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Research Ethics Report

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Contents

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1. Introduction

Research ethics is a fundamental component of any scientific study. It refers to the set of moral principles and professional standards that guide researchers throughout the research process, from planning and data collection to analysis, reporting, and publication. According to Resnik (2015), research ethics involves applying ethical principles to ensure that research is conducted responsibly and fairly. Similarly, the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) defines research ethics as a framework of principles that promotes honesty, integrity, and respect for the rights and well-being of research participants. Together, these definitions highlight that ethical research is not simply about following rules; it is about maintaining trust, accountability, and professionalism throughout the research process.

The importance of research ethics has become increasingly significant in recent years due to the rapid growth of technology, digital data, and automated decision-making systems. Researchers now have access to large amounts of information, which creates new ethical responsibilities related to data privacy, confidentiality, accuracy, and transparency. In the field of real estate valuation, these concerns are particularly relevant because research findings can influence investment decisions, property values, regulatory policies, and market behavior. As Automated Valuation Models (AVMs) become more widely used alongside traditional valuation methods, ethical issues such as data quality, algorithmic bias, transparency of valuation processes, and the protection of sensitive information require careful consideration.

This report has been prepared as part of the requirements for the master's degree in real estate management at Midocean University. The report aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of research ethics and demonstrate how ethical principles can be applied in practice. In addition to discussing the theoretical foundations of research ethics, the report applies these principles to a proposed study that compares traditional property valuation approaches with Automated Valuation

Models (AVMs). Through this discussion, the report illustrates that ethical considerations are an essential part of high-quality research and contribute directly to the credibility, reliability, and usefulness of research outcomes.

The objectives of this report are to: (1) explain the concept and significance of research ethics in academic research; (2) examine the key ethical principles that guide responsible research practices; (3) identify common ethical challenges and violations that may occur during the research process; (4) review the institutional and international frameworks that regulate ethical research conduct; and (5) demonstrate how these ethical principles can be applied to a comparative study of traditional property valuation methods and Automated Valuation Models (AVMs).

2. Importance of Research Ethics

Research ethics plays a vital role in ensuring that scientific research is conducted responsibly and produces reliable results. It serves not only as a guide for researchers' behavior but also as a framework for maintaining the quality and credibility of research outcomes. According to Saunders et al. (2019), ethical considerations influence every stage of the research process, from selecting a research topic and collecting data to analyzing results and presenting findings. When ethical standards are ignored, the value and trustworthiness of the entire study may be compromised. Therefore, research ethics should be viewed as an essential element of good research practice rather than simply a set of rules that researchers are required to follow.

One of the main benefits of research ethics is that it promotes honesty, transparency, and objectivity. Ethical researchers are expected to present their findings accurately, regardless of whether the results support their expectations or desired outcomes. Bryman (2016) argues that the credibility of academic research depends heavily on the integrity of researchers and their commitment to reporting information truthfully. By following ethical principles, researchers contribute to the development of

reliable knowledge that can be used confidently by other scholars, professionals, and decision-makers.

Research ethics also protects the rights and well-being of participants and helps maintain public confidence in research activities. Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasize that researchers have a responsibility to safeguard participants from harm, respect their privacy, and ensure that their involvement is voluntary and informed. Failure to meet these responsibilities can negatively affect individuals and reduce public trust in academic research. Over time, such failures may discourage people from participating in future studies and weaken confidence in research-based recommendations and policies.

These ethical considerations are especially important in applied fields such as real estate research and property valuation. Valuation studies often involve sensitive financial information, property records, and market data that must be handled carefully and responsibly. If researchers fail to protect confidential information, selectively report findings, or allow personal interests to influence their conclusions, the results may misrepresent market conditions and lead to poor decisions by investors, regulators, or other stakeholders. For this reason, ethical research practices are closely linked to the accuracy, reliability, and practical value of valuation research. Ethical conduct helps ensure that research findings can be trusted and used effectively in professional and policy-making contexts.

3. Fundamental Principles of Research Ethics

3.1 Scientific Honesty

Scientific honesty is one of the most important principles in research ethics. It requires researchers to present their methods, data, results, and conclusions truthfully and accurately, without manipulating information or hiding findings that may contradict their expectations. According to Resnik (2015), honesty forms the foundation of scientific research because it ensures that knowledge is built on factual evidence rather than personal opinions, assumptions, or desired outcomes. Researchers are

expected to report what they actually observe during their studies, even when the results differ from their original hypotheses or the expectations of sponsors and stakeholders.

