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# The Importance of Being Earnest in Social Media: Juxtaposing Oscar Wilde's Script with an Empirical Case Study to Examine Digital Deceit from the Blogger's Perspective

## Abstract

Deceit in social media by independent bloggers is a topic of concern for brand managers and for consumers. Empirical research has focussed on the consumer or the brand rather than on the perspective of the online source. This paper elucidates the blogger's motivations for and the contexts in which she is most likely to publish deceitful content. The methodology is an analogical problem-solving process juxtaposing Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest" with an empirical case study. We use the analogy to reverse the perspective of the revisited study from the consumer to the blogger. The results support direct, differentiated, brand management of bloggers according to their level of expertise and to the adopted social or trade norm. A model is proposed.

*Key words: Stealth Marketing, Lying and Deception, Disclosure, Self-Presentation, Social Media*

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### Setting the Stage

In 2008 the AMA Journal of Public Policy & Marketing published a special section on Stealth Marketing. Among the special edition papers, the most frequently cited guerrilla attempt was a blog written by US citizens, Laura and Jim, about their road trip across America, camping in Wal-Mart parking lots. In their blog, which rapidly acquired a substantial following, Laura and Jim reported in glowing terms the encounters they had made with Wal-Mart personnel. A scandal broke when BusinessWeek (Gogoi 2006) revealed that the road trip was sponsored by Wal-Mart. This was not mentioned in the blog. In defence of the criticism, Laura, a freelance writer, claimed earnestness "We were planning a trip on our own dime, and we were thrilled to have a sponsor who would do all our legwork". She also said that she did not "feel like she's misleading anyone" (op cit). In their contribution to the special edition, Martin and Smith (2008) judged the Wal-Mart "flog" (fake blog) along with other, similar cases to be deceptive and contrary to the AMA's basic values of honesty, fairness, and openness. The following years brought research articles reinforcing the view that stealth marketing is morally wrong and potentially damaging to a firm's reputation (Magnini 2011). Publications examine the ethical issues related to masked marketing (Rinallo et al. 2013) and define the conditions under which a marketing tactic can be considered deceitful (Sher 2011). Immoral advertising practices have been emphasized as a core transgression with negative consequences on Consumer Perceived Ethicality (CPE) (Brunk 2010). Conceptual and deontology papers have focussed on covert marketing in the context of the Internet, on social media such as blogs (Magnini 2011) and on fake online customer reviews (Munzel 2015).

The literature which has emerged since the Wal-Mart flog takes either the perspective of the firm or that of the consumer. Work has been carried out on the relative influence and the timing of disclosure and non-disclosure of covert marketing sponsors (Campbell, Mohr and Verlegh 2013), on the credibility of overt versus covert marketing sources (Liljander, Gummerus and Söderlund 2015) and on the effects of lay-person versus expert self-presentations (Willemsen, Neijens and Bronner 2012). On the other hand, the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad and Wright 1994) has been used to study consumer coping strategies with marketing attempts (Evans and Park 2015; Wei, Fischer and Main 2008). In sum, scarce, if any, attention has been given to the motivations and to the *modus operandi* of Laura and Jim as the online

perpetrators of the initial crime.

Recent evidence of fake consumer reviews in social media has prompted a line of research into automated digital deception detection to protect consumers against "online spam" (Li et al. 2014). Computer science research centres on the use of natural language for detection of digital lie detection, whether the offenders are individuals (Ott et al. 2011) or fake consumer reviewers working in groups (Mukherjee, Liu and Glance 2012). However, these advances are not yet successfully applied by all the major online brands. A demonstration is found in TripAdvisor's repeated failure to detect bogus restaurants and to correct high rankings based on fake ratings by journalists (Mezmorian and Second 2015). The TripAdvisor example raises ethical questions about online deceit originating from third parties with direct or indirect professional interests in the content they produce.

Blogs may be produced by amateurs or by independent professionals such as consultants, gourmet chefs, fashionistas or beauticians. As their following grows, the authors of these blogs become 'influencers', integrated by brands as media in their social campaigns (Burns 2016). The influencers may abandon their initial trade for a full time social media activity, whether they manage the relationships with their sponsor brands directly or through an agency (Woods 2016). The adoption by the influencers of a social media norm as opposed to a trade norm creates a conflict of interest between the remunerated affiliated advertising and the independent editorial content. In the case of the influencers, there is a fuzzy line between the remunerated advertising model through affiliated links and the public relations (PR) model incentivised through free goods and invitations to PR events. This entertained confusion leads to less transparency than should be expected under FTC (Federal Trade Commission) guidelines (Kamerer 2015).

In the light of these contemporary concerns, the case of the blogger is of interest to revisit. Researching the perspective of the independent blogger can help management in impeding deviant behaviour and contributes the bloggers perspective to the corpus of literature on online deceit.

The topic of this paper is digital deceit by third party, online content editors who present themselves as independent of the brand whose products they endorse. The central research objective is to elucidate the contexts in which bloggers are most likely to lie by commission or by omission in producing intentionally misleading content, considering the underlying truth of the situation and their self-justification for deceit. The methodology

is a case study analysis involving the juxtaposition of empirical research, previously carried out by the authors in the context of a beauty blog (Salerno, Martin and Crié 2014), with Oscar Wilde's (1895) theatrical script "The Importance of Being Earnest". Through analogical reasoning, the complex underlying relationships between the concepts of the empirically grounded model are revealed. The phenomenological analysis of the literary work draws untapped meaning from the model and authorises the reversal of the perspective from the consumer to that of the blogger, extending the contribution to the context of digital deceit which would be difficult to examine under laboratory conditions.

The empirical case study adapts the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) (Friestad and Wright 1994) to a social media context where the commercial persuasion intentions of the online publisher are less apparent than in classical advertising media. The model explains the perceived sincerity of the source and the behavioural predispositions of the consumers according to the self-presentation and disclosure non-disclosure conditions. It accounts for the influence, on the perceived sincerity, of the inferences which the readers make of the internal (passion-sharing) and external (remuneration) motives of the online source from the blog presentation narrative. The empirical results are used to compare the effectiveness of editorial content provided by a layperson versus a professional and under disclosure and non-disclosure conditions. This provides insight into the motives of the online source in terms of the potential effectiveness of a deceitful marketing tactic.

There is an evident parallel between the remunerated professional blog editor who masquerades as an independent layperson and Oscar Wilde's country gentleman, Jack, who invents a fictitious, rogue brother, Ernest, to lead a more exciting life in town under the assumed false identity (Wilde 1895). The multiple semantic levels of Oscar Wilde's "Trivial Comedy for Serious People" substantiate its use as an allegory for the study of deceit in social interaction. Borrowing from Holyoak (1982), we employ the term allegory as "a discursive metaphorical analogy – metaphorical in that it relates disparate semantic domains, and discursive in that the metaphor makes an extended statement about the target topic".

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In the next section we position the relevance of the empirical case study and of the allegory in relation to the research into digital deceit. We then map the allegory to the context and to the findings of the empirical research. We explore three vertical levels of meaning corresponding to three semantic levels which we identify in Wilde's work. Each of these

levels relates horizontally to the target domain (the study) through the insights derived in the analogical mapping. We present the case study analysis, following the semantic structure of the theatre script to organize the thought processes and gain additional insights as we revisit and extend the findings of the study. The three levels derived from the horizontal map order the research problem into three successive questions. First, which deceitful blog presentation contexts are most likely to be effective compared with the truth? Second, do the comparisons of the effectiveness of the truth versus deceit hold when the product recommendations themselves are not in earnest? Third, given the underlying truth (affiliation, professional status, level of expertise), what is the likelihood of the online source lying by omission and or by commission? In the final section, we discuss the implications of the new contribution. An English language synopsis of the empirical research is available at <http://www.iae.univ-lille1.fr/recherche/projets-recherche/the-importance-of-being-earnest-in-social-media-annexes>. Quotations from Wilde (1895) will be made parenthetically<sup>1</sup>. Due to the methodology and to the topic, the literature review is not included as a specific section but is implicit throughout the paper.

