International
Chamber
of Commerce

esomar

International CODE

on Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) is the institutional representative of more than 45 million companies in over 170 countries. ICC's core mission is to make business work for everyone, every day, everywhere.

Through a unique mix of advocacy, solutions and standard setting, we promote international trade, responsible business conduct and a global approach to regulation, in addition to providing market-leading dispute resolution services. Our members include many of the world's leading companies, SMEs, business associations and local chambers of commerce.

Esomar is a worldwide, not-for-profit membership organisation committed to empowering and connecting the research, insights, and analytics community.

Since 1947, Esomar has empowered professionals and businesses to unlock their potential on both the global and local stage, fostering connections, collaboration, growth, and knowledge. Today, Esomar represents and provides connections among 50,000+ individuals and 750+ companies in 130+ countries.

Esomar's programs, initiatives, reports, and events promote education, best practices, ethical standards, networking, and industry advocacy.

ICC/Esomar International Code on Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics

All ICC codes and guidelines are available at www.iccwbo.org

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Updated as of July 2025

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Introduction

The ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics (hereinafter referred to as “the/this Code”) is designed to ensure that users and commissioners of research, and the general public have confidence in the way research is collected and the conclusions drawn. Within the context of misinformation and disinformation, together with a rapidly evolving digital environment, confidence in research amongst all stakeholders is more important than ever.

Market, opinion and social research and data analytics are facing ongoing dynamic change, driven by social media, artificial intelligence (AI), including synthetic data and other emerging technologies. The fragmentation of the research process is transforming the ways we collect, curate, analyse and interpret data. Many players can be involved in a typical research project. The client can be both the person or entity commissioning and conducting all or part of the research. These developments, and the importance of oversight, mean that it is more important than ever to identify who is commissioning the research programme, who is contributing to the work, and the clear responsibilities and accountabilities of each in respect of adhering to this Code.

The Code and this revision

The Code, recognised by over 60 associations in more than 50 countries, was established over 70 years ago and has been developed in partnership with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) since 1977. The Code gains significant weight from the adoption by ICC, representing over 45 million members in more than 170 countries. It has been revised several times to maintain its relevance; with the most recent update in 2016. This 2025 Code revision is intended to ensure that the Code remains current and fit-for-purpose, by continuing to uphold research as a responsible global citizen through the promotion of high ethical standards and fostering public confidence worldwide. This revision is significant, emphasising ethical conduct, accountability, transparency, and the necessity for human oversight.

Market, opinion and social research and data analytics

Market, opinion and social research and data analytics aim to provide objective, fact-based information and insights into people’s attitudes, needs and behaviours, helping businesses, policy makers and decision makers decide on the most appropriate course of action. In respect of the research industry’s commitment to effective self-regulation, this Code prioritises the protection of privacy, fulfilling our duty of care, promoting professional responsibility, and compliance with the law.

Code responsibility and interpretation

This Code is designed to be a comprehensive set of fundamental principles and articles for self-regulation within the field of market, opinion and social research, as well as data analytics. It sets standards to maintain public trust, ensure compliance with local and international laws, and to uphold industry best practices. Researchers and analysts — whether using traditional methods or emerging technologies — are expected to meet their ethical, professional and legal responsibilities to research participants, clients and the public at large. The Code also affirms researchers' rights to seek and share information, as established in Article 19 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