The significance of scientific honesty extends beyond individual research projects. Academic institutions, policymakers, and professionals rely on published research when making decisions, developing policies, and advancing knowledge within their fields. If research findings are misrepresented or selectively reported, the credibility of the study is weakened, and future research based on those findings may also be affected. For this reason, honesty is essential for maintaining trust in scientific research and ensuring that research contributes meaningful and reliable knowledge to society.

This principle is particularly important in comparative studies where different methods or approaches are evaluated against one another. In the proposed study comparing traditional property valuation methods with Automated Valuation Models (AVMs), scientific honesty requires the researcher to present the results objectively, regardless of which method performs better. For example, if the analysis shows that AVMs provide more accurate valuation estimates in certain circumstances, these findings must be reported transparently even if the researcher initially expected traditional valuation methods to perform better. Similarly, any limitations or weaknesses identified in either approach should be disclosed and discussed openly.

A practical example of scientific honesty can be found in valuation research published in academic journals, where researchers compare valuation accuracy using objective performance indicators such as the Mean Absolute Percentage Error (MAPE). Rather than selecting only favorable results, ethical researchers present the full range of findings and allow readers to draw conclusions based on the evidence. Such transparency strengthens the credibility of the research and supports informed decision-making within the real estate profession (Glumac & Prijatelj, 2019).

3.2 Integrity

Research integrity is a fundamental principle that extends beyond simply being honest when reporting results. It involves maintaining ethical standards throughout every stage of the research process, including planning the study, collecting data, analyzing information, interpreting findings, and publishing results. According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020), research integrity requires researchers to conduct their work responsibly, transparently, and consistently while adhering to accepted professional and ethical standards. It ensures that research findings are credible, reliable, and capable of withstanding academic scrutiny.

A key aspect of research integrity is transparency. Researchers should clearly explain how their study was conducted, justify the methods they selected, and provide sufficient information for others to understand and evaluate their work. Integrity also requires researchers to disclose any potential conflicts of interest that could influence the research process or the interpretation of results. By maintaining these standards, researchers contribute to the development of trustworthy knowledge and enable other scholars to build upon previous work with confidence.

In the context of a comparative study between traditional property valuation methods and Automated Valuation Models (AVMs), research integrity requires careful documentation of all research procedures. This includes clearly identifying data sources, explaining how valuation accuracy will be measured, and describing the analytical methods used to compare the two approaches. The study should be designed in a way that allows other researchers to replicate the process and verify the findings if necessary.

For example, if an AVM dataset is obtained from a private technology provider, the researcher should openly disclose this relationship and explain any limitations associated with the data. Similarly, if specific assumptions, adjustments, or selection criteria are applied during the analysis, these should be reported transparently. Such disclosures help readers assess the objectivity of the study and determine whether external factors may have influenced the results. As noted by Saunders et al.

(2019), failing to provide adequate transparency regarding research methods, data sources, or potential conflicts of interest can weaken the credibility of a study and reduce confidence in its findings.

Ultimately, research integrity strengthens the quality and reliability of academic work. By ensuring transparency, accountability, and consistency throughout the research process, researchers can produce findings that are trusted by academics, industry professionals, and policymakers alike.

3.3 Objectivity

Objectivity is an essential principle of ethical research that requires researchers to evaluate evidence fairly and avoid allowing personal opinions, expectations, or external influences to affect their findings. According to Bryman (2016), objectivity involves using research methods that reduce the impact of bias and ensure that conclusions are based on evidence rather than personal beliefs. Although complete neutrality may be difficult to achieve, particularly in social and applied research, researchers are expected to recognize potential sources of bias and take reasonable steps to minimize their influence throughout the study.

Maintaining objectivity is important because biased research can lead to inaccurate conclusions and reduce the credibility of both individual studies and the wider body of knowledge within a discipline. Researchers must therefore design their studies carefully, apply consistent methods, and interpret findings based on the data collected rather than preconceived assumptions. By doing so, they contribute to the production of reliable and trustworthy research that can support informed decision-making.