### **The relevance of the empirical case study and of the allegory for researching digital deceit**

We adopt Sher's (2011) definition of deceit as a marketing tactic whereby "the agent intentionally performs an action *she*<sup>2</sup> expects will bring about a particular misconception in her target audience". This definition covers stealth attempts but it also extends to a context where an amateur blogger falsely claims to have professional qualifications or to a context where a professional content editor publishes a product review without disclosing her affiliation. More specifically, we refer to online or "digital deception", a term defined by Hancock (2007) as "the intentional control of information in a technologically mediated message to create a false belief in the receiver of the message."

The blog can be considered an easy, low cost type of deceit with a high probability of success due to the ease of manipulating text content and to the targets' "low information literacy and lack of expectation for verifiability and even accountability" (Tsikerdekis and Zeadally 2014). The temptation for the independent blogger to deceive is therefore high, entailing risks for firms of losing their consumer perceived ethical reputations through the autonomous actions of third party bloggers whose personal motivations and perception of the consequences of deceit may not match those of the firm. Such uncontrolled content potentially creates as much damage as "flogs"

(Martin and Smith 2008), prohibited by legislation such as the FTC product endorsement guidelines (Federal Trade Commission 2014).

Digital deceit in social media can operate through the channel, through the content or through the assumed identity of the sender or of the author (Tsikerdekis and Zeadally 2014). In their thorough review, Tsikerdekis and Zeadally draw on two streams of literature, on the one hand the literature on lying and on the other hand, the literature on identity focussing on self-presentation. The corpus of empirical research on lying is useful in examining the perspective of the author of voluntarily misleading digital content. Most of the experimental protocols use dice throwing or other chance mechanisms whereby the subjects are asked to report a win or lose condition. The manipulation is such that subjects are financially rewarded for cheating. These studies compare the declarations of the subjects versus the distribution which would be obtained if no one cheated. This allows to measure both the percentage of people who cheat and the overall rate of lying. However, it is difficult to conclude from these results, other than speculation, what the effects on consumer perceptions would be in a natural situation of an online source attempting to write false content.

**The empirical case study as the target domain**

Albeit carried out under laboratory conditions, the results of the research, conducted by the authors in the context of a beauty blog, can provide insight into the motives of the online source in terms of the potential effectiveness of a deceitful marketing tactic. Beauty is a propitious blog theme for amateurs, experts, professional beauticians and make-up artists from whose ranks some of the most high-earning influencers emerge. Moreover, the beauty industry is under criticism for misleading advertising (O’Neil 2014). The beauty blogger can lie by commission through the content text narrative by making false assertions about the product or she can lie by omission by not disclosing her financial interests through affiliation with a brand. She can also lie by commission in assuming a false identity, passing herself off for a consumer when in fact she is a professional. A blogger presents his or her identity through narrative in the text form of the blog content or through a series of successive asynchronous posts through which readers can make inferences. The model contributed by the authors reposes on the inferences the consumers make of the cues provided by the blogger from the self-presentation narrative. For the deception to be operative, the receiver must believe or enter the lie. At different levels of perceived sincerity, the underlying mechanisms may alter the efficacy of the deceit. The empirical results from the test protocol conducted in the context of a beauty blog therefore constitute an appropriate case for the study of digital deceit.

For reference purposes, the results of the case study are consolidated in Tables 1, 2 and 3 for each of four experimental blog contexts. Table 1 shows the means of the variables studied. Table 2 shows the effects of the external and of the internal motive inferences on the perceived sincerity, Table 3 shows the effect of the perceived sincerity and of the perceived expertise on the intent towards the product.

**TABLE 1**  
**Means Tests for the Four Experimental Blogs**

	<b>External motive inference M (SD)</b>	<b>Internal motive inference M (SD)</b>	<b>Perceived Sincerity M (SD)</b>	<b>Perceived Expertise M (SD)</b>	<b>Product Intention M (SD)</b>
Overall	3.73 (1.65)	5.51 (1.42)	4.63 (1.32)	3.80 (1.54)	3.92 (1.51)
<u>Blog 1</u> (n=106)					
Layperson/Non-disclosure	3.42 (1.73)	5.89 (1.28)	4.87 (1.32)	2.86 (1.19)	4.00 (1.51)
<u>Blog 2</u> (n=81)					
Layperson/Disclosure	3.44 (1.57)	5.88 (1.27)	4.90 (1.23)	2.91 (1.14)	3.94 (1.47)
<u>Blog 3</u> (n=82)					
Professional/Non-disclosure	4.06 (1.62)	5.32 (1.28)	4.16 (1.23)	4.61 (1.26)	3.89 (1.43)
<u>Blog 4</u> (n=114)					
Professional/Disclosure	3.99 (1.58)	5.05 (1.58)	4.56 (1.36)	4.74 (1.36)	3.84 (1.60)

Levene’s tests validated equal variance for all variables. The Scheffé Post Hoc tests show significant differences in mean external motive inference between the contexts [1 and 3] and [1 and 4]. Mean internal motive inferences and perceived expertise are significantly different between [1 and 3], [1 and 4], [2 and 3] and [2 and 4]. Significant differences in mean perceived sincerity exist between the contexts [1 and 3] and [2 and 3]. There were no significant differences in mean product intentions between the blog contexts.



**TABLE 2**

**The Effects of the External and Internal Motive Inferences on Perceived Sincerity**

<b>dv = Perceived Sincerity</b>	<b>External motive inference β</b>	<b>Internal motive inference β</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>
<u>Layperson</u>	-.23**	.43**	43.83**	.32
Blog 1: Layperson/Non-disclosure	-.18*	.55**	36.00**	.41
Blog 2: Layperson/Disclosure	-.31**	.27*	12.16**	.24
<u>Professional Beautician</u>	.05	.59**	48.51**	.34
Blog 3: Professional/Non-disclosure	.05	.49**	12.13**	.24
Blog 4: Professional/Disclosure	.08	.70**	45.03**	.45

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01

β standardized regression coefficients for each of the four experimental blog contexts

**TABLE 3**

**The Effects of Perceived Sincerity and Perceived Expertise on Product Intention**

<b>dv = Product Intention</b>	<b>Perceived Sincerity β</b>	<b>Perceived Expertise β</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>
<u>Layperson</u>	.27**	.26**	16,82**	.16
Blog 1: Layperson/Non-disclosure	.25*	.08	4.10*	.07
Blog 2: Layperson/Disclosure	.32**	.53**	26.40**	.40
<u>Professional Beautician</u>	.32**	.24**	24,87**	.21
Blog 3: Professional/Non-disclosure	.22*	.15	3.17*	.07
Blog 4: Professional/Disclosure	.38**	.28**	25.91**	.32

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01

β standardized regression coefficients for each of the four experimental blog contexts

The results show that for bloggers presenting themselves as a layperson, there is a strong positive effect of the internal passion sharing motive inference on perceived sincerity. This effect will be offset by the negative effect of the external inference on same if they disclose their financial interests. On the other hand, in the case of the self-proclaimed professional beautician, the internal motive inference will have a stronger positive effect on perceived sincerity under disclosure conditions than if she is covert. In addition, the positive effect of perceived sincerity on intentions is highest for the transparent professional. In terms of the comparative effectiveness of the different presentation contexts, these results encourage transparency among professional online sources, while they discourage disclosure by a self-proclaimed layperson. However, the model should be used prudently. The effectiveness of the persuasion tactic will depend not only on the readers' interpretation of the self-presentation and of the disclosure cues, but also on the perceived sincerity of the source in making 'earnest' product recommendations. At higher or lower levels of perceived sincerity, independent of the presentation - disclosure context, the comparative efficacy of the blog presentations will differ. Moreover, there is no significant difference in the mean product intentions between the four blog contexts (Table 1). If a content editor were to test the four stimuli on a split run basis, she would conclude that there is no difference in the efficiency of the endorsements in generating revenue. The relationships between the variables are not immediately apparent, due to the negative and null (positive) effects of disclosure on the effects of the external (internal) motive inferences on perceived sincerity, moderated by the self-presentation narratives. Therefore, to gain an understanding of the circumstances in which a blogger might be tempted to deceive her readers, the underlying mechanisms which are revealed by the model warrant further exploration and thought.

