

Ethical Considerations in Digital Marketing: Challenges and Best Practices

Dr. Monika Sharma¹

¹Assistant professor, GLA University
monika.sharma@gla.ac.in

Dr. Mansi Batra Kawatra²

²Assistant Professor, Galgotias University
mansibatrakawatra@gmail.com

Dr. Preeti vats³

³Assistant Professor, Commerce and Management, Kamal Institute of Higher Education and Advance Technology
preetivats2515@gmail.com

Suchita Arora⁴

⁴Assistant Professor, Computer Science and Engineering, Poornima University
suchita.arora1@poornima.edu.in

Dr. Ashok Kumar Sahoo⁵

⁵Assistant Professor in Commerce, Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education (A Deemed University),
Tamilnadu – 626126
rockashok555@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9873-9599>

Prof. Dr. Manoj Sathe⁶

⁶Associate Professor, Computer Science, PES Modern Institute of Business Studies Pune, India
sathe.manoj@gmail.com

Abstract: The use of technological devices and platforms for user participation, transfer of knowledge, and data exchange is referred to as online ethics. Social media platforms may be digital marketing instruments to identify trends, client interactions, and market demands. Cyberbullying is a serious topic, however, the majority of studies have concentrated on worries related to consumer privacy. It is crucial to use ethical decision-making methods before participating in any type of web-based activity because of how simple and quick these activities are. This essay seeks to examine the expenses associated with social media websites that rely on internet-based technology, as well as any possible drawbacks and moral dilemmas. The research looks at ethical issues including laws, rules, and privacy-regulating insurance plans. Consumer worries regarding the moral implications of internet purchases have increased along with e-commerce. The article uses a comprehensive examination of the literature on digital advertising, social networking sites, and ethics.

Keywords: *Ethical consideration, Digital marketing, consumer,*

INTRODUCTION

Considerations about ethics related to online use have arisen as a result of the increasing adoption of the internet as a means of commerce, raising challenges for both professionals and consumers. These worries about safety and ethics in online shopping can affect and harm online activity, drawing and losing consumers. To promote development, marketers need to know how these ethical problems connect to consumer unhappiness and distrust of online shopping. Online retailers must understand how users see and assess the ethical aspects of their online stores. There Is a lack of moral difficulties in e-commerce that are similar to conventional real-time monitoring shopping, indicating the need for more study on one's view of moral behaviour in online situations.

The capacity of customers to make purchases from online retailers is greatly impacted by certain moral factors, such as safeguards and privacy. The conceptual study is the main subject of studies on customers' opinions of internet retailers' ethical behaviour. A few studies look at how referrals from others, the perception of online ethics, and customer beliefs relate to the general acceptability of digital shopping. More studies must focus on analyzing other influenced characteristics including pride and trust, even if the present research indicates a shift in what consumers see as moral in digital commerce.

Aim and objectives:

Aim: The study aims to explore challenges and best practices of Ethical Considerations in Digital Marketing.

Objectives:

- To understand the Ethical Concepts in Digital Marketing and Internet Ethical Behaviour.
- To explore the Concerns about Ethics in Digital Marketing.
- To focus on Ethical guidelines for Digital Marketing.
- To explore the Methods for upholding the digital marketing ethics regulations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Schaltegger & Burritt (2015) propose that instead of having genuine faith in the cause, many businesses operate ethically based on self-interest. Nevertheless, a firm will behave ethically regardless of the motivations underlying its ethical actions. A three-factor scale was created by Forsythe et al. (2006) to evaluate consumers' perceptions of the dangers associated with online buying, with the risk of finances being linked to moral concerns. According to Singh and Hill's (2003) research, consumers' worries about online security in Germany are a result of their overall opinions about privacy and the roles that businesses and government authorities play in maintaining privacy for customers. This helps to explain why customers in Germany have these issues. Four main problems were identified by Miyazaki and Fernandez (2001) after evaluating customers' worries about buying things on the internet: confidentiality system safety, and online store cheating. Illegal sharing of private information, unwanted contacts from online sellers, secret monitoring of purchasing habits, possible malefactors breaking into data security equipment, and dishonest actions by online stores are some privacy problems.

