

Honesty and Trust in Virtual Communication*

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic led to a trend toward remote work and increased virtual communication. Particularly in organizations, virtual communication has become an essential tool for people to interact with one another. These communication channels provide a different level of social presence, which is known to affect moral behavior, than face-to-face communication. This raises the question of whether people prefer more anonymous communication channels when intending to be dishonest. To investigate this question, we conducted a controlled experiment using a sender-receiver deception game. In this experiment, the sender has the option of using either a text or video communication channel to send an honest or dishonest message to the receiver. In our setup, the sender and the receiver did not know each other, and the likelihood that they would meet after the experiment was negligible. Our results show a tendency for senders to prefer the more anonymous text communication channel when they chose to lie to the receiver. Our findings have important implications for various contexts and for strategies to prevent dishonest behavior. For instance, if certain communication channels tend to facilitate dishonesty, organizations can prioritize the usage of specific communication channels in situations where honest behavior is crucial.

Keywords: digitization; virtual communication; communication channel; honesty; human presence; social image concerns

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