Seeking Patterns of Digital Deception

Marek Palasinski
Liverpool John Moores University, UK

Simon Bignell
University of Derby, UK

INTRODUCTION

A number of interesting questions emerge from the exponential growth in access to online social networking websites and computer mediated communication such as email and mobile phone messaging. For example, 'do people lie more in some media more than in others? Do they choose different media for different types of lies? Are they better at spotting lies in certain media than in others?' In light of the dearth of empirical studies here, we outline the fundamental issues and examine the key developments in the evolving debate. Taking the rapidly growing role of social media into account, this article examines the dimension of technology-mediated human relations at the two dominant levels of interpersonal and business interactions. This is then followed by cultural considerations and search for ways of identifying and tackling digital deception that are yet to be turned into effective, reliable and affordable solutions. Arguing for a more methodologically eclectic, culturally diverse and externally valid approach, the article ends with directions for further research.

BACKGROUND

It is important to note that strategic online deception requires significantly more effort and mental resources than truthful communication. Of course, not all digital deception happens in the context of an online conversation. Sometimes communication focuses just on the contextual and situational aspects of communicative exchanges. This more to-the-point 'interactive communication' is very different from that which focuses on the interpersonal nature of most online communicative exchanges and is not accounted for in theories of interpersonal deception (DePaulo, Ansfield, & Bell, 1996).

From the 'very modest' development of smoke signals in prehistory, to the telegraph in the 18th century, telephone in the 19th century and the Internet in the 20th century, communication technology has come a long way indeed to become digital. As the number of people who have access to the Internet continues to grow along with the number of hours that they spend online, cyberspace keeps opening new vistas of both honest and deceitful computer mediated communication that still remain largely unexplored.

MAIN TYPES OF DECEPTION

Given the primordial tendency for deception, the ever-increasing number of people who have access to the Internet and the growing number of hours that they spend online, digital deception has become pervasive. Thus, cyberspace keeps opening new vistas of deceitful communication that still remain largely unexplored. The typologies used to categorise deception have varied widely (e.g., omission vs. commission; active vs. passive – Galasinski, 2000; self-oriented vs. other-oriented – Feldman, 2009; male vs. female – Canary & Dindia, 2006). Digital deception has also been categorized in terms of identity (i.e., false manipulation of a person or organization's identity) and message (false manipulation of shared information - Hancock, 2007), gender (Guadagno, Okdie & Kruse, 2012), self-promotion and relationship-maintenance (Underwood, Kerlin & Farrington-Flint, 2012), as well as text and photograph (Lo, Hsieh & Chiu, 2013). What all such types have in common is their relation to a special disinhibitory property of the Internet – anonymity, making the potential for alternating identity, personal information

and typical behaviour almost infinite (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012).

DIGTIAL DECEPTION AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

One of the main benefits of information technology has been its power of bringing people together, facilitating the creation of all sorts of interpersonal relationships and helping to keep them alive. At the same time, however, it also created new opportunities for unique forms of deception that only very recently began to be explored. Internet lies about gender (Whitty, 2002), physical attractiveness, age, background and interests (Cornwell & Lungern, 2001), for example, appear to be ubiquitous in cyberspace with some notable gender differences. However, that not all digital deception is socially undesirable. For example, in one study when real gender became hidden, women reportedly found cyberspace to be liberating (Danet, 1998). Experimenting with one's self-presentation online was also shown to be potentially formative and therapeutic, particularly for the coy and physically unattractive (Whitty, 2003), the prevalent motivations to deceive online being 'play' and privacy concerns (Caspi & Gorsky, 2006).

As one might expect, men were found to lie more about their height, and women to lie more about their weight, with participants farther from the mean lying more (Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008). Studies have also shown that men are more likely to misrepresent personal assets, relationship goals, personal interests, and attributes, whereas women were more likely to misrepresent weight (Hall, Park, Song, & Cody, 2010). Furthermore, the less attractive the online daters' attractiveness was, the more likely they were to enhance their profile photographs and lie about their physical descriptors (height, weight, age).

In contrast to male chat room users who reported using identity deception to express their identity and disclose their secrets, female users reported using it to conceal their identity for safety reasons, like avoiding prejudice or harassment (Utz, 2005). In a related study that

compared romantic relationships of chat room users online and offline, it was found that commitment and seriousness tended to be lower in cyberspace than in

'realspace', and misrepresentation - particularly of age and physical characteristics - tended to be higher in cyberspace than in realspace relationships (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001). This finding ties in with the results of a study which examined how differences in expectations about encounters affected the degree of deceptive self-presentation across four conditions: face-to-face, email, no meeting, and a control condition with no pretence of dating. Results showed that men played up their positive characteristics more if the potential date was less salient (e.g., email meeting) compared to a more salient condition (e.g., face-to-face meeting) or the control conditions (Guadagno et al., 2012).

The allure of anonymity provided by chat rooms introduces unprecedented dynamics into relationships so that even (happily) married individuals can enjoy relative safety to express their fantasies and desires while operating incognito (Mileham, 2007). Such safety, however, has limits. One of its most recent ones is the online romance scam whereby fraudsters use online dating sites to pretend to be in a relationship and then cheat their victims out of money. Whitty and Buchanan (2012) found that such victims represent an estimated 230, 000 citizens in the United Kingdom alone, who according to SOCA (Serious Organized Crime Agency) suffered financial losses ranging from £50 to £240,000.

DIGITAL DECEPTION AND SEXUAL ABUSE

At a time when sexually related online activities have often become routine for Internet surfers in the West (Doring, 2009), the low distribution cost of illegal photos continues to increase their availability and reduce detection (Adler, 2008). The ease with which children and teens can access and share such materials only exacerbates the problem further (Freeman-Longo, 2000), making it relatively easy for online predators to misrepresent themselves, gain their trust and groom them (Yaman, 2009). It appears, however, that most online predators do not deceive their victims, who are primarily 13-15-year-old teenage girls (75%) and half of whom report being in love with or feeling close bonds with the offenders, about the fact that they are adults

7 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/seeking-patterns-of-digital-deception/113102

Related Content

Building Inclusive IS&T Work Climates for Women and Men
Valerie N. Streets, Debra A. Majorand Valerie J. Morganson (2015). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, Third Edition (pp. 753-761).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/building-inclusive-ist-work-climates-for-women-and-men/112390

Learning From Imbalanced Data
Lincy Mathewsand Seetha Hari (2018). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, Fourth Edition (pp. 1825-1834).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/learning-from-imbalanced-data/183898

Social Computing
Nolan Hemmatazad (2018). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, Fourth Edition (pp. 7796-7804).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-computing/184475

Mapping the Dissemination of the Theory of Social Representations via Academic Social Networks
Annamaria Silvana de Rosa, Laura Dryjanskaand Elena Bocci (2018). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, Fourth Edition (pp. 7044-7056).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/mapping-the-dissemination-of-the-theory-of-social-representations-via-academic-social-networks/184401

Software Literacy
Elaine Khooand Craig Hight (2018). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, Fourth Edition (pp. 7539-7548).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/software-literacy/184450