A scale of advertising norms ethics was created by Vitell et al. (1993) to evaluate ethical choices that marketers must decide how to handle. The five elements of the scale were: item and publicity rules, duty and transparency rules, details and agreement norms, price and delivery norms, and overall openness and integrity. The scale was based on the United States Advertising Association's standard of ethics. With an emphasis on customer ethics, Muncy and Vitell (1992) created a consumer ethics measure that judged moral convictions about dubious actions. A four-dimensional answer emerged from their research: actively profiting from unlawful activity, passively benefitting from dishonest techniques, actively profiting from fraudulent tactics, and no harm or foul actions.

Ethical Concepts in Digital Marketing:

To link companies with their intended audiences, branding is an important leadership activity. Customers are now more vocal in their criticism of items and in forcing businesses to make changes because of the flexibility that Internet technologies provide. Client devotion is based upon an unstable market setting, which makes ethical marketing methods important. When evaluating how much branding is ethical, trust is a critical component (Chaffey, and Smith, 2022). The moral standards and guidelines that serve as a direction for businesses' marketing strategies are known as ethics. The adding value and advantageous aspects of advertising and social duty are highlighted in descriptions relating to the field, such as those provided by the US Marketing Association. The standards and limits that build enduring marketing connections are set by the ethics of marketing, which stretch beyond common, conventional, and legal difficulties (Mogaji, et al. 2020). As marketing moved towards digitalization, apps with artificial intelligence assistance were developed and put into practice to create marketing plans. In the absence of face-to-face connection, digital customers want assistance to figure out if a business operates morally online. Reliability of retailers, fraud, data security, internet safety, and quality are the top concerns for customers while making online purchases, according to studies. Safety, privacy, honesty, and satisfaction are the four pillars regarded as online ethics (Dwivedi, et al. 2021). Operational marketing categories including product, pricing, location, and promotion may all be used to analyze ethical issues. The

maintenance of all components in balance and connection to the surroundings and the other parts is essential to the skeleton's wellness and equilibrium to meet the needs of the intended customer base. When companies uphold their ethical standards, consumers are more likely to become devoted to them.

Internet Ethical Behaviour:

An ethical collection of rules controlling using a computer may be called online ethics. That is the appropriate behaviour. Another definition of it would be guidelines and standards that users of the internet have to follow.

A person or a group may use ethics as a collection of ethical guidelines to determine appropriate conduct while utilizing websites. A collection of moral guidelines that control computer use may be called digital ethics (Varadarajan, et al. 2022). Copyright violations are one of the most widespread issues with internet ethics. Stealing the personal data of others and replicating copied content without permission from the writer are only a few of the ethically dubious instances.

- ***Internet morality for all users:***

Appropriate online conduct is known as "internet ethics." Regarding others' assets and rights on the internet, people must always behave honourably.

- ***Approval:***

To communicate with friends and relatives, one needs to utilize the internet. Avoid sending emails from outsiders or unfamiliar persons, nor engage in conversation with them. Email transferring and conversations with strangers include hazards that everybody should be mindful of.

- ***Acting differently than you:***

Using the internet to appear as someone else and mislead others is not acceptable. It can even be illegal and dangerous to other people to mask real identities online to mislead others.

- ***Withhold personal data:***

Provide personal information such as house number, phone number, hobbies, and passcode only with authorization. Never send a stranger a picture since you never know who could use it or share it with other people.

- ***While the download is running:***

Using the web is limited to sharing and listening to content that is protected by copyright. It also serves to view films, engage in games, and listen to music. Copyright concerns and their significance must be understood.

- ***Internet connection:***

The creation of instructional plans is made possible by the Internet, a time-efficient tool that is available to everyone. Acquiring knowledge is contingent upon having the ability to choose, process, and examine relevant and trustworthy data quickly and efficiently. These skills may be developed with the help of online research.