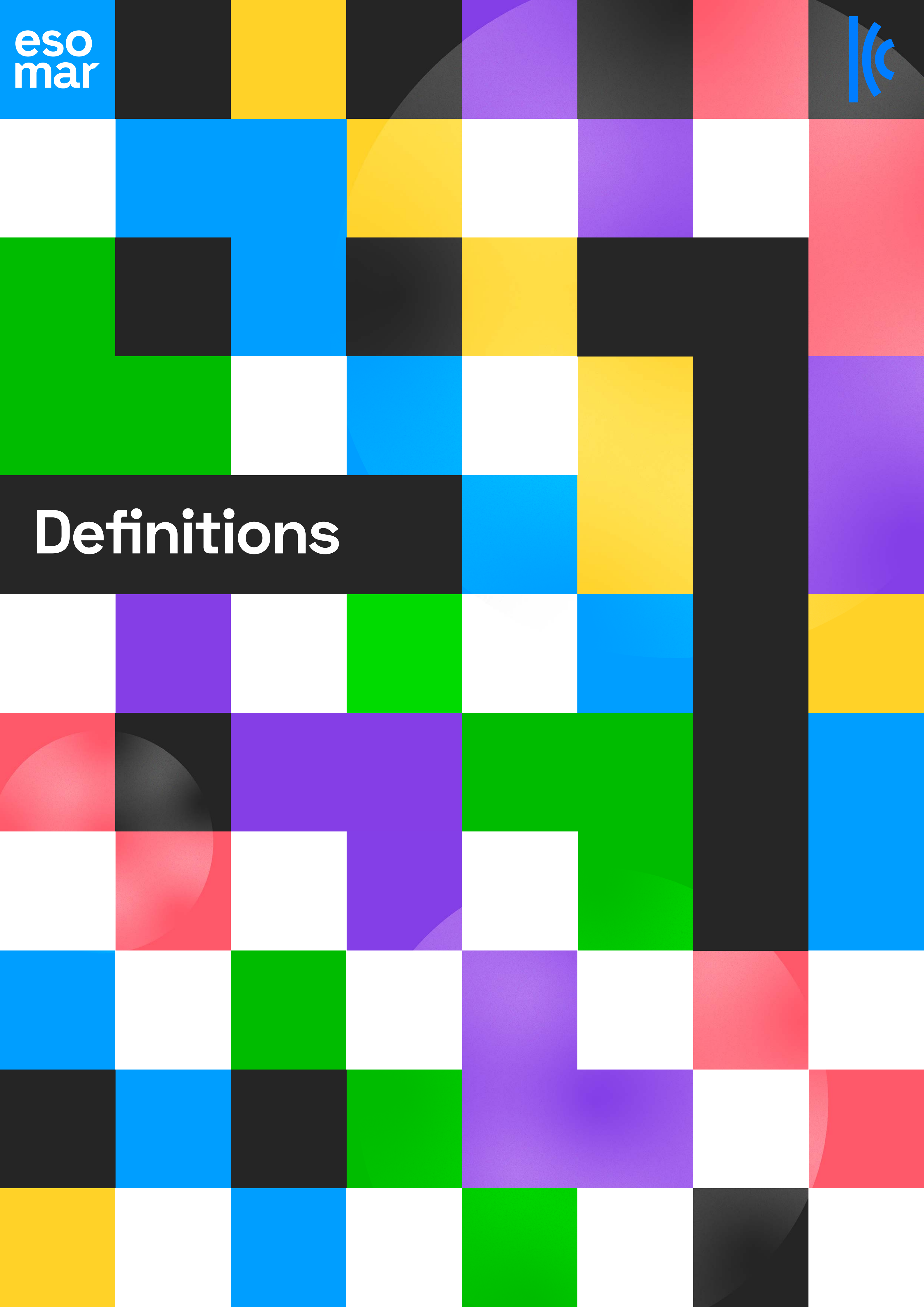
The Code applies to everyone involved in market, opinion and social research, data analytics, both qualitative and quantitative, including those using self-service platforms. Researchers must adhere to the Code according to their role and level of influence. In this context, the revised Code imposes an additional responsibility on the client/commissioner of the research to ensure that any contractors they hire are both aware of the Code and comply fully with it.

This Code is mandatory for all Esomar members and for those in other research associations and self-regulatory bodies that adopt and implement it, together with all those involved in or engaged with any part of the research process.

The Code should be applied both in its spirit and to its specific wording. It must be applied alongside other relevant ICC and Esomar codes, guidelines, principles and framework interpretations that provide context for its application in specific research methods and practices. These and other similar documents are available at www.iccwbo.org and www.esomar.org.

The fundamental principles encapsulate the main themes of the Code.

Titles included in the articles are part of the Code and should be interpreted as such.



Definitions

For the purpose of this Code the following terms have this specific meaning:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a set of technologies that are designed to simulate human intelligence and problem-solving capabilities[1].

Child refers to a person aged 12 years and under[2]. See also "Young person".

Client means any individual or organisation, department or division - internal or external - that requests, commissions or subscribes to all, or any part of research.

Consent means an individual's freely given, specific and informed indication of agreement in response to clear information regarding the collection, processing and any use of their personal data.

Data analytics means the process of integrating and/or interrogating datasets to uncover hidden patterns, unknown correlations, trends, preferences and other useful information for research purposes.

Data subject means any individual/person whose data is used in research (in some cases, the data subject may be a company or organisation).

Harm refers to tangible or material damage (such as physical injury or financial loss), mental or moral harm, intangible harm (such as damage to reputation or goodwill), or excessive intrusion into private life.

