

**Beyond Truth and Lies:  
Evasion as an Alternative to Deception  
in Word of Mouth Communications**

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We extend research on word of mouth communications by examining evasion as an alternative to deception as a means of avoiding self-threatening word of mouth disclosures. Four studies show that although evasion and deception are both driven by a similar goal – to protect the self from anticipated embarrassment (S1 and S2) – the two behaviors are moderated by different situational factors and have different emotional consequences. Deception (but not evasion) is moderated by the presence of an informed other with knowledge of the truth (S2), whereas evasion (but not deception) is moderated by the presence of a persistent other who will not accept an uninformative response (S3). We also find that, compared to deceivers, evaders report feeling less guilty and ashamed about avoiding the truth (S4). Overall, our findings suggest that word of mouth communication is often driven by self-interests that impact not only the veracity but also the clarity and relevance of its content.

*Keywords:* word of mouth information, evasion, deception, self-conscious emotions

“You don’t tell deliberate lies, but sometimes, you have to be evasive.”

- Margaret Thatcher, 1976

Word of mouth exchanges influence nearly half of all purchasing decisions and twice the sales of paid advertising (McKinsey 2010). The massive influence of word of mouth communications is driven in part by the belief that people get more truthful information from fellow consumers than they do from marketers (Bickart and Schindler 2001; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003). But is this necessarily the case?

While consumers often express skepticism about firm sources of product information (Darke and Ritchie 2007; Main, Dahl and Darke 2007), a growing body of evidence suggests that they also should question the information provided by fellow consumers. People try to craft word of mouth messages that present the self in a favorable light (cf. Berger 2014). Such efforts can impact the nature of the information they share with others (Barasch and Berger 2013; Packard and Wooten 2013), and lead to outright deception when the truth is self-threatening (Anthony and Cowley 2012; Argo, Dahl and White 2011; Argo, White, and Dahl 2006; Mazar, On and Ariely 2008; Sengupta, Dahl, and Gorn 2002).

Although considerable attention has been paid to the use of deception in word of mouth contexts, some studies have reported levels of lying intentions that suggest consumers are generally reluctant to lie to each other. For example, across four studies presented by Argo, White, and Dahl (2006), the mean score on the lying index exceeded the scale midpoint in only two of 16 experimental conditions. That is, on average, participants reported being unlikely to deceive. If these participants were being honest about their lying intentions, then how else might they respond to requests for information that might make them look bad?

Prime Minister Thatcher's comment about the need to be evasive suggests a plausible answer to this question. Evasion, defined as the avoidance of a clear and direct answer to a question (Merriam-Webster 2012), has been conceptualized as a nonobvious alternative to truth and lies (Leary 1995), a probable response to concerns about unfavorable self-presentations (Wooten and Reed 2000), and an effective approach to answering difficult questions (Bickart, Morrin, and Ratneshwar 2015; Rogers and Norton 2011). However, most of the deception literature merely treats evasion as a form of lying (i.e., a "lie of omission") if it considers evasion at all (e.g., Anthony and Cowley 2012; Argo, Dahl, and White 2011; Argo and Shiv 2012; Argo, White, and Dahl 2006; DePaulo et al. 1996; Kirmani and Campbell 2004; Mazar, On, and Ariely 2008; Sengupta, Dahl, and Gorn 2002;).

In the present research, we examine evasion as a distinct alternative to deception in self-threatening word of mouth exchanges. Although scholars have devoted considerable attention to lying in word of mouth settings, evasion represents an important, yet largely unexamined, alternative for consumers who are motivated to avoid sharing the truth.

We present the results of four experiments demonstrating that, despite being driven by similar motives, evasion and deception are distinct behaviors that are favored under different conditions and have different psychological consequences. In the sections that follow, we provide the conceptual foundation to support our theorizing, present four experiments to test our predictions, and then conclude by discussing implications of our findings for word of mouth communications and other marketing contexts in which evasive responding may be problematic (e.g. personal selling and marketing research).

## ***CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT***

### *Evasion as an Alternative to Deception*

Despite considerable interest in consumer lying (Anthony and Cowley 2012; Argo, Dahl, and White 2011; Argo and Shiv 2012; Argo, White, and Dahl 2006; Mazar, On, and Ariely 2008; Sengupta, Dahl, and Gorn 2002), our understanding of how consumers avoid truthful disclosures of word of mouth information remains limited. Scholars often define deception following DePaulo's seminal paper on lying (DePaulo et al. 1996, p. 980) as "the deliberate fostering of a false impression rather than the judicious editing of a true one."

This definition of deception implies a third category, one in which people can avoid revealing the truth without telling a lie. This somewhat restrictive definition further implies that the so-called "lie of omission" is a misnomer, because the "judicious editing" of truthful information does not constitute deception at all. Alternatively, some scholars have conceptualized half-truths as whole lies, especially if the communicator intends to deceive (Ekman 1985) or has the potential to "profit from lies without, technically, telling lies" (Goffman 1959, p. 62). For example, Kirmani and Campbell (2004) treated withholding or concealing consumer information as a form of deception in consumer interactions with salespeople. Under this more expansive view of deception, many responses for which any pertinent fact is omitted can potentially be viewed as "lies of omission" if the communicator intended to prompt false inferences or the audience was actually misled.

Regardless of whether one favors the more restrictive definition or a more expansive one, there remains a category of responses that do not reveal the truth, yet also do not involve either deceptive intent by the communicator or deceptive inferences by the audience. The congressional testimony of General Motors CEO, Mary Barra, provides a recent case in point. In response to

multiple questions about her company's mishandling of the problems created by defective ignition switches in many GM vehicles, Ms. Barra indicated that the company was investigating the matter. That is, instead of providing a direct answer containing the most relevant facts or providing false or misleading information (assuming an investigation is actually in process), she gave evasive non-answers to many questions. Evasive responding includes such "non-informative" behaviors as providing vague or ambiguous responses, clamming up, dodging questions or changing the subject (Rogers and Norton 2011; Schlenker and Weigold 1989; Wooten and Reed 2000).

In the present research, we seek to establish evasion as a distinct behavioral response to a potentially self-threatening word of mouth request, with different antecedents and consequences than deception. Surprisingly, empirical examination of when and why people are evasive in social interactions is scant. In two unpublished manuscripts, Leary and his students found that people avoid revealing information about themselves when their self-concepts are inconsistent with personal attributes valued by their conversation partners (Lamphere and Leary 1988; Spivey and Leary 1990). That is, people were less likely to voluntarily provide self-relevant information when their traits (e.g., introversion or light-heartedness) did not match their conversation partners' preferences (e.g., extroversion or seriousness). As withholding information about undesired traits (a non-answer) is qualitatively different than falsely claiming exaggerated levels of desired traits (a deceptive answer), we propose that the two approaches reflect distinct means of achieving similar ends – avoiding the disclosure of truthful information.

Whereas Leary and colleagues explored the tendencies of people to give evasive responses, Rogers and Norton (2011) considered the perspectives of those who receive them. They found that people can fail to detect a speaker's efforts to dodge questions, especially when

the speaker gives answers to closely related questions or when listeners focus more on the speaker than the message. Moreover, ‘artful dodgers’ who answer tangentially-related questions in a fluent manner are rated more positively than those who answer the actual question, but do so less fluently. Similarly, Bickart, Morrin, and Ratneshwar (2015) examined obfuscation by salespeople, finding that under certain conditions, it represents a potentially advantageous selling approach. Taken together, this work suggests there may be some psychosocial advantages to evasive responding.

