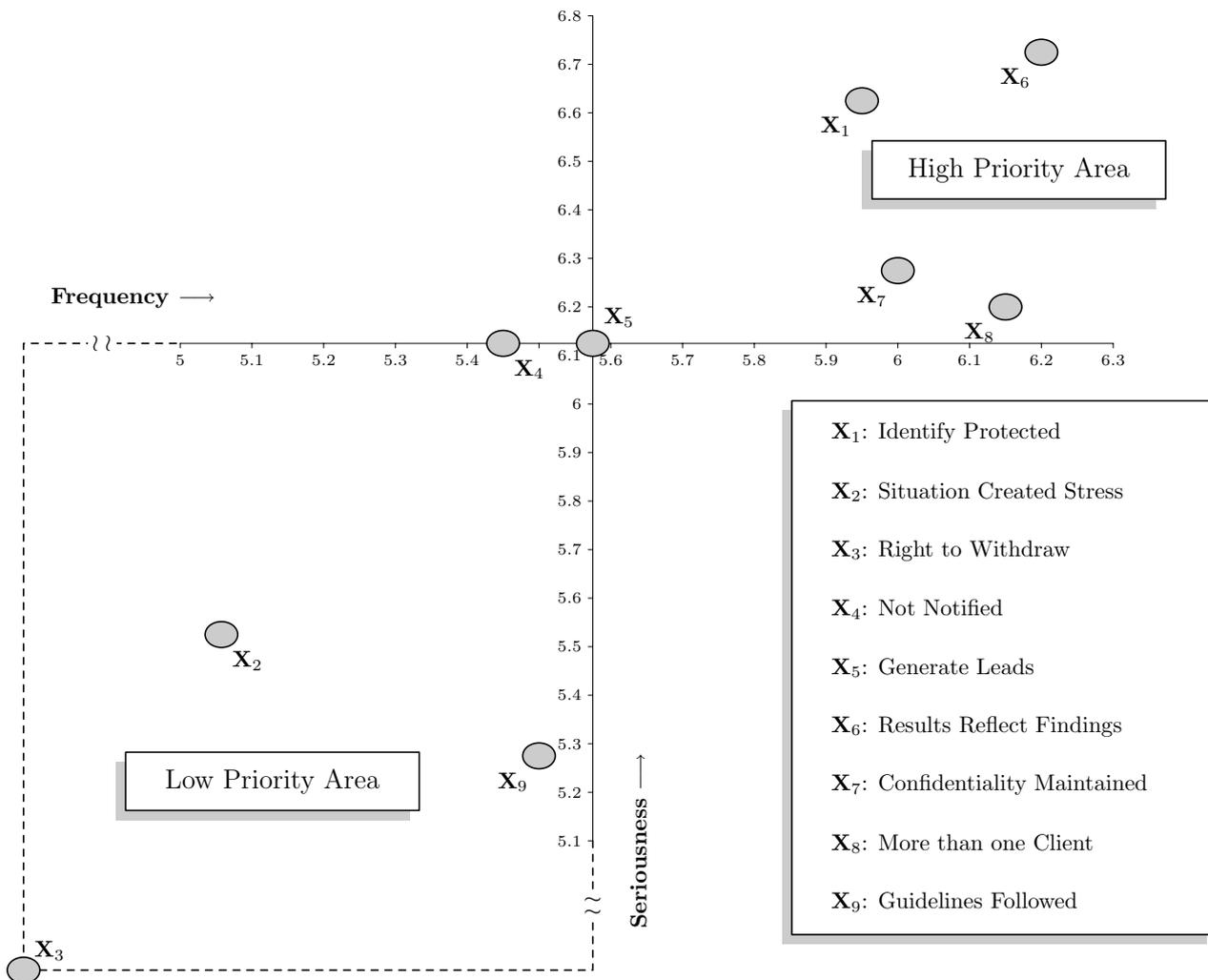
tance” is calculated by taking a cross product of frequency and seriousness for each respondent (see Exhibit 4 for overall summary measures).

