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Judgments of honest and deceptive communication in art forgery controversies: two field studies testing truth-default theory's projected motive model in Korea

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ABSTRACT

Two field studies investigated people's inferences about the honesty or deceptiveness of two Korean artists whose work may or may not have been forged. Based on the projective motive model from truth-default theory, it was anticipated that judgments of honesty would be impacted by people's perceptions of the artist's apparent motive for lying. The results of both studies were consistent with the importance of apparent motives. The role of internal attributions was also assessed for veracity judgment. Internal attributions may be more common as explanations for honesty than deception. The data provide additional evidence of the cross-cultural applicability of truth-default theory.

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Folk wisdom and social scientific theory alike often emphasize the primacy of observed sender nonverbal behaviors in influencing people's judgments regarding the honesty or deceptiveness of other's communication (Levine, 2018a). To improve deception detection, some more recent approaches advocate shifting focus from nonverbal to verbal deception cues (e.g. Vrij, 2019). Such cue-based approaches, whether nonverbal or verbal, examine behaviors removed from, and independent of, the social context in which they are enacted (Levine, 2020). Social perceivers, however, do not form social judgments or make attributions in a social and contextual vacuum (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Furthermore, seeking to understand human's assessments of other humans requires not only a sensitivity to social context, but also knowing which aspects of context matter most in a particular domain (Levine, 2018b).

A new theory of deception prioritizes communication content understood in context. One critical element of communication context is the situation-based motivational states of communicators. According to truth-default theory (TDT, Levine, 2014, 2020), lying and other forms of deceptive messages do not occur at random. People lie for particular reasons. People lie when the truth interferes with their communication goals. According to the theory, everyday people understand that other people lie when they have a reason to and that absent a motivation to lie, people are typically honest. The idea that people

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consider if a communicator might have a motive to lie or not when ascertaining honesty is called the projected motive model (Levine, Kim, & Blair, 2010a) and the projected motive model is a module in truth-default theory. To date, only a few experiments have tested the projected motive model (e.g. Bond Jr., Howard, Hutchison, & Masip, 2013; Levine, Kim, & Hamel, 2010b) and those tests have been done in North America in experimental settings.

Two contemporary art forgery scandals in South Korea (see Doo, 2016; The Korea Herald, 2016) provided an opportunity for a field test of the projected motive model in a previously untested communication context (locally well-known artist's claims about whether or not paintings were forged) and culture (i.e. an Asian country where deception studies were, relatively speaking, fewer, compared to Western countries). In both cases, the authenticity of art works was in dispute. In one case, a painting was ruled genuine despite the artist's denial that she painted it. In the other case, the reverse happened, and several paintings were ruled fake despite the artist's claims that they were authentic. In both cases, independent evidence contradicted the artists public statements. The interested public, however, is likely to assess the honesty of the artists differently for reasons other than the mere existence of evidence because the context is critical. In the current examples, the aspect of context that is especially important is the apparent motivations of the artists and the other players in these two scandals. Apparent motives are considered an aspect of context because they are part of the larger social situation that influence how people understand and interpret what is said.

The focus here is not on either ascertaining the authenticity of the art works or determining the veracity of the artists' claims. Whether the paintings were forged or not is beside the current point. We have two cases where artists made opposite claims about the authenticity of works that may or may not be their own. In one case, the artist's claim seems to benefit the artist. In the other, the claim seems to work against the artist. Truth-default theory and the projected motive model predict that self-benefitting claims are more likely to be seen as deceptive and that communications lacking an apparent motive for deception will more frequently be judged as honest. The research reported here tests this hypothesis with in-depth interviews of art experts (Study 1) and with a survey of common people (Study 2).

Literature review

Inferring honesty and deception

People world-wide self-report reliance on sender behaviors such as a lack of eye contact when assessing sender honesty and deception (Bond, 2006). Similarly, experimental research shows that a sender's honest or dishonest demeanor has a powerful effect on judgments of honesty and deceit (Levine et al., 2011). Although the impact of sender behaviors on perception of honesty and deceit is well documented, context-free sender behaviors are not the only consideration. When people are asked how you can tell when someone is lying, the most common answer is that they are averting their gaze (Bond, 2006). However, when people are asked to recall and describe discovered lie, behavioral cues such as eye contact are listed infrequently and contextualized

communication content becomes more prominent (Park, Levine, McCornack, Morrison, & Ferrara, 2002).

