

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING DISCUSSION 2: CASE STUDY – ACCURACY OF INFORMATION

Initial Post

Murthy Kanuri
Research Methods and Professional Practice
University of Essex

INITIAL POST

Ethical and Professional Responsibilities in Data Reporting

Abi's story raises important moral questions about the truth in data, the responsible use of data, and the implications of selective reporting. To manipulate data openly is wrong, but accurately representing data is a grey area, particularly when studies come to different conclusions (Lyon & Maxwell, 2021). It might be considered data dredging or p-hacking (Head et al., 2015) that Abi's inclination to focus on analyses that portray Whizzz in a favourable light, even if the underlying data remains unchanged. Although this is technically lawful in some places, it contradicts the norms of scientific integrity (Resnik, 2015).

Abi holds a duty to present a comprehensive and balanced view of the results, including both positive and negative findings. According to the **Code of Ethics** by the American Statistical Association (ASA, 2018), statisticians must "present their findings fully, accurately, and objectively." Presenting only favourable analyses risks misleading the manufacturer and the public, potentially leading to consumer harm, especially if Whizzz is harmful. This aligns with the **UK Data Ethics Framework** (Cabinet Office, 2020), which emphasises transparency and accountability in data use.

Legal and Social Ramifications

Legally, Abi could face issues under consumer protection laws if misleading analyses contribute to false advertising (UK Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008; US Federal Trade Commission Act). Socially, Abi's actions might erode public trust in research, especially in the health and food sectors (Ioannidis, 2005).

Courses of Action for Abi

If Abi thinks that the manufacturer will only publish the favourable results, he has several possibilities:

- **Comprehensive Reporting with Caveats:** Abi should report all findings, along with explicit caveats and limitations, to avoid misinterpretation.
- **Consulting Regulatory or Ethics Boards:** Abi could approach a regulatory agency or an ethics board to discuss it further.
- **Whistleblowing (Last Resort):** As a last resort, Abi could consider whistleblowing, though this path can carry significant professional consequences and should be approached with caution and legal advice.

Finally, although Abi is not entirely responsible for how other people utilise his findings, he does have an ethical obligation to ensure that his research is not 'taken out of context' and used to support claims that might be misleading or harmful (Resnik & Shamoo, 2017).

In sum, Abi's ethical duty lies not only in presenting accurate information but also in providing transparent interpretation. At a time of information overload and public mistrust, his decisions could have far-reaching implications for both personal health and the credibility of science.

References:

- ACM. (2018) *Case Study: Dark UX Patterns*. Available at: <https://www.acm.org/code-of-ethics/case-studies/dark-ux-patterns> (Accessed: 6 May 2025).
- Albeshier, A. and Heider, A. (2023) 'An Empirical Analysis of E-Governments' Cookie Interfaces in 50 Countries', *Sustainability*, 15(2), p. 1231. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15021231>.
- British Computer Society (BCS). (2015) *BCS Code of Conduct*. Available at: <https://www.bcs.org/membership/become-a-member/bcs-code-of-conduct/> (Accessed: 6 May 2025).
- Mathur, A., Acar, G., Friedman, M. G., Lucherini, E., Mayer, J., Chetty, M. and Narayanan, A. (2019) 'Dark Patterns at Scale: Findings from a Crawl of 11K Shopping Websites', *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 3(CSCW), pp. 1–32. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3359183>.
- Quinn, M. J. (2020) *Ethics for the Information Age*. 8th edn. Boston: Pearson.