Individual/person refers to a human being to differentiate from a synthetic, virtual/digitally created persona or entity.

Non-research activity means taking direct action toward an individual whose personal data was collected or analysed with the intent to change the attitudes, opinions or actions of that individual.

Passive data collection means the collection of personal data by observing, measuring or recording an individual's/person's actions or behaviour.

Personal data means any information relating to an individual/person (data subject) that can be directly[3] or indirectly[4] identified.

Primary data means data collected by a researcher directly from or about an individual/ person for the purpose of research.

Privacy notice (sometimes referred to as privacy policy) means a published summary of an organisation's, or individual operator's, privacy practices describing why and how the organisation or operator gathers, uses, discloses and manages a data subject's personal data.

Research, which includes all forms of market, opinion and social research, including data analytics applied for research purposes, means the systematic gathering, analysis and interpretation of information about individuals and organisations. It uses the statistical and/ or analytical methods and techniques of the applied social, behavioural, data and other sciences to generate insights and support decision-making by providers of goods and services, governments, non-profit organisations and the general public.

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[1] This definition has been included as it was deemed essential in the specific context of research. The definition is deliberately broad and non-technical to ensure the Code covers all current and future AI applications. It is without prejudice to any self-regulatory documents not based on this Code.

[2] Applicable law, which must be observed, may define "child" differently.

[3] Examples of direct identifiers are a name, specific geographic location, telephone number, picture, sound or video recording.

[4] Indirect identifiers are identifiers which combined can be used to identify the data subject. Examples of indirect identifiers include references to an individual's physical, physiological, mental, economic, cultural or social characteristics. Applicable laws, which must be observed, may define indirect identifiability differently. In some jurisdictions, even if the data holder cannot identify the individual, the data may still be considered as personal data. In others, it is only considered personal data if the individual can be re-identified by legal means.

Researcher means any person or organisation conducting all or any part of a research programme.

Secondary data means data collected for another purpose and subsequently used in research.

Synthetic data means information that has been generated to replicate the characteristics of real-world data.

Synthetic persona means a digital representation of a person generated to mimic the behaviours, preferences, and characteristics of real people or groups.

Vulnerable person means an individual/person who may have limited capacity to make voluntary and informed decisions, including those with temporary or permanent cognitive impairments or communication disabilities.

Young person means an adolescent aged 13 to 17[5]. The term young people is used in plural with the same meaning.

