

Initial Post

The case of Abi and the Whizzz cereal raises significant ethical dilemmas around data integrity, professional responsibility, and the social consequences of statistical reporting. While Abi recognises that altering data values would be a clear violation of ethical standards, the temptation to conduct selective analyses illustrates the subtler but equally serious issue of *data manipulation by omission*. According to the ACM Code of Ethics, computing professionals must avoid harm, be honest, and ensure fairness (ACM, 2018, sec. 1.2; sec. 1.3). Presenting only favourable correlations would mislead stakeholders, contravening these principles.

Abi is ethically obligated to report both positive and negative findings. Selective reporting not only undermines scientific credibility but can also have harmful social consequences if a product is later found to be unsafe. The BCS Code of Conduct similarly requires members to act with integrity, prioritise the public interest, and avoid professional practices that might bring the profession into disrepute (BCS, 2022, sec. 1.1). By withholding harmful evidence, Abi risks breaching both his duty to the manufacturer and his wider responsibility to society.

Legally, misleading reporting could expose Abi and the manufacturer to liability under consumer protection and food safety regulations (European Union, 2002; US Food and Drug Administration, 2016). Socially, it could erode public trust in both statistical research and the food industry. Professionally, such behaviour risks reputational damage and disciplinary action. If Abi fears selective publication, he may consider disclosing results through independent peer review or submitting them to regulatory bodies to ensure transparency and accountability.

Ultimately, Abi's ethical duty extends beyond satisfying the client. As a researcher and programmer, his responsibility is to uphold integrity, protect public welfare, and ensure that statistical outputs are used responsibly.

References

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Summary Post

The case of Abi and the Whizzz cereal illustrates the complex intersection of professional ethics, legal responsibility, and social accountability in data science. My initial analysis focused on the ethical equivalence between falsification and “data manipulation by omission.” Selectively presenting favourable correlations, even when based on correct data, contravenes professional codes such as the ACM (2018) and BCS (2022) by misleading stakeholders and risking harm to the public.

The feedback from my peers helped me broaden this perspective. Gore (2025) highlighted the importance of preregistration and transparent documentation—practical safeguards that reduce cherry-picking and create accountability through reproducibility (ASA, 2022; EFSA, 2014). Bashir (2025) emphasised that industry sponsorship introduces structural bias, with studies showing a significant correlation between funding source and favourable outcomes (Lesser et al., 2007). This underscores the need for institutional reform in addition to individual integrity. Almaazmi (2025) stressed that transparency is not only an ethical duty but also a pragmatic strategy to protect long-term professional credibility and maintain public trust (Rao et al., 2024; Armond et al., 2024).

Taken together, these insights reveal that Abi’s responsibility extends beyond simply reporting results to his client. Legally, withholding or misrepresenting data risks liability under food-safety and consumer-protection regulations (European Union, 2002; US FDA, 2016). Socially, selective reporting undermines consumer confidence in both scientific research and the food industry. Professionally, it risks reputational damage that can outweigh short-term commercial gains.

The case thus demonstrates that ethical research practice requires more than individual honesty; it demands procedural safeguards, institutional accountability, and a commitment to transparency. Abi’s best course of action is to disclose all results—positive and negative—while documenting his methodology in a way that withstands scrutiny. This protects not only public welfare but also his long-term professional integrity.

References

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