Truth Default Theory (TDT, Levine, 2014, 2020), specifies that sender behavior is only one of several categories of information that people use to distinguish between truths and lies. Examples of other factors include evidence of various sorts, logical inconsistencies in communication content, context-based plausibility, subsequent confessions, and perceived sender motives for deception (Levine, 2020).

Two of TDT's modules are most relevant to the current discussion. TDT's deception motives module holds that absent psychopathology, people lie when the truth is sufficiently problematic for the attainment of relevant communication goals. That is, deception is motivated by problematic truths. When the truth of a situation is consistent with a communicator's goals, people are almost invariably honest. Consistent with this prediction, Levine et al. (2010b) exposed people to situations where the truth was or was not problematic for senders. When the truth worked in people's favor, everyone was honest. However, when faced with problematic truths, a majority (but not all) people used deception to mitigate against the problems posed by the truth. Similar findings were reported by Bond Jr. et al. (2013). These findings show that people lie for a reason and that the existence of a motive for deception strongly predicts deceptive communication.

The second relevant TDT module is the projected motive model. It specifies that people in everyday life understand the strong link between deception motives and deceptive communication, people project the motivational states of others, and they use projected motives to make judgments about the honesty of others' communication. That is, people know that others lie for a reason and are more likely to suspect deception when they think a person has a reason to lie (Levine, 2014). In the language of TDT, a projected motive for deception is sufficient to trigger both suspicion of deception and subsequent judgments of deception.

Initial evidence for projecting motives in lie detection was provided by Levine et al. (2010b). Participants watched students being questioned about cheating on a task. The students being questioned either denied cheating or confessed to cheating. The denials and the confessions were either truths or lies in equal proportions. The projected motive model predicts that confessions will be believed more often than denials regardless of actual honesty because deniers have an apparent motive to lie while confessors less so. Generally, people would not want to be seen as cheaters, so when they did not cheat, they have no obviously motive for saying that they did. As predicted, confessions were believed most of the time in an absolute sense and were believed relatively more often than denials.

In a separate series of tests not inspired by TDT, Bond Jr. et al. (2013) gave some participants but not others a strong incentive to lie. As predicted, people lied only when they had a good reason to do so. Other participants were informed of the nature of the incentives and who was and who was not incentivized. Knowledge of the incentives structure strongly predicted other's assessments of honesty and deceit. Bond et al. concluded that deception motives predict deception, knowledge of others' motives predict perceptions of honesty and deception, and accurate knowledge of deception motives yields high accuracy in correctly detecting deception. That is, not only do the deception motives and

the projected motive modules accurately describe people's actions and judgments, when combined, the two modules have utility in lie detection (Levine, 2020).

The projected motive model aligns closely with classic work on persuasion regarding source credibility and trustworthiness. In their seminal article, Walster et al. (1966) wrote:

Our hypothesis is that a communicator, regardless of his general prestige, will be more effective and will be seen as more credible, when arguing for a position opposed to his own best interest, than when arguing for changes obviously in his own interest (p. 327).

The projected motive model also aligns with recent advances in attribution theory. Although much attribution research focuses on dispositional (internal) and situational causes of behavior, Malle (2004) argues that dispositional and situational causes explain unintended, non-volitional behaviors. Lying is usually considered an intentional act. Therefore, people may look for reasons (e.g. motives) rather than dispositional and situation causes when ascribing deception.

Contemporary art scandals and deception motives

The first case involved a long-running controversy over the authenticity of painting named 'Beautiful Woman' which the late Korean artist Chun Kyung-ja denied creating. In 1991, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea exhibited the painting which it attributed to Chun. The artist denied that the work was hers, while the museum claimed that it was a Chun original. In 1999, another artist confessed to the forgery. Chun's family sued the museum for profiting on the forgery. In 2016 a French firm concluded that it was almost certain that the painting was a fake, but the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' office ruled it genuine after extensive analysis (Doo, 2016).

Regarding the second case, in 2016, an art dealer and an artist-forgery were arrested in Korea and accused of selling forged paintings as original works of Korean minimalist artist Lee, U-fan (Korea Herald, 2016). According to the accusations, the arts works were sold for the equivalent of approximately 3 million US Dollars with the artist Lee receiving about one-percent of the proceeds. Seoul Metropolitan Police suspect at least some of the works are forgeries, but Lee claims all the works are original.