Concerns about Ethics in Digital Marketing:

With so many advantages for consumers, the internet has completely changed the way companies run. But there are also ethical problems with modern technology, especially when it comes to AI. Important issues include how well every internet channel reaches customers, how well products are explained to them, how technology may be used to trick customers, how unfair pricing schemes employing electronic devices might be, and how customer information can be used to target advertisements (El Junusi, 2020). By grouping the classic components of the advertising mix—product, price, location, and promotion—this research examines the ethical implications of digital marketing. Each of those elements has important information for making ethical choices, and their unity and interplay determine the well-being and proper functioning of each (Hermann, 2022). Price unfairness is brought up by harmful pricing, dishonest pricing, and unlawful pricing, which emphasizes the significance of ethical issues in pricing. Issues concerning product availability and ethics are also brought up by the expansion of online selling. Another crucial factor that has to be ethically taken into account is shipping because consumers who shop online appreciate quick delivery and gravitate toward companies that put it first (Du, and Xie, 2021). Examining ethically related topics including data use, online advertising, electronic mail, and networking sites is necessary for advancement, the integrated component of the marketing approach.

Digital marketers should make ethical choices at every level. Developing successful company plans while acting morally toward customers is the main ethical duty. Digital customers, according to research, like firms that support them and take

ethical issues into account while promoting their products. To boost perceived dependability, businesses should utilize safety tools and apps properly and take steps not to break laws regarding privacy (Weiss, 2021). Enhanced earnings, share of the market, credibility, consumer trust, and engagement may result from implementing an ethical attitude at every level of the digital marketing approach.



Figure 1: Ethical issues in digital marketing

- **Product-Related Problems:**

The “virtual Items,” made possible by the internet, enables customers to shop and study things around the clock. Regular advertising routes, however, have resulted in less customer involvement, which might cause unhappiness (Katsikeas, et al. 2020). To solve these problems, brands need to provide accurate, interesting, and trustworthy details on their goods in a variety of online settings. The demands of clients are largely influenced by the standards of the products offered, thus businesses need to use creative marketing techniques (Alshaketheep, et al. 2020). Interactions between customers and brands are also impacted by ethical concerns since people are more likely to buy goods that are high-quality, safe, have attractive packaging, and are environmentally friendly.

- **Price-Related Concerns :**

Pricing has changed as a result of electronic commerce, becoming dynamic and unique. Every day, customers compare quick offers and perform price analyses (Saura, et al. 2021). An internet shopping tactic called flexible pricing offers versatility and client loyalty. On the other hand, price unfairness and a loss of trust may result from dishonest pricing, unlawful pricing, and fraudulent activities. Digital pricing solutions are seen as equally exciting by Nunan 2022; nevertheless, customer approval policies and means of communication need to be enacted. Dynamic pricing allows businesses to modify prices in response to market patterns, consumer behaviour, and rivalries (Aiolfi, et al. 2021). Examples of these industries include airlines, travel, auto rentals, and online stores.

Ethical Guidelines for Digital Marketing:

There are several ethical digital advertising principles that businesses must abide by. These include giving accurate and comprehensive product details, making sure that advertising is genuine, avoiding hardship, and appreciating differences in culture. Every claim or promise made about an item should be thoroughly confirmed, and the information provided should be clear and honest. Because honesty in advertising is subject to legal restrictions, businesses should be prepared to assume full liability if their service or good falls short of expectations.

Businesses should stay away from making hurtful remarks about identity, beliefs, politics, or other heated topics on social media since doing so violates moral principles and damages the reputation of the company (Peter, and Dalla Vecchia, 2021). Cultural understanding is likewise essential since company efforts and digital advertising demand that organizations comprehend the values, ethics, and advantages of other nations.

An additional crucial component of moral online advertising is privacy. Businesses should take care to uphold privacy standards by refraining from unfairly mining or harvesting data from platforms like Facebook for the sake of promotion. There may be legal implications if it poses a significant danger of privacy invasion (Jacobson, et al. 2020). When organizations are practising complex internet marketing and promotion, there are also several pieces of advice and principles that they should take into consideration. These include only some of the numerous unwritten ethical standards that businesses must follow while doing business digitally.

