What Happened Before and After You Lied?
Antecedents and Consequences of Self-Presentation in Online Dating

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PENG KUN

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Abstract

This study seeks to increase knowledge regarding the causes and consequences of deceptive self-presentation in the context of online dating. Specifically, this study investigates a) how and why online daters strategically self-present in online dating profiles when confronted with two competing goals—attracting potential daters and avoiding the risk of being detected as deceptive; b) how online daters react to different levels of misrepresentation; and c) what role gender plays in the above situations. This study employs a survey, a content analysis and an experiment to test these questions. The results of this study show that the goal of projecting an attractive image in online dating was significantly associated with acquisitive self-presentation. Falsification was the most commonly adopted strategy by online daters. Also, women were more likely to embellish their self-presentation in online dating, especially their physical appearance. Regarding reactions, online daters showed strong changes in emotion and intended action when they discovered others had been engaging in a high level of misrepresentation. Women and men reacted differently when confronting misrepresented content. Theoretically, these findings expand the Interpersonal Deception Theory (IDT) and the Information Manipulation Theory (IMT) to the mate selection process and integrate an evolutionary psychological perspective into computer-mediated communication. In practice, the current study provides a more complete picture of deceptive communication in the online dating scenario, and thus helps online daters to adjust their online behaviors.

Keywords: Self-presentation, motivations, online dating, deception