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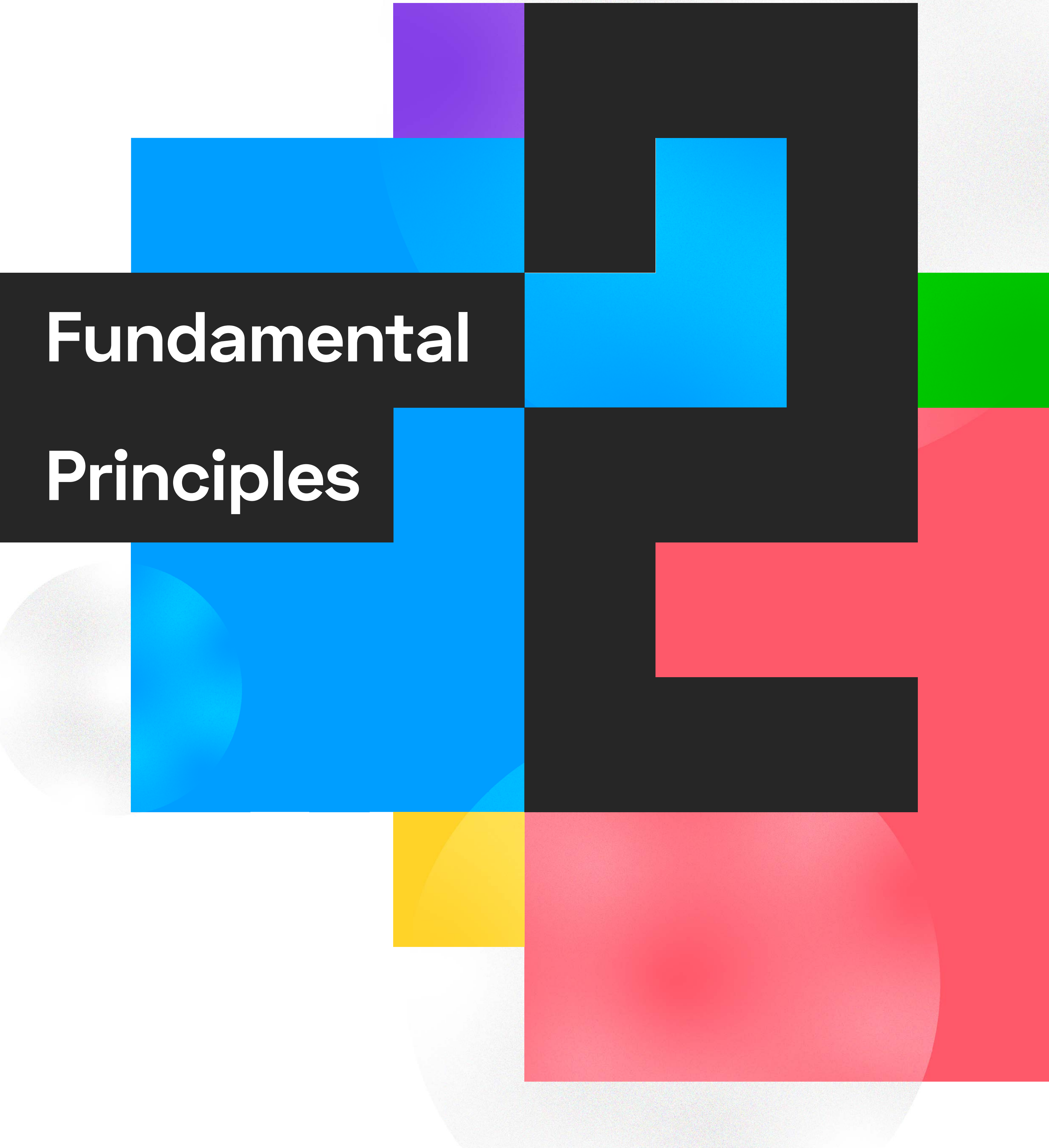
