

Midocean University

Faculty of Management

Department /Project Management



The Impact of Social Media on Customer Satisfaction in Eastern Saudi Arabia's Horeca Sector

Done by:

Mahmood Almaqtari

Supervisor

Dr. Abdulrahim Nader

Academic Year: 2026

Introduction

Research ethics represent the moral principles and professional standards that guide researchers throughout the research process. Ethical conduct is essential because research findings influence academic knowledge, business decisions, public policies, and social development. In recent years, social media has become a major communication channel between businesses and customers. Hotels, restaurants, and cafés (HORECA) increasingly use social media platforms to interact with consumers, promote services, collect feedback, and manage customer relationships.

The present study focuses on the impact of social media on customer satisfaction in Eastern Saudi Arabia's HORECA sector. As businesses rely more heavily on digital engagement, researchers must ensure that studies involving customer opinions, online reviews, and social media interactions are conducted ethically. Research ethics help protect participants, maintain data accuracy, and ensure that conclusions are reliable and trustworthy.

This report discusses the concept of research ethics, explains its importance, examines key ethical principles, identifies common ethical issues, reviews relevant regulations and guidelines, and demonstrates how ethical principles can be applied to the proposed research topic.

Importance of Research Ethics in Scientific Research

Research ethics play a critical role in maintaining the quality and credibility of academic work. First, ethical standards help protect research participants from harm. Participants who provide information for academic studies have the right to privacy, confidentiality, and respectful treatment. Ethical procedures ensure that these rights are protected throughout the research process.

Second, research ethics improve the reliability and validity of findings. When researchers collect and analyze data honestly, the resulting conclusions are more accurate and useful. Ethical practices reduce the risk of data manipulation, selective reporting, and biased interpretation.

Third, ethics strengthen public trust in research. Society expects researchers to conduct investigations responsibly and transparently. Ethical compliance demonstrates accountability and professionalism, increasing confidence in research findings.

Finally, research ethics contribute to maintaining scholarly integrity by ensuring that researchers avoid dishonest practices like plagiarism, fabrication, and falsification. In studies involving social media and customer satisfaction, ethical practices are particularly important because customer information may be sensitive and digital data can easily be misused. Therefore, ethical principles are necessary to ensure that research benefits both participants and the broader community.

Core Principles of Research Ethics

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity requires researchers to acknowledge all sources correctly, avoid plagiarism, and present original work. Every idea, quotation, statistic, or theory taken from another source must be cited appropriately.

Honesty and Transparency: Researchers must report methods, findings, and limitations accurately. Results should never be manipulated to support desired conclusions.

Objectivity: Personal beliefs, preferences, and assumptions should not influence research outcomes. Researchers should evaluate evidence fairly and avoid bias during data collection and analysis.

Confidentiality and Privacy: Information obtained from participants should be protected from

unauthorized access. Personal identifiers should be removed whenever possible.

Informed Consent: Participants must receive a clear explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, benefits, and risks before agreeing to participate. Participation should always be voluntary.

Respect for Participants: Researchers must treat participants with dignity and respect. Participants should have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

Responsibility and Accountability: Researchers have an obligation to carry out their work responsibly while adhering to legal, institutional, and ethical requirements.

For example, when surveying customers about their experiences with restaurants in Eastern Saudi Arabia, researchers should explain the study purpose, obtain consent, protect participant identities, and ensure that responses are used only for academic purposes.

Ethical Issues in Scientific Research

Several ethical challenges may arise during research activities. A common ethical concern in research and academia is plagiarism. It occurs when researchers use another person's ideas, words, or findings without proper recognition. Plagiarism undermines academic integrity and damages the credibility of research.

Data fabrication and falsification involve inventing information or altering data to achieve preferred results. Such misconduct can produce misleading conclusions and negatively affect future research and decision-making.

Bias is another major ethical concern. Researchers may unintentionally influence participants, select evidence that supports their assumptions, or ignore contradictory findings.

Bias reduces the objectivity and validity of research.

Privacy violations can occur when personal information is disclosed without permission. Studies involving social media data require special attention because users may not expect online content to be used for research purpose.

Conflicts of interest arise when researchers have personal, financial, or professional relationships that could influence research outcomes. Transparency is necessary to manage such situation.

For instance, if a researcher selectively analyzes only positive online reviews of hotels while excluding negative reviews, the findings would provide an inaccurate picture of customer satisfaction. Ethical research requires balanced and comprehensive analysis of all relevant data.

Rules, Regulations, and Ethical Frameworks

Research ethics are guided by institutional, national, and international frameworks. Universities often require ethical review procedures before researchers collect data from human participants. Ethics committees or Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) evaluate research proposals to ensure participant protection and ethical compliance.

International ethical standards emphasize respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. These principles require researchers to minimize harm, maximize benefits, and treat participants fairly.

In academic writing, APA citation guidelines help researchers acknowledge sources correctly

and avoid plagiarism. Proper referencing demonstrates respect for intellectual property and allows readers to verify information.

