UNETHICAL MARKETING RESEARCH PRACTICES IN NIGERIA: MANIPULATIONS IN MARKETING REPORTS

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Abstract
Key business decisions are taken based on the recommendations from research report, but the years, information drawn from such data warehouses have resulted to marketing myopia and wrong marketing investment and poor returns thereof. The problem in this study stems from the fact that the research system of a developing nation experiences high level of unethical practices which hampers the integrity of their research results. Most research report application in Nigeria transforms to inaccuracy in business decision making and marketing error, and it is against this backdrop that the need to study the implications of manipulated report arose. The objective of the study was to critically examine the implications of manipulated research report on the business operations effectiveness and efficiency. Marketing research ethics simply entails the right conduct in the marketing research process. It was ascertained that unethical research practice which results to manipulated research report includes, misrepresentation of research findings, fabrication or plagiarism and falsification of data. It was ascertained that this unethical behaviors damps innovation, leads to poor returns on marketing investment (ROMI), marketing myopia, hampers accuracy, and lot more. Researchers who manipulate their research report in ways that deceive others are violating both the basic values and widely accepted professional standards of science, failure to fulfill predetermined obligations. They mislead their colleagues and potentially impede progress in their field or research. They undermine their own authority and trustworthiness as researchers. It recommended that research group instructors should educate their students and research associates about the ethical responsibilities of authors of scientific publications and to insure that, when they are given the responsibility for submitting a paper, they are fully aware of the potential consequences, to themselves and to their coauthors, of violations in these ethical guidelines.

Keywords: Marketing Research, Decision making, Report, Manipulation.

Introduction
In order to make the best decisions, marketing managers in both commercial and noncommercial organizations must have the right information (Kent, 2007). The role of market research in helping business decisions through the systematic and objective collection of data cannot be
under-emphasized. The applications of market research and how many studies are to help show the size of markets, to measure the satisfaction of customers with products, to guide new product development and to show people’s use of and attitudes to products (Kurtz, 2008; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). All businesses need information to guide decision making. Managers desperately trying to understand increasingly complex and global markets need more usable information than ever before. Because of this, the research sector plays a valuable role in the commercial, social and political world today. This information can be likened to that which we need when we are driving. Market research is the map by which businesses can navigate. But most times due to unethical practices, most of the research report is manipulated and thus is biased, misleading and inaccurate.

Marketing research as defined by the American Marketing Association is the function that links the consumer, customer and public to the marketer through information – information used to identify and define marketing opportunities and problems; generate, refine, and evaluate marketing actions; monitor marketing performance; and improve understanding of marketing as a process. Marketing research specifies the information required to address these issues; designs the method for collecting information; manages and implements the data-collection process; analyzes the results; and communicates the findings and their implications (Kotler & Kevin, 2012).

Any organization intending to introduce a new product or service, for instance a group of people starting out in business, needs to establish that there is both a demand for the product or service and that conditions exist for it to be provided. Market research provides the necessary information.

Kotler & Armstrong (2010) opine that research studies can be powerful persuasion tools; companies often use study results as claims in their advertising and promotion. Today however, many research studies appear to be little more than vehicles for pitching the sponsor’s products. In fact, in some cases, the research survey appears to have been designed just to produce the intended effect. Few advertisers openly rig their research design or blatantly misrepresent the findings; most abuses tend to be subtle stretches.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, there have been an increasingly emphasis on manipulated research report as the reason why the developing nations finds it difficult to attain a significant level technological development and this have affected the operation of infant industries and the economic Gross Domestic Product (GDP). On yearly bases, the educational sector turn out numerous research report which in the actual sense, its application in the decision making process should proffer solutions to existing problems in our immediate environment as is obtainable in the developed nations where the industrial players rely mostly on academic research reports to get recommendations that will guide them to make informed decision. The research system of a developing nation experiences high level of unethical practices which hampers the integrity of their research results. Most research report application in Nigeria transforms to inaccuracy in business decision making and marketing error, and it is against this backdrop that the need to study the implications of manipulated report arose.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to critically examine the implications of manipulated research report on the business operations effectiveness and efficiency.
Ethical Considerations in Marketing Research

Coinciding with the rise of consumerism and equal rights legislation, people have become more assertive of their rights, especially in the market place (Kamat, 2006). An increased concern for privacy, a reluctance to be used as guinea-pigs for new products and an increased reluctance to accept research claims for new products in advertisements characterize the new outlook of many consumers (Nwokoye, 2000).