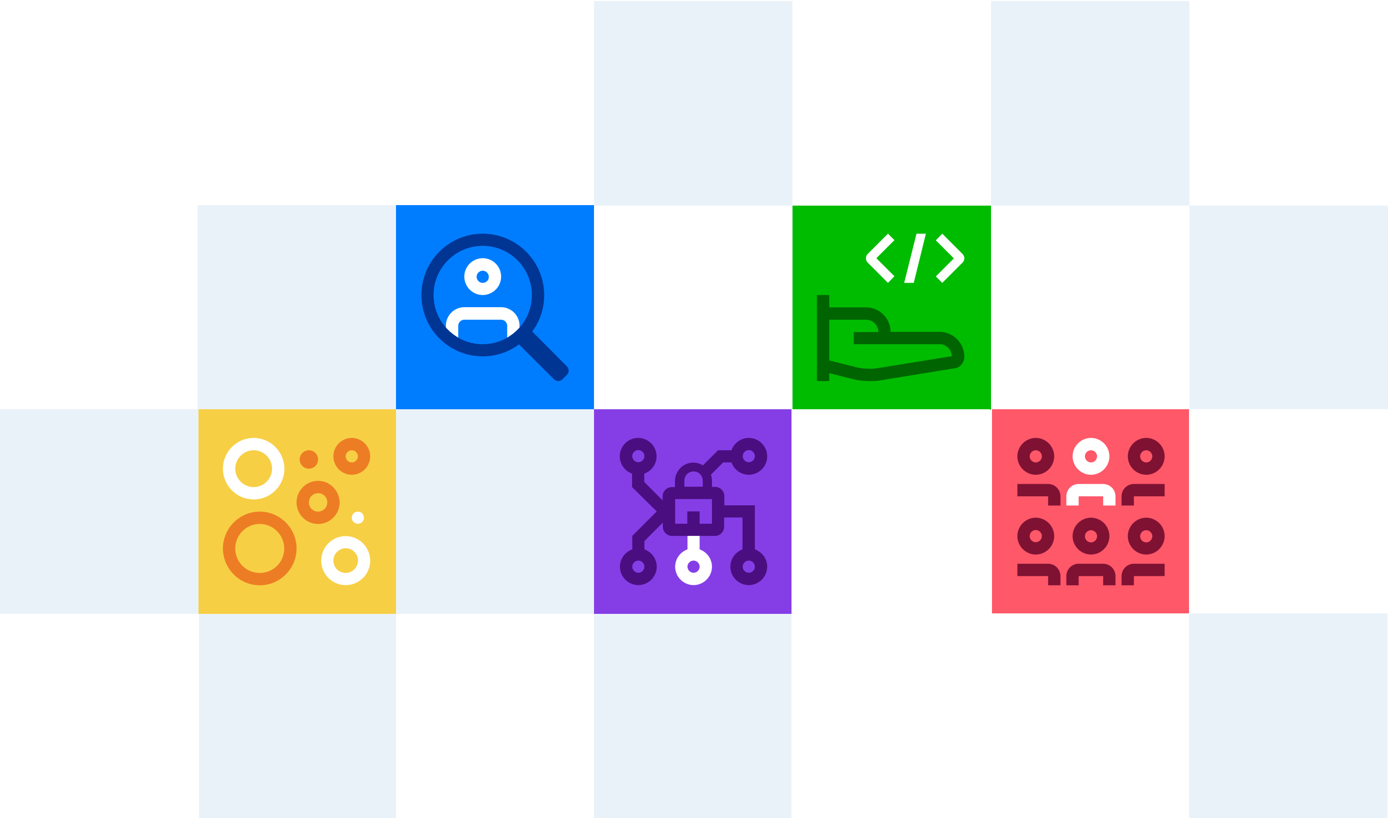
[5] Applicable law, which must be observed, may define “young person” differently.