Objectivity is particularly important in studies that compare different approaches or technologies. In the proposed research comparing traditional property valuation methods with Automated Valuation Models (AVMs), researchers may have professional backgrounds or personal preferences that could influence their interpretation of the results. For example, experienced property valuers may be inclined to favor traditional valuation techniques, while researchers with a strong interest in technology may be

more supportive of automated solutions. These preferences can unintentionally affect research design, data interpretation, and conclusions if not carefully managed.

To maintain objectivity, the study should use a balanced sample that includes different property types, market segments, and geographic locations. The criteria used to evaluate valuation performance should be clearly defined and applied consistently to both traditional valuations and AVM outputs. Where possible, analysis should be conducted using standardized procedures and objective performance measures such as valuation accuracy, prediction error, and consistency of results. In addition, findings should be reported impartially, regardless of which method performs better under specific conditions.

By acknowledging potential biases and implementing measures to reduce their impact, researchers can strengthen the credibility of their work and ensure that conclusions are based on evidence rather than personal or professional preferences. This commitment to objectivity enhances the overall quality of the research and supports meaningful contributions to the field of property valuation.

3.4 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a key principle of research ethics that requires researchers to protect information obtained during the research process from unauthorized access, disclosure, or misuse. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), confidentiality involves safeguarding the privacy of participants and ensuring that any information provided for research purposes is handled responsibly. This principle applies not only to individual participants but also to organizations, businesses, and institutions that may share sensitive information with researchers. Maintaining confidentiality is essential because it helps build trust between researchers and participants, encouraging honest participation and cooperation.

The importance of confidentiality has increased significantly in modern research due to the widespread use of digital data and electronic information systems. Researchers often have access to personal, financial, or commercially sensitive information that could cause harm if disclosed

improperly. As a result, researchers are expected to implement appropriate measures to protect data throughout the research process, including collection, storage, analysis, and reporting.

In the field of property valuation research, confidentiality is particularly important because valuation studies frequently involve access to sensitive market information, transaction records, client details, and property-specific data. For example, a study comparing traditional property valuations with Automated Valuation Models (AVMs) may require access to valuation reports, sales transactions, and internal company databases. Such information often contains details that should not be disclosed publicly, including property addresses, owner identities, financial information, and client records.

To uphold confidentiality, researchers should remove or anonymize any information that could directly identify individuals or organizations before conducting the analysis. This may involve replacing names and addresses with coded identifiers, storing data in secure and encrypted systems, limiting access to authorized research personnel, and ensuring that research findings are presented in an aggregated format that prevents the identification of specific properties or individuals. These practices are widely recognized as essential components of responsible data management and ethical research conduct.

By protecting confidential information, researchers demonstrate respect for participants and organizations while reducing the risk of financial, legal, or reputational harm. Maintaining confidentiality also enhances the credibility of the research process and increases the willingness of stakeholders to participate in future studies involving sensitive valuation and market data.

3.5 Informed Consent

Informed consent is a fundamental principle of research ethics that ensures participants voluntarily agree to take part in a study after receiving sufficient information about its purpose, procedures, potential risks, and expected benefits. According to the National Commission (1979) and the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020), informed consent is closely linked to the principle

of respect for persons, which recognizes the right of individuals to make independent decisions regarding their participation in research. By obtaining informed consent, researchers demonstrate respect for participant autonomy and ensure that participation is based on free choice rather than pressure, influence, or obligation.

The informed consent process requires researchers to provide clear and understandable information before collecting any data. Participants should be informed about the objectives of the study, the activities they will be asked to undertake, how their information will be used, and any potential risks associated with participation. They should also be made aware of their rights, including the right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any time without facing any negative consequences. This transparency helps establish trust between researchers and participants and contributes to the ethical conduct of research.

In the context of property valuation research, informed consent becomes particularly important when collecting primary data from professionals such as valuers, surveyors, real estate consultants, or other industry stakeholders. For example, if a researcher conducts interviews with chartered surveyors to explore their views on the accuracy and effectiveness of Automated Valuation Models (AVMs), each participant should receive an information sheet explaining the purpose of the research, how the interview data will be recorded and analyzed, and how the findings will be reported. Participants should also be informed about the measures taken to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

Before participating, individuals should have the opportunity to ask questions and provide their consent voluntarily, typically through a signed consent form. The consent process should clearly state that participation is entirely voluntary and that participants may withdraw from the study at any stage without providing a reason. This safeguard protects participants from any form of coercion and ensures that their involvement remains a matter of personal choice.