In applying the term ‘ethics’ to marketing research, it is assumed that ethics involves the assessment of an action in terms of that action being morally right or wrong (Proctor & Jamieson, 2004). Each society possesses standards to which it expects its members to adhere. Sometimes, these standards are quite precise and there is little dispute about their meaning. At other times, however, these standards are quite general and can be interpreted in different ways. The area of greatest concern is marketing researchers’ treatment of participants. The abuses that arise in this area tend to fall into three broad categories: invasion of privacy, deceptive practices and impositions.

Good ethics is a cornerstone of sustainable marketing (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). In the long run, unethical marketing harms customers and society as a whole. Furthermore, it eventually damages a company’s reputation and effectiveness, jeopardizing the company’s very survival. Thus, the sustainable marketing goals of long-term consumers and business welfare can be achieved only through ethical marketing conduct.

Conscientious marketing face many moral dilemmas. The best thing to do is often unclear. Because not all managers have fine moral sensitivity, companies need to develop corporate marketing ethics policies—broad guideline that everyone in the organization must follow, most especially when conducting research and reporting finding (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). These policies should cover distributors relations, advertising standards, Research standards/methodologies, customer service, pricing, product development and general ethical standard. These will go a long way in improving the performance of a business organization in it’s dynamic and fierce business environment since the issue of marketing myopia would be avoided and thus effectiveness and efficiency is upheld in the operation. By so doing, the integrity of research reports would sound and dependability on such reports enhanced.

Stages of the Research Process where Manipulations takes place

The manipulated research report is a function of misconducts at the various stages of the research process and they include:

Drawing up a Research Plan
You must first determine what you are trying to find out, who you are finding this information out from, where the information can be obtained and how best to obtain it. Then tasks must be drawn up matching these aims, responsibility assigned, a timetable set and a method for analyzing and reporting the information (if necessary) agreed. And at this stage, researcher tend to use unethical plans which does not guarantee consistency during the research and thus the research report is manipulated so as to favor a predetermined goal or objectives.

Collecting the Information
This depends on information, either primary information (that you obtain directly) or secondary information (that other people have found out). Primary information can be collected by personal interviews, telephone interviews, or postal questionnaires. It can include street surveys, talking to groups of potential customers, observation (especially of competitors), talking to similar organizations in other areas and talking to suppliers or other people in the industry or sector.
Secondary information includes statistics on the product or service area, socio-demographic information, competitor analysis, trade directories and journals, government statistics e.g. the census.

The starting point for market research should be secondary information since this has already been gathered, organized and analyzed. But secondary information may not be enough. For instance, secondary data which is so in most cases, the researcher is not part of the generating process which might have questionable integrity issues and if the conclusions are drawn based on the information, manipulating research data will be inevitable.

**The Questionnaire**

The most common method but usually is disappointing. People see it as a waste of time and intrusive. Postal questionnaires have response rates of 1-5%. The questionnaire works best when it is either face-to-face or the questionnaire has been targeted on key individuals who, perhaps through a letter or telephone call, have been informed about the proposed product or service and see some advantage to them (e.g. saving money) through ‘being sold’ on it.

**The Focus Group**

A group of ‘ideal’ customers or users who represent the kinds of people you are trying to reach give their views on the quality of the product/service, the price, the publicity material, the product’s usability and its acceptability. This can be a relatively cheap method (especially where customers or users exist already) of finding out consumer attitudes to a product or service.

**The Personal Interview**

Very time consuming and not much use unless, used with a questionnaire, it provides an opportunity to market or sell the product/service to the interviewee. The interviewee is made aware of the product or service, interest is created and they may be persuaded to buy or use the product/service.

**The Telephone Interview**

Perceived as low cost and effective but needs careful preparation to reach the target group. Can be used to obtain sales or users but people called may be hostile or deflationary.

