

## Unveiling the Romance Scam Scheme: Psychological Manipulation and Its Impact on Victims

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the schemes used by Romance Scam perpetrators to manipulate victims, which ultimately leads to psychological and financial impacts on the victims. The analysis applies the Dramaturgy concept and Psychological Manipulation theory, which are relevant in understanding the interaction patterns between perpetrators and victims. This research is a literature review, with data collected from secondary sources, including Japanese online news portals such as Ameblo and Newpostseven, as well as social media platforms like Instagram. The Dramaturgy concept is used to explain identity falsification and the avoidance of direct communication by the perpetrators, while the Psychological Manipulation theory is applied to examine exaggerated expressions of love and requests for money by the perpetrators. These schemes significantly impact victims both psychologically and financially, often leaving long-lasting effects on their mental well-being and economic stability, indicating the extent of significant psychological and financial impacts on the victims. This research is to enrich the literature on cybercrime in Japan, particularly focusing on the emotional and relational aspects in the context of fraud.

**Keywords:** dramaturgy; psychological manipulation; romance scam, online dating

### Introduction

The rapid development of information technology, particularly in the era of globalization, has brought many benefits and advancements to various aspects of society. One of its key innovations was digital technology in the mid-20th century, which eventually gave rise to the internet. Japan became a leader in technological innovation due to its close relationship with the United States after World War II. The U.S. supported Japan's recovery through technology transfer, which Japan used to rebuild its economy (Hirai, n.d.).

Over time, Japan has continued to advance in technology and is currently developing the concept of Society 5.0. According to Atsushi Deguchi in his book *A People-Centric Super-Smart Society* (2020), Society 5.0 aims to achieve a high level of integration between the digital and physical worlds, allowing for a balance between economic progress and social problem-solving. (Hitachi-UTokyo Laboratory(H-UTokyo Lab.), 2020). The core of Society 5.0 lies in collecting data from the real world, processing it through computers, and applying the results back to the real world. Society 5.0 is a concept that integrates various technologies such as AI, IoT, and robotics to create a smarter society by utilizing technology more efficiently in everyday life. This also drives the rapid growth of social media, which connects users worldwide through the internet. (*Memahami Penggunaan Dan Motivasi Akun Anonim Instagram*, n.d.)

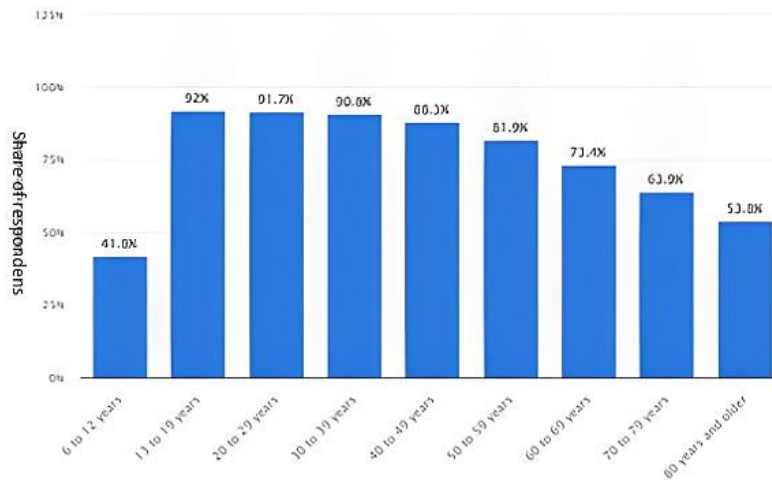
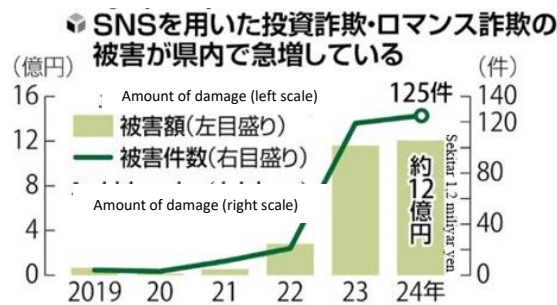


Figure 1. Internet Users Utilizing Social Media in Japan in 2022, by age group.  
(sumber: statista.com: 2023)

