

# **Honesty as the Best Policy? An Examination of Online Chatters' Interpersonal Deception in Taiwan**

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## **Abstract**

With the advent of the Internet, the impact of online deception on interpersonal communication becomes intriguing. This study focuses on twenty online chatters in Taiwan with at least 2-year online chatting experience as research targets and employed qualitative interviews to solicit information about online interpersonal deception. It is found that (1) most interviewees reported that they had deceived strangers or intimate others online at least once, and vice versa; (2) their motive of deceiving intimate others was reported only for fun whereas the motives of deceiving strangers were for fun and/or preventing himself/herself from being hurt mentally; (3) interviewees indicated they could detect others' online interpersonal deception easily whereas their deceptions were seldom detected by others; (4) online interpersonal deception would not affect the relationships between people with an intimate social tie. However, the outcomes of online interpersonal deception between two strangers were associated with their attitudes about being deceived. Those who took online interpersonal deception seriously wanted to stop chatting with those who deceived and to take revenge whereas people who chatted online only for fun would ignore the online interpersonal deception.

**Keywords: deception, interpersonal deception,  
online interpersonal deception**

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*Is honesty the best policy?* Lying and deception are a part of daily life (Saarni & Lewis, 1993) and everyday relationships (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998). Deception and suspected deception arise in at least one quarter of all conversation (Turner, Edgley & Olmstead, 1975). A recent study estimated that people used some forms of lying in twenty to thirty percent of their social interactions (Depaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer & Epstein, 1996), although communication was founded on a presumption of truth. Thus, job applicants overstate their qualifications to impress the interviewer; spouses lie to avoid marital conflicts; politicians misrepresent their actions to the media; and people lie to others in dating relationship. Since interpersonal deception is related to ethics, it has become an intriguing issue in interpersonal communication research. A variety of studies focusing on face-to-face interpersonal deception are conducted in the U.S. to answer deception-related questions, such as why people deceive others, what affects the success or failure of deception, and what are the outcomes of deception.

Buller and Burgoon (1996), viewing deception as an instrumental or functional behavior (e.g., avoiding conflicts, facilitating marital relationships, and avoiding embarrassing others), have already developed the interpersonal deception theory (IDT) and adopted IDT to guide their interpersonal deception studies. Other scholars have also conducted several studies on face-to-face interpersonal deception. They found that (1) interpersonal deception is a widespread phenomenon in everyone's daily life (e.g., O'Hair & Cody, 1994; Turner et al., 1975); (2) human beings are not good at deception detection (e.g., Buller, Strzyzewski & Hunsaker, 1991; Burgoon & Buller, 1994a; Burgoon, Buller, Ebesu & Rockwell, 1994; Cole, Leets & Bradac, 2002; DeTurk, Harsztrak, Bodhorn

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& Texter, 1990); (3) intimacy between two parties may affect the success of interpersonal deception (e.g., Anderson, Ansfield & Depaulo, 1997; Comadena, 1982; McCornack & Parks, 1986; Millar & Millar, 1995; Stiff, Kim, & Remesh, 1992); (4) there are different motives behind deception acts (e.g., Cochran & Mays, 1990; Ekman, 1989; Hample, 1980; Lippard, 1988. Rowatt, 1998); (5) deceivers may unwittingly signal deception by way of verbal and nonverbal signals (e.g., Buller & Burgoon, 1994b; Buller, Burgoon, Buslig & Roiger, 1994; Burgoon & Buller, 1994; DeTurck et al, 1990); and (6) deception is a double-edged sword exerting a positive (e.g., Buller & Burgoon, 1996) and negative (e.g., Cochran & Mays, 1990; O'Hair & Cody, 1994) impact on interpersonal relationship.