By implementing a clear and transparent informed consent process, researchers uphold ethical standards, protect participant rights, and enhance the credibility and integrity of their research. In studies involving professional opinions and industry expertise, informed consent is essential for maintaining trust and encouraging open and honest participation.

4. Ethical Issues in Scientific Research

4.1 Plagiarism

Plagiarism is one of the most serious violations of research ethics and occurs when a researcher uses another person's ideas, words, data, or intellectual contributions without providing proper acknowledgment. According to Resnik (2015), plagiarism involves presenting someone else's work as one's own, whether intentionally or unintentionally. It is considered a form of academic dishonesty because it misrepresents the true source of information and undermines the principles of honesty, integrity, and intellectual respect that are essential to scholarly research.

Plagiarism can take several forms. The most obvious form is copying text directly from books, articles, websites, or other sources without proper citation. However, plagiarism also includes paraphrasing another author's ideas without acknowledgment, reusing substantial portions of one's own previously published work without disclosure (self-plagiarism), and using data, tables, figures, or research findings developed by others without appropriate referencing. Regardless of the form it takes, plagiarism damages the credibility of research and compromises the integrity of the academic record.

The consequences of plagiarism can be significant for both researchers and academic institutions. Universities and research organizations often impose disciplinary actions that may include failing grades, suspension, revocation of academic degrees, or termination of employment. In the academic publishing environment, plagiarism may result in article retractions, loss of professional credibility, and long-term damage to a researcher's reputation. Such consequences highlight the importance of maintaining high standards of academic honesty throughout the research process.

In a study comparing traditional property valuation methods with Automated Valuation Models (AVMs), plagiarism could occur if a researcher reproduces valuation models, performance indicators, benchmarking frameworks, or analytical methods developed by previous researchers without proper citation. For example, presenting an existing AVM methodology as an original contribution or using published valuation accuracy results without acknowledging the original source would constitute plagiarism. To avoid these issues, researchers should carefully reference all sources used in their work and clearly distinguish between their own contributions and the findings of others.

Good academic practice requires researchers to maintain accurate records of their sources, use appropriate citation styles such as APA, and verify their work before submission. Many institutions also recommend using plagiarism detection software to identify unintentional similarities and ensure that all borrowed material is properly cited. By adhering to these practices, researchers demonstrate respect for intellectual property, maintain academic integrity, and contribute to the production of trustworthy and ethical research (Bryman, 2016).

4.2 Data Fabrication and Falsification

Data fabrication and data falsification are serious forms of research misconduct that threaten the accuracy and credibility of research findings. According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020), fabrication involves creating data that were never collected, while falsification refers to manipulating or selectively reporting data to produce desired results. Both practices violate research integrity and can lead to misleading conclusions, poor decision-making, and a loss of trust in research.

In property valuation research, these risks may arise if researchers exclude transactions that do not support their preferred outcome or alter results to make either traditional valuation methods or Automated Valuation Models (AVMs) appear more accurate than they actually are. Such actions can distort the findings and misrepresent the true performance of valuation approaches.

To prevent fabrication and falsification, researchers should apply transparent data collection and analysis procedures, document all data exclusions and adjustments, and maintain complete records throughout the study. Ethical handling of data is essential to ensure that research findings remain reliable, objective, and useful for professional and policy-related decision-making (Pagourtzi et al., 2003).

4.3 Research Bias

Research bias refers to factors that unintentionally influence the research process and lead to inaccurate or misleading conclusions (Bryman, 2016). Bias may occur during study design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation of results, making it one of the most common ethical challenges in research. If not properly managed, bias can reduce the validity and credibility of a study.

In the proposed research comparing traditional property valuation methods with Automated Valuation Models (AVMs), bias may arise through unrepresentative sampling or personal assumptions held by the researcher. For example, focusing on a specific property type or market segment may produce findings that do not reflect the wider market. Similarly, researchers may unintentionally interpret results in a way that favors either traditional valuation practices or automated technologies.