In summary, people actively manage the information they reveal, especially information that presents the self in an unfavorable light. Although deception is a well-documented means of managing the information that consumers reveal about themselves, evasion may represent a less obvious means to a similar end. However, scholars have not devoted sufficient attention to evasion as an alternative to truth or lies, drivers of evasive and deceptive responding, factors that independently moderate each of these two behaviors, and differences in their psychological consequences. The present research seeks to fill these gaps.

### *Evasion and Deception as Protective Responses to Anticipated Embarrassment*

In his classic analysis of *face-work*, defined as the actions people take to navigate situations with self-threatening implications, Goffman (1959) posits that the norm of self-respect requires individuals to go to certain lengths to protect themselves from threats to their situated identities. Argo, White, and Dahl’s (2006) finding that victims of unfavorable social comparisons are willing to lie about the prices they paid to protect themselves from the potential self-threat of being “taken” is consistent with Goffman’s analysis. In Goffman’s parlance, Argo and colleagues found that consumers who fared worse than others were willing to resort to

deception in order to save face. Although Argo, White, and Dahl (2006) did not conduct formal tests of mediation, their discussion of unfavorable performance disparities as threats to public self-images suggests embarrassment as a possible mediator of the effect of such disparities on individuals' intentions to lie about their consumption outcomes.

Self-presentation theorists have described embarrassment as a reactive response to social predicaments (Leary and Kowalski 1995). That is, people feel embarrassed after presenting themselves unfavorably to others (Ekman 1985; Miller 1995). However, because it is an aversive state (Leary 1995; Miller 1992), embarrassment also serves an important regulatory function that is essential for orderly social interaction and social well-being (Goffman 1963). The fear of embarrassment motivates people to keep their behaviors within the limits of propriety and to withhold information that threatens their public self-images (Leary and Kowalski 1995). The notion that desires to avoid embarrassment can influence future behaviors suggests that embarrassment can be anticipatory as well as reactive. If people can feel embarrassed for others (Miller 1987, 1992; Stocks et al. 2011), then they should be able to feel embarrassed for future selves (Tangney et al. 1996; Verbeke and Bagozzi 2003), and respond accordingly.

We therefore predict that anticipated embarrassment will mediate the effect of unfavorable performance disparities on consumers' intentions to avoid responding truthfully to word of mouth inquiries about the topic in question.

#### *Differential Drivers of Evasion versus Deception*

While we predict that evasion and deception arise out of a similar need – to avoid the anticipated embarrassment of sharing self-threatening consumption information – we also predict that different conditions moderate individuals' propensities to engage in each behavior.

Previous research has demonstrated that the strategies people use to present themselves to others are often influenced by characteristics of the situation and audience at hand. For instance, people present themselves differently to psychologically close than to psychologically distant audiences (Argo, White, and Dahl 2006; Tesser and Campbell 1982). To support our conceptualization of evasion and deception as distinct behaviors, we examine how two characteristics of the situation in which a word of mouth exchange occurs differentially affect people's intentions to engage in each behavior. Specifically, we investigate how the presence of an informed or a persistent other differentially affects intentions to deceive or evade, respectively.

*The Presence of an Informed Other.* We predict that the presence of an informed other should moderate intentions to deceive, but not evade in response to a request for self-threatening information. Previous research has shown that the information people share with others is sometimes constrained by what their audiences know about them (Baumeister and Jones 1978). People are more likely to self-aggrandize when it is difficult for others to invalidate their self-presentations (Schlenker 1980). Moreover, people behave differently when potentially damaging information that is not widely known about them is at risk of being discovered (Goffman 1963). This risk is heightened by the presence of an informed other.

In the present context, a consumer faces a risk of being "exposed" as a liar if he or she misinforms the recipient of a word of mouth request in the presence of someone who knows the truth. By increasing the probability of detection, the presence of an informed other should reduce intentions to deceive. In contrast, because evasion involves an uninformative, as opposed to a misinformative, response, evasive responders should not be at risk of being "exposed" as liars by

someone who possesses knowledge of the truth. As a result, the presence of an informed other should reduce intentions to deceive, but not evade.

*The Presence of a Persistent Other.* We predict that the presence of a persistent other should moderate intentions to evade, but not deceive in response to a request for self-threatening information. Research on criminal interrogations suggests that evasion may be a risky strategy for an individual who faces a questioner expected to continue probing for a definitive answer (Buller, Strzyzewski, and Comstock 1991), partly because uninformative (i.e., evasive) answers are more easily detected than misinformation (i.e., deception) (Burgoon et al. 1994). As a result, persistent interaction partners are likely to get informative responses (Inbau, et al. 2011), but not necessarily truthful ones. Persistence does not necessarily improve efforts to detect deception (Buller et al. 1989), as people can simply continue to substantiate their lies.

In the present context, consumers should expect to encounter difficulty providing uninformative responses to word of mouth requests in the presence of someone who is expected to continue probing for a definitive response. As a result, the presence of a persistent other should reduce their intentions to be evasive. However, because deceptive responses are informative (albeit falsely so), the tendency to provide them should be unaffected by the prospect of facing someone who refuses to accept uninformative responses. As a result, the presence of a persistent other should reduce intentions to evade, but not deceive.

Taken together, these two situational factors help distinguish evasion from deception by demonstrating that the two behaviors hold different information content and have at least one distinct driver. We predict that the risk of being caught providing misinformation by an informed other will affect consumers' intentions to deceive, but not evade in response to a request for self-

threatening information. On the other hand, we expect the difficulty of providing uninformative responses to a persistent other to drive consumers' intentions to evade, but not deceive.

### *Emotional Consequences of Evasion versus Deception*

We seek further evidence of our proposed distinction between evasion and deception by exploring consumers' emotional responses to employing each tactic. Recent efforts to understand the consequences of truth avoidance (e.g., Anthony and Cowley 2012; Argo and Shiv 2012) have focused primarily on financial and behavioral consequences, and exclusively on deception as an alternative to truthfulness. Although evasion and deception both entail truth avoidance, we predict that the two tactics will have different emotional consequences. In particular, we expect that relative to telling the truth, evasion does not produce the negative self-conscious affect (i.e., guilt and shame) that is expected to arise from deception.

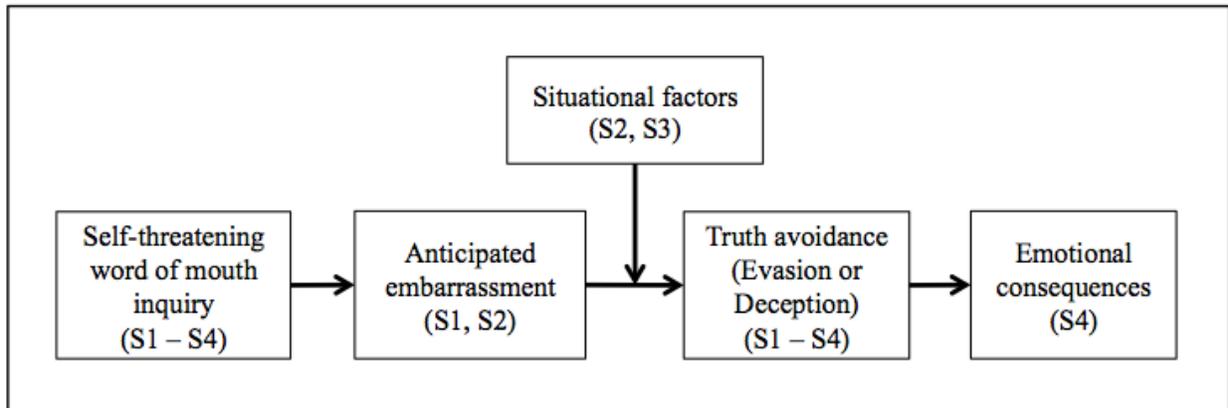
Because people generally value honesty, deception is a potential affront to one's morality (Bok 2011) and self-concept maintenance (Mazar, On, and Ariely 2008). As a result, people report feelings of tension, guilt or anxiety during the act of lying (Caso et al. 2005; Ekman and Frank 1993; Vrij, Semin, and Bull 1996). Such feelings are driven in part by the fear of deception detection—being caught in a lie (Zuckerman, DePaulo, and Rosenthal 1981). The fear of deception detection has also been associated with feelings of shame (Keltner and Buswell 1996). However, the psychological consequences of deception likely extend beyond the fear of being caught in a lie. When deception is self-interested and therefore a moral transgression (Mazar, On, and Ariely 2008), guilt and shame can arise as a result of the blow to one's self-concept associated with being a liar (Ekman and Frank 1993).