Recently, with the Internet being increasingly used as a shell game to hide identities by Internet users (Tamosaitis, 1995), online interpersonal deception becomes an important research issue as face-to-face interpersonal deception in the field of interpersonal communication. Therefore, Burgoon, Stoner, Bonito and Dunbar (2003) attempted to investigate the ways people detect their counterpart's deception when interacting with others on the Internet in the U.S. Researchers further concluded that computer-mediated relationships might create challenges for current interpersonal communication approaches (Walter & Parks, 2002).

By the same token, Taiwan has reached an online penetration of thirty percent with 6.74 million active Internet users, including 5.28 million dialup, two hundred twenty thousand (220,000) ADSL, and one hundred forty thousand (140,000) cable modem subscribers (GIO, 04/28/2003). Sun, Wu, Wan, Jen and Shie (2001) found that seventy percent of adolescents in Taiwan made friends with others via the Internet. Additionally, Hu and Chang (2003) found that twenty-five percent of college students in their study in Taiwan experienced online interpersonal deception when interacting with others in chat rooms. It means that

people in Taiwan have more opportunities to interact with others online than before and to experience online interpersonal deception. Therefore, online interpersonal deception in Taiwan indeed needs to be embraced as an approach to enrich and extend the understanding of online interaction dynamics and outcomes of online interpersonal deception.

Accordingly, this paper would first yield a clear picture about face-to-face interpersonal deception in the U.S. by reviewing the findings about the frequency of face-to-face interpersonal deception, the possibility of face-to-face interpersonal deception success, the motives of face-to-face interpersonal deception, and the outcomes of such face-to-face interpersonal deception. Then, this paper reviews the relationship development on the Internet and some exploratory research about online interpersonal deception in the U.S. and Taiwan. Hopefully, this literature will serve as a blueprint to guide a study on online interpersonal deception in Taiwan.

## **Face-to-Face Interpersonal Deception**

### ***Frequency of Face-to-Face Interpersonal Deception in Daily Life***

Since interpersonal deception is prevalent, how often does it happen? In a face-to-face interpersonal communication, Turner et al. (1975) reported that approximately sixty-two percent of conversational statements made by subjects could be classified as deceptive. That is, only thirty-eight percent of communication acts are completely truthful. O'Hair and Cody (1994) also concluded that there are several alternative viewpoints regarding the proliferation: Deception is becoming a fairly common event, and more people report talking about deception today because it appears to be more commonplace and is less negatively evaluated, relative to decades ago.

### ***Success of Face-to-Face Interpersonal Deception***

In addition to frequency of interpersonal deception, accuracy in

detecting face-to-face interpersonal deception has been the focus of other research as well. According to Cole, Leets & Bradac (2002), this might be, in part, due to the fact that deceivers inconsistently marked their deceptive practice. DeTurck et al. (1990) found that lie detection rates usually ranged from fifty-five percent to sixty percent with detection rates as high as seventy-five percent in rare cases. Similarly, observers in the Feeley and DeTurck study (1997) only correctly identified thirty-one percent of all liars, and observers in the Buller et al. (1991) study correctly identified only forty-nine percent of liars. Thus, past research in the success of interpersonal deception has yielded a consistent finding that less than sixty percent of face-to-face interpersonal deception will be identified by people due to their inability to distinguish lies from truths.

### ***Relationship between Intimacy and Face-to-Face Interpersonal Deception***

Although humans lack the ability to detect it while presented with deceptions, they will develop a sense of another's baseline for communicating truthful information while becoming closer or more familiar with one another over time. Greater familiarity with another person may not only provide a more reliable sample of what the other looks like when truthful, but many also provide a guide to how one may look when deceiving (Anderson et al, 1997). People believe that lie detection accuracy increases as relational intimacy and familiarity increases. Moreover, they believe that the person telling a lie may also be wary or apprehensive that a relational other has the ability to uncover the truth. There are a variety of studies examining relationship familiarity with a source and lie detection accuracy but these studies suggested one paradoxical conclusion: the relationship between intimacy and accuracy detection of lies is indirect. Millar & Millar (1995) indicated that under certain conditions friends fare worse than strangers while encountering deception. Other studies (e.g., Comadena, 1982; McCornack & Parks,

