**Case Study: Accuracy of information**

**by Vasilisa Lukashevich**

**(Unit 7 Research Methods and Professional Practice May 2023)**

**The task:**

Abi is a researcher at an institute and also a statistical programmer. Abi has received a project from a manufacturer to review the nutritional value of a new cereal, Whizzz. Having collected the necessary data, he now needs to perform the appropriate analyses and print the reports for him to send to the manufacturer. Unfortunately, the data Abi has collected seems to refute the claim that Whizzz is nutritious, and, in fact, they may indicate that Whizzz is harmful.

Abi also realises that some other correlations could be performed that would cast Whizzz in a more favourable light. “After all,” he thinks, “I can use statistics to support either side of any issue.”

Ethical Concerns

Clearly, if Abi changed data values in this study he would be acting unethically. But is it any more ethical for him to suggest analysing correct data in a way that supports two or more different conclusions?

Is Abi obligated to present both the positive and the negative analyses?

Is Abi responsible for the use to which others put his program results?

If Abi does put forward both sets of results to the manufacturer, he suspects that they will publicise only the positive ones. What other courses of action has he?

You should also highlight legal, social and professional impacts of any choices made. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers here and you may introduce local, as well as international, legislature in your responses.

**Summary post**

Despite the task lacking many details (such as the country where Abi conducted the research, information on the contract between the manufacturer and the research institute, how the test was administered, and the specific "harm" revealed), we have had a meaningful discussion.

Most fellow students emphasised that altering data is highly unprofessional and unethical behaviour, with the potential to harm public health. This could lead to fines and legal repercussions for the individuals involved (Adelakun, 2023). I agree that researchers must maintain objectivity and honesty in their studies.

Simultaneously, Linhoff (2023) suggested that Abi should clearly present both positive and negative analysis results in the report. However, there is a risk that the manufacturer will focus solely on the positive aspects and disregard the negative outcomes. Kyriacou (2023) proposed that manufacturers should be warned about the legal, social, and professional consequences of distorting outcomes. While this suggestion is reasonable, I believe it is not sufficient. In my opinion, in cases like this, the entire research design should be structured to prevent favouring a particular outcome, establishing clear understandings between the client and the researcher (Katan, 2007).

According to the recommendations of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, at least two double-blind, randomised control trials should be conducted before promoting a particular product (Ruckers, 2016).

However, even though there is no perfect research method, in Abi's case, conducting further analysis is necessary to obtain clinical results for the product. For example, as suggested by Weaver and Miller (2017), a case study design could incorporate factors such as the tested nutrient or dietary pattern, background status, delivery of the test diet or supplement, and so on.

Additionally, I would recommend utilising the Approach to Ethical Decision-Making outlined in the Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession. It provides guidance for identifying potential ethical dilemmas and developing strategies to prevent future issues. For instance, in our case, Abi could have made better decisions by asking themselves questions based on the main principles of the Code of Ethics, such as professional development, integrity in personal and organisational behaviour, and social responsibility for well-being.

In conclusion, I concur that we should always prioritise the collective good and eliminate self-serving behaviours that disregard the potential adverse consequences for the public (Kyriacou, 2023).

**References**

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