In both cases of potential art forgery, the authenticity of the works is in dispute. In the case of Chun, the artist denies the authenticity. In the case of Lee, the artist to whom the work is attributed claims the work as genuinely his own. In both cases, expert and technical analyzes are disputed. The artists' claims regarding the authenticity of the works may be honest, may be lies, or might be false but not intentionally so.

The projected motive model suggests that people are likely to see the two artist's claims differently. Lee profited financially by the work being attributed to him. It is in his apparent interest that the painting were not forgeries. People may think he had a reason to lie. Chun, in contrast, lacked an obvious motive for deception. Why would she deny painting a work of hers that was being exhibited in the national museum? On the surface, it would be an honor to have her work prominently exhibited in the national museum.

The main hypothesis is that people are more likely to see Lee as lying compared to Chun, and Chun as honest compared to Lee. This is because Lee has an apparent

motive to lie while Chun does not. This follows directly from the projected motive model of TDT.

H1: Chun's claim will be believed more frequently than Lee's claim.

Further, we predict that people who believe either artist are likely to mention a lack of motive as justification for their attributions of honesty while those who infer deceit will frequently cite a motive as a reason why the artist is doubted.

H2: Judgments of truth and deceit will not be based only on evidence (i.e. the results of investigations). People's perceptions of motives or lack of motives will be offered as reasons for believing or not believing the artists.

Alternatively, honesty and deception might be attributed to the artists' dispositions (i.e. an internal attribution). Perhaps due to their skill, prominence, and fame, the artist is seen as a person of high credibility and integrity who would not lie. Or, given the allegations, they might be seen as a shady sort of person prone to deceiving others. The second type of internal attribution would hold for artists as a group rather than individual artists. People may have, for example, stereotypes of artists as credible people of integrity. Thus, a research question asks about attribution regarding artists.

RQ1: To what extent are honesty and deception attributed to internal-dispositional qualities of the artists either as individuals or as a social group?

According to Malle (2004), internal-dispositional attributions such as having an honest personality apply to non-intentional behaviors. For volitional actions, in contrast, people look for reasons such as saving face or seeking monetary gain. To the extent that people see lying as intentional but honesty as not necessarily intentional, it follows that dispositional attributions are more likely when the person is judged as truthful compared to lying. On the other hand, projected motive research and TDT suggests that people infer honesty from a lack of a deception motive. For example, even a person with a dishonest personality will be expected to be honest when they have nothing to gain from dishonesty. Honesty is the default.

Thus, a research question is put forward about the roles of motives and dispositional qualities.

RQ2: Are motives or internal-dispositional qualities more or less likely for claims judged as true as opposed to false?

Overview of studies 1 and 2

This research involved two separate studies using different methods and different sets of participants, art experts and non-experts. In order to see how people with in-depth knowledge of the art industry evaluated the veracity and reasons for lying or telling the truth, Study 1 assessed art experts' evaluations of the art forgery scandals. Study 2, on the other hand, examined if the findings of Study 1 would replicate with everyday people who may not know as much about the art forgery scandals.

There were three reasons for employing different methods (interview and survey) targeting the two different populations (art experts vs. laypeople). First, art experts have in-depth understanding, and interview methods are a good way to gain nuance that is lost in

pre-formatted surveys. Interviews, for example, facilitate longer and more elaborate questions and answers and allow follow-up questions. Simply put, the different samples were best investigated with the method best suited to each sample. Second, the interview answers allowed us to create the structured survey questionnaire used in the second study. That is, the expert interviews were critical to creating a non-expert survey. In this way, doing interviews then a survey was a logical progression. Third, we hold the view that multiple methods are desirable when possible. We think they enhance the contribution by reducing the potential for mono-method biases and idiosyncrasies. Although the use of different methods creates across-study comparison confounds, we believed the trade-off was nevertheless advantageous.

Study 1

The first study used in-depth interviews of art experts to investigate opinions of the Lee and Chun cases. The interviewers explored the extent to which Chun and Lee were believed and why.

Method

In-depth interviews were conducted with 19 people: 11 painters, 3 directors of art museums, 3 art reporters, 1 professional appraiser of art, and 1 painter who self-claimed to have forged some art works in the past. The interviews were conducted in person and individually in places where each interviewee preferred to meet. The interviewees were in their 30s to 70s and had been working in their respective areas for between 10 to nearly 50 years. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, most of the interviewees preferred to remain anonymous. Further demographic information about the interviewees is not revealed here.

