

# REFLECTIONS ON THE GLOBAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

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Jessica Sirotn · Oct 13 · 5 min read



## Do ethics and privacy really matter? Yes.

### If no one is watching do ethical concerns and personal privacy really matter to global media planning?

Even when away from public eyes, ethical concerns and personal privacy concerns should remain a priority for global media planners and the brands they represent. According to American philosopher and conservationist Aldo Leopold, 'ethical behaviour is doing the right thing when no one else is watching' (Mintz 2018). Of course, there is no guarantee of compliance to ethics and privacy laws when no one is watching (Telford 2022). However, 'doing the right thing' should always matter to global media planning because the consequences of unethical practices and privacy violations have so often proven costly in financial and legal penalties and brand reputation (Cadwalladr 2018, Lee 2017, Reardon 2016). Hence, stringent and consistent adherence to ethical principles and the protection of personal privacy by global media planners is crucial both publicly and privately.

### Why did ethics and data privacy become such a hot topic for global media planning?

Growth of commercial activities on the Internet irrevocably transformed traditional forms of commerce (Palmer 2005), however, public awareness of the consequences of entrusting privacy and data to internet platforms did not keep pace. According to PEW Research Centre in 2019, 74% of Americans polled did not understand the consequences of personal data collection (Auxier et al 2022). Yet, suspicion among consumers that their rights to privacy and anonymity are at risk has been growing for decades (Smith 2021; WARC 2021). Even today, according to a poll by Ipsos and the Boston Consulting Group, 73% of users between 16-74 are concerned about their data being misused online (Sutcliffe 2021). Consumers have also become more aware of data breaches and their rights under various legislation, with public awareness of GDPR in the UK growing to 73% in 2022 versus 32% in 2018 (DMA 2022).

Ongoing scandals involving the misuse of data by various brands, e.g. Verizon, Uber, Microsoft and Amazon revealed that suspicious consumers were right (Lee 2017, Reardon 2016, Rosenblatt 2022). Things reached a tipping point in 2016, when Cambridge Analytica was discovered to have illegally harvested millions of Facebook profiles for campaign targeting (Cadwalladr 2018). Again in 2018, a Facebook data hijacking scandal affected 50 million users, devastating its reputation. The consequence was a 3% loss in its stock price, and an overall erosion of public trust in the brand that persists today (Wong 2018). According to recent polls, 32% of US respondents, and 80% in the UK, feel that Facebook is not a trustworthy brand (Business Insider 2020, Hern 2019). Despite its rebranding as Meta,

Facebook's brand is still tarnished. Company employees even refer to this sentiment as a 'brand tax' that negatively impacts business activity (Meredith 2018, Rodriguez 2021). Their misbehaviours persist too, Facebook recently settled a class action lawsuit for \$650 million for misuse of facial recognition technology (Rosenblatt 2022). They are not alone either, many companies continue to face litigation for misusing data despite the consequences.

Increased public expectations of data privacy will continue to pressure global media planners. This does not mean global media planners should seek new ways to hide unethical

behaviour. Rather, they must push to safeguard the trust they have already earned. The consequences are expensive not just in financial terms, the loss of consumer trust affects the customer base and impacts Customer Lifetime Value (CLV). An ethical approach by all marketers is worth supporting, as publicised data breaches and privacy violations from one brand can also negatively impact all brands. According to WARC, general net sentiment can decline as a result of publicised data breaches by even a few companies (WARC 2018).

Keeping privacy and ethical standards transparent and vigorously enforced in public and private is imperative (WARC 2021). Furthermore, this behaviour must be accompanied by company-wide internal controls that prioritise ethical and transparent data usage. Without these measures, trust in brands cannot flourish and global media campaigns will fall flat. According to a recent GDMA research study, 77% of global consumers state that transparency around data collection remains important to them (GDMA 2022). To sustain this sense of trust and protect their brands, global media planners must always prioritise ethical behaviours and the use of clean data, even when no one is watching.

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