***The theatre script as the base analog for answering research questions in the target domain***

Much of the digital identity literature stems from Goffman's (1959) use of theatre as a metaphor for self-presentation, as reconsidered in a social media context by Hogan (2010). Goffman's dramaturgical model of human interaction sets individuals on the stage of everyday life, playing situational roles that explicitly or implicitly signify social characteristics so that they may control the impressions their audience makes of them. Through these inferences, the actor's identity is construed by others as the intended role. Hogan (2010) clarifies the ontological distinction between Goffman's actor, performing in real-time before an audience, and the asynchronous social media artefact, such as a face-book Facebook post or "exhibition", which "lives on

for others to view on their time". In their conceptual paper, Orsatti and Reimer (2015) posit that identity making in social media is a multimodal, "active achievement involving reflective, narrative and active modes". Individuals narrate coherent life stories through asynchronous artefacts exhibited on social networks that fit contextually into the narratives of their social contacts. They actively perform roles in synchronous social and professional situations, all the while constructing a reflective representation of their inner self which is perceived as coherent despite the multiplicity of the identities which they project. From this angle, the self-presentation narrative of the case study blog is a single, asynchronous artefact contributing to the identity making of the online source. It is not, strictly in Goffman's sense, a performance by the actors in interaction with the audience. However, in considering the theatre metaphor, while the performance is synchronous, the script remains as an artefact, capable of reinitiating the dynamic interpretation by the actors in many ways. The script contains the static properties of the artefact together with the dynamic properties of the interactions of the actors with the other players and with the audience. One of Goffman's main propositions is the use of the theatre metaphor to explain how individuals as actors control the impressions their audience makes of them. However, this use of the theatre underplays the role of authorial control. In her contribution to a book about Shakespeare's use of facial expression, Loomis (2015) shows how Shakespeare masters the conveyance of identity, emotion and the moral fibre of his characters by generations of future players. Similarly, we posit that, rather than the actors, it is Oscar Wilde, as the master of social interaction, who has the inherent understanding of the mechanics of deceit. His theatre script can therefore appropriately serve as an analogy to structure the thought processes as we unravel the complex underlying mechanisms of the empirical case study. The untapped meaning drawn from the model through the analysis of the script authorizes the reversal of the perspective of the grounded model from the consumer to the blogger, without recourse to further experimentation under conditions difficult to manipulate, given the research question.

Holyoak's (1982) analogical framework for literary interpretation accurately describes the process which we adopt. The interpretation of the vertical levels of meaning of the literary work gives rise to horizontal analogies between the base analog (the play) and the three semantic levels of the target analog (the empirical study). Namely, there are parallels to be drawn at the "trivial" "surface"

(Lady Bracknell, 3. 169)<sup>3</sup> level of the plot, from the dialogues and at the deeper "serious" level of the underlying meaning which Wilde conveys through his use of contrasts. This horizontal mapping produces insights from the interpretation of the base analog and which are seen to apply to the target analog. The horizontal, semantic levels then vertically structure the target case study analysis.

### **The triple-level horizontal map from "The Importance of Being Earnest" to the case study**

The first level of the map to the target domain is provided by the plot; who is deceiving whom, about what and for which immediately evident, external, motives. Jack and Algernon have deceived each other, and they will continue to deceive Gwendolen and Cecily until the disclosure in Act III. The other characters also deceive. Miss Prism omits to tell Gwendolen in which dramatic circumstances she had lost the novel she had written (2. 135) and Lady Bracknell deceives her husband when she follows Gwendolen to Jack's country estate (3. 167). In the study, the online source, 'Agathe' is the potential deceiver. She may be acting alone, in collusion with a firm or may not even exist, such as in the case of a 'flog'.

The literature defines deception as the opposite of truthfulness. Deception can be through 'omission' or 'commission'. While omission is deceiving someone by not providing all the information necessary for the receiver to apprehend the truth, commission is an active form of lying (Lee 2004). Sher (2011) defines deceptive marketing tactics as those which "intend to bring about a consumer misconception by providing what the marketer believes is false evidence, omitting key evidence, or misrepresenting what the evidence means". All three forms of deception are found in the play; however, the deceptive modes differ with the characters. Jack lies by omission by not mentioning Cecily's existence to Gwendolen, he lies by commission about being called Ernest and he attempts to misrepresent the evidence of the inscription inside the cigarette case when he tells Algernon that Cecily is his aunt (1. 113-114). Algernon, on the other hand, lies only by commission. He lies by commission each time he "Bunburies", using a fictitious invalid friend, Bunbury as cover to escape from his social obligations in town. He lies by commission when he assumes the identity of Jack's invented brother, Ernest, to meet Cecily. In the target domain context, the online source can lie by omission about her financial interests with the recommended brand, she can lie by commission about her level of expertise or about her layperson status, or by making false assertions about the products and/or she can misrepresent the evidence

through misleading product recommendations. The triadic relationship between the proclaimed deceitful identity (assumed name Ernest), the deceiver's perception of the identity (real name Jack) and the underlying real identity (Jack is really Ernest) is reflected in the target domain. This relationship structure maps to the proclaimed truth (the deceitful blog), the deceiver's perception of the truth (the online source's beliefs about the products and about her level of expertise) and the underlying truth (the product characteristics, her actual level of expertise, her professional or her lay-person status).

We can additionally map the deceiver's perception of the moral integrity of the audience, acting as a moral inhibitor for the deceit. Based on Sher's (2011) framework, the *intent* to manipulate the audience's normal decision-making process through a deceptive blog content is a necessary component for the study of contexts in which the source would be likely to deceive. In other words, the deceiver (Jack – Agathe, the blogger) must intend to manipulate the receiver (Gwendolen – the consumer) through the object of the deception (the name Ernest – the blog presentation and/or content) with a specific intent to manipulate her decision process (selection of an eligible husband / evaluation of the product benefits) to a specific end (marriage / financial gain from consumer response). Initially, neither Jack nor Algernon intend to manipulate anyone since the object of their lies (the fictitious Ernest and Bunbury) serve only their own personal pursuits without any intention to undermine their audience's decision-making process. It is only when the intent is linked to the goal and to a specific receiver through the marriage proposal that Jack and Algernon are forced to choose between disclosure (revealing their true names), or turning the deceit into truth (changing their names). We can relate this to a covert amateur blogger's dilemma of either deceiving her peer consumers through non-disclosure or giving up the affiliation to embody the truth.

The second vertical level of meaning in Wilde's work is the level of discourse. The juxtaposition with the target domain operates on two levels. The receiver perceives the sincerity and of the trustworthiness of the source through the surface level proclaimed discourse, while she also perceives an underlying 'truth' which the receiver can build as an ideal or detect as reality. At the surface level, an evident analogy from the play to the conceptual framework of the study lies in the inferences the receivers make from the self-portrayal narrative of the deceivers. ALGERNON (1. 114). You are the most earnest looking person I ever saw in my life.

CECILY (2. 151). There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence.

GWENDOLEN (1. 122). The only really safe name is Ernest.

The reader who believes the self-portrayal / disclosure blog context would not accept the product recommendation in the same way under a different scenario. It is the receiver who bestows trustworthiness on the source through her perception of the cues designed by the source. At the underlying level of truth, both Gwendolen and Cecily have built an ideal anchored in the name "Ernest". The ideal built by the receiver is more beautiful than real life, however the ideal is fragile. This cognitive concept is demonstrated in the study results; the inferences the reader makes of the external motives of the "amateur" beauty blogger, were found to have a negative (therefore potentially destructive) effect on the perceived sincerity of the source. As soon as the consumer intuits the external motives, the beautiful image of the sincere amateur beauty blogger is destroyed. Since the acceptance of the truth is unimaginable to Gwendolen and Cecily, Jack and Ernest sense, through their intuitive grasp of the principles of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957), that disclosure will entail the rejection of their marriage proposals. The only apparent solution for Algy and Jack is to remove the dissonance by having themselves christened as Ernest. Similarly, the online source may intuitively sense the underlying mechanisms in the model. The empirical results can therefore be used to consider the blogger's perception of the effectiveness of the envisaged deceitful blog presentations versus the truth. The perception of the effectiveness constitutes her external motive for the deceit.