Researchers are also expected to follow data protection requirements by ensuring that information is securely maintained, restricting access to authorized personnel, and handling the disposal of data appropriately once the research project has been completed.

Compliance with these regulations ensures that research activities are conducted responsibly and according to accepted professional standards.

Application to the Research on the Impact of Social Media on Customer Satisfaction in Eastern Saudi Arabia's HORECA Sector.

This section applies ethical principles directly to the proposed research topic and represents the most important component of the report.

The study aims to examine how social media activities influence customer satisfaction within hotels, restaurants, and cafés in Eastern Saudi Arabia. Specific areas of interest include online reviews, social media marketing, customer engagement, brand communication, and digital customer service.

Participants may include customers who have recently used HORECA services in cities such as Dammam, Khobar, and Dhahran. Participants will provide opinions regarding their experiences with businesses and their interactions through social media platforms.

The study may use questionnaires, interviews, or online surveys. Publicly available customer reviews from social media platforms may also be analyzed. Researchers should clearly distinguish between public and private information.

Before participating, respondents will receive an information sheet explaining the objectives of the study, expected participation time, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants must indicate their consent before answering survey questions.

No personal identifiers such as names, phone numbers, email addresses, or account credentials should be collected unless absolutely necessary. Responses will be coded and stored securely. Findings will be presented in aggregate form to prevent identification of individual participants.

Only publicly accessible content should be analyzed. Researchers should avoid collecting information from private accounts, private groups, or direct messages without explicit permission. Even when information is publicly available, researchers should carefully consider privacy expectations and avoid exposing identifiable details.

The study involves minimal risk; however, some participants may feel uncomfortable discussing negative experiences. To address this concern, participants should be informed that they may skip any question or withdraw at any time.

Survey questions should be neutral and balanced. Data analysis should include both positive and negative customer experiences. Researchers must avoid selectively reporting results that support predetermined expectations.

All electronic files should be password protected and stored securely. Access should be limited to the researcher and authorized supervisors. Data retention policies should follow university requirements.

If the researcher has relationships with any hotel, restaurant, or café included in the study, this should be disclosed. Transparency helps maintain objectivity and trustworthiness.

Applying these ethical principles will improve the quality of the study, increase participant trust, enhance the accuracy of findings, and support responsible recommendations for HORECA businesses seeking to improve customer satisfaction through social media engagement.

Overall, ethical compliance contributes directly to the credibility and practical value of the research findings.

Researchers should exercise caution when interpreting comments, ratings, and interactions obtained from social media platforms. Online expressions may not always represent customers' complete experiences, and some posts may be exaggerated, misleading, or influenced by temporary emotions. Therefore, information gathered from social media should be evaluated carefully and, where possible, supported by responses collected directly from participants. Such an approach contributes to a more accurate understanding of customer satisfaction within hotels, restaurants, and cafés operating in Eastern Saudi Arabia.

Special attention should also be given to the responsible use of screenshots, quotations, and user-generated content. Even when customer comments are publicly visible, reproducing usernames, profile pictures, or other recognizable elements may compromise individual privacy. To safeguard participants and online users, researchers should remove identifying features and present examples in a generalized manner. Respecting the digital identity of individuals strengthens ethical standards and encourages responsible use of social media information in academic investigations.

Since social media platforms frequently contain opinions about particular businesses, researchers should remain independent and avoid allowing personal preferences or previous experiences with specific hotels, restaurants, or cafés to influence the interpretation of results. Customer feedback should be evaluated according to consistent criteria regardless of whether

the opinions are favorable or unfavorable. Maintaining fairness throughout the research process helps ensure that conclusions accurately reflect customers' perceptions and provide meaningful insights for HORECA service providers.

In addition, researchers should communicate the outcomes of the study in a manner that avoids causing unnecessary harm to businesses or individuals. Findings should be discussed professionally and supported by evidence rather than isolated comments or exceptional cases. Recommendations should focus on improving customer interactions, strengthening communication through social media channels, and enhancing service quality. Presenting results in a balanced and constructive manner increases the usefulness of the study and promotes ethical responsibility toward both consumers and HORECA organizations in Eastern Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

Research ethics are fundamental to successful academic research. Ethical principles such as integrity, honesty, objectivity, confidentiality, informed consent, and participant protection ensure that studies are conducted responsibly and professionally. The topic of social media and customer satisfaction in Eastern Saudi Arabia's HORECA sector involves the collection and analysis of customer opinions, making ethical considerations especially important.

By following ethical guidelines, researchers can protect participant rights, produce reliable findings, and contribute meaningful knowledge to both academic literature and industry practice. Ethical research not only improves study quality but also strengthens public confidence in scientific inquiry. Therefore, the consistent application of research ethics should remain a central component of all future research activities.

References

American Psychological Association. (2020). Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (7th ed.). APA.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.

Israel, M., & Hay, I. (2006). *Research Ethics for Social Scientists*. Sage Publications.

Resnik, D. B. (2020). *What Is Ethics in Research and Why Is It Important?* National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.