1986) also stressed that spouses fare no better than friends who fare no better than strangers at deciphering lies. As McCornak and Parks (1986) put it, closeness is positively related to confidence, which is positively related to a truth bias. This truth bias, in contrast, is negatively related to accuracy of deception detection. In short, the truth bias would suggest that one's trust and confidence in another makes the lie detection task much more difficult. In the future, more attention should be turned to see how intimacy affects the possibility of interpersonal deception.

### ***Motives of Face-to-Face Interpersonal Deception***

To investigate face-to-face interpersonal deception, researchers also need to understand the motives of deception. Why do people deceive others? Different studies (e.g., Cochran & Mays, 1990; Ekman, 1989; Hample, 1980; Lippard, 1988; Rowatt et al., 1998; Seiter, Brusckke & Bai, 2002) reported that interpersonal deceptive motives included benefiting the deceiver or the deceived, avoiding conflicts, acquiring or protecting sources, manipulating interactions with others, protecting image or avoiding self-disclosure, teasing or tricking others, having sex with others, initiating a dating relationship, etc.

Based on past research, O'Hair & Cody (1994) developed a taxonomy representing what people feel are reasons behind deceptive acts. It seems that deception motives can be classified into six categories including "egoism," "exploitation," "benevolence," "malevolence," "utility," and "regress." Egoism is a self-directed motive employing deceptive strategies intended to protect, preserve, or promote the self-concept or self-esteem of the deceiver; exploitation serves selfish motives with the purpose of gaining at the cost of others; benevolence is the message strategy directed toward the advancement and security of others; malevolence is a deception motive with the intent of hurting or harming others; utility is a kind of positive relational deception strategy and usually focuses on tactics intended to improve, enhance, escalate, and

repair relationships; and regress is a category depicting negative relational motives. Different motives evoke people to deceive others.

### ***Detection of Face-to-Face Interpersonal Deception***

Having reviewed the motives of face-to-face interpersonal deception, the current review will explain why people are able or unable to detect deception when it is presented. In fact, people may unwittingly signal deception via verbal and nonverbal cues. Buller & Burgoon (1994a) claimed that during deception some non-strategic messages (e.g., arousal and nervousness, negative affection, and incompetent communication performance) were inadvertently transmitted indicating that deception was occurring. Similarly, Navarro & Schafer (2001) reported that investigators usually judge deception by the other party's verbal cues, eye contact, head and body movements, and mouth and breathing.

With respect to verbal cues, they found that liars prefer concealing the truth rather than fabricating an entirely fictitious story. As to nonverbal cues, they concluded that (1) frequent liars usually increase eye contact; (2) lying people tend to mirror the head movements of the person with whom they converse; (3) people who attempt to conceal information often breathe faster and take a series of short breaths followed by one long deep breath; (4) and liars often keep their hands motionless and draw their arms close to their bodies into a position as if "flash frozen." DeTurck et al. (1990) analyzed four meta-analytic studies that have examined the behaviors associated with deceptive communication and concluded that there appeared to be eight cues that were correlated with deception: greater pupil dilation, more blinking, decreased response length, more speech errors and hesitations, greater voice pitch, more negative statements, and more irrelevant information. These findings showed that there are verbal or non-verbal cues for people to detect a deception during a communicative encounter. However, Feeley & Young (1998) pointed out that findings related to deception detection were still

collapsed across different studies, so researchers need to be cautious when drawing any conclusion.