The index clearly indicates that the top three out of four (highest priority) ethical practice violations are client-related and the bottom three (lowest priority)

are respondent-related. However, it is interesting to note that ethical practice violation related to “Respondent identity protected” is rated number two ahead of the “Client confidentiality.” An alternative and more powerful way to illustrate this is through the development of a 2×2 matrix with frequency and seriousness dimensions. Exhibit 5 shows how the Priority Paradigm is operationalized for the violation of ethical practices/ethical lapses in the Australian marketing research context. Exhibit 5 identifies four ethical lapses/violations of ethical practices that fall in the high priority area of “High frequency-high seriousness.” They are: “Reported results accurately reflect report findings,” “When promised, the respondent’s identity is protected against disclosure,” “Clients are notified if the research is being conducted for more

than one client,” and “Client confidentiality is strictly maintained.” It is noteworthy that except for one, all other ethical lapses are related to the client. Given that a vast majority of respondents (about 69%) are from research agencies, their “client-centric” responses are not surprising. “Research is used to generate promotional and sales leads” and “Respondents are *not* notified if recording devices are being used during the interviews,” fall into moderate level priority area. Australian marketing research professionals’ perceptions on frequency and seriousness when examined simultaneously indicate a relatively low level of priority for the following: “Respondents are placed in situations which create unnecessary stress,” “Following industry guidelines for results reporting” and “Respondents are

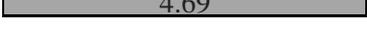
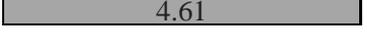
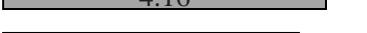
**Exhibit 5:
Prioritizing Ethical Issues in Marketing Research**



told that they have the right to withdraw at any point in the interview.” To further understand and underscore these results, Australian marketing researchers were also asked to provide importance ratings (5-point scale where 5 = extremely important and 1 = not important at all) for a number of ethical codes of conduct found to be common to most professional marketing research associations in several countries. As shown in Exhibit 6, these codes are inclusive of the nine ethical practices assessed earlier. The exhibit shows the average importance ratings for each ethical practice as perceived by the Australian marketing research personnel. The findings from the Priority Paradigm appear to have some degree of validity as

all these priority areas are confirmed by this independent assessment of the ethical codes via importance ratings. Exhibit 6 reveals that the four ethical concerns that are rated very high in importance by respondents are found in the high priority area of the Priority Paradigm. Similarly, ethical concerns related to “Respondent’s right to withdraw from the research process” and “Following industry guidelines for results reporting” are rated the lowest as they, too, appear in the low priority area of the Priority Paradigm. Consistent with the prioritization in the paradigm, “Not using marketing research as a means of developing sales or promotional leads” is rated to be of mid-level importance.

Exhibit 6:
Ethical Practices: Perceived Importance

#	Areas of Ethical Concerns in Marketing Research	Mean	Graphical Representation
1	Not misrepresenting research results	4.75	
2	Taking special care in interviewing children	4.72	
3	Maintaining client confidentiality	4.7	
4	Protecting the anonymity of a respondent	4.69	
5	Securing respondents' cooperation for the interviewing process	4.69	
6	Not using marketing research as a means of developing sales or promotional leads	4.66	
7	Providing respondents the name of the research agency conducting the study	4.63	
8	Notifying clients if research is to be used for more than one client	4.61	
9	Maintaining correct ownership of research data	4.55	
10	Preventing embarrassment or undue stress on respondents	4.21	
11	Maintaining correct ownership of proposal information	4.16	
12	Following industry guidelines for reporting research results	3.79	
13	Notifying respondents of their right to refuse to participate or withdraw from the research agency conducting the study	3.46	

(* Measured on a 5-point scale: 5 means 'Extremely Important' and 1 means 'Not Important at all')