**Observation**

Just looking can tell you, for instance, what people are doing, how they are buying, who they buy from, where they buy and how often.

**Analyzing and Reporting the Information**

Analysis must begin by returning to the original question of what you were trying to find out. The information must be organized in an understandable way. You must be able to present this information to others so they can understand it and draw the same conclusions. Your analysis must be honest. But in most cases, mostly in academic research, the analysis is not honest since most researchers hardly make use of original data gotten from the field.

**Implications Of Manipulated Research Report On Overall Business Operations**

Manipulated research report have over the years affected Nigeria economy since most of the infant industries wind up with few years of operation and this have also multipliers effect on our standard of living (Osuala, 2004). Some of the implications of manipulated research report on our contemporary business world includes but not limited to;

i. **It hampers Accuracy**

This is true because when the marketing manager makes decision and forecast based on a research report that is manipulated, the outcome of such decision will not be accurate.
Application or implementation of such report into their business operations will not give the organization the expected result and this goes a long way in limiting the operations of the company and most times, it derails them from pursuing their predetermined objectives (Hyman & Sierra, 2010). Inaccuracy refers to either intentional or unintentional errors in a respondent’s answers, in the future (predictive) or in the present (concurrent). Predictive inaccuracy is a special case of response error caused by inaccurate intentions.

ii. It is Misleading
Empirical evidence in the field of business management have over the year acknowledged the fact that research reports that are faked or manipulated, is always misleading and unfit for the organization to depend on such report (Kent, 2007). This unfit report which is a product of an unethical behavior during the research process is misleading in the sense that it does not create room for transparency and fairness. The organization that uses manipulated research report will always have deficit budget and focusing their marketing efforts to the wrong segment or even producing a product that is not need by a particular segment, and by so doing, their limited resource is being wasted and shareholder fund maximization will be impeded.

iii. It Limits Researcher’s Capacity/Expertise
This is true in the sense that a researcher who is always involved in unethical research process which gives out a manipulated report does not in any way improve on his skills and capacity in the field. Since his report/result cannot proffer any solution to an identified problem and would even endanger the investments of the organization.

iv. It Soils the Relationship between the Industrial Sector and the Education sector
Due to incessant manipulation of majority of academic research reports, the players in the industrial sector in Nigeria always question the integrity of virtually all academic research report and this have really hampered the relationship which should exist between the two sectors. For instance in developed countries, it is the industries that fund most of the academic studies and they also make use of the findings and reports of these research but in Nigeria just like every other developing country, the reverse is the case.

v. It Damps Innovation
Innovation is the act or process of introducing new ideas, devices or methods. When most of the research reports are manipulated, it does not create room for creativity or contrivance. This is responsible for the poor technological advancement in the most of the developing countries and lack of technical know-how. As a result of manipulation in various research report that would have given a comprehensive SWOT analysis of a particular business operations, biasness of the entire research process limits the ability of the report to project a clear gap that need to be filled.

vi. It leads to poor Return on Marketing Investment (ROI)
Over the years, the rate at which firms incur loses have been alarming and this confirms the truism of the fact that ‘if you are not informed, you will be deformed’. Prosperous organizations with great potentials and promising future have wind up as a result of using falsified research report which leads them into making a wrong budget and marketing investment decisions, which does not pay off at the end of the operation period. By so doing, the company finds it extremely difficult to break-even and this ties their working capital to a wrong area, this results to poor returns on marketing investment (ROI). This is very dangerous to the life line of any business because shareholder funds are not being maximized and thus the doubt the capability of the firm’s management to protect and manage their estate, which leads most of them to withdraw their fund from such firm.
vii. **It Decays the System and breeds a poor Data Mining and Data Warehousing System**

This is what is obtainable in a system that breeds unethical research practices, since the business operating system is progressive in nature, people following, and takes after actions that are based on faked reports and this affects the overall system. Manipulation of research report goes a long way in building a pool of data system that is poor and biased which its usage does not guarantee efficiency and effectiveness.

**Three sets of obligations researchers have to adhere to in line with professional standards.**

1. An obligation to honor the trust that their colleagues place in them.
2. An obligation to themselves. Irresponsible conduct in research can make it impossible to achieve a goal.
3. An obligation to act in ways that serve the public.