Figure 1 show that over 92% of teenagers use social media. A similarly high percentage is observed among those in their twenties, indicating a very high intensity of social media use in Japanese society. The majority of social media users in Japan are from the younger generation, with an average age of around 20. Social media cannot function independently and remains reliant on internet technology. The internet has unique characteristics, such as the absence of physical contact, round-the-clock accessibility, and flexibility in time and place. Interactions conducted online are generally text-based. When communicating through text, individuals can express themselves freely without others knowing their identities (anonymity). Anonymity plays a crucial role in online interactions and expressions. People tend to feel more comfortable expressing themselves online than in face-to-face situations because online communication allows for interaction without physical meetings, which can reduce feelings of self-doubt or social anxiety that may arise during direct interactions. (*Memahami Penggunaan Dan Motivasi Akun Anonim Instagram*, n.d.). In Japan, social conformity and the fear of judgment often discourage open expression in real life. Anonymity online provides a safe space for individuals to voice their opinions on taboo topics, such as mental health. (Bovee & Cvitkovic, n.d.)

As the use of technology, particularly social media, continues to grow, there has also been an increase in cybercrime. Activities such as hacking into others' computer programs, data theft, and fraud are conducted with the aim of personal gain (*Kebijakan Integral Penanggulangan Cyberporn Di Indonesia*, n.d.) Since 2000, Japan's cybersecurity initiatives have progressed from a focus on crime prevention and infrastructure, outlined in early plans like the Special Action Plan on Cyber-terrorism, to a broader strategic approach. The 2014 Basic Act on Cybersecurity established key institutions, and the 2015 Cybersecurity Strategy elevated cybersecurity as essential to technology, foreign policy, and defense. (*From Reactive to Proactive*, n.d.). Although crime rates in Japan are relatively low compared to other countries, cybercrimes such as phishing, malware, data theft, and fraud, including romance scams, continue to rise. Romance scams in Japan are more personal and relationship-based, while other cybercrimes are more technical and often target systems or data.

The number of cases of investment fraud and romance fraud using SNS is increasing rapidly in the prefecture



Grafik 2. Increase in Losses Due to Romance Scams in Japan.  
(sumber: yomiuri.co.jp: 2024)

Based on Figure 2, it is evident that losses due to romance scams in Japan have significantly increased from 2021 to 2024. From 2019 to 2020, total losses remained below 4 billion yen; however, during the period from 2021 to 2024, this figure soared to 16 billion yen. Additionally, data from Figure 1.2 shows a similar trend in the number of reported romance scam cases to the police. Between 2019 and 2020, the number of reported cases was below 20, but from 2021 to 2024, this number rose to 140 cases. This data was obtained from the police, specifically the Criminal Investigation Department and the Public Security Department, as reported by the Yomiuri news site. This increase indicates that romance scams are still prevalent in Japan and require greater attention. Given the alarming phenomenon of romance scams, the author is interested in exploring this issue further, specifically examining the schemes used by perpetrators and the impacts experienced by victims as a result of these crimes.

There are previous studies that have examined this theme, for example; in Juditha article "Communication Patterns in Cybercrime (Love Scams Case)," used the Theory of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and found that romantic communication through emails and social media led victims to ignore negative information (Christiany Juditha, 2015). In other articles Salsabilah examined the causes of these crimes in Indonesia, showing that economic factors and opportunities contributed to romance scams, which are regulated under the Criminal Code (Tasya Salsabilah, 2021). Meanwhile, Whitty and Buchanan revealed, through the theory of transfer effects, that victims of romance scams experienced severe psychological impacts due to losing money and expected relationships (Whitty & Buchanan, 2016).

On the other hand, Langga used dramaturgical theory to analyze how the defendant Ferdy Sambo played a role in court, trying to gain leniency in his sentence. (Gabriel Langga, 2023). Fitriani also discussed gaslighting as a form of psychological manipulation that caused victims to doubt their perceptions and increased the risk of mental health issues. This grouping of studies demonstrated that research on romance scams focused on social interactions, while studies on psychological manipulation explored its effects on individuals (Fitriani et al., 2023).

Although the previous studies share a common theme in discussing how patterns of fraud can harm victims psychologically, this research differs by focusing on Japanese society as its subject. Additionally, the approach used in this study is distinct, employing a literature review that utilizes news portals and media reporting on romance scams in Japan. This

research also aims to explore the motivations of romance scam perpetrators and the various forms these crimes can take. Furthermore, it examines the impact of these crimes on victims, who are typically between the ages of 20 and 50, particularly noting a significant increase in romance scam cases from 2021 to 2023. This context underscores the importance of this research, as it addresses a gap in prior studies. Additionally, this research contributes new insights to the fields of criminology and psychology by presenting a fresh perspective that likens romance scams to a drama performed by the perpetrators, highlighting how these scams involve manipulation of the victims.