The interview questions asked (1) Do you think Chun's (Lee's) claim to be true or false? (2) Why do you think she (he) tells the truth or a lie? (3) If do you think others who had direct involvement with this incident such as Museums are lying or telling the truth, why do you think they do so? The interview answers were transcribed and analyzed for frequencies. The direct questions and straight-forward answers did not require multiple coders, although a co-author independently verified the accuracy of the data.

Results

The Chun case (no apparent motive)

Out of 19 interviewees, 17 (89%) considered her claim to be true. Of the 17 who believed her, 16 (94% of believers, 84% of total) said Ms. Chun did not have any reason to lie. As reasons for her being truthful, 10 interviewees (59% of the believers) stated that considering Ms. Chun's personality, she was probably truthful. This implies that 10 (59%) interviewees were making internal attributions and 16 (94%) mentioned reasons. The percentages sum to more than 100% because some participants offered accounts in both categories.

Of the two experts who believed that Chun's painting was authentic and thus did not believe her, one expert advanced a reason to lie (enhancing the value of her work) while

the other thought the claim was an honest mistake, that she believed her claim, but that she was confused.

Many of the 17 experts who believed Chun thought that the museum had a reason to lie. Twelve suggested that the museum was trying to save face and protect the reputation of the institution while 11 suggested that since they spent the money on the acquisition, lying was a way of avoiding responsibility. Seven experts thought that there were external pressures that might motivate false claims. Two experts believed that the museum's position was false, but that the denials were in good faith and they honestly believed in the work's authenticity.

The Lee case (apparent motive)

Out of 19 interviewees, 16 (84%) considered his claim to be false. Of 16 disbelievers, 7 (37%) said that considering Mr. Lee's personality, he was probably deceptive. This implies that these interviewees were making internal attributions. Eight interviewees (42%) attributed the projected motives for lie to external pressure. Three interviewees (16%) expressed an opinion that Mr. Lee was probably confused in such a way that he did not mean to be lying but he might have an incorrect view of the situation. Two suspected deception but said the motives were not clear. Thirteen of the sixteen (81%) thought that the gallery had a financial motive to lie.

Of the experts who believed Lee was honest, one said he had no reason to lie and the other believed him because artists are people of honest character. For their reasons to believe Lee, they stated that the police had political motivations for making false accusations.

Comparisons of Chun and Lee cases

Unlike Chun's case where Chun was contradicting the claim of Museum, Lee's case involved both Lee's and the gallery's claim that Lee's works (i.e. 13 paintings) are genuine. In Lee's case, 13 interviewees considered the galleries to be lying and 2 considered the police to be lying. The galleries' reasons were that they needed to be in line with the artist because they need to prevent the art price from going down and protect their relationship with the artist. As the reason for the police lying about their investigation's findings, the interviewees cited external pressure from those in high power positions who want to protect their reputation and their investment in the art.

Hypothesis one was tested with a McNemar's test instead of chi-square test of independence. McNemar's test is used for paired nominal data and, in this study, the interviewees answered questions about both Chun and Lee. Examining if the 19 interviewees' veracity judgements were different for the Chun case compared to the Lee case, the proportion of those believing Chun was statistically significantly larger from the proportion of believing Lee, McNemar's test statistic (χ^2) = 14.07, $p < .001$ (two-tailed). The percentages are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Veracity assessments of Chun and Lee in study 1.

Artist	Truth	Lie
Chun	89%	11%
Lee	16%	84%

Summary

The data were consistent with the main hypothesis that Chun would be believed more often than Lee. Nearly 90% of the experts believed Chun compared with 16% who believed Lee. Further, the qualitative data demonstrated the pervasiveness of projected motives in expert deliberation of the veracity of claims. The data also suggest that dispositional attributions play a role, and that dispositional attributions may be more common as explanations for honesty rather than deceit.

Study 2

Method

Convenience sampling was used to recruit ($N = 141$) participants. A researcher approached people in public places (e.g. café) and in graduate classes and asked for voluntary participation. The average age was 37.99 ($SD = 11.49$), slightly more than half of the participants were women ($n = 83$, 58.87%), and for education level, 59.57% undergraduate degree, 18.44% graduate degree, 7.80% currently in college, 12.77% high school diploma, 0.71 ($n = 1$) less than high school, and no answer = 1. When asked if they know about the art industry in Korea (1 = not at all, 5 = very well), mean was 2.33 ($SD = 0.87$); 15.6% indicated 1 = not at all, 44% not much, 33.3% average, 4.3% somewhat, and 2.1% very well.