**Research Misconduct and Research Fraud**

Research misconduct and fraud means Fabrication, Falsification, or Plagiarism (FFP) in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results.

(a) **Fabrication** is making up data or results and recording or reporting them.

(b) **Falsification** is manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record. This also entails manipulating research materials, images, data, equipment, or processes. Falsification includes changing or omitting data or results in such a way that the research is not accurately represented. An individual might falsify data to make it fit with the desired end result of a study.

(c) **Plagiarism** is the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit. It is using the ideas or words of another person without acknowledging him. We have Self-Plagiarism which entails the verbatim copying or reuse of one's own research. It is considered to be Unacceptable and unethical practice in scientific literature.

(d) Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion (Hyman & Sierra, 2010).

(e) **Research Fraud** is publishing data or conclusions that were not generated by experiments or observations, but by invention or data manipulation. There are two kinds in research and scientific publishing:

**Other Types of Ethical Violations**

- Duplicate publication/submission of research findings; failure to inform the editor of related papers that the author has under consideration or “in press”
- Unrevealed conflicts of interest that could affect the interpretation of the findings
- Misrepresentation of research findings - use of selective or fraudulent data to support a hypothesis or claim (Kamat, 2006).

**Marketing Research and Decision-Making**

There are elements of uncertainty and risk attached to all business decisions and the main difficulty is how to reduce the risk involved in the choices that are made (Hunt, 2010). Common sense suggests that the availability of good information reduces the risk. After all, having perfect information all the time would make the job of exercising choice much easier since there would be no risk in making marketing decisions. Correct answers to such questions as how much to
spend on advertising and what message should be contained in the advertising would always be known. The first step in the decision-making process is the identification of needed information. Incorrect specification of requirements will provide only useless information, so it is necessary to ensure that the specification is correct. Poor or misleading information not only costs time and money but also generates confusion, chaos and badly informed decisions. One must determine what information is needed to make a particular decision. Next, consideration has to be given to whether the information can be obtained within a reasonable time and at a reasonable cost, and whether one can afford to spend both the time and the money to obtain it. Information used in the right way can be a powerful aid to marketing. A competitive advantage can be achieved with the help of accurate, relevant information since it helps marketers make better decisions. Inaccurate, irrelevant information is both misleading and dangerous in the extreme (Proctor & Jamieson, 2004).

Summary
In our contemporary society, manipulation of research report is on the increase and as such most organization does not actually have the true Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analysis of the business which they venture into. This have been responsible for the high rate at which infant industries wind up, since most of them do not have enough resources to verify most of the research reports they work with so as to ensure the integrity of the data that was used for the study which gave rise the report. This unethical behavior in marketing research have hampered returns on marketing investment (ROI) because most organization make key decisions based on research reports that are manipulated and thus biased and inaccurate. Basically a research report should provide a risk management/reduction strategy for business decision making and to better understand the market condition and thus when the report is manipulated, lapses will be experienced towards the attainment of the organizational goals and objectives.

Researchers who manipulate their research report in ways that deceive others are violating both the basic values and widely accepted professional standards of science, failure to fulfill predetermined obligations. They mislead their colleagues and potentially impede progress in their field or research. They undermine their own authority and trustworthiness as researchers. In the end, however, unethical or inappropriate actions cannot simply be regulated away. Each company must accept responsibility for policing the conduct and reporting of its own marketing research to protect consumers’ best interests and its own.

Recommendation
I would like to encourage the leaders of academic research groups to educate their students and research associates about the ethical responsibilities of authors of scientific publications and to insure that, when they are given the responsibility for submitting a paper, they are fully aware of the potential consequences, to themselves and to their coauthors, of violations in these ethical guidelines.

The players in the industrial sector should be willing to fund and collaborate with the Academia so as to carry out an extensive research exercise which will come up with a dependable report and also help in building comprehensive and effective data mining and data warehousing system. This should be given key attention since most of the research processes that are manipulated are due to limited and scarcity of funds on the part of the researcher.
Nigeria as a country should have a functional Business and Management Research Institute that would shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that every research in the field must follow the ethical laid down procedures and by so doing, sanity would been restored in the system.

References