The external motives of the deceivers are immediately accessible to the audience. Algernon poses as Ernest to meet Cecily, Jack omits to mention the existence of Cecily to Gwendolen so as not to jeopardize her acceptance of his proposal of marriage. Lady Bracknell's mercenary motives in ensuring "eligible" partners for her daughter and for her nephew, are evident to the audience (1. 124-126). In the same way, the study results show that the external motives of the blogger are immediately accessible to the reader through disclosure and through the professional status of the proclaimed beautician. The characters also deceive for internal motives. Jack and Algernon deceive Cecily and Gwendolen in the pursuit of their romantic passion. The initial deception by Jack in assuming the identity of the fictitious Ernest, in



inventing the 'rogue brother' and by Algernon's "Bunburying" were for identity motives. In each case the deceit allows them to live according to their own ideal. The online source's own perceived truth, as an ideal identity for themselves or as a perceived benefit for the reader can constitute an internal motive for deceit. Thus, the articulation of the self-presentation of the deceiver, of the ideal perceived by the receiver, together with the perception each may have of the underlying truth and of the other's degree of knowledge of the underlying truth, reveal the motives for and condition the self-justification of the deceit.

Beneath the second strata of language lies the third semantic level of underlying meaning, conveyed by the contrasts in Wilde's work. At this deepest level, the horizontal map to the target domain is less immediate (Holyoak 1982). However, the analogies which tie the metaphor to the target at the superior levels we have discussed, provoke thought about how the concepts found at this level could apply. Lying to tell the truth (L. West, personal communication, 2013)<sup>4</sup> is one such underlying concept, discernible throughout the work. This underlying theme is conveyed in three different ways at the three semantic levels of plot, discourse and meaning.

The most evident way in which Wilde communicates this message is through the denouement of the plot. In the final scene, it transpires that Ernest really is called Ernest and that he has a brother, Algernon. Therefore, Ernest has been earnest all along, unbeknown to himself, while Algernon was also telling the truth when posing as Jack's brother. The second way in which Wilde conveys the concept of lying to tell the truth is through the language of lies woven into the dialogue. Throughout Wilde's work, the dialogues contrast the socially acceptable surface level discourse with the underlying, socially deviant messages which the characters exchange. When a character is ironic, he believes he is 'lying', however in many instances he is in fact telling the truth. Wilde uses the technique of placing oxymora and paradoxes in the speech to convey to the audience the underlying, true message as a perceptible shadow of the socially acceptable surface discourse. The surface discourse is the lie and the truth is the underlying message accessible through the semantic contrasts. Wilde is using the language of lies to deliver the true message. This linguistic, pragmatic technique allows Wilde to convey the underlying truth about the insincerity or the sincerity of the characters. The less sincere the character is, the more ironic contrasts to the truth

and the more antonyms and paradoxes figure in the speech. On the other hand, when the character is in earnest, they 'talk straight'.

The third way in which Wilde uses lying to tell the truth is in the portrayal of the characters as opposed to their true identities. The overtly morally upright characters such as the "innocent" victims of the deceit, Gwendolen and Cecily (2.161), the "admirable" (1. 115) and "respectable" (3. 174) Miss Prism and Lady Bracknell, who is willing to override her social norm when the potential financial gain exceeds a certain limit, are those who most frequently reveal their insincerity through the language. While the 'deceivers' Algernon, and particularly Ernest are sincere in their exchanges with these same characters (3. 165). Ernest is only insincere when talking to Algernon. In this way, Oscar Wilde is using the characters' externally portrayed personalities as the lie which tells the truth about their inner identity, and indeed his own, all the while making a statement about the hypocrisy of the contemporary society. While the external motives of deceit are accessible in the play, the relationship to the truth is an internal, identity issue both for the source and for the audience. The lie is on the outside, on the surface, trivial, apparent, while the serious truth is on the inside, underneath the socially respectable discourse, hidden but remains perceptible through the deceiver's and the receivers' interpretation of and identification with it.

How Oscar Wilde uses the language, the contrasts and the character portrayal to articulate the lie with the truth stimulates thought about the processes operating in the target domain. The reader of the beauty blog can detect the external motives for deceit through her knowledge of persuasion tactics. However, she can also infer the sincerity of the blogger from the discourse. Readers may decide to reject the message, or to accept it for their own identity driven reasons. For example, a reader may accept not totally convincing assertions about the benefits of beauty products because the idea of the youth preserving properties bolsters her ideal self-image. This raises questions about who, of the source and the reader is closest to the truth and what benefits the reader may draw from accepting what he consciously or unconsciously perceives as a persuasion tactic (Wei, Fischer and Main 2008). Moreover, the blogger may lie, as Jack/ Ernest do, without the intention to manipulate the audience, for her own internal identity driven motives, such as the level of expertise. The concept of lying to tell the truth therefore merits further exploration as we revisit the empirical study, with the aim of gaining insight into the bloggers perspective.

Our interpretation of the three semantic levels of the literary work (plot, style, meaning), has provided the new insights into the target domain which we have discussed *infra*. This has represented the horizontal mapping stage of the analogy. In the next section, we proceed to the problem-solving stage described in Holyoak's (1982) framework. This vertical process focusses on the target analog. We apply the salient insights which have emerged from the analogy to deploy three sequential analytical steps. First, we use the model at face-value to estimate the potential effectiveness of the contrasting truthful – deceitful blog contexts, according to the true identity of the online source as a professional (Jack) or as a layperson (Ernest). Second, the analogies from the discourse level of the allegory suggest that we further investigate the effectiveness under conditions where the blogger is not sincere in her product recommendations. Third, we consider how the concept of lying to tell the truth can be employed in conjunction with the study results to investigate the blogger's relationship with the truth, her self-justification for deceit and provide a rationale for positing the likelihood of the deceit.

**The case study analysis following the semantic structure of the theatre script**

**Act 1 (Level 1-Surface). The effectiveness of truthful versus deceitful blog presentations**

"The truth is rarely pure and never simple" (Algernon, 1. 116).

In this section, we examine the effectiveness of the 'truthful' versus the 'deceitful' blog presentations as shown in Table 4. The comparisons were not studied in the original paper and provide a deeper understanding of the target domain. The target study does not distinguish between a deceitful and a truthful blog presentation so, for the sake of our analysis, we assume that the true context is where the online source has an affiliation with the recommended brand. Neither do we know whether 'Agathe' is truly a professional beautician or truly a layperson, therefore we consider both perspectives in turn. We consider conditions where the source is in earnest about the product recommendations. We define effectiveness as the level of favourable intentions towards the products. However, we also examine perceived sincerity since this would be important to the source in terms of reputation. The online source estimates the effectiveness of the tactic versus the truth based on her intuition of the mechanisms of the model, if she would not be found out. Therefore, in this step we assume that the reader does not detect the deceit.

In the 'professional' blog versions, Agathe presents herself as a qualified beautician. While the perceived expertise is higher in the case of a professional than in that of the layperson presentation (Table 1), we choose not to refer to the source as an 'expert'. More accurately, we define 'expert' as referring to the level of true or proclaimed expertise regarding the recommended products.

**TABLE 4**

**The Six Cases of Digital Deceit which are Examined**

	<b>Blog 1</b>	<b>Blog 2</b>	<b>Blog 3</b>	<b>Blog 4</b>
<b>Deceitful Presentation</b>	<b>Layperson /Non-disclosure</b>	<b>Layperson/ Disclosure</b>	<b>Professional/ Non-disclosure</b>	<b>Professional/ Disclosure</b>
<b>Underlying Truth</b>				
Blog Professional/Disclosure	4 Omission and Commission (P <sub>3</sub> )	Commission (P <sub>2</sub> )	Omission (P <sub>1</sub> )	
Blog 2 Layperson/Disclosure	Omission (L <sub>1</sub> )		Omission and Commission (L <sub>3</sub> )	Commission (L <sub>2</sub> )

Referring to the cases shown in Table 4, we order the discussion about the effectiveness of lying according to the 'true' professional (P) or layperson (L) status of the blogger and by 'degree of deceit' (1 omission, 2 commission, 3 omission and commission).