Guilt and shame are described as “close cousins” in the family of negative self-conscious affect, being the private and public manifestations of this affect, respectively (Ekman 1985; Tangney et al. 1996). Both emotions are significantly more aversive than embarrassment (Tangney et al. 1996) in that they reflect a more serious personal flaw or moral transgression (Buss 1980; Lewis 1992). Accordingly, we expect feelings of shame and guilt to be prevalent among those who deceive in word of mouth communications. In contrast, these feelings should be less prevalent among those who evade because evasion allows individuals to avoid the moral transgression associated with sharing false information.

### *Research Overview*

To summarize, this paper extends research on truth avoidance in word of mouth communications by examining evasion as a distinct alternative to deception for those who wish to avoid disclosing self-threatening consumption information. We seek to demonstrate that both evasion and deception: (1) are driven by a common goal – to protect the self from anticipated embarrassment, (2) are independently moderated by different situational factors in a manner that supports evasion as an “uninformative” as opposed to a “misinformative” tactic (i.e. “lies of omission”), and (3) have distinct emotional consequence, whereby deception, but not evasion, produces shame and guilt. Our overall conceptual model is summarized in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL MODEL



We accomplish these objectives by presenting four laboratory experiments. Study 1 provides an initial demonstration of evasion as an alternative to deception by allowing participants to indicate how they would respond to a request for potentially self-threatening word of mouth information. This study also assesses anticipated embarrassment as a driver of non-truthful responses to such inquiries. Studies 2 and 3 provide empirical support for our distinction between evasion and deception by presenting situational factors that differentially affect the two approaches to protecting the self from a threatening truth. Study 2 shows that the presence of an informed other affects intentions to deceive, but not evade as a means of protecting the self from a threatening truth. It also provides a more fulsome examination of the psychological mechanism that drives both tactics. Study 3 demonstrates that the presence of a persistent other drives intentions to evade, but not deceive as a means of protecting the self from a threatening truth. Study 4 moves beyond measured intentions to actual responses to a self-threatening word of mouth inquiry that has the potential to implicate participants' overall performance as consumers (i.e., their credit score). This study also provides additional support for our distinction between

evasion and deception by revealing differences in the psychological consequences associated with engaging in the two behaviors.

All of our studies operationalize self-threatening word of mouth inquiries in a manner consistent with prior research: as a consumer performance disparity revealed through an upward social comparison (e.g., paying more than another for the same product; Argo, Dahl and White 2011; Argo, White, and Dahl 2006; Sengupta, Dahl, and Gorn 2002). While people are motivated to avoid the truth when they performed worse than others (disparity condition), they possess no such motivation in the absence of this potential self-threat (no disparity / control condition).

### ***STUDY 1***

In study 1, we examine the extent to which performance disparities increase consumers' intentions to either evade or deceive in response to word of mouth inquiries. This study also provides a preliminary test of anticipated embarrassment as a driver of both means of protecting the self.

#### *Method*

Participants in an online panel (N = 227, 138 female) completed the study in return for a small cash payment. Participants imagined themselves in one of three scenarios involving a word of mouth exchange about television prices. Gender was collected beforehand to enable presentation of the scenarios as same-sex interactions to avoid confounding deception motives associated with social interactions between sexes (DePaulo et al., 1996).

The word of mouth exchange revealed that both the participant and his or her friend had purchased the same TV. Participants learn how much the friend paid, and are asked to reveal how much they paid. In the large disparity conditions, participants paid \$300 more than their friend (\$1,000 vs. \$700). In the small disparity condition, participants paid only \$100 more (\$1,000 vs. \$900). In the control condition, both parties paid the same price (\$1,000). We tested two disparity levels in our first study based on previous findings that larger disparities are associated with greater intentions to deceive (Argo, White, and Dahl 2006). Full text of the scenario is provided in the appendix.

Following the scenario, we collected six scaled measures of participant's intentions to evade or deceive. Participants indicated their likelihood of: (1) revealing the actual price (reverse scored), (2) concealing the actual price, and (3) being evasive about the price, (4) misrepresenting the actual price, (5) being deceptive about the price, and (6) misleading their friend about the price. The first three items were intended to capture evasion intentions, and the latter three deception intentions. All items were measured with seven point scales anchored by 1 = Very unlikely and 7 = Very likely. Item order was randomized. Reliabilities for the three item evasion and deception indices were  $\alpha = .91$  and  $\alpha = .98$ , respectively. Confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the evasion and deception items fit a two-factor model better than a single factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 185.0, p < .001$ ), providing preliminary support of our conceptual distinction between the two behavioral responses.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some may argue that responses on the lower end of the "revealing the actual price" scale item could indicate that by avoiding this revelation, participants are indicating intentions to "reveal a *false* price" (i.e. deception). While we concede this possibility, confirmatory factor analysis suggests the item was perceived as consistent with evasive responding (i.e. "*not* revealing the actual price"). Further, including this item as part of the deception index reduces scale reliability. Finally, results do not change when this item is excluded from analysis.

Anticipated embarrassment was measured with three items assessing the extent to which participants would feel embarrassed, awkward, and uncomfortable (on seven point scales from “Not at all” to “Very”) in the situation described in the scenario. These three items were averaged to form an embarrassment index ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

We used three items (measured on a seven-point scale) to assess the performance disparity manipulation (“I paid much less [more] than the other guest,” “I [The other guest] got a better deal than the other guest [me],” “I paid a much lower [higher] price relative to the other guest;”  $\alpha = .94$ ) and three items to assess participant comprehension that both parties in the scenario purchased similar products (“Not at all [Extremely] similar,” “Not at all [Very much] identical,” “Not at all [Very much] the same”;  $\alpha = .95$ ). Finally, participants completed a suspicion-probe question before being thanked and dismissed. Responses to the suspicion probe suggest that none of the participants identified the study’s purpose.