### ***Outcomes of Face-to-Face Interpersonal Deception***

So far, this paper has focused on reviewing the frequency, motives, detection of face-to-face interpersonal deception in everyday life and the relationship between intimacy and interpersonal deception. One critical question cannot be missed is the impact of face-to-face interpersonal deception on the relationship between two parties. Some scholars (e.g., Buller & Burgoon, 1996), taking an instrumental or functional perspective on deception, stressed that the positive impact of interpersonal deception included maintaining relationships, avoiding conflicts, and preventing both parties from suffering from embarrassment. On the flip side, some scholars (e.g., O'Hair & Cody, 1994) emphasized the need to look at the dark side of deception, since many people could not accept a lie if it hurt others (e.g., Cochran & Mays, 1990). For example, Cochran and Mays (1990) reported that some people would agree that lying about one's positive HIV status before having unprotected sex would be heinous. O'Hair and Cody (1994) claimed that many deceptive acts might start to protect someone's feelings, but eventually led to negative consequences. One of the costs of detection for the deceiver is a loss of trust and respect, because establishing one's credibility after deception is one of the most difficult and challenging communication strategies. Similarly, negative consequences of being deceived include hurt feelings, lowered self-esteem, bewilderment, and thoughts of retaliation.

## **Computer-Mediated Interpersonal Deception**

### ***Interpersonal Relationship Development on the Internet***

Obviously, researchers have drawn lots of attention to face-to-face interpersonal deception for decades. However, the Internet, an integration

of interactivity, anonymity, accessibility (Rice, 2001), personalization (Borsekoski & Rickfert, 2001), consumer-centeredness (Ferguson, 1997), relatively low cost (Brown & Keller, 2000; Cooper & Griffin-Shelley, 2002), timeliness, and clarity (Napoli, 2001), has already expanded the scope of face-to-face interpersonal communication. Researchers indeed have to extend their understanding of the characteristics computer-mediated interpersonal communication and the probability of online interpersonal deception.

Researchers (e.g., Katz & Aspden, 2001; Howard, Rainie & Jones, 2001; UCLA Internet Report, 2000) who were interested in the association between Internet use and social relationships has recently tried to adopt what they have found in the field of face-to-face interpersonal relationship to guide their studies on online interpersonal relationships. They found that the Internet had gradually replaced face-to-face communication in user's relationships with their family members and friends. Internet use created a social community. As Norris (2004) indicated, many people believe that the Internet has the ability to supplement, restore, or even replace social contacts in traditional face-to-face interactions.

### ***Online Interpersonal Deception Studies***

Researchers (e.g., Walther, 1996) have described relationships formed through cyberspace as "hyperpersonal." The Internet can be used anonymously, or as a shell game to hide identities. Anyone who has access to Internet tools could create anonymity or disguise their identities. Anonymous logins are also possible for many of the thousands of chat rooms, e-mail addresses, and different screen names on the net, so that Internet users can experiment with different personas (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2001). If desired, the user can access cyber cafes, university and library computers, or additional external resources to further hide the source of the messages (Thomas, 2003). As Brooks (2001)

put it, no matter how much people supposedly have in common and how sincere their cyberfriends might be, there were countless stories of creeps, scammers, and liars who logged on and pretended to be someone whom they were not. With the advent of the Internet, online interpersonal deception becomes unavoidable and the impact of online deception on interpersonal communication is as critical as face-to-face interpersonal deception.

What is online interpersonal deception? Face-to-face interpersonal deception is defined by scholars as a communication act intended to create a personal belief in the target that the source considers false, either by causing a false belief to be formed or by altering preexisting beliefs to a false state (Knapp & Comadena, 1979; Zuckerman, Depaulo, & Rosenthal, 1981). Based on this definition of deception, online deception means a communicator communicating online who encodes a deceptive message designed to create the false belief in order to establish the veracity of the central deceptive message or to protect the source in the event that deception is detected.

