

People more likely to lie when texting: research

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Text messaging leads people to be more deceitful when compared to other modes of communication, according to Sauder School of Business researchers at the University of British Columbia.

Their study compares the level of deceit people are prepared to use in a variety of media, from text messages to face-to-face interactions.

“People are communicating using a growing range of methods, from Twitter to Skype,” says Sauder Assoc. Prof. Ronald Cenfetelli, a co-author on the paper. “As new platforms of communication come online, it’s important to know the risks that may be involved.”

“Our results confirm that the more anonymous the technology allows a person to be in a communications exchange, the more likely they are to become morally lax,” says Sauder Prof. Karl Aquino, also one of the co-authors.

The study involved 170 students performing mock stock transactions in one of four ways: face-to-face, or by video, audio or text chatting. Researchers promised cash awards of up to \$50 to increase participants’ involvement in the role play. “Brokers” were promised increased cash rewards for more stock sales, while “buyers” were told their cash reward would depend on the yet-to-be-determined value of the stock.

The brokers were given inside knowledge that the stock was rigged to lose half of its value. Buyers were only informed of this fact after the

mock sales transaction and were asked to report whether the brokers had employed deceit to sell their stock.

The authors then analyzed which forms of communication led to more deception. They found that buyers who received information via text messages were 95 per cent more likely to report deception than if they had interacted via video, 31 per cent more likely to report deception when compared to face-to-face, and 18 per cent more likely if the interaction was via audio chat.

Their results suggest that communicating by video heightened the brokers' awareness of being scrutinized, which suppressed their impulse to use dishonest sales tactics – the so-called “spotlight” effect.

“With this in mind, people shopping online using websites like eBay should consider asking sellers to talk over Skype to ensure they are getting information in the most trustworthy way possible,” says Cenfetelli, who studies human-computer interaction in Sauder’s Management Information Systems division.

The study also reveals that people deceived by “leaner” media, such as text messages are more angered than those misled by “richer” media, such as video chat.

The lesson for business, says Cenfetelli, is that video conferencing or in-person interactions may be preferable to text-based communication if the company is concerned about how customers may react to the given information.

The study, led by Asst. Prof. David Jingjun Xu of Wichita State University, will appear in the March edition of the *Journal of Business Ethics*.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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