## *Results*

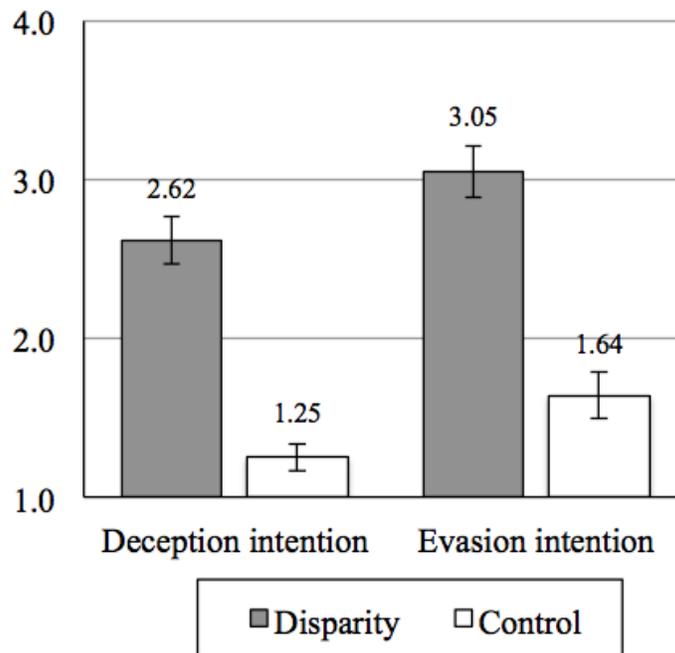
*Manipulation Checks.* Consistent with condition assignment, participants in the disparity conditions perceived a significantly larger price gap than control participants ( $M_{\text{disparity}} = 5.97$ ,  $M_{\text{no disparity}} = 3.88$ ;  $F(1, 225) = 333.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, participants in the large disparity condition perceived a significantly larger price gap than those in the small disparity condition ( $M_{\text{large}} = 6.29$  vs.  $M_{\text{small}} = 5.63$ ;  $F(1, 150) = 22.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Finally, participants understood that the television they purchased was extremely similar to the one purchased by their friend ( $M = 6.88$ ,  $SD = .40$  on a seven point scale).

*Main Results.* Analysis of variance revealed no differences in deception ( $F < 1$ ) or evasion intentions ( $F(1, 150) = 1.17$ ,  $p = .28$ ) due to disparity level. In hindsight, this finding is

consistent with Argo, White, and Dahl’s (2006, study 1) finding that disparity size affects deception intentions only when the comparison target is socially distant (i.e., a stranger rather than a friend). As a result, we collapsed our data across disparity levels, resulting in two experimental conditions (disparity and control).

Participants in the disparity condition reported greater intentions to deceive ( $F(1, 225) = 37.91, p < .001$ ) and evade ( $F(1, 225) = 30.46, p < .001$ ) than did control participants. Moreover, participants reported higher intentions to evade than to deceive in both the disparity ( $t(152) = 4.49, p < .001$ ) and control conditions ( $t(75) = 3.29, p < .01$ ). Condition means are summarized in Figure 2. To sum, replicating prior research, deceptive responding was more likely to occur given the self-threat of a performance disparity (vs. control). More importantly, evasive responding was also more likely to occur in response to a self-threatening disparity (vs. control), and it appeared to be favored over deception.

FIGURE 2  
STUDY 1: INTENTIONS TO DECEIVE AND EVADE



*Embarrassment as a Driver of Both Responses.* Bootstrapped tests of anticipated embarrassment as a driver of the relationship between a self-threatening word of mouth inquiry (disparity condition) and either evasion or deception intentions supported mediation (Preacher, Rucker and Hayes 2007). The indirect effect was significant for both evasion (95% CI = [.28, .55] with 5,000 resamples) and deception (95% CI = [.24, .52]). All path coefficients for both models are positive and significant at ( $\beta$ s > .30,  $p$ s < .05).

### *Discussion*

Study 1 reveals that evasion may be an attractive alternative to deception among consumers who are motivated to protect themselves from potentially self-threatening word of mouth inquiries. Moreover, anticipated embarrassment mediated the effects of a consumer performance disparity on both means of protecting the self from a threatening truth.

In Studies 2 and 3, we seek empirical evidence that evasion and deception are distinct by examining situational factors that may moderate intentions to use one tactic without affecting the other.

## ***STUDY 2***

In Study 2, we test our prediction that the presence of an informed other, which gives rise to the risk of being exposed providing disinformation, drives deception but not evasion intentions among those who are motivated to avoid truthful information sharing.

In this study, we also conduct a more fulsome examination of the shared emotional driver of both behaviors (anticipated embarrassment) to rule out alternative mediating variables such as shame, guilt, envy, resentment and generalized depressive affect.

### *Method*

Undergraduate students (N = 188, 89 female) at a North American university completed the study for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (Disparity vs. Control) x 2 (Informed Other vs. No Informed Other) between-subjects design. Participants again imagined they had purchased a television using the same stimuli as Study 1, but learned that they paid either \$200 more (disparity condition) or the same (control condition) as a friend.<sup>2</sup> In the informed other condition, a second person also knew the actual price the participant paid for the television. In the no informed other condition, the participant was the only one who knew how much s/he paid for the television. Scenarios were again constructed to involve same-sex interactions.

Participants used the same items used in Study 1 to indicate their likelihood of evading or deceiving. Confirmatory factor analysis again confirmed that the evasion ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and deception ( $\alpha = .95$ ) intention items fit a two-factor model better than a single factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 93.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Anticipated embarrassment was also measured using the items used in Study 1. In addition, we collected previously validated multi-item measures capturing alternative emotions that are potentially associated with self-concept threats (shame, guilt, anger, envy, resentment, and depressive affect) to rule out alternative drivers of evasive and deceptive responding. All emotions were captured using items from Tangney et al. (1996) with seven-point scales (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much). Items are listed in the appendix.

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<sup>2</sup> Given no difference in results for the high vs. low disparity levels in Study 1, we used a single disparity condition in this and subsequent studies.

Participants then completed a series of manipulation checks. Three items were used to assess the presence of an informed other: (1) how hard it would be for the friends to find out the actual price (reverse scored), (2) how easily could the friends discover the real price paid, and (3) how accessible was the true price to the friends (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much). Finally, checks regarding the size and direction of the disparity and the similarity of the televisions were measured in the same manner as Study 1.

### *Results*

*Manipulation Checks.* All participants correctly identified how many of their friends knew the actual price paid for the television. Consistent with condition assignment, analysis of variance on the mean of the three item scale ( $\alpha = .92$ ) revealed that participants in the informed other condition perceived a higher risk of discovery ( $M = 5.69$ ) than those in the no informed other condition ( $M = 4.10$ ;  $F(1,196) = 44.14, p < .001$ ). Participants in the disparity condition perceived a greater price disparity ( $M = 6.10$ ) than did participants in the control condition ( $M = 4.03, F(1, 196) = 547.19, p < .001$ ), and participants recognized that both parties purchased similar televisions ( $M = 6.74, SD = .70$ ) on a seven-point scale).

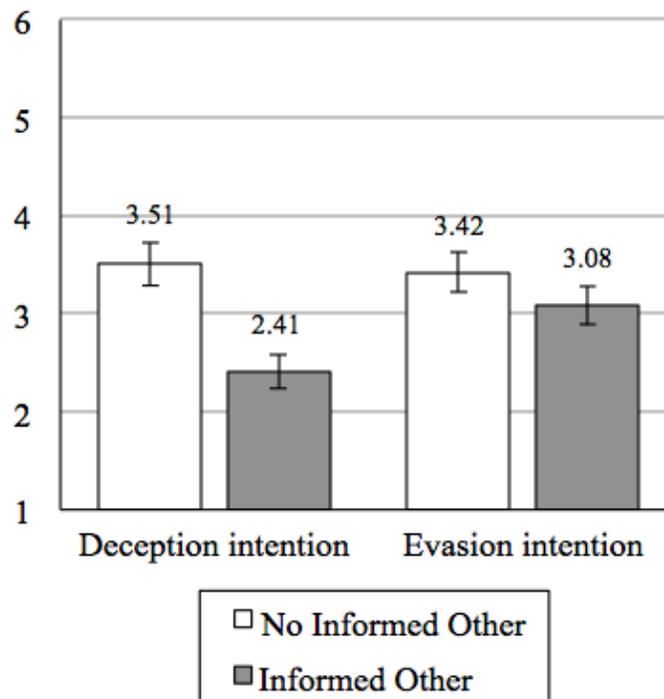
*Main Results.* ANOVA on the composite measure of deception intentions revealed a significant main effect of a disparity ( $M_{\text{disparity}} = 2.59$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 1.68$ ;  $F(1,194) = 17.15, p < .001$ ), no effect of an informed other ( $F < 1$ ), and a significant disparity by informed other interaction ( $F(1,194) = 9.48, p < .01$ ).