*The effectiveness of deceitful marketing attempts of a professional blogger (cases P1, P2, P3 of Table 4).*

First, we examine case P<sub>1</sub> where a professional beautician lies by omission about her financial interests in the recommended brand. This would be a risky tactic, exposing both the blogger and the firm to prosecution

and to damage to their image. Moreover, readers are likely to be sceptical about the non-remunerated professional. The study supports this cautious view. The results (Table 1, Blog 4 versus Blog 3) show that disclosure will not make any significant difference to the level of inference readers make about the professional blogger's external or internal motivations. In the professional contexts, there is no significant relationship between the external motive inferences on perceived sincerity; remuneration is an accepted norm. However, the effect of the internal motivation inference on perceived sincerity is stronger when the professional beautician tells the truth than when lying by omission (Table 2, Blog 4 versus Blog 3). The professional beautician will be perceived as sincerer in her product recommendation if she discloses the affiliation than if she does not. In addition, the effects of perceived sincerity and perceived expertise on intentions toward the product are stronger under professional transparency conditions than under the omission context (Table 3, Blog 4 versus Blog 3). The certainty of the disclosed remuneration disperses doubt. The study results therefore indicate that the professional beautician's product endorsements will be more effective if she discloses her financial interests than if she lies by omission.

Next, we examine case P2 where a professional beautician lies by commission, presenting herself as a layperson while remaining candid about the affiliation. The tactic would remain legal, if untruthful. The results (Table 1, Blog 4 versus Blog 2) support the online source in thinking that, as a layperson, her internal passion – sharing motives are more accessible to readers than under her true professional identity. While lying by commission makes no difference to the level of the external motivation inferences, due to the disclosure. If the blogger reveals her professional status, the internal motive will have a stronger positive effect on perceived sincerity than it would under layperson – disclosure conditions. In addition, if she lies by commission the external motive inferences from the disclosure will diminish the perceived sincerity while there will be no significant effect when telling the truth (Table 2, Blog 4 versus Blog 2). This result indicates that the transparent professional will be perceived as sincerer than a remunerated layperson, if she is able to convey her passion-sharing motivation. Whereas the disclosed remuneration will detract from the perceived sincerity if she poses as a layperson. This can be due to the apparent conflict of interests between the self-presentation as a layperson and remuneration. As in Wilde's character portrayals, the paradox is a semiolinguistic cue to the underlying truth. The perceived sincerity and the

expertise conveyed by the disclosure (Table 1, Blog 4 versus Blog 2) will positively affect the intentions towards the product under both conditions (Table 3, Blog 4 versus Blog 2). Thus, the transparent professional beautician will be more efficient when undisguised, if she is perceived as earnest about her product recommendations.

Finally, we examine case P<sub>3</sub>, where the professional beautician lies by commission and by omission in presenting herself as a non-remunerated layperson. This is the classic stealth scenario which might involve an online source, alone or in collusion with the brand, or a brand might produce an entirely fictitious 'flog'. The assumption is that due to the social media norm, a non-remunerated passion sharing layperson should appear sincerer and thereby more convincing than a remunerated professional. This view is initially supported by the significantly higher (lower) levels of internal and (external) motivation inferences made by readers of the stealth blog as opposed to the truth (Table 1, Blog 4 versus Blog 1). As expected, the undetected stealth blogger is perceived as being more motivated by the desire to share a passion and less motivated by external incentives while the candid professional is perceived as being more motivated by remuneration and less by internal motives. However, the study results encourage the truthful context. The positive effect of the internal motive inference on perceived sincerity is stronger in the case of the professional – disclosure context than in the stealth context. Moreover, the external motive inference from the professional – disclosure presentation has no significant impact on the perceived sincerity of the endorsements. Yet if readers make inferences of external motives in the stealth scenario, it will significantly reduce perceived sincerity (Table 2, Blog 4 versus Blog 1). Thus, at the same level of ability to make her passion sharing motives accessible to the reader, the professional remunerated blogger will be perceived as sincerer if she tells the truth than in an undetected omission-commission stealth attempt, even more so if the reader conjectures that the 'amateur' content editor has financial interests. *In fine*, the effects of the perceived sincerity and of perceived expertise of the blogger on the product intention are stronger under truthful conditions than in the stealth scenario (Table 3, Blog 4 versus Blog 1). Therefore, the law abiding, candid professional is more efficient in telling the truth than by posing as a non-remunerated amateur, if she is perceived as sincere. In all the above cases it is not effective for the professionals to lie whether by omission or by commission or both, if they are able to convey

their passion sharing motive and if the product endorsements are perceived as being earnest.

*The efficiency of a layperson lying by omission and/or by commission about her remuneration and/or about her professional status (cases L<sub>1</sub>, L<sub>2</sub>, L<sub>3</sub> of Table 4).*

A layperson could be tempted to lie by omission about her affiliation (case L<sub>1</sub>) for fear that scepticism about her passion-sharing motives will make the recommendations less credible and less convincing. The case study shows that omitting to reveal the conflict of interest will not increase the level of inference the readers make of the lay-blogger's internal passion sharing motives (Table 1, Blog 2 versus Blog 1). However, the significant positive effect of the internal motivation inferences on sincerity is greater under layperson omission conditions than when telling the truth. In addition, the negative effect of external motivation inferences on perceived sincerity will be weaker if the lay-blogger is covert (Table 2, Blog 2 versus Blog 1). Thus, through the effects of the motive inferences on perceived sincerity, the layperson blogger is founded in fearing that if she reveals her financial interests, her recommendations will be perceived as less sincere. The effect of perceived sincerity on product intentions is positive and not significantly different under covert or truth conditions. While the positive effect of perceived expertise conveyed by disclosure is offset by the low average in the layperson context (Table 3, Table 1, Blog 2 versus Blog 1). Overall, the study results indicate that a layperson will be more efficient in lying by omission than in disclosing the affiliation.

An affiliated amateur beauty enthusiast might lie by commission in presenting herself as a trained beautician (case L<sub>2</sub>). She may hope that the professional status would increase the cogency of her arguments through the conveyed expertise, all the while making her remuneration more acceptable. As discussed *infra* (Table 4, case P<sub>2</sub>), the comparison of the study results between Blog contexts two and four shows the professional self-presentation to be more effective. The transparent lay-blogger's recommendation will be more effective if she lies by commission.

If the affiliated lay-blogger masquerades as a non-remunerated professional (case L<sub>3</sub>), the results of the study are mitigated. Telling the truth or lying makes no difference to the mean level of external motivation inferences (Table 1, Blog 2 versus Blog 3). The external motivation of the candid layperson is accessible both through the disclosure of her financial interests and through the commercial, professional cue. However, under truthful layperson

– disclosure conditions, the external motivation inferences significantly decrease perceived sincerity as opposed to no effect under deceitful non-remunerated professional conditions. Moreover, the positive effect of the internal motivation inference on the perceived sincerity of the transparent lay-blogger's recommendation is weaker than when lying by omission and by commission (Table 2, Blog 2 versus Blog 3). Nevertheless, the effect of the perceived sincerity on the product intention is higher in the case of the candid layperson than in the deceitful scenario. While the, albeit lower, perceived expertise in the truthful context (Table 1, Blog 2) will contribute to efficacy (Table 3, Blog 2 versus Blog 3). We suggest that this mitigated result is due to the equivocal presentations of the remunerated layperson and of the non-remunerated professional, considering the social and trade norms. Thus, the affiliated layperson is more certain to be efficient if she lies by omission or by commission but not both. From the legal and ethical standpoints, the greater efficiency of the covert layperson versus disclosure poses a challenge. On the other hand, an amateur claiming false professional qualification could represent a health and safety danger for consumers and consequently put brands' reputations at risk. Moreover, amateur bloggers are potentially difficult for firms to control.

At this, surface level stage of the analysis of the reported study results, we derive the following analogic understanding. Jack (the true professional) is more efficient in being truthful than in deceiving, if he is perceived as sincere. While Ernest (the true layperson) would be more tempted to lie by omission or by commission, but not both. Below, we revisit the data in the light of the second, semantic level of the theatre script. This, second interpretive level of the case study articulates the internal motivations of the deceiver with the receiver's perceptions of them.

