Initial Post

◄ Initial Post

Display replies in nested form

Settings

Initial Post

by Yuji Watanabe - Wednesday, 19 February 2025, 2:01 PM

Abi has been asked by a manufacturer to investigate the nutritional value of a cereal called Whizzz. After collecting data, he found that the data can be used to interpret results in both favorable and harmful ways. Abi is considering using accurate data to arrive at a conclusion, but this raises ethical and social issues.

First of all, it is essential to conduct an analysis based on accurate data. However, if the data analyst makes arbitrary interpretations while using correct data, objectivity and integrity will be lost (American Statistical Association, n.d., FENStatS. n.d.). In this case, Abi believes it is necessary to show both the advantages and disadvantages of the cereal to the customer. However, since the manufacturer may only use useful results, in such cases, a report to a third party will be required within the scope of the contract.

Also, from a social perspective, if an arbitrary judgment is made and it turns out to be harmful, the manufacturer's credibility will decrease, which can ultimately cause a decline in business performance. In recent years, Volkswagen has violated the regulations in tests to measure carbon dioxide emissions, which has become a very serious issue (BBC News, 2015). Responding dishonestly in this way will result in the manufacturer losing social credibility.

In conclusion, emphasizing only the positive aspects in the short term may help sales. However, this is ethically questionable, and if harmful effects are discovered, it will result in a significant drop in sales. As data analysis professionals, we should be honest with users and consumers.

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Peer Response

by Daniel Malok - Sunday, 2 March 2025, 5:41 AM

Dear Watanabe,
This is a well-synthesized response regarding the ethical research challenges Abi was facing. I have noted the specific point you have raised about the negative impact of presenting false research on the long-term viability of the manufacturing firm and its credibility. Capraș et al. (2025) postulated that the recent discovery by Romanian auditors of financial fraud and falsification of financial data by some firms in the Bucharest stock exchange between 2020 and 2015 has led to their loss of credibility, and they are now facing bankruptcy and legal action. Chen et al. (2022) reiterated this view by indicating that researchers, managers, and firms should conduct research ethically and avoid data manipulation to protect society, their reputation, and long-term credibility. According to Yang and Zhang (2022), the media and investigative journalists play a critical role in preventing data manipulation by research and development firms by conducting independent data analysis and validation. These validation processes are conducted by auditing the research process by verifying data sources and checking for consistency, integrity, and error identification (Yang & Zhang, 2022). The review of the research process and the data analysis by peer researchers also disclosed data manipulation or misrepresentation of results (Tourish & Craig, 2020).

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Re: Initial Post

by Panagiotis Mourtas - Monday, 3 March 2025, 11:19 AM

Peer Response

Hello Yuji,
The example you mentioned is highly relevant and well-illustrated.

The Volkswagen emissions scandal highlights the critical need for proactive and independent audits before data publication, rather than after, to prevent corporate misconduct. Regulatory bodies must ensure timely, unbiased audits, free from financial ties to the companies they evaluate, to maintain integrity and public trust. As Bos (2020) emphasizes, ethical oversight is essential to prevent fraud and misconduct. The integration of advanced technologies like AI can enhance audit efficiency and accuracy, detecting anomalies or malicious practices, such as the "defeat devices" used by VW to manipulate emissions data (Binns, 2018). However, AI must be governed by robust ethical frameworks to ensure fairness and accountability.

Penalties for violations, such as those imposed on VW, must be proportional to the profits gained through deception. While VW faced significant fines, many argue they were insufficient compared to the financial benefits of its fraudulent practices (Zhang et al., 2022). Lynch et al. (2019) suggest that penalties should outweigh the gains from misconduct to serve as a genuine deterrent. Strengthening regulatory frameworks, ensuring transparency, and imposing stricter penalties are crucial steps to prevent future scandals.

In conclusion, independent audits supported by AI, combined with proportional penalties, are essential to deter unethical behavior and ensure corporate accountability. As Power (2019) notes, auditors play a vital role as gatekeepers of trust independence must be safeguarded to maintain the integrity of financial and environmental reporting.

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Peer Response

by Ben Zapka - Monday, 17 March 2025, 12:53 PM

Hello Yuji,

Thank you for your insightful contribution to the discussion. I especially liked how you raise the broader societal risk of unethical behaviour, using Volkswagen's case as a relevant example. Research shows that corporate misconduct, especially involving data manipulation, significantly reduces long-term shareholder value and customer trust (Lins et al., 2017). Scholars emphasise that data analysts must advocate for balanced reporting to protect consumers and prevent reputational damage (Association of British Insurers, n. d.).

However, some parts of your analysis could be extended. You did not really explain your thoughts on whether Abi is responsible for how others interact with his research results. This raises an important debate in research ethics concerning the responsibility of analysts beyond data collection and interpretation. According to Resnik (2018), researchers hold a duty to anticipate and mitigate foreseeable misuse of their findings, especially when such misuse could harm consumers or the public. Moreover, McCoy et al. (2023) argue that data professionals must adopt a careful approach, where responsibility extends to the potential social and ethical implications of how information is disseminated and utilised.

In Abi's case, while he may not control how the manufacturer ultimately uses the report, ethical frameworks suggest that he should implement safeguards—such as transparent reporting or disclaimers—to prevent misleading applications of the data (Zook et al., 2017). The principle of "anticipatory governance" (Milojević, 2024) further supports this, encouraging researchers to engage in proactive strategies to minimise downstream risks. By considering these broader responsibilities, Abi would be upholding ethical research standards and contributing to public trust in data-driven conclusions.

While implementing these ideas would further deepen your discussion of the case study, I thank you for your interesting considerations.

Kind regards,

Ben

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Peer Response

by Oi Lam Siu - Saturday, 22 March 2025, 10:47 AM

Hello Yuji,

You make a strong argument for upholding objectivity and accuracy in data analysis. As you note, merely using correct data is insufficient if the interpretations are deliberately biased (American Statistical Association, n.d.). This concern aligns with the BCS Code of Conduct principle of "Professional Competence and Integrity," which stresses that IT and data professionals must not distort data or hide important findings (BCS, 2022).

Similarly, I agree that it is essential to present both positives and negatives to protect end-users and maintain public trust. In my discussions with other peers, we have also emphasised the role of transparent auditing processes and independent reviewers in minimising inaccuracies or misleading conclusions (PwC, 2017). Moreover, consulting a specialist is crucial to ensure accurate data collection and analysis, potentially offering a different perspective on explaining research results (Bhandari, 2024). Such steps are consistent with serving the "Public Interest," where safeguarding stakeholders and avoiding harm take priority (BCS, 2022; Duquenoy, n.d.).

Ultimately, as data professionals, our responsibility for integrity goes beyond precise calculations. We must remain vigilant against any misuse or selective presentation of data, since withholding negative findings can be ethically questionable and may endanger both public wellbeing and the reputations of those involved.

Best regards,

Helen

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