

Peer Response 1

Hi Gesine,

Thank you for your insightful contribution. You rightly identify that analytical bias and the garden of forking paths are central to Abi's ethical failure, effectively refuting the notion that avoiding fabrication equals acting ethically.

However, whilst I agree that Abi should present a unified report, relying on individual whistleblowing or unified reporting might be overly optimistic given the commercial reality Abi faces. Vie (2022) argues that market-based funding structures create inherent conflicts of interest where research integrity often competes directly with customer satisfaction. In this context, Abi is not merely an independent statistician but a service provider under financial pressure to deliver a specific product (favourable results). This structural dependency makes internal dissent significantly harder than abstract ethical codes suggest.

Furthermore, recent research suggests that these pressures actively cultivate questionable practices. Johann (2024) found that perceived pressure to produce useful or publishable outputs is significantly correlated with researchers engaging in strategic omissions. Therefore, Abi's dilemma is not just a failure of personal character but a symptom of a client-provider research model that lacks external oversight. To add value to your solution, I would suggest that Abi's only robust defence is not just a unified report, but pre-registration of his analysis plan before touching the data, effectively binding his hands against the flexibility you described.

Word count: 216

References

- Gelman, A. and Loken, E. (2014) 'The garden of forking paths', *American Scientist*, 102(6), pp. 460–465. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1511/2014.111.460>
- Johann, D., Neufeld, J., Thomas, K., Rathmann, J. and Rauhut, H. (2024) 'The impact of researchers' perceived pressure on their publication strategies', *Research Evaluation*, 33(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/reseval/rvae011>

Vie, K.J. (2022) 'Can research integrity prevail in the market? Lessons from commissioned research organizations', *Accountability in Research*, 29(7), pp. 415–441. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989621.2021.1937603>

Peer Response 2

Hi Nikolaos,

Thank you for your well-structured contribution. I particularly appreciated your reference to the BCS Code of Ethics and the emphasis on how selective reporting constitutes a fundamental breach of professional integrity. You correctly identify that truthfulness is not merely about avoiding data fabrication, but extends to the holistic presentation of evidence.

However, I would critically evaluate your suggestion that Abi's responsibility is "indirect". Given the potential for physical harm from a consumable product, Abi's liability is arguably direct and acute. Relying on "requesting guarantees" of full disclosure, as you suggest, often proves insufficient against structural commercial pressures. Montgomery and Belle Weisman (2021) argue that non-financial conflicts of interest, such as the desire to please a client, can be as biasing as direct financial ones, often leading to interpretative spin even when data values remain unaltered.

To add value, I would suggest that the transparency you advocate for is only effective if the analysis plan is fixed before data collection. Bero (2022) highlights that industry-sponsored nutrition research is particularly prone to funding bias, where the research agenda itself is skewed to favour profitable outcomes (e.g. focusing on minor nutrients rather than whole-diet effects). Therefore, Abi's most ethical course of action is not just to report all findings now, but to have established a pre-specified analysis protocol that legally binds the manufacturer to the agreed methodology, effectively removing the option for post-hoc selection.

Word count: 233

References

Archontas N. (2025) Initial Post. *RMPP: Research Methods and Professional Practices 2025 A*. Forum Post submitted to the University of Essex Online.

BCS (2021) *BCS Code of Ethics*. The Chartered Institute for IT.

Bero, L. (2022) 'Industry Influence on Research: A Cycle of Bias', in *The Commercial Determinants of Health*. Oxford University Press, pp. 185–196. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197578742.003.0019>

Montgomery, P. and Belle Weisman, C. (2021) 'Non-financial conflict of interest in social intervention trials and systematic reviews: An analysis of the issues with case studies and proposals for management', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 120, p. 105642. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105642>