**Act 2 (Level 2-Discourse). The effectiveness of the truthful versus the deceitful blog presentations when the blogger is not Earnest.**

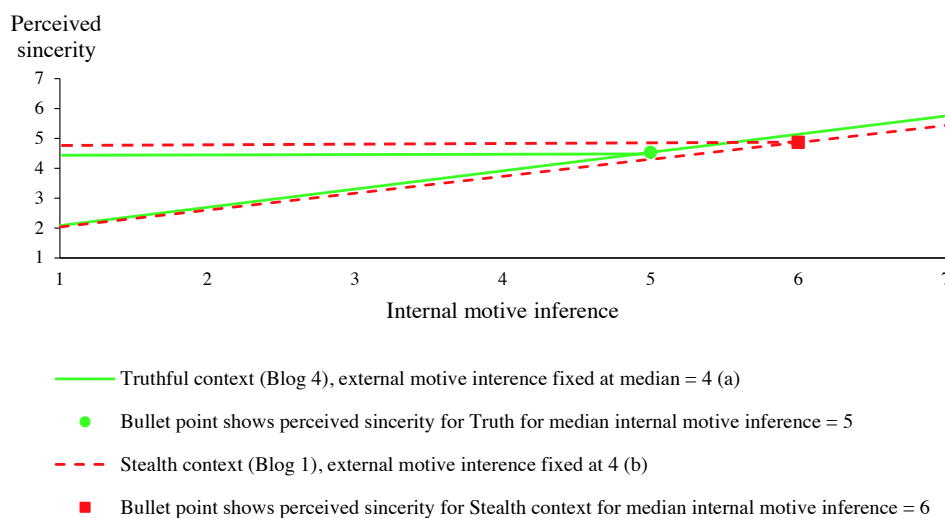
"In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing" (Gwendolen, 3. 165). This section presents an extension of the model (Holyoak 1982) under conditions of low internal motive inferences, not examined in the 2014 paper. Wilde's second semantic level reposes on the interpretation the receiver makes of the discourse, dependent on the receiver's own ideals and motives. The study results show that the effectiveness of the product recommendation depends on the interpretation the reader makes of the semiolinguistic cues in the blog presentation. The horizontal map to the study therefore operates at the level of the inferences the



reader makes of the internal and external motives of the blogger. Up until this point, we have considered the effectiveness of the truthful versus the deceitful blog contexts on the basis that the product recommendations are sincere. If the product recommendations are not in earnest, the internal passion-sharing motive may be expected to be less clear. It is likely that the reader would be able to detect this, just as the audience can detect through the style of the discourse when the character of the play is sincere. Thus, the analogy prompts us to apply the model to consider the effectiveness of the endorsements at low internal inference levels. Let us re-examine the guerrilla marketing context (case P<sub>3</sub> of Table 4). Considering the effects presented in Tables 2 and 3, the truthful blog presentation (Blog 4) prevails over the stealth presentation (Blog 1). However, the position is reversed at low internal passion-sharing motive inference levels.

**FIGURE 1**

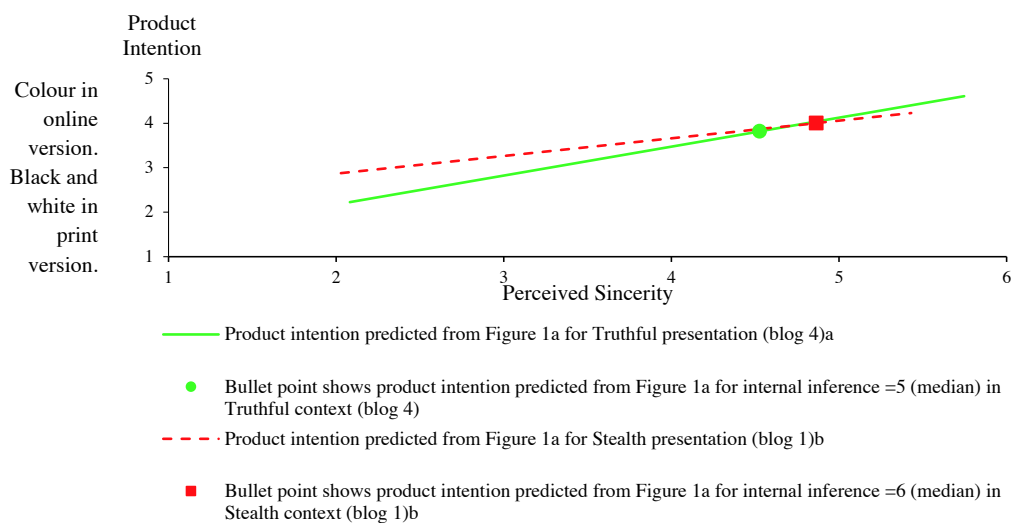
**1a Perceived Sincerity Predicted from Internal Motive Inference under Truth (Professional/Disclosure) versus Stealth (Layperson/Non-disclosure) Conditions**



**Notes:**

- a. From regression results for blog 4;  $y=1.15+.08a+.61x$ , where  $a$ = external motive inference fixed at 4
- b. From regression results for blog 1;  $y=1.99-.132a+.57x$  where  $a$  = external motive inference fixed at 4

**1b Product Intention Predicted from Perceived Sincerity under Truth (Professional/Disclosure) versus Stealth (Layperson/Non-disclosure) Conditions**



**Notes:**

- a. From regression results for blog 4;  $y=.88+.65x$
- b. From regression results for blog 1;  $y=2.07+.40x$

Figure 1a shows the perceived sincerity predicted by the internal motivation inference for the stealth and for the truth blog contexts where the external motivation inference is fixed at four, the median value for the professional-disclosure blog (Blog 4). If the stealth deception (Blog 1) is effective, the external motive inference should not likely be higher than four in the seven-point scale. In the case of the truthful presentation (Blog 4), the level of external motive inference is accessible from the disclosure and, due to the professional self-presentation, it has no significant effect on the perceived sincerity. Although, at the median level of the external motive inference, the truth context generates higher perceived sincerity irrespective of the level of internal motive inference, there is only a marginal gap at the higher end of the internal inference scale. In addition, when considering the perceived sincerity predicted from the respective median values of the stealth and the truth internal inferences as shown by the bullet points, the stealth solution performs better than the truth.

In Figure 1b, the predicted values of perceived sincerity are carried over from Figure 1a to infer the levels of positive intentions towards the product. When perceived sincerity is below the values predicted by the median internal inferences in the respective blogs, the stealth presentation proves more effective than the truth. If the blogger is not in earnest about the products she is recommending, the internal motive inferences are likely to be less accessible than they would be if she were sincere, thereby lowering the perceived sincerity such that the stealth context is more persuasive than the truthful presentation. This provides a clear financial incentive for adopting stealth tactics if the source is insincere about the product endorsements. On the other hand, at high levels of passion sharing, the increased earnestness about the products would favour the professional disclosure context. The externally motivated commercial source would be more tempted to commit a stealth attempt when the product recommendations are less sincere. Whereas the earnest professional blogger would be more founded in telling the truth. If Jack is insincere, he is more efficient if he poses as Ernest. If he is in earnest, he is better off telling the truth.

**Act 3 (Level 3 – Meaning). The opportunity for and the self-justification of deceit**

“The vital Importance of Being Earnest” (Jack, 3. 180). At the third, pragmatic level, we resolve our central research problem. We use an entirely new concept, lying to tell the truth, imported from the analogy. The results presented in table 5 reverse the perspective of the original research

from the consumer to the blogger.

As lying is wrong, the independent blogger would have to overcome a moral inhibitor to lie to her readers, perceived as honest citizens. On the other hand, there is no such internal inhibitor in the case of a stealth attempt by an advertiser. A stealth attempt or insincere product recommendations on the initiative of the brand alone, or in collaboration with a blogger, will be externally motivated. While deceit on the initiative of the independent content editor can also be self-justified through internal motivation.