Conclusions, Implications and Limitations

The overall findings from the priority analysis can be summarized in terms of the three priority cluster or group of ethical lapses/violations of ethical conduct. They are:

- High Priority (high frequency-high seriousness) Group
 - Results reflect findings
 - Respondent confidentiality is protected
 - Projects done for more than one client (not notified)
 - Client identity is protected
- Moderate Priority (medium frequency-medium seriousness) Group

- Generate sales and promotional leads
- Respondents are not notified if recording devices used
- Low Priority (low frequency-low seriousness) Group
 - Situation creates stress for respondent
 - Guidelines followed
 - Right of the respondent to withdraw from research

These findings, too, are underscored by some of the respondents' remarks made when they were asked to describe some specific unethical situations that they had recently encountered.

For the *high priority area*, the following verbatim remarks are very relevant:

Results Reflect Findings.

- “Client required ‘selective’ reporting.”
- “For an Ad test for client company, client wanted results to be reported in a negative manner”

Client Confidentiality Maintained

- “Asked to divulge client name by survey participant...”

Studies For More Than One Client

- “... purported to provide category exclusivity for a technique they were franchised to administer, but were proposing to supply two new companies in one category without notifying either...”

Respondent Identity Protected

- “In a staff climate survey, I was asked by a client (manufacturer) to report the identities of respondents one staff member that had made particular comments about senior management.”
- “My client was viewing a focus group behind our one-way mirror... he recognizes a respondent in the group as a neighbor from his suburb. After the group, the client wants to say “hello” to this distant acquaintance”
- “We recently commissioned group discussions (Focus Groups) to explore the public’s perceptions of post offices. Area managers from Australia Post sat in at these sessions (behind a one-way mirror) as observers. There were criticisms about particular post offices and post office counter staff. Two area managers wanted to confront the staff involved with ‘proof’ what they were not conducting themselves”
- “A client persisted in trying to ‘guess’ which customer said what in a customer survey. Many customers had agreed to be identified for feedback and in small communities this meant those who had not agreed were more ‘guessable’...”
- “Client wanted questionnaires to see how individuals responded.”

For the moderate priority area, the following verbatim remarks are very revealing:

Generate Sales or Promotional Leads

- “asked for respondent lists,”
- “Asked to supply individual respondent responses for sales leads”
- “we were approached by a potential client who informed us they were conducting bogus surveys in order to generate sales leads”
- “most common problem I am presented with is the supply of respondent lists for sales follow-up”
- “Asked to supply names of respondents to generate sales leads...”

Clearly, these findings have significant implications for Australian marketing research professionals, especially those in leadership positions for the marketing research industry associations, trade, or industry groups affiliated with the marketing or advertising research business. While such groups (e.g., Australian Marketing Research Association) must pay close attention to all current and potential ethical issues or violations, the prioritized framework should assist in channeling their limited time and financial resources effectively and efficiently. These efforts will be consistent with the call for raising the level of professionalism in Australian marketing (Roberts and Sykes, 2001). To the extent these findings are generalizable to the research profession in general, they suggest that the various research trade groups [e.g. CASRO, MRA, AMA, AAPOR, ESOMAR] should pay closer attention primarily to ethical lapses pertaining to client-researcher relationships. Since unethical practices in this area will most definitely compromise clients' confidence in marketing research and its subsequent usage, this is a critical area where financial and other resources should be committed. This may take the form of industry training and professional development programs to sensitize and educate the research community about the significance of ethical practices,