Regarding online interpersonal deception, Burgoon et al. (2003) and Walter et al. (2002) have found that online interpersonal deception has already created challenges for current face-to-face interpersonal communication approaches in the U.S. Although Taiwan's researchers interested in Internet use usually used to focus on issues such as adolescents' online interaction behavior (Sun et al., 2001), the perceived sincerity of online interaction (Dai, 1999), and the relationship between communication apprehension and online anonymous interaction (Yo, 2001), some researchers who have given their attention to online interpersonal deception also found that the impact of online interpersonal deception on interpersonal relationship cannot be overlooked. Hu and Chang (2003) found that twenty-five percent of college students in their study in Taiwan experienced online interpersonal deception when

interacting with others in chat rooms.

Accordingly, this paper, based on literature review of face-to-face interpersonal deception, will attempt to (1) realize the possible targets of online deception in online interpersonal communication, (2) investigate the motives of online interpersonal deception, (3) analyze online deception detection strategies while void of nonverbal cues, and (4) uncover the impact of online deception on interpersonal relationships. Hopefully, this study will explore the similarities and differences between face-to-face and online interpersonal deception.

## **Method**

### ***Targets***

This study focused on online chatters' interpersonal deception. Therefore, it recruited twenty online chatters in Taiwan with at least two years of online chatting experience. Qualitative interviews were employed from September 1 to September 25, 2003 to solicit information about their experiences about online interpersonal deception, which will then contribute to understanding the impact of online interpersonal deception on interpersonal relationships. Respondents included a graduate student, a restaurant worker, a bank teller, a motorcycle station owner, two high school students, five college students, two soldiers, two freelancers, a civil servant, an electrician, a MIS executive, a web designer, and an unemployed person. Of those reached, five of them were aged fifteen to twenty, thirteen aged twenty-one to twenty-five, one aged twenty-six to thirty, and one aged thirty to thirty-five.

### ***Interviews and Analysis***

This study employed qualitative interviews to collect data. Open-ended interviews provided an opportunity to gain insights into the dynamics, behavior and experience of the online chatters. Most importantly, the collection of the data was guided by the interviewees'

experiences rather than fixed assumptions.

There were five interviewers recruited. They were undergraduate or graduate students in communications at a college in Taiwan who were trained how to interview others in a news writing class. All interviewers were trained before the interviews began about how to ask questions and take notes during the interview. Each interviewer also used a recorder to record what the interviewee said. Each interview on average took about one hour.

All the questions asked by the interviewers aimed at examining how prevalent online interpersonal deception was among interviewees, at determining the differences and similarities of face-to-face and online deception, at realizing the way interviewees successfully detect online deception, at investigating the cues which helped them detect deception, and at focusing on the positive and negative outcomes of online deception among them. After interviews, all answers were transcribed by interviewers and used for analysis.

## Results

*Most interviewees at least deceived strangers or intimate others online once. Similarly, they had been deceived by strangers or intimate others online.*

Who is easier to deceive or be deceived when chatting online, a stranger or an intimate? Interviewees' answers were inconsistent. Some found that intimate friends or classmates were easily deceived by them whereas some reported that strangers were easily deceived by them. By the same token, interviewees reported that they might be deceived frequently by strangers or people who had an intimate relationship with them.

“I used to deceive strangers due to the lack of familiarity between us. Under such circumstances, I could chat anything else with

them without being detected.”

“Familiar people might tell me lies online.”

“I was deceived by strangers because I did not understand her/him a lot. Without understanding the background of a person, it was unavoidable to believe everything he/she told you”

“I could make sense of any deception if I chatted with a person I had a long-term relationship with him/her. On the contrary, I could not tell anything wrong if I interacted online with anyone who was a stranger to me.”

***The motive of deceiving intimate others was only for fun whereas the motives for deceiving strangers were for fun and/or preventing himself/herself from being hurt mentally.***

Some interviewees, who admitted having deceived others online, indicated that they might tell a lie to others while chatting on the Internet for fun. They especially liked to deceive their friends or classmates who had an intimate relationship with them.

“Playing a joke on friends or classmates was fun. I deceived my classmates and friends online very often.”

