



DataSense

Research Ethics Guideline

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A. Background

The process of conducting research involves not only searching for data and preparing a report on the gathered insights, but also maintaining the ethical grounds in the collection, storage, transmission, retrieval and usage of data, and the publication of report. This creates the need of having a standard ethical guideline regarding the research process. In this context, DataSense publishes this guideline for its researchers and team members which will facilitate them in coming up with insightful outputs while ensuring the ethical soundness of those outputs.

B. Report writing

Based on the type and focus of the research, reports can be structured into different types. Though the contents will vary among these types, there are some core instructions to be followed while writing the reports.

- a. The structure of the report needs to be designed in a way that it is simplified and understandable for the readers.
- b. A research report should not contain grammatical errors, as these errors may result into misinterpretation of the research findings.
- c. If relevant, a report should mention the source of data/table/figure presented.
- d. The report should acknowledge the contribution of the relevant parties.

C. Collection of data

The data collection procedure needs to ensure that the data is being sourced through proper channels and the authenticity of the data can be proved. The data collection procedure needs to ensure that the data is being sourced through proper channels and the authenticity of the data can be proved.

1. Informed consent

- a. The participants/respondents need to know about the purpose and use of the data he/she is providing. In order to communicate this information to the participants, the message needs to be in a language which is understood by the participants.
- b. Informed consent/assent/permission needs to be taken from the participants/respondents, before collecting or using their data. This may be collected in writing or voice recording form.
- c. The procedure of collecting informed consent needs to be mentioned in the certificate of manuscript and in the 'Methods'/'Methodology' section of the report.

2. Treatment of human participant

- a. While collecting data, a participant should not be harmed physically, emotionally or psychologically.
- b. A *protocol* on the treatment of human subjects should be prepared and maintained. It is essential that the protocol is reviewed by an appropriate committee.
- c. A participant should never be coerced or inappropriately induced to participate in the research.
- d. Participation in the research should not be unduly influenced based on the researcher's status, power or authority.
- e. The debriefing procedure for the participants should not be unduly delayed or unjustified.

3. Treatment of non-human animal subjects

- a. The non-human animal subjects of the research should be treated humanely and be kept in a healthy condition. A *protocol* on the treatment of non-human animal subjects should be prepared and maintained. It is essential that the protocol is reviewed by an appropriate animal care committee.

- b. The condition in which the subjects are being kept need to be mentioned in the certificate of manuscript and in the 'Methods'/'Methodology' section of the report.

D. Literature review and referencing

While reviewing the literatures, it is essential to note whether any past literature has later been corrected and gather insights from the updated version of the literatures. If such a literature is cited in the report, it is also important for the researcher to mention the version of the report that is being cited.

E. Management of information

The information of participant/client/organization need to stored and managed in such a way that the confidentiality is being maintained as it has been told to the respective parties.

- a. The data collected from the participants should be dealt with caution, so that the confidential and personally identifiable information are not disclosed to any unauthorized person. For this reason, adequate measures need to be taken in order to prevent unauthorized access to the participants' data. A *protocol* of authorization of access to data needs to be developed and maintained.
- b. Participants' data should not be disclosed unless consent has been documented. In other words, data of the participants are not to be disclosed to the public or any other entity, unless it has been mentioned during the collection of consent.
- c. In cases where participants are also authors/investigators for the research, they should be provided with the authority of deciding the level of information they want to disseminate.
- d. Sometimes, there could be situations where the observations are important and relevant for the research. In such situations, the following measures can be taken:
 - i. Altering specific characteristics of the information.

- ii. Limiting description of specific characteristics of the information or presenting composite description.
- iii. Muddling the details of the information by adding extraneous material to it.
- iv. Deidentifying the information by not altering the relevant parts.

F. Lawfulness and transparency

The research and the report need to be transparent in presenting the activities, influences, consistency with the legal requirements, etc. This not only adds to the reliability of the report, but also adds value to the acceptability of the report.

1. Conflict of interest

- a. Research participants should be protected against any potential harm or exploitation arising from personal, scientific, professional, or legal conflict of interest.
- b. The objectivity of the research should also be protected against any sort of conflict of interest.
- c. In case of a potential conflict of interest or a circumstantial influence, the potentiality or the circumstances need to be mentioned in the 'Author Note' section of the report.
- d. The possibility of financial conflict of interest should be strictly looked into as this carries a higher chance of impairing the objectivity of the research.

2. Research results and report

- a. The research results should have a strong methodological reasoning, where selective omission of observations in order to modify the results, without a valid reasoning, is unacceptable.
- b. In case of errors that significantly influence the meaning of the published results/report, it should be immediately communicated to the relevant authorities in order to correct or retract the report.