### **Method**

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. The study takes a literature review approach, analyzing written works like books and journal articles to gather data on the role of online platforms in facilitating romance scams and their effects on victims. The focus is on Japanese society, with data collected from literature and online sources. Secondary data comes from news portals such as Ameblo and Newpostseven, as well as social media platforms like Instagram. Additional sources include official reports from relevant agencies. Content analysis will examine the experiences shared by romance scam victims on social media. The study analyzes six cases in Japan, using screenshots of conversations to identify patterns in the behavior of the perpetrators. These screenshots were taken through images sent by victims through the Ameblo platform. From the data obtained, the victim uses a pseudonym to cover his real identity so that they are not known who they really are to avoid negative judgment from others. To analyze the perpetrator's scheme, the author uses Erving Goffman's Dramaturgy theory which discusses that the perpetrator is likened to playing a role in a drama in front of the victim in order to attract the victim's attention (*Goffman Erving The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, n.d.). Then in examining the impact experienced by victims, the author uses the theory of Psychological manipulation by Erich Fromm to examine how the perpetrator uses manipulation techniques to control the emotions, thoughts, and actions of the victim, so that the victim gradually believes and eventually falls for the scam (*Erich Fromm The Art Of Loving 1956*, n.d.).

### **Finding**

Online dating can help individuals struggling to find partners in real life. However, it also creates opportunities for criminals to engage in scams and extortion, harming victims. According to Toshihiko Yamazaki (2022) from Nikkei.com, romance scams have been a concern since before the COVID-19 pandemic, and the number of cases has notably increased. (「愛してる」 「2人の将来に」 ロマンズ投資詐欺の手口, 2022). Data from the Cross Border Consumer Center Japan (CCJ) shows that while incidents were relatively low in Japan in 2018, cases have risen significantly since the pandemic's decline. (*Gift of Love? It Might Be a Sign of International Romance Scam - National Consumer Affairs Center of JAPAN* -, n.d.) This situation has been exploited by Mai Watanabe, known as Riri Chan, who sold a guide on how to scam people online, as reported by The Japan Times. Selling such guides is unethical and dangerous, as it encourages morally wrong behavior and raises public anxiety about romance scams. (*'Sugar Baby Riri' Gets Nine-Year Prison Term over Romance Scam - The Japan Times*, n.d.)

### **The Scheme of Romance Scam Perpetrators to Trap Victims**

A scheme is a structured plan or outline designed to achieve a specific goal. According to Maryam, A scheme is a set of structured arrangements of knowledge or understanding regarding several concepts or stimuli (Maryam, 2018). By planning their tactics, criminals can increase their chances of successfully committing crimes. This is also true for Romance Scam perpetrators, who aim to profit from their victims. The following section outlines the schemes used by these offenders to trap their victims in Romance Scams:

#### **1. Providing Fake Identity**

One scheme used by Romance Scam perpetrators is to provide unclear identities. Identity fraud involves deliberately concealing one's true identity. This leads victims to have a false belief that the identity presented by the perpetrator is genuine. Catfishing is a phenomenon that describes online deception, where someone uses a fake identity to pretend to show interest in another person (Putri & Hamzah, n.d.). According to Smith (Smith et al., 2017) In her research on identity fraud phenomena, catfishing is one form of violation in social networking services (SNS) that involves identity deception, primarily posing as a virtual partner in online dating. In this context, someone engaging in online dating typically looks for matches based on shared interests, such as dating goals, age, occupation, personality, and physical appearance. Therefore, individuals in online dating can present themselves by showcasing an ideal character they consider appealing, even if it is not accurate. This act of identity fraud is also related to Erving Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory. It pertains to how individuals present themselves in the digital world, particularly on social media and dating apps. In cases of identity fraud, perpetrators literally play a role using a false identity. They create a front stage that is very different from their back stage, aligning with the concept of Dramaturgical Theory, which describes how people perform on a stage. By playing a specific role, identity fraud can exploit the victim's vulnerabilities, using the empathy and trust they build through their appearances.



Figure 1. Profile of Perpetrators Using False Identities

(source: ameblo.jp:2024)

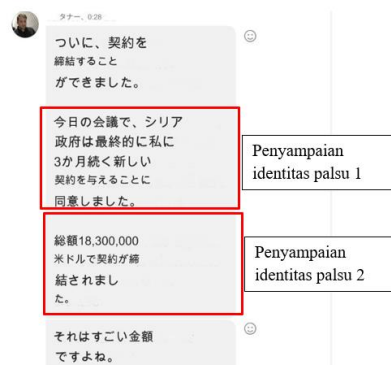


Figure 2. Screenshot from the Victim When the Perpetrator Declared a False Identity.