While there was no difference in deception intentions by the presence or absence of an informed other in the control condition ( $M_{\text{informed other}} = 1.86$  vs.  $M_{\text{no informed other}} = 1.47$ ;  $F(1, 100) = 2.42, p > .10$ ), given a disparity, participants faced with an informed other were significantly less

likely to deceive ( $M = 2.41$ ) than were those who did not face an informed other ( $M = 3.51$ ;  $F(1, 94) = 7.24, p < .01$ ; Figure 3).

However, evasion intentions were not impacted by the presence of an informed other. ANOVA for evasion intentions yielded a main effect of disparity ( $M_{\text{disparity}} = 3.47$  vs.  $M_{\text{no disparity}} = 2.31$ ;  $F(1, 194) = 24.40, p < .001$ ), no effect of an informed other ( $F < 1$ ), and a significant disparity by informed other interaction ( $F(1, 194) = 4.32, p < .05$ ). Despite the unexpected cross-over interaction, evasion intentions did not differ by the presence of an uninformed other within either the disparity condition ( $M_{\text{informed other}} = 3.22$  vs.  $M_{\text{no informed other}} = 3.76$ ;  $F(1, 94) = 2.58, p > .10$ ) or the control ( $M_{\text{informed other}} = 2.53$  vs.  $M_{\text{no informed other}} = 2.07$ ;  $F(1, 100) = 2.60, p > .10$ ). That is, the presence of an informed other had no impact on evasion intentions.

FIGURE 3: PRESENCE OF AN INFORMED OTHER IMPACTS DECEPTION BUT NOT EVASION GIVEN A PERFORMANCE DISPARITY



*Anticipated Embarrassment and Alternatives.* We examined embarrassment and other negative self-conscious emotions as simultaneous parallel mediators of the relationship between a self-threatening word of mouth inquiry (disparity) and non-truthful responding (either evasion or deception) following Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007). Results (detailed in the Appendix) show that a self-threatening consumer performance disparity affects each measured emotion (a path), but that only embarrassment drives truth avoidance (b paths). The conditional indirect effect of a performance disparity through embarrassment was significant for both evasion (95% CI = [.23, .94] at 5,000 resamples; Appendix Table Model A) and deception (95% CI = [.22, .91]; Appendix Table Model B).

The mean of the depressive affect measures also mediated the relationship between the self-threatening disparity and deception intentions (but not evasion intentions) in the full simultaneous model (Appendix Table Model B). However, when the model was reduced to compare only the significant embarrassment and depression mediators, embarrassment remains significant (95% CI = [.30, .73]) while depression falls to non-significance (95% CI = [-.49, .11]; Appendix Table Model C), supporting anticipated embarrassment as the dominant mediator of the relationship between a request for self-threatening word of mouth information and non-truthful responding.

### *Discussion*

Study 2 demonstrates that the presence of an informed other decreases consumers' intentions to deceive without affecting their intentions to evade in response to a self-threatening word of mouth request. This finding supports our conceptual distinction between evasion and deception by providing empirical evidence of a unique moderator of deception. This study also

confirms anticipated embarrassment as the mechanism underlying the relationship between unfavorable performance disparities and truth avoidance after controlling for several alternative emotional drivers.

### ***STUDY 3***

In Study 3, we examine another situational factor that distinguishes evasion from deception. This study tests our prediction that the presence of a persistent other moderates intention to provide evasive (i.e. uninformative) responses without affecting deceptive (i.e., misinformative) responses given a self-threatening word of mouth inquiry (disparity).

#### *Method*

Study 3 employed a 2 (Disparity vs. Control) x 2 (Persistent Other vs. No Persistent Other) between-subjects design. Undergraduate students (N = 186, 71 female) at a North American university participated for partial course credit. To demonstrate robustness, we used a different consumer performance disparity than in prior studies. Participants imagined themselves meeting a group of same-sex friends at a mall food court. On the way to the food court, the participant and a friend (the interaction partner) stop at a kiosk where each receives a free credit report. Participants privately see an electronic copy of their own credit report with a FICO score of 610, indicating “low credit-worthiness” (disparity condition) or 775, indicating “excellent credit-worthiness” (control condition). Later, while socializing with friends over lunch, the participant overhears the interaction partner being either very persistent or not very persistent when asking another friend about a recent exam. In the scenario, the participant thinks about how this display of (absence of) persistence is typical of the interaction partner. The interaction

partner then turns the conversation to the credit scores that s/he and the participant just obtained. The interaction partner mentions that s/he had a rating of “excellent credit-worthiness” with a FICO score of 775, and then asks the participant, “What about you?” (see Appendix for full stimuli).

Immediately after participants read this scenario, we measured evasion ( $\alpha = .85$ ) and deception ( $\alpha = .95$ ) intentions as we did in prior studies. Confirmatory factor analysis again supports evasion and deception as independent factors ( $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 162.57, p < .001$ ).

We next used three seven-point bipolar items to assess the persistent other manipulation (the friend was “relenting:unrelenting,” “surrendering:persistent,” “unyielding:yielding”;  $\alpha = .60$ ). Each participant also completed manipulation checks to confirm that nobody else knew the participant’s credit score, and how it compared to that of the friend.

## *Results*

*Manipulation Checks.* Participants in the persistent other condition perceived the friend as more persistent ( $M = 4.91$ ) than did participants in the no persistent other condition ( $M = 3.49$ ;  $F(1, 172) = 83.90, p < .001$ ). Responses to an adapted version of the same three-item disparity check ( $\alpha = .94$ ) used in prior studies supports our disparity manipulation ( $M_{\text{disparity}} = 6.16$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 4.03$ ;  $F(1, 172) = 182.91, p < .001$ ). One hundred and thirty-seven (94%) participants correctly indicated that only they knew their own credit score. Excluding participants who failed this check did not change the results.

*Main Results.* ANOVA on the composite measure of deception intentions revealed only a main effect for performance disparity ( $M_{\text{disparity}} = 3.45$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 2.81$ ;  $F(1, 170) = 6.43, p < .05$ ). Deception intentions did not differ due to the presence of a persistent other in either the

disparity condition ( $M_{\text{persistent other}} = 3.49$  vs.  $M_{\text{no persistent other}} = 3.41$ ;  $F < 1$ ; see Figure 4) or the control ( $M_{\text{persistent other}} = 2.92$  vs.  $M_{\text{no persistent other}} = 2.71$ ;  $F < 1$ ). In short, the presence of a persistent other had no impact on deception intentions.

However, the presence of a persistent other did affect evasion intentions. ANOVA for evasion intentions revealed both a main effect of disparity on evasion intentions ( $M_{\text{disparity}} = 4.22$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 3.55$ ;  $F(1, 169) = 7.82, p < .01$ ) and a significant interaction of disparity and the presence of a persistent other ( $F(1, 169) = 7.83, p < .01$ ).