To minimize bias, researchers should use representative samples, apply consistent analytical methods, document all research decisions, and report findings transparently. Additional measures such as peer review and independent verification can further strengthen the reliability and objectivity of the research. Managing bias is particularly important in valuation research, where findings may influence professional practice, investment decisions, and policy development (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.4 Privacy Violations

Privacy violations occur when personal or organizational information is collected, used, or disclosed without proper authorization or in ways that expose individuals to harm. Protecting privacy is a fundamental ethical responsibility that helps maintain participant trust and safeguards sensitive information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In property valuation research, privacy concerns are particularly important because transaction records and valuation data may reveal financial, personal, or business-related information. Even when some property data is publicly available, combining multiple datasets can increase the risk of identifying individuals or organizations.

For example, a study comparing traditional valuations with Automated Valuation Models (AVMs) may use transaction records and valuation reports from different sources. Without appropriate safeguards, these datasets could unintentionally reveal the identities of property owners or clients. To prevent this, researchers should apply strong data protection measures, including data minimization, restricted access, secure storage, and anonymization before analysis and publication.

By protecting privacy and handling data responsibly, researchers can reduce the risk of harm, maintain public confidence, and ensure compliance with ethical and legal requirements (European Parliament, 2016).

4.5 Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest occurs when a researcher's personal, financial, or professional interests have the potential to influence, or appear to influence, the outcomes of a study (Resnik, 2015). While a conflict of interest does not necessarily indicate misconduct, it may raise concerns about the objectivity and credibility of the research.

In property valuation research, conflicts of interest may arise when comparing traditional valuation methods with Automated Valuation Models (AVMs). For example, a researcher affiliated with an AVM provider may have an interest in demonstrating the effectiveness of automated systems, while a professional valuer may be inclined to favor traditional valuation approaches. Although such relationships do not invalidate the research, they should be disclosed openly.

To manage conflicts of interest, researchers should declare all relevant affiliations, funding sources, and professional relationships related to the study. Independent review and transparent reporting can further strengthen confidence in the findings. By openly addressing potential conflicts, researchers help ensure that their work remains credible, objective, and ethically responsible (APA, 2020).

5. Rules and Regulations Governing Research Ethics

5.1 Institutional Review Boards (IRBs)

Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), also known as Research Ethics Committees (RECs), are independent bodies responsible for ensuring that research involving human participants is conducted ethically and complies with relevant regulations and institutional policies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Their role is to review research proposals, assess risks and benefits, evaluate informed consent procedures, and ensure that participant rights and confidentiality are adequately protected.

In the proposed study comparing traditional property valuation methods with Automated Valuation Models (AVMs), ethical approval may be required if interviews, surveys, or identifiable personal information are involved. Before data collection begins, the researcher should submit the research proposal, consent forms, and data protection procedures for review and approval. Any significant changes to the study design may also require additional approval.

Although the ethical review process may require additional time and documentation, it plays an important role in protecting participants, ensuring accountability, and enhancing the credibility and integrity of the research (National Commission, 1979).

5.2 International Ethical Frameworks

Research ethics is guided by internationally recognized frameworks that establish standards for responsible research conduct. Although many of these frameworks originated in medical and behavioral research, their principles are now widely applied across academic disciplines.

One of the most influential frameworks is the Belmont Report (1979), which identifies three core principles: respect for people, beneficence, and justice. These principles emphasize informed consent, minimizing harm, maximizing benefits, and ensuring fairness in the treatment of research participants.

Another key framework is the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), which highlights participant protection, informed consent, transparency, and independent ethical review. While originally developed for medical research, its principles are widely applied in other research fields.

The American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) also provides ethical guidelines covering integrity, competence, confidentiality, authorship, and publication ethics. These principles support responsible research practices and promote transparency throughout the research process.

Together, these frameworks form the foundation of modern research ethics and are reflected in university policies, ethics committee requirements, and academic publishing standards. Adherence to these principles helps ensure research is ethical, credible, and socially responsible (Saunders et al., 2019).

6. Practical Application to the Research Topic

This section applies the ethical principles discussed in this report to the proposed study, “*Traditional Property Valuation vs. Automated Valuation Models (AVMs): A Comparative Analysis of Performance and Valuation Quality*.” The aim is to demonstrate how ethical considerations will be integrated into the study’s design, data collection, and analysis.