(source: ameblo.jp:2024)

As seen in Figure 1, the perpetrator on his Facebook account uses a profile picture of a man in a suit. The perpetrator likely has his own motives for using this photo, aiming to present himself as someone who works in an office setting. However, this identity is false. The victim stated, 「写真は盗用されたものでご本人は詐欺とは無関係です。」 which

means that the perpetrator stole the photo from the man to assume a false identity, effectively impersonating the individual in the picture.

From Figure 2, it can be seen that the perpetrator engaged in conversation with the victim through messages on a chat application. According to the victim's account published on the Ameblo news site, the perpetrator and the victim started their conversation on Facebook in November 2023. However, their communication later transitioned to another platform, specifically the Skype application, as shown in Figure 3.2. The victim reported that the perpetrator claimed to be Tanner Stephens Wiseman, an American citizen who works as a heart specialist affiliated with the WHO.

「ついに、契約を締結することができました。今日の会議で、シリア政府は最終的に私に3か月続く新しい契約を与えることに同意しました。総額18,300,000米ドルで契約が締結されました。それはすごい金額ですね。」

Translation:

*"Finally, we were able to create a contract. In today's meeting, the Syrian government has finally agreed to provide a new contract that will last for three months. The contract was signed for a total value of USD 18,300,000. A very large amount."* (sumber: [www.ameblo.jp](http://www.ameblo.jp):2024)

In the excerpt marked in Figure 2, the perpetrator pretended to inform the victim about a significant change in a contract involving a large income. The contract stated that Tanner would serve in Syria for three months, earning \$10,980,000. This illustrates the application of Dramaturgy in Romance Scam cases, particularly through identity fraud tactics designed to create and execute their deception meticulously. Each element of the perpetrator's story supports the narrative of a soldier wanting to retire, which is referred to as a "script" in Dramaturgy theory. Additionally, in the identity fraud tactics used in Romance Scam cases, the perpetrator also utilized props. They employed fake photos, counterfeit documents, and communication via social media to strengthen their story, including images suggesting affiliation with a medical profession and other fabricated evidence (Brown, 2003)

## 2. Avoiding Direct Communication

When someone commits to a romantic relationship, they often plan frequent meetings, feeling like the world belongs to just the two of them and always wanting to be together. However, this is not the case for Romance Scam perpetrators. They tend to avoid direct communication with their victims, making face-to-face meetings highly unlikely. The perpetrators have their reasons for refusing any invitation to meet in person, as they want to keep their true identities hidden from the victims.



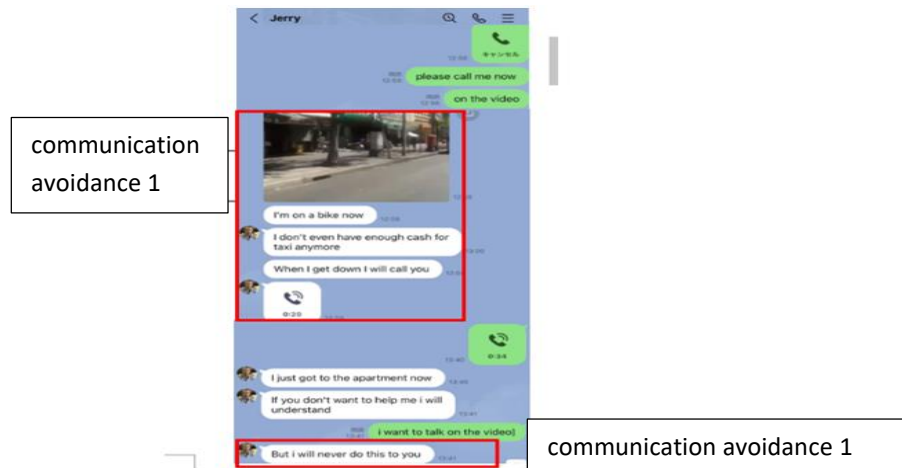


Figure 3: Screenshot of the Perpetrator Avoiding Communication with the Victim (source: minamoto-aida.com:2021)

As shown in Figure 3, the perpetrator claimed to be facing several issues and asked Aida for help. When Aida requested a video call, the perpetrator avoided it with excuses like driving or being outside. While the perpetrator didn't completely avoid communication, as seen in Figure 3, they did engage in voice calls. This choice indicates a preference for voice calls over video calls to maintain anonymity. Voice calls allow the perpetrator to hide their identity, as they don't need to show their face, which could reveal their true identity and make them easier to trace. Additionally, a video call could expose the perpetrator's actual appearance, which may not match the photos or descriptions used to deceive the victim. If someone in an online dating relationship declines multiple requests for voice or video calls, it can be an early sign of a Romance Scam.