While there was a marginal increase in evasion intentions due to the presence of a persistent other in the control condition ( $M_{\text{persistent other}} = 3.86$  vs.  $M_{\text{no persistent other}} = 3.23$ ;  $F(1, 86) = 3.30, p < .10$ ), given a performance disparity, there was a significant reversal of this pattern. Participants facing a self-threatening performance disparity were significantly less likely to evade in the presence of a persistent other ( $M = 3.86$ ) than those who did not face a persistent other ( $M = 4.59$ ;  $F(1, 85) = 4.61, p < .05$ ). In sum, the presence of a persistent other moderated evasion, but not deception intentions in the face of a self-threatening performance disparity.<sup>3</sup>

### *Discussion*

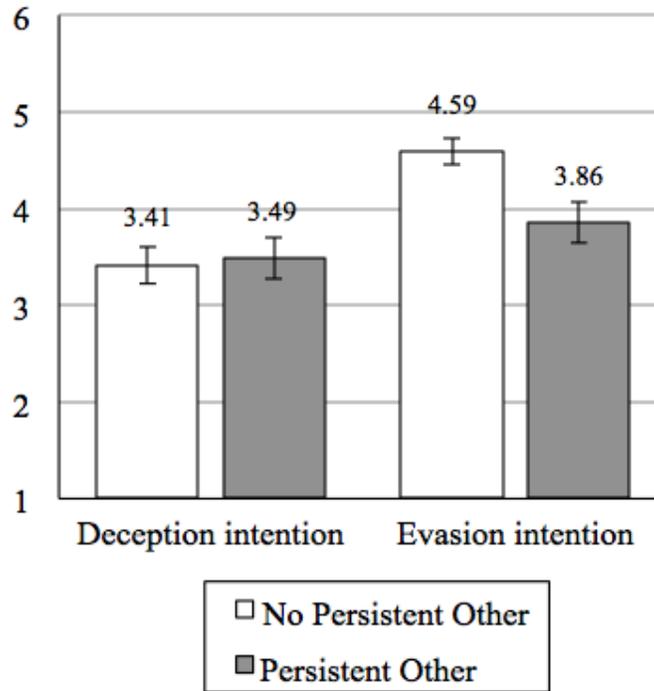
Study 3 demonstrates that the presence of a persistent other impacts intentions to evade, but not deceive, to protect one's self from the threat of revealing embarrassing word of mouth information. Taken together, our first three studies demonstrate that, although tendencies to

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<sup>3</sup> Given potential collinearity between evasion and deception intentions, we also performed the main analysis for Studies 2 and 3 controlling for evasion intentions as a third predictor of deception intentions (and vice versa) using a mixed regression model including all potential two- and three-way interactions. While there was a main effect relationship between evasion and deception (and vice versa) in both studies, inclusion of the alternative behavioral response as a third predictor had no effect on the pattern of results reported.

evade or deceive can be motivated by a similar emotional antecedent – anticipated embarrassment – each tactic is favored under different circumstances.

FIGURE 4: PRESENCE OF A PERISTANT OTHER IMPACTS EVASION BUT NOT DECEPTION GIVEN A PERFORMANCE DISPARITY



**STUDY 4**

While Studies 2 and 3 examine how different situational factors moderate the use of evasion versus deception, Study 4 seeks to further distinguish between the two behaviors by testing our prediction that they have different emotional consequences. Specifically, we expect that the use of deception will result in higher levels of guilt and shame than either evasive or truthful responding.

Although most prior research has used self-reports to measure deception intentions, socially desirable responding could be responsible for low self-reported deception intentions relative to either evasion or truthful responding. While our comparison of evasion and deception relative to a control condition accounts for baseline differences in self-reporting for the two responses, as a secondary contribution, Study 4 uses real behavioral responses in a controlled lab setting to fully control for this possibility.

### *Method*

Undergraduate students (N = 212, 107 female) at a North American university participated in the study for partial course credit. Participants were run one at a time in a small lab room with a same sex confederate who was blind to the research hypotheses and condition assignments. The participant and confederate were first invited to complete a national survey of credit-worthiness using a widely accepted credit-score test (FICO). Participants were told that they would learn their own credit score as a bonus for taking the survey.

After taking the survey, participants received a private electronic copy of their own credit report with a FICO score of 610, indicating “low credit-worthiness” (disparity condition) or 775, indicating “excellent credit-worthiness” (no disparity control). Afterwards, a research assistant, who was blind to condition assignments, instructed the participant and confederate to wait for a third participant who was scheduled to join them in an unrelated group discussion. Then, the research assistant left the participant and confederate in the room unattended, ostensibly to find the third participant.

While the participant and confederate were alone, the confederate initiated a conversation that included revealing his/her credit score, which was either higher than (disparity condition) or

the same as the participant's score (control condition). The confederate then asked the participant about his/her credit score. The confederate was instructed to give the participant time to respond before covertly signaling for the research assistant to re-enter the room.

Upon returning, the research assistant informed the participant and confederate that the third participant was “missing,” and instructed them to skip the group discussion and proceed to a final computer-based study. In this part of the study, participants were asked to indicate whether the confederate asked them anything after the research assistant left the room; and, if so, what (open-ended). This question was used to confirm that participants heard the question and recalled it accurately. Participants were also asked to report how they answered the question and to indicate the extent to which a series of words described how they felt after responding to the other student’s question. We asked how shameful (ashamed, humiliated, disgraced) and guilty (repentant, guilty, blameworthy) participants felt about their response using items from Tangney et al. (1996). All items used seven-point scales from 1 = Not at all to 7 = Very much.

Next we used three bipolar items using seven-point scales to assess the disparity manipulation (“I was less [more] credit-worthy than the other student,” “I [The other student] got a lower credit score than the other student [me],” “I had a worse [better] credit score than the other student;”  $\alpha = .96$ ). Finally, we performed a funneled debriefing, including checks for suspicion and hypothesis guessing.

Participants’ open-ended verbal responses to the confederate’s prompt were recorded by an audio device and used as the dependent measure. Two independent research assistants transcribed the audio recordings to text. Three more independent judges assessed the transcription of participants’ verbal responses. Judges were asked to code factually accurate responses as “truthful,” factually inaccurate responses as “deceptive,” and vague or indirect

responses that were neither factually accurate nor inaccurate (i.e., non-informative) as “evasive.” Inter-judge agreement was 84%. Disagreements were resolved by majority rule.

### *Results*

The confederate, research assistant and audio transcriptionist were provided a mechanism to indicate suspicious participants as they were processing participants. Participants for which there was majority agreement regarding suspicion were withheld from analysis ( $N = 20$ ). The high frequency of suspicion was due to participants showing up earlier than their scheduled time, in which case they saw the confederate in the lab before the study began. Using unanimous rather than majority agreement on suspicion as the exclusion criteria produces the same statistical conclusions as those reported below. No participants guessed that the study was concerned with evasion, deception, or truthfulness. The audio recording of the response to the confederate’s question about the participant’s credit score was inaudible for one participant, leaving a total of 191 participants for analysis.

*Manipulation Checks.* All but two participants recalled that the confederate asked about their credit score. Consistent with condition assignment, analysis of variance on the mean of the three credit disparity check items revealed that participants in the disparity condition perceived themselves to be on the short end of the credit score comparison ( $M = 6.42$ ), compared to those in the control condition ( $M = 3.45$ ;  $F(1, 189) = 481.17, p < .001$ ).