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with professional valuers and real estate experts in the UAE and quantitative analysis of property transaction data from Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The study will compare valuation results produced by traditional valuation methods with those generated by Automated Valuation Models (AVMs).

Three main research instruments will be used: expert interviews, the Bayut TruEstimate™ platform as a reference AVM, and a custom-developed Excel-based AVM valuation calculator. Each component introduces specific ethical responsibilities, including obtaining informed consent, protecting participant confidentiality, securing transaction data, and ensuring transparency in the use of valuation models and analytical methods.

Throughout the research, the principles of honesty, integrity, objectivity, confidentiality, and transparency will be maintained. Appropriate safeguards will be implemented to protect participants and data, while findings will be reported accurately and without bias. By embedding ethical considerations into every stage of the study, the research aims to produce credible and professionally responsible results that contribute to the field of property valuation.

6.1 Data Collection

The proposed study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data sources, each requiring careful ethical management. The quantitative component will use property transaction data from official

UAE authorities, including the Abu Dhabi Department of Municipalities and Transport (DMT) and the Dubai Land Department (DLD). Additional data sources include traditional valuation reports, valuation estimates from the Bayut TruEstimate™ platform, and outputs generated by the Excel-based AVM calculator developed for this research. The qualitative component will consist of semi-structured interviews with professional valuers, real estate analysts, and industry experts.

All data must be obtained through authorized and legitimate channels, such as government authorities, licensed data providers, or publicly available sources where academic use is permitted. The researcher is responsible for ensuring that all data is used only for approved purposes and that any restrictions imposed by data providers are respected (Saunders et al., 2019).

The use of the Bayut TruEstimate™ platform requires particular attention to intellectual property rights. The study will use only publicly available valuation outputs and will not attempt to replicate or disclose proprietary algorithms. Similarly, the Excel-based AVM calculator will be documented transparently, including its variables, assumptions, and calculation methods, allowing readers to understand and evaluate its outputs.

Data quality is also an important ethical consideration. The researcher must assess the completeness and representativeness of the data set and acknowledge any limitations that may affect the findings. Variations in transaction volumes across different property types and market segments may influence valuation accuracy and should therefore be disclosed. In addition, the market conditions prevailing during the study period (2023–2024), including economic and regulatory factors, will be clearly documented to provide context for interpreting the results.

By obtaining data ethically, respecting intellectual property, ensuring transparency, and openly reporting limitations, the study aims to maintain high ethical standards and produce reliable, credible, and academically sound findings.

6.2 Confidentiality Measures

Maintaining confidentiality is a key ethical responsibility in this study due to the sensitive nature of property transaction and valuation data. The research involves information related to property owners, valuation professionals, and commercial valuation platforms, all of which require appropriate protection.

To protect privacy, all identifying information within transaction datasets, such as owner names, property addresses, plot numbers, and agency references, will be removed or replaced with anonymous codes before analysis. Any files linking these codes to original records will be stored separately and securely, with access restricted to authorized personnel only.

Confidentiality also applies to the qualitative interviews conducted with valuers, real estate analysts, and industry experts. Interview transcripts and research outputs will be anonymized by removing names, employer details, and other identifying information unless participants provide explicit written consent to be identified. This approach encourages open participation while protecting professional privacy.

The study will follow the principle of data minimization by collecting and retaining only information directly relevant to the research objectives. Any information obtained during interviews that falls outside the scope of the study will not be included in the analysis. In addition, all electronic data will be stored in secure, password-protected systems, and data transfers will be conducted through encrypted channels.

By applying anonymization procedures, restricting data access, and implementing secure storage practices, the study aims to protect participant confidentiality and comply with recognized ethical and data protection standards (European Parliament, 2016).

6.3 Informed Consent

Obtaining informed consent is a fundamental ethical requirement for the qualitative phase of this study, as it involves direct interaction with human participants through semi-structured interviews. In line with the principle of respect for people outlined in the Belmont Report, all participants must be provided with sufficient information about the research before deciding whether to participate (National Commission, 1979). This process ensures that participation is voluntary, informed, and based on a clear understanding of the study's purpose and procedures.