### 3. Love Bombing

In Romance Scam cases, perpetrators use excessive declarations of love to manipulate victims into forming a relationship. Initially, they tend to flatter, praise, and entice individuals to win their hearts. During this stage, victims may feel that the relationship is progressing too quickly, as this often happens before any formal commitment. Once the perpetrator has showered attention and compliments, victims typically perceive their partner as caring, considerate, and appealing. Perpetrators often target individuals with low self-esteem, providing attention and affection to exploit their vulnerabilities. After satisfying their desire to toy with the victim's emotions, the perpetrator will begin to act as if they hold power, believing they are the one who genuinely cares for their partner (Strutzenberg et al., n.d.). The perpetrator carries out their scheme by extorting money from the victim, often sharing sad stories to evoke sympathy.

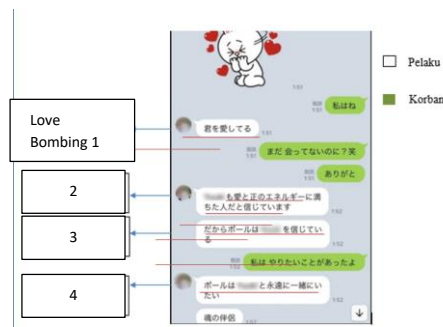


Figure 4. Screenshot of the Victim's Conversation with the Perpetrator.  
 (source: news-postseven.com:2022)

In Figure 4, the screenshot of the conversation on the LINE social media platform shows a Romance Scam perpetrator attempting to express romantic words directed at the victim.

lo	Excessive expressions of love	Translation
1	のソフトを使って間もなくあなたのような優しい女の子に出会うとは思いませんでした！”	ever expected to meet a kind-hearted girl like you shortly after using this software!”
2	ている”	
3	こいたい”	ant to be with you forever”
4	たち2人の家を買うことができると思っています”	ink we can buy a house for us”

Table 4. Love Bombing according to the screenshot

In statement expressing excessive love number 1, the perpetrator begins by praising the victim's kind nature, even though they have never met in person and are still in the early stages of getting to know each other. This is further supported by the perpetrator's remark, “shortly after using this software.”.

In the statement demonstrating excessive love number 2 and 3, the perpetrator expresses feelings for the victim, despite never having met in person. Healthy love is typically based on shared experiences and a deep understanding of one another. However, a relationship built solely on virtual communication can easily be manipulated by the perpetrator. In the third excessive love statement, the perpetrator continues to shower the victim with sweet words. They often use such phrases to control the victim's emotions, making them feel special and connected, which facilitates manipulation for ulterior motives, such as requesting money.

In the excessive love statement number 4, the perpetrator begins to mention the idea of buying a house together. Discussing home purchases is a significant step in any relationship. The perpetrator uses this conversation to create the illusion of long-term commitment, making the victim feel safe and emotionally attached. Such expressions of affection can certainly feel excessive, especially for someone in a romantic relationship without any prior meetings. It's important to recognize that this kind of excessive love is a form of psychological manipulation that is harmful and damaging. The perpetrator will likely



increase the intensity of these declarations over time. This scheme exemplifies psychological manipulation theory, as the victim becomes ensnared in the role the perpetrator plays in this drama of affection and attention. Once the victim is captivated by these words, the perpetrator will exploit their emotions to manipulate their thoughts, convincing them to give whatever is requested. The perpetrator uses this scheme to disguise their true intentions and behaviors. Furthermore, by providing excessive and profound affection, this strategy accelerates the emotional bonding process.

#### 4. Requesting Money from the Victim

When someone falls deeply in love, they are often willing to give up many things in the name of love, including money. Men or women who are in love will happily spend a significant amount of money to meet their partner's needs, often without realizing that they are being exploited.. According to Dunn (Dunn et al., 2008) Money can enhance happiness, but it's unfair for one person in a romantic relationship to bear all the expenses, and it's important to discuss this openly. However, in Romance Scams, perpetrators typically avoid such discussions and instead create sad narratives about their lives—claiming they're sick, scammed, or in urgent need of money, threatening their life if not paid immediately. Victims, already swayed by the perpetrator's charm, often provide financial help without ever meeting them. This trust stems from the perpetrator's skillful words that win the victim's heart. Others may see the victim as merely an ATM rather than a partner, especially when the requested amounts exceed their financial capacity.