G. Data retention

Retention of data collected, curated and analyzed for the purpose of research should maintain a consistent *protocol*. It is generally advised that the data should be stored for at least 5 years, after the completion or publication of a report. Considering the nature of DataSense, this timeline may be extended to a period more than 10 years. However, the retention procedure should filter the data based on the adequacy and the relevance of the data.

H. Data security

The security of the retained data should be strictly maintained. The measures that needs to be taken to ensure data security are:

- a. Protection of data against cyber-attack.
- b. Preventive steps to be taken against data theft.
- c. Structured provisioning of data storage and sharing

I. Data sharing

The core focus of sharing data should be on ensuring the confidentiality of the research participants. In order to ensure this provision, the following measures should be in place:

- a. Informed consent needs to be collected from the participants, before collecting data from them. They should be aware of the use of the collected data and the list of entities that may have access to those data.
- b. Data may be shared with a qualified requester, if the accuracy of the report has been questioned.
- c. In any instances of data sharing, DataSense should enter into a written agreement with the parties with which the data is being shared, where the parties assure not to disclose the data they have gained access to.
 - i. It is advised to hide or remove the identifiable information from the dataset, before sharing it with an entity other than the researcher.

- ii. An important aspect of sharing data is the relevant costs of sharing. The provisions of cost sharing should be determined before sharing the data with another entity.

J. Authorship

The provision on authorship covers multiple aspects.

1. The following types of people involved in the research process can and should be recognized as authors of the report, where they have agreed to serve as an author (written verification) and have reviewed the manuscript:
 - a. Writer of the report.
 - b. Formulator of research problem or research hypotheses.
 - c. Structurer of the experimental design of the study.
 - d. One who organizes and conducts the analysis process.
 - e. Interpreter of the results and findings of the research.
 - f. Other type of contributors may be added, based on their contribution to the research

Contributors, who are not recognized as authors, should get acknowledged for their contributions in the 'Author Note' section of the report.

2. The order of authorship needs to be determined based on the contribution of the authors and on the mutual agreement among them. In case of equal contribution from each of the authors, the distribution of contribution should be mentioned in the 'Author Note' section.
3. It is essential to present the copyright notice in/with the report. In most of the cases, the creative commons licensing is being used.
4. A less discussed matter regarding the parties involved with the research process is accountability. The accountability of each involved party needs to be determined and documented by adopting auditable steps and strategies.

K. Plagiarism

Plagiarizing works of others and of the researcher him/herself is considered to an unethical act. This not only shows the absence of morality, but also devalues the work of the researcher. For this reason, plagiarism should be strictly prohibited.

L. Accuracy of report

The accuracy of the report can be ensured through reviews.

1. Before being published, a report has to go through a thorough review. In case of being reviewed by institutional reviewers, the process should be reported in the 'Method'/'Methodology' section of the report.
2. In addition to the initial review, a report should go through regular reviewing, based on the importance and the relevance of the report.

M. Further publication

The responsibility of a researcher may extend to multiple publications. In such cases, there are some *protocols* that need to be followed.

1. Further publication is in sole discretion of DataSense. Without prior permission any publication is prohibited. Based on the institutional strategy, the publication roadmap for each research will be decided.
2. A researcher should not opt for piecemeal publications, instead of publishing all the results of the research in one report.
3. Multiple publication is acceptable when new insights have been dug out through extending the work of a published report. In such cases, the latter publications should always ensure copyright permission from the previous authors and the previous works should be cited in the report.
4. One may publish the same or similar report in a different journal, if the former report is not widely available or has been circulated within a limited group of people.

5. One should not re-publish a translated work or a report which contains substantially same content as the previous report. This is an act of redundancy and wastes the valuable space of academic works.

N. Pandemics and natural disasters

Procedures during a pandemic or a disaster should be considered as special cases.

1. Safety *protocols* need to be followed as instructed by the public health authority.
2. Data collection procedure during pandemics, like COVID-19, needs to be dealt with caution, by considering the safety of the respondents and the data collectors. The precautions taken during data collection procedure should be mentioned in the 'Methods' section of the report.
3. If the researcher excludes a certain group of research participants, as a result of the crisis, it should be mentioned and justified in the report.
4. The working environment of the researcher should ensure coherence with the *safety protocols*.
5. The researcher should maintain the *health protocols* during external communications and should ensure that the other parties are also maintaining those.
6. It is advisable to mention it in the report if the research work has been conducted during a pandemic or a natural disaster.
7. In case of natural disaster, the researcher should consider the living condition and the emotional state of the respondent/participants.

This guideline is developed to facilitate a researcher in abiding by the ethical policies related to the process of research. This document is to be constantly reviewed and updated, based on the need of research and the market norms regarding this matter.