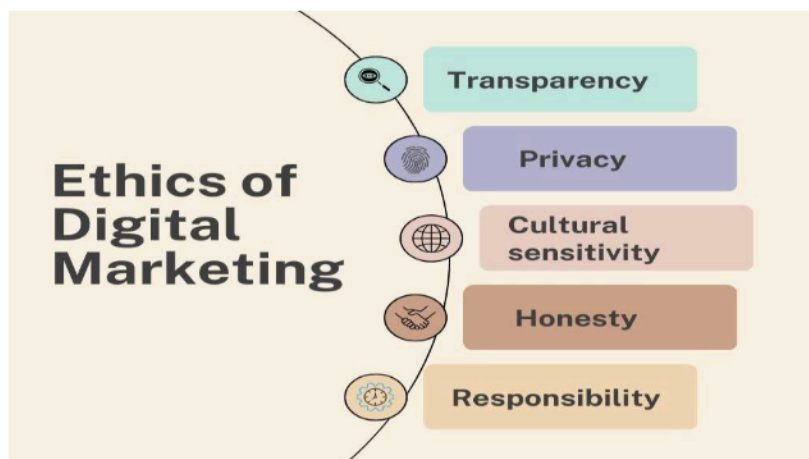


Figure 2: Ethical Guidelines for Digital Marketing

Methods for upholding the digital marketing ethics regulations:

There are a lot of ways to promote trust among the intended customer base in the context of digital advertising.

- ***Foster Trust via Verified Information:***

Customers in the digital environment should have confidence in the digital products and data that companies are providing. If records are to be valued by customers, those who gather and manage them have to conform to the principle that records must be guaranteed to be honest.

- ***Have an opinion:***

Personal marketing and promotion refers to statements made by advertisers about their products (derived from public opinion) as opposed to objective claims, such as those that can be verified by customers (Newman, et al. 2021). Watch out for biased promotion. The consistent inability of the number of customers to see the goods as you have sold them could lead you to face trust issues since subjectivity claims or personal views are unproven.

- ***Watch out for false claims and misleading connections:***

Studies have shown that some marketers will actively make claims about how well-known or superior their goods are. An extraordinary example of this is whenever telecom companies claim you may get security when you purchase their product, which is undoubtedly non-existent (Hofacker, et al. 2020). A company is acting unethically when it makes misleading or simply fraudulent statements about a rival brand.

Someone must ensure that every element of the plan for digital marketing is morally sound if they want to distinguish themselves as a business that engages in ethical digital marketing. This includes everything, including how you distribute the content, advertise, and discuss competitors. It is so simple to lose that way and find oneself accidentally violating moral standards.

METHODOLOGY

The study has employed secondary data collection methods by following ethical consideration of Digital Marketing. Secondary Data has included using information which already exists with datasets of collecting information. The method has been used for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of research topics as primary data collection methods might be time consuming. For research philosophy this study will be using interpretivism research philosophy as it will be able

to explore the ethical considerations of digital marketing. Interpretivism research philosophy has emphasized the understanding of individual experiences and meanings. Hence, it is important to understand consumers and businesses and ethical behaviours. The philosophy is able to conduct in-depth research for deeper comprehension which is aligned with digital marketing ethics. The justification of using interpretivism research is to explore nuanced and context regarding ethical consideration in digital marketing. The interpretivism philosophy is relevant to ethical behaviour of digital marketing influence of subjective perceptions and experiences in both consumers and businesses. The study has used secondary sources which means using academic journals, websites, books and other sources related to digital marketing ethics. Digital Marketing Ethics encompasses complication, and multifaceted issues to understand objective measures. Interpretivism facilitates understanding the complexities of different perspectives and contexts. Ethical consideration of digital marketing has considered different cultural, organizational and social context. However, secondary data collection methods have been chosen as it allows in leveraging the existing insights and knowledge to offer robust foundation in understanding complications of ethical considerations. Furthermore, it enables collecting a wide range of sources and comprehension analysis of the research topic (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021).

DISCUSSION

Current Ethical Challenges in Digital Marketing

In this ever-changing condition of Digital Marketing, several issues have emerged for several companies, businesses, and government agencies. These issues are a projection of consumers' requirements and technological advancement where digital marketing functions (Varadarajan *et al.*, 2022).