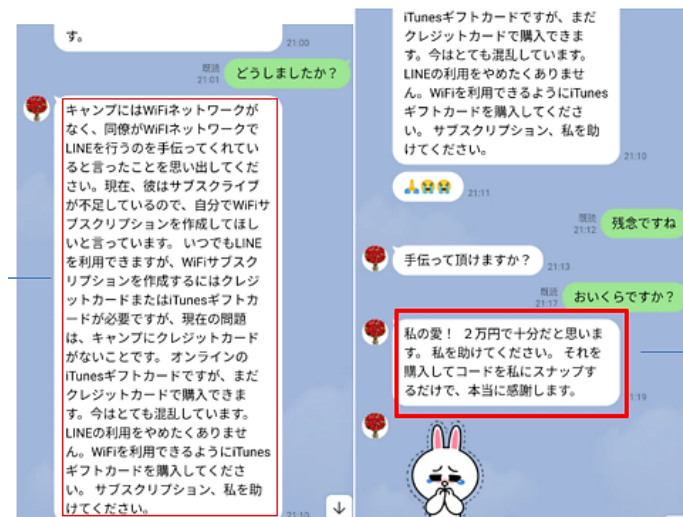


Figure 5. Screenshot of the conversation between the victim and the perpetrator when asking for money to cover their needs.

(sumber: ameblo.jp:2021)

In Figure 5, which is a screenshot of the conversation between the victim and the perpetrator reported on the Ameblo site, it is revealed that the victim is a woman with the username @Nosuken. She even specifies the amount of money that the victim must send to the perpetrator, which is 20,000 yen.

#### Reasons Used by Perpetrators to Ask Victims for Money:

“キャンプにはWiFiネットワークがなく、同僚がWiFiネットワークで「LINEを行うのを手伝ってくれていると言ったことを思い出してください。現在、彼はサブスクライブが不足しているので、自分でWiFiサブスクリプションを作成してほしいと言っています。いつでもLINEを利用できますが、WiFiサブスクリプションを作成するにはクレジットカードまたはiTunesギフトカードが必要ですが、現在の問題は、キャンプにクレジットカードがないことです。オンラインのiTunesギフトカードですが、まだクレジットカードで購入できません。今はとても混乱しています。LINEの利用をやめたくありません。「ん。WiFiを利用できるようにiTunesギフトカードを購入してください。「い。サブスクリプション、私を助けてください。”

#### Translation:

*"Please remember that there is no WiFi at the camp, and my friend told me he helped me use LINE on WiFi. Right now, he's out of subscriptions, so I'm trying to get my own WiFi subscription. You can always use LINE, but you need a credit card or an iTunes gift card to set up the WiFi subscription. The problem is, I can't get a credit card for the camp. I don't have an online iTunes gift card, but I can still buy one with a credit card. I'm really confused right now. I don't want to stop using LINE. Please help me by buying a subscription card. Thank you."*

In the conversation, the perpetrator claims to be using a friend's WiFi to chat with the victim on LINE because there is no network at the military camp where he is stationed. He states that his subscription has expired and he wants to get his own WiFi but needs a credit card or iTunes gift card for that. He asks the victim for help in purchasing the card because he doesn't want to stop using LINE.

#### The Perpetrator's Statement Requesting Money from the Victim:

“私の愛! 2万円で十分だと思います。私を助けてください。それを購入してコードを私にスナップするだけで、本当に感謝します。”

#### Terjemahan:

*""My love! I think 20,000 yen is enough. Please help me. Just buy it and give me the code; I would really appreciate it.""(Sumber:ameblo.jp 2021)*

In the statement from the perpetrator, he continues to use sweet words while attempting to execute his scheme. Nosuken, the victim featured in Ameblo, finds the perpetrator's request suspicious, as it seems trivial and not something she should handle. She notes that the perpetrator, who claims to be a doctor, should not have financial difficulties, yet he appears to struggle to make this purchase.

Scammers use various reasons to manipulate victims into giving money, such as claiming that they or their loved ones are in trouble, like being sick or injured. According to Dr. Rizal Fadli, this is emotional manipulation that exploits the victim's guilt and emotions. (Halodoc, n.d.). Alfred Edmond Jr., an expert in romantic relationships, emphasizes that using money to entice someone with the hope that they will fall in love can be detrimental to the

giver. As a result, victims feel pressured and fear losing the scammer if they cannot meet the monetary demands. (*Love and Money*, n.d.)