which interface with clients, and to uphold the highest professional standards for these client-related areas. Clearly, no exceptions should be tolerated when it comes to making sure that the reported results accurately reflect findings from the project. Client confidentiality should be maintained, and clients ought to be notified when the same or similar projects are undertaken for more than one client, especially in the same industry. It also needs to be underscored that occasionally the pressure to make exceptions to some of these practices comes from clients themselves; this must be resisted with equal vigor. A compromise here does a great disservice to the profession in the short run, and the client's interests are not well-served in the long-run. Besides client-centric areas, the “Respondent promised confidentiality” issue was also a high priority item identified through the priority framework. As respondents are the lifeblood of the marketing research profession, violation of this ethical practice, too, must be taken very seriously, and training and education may be the solution to this problem as well. Clearly, the research profession's resources, on a relative basis, must flow in the direction of the high priority areas. Similarly, educational institutions involved with the preparation of aspiring marketing research professionals, especially with graduate degree programs (e.g., Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville; University of Georgia; and University of Texas, Arlington), must build into their academic programs the topical areas which cover these high priority ethical practices. Having research industry guest speakers discuss these issues with marketing research students will also underscore the significance of these areas.

While the study focused on a set of only nine ethical lapses/violations of ethical practices, the conceptual framework and the empirical assessment is general and simple enough to be applied to other practices as well (e.g., those listed in Exhibit 6). Indeed, such an approach is not only desirable but is strongly recommended as an extension of this study. Beyond serving the self-interest of the institutions and organizations involved in the promotion of sound marketing research practices, we also expect individual research professionals to pay close special attention to the high

priority areas in their own daily practice and use of marketing research. It is at this grass-roots level that we must ensure that the highest standards of practice are upheld.

Like any other study dealing with a sensitive subject matter such as ethics, this investigation too has a number of limitations that must be taken into account prior to making any substantive generalizations. First, given a very low response rate and the sensitive subject matter, it is not clear whether the study has captured the “true” responses of the research professionals. Perhaps non-respondent perceptions are substantively different from those of respondents, or, alternatively, some respondents may have provided more socially acceptable responses in order to appear more ethical. Unfortunately, these biases, which are quite common in all studies on ethics, are not readily measured. Secondly, the study sampled only members of the Australian Marketing Research Society and to the extent the Australian universe of marketing research differs from this group; the result may be a skewed set of responses not representative of the entire target population. Given these limitations, the findings from this investigation should be considered tentative and exploratory in nature and consequently, caution is necessary prior to making any generalizations to the larger target population. Replication of the investigation will most assuredly enhance confidence in the findings reported here.

However, these limitations must not negate the significance of the proposed framework to develop and assess appropriate priorities for addressing ethical concerns in Australian marketing research. Indeed, the approach presented here to prioritize ethical concerns can be readily adapted for implementation in other country contexts. Given that variations in ethics are closely related to cultural diversity, such studies will help provide an understanding of how cultures may assign varying priorities to different ethical norms. However, the paucity of empirical studies provides little evidence of whether cultural differences are, in fact, prevalent in marketing research ethics (Akaah, 1990). From this perspective alone, the framework presented here should help augment the extant knowledge base and increase understanding of the relation-

ship between ethical marketing research behavior and its cultural environment. This should be a necessary logical step toward enhanced trans-national and global marketing decision-making by improving familiarity with variations in priorities in ethical standards and norms in marketing research.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Madhav N. Segal, Ph.D. (msegal@siue.edu) is Professor of Marketing and Director of the Master of Marketing Research [MMR] program in the School of Business at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (USA). His research has been published in various journals including the *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Business Research*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *International Journal of Retail and Distribution*, *Canadian Journal of Marketing Research*, *California Management Review*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Marketing Research: A Magazine of Management & Applications*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of Business Ethics* among others. His current teaching and research interests include marketing research and research methods, research ethics,

new product design and cross-cultural and international marketing research.

Ralph W. Giacobbe, Ph.D. (rgiacob@siue.edu) is Associate Professor of Marketing in the School of Business at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (USA). His research has been published in various journals including *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Marketing Research: A Magazine of Management & Applications*, *Canadian Journal of Marketing Research*, *International Journal of Retail and Distribution*, *Journal of Marketing Education*, and *Journal of Professional Services Marketing* among others. His teaching and research interests include marketing and consumer research, services marketing and personal selling.