*Main Results.* An omnibus Fisher’s exact test revealed that the pattern of responses was significantly different across the disparity and control conditions ( $p < .001$ ). Participants were less likely to be truthful in the disparity condition (60.6%) than in the no disparity control condition (88.7%;  $\chi^2(1) = 18.46, p < .0001$ ). Participants in the disparity condition were more

evasive (25.5% vs. 11.3%;  $\chi^2(1) = 6.42, p = .01$ ) and more deceptive (13.8% vs. 0%; Fisher's exact test  $p < .0001$ ) than were participants in the no disparity condition. Given a disparity, participants were significantly more likely to use evasion than deception (25.5% vs. 13.8%;  $\chi^2(1) = 4.07, p < .05$ ; Table 1).

TABLE 1: ACTUAL RESPONSES TO A WORD OF MOUTH INQUIRY (S4)

	<u>Condition</u>			
	Disparity		Control	
Truthful	57	(60.6%)	86	(88.7%)
Deceptive	13	(13.8%)	0	(0.0%)
Evasive	<u>24</u>	<u>(25.5%)</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>(11.3%)</u>
Total	94	(100.0%)	97	(100.0%)

*Emotional Consequences.* As predicted, participants who gave deceptive responses reported higher feelings of guilt and shame than did their evasive counterparts (Guilt: Deception = 3.56 vs. Evasion = 2.33;  $t(35) = 2.16, p < .05$ ; Shame: Deception = 3.82 vs. Evasion = 2.64;  $t(35) = 2.15, p < .05$ ).

Moreover, consistent with prior research, deceptive participants felt more guilt and shame than did truthful participants (Guilt:  $\alpha = .87$ ; Deception = 3.56 vs. Truth = 1.83;  $t(68) = 3.58, p = .003$ ; Shame:  $\alpha = .91$ ; Deception = 3.82 vs. Truth = 2.08;  $t(68) = 3.18, p = .006$ ). By contrast, evasive participants felt no more guilty than truthful participants (Evasion = 2.33 vs. Truth = 1.83;  $t(79) = 1.44, p > .15$ ), and only marginally more ashamed (Evasion = 2.64 vs. Truth = 2.08;  $t(79) = 1.75, p = .09$ ).

### *Discussion*

Study 4 revealed that evasion has different emotional consequences than deception. For those who were motivated to protect themselves from an embarrassing truth, evasion produced less guilt and shame than deception, and had emotional consequences that resembled truthfulness. This study also revealed, in a controlled laboratory setting, that evasion is a natural behavioral response that represents an attractive (and sometimes preferred) alternative to deception and is not merely an artifact of socially desirable responding.

### ***GENERAL DISCUSSION***

Although a large body of research documents the use of outright deception in consumer exchanges of information, there has been scant empirical attention paid to efforts to employ a less obvious and less (emotionally) costly means of responding to word of mouth requests without revealing the truth. We address this gap by examining evasion as an alternative to deception in interpersonal exchanges of consumption information.

Our research makes three main contributions. First, across four studies using both self-reported intentions and actual behaviors, we found evidence that evasion is a frequently used, and sometimes preferred, alternative to deception as a means of protecting the self from an embarrassing truth.

Second, we provide evidence of discriminant validity between evasion and deception by demonstrating different situational factors moderate the use of each tactic. Specifically, we found that deception (but not evasion) intentions decline with the risk of being “exposed” for providing misinformation in the presence of a person who has knowledge of an embarrassing truth, whereas evasion (but not deception) intentions were affected by the presence of a persistent other

who refuses to accept an uninformative response. Thus, although we find that tendencies to deceive or evade arise out of similar needs to protect the self from anticipated embarrassment, we also find that different factors impact the use of each response tactic.

Third, we provide further evidence of discriminant validity by finding that deception and evasion have distinct emotional consequences. Specifically, people reported feeling less guilty and ashamed about evading than deceiving. This finding suggests that the relative infrequency of deceptive responding observed in previous research (and in Studies 1 and 4 here), may be driven by the relatively higher emotional costs of deceiving. In other words, evasion allows consumers to avoid revealing embarrassing information without the guilt or shame associated with deception.

### *Substantive Implications*

A global survey conducted by Nielsen (2013) reports that consumers not only rely more heavily on word of mouth communication than ever before, but they also trust this information source more than firm-generated alternatives (e.g. advertising). Our research further confirms the need for consumers to reconsider their trust in word of mouth communications (Barasch and Berger 2013; Packard and Wooten 2013).

In contrast to firm-generated information that is predictably biased by the dominant (i.e. profit-seeking) motive of this source, our findings suggest that consumer-generated information can suffer from distortions that result from less obvious motives and less predictable biases. That is, consumers expect advertising messages to be biased in favor of the advertiser's products and they take this persuasion knowledge into account when they process this information (Friestad and Wright 1994; Kirmani and Campbell 2004). However, people tend to be less suspicious of

other consumers' motives and less certain of whose products will be favored in messages from self-interested consumers. Therefore, greater awareness of the multiplicity of self-serving motives and responses associated with word of mouth information can either decrease or increase consumers' efforts to seek this information from their peers. On one hand, consumers may seek less word of mouth information if they are more aware of the uncertainty surrounding its generation and transmission. On the other hand, they may seek more word of mouth information from additional sources in order to obtain convergent evidence.

Our findings should mitigate concerns about deception being a common response to sensitive or self-threatening word of mouth exchanges (e.g. Anthony and Cowley 2012; Argo, Dahl, and White 2011; Argo and Shiv 2012; Argo, White, and Dahl 2006; Mazar, On, and Ariely 2008; Sengupta, Dahl, and Gorn 2002). We instead find evidence that the suppression of true information may be a greater risk than the introduction of false information in word of mouth exchanges. In other words, instead of being misinformed in some word of mouth exchanges, we find evidence that consumers may often be uninformed (or insufficiently informed) by these exchanges.

The extent to which receiving an evasive response is less problematic than receiving a deceptive one is unclear. The problem created by evasive responding depends, in part, on the ability of message recipients to detect evasion (Rogers and Norton 2011). If word of mouth recipients recognize that their questions have not been answered or their information needs have not been met, then the problem of being uninformed is minimal. In this case, recipients should be aware of the need to seek additional information. However, the potential problem arising from evasive responding is much greater if evasive responses go undetected. In this case, consumers

may not perceive themselves to be insufficiently informed, which may lead them to make purchase decisions based on limited or non-diagnostic information.

In addition to word of mouth settings, our findings have implications for other contexts that involve people sharing information about their consumption experiences, with marketers as well as with other consumers. As a result, firms may wish to train their research, sales and service personnel to recognize evasive responding, which should be easier to detect than deception (Buller, Strzyzewski, and Comstock 1991). Greater ability to detect evasive responses from consumers could allow frontline employees to better recognize the need to probe customers for more or better information when necessary and could alert them of the presence of alternative buying motives that consumers may be reluctant to disclose.

### *Theoretical Implications*

Although our research provides an initial exploration of evasive responding by consumers, additional research is needed for a fulsome understanding of when, why and how evasion occurs, both within and outside the domain of consumption. Wooten and Reed (2000) theorize that evasion may be especially likely to occur when individuals are highly motivated to make desired impressions, but uncertain of how to do so. Their analysis suggests that evasion may be especially useful when individuals wish to avoid looking bad, but it may be less useful when they are concerned about looking good. Our findings are consistent with their view of evasion as a protective, as opposed to an acquisitive, communication strategy (Arkin 1981). By contrast, Wooten and Reed (2000) argue that individuals may be more likely to resort to deception when they are motivated to make desired impressions and they understand what is required to succeed. This implies that, unlike evasion, deception can facilitate efforts to look

good. However, our findings suggest that deception can be used for protective as well as acquisitive purposes.