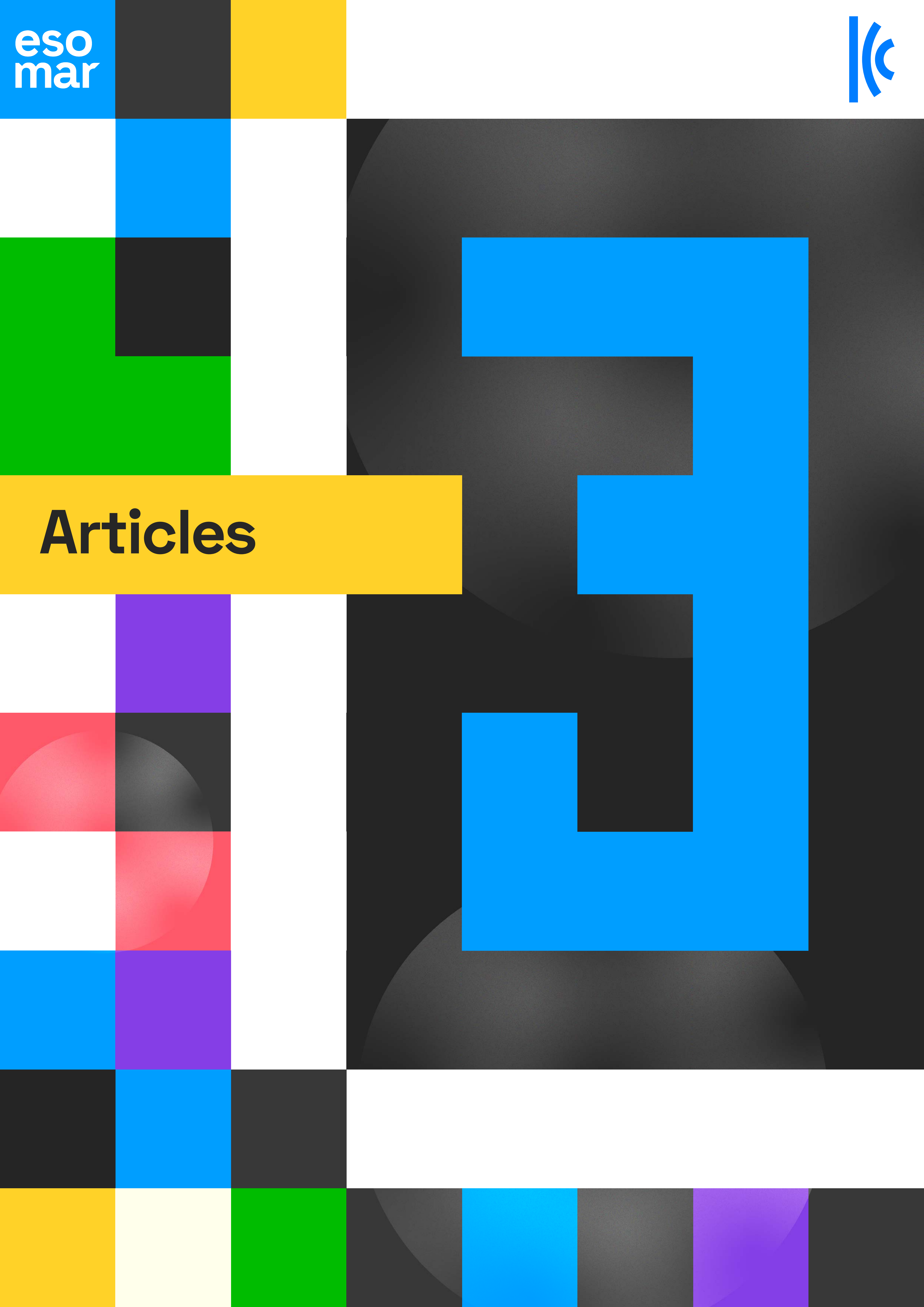


Fundamental Principles

This Code is based on five fundamental principles that encompass the role and relevance of market, opinion and social research, and data analytics in the current environment. They are intended to underpin the interpretation and application of the Articles of the Code. While legality is the foundation, the Code upholds ethical standards that go above and beyond legal requirements.

1. All research must be legal, honest, transparent and truthful.
2. All research must be conducted with due care. Interactions must be fair, respectful and avoid harming the data subject.
3. Researchers must clearly communicate to data subjects how their personal data will be collected and used. All personal data must be fully protected against unauthorised access or use.
4. Researchers must behave ethically and not do anything that may undermine the public's trust and confidence in research or damage its reputation.
5. Researchers have the overall responsibility and oversight for the research they undertake, irrespective of the method, technique and technology applied. Those who contribute to the research have a degree of responsibility commensurate with their activities, expertise and control.





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Articles

Responsibilities to data subjects

Article 1 Duty of care

(a) All individuals, including children, young people and other vulnerable individuals, who are approached to participate as data subjects in research — have the right to decline participation. This includes subjects of secondary data collection where feasible.

(b) Regardless of whether personal data is gathered directly or indirectly for quantitative or qualitative research, researchers must ensure that participation does not result in harm.

(c) Essential personal data may be disclosed to emergency services in exceptional life-threatening or abusive situations, as defined by local law.

(d) Researchers must remain mindful that research depends on public confidence in both its integrity and the confidential treatment of provided information. Therefore, researchers must diligently maintain a clear distinction between research and non-research activities[6].

(e) Data subjects must be informed of any non-research activity — for example promotional, commercial or customer experience follow-up — before data collection begins. Separate consent must be obtained for non-research purposes. Such applications must be clearly distinguished from the research activities.

Article 2 Children, young persons and other vulnerable individuals

(a) Consent from a parent, legal guardian or responsible adult must be obtained whenever children are involved as data subjects, and also whenever such consent is required under applicable law.

Researchers must determine the data subject's age and obtain consent before collecting any additional personal data from children. The nature and extent of the information to be collected must also be presented at this time, together with clear means to provide consent.

(b) Researchers must exercise special care when considering the involvement of children and young people in research. The content and nature of the research must be appropriate for their age, maturity level, and varying cognitive abilities. Throughout the research process, researchers must remain attentive to any susceptibilities that a child or vulnerable individual may have or exhibit.

(c) Personal data must only be disclosed by researchers to third parties after obtaining consent from a parent, legal guardian or responsible adult or where disclosure is authorised by law.

(d) When working with vulnerable individuals, researchers must ensure they are capable of making informed decisions and are not unduly pressured to cooperate with a research request.

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[6] As it is important that non-researchers also clearly distinguish research from commercial activities, attention is drawn to Article 7 of the ICC Advertising and Marketing Communications Code: 'Marketing communications should be transparent about their true commercial purpose, and not misrepresent it. Hence, a communication promoting the sale of goods, or the contracting of a service should not be disguised, for example as news, editorial matter, market research, consumer surveys, consumer reviews, user-generated content, private blogs, private postings on social media or independent reviews etc.'

Article 3 Data minimisation

(a) Researchers must limit the collection and/or processing of personal data in any research project to information that is reasonable and directly relevant to the purpose of the research (also see Article 6(e)).

(b) Where data is provided to subcontractors or other third-party suppliers, researchers must ensure that only the minimum amount of personal data necessary for them to perform the agreed services will be transferred. Such data must not be used for any additional purpose.

