



DIGITAL BEHAVIOR BRIEFING

Why Do People Lie More Online Than in Person? The Data

Six data points on digital honesty, and a catch: the least honest medium in the numbers below isn't an app at all.

Cross-referencing Cornell University, Stanford's Social Media Lab, a 2021 content analysis in the journal Information, Federal Trade Commission fraud data, and current workplace and social media surveys.



What's inside the full report

The complete report runs several pages and draws on seventeen primary sources. Here's the structure, plus the summary table it opens with.

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The clearest case, and why
Phone calls vs. email: the study that found a landline call less trustworthy than an inbox, and the model that explains why.
- 2

How we picked these six
What "the channel effect," "the curation effect," and "the exploitation effect" actually mean.
- 3

The complete six-case list
Anonymous comments, dating profiles, resumes and LinkedIn, social media, and romance scams, each with sourced figures.
- 4

Also worth watching
Age misrepresentation on platforms with a minimum age, and the "context collapse" theory of a single, flattened online persona.
- 5

The caveat that matters most
Why this report's own title runs into its best piece of data, and where online anonymity makes people more honest, not less.

NO.	CONTEXT	EFFECT	WHY IT'S ON THE LIST
1	Phone calls vs. email	The channel effect	37% of phone conversations included a lie versus just 14% of emails, in the same study.
2	Anonymous online comments	The channel effect	A real but tiny anonymity effect that a national identity law failed to meaningfully improve.
3	Online dating profiles	The curation effect	Nearly universal small lies about weight, height, and photos.
4	Resumes and LinkedIn	The curation effect	21.5% lied on their resume in the past year, ten times higher for Gen Z than Boomers.
5	Social media (Facebook, Instagram)	The curation effect	57% say their own profile isn't a fully accurate reflection of who they are.
6	Romance scams and catfishing	The exploitation effect	\$1.16 billion lost to fabricated online identities in nine months of 2025.

The full report also includes an interactive dashboard version of this table, comparing each case's honesty data side by side, filterable and sourced.

EXCERPT FROM THE FULL REPORT

The clearest case: what a phone call can do that email can't

The most cited data point behind this entire report comes from a 2004 Cornell University study that asked 30 students to keep a diary of every lie they told over seven days, across every communication channel they used. Researchers logged 1,198 separate social interactions and 310 documented lies.

The rate of lying varied enormously by medium: 37% of phone conversations included a lie, compared with 27% of face-to-face conversations, 21% of instant-message conversations, and just 14% of emails. Participants told an average of 1.6 lies a day, and the phone, not any online platform, carried the highest rate of any medium studied.

Lead researcher Jeff Hancock later formalized why in what he calls a feature-based model of deception: three properties of a communication channel predict how much lying happens in it, largely independent of who is talking. Synchronicity, whether a conversation happens in real time

Continues in the full report, alongside anonymous comments, dating profiles, resumes, social media, and romance scams

GET THE FULL REPORT

This is a short taste of the complete briefing.

The full report covers all six cases in depth, the complete methodology, seventeen cited sources, and comes with a live interactive dashboard you can embed or share. Get in touch and we'll send it over, or talk to us about custom trust and safety research for your own team.

THE FULL PACKAGE INCLUDES

- The complete written report (Word and PDF)
- The interactive digital-honesty dashboard, filterable by case
- Full source list with 17 primary citations
- Custom data or refresh schedule, on request

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This preview reflects public research available as of September 2026. It draws on academic studies, government fraud data, and commercial surveys, which use different methods and definitions of "lying," and treats each figure as one estimate rather than a universal fact. Full citations are in the complete report.