Data Privacy: In the world of Digital Marketing the most important aspect is data privacy and data protection. Technological advancements like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data analytics have created a more advanced mode of data collection. However, this also raises the question of data transparency and authenticity as it has increased the risk of increasing data breaches. Currently, customers are always in fear of breaching their data privacy and losing their privacy rights (El Junusi, 2020).

Ethical use of AI: The implementation of AI in digital marketing opens up the door to several ethical dilemmas regarding accountability and data control. It is important to ensure that this smoothens the experience of the customer without compromising their privacy.

Deceptive Advertising: AI is a powerful tool in digital marketing as it can create the best possible outcome for any kind of customer-specific advertisement. However, it should not be used to deceive the customers such as exaggerated claims, pricing, or unjustified product quality (Hermann, 2022).

Across Border Data Safety: Digital Marketing is a global platform as it is accessible from any point of the world so marketers need to give special attention to the protection of data or else it can cause data breaches and can be accessed across borders (Du and Xie, 2021).

Justified influencer marketing: Influencer marketing has become an integral part of any kind of brand as it creates a better reach. From an ethical point of view, it is important to maintain transparency about that product as customers expect honesty from them (Katsikeas *et al.*, 2020).

Social and environmental responsibility: Ethical aspects of digital marketing are not just bound to customers as it has an impact on governmental bodies and social influence. Businesses are taking several social initiatives that help in sustainability and create a more positive image of that company as well as customer goodwill. These are the issues that business faces in terms of digital marketing. By handling these challenges tactfully businesses can create an ethical practice while connecting with this dynamic digital world responsibility (Alshaketheep *et al.*, 2020).

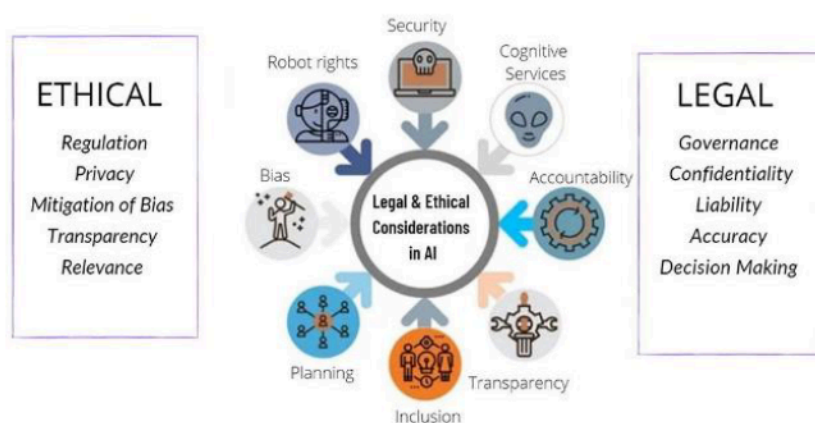


Figure 3: Legal and Ethical Considerations in AI

Significance of Ethical practice on customer Trust

Ethical practice is an important aspect of gaining customer loyalty and trust. For long-term sustainability, it is very crucial. As businesses prioritize ethics and transparency it creates a positive brand reputation (Saura *et al.*, 2021).

Customer trust: Customer trust can be greatly influenced by an ethical approach toward customers and in digital marketing too. Currently, guests are getting more worried about data security, privacy, and data breaches. Digital marketing can reduce this worry to their customers by an ethical approach and honest advertisement. It has been seen that customers worry less when companies give access to their data and can customize as per their will they feel a sense of faithfulness towards that company (Aioli *et al.*, 2021).

Building Long-term Loyalty: Creating ethical practices not just creates brand loyalty with the customer it creates a bond with the customer. This creates a champion reaction of promotion in favour of the company as loyal customers and word-of-mouth promotion are very important for any brand or company and for this trust customers are willing to spend more.

Case Studies: Few case studies have shown the impact of ethical practices on customer trust and loyalty. The digital platform focuses on data privacy as Apple takes a strong stand on data protection. This customer believes in their strong data privacy system thus building customer trust and loyalty (Peter and Dalla, 2021).