Prior to conducting any interview, each participant will receive a Participant Information Sheet that explains the objectives of the research, the overall study design, and the role of the interview within the broader comparative analysis of traditional property valuation methods and Automated Valuation Models (AVMs). The information sheet will also outline the main topics to be discussed during the interview, including current valuation practices, experiences with valuation technologies, perceptions of AVM accuracy, challenges associated with integrating automated tools into professional practice, and views regarding platforms such as Bayut TruEstimate™ and similar valuation systems.

In addition, participants will be informed about how the interview data will be collected, recorded, stored, analyzed, and reported. The information sheet will clearly identify who will have access to the research data, how confidentiality will be protected, and how long the data will be retained. Providing this information in advance allows participants to make an informed decision regarding their involvement and helps establish trust between the researcher and participants.

Participation in the study will be entirely voluntary. Participants will be informed that they may decline to participate, refuse to answer any question, or withdraw from study at any stage without facing any professional, academic, or personal consequences. They will also be advised that they may request the removal of their interview data from the study up to the point at which the final

analysis has been completed. This right to withdraw is an important safeguard that supports participant autonomy and reinforces ethical research practice.

For interviews conducted in person, participants will be asked to sign a formal consent form before the interview begins. In cases where interviews are conducted remotely using online meeting platforms, verbal consent will be obtained and recorded at the beginning of the session after participants confirm that they have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet. All consent records, whether written or recorded, will be stored securely and treated with the same level of confidentiality as the research data itself. These records will be retained in accordance with university research governance requirements and institutional data management policies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Special attention will be given to the professional context of this study. Because the research compares human valuation practices with automated valuation technologies, some participants may have concerns regarding how the findings could reflect on their profession or professional expertise. To address these concerns, the Participant Information Sheet will clearly state that the study is not intended to evaluate or rank individual professionals. Instead, the objective is to examine the strengths, limitations, and practical applications of both traditional valuation methods and AVMs within the UAE real estate market. The study seeks to develop balanced and evidence-based insights rather than promote one approach over another.

Furthermore, all interview responses will be reported anonymously unless participants explicitly agree in writing to be identified. No individual valuation opinions, comments, or experiences will be attributed to named participants in any thesis, report, presentation, or publication resulting from the study. This assurance is intended to encourage open and honest discussion while protecting participants' professional reputations and privacy. By implementing a clear and transparent informed consent process, the study aims to uphold participant rights, maintain professional trust, and ensure compliance with recognized ethical research standards (APA, 2020).

6.4 Potential Ethical Risks

The proposed study involves several ethical risks that must be managed to ensure responsible and credible research. One key concern is the risk of privacy breaches and re-identification, particularly when property transaction data contains detailed information about locations, values, and transaction dates. To reduce this risk, data will be anonymized and, where appropriate, aggregated to broader geographic or time categories (European Parliament, 2016).

Another potential risk is algorithmic bias within the AVM systems being evaluated. Since AVM performance may vary across property types, locations, and market conditions, the study will assess valuation accuracy separately for different market segments rather than relying solely on overall results. Performance measures such as MAPE, COD, and PRD will be used to provide a balanced evaluation of valuation quality.

Conflict of interest is also a potential concern, particularly if data providers or technology platforms have commercial interests related to the research outcomes. To address this, all data sources, affiliations, and funding arrangements will be disclosed transparently, and external parties will not influence the analysis or reporting of results (Resnik, 2015).

Finally, the study will seek to minimize selection bias by including participants with diverse professional backgrounds and experience levels. Participant selection criteria and research methods will be clearly documented to enhance transparency and credibility.

By implementing these safeguards, the study aims to maintain high ethical standards and produce reliable, objective, and trustworthy findings.

6.5 Ethical Safeguards

To address the ethical risks identified in this study, several safeguards will be implemented to protect participants, maintain data integrity, reduce bias, and ensure transparency throughout the research process.

The first safeguard relates to data quality and validation. All transaction data will be reviewed for missing values, duplicate records, and inconsistencies before analysis. Any data cleaning procedures will be documented, and unusual valuation results generated by the Excel-based AVM calculator will be investigated and explained rather than automatically excluded. This supports transparency and scientific integrity.

