



Ethics in an AI World

Artificial intelligence brings incredible opportunity for marketers who want to deliver truly personalized experiences at scale, but with great potential comes great responsibility. Knowing and acting upon an individual's intimate details requires careful consideration.

Marketers must adapt to this new reality by re-examining ethics policies to reflect the individual attention that this fast moving technology provides.

Ethical Uses of Collected Data

Marketers have access to an enormous amount of information about individual consumers. This data is collected from a myriad of sources, including search data, transaction history, location data, credit card data, and sensor triggers.

Until recently, the data collected was used largely for analytics and informed segmentation strategies. However, the adoption of cognitive marketing puts into question not only what kind of data is being collected, but how that data is being used. For the first time we have the opportunity to infer and act upon highly personalized, intimate insights.

Most people would agree that promoting new skis to someone visiting a ski resort is helpful to both consumers and the brand. But would it be right to advertise something to a buyer that you know would likely cause them harm? For example, if data indicates that someone is diabetic, is promoting sugary treats to their mobile device a violation of ethics? What about marketing a luxury vacation with deferred payments to someone who just filed for bankruptcy? These are the types of questions marketers must ask as we evolve away from broad stroke segmentation, and toward individual communication.

Protecting the Most Vulnerable

Even the most astute adults can be manipulated by messaging. Until modern times, virtually all communications passed through human hands, and we took comfort knowing that communication was generalized. AI moves at such a pace that the way we have traditionally applied checks and balances simply can't keep up. Marketers need to develop guideposts that protect children, the elderly, and others who may not be able to distinguish between communicating with a machine and communicating with a person.

Assumption Bias

What if the collected data leads to the wrong conclusions? Data is an incredible tool, but AI doesn't always correctly distinguish between right and wrong in human behavior. For example, if you train a self-driving car not to speed, how do you teach it to speed up when doing so would avoid an accident? The accuracy of AI technology depends on the data we use to teach it, and marketers must always use it within the cultural context by which it was collected.

The Three Elements to an Effective Ethics Strategy

To protect brands and consumers, these three guideposts should always stay top of mind.



1. Align Your Purpose with Customer Value:

It is critical that consumers develop trust in AI systems. For marketers, this means positioning campaigns to entertain, inform, and aid customers - not to trick them.



2. Operate with Transparency:

AI systems do not have self-awareness. We have a responsibility to be careful about how AI platforms are trained, and what data is used in training the system. Marketers must be transparent about communications to protect privacy and build trust.



3. Include Checks & Balances:

Marketers must be hands on in the development, delivery, and maintenance of AI driven campaigns to ensure ongoing integrity. Brands should look to build mechanisms that constantly collect feedback and quickly identify and respond to ethics violations.



The media industry is catching on, with leading technology vendors including IBM, Amazon, and Google becoming founding partners of the Partnership on AI.

This consortium has been established to study and formulate best practices on AI technologies, advance the public's understanding of AI, and serve as an open platform for discussion and engagement about AI and its influences on people and society.

For marketers, it is becoming increasingly more important to establish ethical boundaries around AI technologies to foster and improve relationships with consumers - not just to increase sales. When properly considered, AI has the potential to drive remarkable relationships.