Article 4 Primary data collection

(a) When collecting personal data directly from a data subject for the purpose of research:

  i. Researchers — regardless of whether representing an organisation, company or as an independent practitioner — must identify themselves promptly, and data subjects must be able to verify the identity of the researcher without difficulty. The data subject must also be able to contact the researcher or their organisation quickly and easily with any concerns or questions they may have about the research.

  ii. The use of a synthetic persona for data collection must be clearly notified to the data subject at the beginning of the research.

  iii. Researchers must ensure that participation is voluntary and based on clear and accurate information about the general purpose and nature of the research. Such information must be provided at the beginning of the research. If this is not possible due to methodology, data subjects must be informed at the earliest opportunity.

  iv. Researchers must inform data subjects if any activity will involve re-contact and seek the data subjects' agreement to such re-contact. The only exceptions are re-contact for quality control purposes, the reporting of adverse events such as those encountered in medical research, or if required by law.

  v. Researchers must provide a clear statement as to how long, and for what purpose, personal data will be retained.

(b) When collecting data indirectly/passively from a data subject:

  i. Data collection must be based on the consent of the data subject and meet all the conditions (a) i-v above.

  ii. Where it is not possible to obtain consent, researchers must have legally permissible grounds to collect the data, and they must remove or obscure any identifying characteristics as soon as operationally possible.

(c) Researchers must allow data subjects to withdraw from the research at any time. Upon withdrawal, all personal data collected must be deleted — provided this is technically and operationally feasible and does not compromise the integrity of previously collected or analysed research results.

(d) Data subjects must have access to amend their personal data where technically and operationally feasible and where this does not comprise the integrity of the research results.

Article 5 Use of secondary data

When using secondary data that includes personal data, researchers must ensure that:

(a) The intended use aligns with the purpose and quality for which the data was originally collected and that there are clear grounds for its re-use for any additional data collection or processing.

(b) The intended use was not specifically excluded at the time of original collection, nor does it violate any contractual restrictions, copyright or intellectual property rights.

(c) The use of the data will not result in direct harm to data subjects, and there are measures in place to prevent such harm.

(d) Any requests from individual data subjects that their data not be used for other purposes are upheld.

Article 6 Data protection and privacy

(a) Researchers and subcontractors must not share or transfer a data subject's personal data to a client unless the data subject has consented to the specific purpose for which the data will be used and agreed to such transfer.

(b) Researchers must provide a privacy notice that is clear, not misleading and readily accessible to data subjects. If tracking tools are used, notice of this must also be given before any data is collected from the data subject.

(c) Researchers must take steps to ensure that personal data including a person's inferred identity is not traceable via deductive disclosure even when advanced analytic techniques or AI are used. Such techniques may involve cross-analysis, small samples, other forms of inference or combining with additional data such as a client's records, secondary or publicly available data sets.

(d) Researchers must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that personal data is held securely. It must be protected against risks such as loss, unauthorised access such as cyberattacks or hacking, destruction, misuse, manipulation, modification, disclosure or any other act that could compromise data.

(e) Personal data is to be held no longer than necessary and only for the initial purpose for which it was collected or used. After this, the data must be anonymised or deleted.

(f) Before transferring personal data to clients, subcontractors, or other third-party service providers, researchers must ensure that such recipients maintain at least equivalent security measures, and comply with all applicable data protection and data breach laws.

(g) Researchers must take particular care to ensure that the data protection rights of data subjects whose personal data is transferred from one jurisdiction to another are maintained. Such transfers must not be made without the consent of the data subject and meet all conditions noted in Article 4 (a) i-v. In addition, researchers must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the security measures and data protection principles of this Code are complied with by all parties.

(h) In the event of a data breach involving personal data, researchers have a duty of care to the data subjects involved. Those data subjects, along with any relevant authorities, must be informed of the breach as required by applicable laws.

Responsibilities to clients

Article 7 Fit for purpose

(a) Researchers must design research that is fit for purpose, and meets the requirements and quality agreed with the client. If this is not considered to be the case, the client must be informed and the issues resolved.

(b) Researchers must carefully design research that is appropriate for the population in question and reflect the intended target group as accurately as possible. They must also be transparent about any limitations — such as potential gaps in data sources or population representation — that may affect how well the research reflects the defined target group.

(c) Researchers must provide clients with sufficient technical information, including method, sources of data, quality controls, analysis used and possible limitations about the research to enable them to assess the validity of the results and any insights and conclusions drawn.

(d) Researchers must ensure that findings, results and any interpretation of them are clearly and adequately supported by data. They must also clearly distinguish between the findings, the researchers' interpretation of those findings, and any insights and conclusions drawn or recommendations made.

(e) The client must be informed when AI or other emerging technologies are to be used in the compilation of datasets, analysis, reporting or interpretation of findings. This includes the use of synthetic data and synthetic personas. In such situations, the extent of human oversight must be stated.