However, the perpetrator will not care about the impact of their actions on the victim in order to achieve their goals. This aligns with Erich Fromm's theory of psychological manipulation in relationships, as discussed in his book (*Erich Fromm The Art Of Loving 1956*, n.d.). Fromm explains that psychological manipulation in relationships occurs when one party tries to control the other to fulfill their personal needs while ignoring their partner's feelings and needs. In Romance Scam, the perpetrator employs psychological manipulation through the concept of Illusion of Love. According to Fromm, manipulation can happen when someone creates an illusion of love to achieve their goals. The perpetrator may pretend to love or care while actually seeking to exploit their partner for specific purposes. This illusion can make the manipulated partner feel loved, but in reality, they are merely being used.

### ***Romance Scam Impacts on victims***

Romance scams harm victims not only financially but also have serious psychological effects. Chenyang Wang's 2022 research on the psychological impact of online dating scams highlights that such fraud can lead to long-lasting negative psychological effects, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and even suicidal attempts (Wang, 2022)

During online dating, perpetrators use manipulation tactics to make victims fall in love and willing to do anything for them. The perpetrator presents themselves as perfect in the victim's eyes. Once the victim is in love, the perpetrator pretends to face financial difficulties and requests money, continuing to deceive the victim. Research shows that after obtaining money, the perpetrator distances themselves and eventually disappears, leaving the victim realizing they have been scammed. Even after recognizing the deception, the victim experiences loss similar to a breakup, feeling not only sadness but also disappointment, anger, and deep embarrassment.

Statement of the victim's disappointment:

“分かっていた。分かっていたよ。初めからあなたが本物の医師ではないことは。でも私、あなたが本当に好きだったよ…。叶はずない夢を夢見て何度も泣いたよ。。もう、、どうしようもないんだね。あなたにとっては私はただのターゲットの1人だったんだね。初めから。今も。タナーをどうやって繋ぎ止めれいいのかわからない。”

Translation:

“I know, I know. That you're not a real doctor from the beginning. But I really liked you; I cried many times, dreaming of dreams that would never come true. Now I can't hold it back, can I? To you, I'm just a target. From the very start. Even until now, I don't know how to connect with you.” (sumber: ww.ameblo.jp:2024).

The victim's words when the perpetrator disappeared and blocked them reveal that they actually knew the truth but still liked the perpetrator due to the romantic messages received. The victim admitted to crying multiple times over failing to realize their dream of living together. Upon discovering that their account was blocked, they felt hurt and betrayed, realizing that the perpetrator's expressions of love were just lies. This illustrates the deep

disappointment the victim felt, as they had hopes of achieving their dreams with the perpetrator.

Losing someone can lead to disappointment due to shattered hopes and emotional bonds. The feelings of loss experienced by victims of romance scams have a profound impact on their psychological well-being. Research indicates that victims of romance scams experience significant emotional distress. According to the official website of the American Psychological Association (APA) (2023), stress is an individual's response in situations where the demands faced exceed their ability to cope. Meanwhile, emotion, according to Crow & Crow (1973) (Fitri & Adelya, 2017) is a turbulent state within an individual that functions as an adjustment to the environment to achieve well-being and safety. Thus, emotional distress is a condition experienced by someone with uncomfortable feelings due to situations or events that cause stress. Personal issues such as conflicts in relationships, financial difficulties, and the loss of a loved one can lead to emotional distress. Victims of romance scams may experience excessive anxiety, feelings of insecurity, depression, and long-term mental health issues such as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).

One piece of evidence of anxiety symptoms in victims can be seen in the statement of a romance scam victim, blog user @moyunoeni4631. The victim, deceived by an unnamed foreign national from America, explained the worry they experienced. According to the official website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, anxiety disorders often coincide with depression, and excessive worry is a symptom that can disrupt activities if left unaddressed.

Here is the victim's statement.:

“しばらく、部屋でぼーっとしていましたが、だんだんと誰にも話さず、自分だけでこの今の辛い気持ちを溜めておく事が果てしなく苦しくなってきました。でも、身内や、職場、私の家族との繋がりがあるような友人には、知られたくない。こんな詐欺にひっかかってしまう人間であることで、信頼を失いそうで怖くて話せません。ものすごく悩みました”

Translation:

“Unknowingly, I sat in my room, finding it increasingly difficult to keep this painful feeling to myself without telling anyone. However, I don't want my siblings, coworkers, or close friends of my family to know about it. I'm afraid of losing their trust for being seen as someone who was deceived. I'm very worried” (sumber: www.sinmam.blog.jp:2022)

The statement from the victim with the username @moyunoeni4631 reflects feelings of worry due to the pressure of keeping pain and sadness to themselves. They fear losing the trust of those close to them if they find out they are a victim of fraud, which makes them feel trapped in loneliness. Additionally, the victim feels ashamed for not recognizing the signs of deception. This shame arises from feeling foolish and unworthy of true love, leading to a decrease in self-esteem. The victim, @moyunoeni4631, recounts their experience after falling victim to a romance scam, resulting in a loss of approximately 600,000 Yen.