Before answering the survey questions, participants read overview information about each forgery case (see Appendix). One item for each artist asked participants to evaluate each painter's claim as the truth, a lie, 'I don't know', or 'no interest.' For participants who believed an artist, they were asked why with fixed response options. Response options included no reason to lie, the artist is individually an honest person, artists are collectively honest, or if there were situational pressures motivating honesty. For participants who did not believe an artist, they were also asked why. Response options included a reason to lie, situational pressures motivating deceit, or confusion resulting in an honest mistake. Participants were also given an opportunity to provide open-ended other reasons for believing or not believing the artist.

Results

As shown in Table 2, of the 141 participants, 40.43% considered Chun's claim to be true and 2.13% considered it as a lie. On the other hand, 20.57% considered Lee's claim to be true and 14.18% as a lie. Although over 40% of the participants made the veracity evaluation, more than 50% of the participants indicated as 'I don't know' or 'I have no interest'.

Table 2. Veracity assessments of Chun and Lee in study 2.

Artist	Truth	Lies	Do Not Know	No Interest	
Chun					
<i>n</i>	57	3	61	20	Total $n = 141$
%	40.43	2.13	43.26	14.18	$\chi^2 (3) = 68.33, p < .001$
Lee					
<i>n</i>	29	20	72	20	Total $n = 141$
%	20.57	14.18	51.06	14.18	$\chi^2 (3) = 52.62, p < .001$

More than 50% of the participants indicated that either 'I don't know' or 'I have no interest.' Among those participants who did express an opinion, however, the data strongly support main hypothesis that Chun would be believed more often than Lee. Specifically, 57 of the 141 participants (40.43%) considered Chun's claim to be truthful while only 3 (2.13%) thought she was lying; for comparing the proportion of truth versus lie judgments, the chi-square value was significant, $\chi^2 = 48.60$, $p < .001$. On the other hand, 29 (20.57%) considered Lee's claim to be true and 20 (14.18%) as a lie. A chi-square test comparing the proportion of truth versus lie judgments was not significant, $\chi^2 = 1.65$, $p = .199$.

Additionally, as in Study 1, McNemar's test was also conducted with data from participants who indicated truth and lie judgments for both Chun and Lee. Because a good number of people who chose 'I don't know' or 'no interest' for either Chun or Lee, the usable number of participants who provided the exact veracity judgments for both Chun and Lee was small ($n = 33$). Nevertheless, the test showed a significant difference in the proportion of participants believing Chun versus Lee, test statistics (χ^2) = 7.11, $p = .008$ (two-tailed). That is, of the 31 participants who believed Chun, 22 thought Lee was honest and 9 thought Lee was lying, whereas 2 participants who thought Chun was lying also thought Lee was lying.

The reasons people provided for belief were examined. Because so few participants doubted Chun, only the data from the 57 Chun believers are further explored. The most common reason for belief was that artists are generally honest people ($n = 20$, 35.09%). Only 2 (2.51%) people thought Chun was honest because she was an especially honest person. Situational attributions were mentioned by 18 (31.58%) participants while 13 (22.81%) said she had no reason to lie.

Regarding Lee, of the 29 participants who believed him, 13 (44.83%) said he had no reason to lie while 12 reported that artists are generally honest people. Only 4 (13.7%) listed situational pressures and no one thought Lee was an especially honest person. Of the Lee doubters, 60% thought he was lying to save face (a motive to lying) while 30% thought he had situational pressures to lie. One (5.0%) thought he might honestly believe his own claim.

Among the 20 (14.18% of total) respondents who thought Lee was lying, a majority (12 of 20, 60%) attributed a personal financial motive for deception. An additional 30% thought he was pressured to lie by actors in the art industry such as gallery owners and art collectors. Just 5% thought he might be honesty mistaken, and the remaining 5% did not select a motive.