People can self-justify deceit for the common good. Journalists self-justify using stealth tactics to deceive sources as they are often seen as being morally less upright than the readers who should be defended at all costs (Lee 2004). A lay-blogger may justify lying to the advertiser about her professional status to restore the balance of power between herself and the firm. Or she may be tempted to lie about her professional status for identity driven motives if she is temporarily out of a job or if she believes she has professional-level expertise. If the online source earnestly feels that the product recommendation is in her readers’ best interests, she may choose not to reveal her financial interests for fear that consumers would be less inclined to follow her advice, or she may pass herself off as a trained beautician to make her arguments more cogent. In both cases a passion sharing motive could cause her to lie, notwithstanding financial gain. Since lying by commission is perceived as more wrong than lying by omission, it is more likely that a lay content editor would be tempted to omit her financial interests than that she would lie about her identity or about the product recommendations. It follows that the externally and or internally motivated lay-blogger could more easily self-justify lying by omission than by commission, while the externally motivated professional blogger or stealth advertiser can deceive by omission and or commission through the lack of internal inhibition in a professional context. However, in considering the concept of lying to tell the truth, we propose that the level of expertise of the blog editor can sway these principles.

*Lying to tell the truth.*

The more certain an individual is about something, the less likely they are to lie about it since they are more conscious of their act. On the other hand, when people are less sure about the facts and deception is in their best interests, they are inclined to “fudge”. In other words, they lie or omit based on the idea that what they are saying may turn out to be the truth. Leblais and Bonnefon (2013) demonstrate




this principle empirically. To this extent, fudging is a way for the liar to give him or herself the benefit of the doubt. In the context of the online source, fudging could occur if the content editor both has a financial incentive and lacks expertise about the products she is recommending. She may make assertions about the products of which she is not certain but which she imagines could turn out to be true. On the other hand, a blog editor with expert product knowledge should be less likely to make insincere recommendations. The deceitful expert would need a different self-justification, such as a disregard for consumers as potential liars themselves. An independent, expert, blog editor would therefore be unlikely to make false product endorsements to honest readers. While an amateur blog editor may fudge.

**TABLE 5**  
**Examination of the Risk of Deceit**

Case	Underlying Truth		Nature of the Deceit (Case # from Table 4)	Effectiveness of the Deceitful versus the Truthful Context		Risk of Fudging Insincere Product Endorsements (iii)
	Truthful Blog #	Product Expertise		For high internal motive inferences (i)	For low internal motive inferences (ii)	
a	Blog 2	Amateur	Omission (L1)	more	less	High
b			Commission (L2)	more	less	High
c			Omission and Commission (L3)	equivalent	equivalent	High
d	Disclosure	Expert	Omission (L1)	more	less	Low
e			Commission (L2)	more	less	Low
f			Omission and Commission (L3)	equivalent	equivalent	Low
g	Blog 4	Amateur	Omission (P1)	less	more	High
h			Commission (P2)	less	more	High
i			Omission and Commission (P3)	less	more	High
j	Disclosure	Expert	Omission (P1)	less	more	Low
k			Commission (P2)	less	more	Low
l			Omission and Commission (P3)	less	more	Low

Notes:

- (i) Evaluation of effectiveness based on product intentions predicted from perceived sincerity for median external motive and for median and above median value internal motive inferences.
- (ii) Evaluation of effectiveness based on product intentions predicted from perceived sincerity for median external motive and for median and below median value internal motive inferences.
- (iii) Opportunity for fudging insincere product recommendations is posited as low for expert content editors and high for amateur content editors.

-  Conditions presenting a high risk of digital deceit, in consideration of columns i, ii and iii.
-  Conditions presenting a moderate risk of digital deceit, in consideration of columns i, ii and iii.
-  Conditions under which a 'flog' is more effective than the truth.

Drawing on this rationale, Table 5 examines the relative effectiveness of the different deceitful presentation narratives (professional status, level of expertise) according to the nature of the deceit compared to the underlying truth. From this summary we can appreciate the strength of the temptation to deceive. In columns i and ii of Table 5, we use the model to infer the effectiveness of the deceitful tactics versus the truth at high (i) or low (ii) inference levels. In column iii, we further consider the opportunity for “fudging” insincere product recommendations. To estimate the effectiveness of deceit compared with the truth, we apply the same method as previously shown in Figure 1 to all of the cases in Table 5. We carry over the perceived sincerity predicted from the internal motive inferences to infer the level of the reader’s favourable product intentions. The level of opportunity to fudge insincere product recommendations (column iii) is posited as relatively high in all the ‘true amateur’ cases where product expertise is low. On the other hand, the level of opportunity to fudge is posited as low in all the ‘true expert’ cases where product expertise is high. Below, we use table 5

to discuss the likelihood and the motives for deceit according to the true identity and to the level of expertise of the online source. The shaded cells in columns i-iii of table 5 show the conditions under which the underlying mechanisms of the model infer the likelihood of digital deceit to vary.

*The likelihood of deceit by a lay-blogger (cases a-f of Table 5).*

Considered together, columns i, ii and iii of Table 5 offer the degree of risk of deceit under each of the six conditions. The layperson case which affords the broadest spectrum for deceit is that of the affiliated, amateur layperson lying both by omission and by commission (case c). Case c is the only case where the effectiveness of the deceit is equivalent to that of the truth, independent of the level of passion sharing inferences (columns i and ii). Whether the source is sincere or not about the product endorsements, lying is as effective as telling the truth. Moreover, due to the lack of expertise, the opportunity for fudging insincere product recommendations is relatively high (column iii). Case c is therefore a plausible situation where the misguided, amateur lay-blogger may be tempted to self-proclaim false professional qualifications while at the same time making uncertain claims about the product benefits for undisclosed financial gain. However, the enlightened amateur blogger will fear consumer scepticism about a professional not having any affiliation with the brands she recommends. As previously shown, under professional/non-disclosure conditions, the perceived expertise is lower (Table 1) than when the affiliation is disclosed, and has no effect on intentions towards the product (Table 3).

Therefore, in case c, the risk of deceit is posited as moderate. In the remaining layperson cases, either the deceitful, insincere product endorsements are less effective than the truth (cases a, b) or the opportunity for fudging is low (cases d, e, f). Therefore, only lay-bloggers who are in earnest about the product endorsements should be tempted by the greater effectiveness of non-disclosure (cases a, d) or of falsely claiming professional status (cases b, e). Thus, we posit that the layperson who deceives by omission or by commission would be most likely to do so with earnest, passion sharing motives, through fear that either disclosure or her 'amateur' status (but not both) would make her recommendations less cogent.

When Ernest is insincere his readers will detect the insincerity. They may choose to believe him for their own identity driven motives. When Ernest is earnest he may lie by omission or by commission to better tell what he believes is the truth.

*The likelihood of deceit by a professional online source (cases g-l of Table 5).*

When the product endorsements are sincere, and the professional online source is able to convey her passion sharing motives (column i), she is always more efficient in telling the truth. Therefore, in addition to the legal obligations and the moral inhibitor, sincere professionals, certain about the product benefits, should have no external motive for deceit. If the professional blogger's endorsements are insincere (column ii), this could occur either as fudging through lack of expertise about the products (cases g, h, i) or, in the case of a true expert, through a cynical disrespect of her readers (cases j, k, l). Both cases are unlikely. A professional beautician would have the product expertise, unless the products are new to her or unless the brand makes false claims which the beautician believes. In addition, it is unlikely, that an independent professional would hold her readers in disregard. Therefore, we posit a moderate level of risk of deceit in cases g to k. Cynicism is possible however, in the case of a fictitious blog. Since the advertiser has expert knowledge of the firm's own products, stealth 'flogs' belong in case l. If, through cynicism, the fake blog message is not delivered with earnestness, then deceit is more effective than the truth. The unscrupulous, insincere expert has a clear motive for going under cover. Overall, a true independent professional is more likely to be earnest than to be insincere and more efficient in telling the truth than in being deceitful. While a fictitious blogger could efficiently lie. Either Jack is reliable, respectable John. Or he is the fictitious Bunbury; he is himself the lie.

### **The Denouement**

The research focus of this paper is to elucidate in which contexts third party bloggers are most likely to produce intentionally deceitful content. For the intention to be carried out, the blogger must first evaluate the efficacy of the tactic. The higher the perceived effectiveness of the deceitful tactic, the greater the temptation to deceive. The original (2014) authors' paper shows that the efficacy differs according to the trade professional or consumer peer social norm adopted by the blogger and according to the accessibility of the internal and external motives to the blog followers. This paper provides a deeper and more accessible understanding of the results through the comparison of the cases shown in Table 4. Flogs by cynical professionals (Bunburies) and deceitful online content by Earnest lay-bloggers are more effective in generating product intentions than the truth. While the transparent, sincere professional (John) is the most efficient of them all.