Regulatory Framework

As the General Data Protection regulation (GDPR) and the California Customer Privacy (CCPA) has set up legal standards till how much can business use the customer data. CCPA allows California's populations to control their personal data as they can go for no personal data option.

These small changes not just create a better customer impression but also a safer environment for the customer to use (Jacobson *et al.*, 2020).

As per the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) and Direct marketing Association (DMA) has developed several guidelines to create an ethical environment for customers. Such as IAB's guidelines not just help business to adapt the best practices as it creates a better customer platform also and creates a less risky environment. Abiding by these laws just not show their ethical practices but also their commitment towards their customers (Hofacke *et al.*, 2020).

By following these guidelines businesses reduce the complexity of digital marketing. As they can help the business to create a positive reputation and customer trust. By not following these guidelines can fall that business into legal consequences and loss of customer trust. Industry guidelines offer an important base to promote ethical behaviour in digital marketing. As they set clear and crisp guidelines for data transparency, data protection, fairness and customer personal data privacy. By implementing all these guidelines business creates an ethical environment for customers and ultimately the growth of that business (Chen *et al* 2021).

Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The improvement of AI has revolutionized the base of digital marketing by providing new opportunities and specific ethical regulations. As an introduction AI business can customize their digital marketing as per specific customer needs, offer personalized suggestions therefore improving overall customer experience. As the capability of AI to operate with huge amounts of data smoothly.

But with these positive implications there are several scope to worry such as data privacy, transparency and fairness. As AI operates on the personal data of the customers and as per their behaviour and data AI formulates personalized content for them. Thus, creating target customer based content. So the fear of data breach is also there. Thus it is very important to integrate technological advancements with ethical reasoning. If the customer can be aware of how their data is being used they can have better transparency with their customer as they can choose or be aware of how their data is getting used. For the company's customer data privacy is their first priority. As AI and data analysis offers outstanding opportunities for digital marketers and by adding ethical guidelines with AI they can maximize the outcome.

Blockchain technology has created a revolution in digital marketing, offering safe data storage and asking for verification. It promotes transparency by providing secure transactions by cutting out the intermediaries. As it reduces cost and lower the risk of fraud. However there is one major concern is data ownership as the place where the data is stored and who has control over it. By ensuring user consent and data ownership is an important ethical aspect. Although it creates a safe space for user data, it also makes it difficult to update or delete personal data. Moreover companies must keep transparency with their data collection, data storage and data protection. As companies are adapting to new ethical guidelines in digital marketing. As they provide a structured approach to abide by ethical guidelines. Compiling ethical guidelines with their process creates a more ethical environment for users as it lowers the risk of unethical approach. As is safeguard customer trust and enhance brand reputation and customers will not worry about how their data is stored and been used. Thus creating a safe place and implementing trust for the companies. Also it serves everyone the same as the customer, stakeholders, employee and competitors. By this the company not just reduces the legal complexity but also data safety and sustainable growth for business (Tursunbayeva, *et al*, 2022).

Ethical Standards in Different regions: Ethical standards in digital marketing are very different as per the region and country. By analysing these regions we can get an overview of the global customer expectations. Such as in North America, mainly the United States and Canada follow the guidelines made by General Data protection Regulation (GDPR) . As per their guidelines the framework must have transparency, consent, and secure customer data handling. Truthfulness on advertisement, fairness in marketing communication. For this guidelines companies need to implement strong data protection methods and personalized marketing to satisfy customer needs.

In Europe the framework is also under GDPR which sets especially high evaluation standards for the EU. They have a very strict policy to be able to ask for customer consent and special protection for sensitive data category such as biometric data and health related. By the implementation of such strict policy they have adopted to Privacy enhancing technologies (PETs).

In Asia-Pacific region because of several markets with several regulations. The dynamicity in data protection laws and improvement over the region. By adapting with the digital advancement is it much more efficient now to influence ethical regulation. Due to the multicultural situation companies must implement as per cultural diversities.

Companies operating globally must abide by these rules and the ethical frameworks to increase customer trust and data privacy.

Best practices for following digital marketing ethics

Transparency and Honesty: Clear communication of product information, terms of services and pricing has often avoided misleading claims which ensure marketing content is accurate and truthful.