Here is the victim's statement:

“一年半たっても詐欺の被害にあった事実は、やっぱり私のなかでは、自分にとって大いなる失敗体験で、心の中に、『恥』として、こびりついていました。”

Translation:

“Even after a year and a half, the reality that I have been a victim of fraud still feels like a significant failure and remains in my heart as a source of shame.” (source: [www.sinmam.blog.jp:2022](http://www.sinmam.blog.jp:2022))

The statement from the victim with the username @moyunoeni4631 indicates that even after one and a half years, they still view the event of being a romance scam victim as a significant failure. This sense of failure has led to a persistent feeling of shame in their heart. According to Dr. Nadia Nurotul Fuadah in a discussion on the Alodokter forum, if this shame becomes excessive and does not improve, it can lead to self-harm and result in psychological disorders such as social phobia and depression. This shame causes the victim to blame themselves, ultimately leading to depressive symptoms, as expressed by @moyunoeni4631 in their personal blog about their experience as a romance scam victim.

Here is the victim's statement:

“命をたいたいくらい、自分を責める気持ちに苛まれます。”

Translation:

“I feel so much self-blame that I want to die.”. (source: [www.sinmam.blog.jp:2022](http://www.sinmam.blog.jp:2022))

The statement from the victim with the username @moyunoeni4631 reveals feelings of despair and deep sadness due to regret and self-blame after becoming a victim of a romance scam. They feel ashamed and disappointed for being deceived by a perpetrator who exploited their feelings of love. Guilt arises from the belief that they should have been more cautious to avoid this situation. Additionally, feelings of betrayal and loss—both emotional and financial—hurt them, leading to negative thoughts, including the desire to end their life. Victims of this crime can come from various backgrounds. Those with wealth may not struggle to give money to the perpetrator, but those with average finances often resort to borrowing from banks, friends, or family. This debt can accumulate and create significant financial pressure.

Here is the victim's statement.:

“美穂は親族に借金を申し出て、2700万円を調達。”

Translation:

“I tried borrowing from relatives and managed to gather 27 million yen.”

This statement was made by Miho Machida, a victim of a romance scam who sent over 20 million yen. This amount is substantial, forcing the victim to borrow from relatives and deplete all their savings to meet the perpetrator's demands. This financial loss has significant psychological effects, leading to stress, depression, and anxiety. This is also supported by the statement of another victim, @moyunoeni4631.

Here is the statement from the victim:

“私は詐欺に気がつき、金銭被害に遭い、被害後の事務手続きに追われ、そのストレスと、自己嫌悪による落ち込みも大きいものでした”

Translation:

“I realize that I have been deceived, suffered financial losses, had to deal with administrative procedures after the loss, and feel a lot of stress and self-hatred” (sumber: sinmam.blog.jp)

The victim's statement reveals that they faced difficulties after realizing they had been deceived. As a result of being a romance scam victim, they suffered financial losses that led to stress and self-blame, feeling foolish for being scammed. Poor mental health can affect the victim's ability to work and earn income. Therefore, it is recommended that the victim seek counseling to alleviate this burden and receive support from their surroundings and relevant parties. In addition, the author also advises victims to read other victims' stories, one of which is SCARS SLATE BOOK by Tim McGuinness, Ph.D. Aimed at victims and their families, this book offers tools to understand fraud, recognize trauma, and support recovery. The book emphasizes emotional and psychological healing and is ideal for those supporting loved ones affected by fraud.

### Conclusion

In the phenomenon of Romance Scam, perpetrators employ a structured scheme, from initial approach to emotional and financial manipulation, aligning with Erving Goffman's Dramaturgical theory. They create false identities and build emotional connections with victims without any face-to-face meetings. This trust can be seen in how the victim believes in giving her money to the perpetrator who is a new person. Once trust is established, they solicit financial help using touching stories. Research indicates that Romance Scams not only cause financial harm but also have profound psychological effects. Thus, counseling services are essential to support victims. The author recommends further research to understand the long-term impacts and develop more effective prevention strategies.

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