“Once upon a time, I tried to find some answers concerning my friend’s life. Because my friend did not tell me the truth, I could not but deceive him online in order to find the answer. It was very funny since he really told me the answer unconsciously.”

“It was only for fun because I could hide my identity. I was like an actor who played a role which was different from mine in the real world.”

In addition to deceiving others for fun, interviewees would tell a lie as well when they sensed the counterpart was a stranger who was not sincere, boring or attempted to invade their privacy. The purpose of

deceiving strangers online with insincerity was to avoid being hurt mentally. Interviewees indicated that they could deceive strangers successfully due to the lack of familiarity between them.

“I would not hesitate to tell a lie if I felt that a counterpart I interacted with on the Internet was not sincere.”

“I would not tell anyone about my privacy, thus, if necessary, I dared to deceive others when chatting about something related to my privacy online.”

“Sure, ...I would not hesitate to tell a lie if I felt that a counterpart I interacted with on the Internet was not sincere.”

“Telling a lie was no good. However, I would hide something if I were asked some questions regarding my privacy by someone who I never saw or was unfamiliar with before.”

“If I could tell the counterpart’s attempt of question asking, I might hide the real answer and told them something opposite to the real answer. The first time, especially, I interacted online with a stranger, I would be very careful about my self-disclosure.”

“Of course, I would hide my identity. People chatted online with me never understood that I was a girl. They could not see me and believed that I was a boy. Why did I do so? Guys would like to play a trick on me if they knew I was a girl that bored me very much. I dislike that kind of feeling. Hiding my identity made me feel more comfortable when chatting with others.... Most importantly, online role-playing was very interesting.”

***Online deceivers believed that their deceptions were seldom detected by others. However, online deceptions still have a high probability to be found if online chatters narrated something online too exaggeratedly and unreasonably.***

Interviewees' online deception was seldom detected by others according to their experience. Only when interviewees' responses could not be made sense of or sounded unreasonable would their deceptions be detected.

“Overall, my deception was seldom detected by others. The percentage of being detected was pretty low,... only about ten percent.”

“They were stupid..., they were deceived by me over and over again.”

“Haha, ...it was impossible to be detected that I was lying when I chatted with others online.”

“She found that I was lying because I exaggerated a lot of things.... She could not believe most I told her online. Then, she did not make me any response.”

“I was found telling a lie because I could not immediately answer some questions asked by the counterpart.”

Similarly, interviewees had two different answers about their ability to detect others' online interpersonal deceptions. Some reported they could not tell anything was wrong if people deceived them when chatting online whereas others were very confident that they could distinguish a truth from a lie.

“If they did not tell me they lied to me, I really could not sense anything wrong,”

“When I chatted online with others I was familiar with, I could quickly tell what they said was true or untruth. Think about that. I might have already known the answer. How could they deceive me? They would be embarrassed about their lies since I could tell that.”

“Exaggeration was not a good policy. I usually found that I was

deceived because they illustrated some unbelievable examples or facts. They were ridiculous and could not convince me.”

“I could judge the possibility of deception by their hypertext. If the hypertext was fragmentary, I might guess that I was deceived.”

“Some people liked flirting with you, behaving naively, or telling you nothing but ‘garbage.’ It meant that they were not sincere and might tell you a lie.”

“I was very experienced, so it was a piece of cake for me to detect any online deception.”

***Online interpersonal deception will not affect the relationship between people with an intimate social tie whereas online interpersonal deception will stop the development of interpersonal relationships between two strangers***

Interviewees admitted that they might deceive their intimate others. Their motive of online deception was for fun, so the outcomes of their deceptions would not affect their interpersonal relationships with those intimate others. However, the outcomes of being deceived by strangers were quite opposite based on online chatters’ attitudes. Interviewees, who chatted online for fun or time-killing, seemed not to care about online deception. They indicated that it did not matter since they did not know each other. On the contrary, some interviewees would be mad because of deception. Some reported that once their online interpersonal deceptions were detected, the interpersonal relationships would be affected seriously. Since the interpersonal relationships between two strangers were weak in essence, the deceived would not keep in touch with them again in the future. By the same token, they might take action to block those strangers who deceived them since they disliked the feeling of being deceived.