Summary

Compared to the experts investigated in Study 1, the participants in Study 2 were generally more trusting and truth-biased. Nevertheless, Chun was the more believable of the two. Only 2% thought Chun was lying compared to 14% who thought Lee was lying. Of those who had an opinion, a substantial majority (95%) believed Chun, who lacked an apparent motive for deception compared to 60% who believed Lee. Both internal attributions and perceptions of motives guided judgments. The data once again were consistent with the hypotheses.

General discussion

Two contemporary art forgery scandals in Korea (see Doo, 2016; The Korea Herald, 2016) provided an opportunity for a field test of the projected motive model which is a module of truth-default theory (Levine, 2014, 2020). The core idea of the projected motive model is that when trying to decide whether to believe a communicator, people consider if the communicator seems to have a motive to lie. When there is no obvious motive for deception, people tend to believe others. In contrast, when a communicator seems to have a motive to lie, people are more likely to see the communication as deceptive than when absent a motive.

The two contemporary art forgery scandals examined here involved two famous Korean artists; Lee U-fan and Chun Kyung-ja. Lee claimed to have painted suspected forgeries attributed by him and was accused of profiting from the sale of forged paintings. Chun, in contrast, denied that she had painted a work attributed to her that was exhibited in a national gallery. Lee had an apparent motive to lie while Chun lacked an obvious deception motive.

The projected motive model clearly predicts people are more likely to believe Chun than Lee. Two studies, one involving interviews with art experts and the second involving a survey of non-experts yielded results consistent with this prediction. More people believed Chun's claim. This is remarkable because the results of extensive analysis by local prosecutors ruled Chun's claim false (although other evidence supported her).

Additional evidence for the projected motive model came from the explanations that participants provided for their belief or disbelief. Many participants listed a lack of motives as reason for believing an artist. Similarly, many participants who thought an artist was lying ascribed a deception motive. The experts also ascribed motives to the police, gallery, museum and other players.

An interesting trend in the data was that internal-dispositional attributions seemed to be more common in explaining behaviors deemed honest. Malle (2004) holds that people make dispositional or situational attributions about non-voluntary behavior but look for reasons to explain intentional behavior. The current findings were generally consistent with Malle's account.

Differences between the results of two studies are also interesting. For example, the participants in Study 2 were considerably more truth-biased than the experts in Study 1, especially in regard to Lee's case. The differences may be attributable to the interplay between the availability of external evidence, knowledge of the evidence, and possessing the expertise to factor in the evidence. In TDT, much like projected motives, external evidence plays two critical roles. First, evidence prompts suspicion when what is said contradicts known facts. This may account for the lower truth-bias in Study 1. The experts were unlikely to default to passive belief because they were aware of evidence suggesting the possibility of deception. In TDT, once suspicion is triggered, then people actively consider the possibility of deception. If the evidence is compelling, it can be used as a sufficient basis for making a determination of honesty or deceit. In the current cases, however, the evidence was not definitive. Consequently, people relied on other sorts of information such as projected motives and dispositional attributions.

Implications

The findings have a number of important theoretical, practical, and methodological implications. Theoretically, the two studies provide field tests of TDT proposition 6 and the projected motive model. Adding evidence from field studies to prior support from the lab adds to the ecological validity of TDT. The other theoretically notable contribution was the addition of Malle's distinction between intentional and unintentional actions in attribution theory within the context of deception. That is, people's understanding of deception as intentional and honest as unintentional allows for the integration of deception and attribution theories.

Due to the case-study nature of this research, the findings show how communication theory can be applied to the public understanding of scandals. How the public perceives social actor's motives (or lack thereof) impact their judgments of wrongdoing. It follows that news reporters, for example, might include information on motives in their stories and that public relation professionals would be advised to consider public perceptions of apparent motives in their strategic responses to crisis situations.

Methodologically, the current studies differ from most deception detection experiments in one especially important way. In experiments, communicators are often randomly assigned to either lie or tell the truth. Participants' reason for honesty or deception is following experimental instructions which occurs at random (Levine, 2018b). In such experiments, ascertaining motives is not a viable option for lie detection. Outside the lab, however, motives not only impact the likelihood of honest and deceptive communication, apparent motives also affect perceptions of honesty. The current results therefore, highlight aspects of deception detection judgments that are precluded in most lab research.