The results of Studies 2 and 3 suggest that the risk of being exposed by interaction partner for providing inaccurate or insufficient information plays an important role in determining the relative attractiveness of evasion versus deception, respectively. While rates of deception detection among lay people are no better than chance (DePaulo, Stone, and Lassiter 1985; Vrij and Graham 1997), researchers have devised ways to improve evasion detection (Buller, Strzyzewski, and Comstock 1991; Rogers and Norton 2011). We found that the presence of a persistent other moderates evasive, but not deceptive responding, possibly because probing facilitates detection of evasion (Buller, Strzyzewski, and Comstock 1991; Burgoon et al. 1994) but not deception (Buller et al. 1989). On the other hand, our finding that the prospect of being exposed by an informed other moderates the use of deception (but not evasion), suggests that actually being “exposed” may be more costly for deceivers than evaders. People are ashamed of being caught telling lies, and the facade of a false reality can be challenging to sustain over time (Buller, Strzyzewski, and Comstock 1991). Thus, deceptive responses may be easier to construct, harder to maintain, harder to detect, and more damaging if exposed by the information recipient.

Depending on how broadly one defines deception, the so-called “lie of omission” is either a special case of evasion or a hybrid approach that blurs the boundary between deception and evasion (i.e., an evasive response that prompts deceptive inferences). Consistent with our focus on evasion as an alternative to, rather than a means of deception, we constructed scenarios that limited opportunities to tell “lies of omission” and we included measures that captured the communicators’ intentions, while ignoring the inferences made by message recipients. Nonetheless, it is possible that, despite communicators’ best intentions, their evasive responses

allow them to profit from their audiences' deceptive inferences while minimizing their own psychological costs of intentionally misrepresenting the truth. Further research is needed to better understand this subtle form of deception.

Although our studies were not designed to assess the prevalence of evasion, our results suggest that it is a common, if not preferred, alternative to deception. One might argue that evasive behaviors may be more prevalent than our studies suggest, because we limited our investigation to consumers' responses to direct requests for information. In more voluntary word of mouth settings, where consumers have more freedom to choose what information to share, it may be much easier to withhold factual information without having to "beat around the bush."

In conclusion, this research empirically introduces evasion as a distinct alternative to deception in word of mouth exchanges. It also contributes theory-driven insights on the behavioral and psychological distinctions between these two means of protecting the self from an embarrassing truth. We hope that this research will stimulate further investigations of evasive maneuvers and their impact on those who experience them.

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## APPENDIX

### STUDY 1 SCENARIO

Imagine that you have invited a handful of friends to your apartment to watch a movie on the new big-screen TV that you bought for \$1,000. Before the movie starts, one of your friends notices that your new television is exactly the same brand, model, and size as the one (s)he bought a week ago. Then you and (s)he have the following conversation about television sets:

Friend: "Nice TV. When did you get it?"

You: "I got it on sale about a week ago."

Friend: "Me too. I got the exact same set!"

You: "Really?"

Friend: "Yeah, I paid [Large Disparity = \$700; Small Disparity = \$900; No Disparity = \$1,000]. What about you?"

You: “ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

### STUDY 2 SCENARIO

Social Presence: (Informed Other / No Informed Other); Female Version

Imagine that you have invited a handful of friends to your apartment to watch a movie on the new big-screen TV that you bought for \$1,000. One of your friends, Maria, arrives at your apartment a few minutes earlier than everyone else, so the two of you talk about the (price you paid for / features on) your new television while you wait for your other friends to arrive. Maria seems to be impressed when you tell her (you paid \$1,000 for it / about the 60-inch screen).

Soon, everyone arrives at your apartment and gathers around the television before you start the movie. Everyone is talking, when Jane looks at your TV and notices that it is exactly the same brand, model, and size as the one she bought a week ago. She suddenly blurts out, "Hey, I got the exact same set on sale last week for \$800 at Best Buy, what about you?"

How are you likely to respond to Jane's question?

### STUDY 3 SCENARIO

Social Presence: (Persistent Other / No Persistent Other); Male Version

Imagine that you and some friends are meeting for lunch at the food court in the local mall. You and one of your friends, John, arrive a bit early to walk around the mall. The two of you stop at a kiosk for a credit card company that offers a free credit report for completing a credit application. After completing the application, each of you go to separate booths to see electronic copies of your credit reports. You privately learn that your FICO score of 610 is in the “low credit-worthiness” range.

You and John then head to the food court to join your friends for lunch. While eating, you overhear a conversation between John and one of your mutual friends, Victor:

John: “That history midterm was brutal. How did you do?”

Victor: “I’ve been so busy this term, it’s been hard to study.”

John: “I know what you mean. (So what did you do on the weekend? /So how did you do on the midterm?)”

Victor: “I studied really hard for that exam.”

John: (“So what was your mark?” / “So what are you doing tonight?”)

Victor: (“Well, I got a C.” / “Well, I’m going to a movie.”)

John: “Me too. (Maybe we should study together! / Maybe we should go together)!”

After listening to this conversation, you think to yourself, “That’s just like John... he’s (so / not very) persistent when he wants to know something. He (totally didn’t / totally) let Victor avoid answering his question about his midterm mark.”

John then mentions to everyone that the two of you just received your credit scores. He says, “I got a score of 775, which means I have “excellent credit-worthiness.” Turning to you, he says, “What about you?”

You are the only one who knows about your low credit score. How are you likely to respond to John's question?

## STUDY 2 EMOTION ALTERNATIVE MEASURES

Shame: ashamed, humiliated, disgraced

Guilt: repentant, guilty, blameworthy

Anger: angry, irritated, annoyed

Envy: envious, jealous

Resentment: resentful, malicious, animosity

Depressive affect: unhappy, distressed, dejected, awful

All items from Tangney et al. (1996)

## STUDY 2 MEDIATION RESULTS

Model	DV	Mediator	95% CI for Indirect Path	Path coefficients			
				a	b	a x b	c
A	Evasion	Embarrassment	.23, .94 *	.98 *	.54 *	.53 *	0.22
		Shame	-.18, .57	1.01 *	.18	.18	0.22
		Guilt	-.25, .15	.81 *	-.05	-.04	0.22
		Anger	-.67, .21	1.55 *	-.13	-.20	0.22
		Envy	-.47, .26	1.59 *	-.06	-.09	0.22
		Resentment	-.08, .71	.91 *	.31	.28	0.22
		Depression	-.87, .19	1.20 *	-.25	-.30	0.22
B	Deception	Embarrassment	.22, .91 *	.98 *	.55 *	.54 *	0.25
		Shame	-.35, .46	1.01 *	.05	.05	0.25
		Guilt	-.37, .12	.81 *	-.15	-.12	0.25
		Anger	-.66, .20	1.55 *	-.14	-.22	0.25
		Envy	-.25, .46	1.59 *	.08	.13	0.25
		Resentment	-.01, .83	.91 *	.45	.41	0.25
		Depression	-1.17, -.01	1.20 *	-.48 *	-.58 *	0.25
C	Deception	Embarrassment	.30, .73 *	.98 *	.51 *	.50 *	0.15
		Depression	-.49, .11	1.20 *	-.16	-.19	0.15

Price disparity versus no disparity control is the IV for all results.

\*Significant at  $p < .05$  or better.