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Case Study: The Romance Scammer

Introduction

A romance scammer is an individual who manipulates their victims, often by catfishing, for monetary gain. Merriam-Webster defines a “catfish” as “a person who sets up a false personal profile on a social networking site for fraudulent or deceptive purposes (Merriam-Webster, n.d). Romance scams gained popularity during COVID (2019-2021), and several names have been associated with this manipulative crime. Andrew Tate is one name of note due to his current criminal trial for romance scamming and trafficking in Romania, as well as the U.K. Shimon Yehuda Hayut, alias Simon Leviev, or the Tinder Swindler, is the topic of discussion for this case study.

Analysis

Tinder is a common dating app for individuals looking for a hookup or sometimes a committed relationship. On dating apps, people are sociologically driven to peacock or make themselves appear more desirable to obtain more matches. Simon was no exception to this concept. In fact, he posed as the son of a billionaire to lure his victims in. In my opinion, Simon was successful because he was an attractive male. The added factor that the crimes took place during COVID adds a layer of complexity to the scam. From a sociological perspective, people craved connection due to forced isolation and social distancing during the pandemic. This may

have contributed to Simon's ability to manipulate his victims with ease and reduce the victims' ability to sense the red flags that were present.

Pretty privilege is a psychological and sociological concept that drives human behavior. It can be argued that the reason he was successful for so long is because of his ability to appear wealthy and his underlying attractiveness. The techniques Simon utilized are similar to how a narcissist or a typical scammer would behave. The first thing is the "love bombing" phase, where he would shower the women with luxury to make them believe he was wealthy. He maintained constant communication with these women to create the illusion of an intense romantic relationship and create an unhealthy emotional attachment. One of the red flags he displayed is that he created emergency scenarios that required his victims to loan him money. In theory, he should've been able to pay for himself, but he used excuses to obtain the loans from his victims. This flag may have been ignored because he would pay the victims back. He did this by utilizing an MLM/Pyramid scheme where he would use money/loans from one victim to pay off another. This would make his victims feel more comfortable and loan him more money.

Solutions

Increased moderation on dating apps may help deter romance scammers. This could be a feature that uses AI to monitor the behaviors and patterns romance scammers tend to follow. A key indicator or red flag would be the urgent need to communicate outside of the application. This would be difficult to implement due to privacy concerns. Due to the nature of dating applications, some individuals may not want their flirtatious or even sexual conversations monitored. To mediate this, I recommend making this an optional feature. While it would render the feature useless, it protects the individual's right to privacy.

Reflection

With our growing dependency on technology in our everyday lives, it's important to consider the security risks associated. Dating via applications, while convenient, makes us vulnerable to catfishes, bots, and scammers. It is also important to consider the psychological effects a victim may face after being victimized. We tend to be less sympathetic and "tune in" when we see stories like the Tinder Swindler, but it's important to note he was criminally charged.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Tinder Swindler is an example of a romance scam that stole \$10 million by manipulating women on social media. Despite the Netflix documentary, this situation should not be seen as entertainment, but a use case for the impact of cyber-based victimization and the need for stricter guardrails on social media. This, of course, cannot come at the price of privacy, but compromises need to be made to avoid victimization in a technology-dependent society.

Reference

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Scam. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved April 21, 2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/scam>