Limitations and future directions

Because the two studies involved interview and survey methods to investigate two real scandals, the current studies lack the level of control of prior experiments testing the projected motive model. Lee and Chun, for example, differ in many ways other than apparent motives. Lee is male and Chun is female. Lee's scandal is more recent. Maybe people just believe female artists more or maybe people tacitly think there has been an increase in forgeries over time. These accounts, however, were not the reasons the participants in this research listed. Participants mentioned deceptive motives, not gender or trends over time. Further, the results align with the findings of prior experimental studies that did have greater control. Thus, there are reasons for confidence in the conclusions in spite of the lack of control. Further, the current findings show how prior experimental findings can apply beyond the lab.

A number of other limitations justify caution in interpreting the results. Neither study involved representative sampling. The sample size of Study 1 was quite small and from a small and unique population (Korean art experts). Many participants in Study 2 either did not have an opinion or were not familiar with the scandals. Because both studies focused on just two art scandals, it is unclear how well the findings may generalize to other cases of art forgery or other things people may lie about other than forged artwork. Nevertheless, the findings do align with theoretical expectations and with prior experimental results.

In the current data, the order of causation is murky. This work is based on the idea from TDT that perceptions of motive affect judgments of honesty and deceit. Attribution theorists, however, may well see the causation flow the other way. Social perceivers who judge an artist as deceptive may infer motives for their deceptive behavior (cf. Malle, 2004). Both accounts are plausible, and one does not preclude the other. Further experimental research will be useful in establishing causal order.

This paper serves as an example of what can be gained by opportunistic field research. Although studies such as this one cannot replace lab experiments, the current approach exemplifies how theoretical predictions can be tested in a non-lab setting. Doing so helps establish the robust nature of theoretical claims across applications and domains. Therefore, field studies in other contexts are needed.

Conclusion

Two art scandals in South Korea, one with a potential motive for deception and one without, provided an opportunity to test predictions of TDT in the field. The projected motive model predicts that judgments of honesty and deception are based on apparent motive for deception or the lack thereof. Consistent with predictions, the artist who appeared to gain from deception was doubted more than an artist who lacked an obvious reason to lie.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Si-Ah Lee (MA, Korea University) was a graduate student at the time when this research was conducted. Her research interests include various forms of deception and communication behaviors.

Hee Sun Park (PhD, University of California, Santa Barbara) is a professor in the School of Media and Communication at Korea University, Republic of Korea. Her research projects examine diverse topics in interpersonal and intercultural communication.

Timothy R. Levine (PhD, Michigan State University) is a distinguished professor and chair in the Department of Communication Studies at University of Alabama at Birmingham, United States. He is a leading expert in the area of deception detection.

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Appendix

Synopsis of each forgery case

Chun kyung-ja's alleged forgery case involving 'beautiful woman'

The controversy about 'Beautiful Woman' started when the painter, Chun, said 'Parents can recognize one's child. That is not my painting' after seeing a poster of the 'Beautiful Woman' exhibition at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in 1991. The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art and the Galleries Association of Korea disregarded Chun's claim and declared the painting to be authentic. Chun stopped painting and moved to USA. After Chun passed away in 2015, her surviving family revived the 'Beautiful Woman' dispute in order to clear the artist's name. At the request of Chun's family, a French image analysis firm Lumiere Technology evaluated the painting and concluded that there was only a 0.0002 percent chance that the piece could have been painted by Chun. As Chun's family filed a suit against the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office conducted a nearly five-month investigation and concluded the painting to be genuine. Despite the prosecution's conclusion, Chun's family insisted that they would fight back by taking all the possible legal actions.

Lee Ufan's alleged forgery case involving 'No. 780217' and 12 paintings

Following suspicions circulating about counterfeit Lee Ufan paintings being distributed in art market, the Seoul Police formally launched a full investigation in 2015 in response to information about fake paintings being sold by some galleries located in Insa-dong. The Seoul Police investigation concluded that 13 paintings including 'From Point' were fake and arrested accused forgers. 'From Point' was sold for a half-million dollars at the K-auction. Lee Ufan disputed the police findings and claimed that the 13 alleged fakes including 'No. 780217' were 'all authentic' after examining them with his own eyes. Although the Seoul Metropolitan Policy Agency and a Seoul Court ruled them to be fake, Lee continues claiming to have painted them, by saying 'A person's flow and rhythm are like one's fingerprints, which cannot be imitated. They [the 13 works] are undoubtedly mine'. The lawyer for Lee said, 'He won't reverse his judgment about his paintings because he spent a substantially long time making the judgment.'