(f) Researchers must ensure that any research data, or collateral materials, whether from surveys or client-related sources, remain confidential when utilised by AI or emerging technologies. Access to such materials must be strictly limited to a secure and controlled environment.

(g) Upon request, researchers must allow clients to arrange for independent checks on the quality of data collection and data preparation, subject to appropriate confidentiality agreements.

Article 8 Transparency, confidentiality and responsibility

(a) Researchers must identify and be transparent about any known, potential or suspected biases in the research that may have an impact on the collection, curation, processing, analysis or interpretation of the data and the findings.

(b) Researchers must comply with any intellectual property (IP) restrictions, such as copyright, or privacy requirements associated with the re-use or application of the data.

(c) Upon request, researchers must declare the use of subcontractors.

(d) All parties must work in good faith to resolve disputes, whether they involve researchers, clients, subcontractors or data subjects.

(e) Researchers must keep all communications with the client and all research results confidential, unless otherwise agreed with the client.

Responsibilities to the general public

Article 9 Publishing findings

When publishing findings:

(a) Researchers and clients must ensure that the public has access to sufficient information, including data source, sampling, and methodology, to assess the validity of the conclusions. This must be in a form that is easily understandable by the general public.

(b) Upon a reasonable request, researchers must make sufficient technical information and clear documentation available in a timely manner to validate any published findings. Researchers and clients must disclose whether AI, synthetic data, or other emerging techniques and/or technologies played a significant role in sampling, deployment, analysis, or interpretation of the data, and to what extent human oversight was involved.

(c) Researchers must not disseminate research or conclusions, nor allow their names or that of their organisation to be associated with such dissemination, unless these are adequately supported by the data.

(d) Researchers must ensure that they are consulted on the form and content of any publication of the research findings by the client. Both the client and the researcher have a responsibility to ensure that published results are not misleading and that there is no undue selectivity of the findings.

(e) If research involves the publication of a data subject's identity or personal data, researchers must clearly inform the data subject in advance about which data will be published and obtain their consent beforehand.

Responsibilities to the research profession

Article 10 Professional responsibility

(a) Researchers must be honest, transparent, truthful, and objective. They must ensure that the data or information gathering, processing, and analysis are conducted in accordance with appropriate scientific research principles, methods and techniques.

(b) Researchers must behave ethically and not do anything that may undermine the public's trust and confidence in research or damage its reputation.

(c) Researchers must be straightforward and honest in all their professional and business dealings.

(d) Researchers must not make false or otherwise misleading statements about their skills, experience or activities, or about those of their organisation.

(e) Researchers must not unjustifiably criticise other researchers.

(f) Researchers must conform to the generally accepted principles of fair competition.

(g) Researchers must declare any potential conflict of interest associated with a research engagement to the client.

Article 11 Legal responsibility

(a) Researchers must comply with all applicable international and national laws, as well as local codes of conduct, professional standards or rules. If the ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics imposes a higher standard, researchers must adhere to that higher standard.

(b) Researchers and clients must check that there is no privacy, or intellectual property (IP) infringement, such as a copyright breach including that related to the application of AI and the training data, in the published research results and findings.

Article 12 Compliance

(a) Researchers must ensure that research is carried out in accordance with this Code, that clients and other parties to the research, including all sub-contractors, agree to comply with its requirements, and that the Code is applied, where appropriate, by all organisations, companies and individuals at all stages of the research commensurate with their activities, expertise and control.

Where appropriate, all parties are encouraged to include a clause in their contracts confirming their compliance with, and responsibility for adhering to, the Code.

(b) Correction of a breach of this Code by a researcher, while desirable, does not excuse the breach.

(c) Researchers must co-operate with any disciplinary investigation by ESOMAR into a possible breach of this Code. Failure to do so will be considered a breach of this Code. This also applies to members of other self-regulatory bodies implementing this Code and disciplinary investigations by their responsible bodies.

Article 13 Implementation

(a) Once the Code and its underlying principles are adopted, they must be implemented at the local, national and international levels by the appropriate self-regulatory bodies. Researchers and clients must also familiarise themselves with relevant local self-regulatory documents on research and with any decisions issued by the appropriate self-regulatory body.

(b) Requests for interpretation of the principles contained in this Code must be submitted to the ESOMAR Professional Standards Committee or under specific circumstances the Global ICC Commission on Marketing and Advertising for possible consideration by its ICC Code interpretation panel.

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