

Chapter 25

Online Romance in the 21st Century: Deceptive Online Dating, Catfishing, Romance Scams, and “Mail Order” Marriages

Renee D. Lamphere

University of North Carolina at Pembroke, USA

Kweilin T. Lucas

University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA

ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of technology has changed the dating world for millions of people. While dating scams are not a new phenomenon to the online dating community, a new form of scam known as “catfishing” is also taking place. Catfishing is the verb used to describe the actions of a “catfish,” a person who creates falsified online profiles on social networking sites with the purpose of fraudulently seducing someone else. In addition to talking about online dating scams and catfishing, this chapter will also examine “mail order” marriages and the potential impact of this practice.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of Internet-based technologies has changed many aspects of our lives. One area of human communication that has been effected by technological advances is the opportunity for online romantic endeavors. The Internet has now made it possible for a person to date without ever leaving their home. The use of Internet dating sites, social networking sites, and dating applications has enabled humans to date 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year (Rege, 2009). It is estimated that one in four dating relationship begin online, making the Internet the second most common way that dating couples meet (Cocalis, 2016).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8535-0.ch025

With the increase in popularity of online dating in the past twenty years has come a growth in both the numbers and revenues of online dating websites (Close & Zinkhan, 2004). There are over 1,400 dating site in North America alone (Rege, 2009), which are estimated to generate \$2 to \$4 billion in revenue annually (Hamm, 2014; Harwell, 2015; Rogers, 2013). Popular sites such as Match.com, eHarmony.com, Chemistry.com, OurTime.com, and OKCupid.com make it easy for individuals to meet potential online matches (Harwell, 2015; Rege, 2009). Online dating sites provide an avenue to meet people online with the potential to move offline into face-to-face relationships (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008). In addition to traditional websites, there are also a number of popular online dating applications. Popular apps such as Tinder, Coffee Meet Bagel, and Zoosk that users download on their phone make it easy to browse for potential mates (Windelman, 2018). Online dating is not limited to dating sites and apps only; social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter have generated a new method of connecting with others who may share similar interests (Wortham, 2014). It is through this new method of social networking that a new type of dating scam has emerged known as “catfishing”. Catfishing is the verb used to describe the actions of a “catfish”, a person who creates falsified online profiles on social networking sites with the purpose of fraudulently seducing someone (Harris, 2013).

Recent research by Smith (2016) in conjunction with the Pew Research Internet Project echoes the trend towards online dating, with 12% of Americans reporting using online dating sites or mobile dating applications. This represented a 3% increase from the 9% who reported usage in 2013 (Smith & Duggan, 2013). In regard to social networking sites (SNS), 31% of respondents reported using these sites to check up on someone they used to date or be in a relationship with, and 15% asked someone out on a date using an SNS (Smith & Duggan, 2013). While the majority of people who go online to date do not experience major difficulties, it is an industry that has faced a number of problems, particularly the emergence of dating/romance scams (Button, McNaughton-Nicholls, Kerr, & Owen, 2014; Rege, 2009). This has left many online dating users weary of dating on the Internet, with 45% of adult online dating users agreeing that it is more dangerous than other ways of meeting people (Smith, 2016).

In addition to the “traditional” online dating/romance scams, the emergence of catfishing has brought about a new and different type of online dating victimization for online daters to be weary of. Also, something to consider is that the increase in the use of online dating is also correlated with increases in the use of the Internet for finding marriages. One particular practice, the use of mail order brides in the United States, will be explored in detail in this chapter. It is important to understand the difference between these types of online dating victimization, as the motivation of the scammer and the potential for victimization varies greatly depending on the type of scam a person fall victim to.

TRADITIONAL ONLINE/DATING ROMANCE SCAMS

While the exact origins of the traditional online dating/romance scams are unknown, its roots can be traced back to the mid-2000s (Buchanan & Whitty, 2014; Whitty & Buchanan, 2012). Although these scams can manifest in a number of ways, there are commonalities among them. It should be noted that online dating romance scams are increasingly being conducted by international criminal groups, though lone individuals still engage in this activity as well (Whitty & Buchanan, 2016). Many victims of online dating scams in the United States fall prey to international scammer. Research by Beldo (2016) found that countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, the Netherlands, Romania, and South Africa had the highest fraud rates. Indeed, many are familiar with Nigeria’s reputation for email scams. This certainly does not mean

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/online-romance-in-the-21st-century/230771

Related Content

Social Software Trends in Business

Peter Burkhardt (2009). *Social Software and Web 2.0 Technology Trends* (pp. 1-16).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-software-trends-business/29274

An Extensible Game Engine to Develop Animated Facial Avatars in 3D Virtual Environment

Anis Zarrad (2016). *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking* (pp. 12-27).

www.irma-international.org/article/an-extensible-game-engine-to-develop-animated-facial-avatars-in-3d-virtual-environment/160082

Maturity Profiles of Organizations for Social Media

Edyta Abramek (2022). *Research Anthology on Social Media Advertising and Building Consumer Relationships* (pp. 806-815).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/maturity-profiles-of-organizations-for-social-media/305371

Citizen Engagement and Social Media: The Case of Mexican Presidential Candidacies

Rodrigo Sandoval-Almazan and Juan Carlos Montes de Oca Lopez (2019). *International Journal of E-Politics* (pp. 24-43).

www.irma-international.org/article/citizen-engagement-and-social-media/251891

Persuasive Propaganda: An Investigation of Online Deceptive Tactics of Islamist, White, and Zionist Extremists

Sampada Karandikar (2019). *Handbook of Research on Deception, Fake News, and Misinformation Online* (pp. 538-555).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/persuasive-propaganda/230777