“If the deceiver did not hurt me mentally or physically, I was not very concerned about his/her online deceiving behaviors. If the

counterpart deceived me about romance, I would block him forever and never chat with him again.”

“If the deceived was my friend, we would laugh a lot after the deception was detected. If we did not know each other, I just let it be no matter what happened. We chatted online just for fun, so I would not take it too seriously. It was the attraction of online chatting.”

“Angry, angry, and angry..., I would not trust in others again if I was deceived online. Without any trust, we would have many obstacles in communication.”

“No matter whether I was the deceived or the deceiver, deception would affect our feelings of trust which would have an influence on the frequency of our future online chatting.”

“He tried to send me an e-mail with a virus as a kind of retaliation when he realized that I deceived him. So terrible..., he might be very unhappy.”

“I would take revenge on people who deceived me. I once have others chatted online with the netter who deceived me and tried to deceive him as well.”

## **Discussion**

In the face of the development of communication technologies, the impact of online interpersonal deception on interpersonal communication needs to be investigated. This study examined the online interpersonal deception based on past face-to-face interpersonal communication findings. It found that most interviewees at least deceived strangers or intimate others online once and that they also had been deceived by strangers or intimate others online. This finding was supported by past studies about face-to-face interpersonal relationships which indicated that

lying and deception were a part of daily life (Saarni & Lewis, 1993). In the context of cyberspace the relationship established in cyberspace is more disembodied than face-to-face interpersonal relationships. In cyberspace, men can easily pretend to be women, and women can easily pretend to be men. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that it becomes more possible for people to explore deception on the Internet.

However, why do people deceive others in cyberspace? This study found that online chatters deceived online counterparts for different motives. The motive of deceiving intimate others was only for fun whereas the motives of deceiving strangers were for fun and/or for preventing himself/herself from being hurt mentally. The finding was similar to those of past studies (e.g., Lippard, 1988; Seiter et al., 2002) about face-to-face interpersonal communication indicating that the motives for deceptive behaviors included gaining or protecting resources, increasing or decreasing affiliation, protecting the self, protecting another, manipulating another, being humorous, and excusing oneself. Undoubtedly, any counterparts on the Internet could make themselves taller, thinner, married, unmarried, richer, or smarter while interacting with others online, which has led to the growing popularity of a bizarre form of digital deception (Tamosaitis, 1995). To avoid being deceived and hurt by strangers with illegal attempts, people become more careful about self-disclosure to reduce uncertainty. Under such circumstances, online chatters interacting with strangers may be reluctant to tell others their identities or privacy in cyberspace before establishing any trust or relationships with online chatters. Compared to chatting online with strangers, people may be more willing to chat more and play a joke on their intimate others, such as friends and classmates, because of the long-term existing relationships in real life.

The second major finding of this study was that interviewees indicated that they could detect others' online deception easily; in contrast,

their deceptions were seldom detected by others. Interviewees indicated they detected online interpersonal deception by way of judging the hypertext they saw on the computer monitor or the logics of narratives. Exaggerated and unreasonable narratives would be regarded as deceptions. Based on this finding, it is obvious that interviewees believed in their ability to detect online interpersonal deception online and overlooked others' ability to detect their online interpersonal deception.