Methodological transparency is another key safeguard. The Excel-based AVM calculator will be fully documented, including its variables, assumptions, and calculation methods. Similarly, the criteria used to select interview participants will be clearly defined and consistently applied. Any changes to the methodology will be recorded and justified.

The study will also acknowledge the limitations of using commercial AVM platforms such as Bayut TruEstimate™. Since the platform's internal methodology is proprietary, the analysis will focus on valuation outputs rather than undisclosed algorithms, ensuring that conclusions remain balanced and evidence-based (IVSC, 2022).

To reduce algorithmic and methodological bias, valuation performance will be analyzed across different property types, locations, and market segments rather than relying solely on overall accuracy measures. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of where AVMs and traditional valuation methods perform most effectively.

Independent oversight from academic supervisors will further support ethical compliance by reviewing research methods, data analysis, and interpretations throughout the study. In addition, all findings will be reported objectively, including results that challenge the study's expectations or highlight limitations of either valuation approach.

Through these safeguards, the study aims to uphold the principles of integrity, transparency, objectivity, and accountability while producing reliable and trustworthy research findings (Bryman, 2016).

7. Conclusion

This report has explored the concept of research ethics and its importance in ensuring that academic research is conducted responsibly, transparently, and with integrity. The discussion began by examining the meaning and significance of research ethics before reviewing the key ethical principles that guide responsible research practice. It also considered common forms of research misconduct, including plagiarism, data fabrication, falsification, bias, privacy violations, and conflicts of interest, together with the potential consequences these issues can have on research quality and credibility. In addition, the report reviewed the role of institutional and international ethical frameworks in promoting ethical research conduct and protecting the rights and interests of research participants.

A major conclusion from this analysis is that research ethics should not be viewed merely as a set of administrative requirements or procedural obligations. Instead, ethical principles are closely linked to the overall quality, reliability, and credibility of research outcomes. Decisions relating to data collection, participant engagement, confidentiality, transparency, and reporting directly influence the trustworthiness of research findings. Ethical research practices help ensure that conclusions are based on accurate evidence and can be relied upon by academics, professionals, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

The report also demonstrated that the proposed study, which compares traditional property valuation methods with Automated Valuation Models (AVMs), presents several important ethical considerations. The research involves the use of property transaction data, valuation information, and professional opinions gathered from industry experts. These activities create responsibilities relating to confidentiality, privacy protection, informed consent, data security, and the management of potential conflicts of interest. In addition, the evaluation of automated valuation systems introduces ethical challenges associated with algorithmic bias, transparency, and the interpretation of model performance across different market conditions. Addressing these issues requires careful planning and the implementation of appropriate safeguards throughout the research process.

Another important finding is the continued relevance of internationally recognized ethical frameworks such as the Belmont Report, the Declaration of Helsinki, and the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct. Although these frameworks were originally developed in different research contexts, their core principles remain highly applicable to contemporary real estate and valuation research. Principles such as respect for persons, beneficence, justice, integrity, and transparency provide valuable guidance for ensuring that research is conducted ethically and responsibly.

The report further highlights the close relationship between ethical conduct and research credibility. Ethical research practices strengthen the reliability of findings, while transparent and trustworthy findings reinforce confidence in the ethical standards that govern academic research. This relationship is particularly important in emerging areas such as automated valuation technologies, where research outcomes may influence professional practice, investment decisions, regulatory policies, and future technological development.

From a personal and academic perspective, preparing this report has emphasized that ethical awareness is an essential research skill rather than a simple compliance requirement. Researchers must develop the ability to recognize ethical challenges, evaluate potential risks, and apply appropriate safeguards

throughout the research process. As technology continues to transform the real estate sector and algorithmic tools become increasingly influential in valuation activities, maintaining high ethical standards will become even more important.

In conclusion, the success of the proposed study depends not only on the accuracy of its methodology or the sophistication of its analytical techniques, but also on the ethical principles that guide its implementation. By adhering to established ethical standards and maintaining a commitment to honesty, transparency, objectivity, and respect for participants, the research can produce findings that are credible, meaningful, and valuable to both the academic community and the real estate profession. Ultimately, ethical research contributes to the advancement of knowledge by ensuring that future researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers can trust, evaluate, and build upon the evidence it provides.

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