Respect for Privacy: Making sure strong data protection practices are used when gathering, storing, and using customer data by following privacy laws and getting clear permission to use data.

Honest Ads: To keep people's trust, ads for goods and services shouldn't lie or say things that aren't true. He or she should instead give a true description of the goods or services.

Cultural sensitivity: Know how people from different cultures see things and stay away from things that might offend or hurt those cultures. When making marketing plans, people's values and habits are taken into account.

Consumer Respect: Listening to and responding to issues from customers with respect shows that you care about their happiness and well-being.

Future trends of digital marketing ethics

Increased Regulation and Compliance: As worries about data privacy grow, tighter rules like the CCPA and GDPR will become the norm. Businesses are required for increasing data protection and compliance for evolving legal requirements.

Transparency and Authenticity: Consumers are demanding authenticity and transparency for brands. Future digital marketing has surge practices such as transparent data usage policies, clear labelling sponsored and honest advertising to build trust and credibility.

AI and Ethical Use of Technology: With the use of AI it raises several concerns one of which is data privacy. Without proper and save ethical guidelines there is always a chance of data misuse and privacy breach.

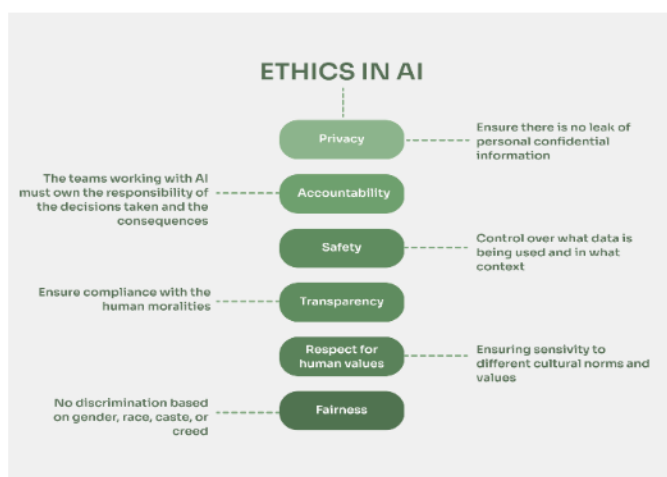


Figure 4: Ethics in Artificial Intelligence

The sudden and dynamic growth of digital marketing and technological advancement created numerous opportunities still data privacy remains a serious concern as customer data breach is a serious offence. Moreover the use of personal data in an ethical way is a commitment on itself as it requires proper framework to follow and it could be expensive. As digital marketing relies on vast amount of personal data, the risk of data breach is very much prominent. Companies should have that much transparency with the data of customer so that they can see the utilization of their data. Not just using their data for manipulative advertisement.. Integration of AI and Ethics framework is also an important aspect thus it is somewhat ensured that the AI will follow the framework of ethical data usage guidelines the chance of data misuse reduces. This will also reduce the chance of manipulative marketing, justifying the actuality of the product. Thus it will create a sense of trust and bond towards the company from customer point of view. To deal with the ethical challenges most of the companies are adapting to the ethical guideline system ensuring a better environment for the usage of data and maintaining ethical integrity. As digital marketing is a dynamic environment maintaining the ethical practices is crucial for the marketers. By following this guideline they can create a sustainable environment for both the customers and the businesses.

CONCLUSION

It has been suggested that ethics in advertising, promotion, and business in general are unrelated to short-term financial gain. Ethical advertising is criticized for being costly, lengthy, ineffective, and even dangerous when the maker misses the point. But as this essay explains, ethical behaviour—especially in advertising—is no longer only a very beneficial investment, even if it is still essential to a business's longevity. On the other hand, acting illegally has been shown to cause undoubtedly harm to one's character along with an abundance of minor criminal problems. It has been shown that good behaviour is very well-obtained and commonly preferred while making selections about what to buy, especially among youngsters. Even in previously secure huge companies, unethical behaviour is no longer tolerated in 2018 due to the growing influence of the conscious and connected customer. Companies will find that today's customers are cautious to purchase from them if they're unable to adjust to this newer ethical standard.

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