Although this finding was supported by Shippee's (1977) study, indicating that most people thought they could always tell when others were lying, it also raised an intriguing question about if online chatters overestimated their ability to detect deception online. In fact, detecting deception still remains a difficult task in face-to-face interpersonal communication (Cooper & Griffin-Shelley, 2002). Over twenty-five years of research in behavior lie detection has yielded one consistent finding that humans are not good at detecting when deception is present (Feeley & Young, 1998). How could interviewees of this study easily express that they have no trouble in detecting online interpersonal deception without other non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, and gestures? Could deception detectors only judge deception by the logics of narratives and hypertext? Does any misunderstanding or unnecessary flaming and destruction happen in cyberspace because of misjudgments of online interpersonal deception? These questions need to be given more attention in future studies.

As to the outcomes of online interpersonal deception, interviewees of this study reported that online interpersonal deception would not affect the relationships between people with an intimate social tie. Regarding interaction with strangers, the outcomes of online interpersonal deception are associated with people's attitudes about being deceived. One explanation of this finding is that some people who chatted online only for time-killing might ignore the deception because their expectation

about online relationships might be lower than for their real life. However, compared to online chatters ignoring the deception, others who took deception seriously would like to stop chatting and take revenge. This might be caused by the “hyperpersonal” relationship on the Internet (Walther, 1996). On the Internet, online chatters knew that most dyadic interactions might be one-time encounters, short-lived exchanged or casual friendships (Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2002); thus, the cyber relationship tended to be relatively disinhibited (such as flaming, destructive and hostile) if they felt they were hurt by others on line. Therefore, if online chatters would like to forge sincere interpersonal relationships on the web, they better not deceive others before establishing any credibility or relationship with others. The consequences of online interpersonal deception between two strangers may hurt other’s feelings, lower his/her self-esteem, and those outcomes may also cause thoughts of retaliation from the person who feels uncomfortable, which will, undoubtedly, affect the relationships.

In closing, this study was conducted by using a qualitative approach. In the near future, researchers may adopt a quantitative method to investigate online interpersonal deception. In doing so, researchers can look at the same issue from different research perspectives and approaches, which will contribute more to the field of online interpersonal deception. The findings of this study should help researchers understand more about the similarities and differences between deception in cyberspace and in face-to-face communications. In the real world, except for verbal information people can judge deception in face-to-face communications by eye contact, breath, and voice pitches. In cyberspace, the lack of reliable deception cues may prevent people from accurately judging the veracity of statements. However, interviewees of this study were still confident in their ability to detect deception. Shippee (1977) indicated that people always believe that they are good at detecting others’ deception. Whether people frequently

overestimate their online interpersonal deception detection competence needs to be given more attention in future studies.

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# 誠實為上策？ 檢視台灣線上聊天者的人際欺騙

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## 摘要

網路問世後，線上欺騙對人際傳播的影響成爲一個有趣的研究問題。本研究針對台灣地區二十位具有兩年以上線上聊天經驗的聊天族進行深度訪談，試圖瞭解線上欺騙對線上聊天者雙方人際關係的影響，結果發現（一）多數受訪者表示他們曾在線上聊天時騙過熟悉的人或陌生人；同樣地，他們也被熟悉的人或陌生人騙過；（二）受訪者在線上聊天時欺騙熟悉的人主要是「好玩」；但是他們欺騙陌生人的原因除了「好玩」之外，也是爲了免於「受到心理上的傷害」；（三）受訪者認爲他們大多可以輕而易舉地發現對方是否欺騙他們；相對地，受訪者也大多很有自信地認爲線上聊天的另一方不太容易察覺正受騙；（四）如果雙方原本就熟識，線上欺騙行爲對雙方的原有關係影響不大。一旦雙方原本不熟悉，可能會有兩種不同狀況發生，結果依雙方的上線聊天動機或態度而不同，只因好玩或爲了殺時間而上線聊天的人，發現受騙時會選擇一笑置之，但線上聊天者如果有被欺騙感情或感到不舒服的感覺時，線上欺騙會讓他們感到不悅，甚至採取報復行爲。

**關鍵字：**欺騙；人際欺騙；線上人際欺騙