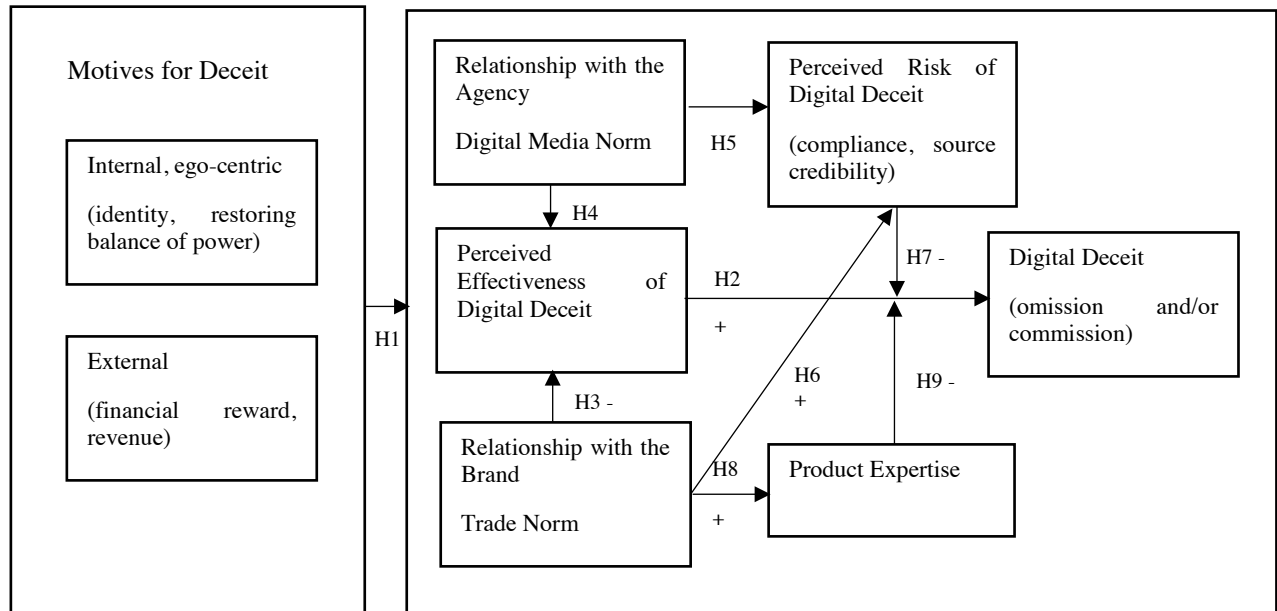
The analogy further led to examining the comparative effectiveness of the deceitful contexts under high and low internal motive inference conditions, not considered in the original paper. Finally, the new concept of lying to tell the truth, imported from the analogy, completes the reversal of the perspective of the original work from the consumer to the blogger. The danger of digital deceit is particularly acute in the case of genuine amateur enthusiasts who may fudge inaccurate statements about the products. Ego centric motives, the perceived superior effectiveness of deceitful tactics, combined with low product expertise are difficult factors for managers to control. The “uberization” of social media affiliations is under way through open access dot.com intermediaries and e-retailer social advantage programs (Kamerer 2015). This can massively increase the numbers of lay content editors at risk of causing damage to their own and brands’ reputations through non-disclosure and fudging. The case study results suggest that one way of setting amateur lay-bloggers on the right track is through controlled professionalization. The objective is that, as the blogger’s income from affiliation increases, she should adopt the professional trade norm rather than the ambiguous social influencer norm. The work provides supporting information that brand managers should accompany the blogger’s development from amateur lay person status through to the expert professional. In the first stage, they should educate amateur online sources about the products so that they are not tempted to fudge. When the product knowledge is acquired, they can certify lay-experts. The certification will confer the perceived expertise which the study demonstrates increases the effectiveness of transparency. In addition, the certified recognition of the lay-

blogger’s expertise will remove the internal motive for lying by commission and justify the disclosure of the affiliation through the professional norm. People can lie because they fear the reaction of others if they speak the truth. Educating individual bloggers about the effectiveness of the perceived expertise can remove that fear without lessening the passion. The sincere, transparent professional is always more efficient than if she were to lie, even more so for the greater earnestness in the product recommendations. Overall, the results encourage brands to professionalize their affiliated online sources, conferring expertise and making the disclosed remuneration acceptable, while convincing them that the products are in the end users best interests, so that the internal passion sharing motive will be high and leverage the greatest efficiency.

Social influencers are increasingly under contract with agencies mediating the relationship with the brand (Holmes 2015). Bloggers may even become agents themselves (Feret 2016). Increased financial rewards have been shown to « crowd out » internal motivation (Anghelcev, 2015 cited by Burns 2016). The case study analysis shows that at lower than median internal motive inference levels, the professional blogger is more efficient in deceiving by omission or by commission. Thus, as external motivation increases, the professional influencer will be more tempted to deceive. Moreover, as Kamerer’s (2015) study shows, influencer blogs tend not to be as transparent as FTC guidelines would require. It is therefore the brand manager’s responsibility to counter these dangers through establishing and managing direct relationships with the bloggers.

FIGURE 2

**The influence of stakeholder relationships with the affiliated online source on the propensity of digital deceit**



- H1. The higher the internal and/or external motives for deceit, the higher the propensity to deceive.
- H2. The greater the perceived effectiveness of digital deceit, the higher the propensity to deceive.
- H3. The adoption of the Trade Norm as a professional beautician and/or through the Brand education / certification program reduces the perceived effectiveness of the deceit.
- H4. When the external motivation increases through a contractual relationship with Influencer Agencies or dot.com sites, the perceived effectiveness of digital deceit will increase.
- H5. The direct relationship with the Agency /digital Media Norm will affect the perceived risk of digital deceit, positively or negatively according to the Agency's policy.
- H6. The adoption of the Brand /Trade Norm will increase the perceived risk of digital deceit through compliance and education.
- H7. Perceived risk of deceit will moderate (reduce) the effect of perceived effectiveness on the propensity to carry out the deceit.
- H8. The direct relationship with the brand will increase product expertise.
- H9. Product expertise will moderate (reduce) the effect of perceived effectiveness on the propensity to deceive.

Figure 2 synthesizes, from the bloggers perspective, the processes inferred from the discussion of the results *infra*. A direct relationship with the brand will reduce the risk of digital deceit through education. The brand certification program will reduce the perceived effectiveness of the deceit, increase the perception of the risks of deceit and lower the propensity to fudge through the acquired product expertise. A fully agency mediated relationship between the blogger and the brand bears risks of the blogger becoming herself influenced by the conflict of interest between the advertising and the independent editorial norms.

Finally, table 5, together with the character insights from the analogy provide the foundation for a typology of social media content editors to be managed as individuals rather than as mediated influencers. John is the transparent, honest trade professional, Ernest is the remunerated lay-blogger, tempted to lie for identity and passion sharing driven internal motives. Algernon is the cynical professional writing Bunbury, the "flog". These different characters require different treatments. Neither can one ignore the complicity of Gwendoline and Cecily, the followers of the beauty blog who may enter the deceit for their own benefits. They may choose

to ignore high external motive inferences to keep intact the beautiful image of the passionate peer. Touch the image with an overtly explicit disclosure statement and it will be gone. A subtler consumer protection measure would be to audit online the level of external inferences consumers make of affiliated influencers, with the objective of monitoring a threshold beyond which the Persuasion Knowledge Model becomes inoperative.

In this paper, we have used only some of the concepts vehicled in the work of Oscar Wilde. Some examples are the concept of self (ideal, proclaimed - portrayed, perceived), relationship to the truth (proclaimed, perceived, underlying), self-justification of deceit, lying to tell the truth, certainty versus doubt, social norms. Our choice of "The Importance of Being Earnest" is justified by its multilevel semantic depth and by the profound understanding Wilde has of social interaction. An understanding that we demonstrate can be grounded with empirical research. Marketing scholars have begun to use art to stimulate thought (Ladwein 2017). The precise juxtaposition of the theatre script with the target domain supports the potential of the literary arts as research material.

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