



Explore the Causes of Crime and Social Impact of Romance Fraud in Mainland China from 2019-2021

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Abstract. This paper explores the sociological and criminological dimensions of romance fraud in mainland China, focusing particularly on its causes and social impacts. Romance fraud, often termed as "pig-killing plate" in colloquial language, has shown a significant rise with the advent of the internet, affecting mainly single individuals through platforms like online dating and social media. This study delves into the criminal psychology behind these scams and the socio-cultural factors that make individuals susceptible to such frauds. It examines the role of the internet in facilitating these crimes and discusses the construction of deceptive personal identities online. The analysis also highlights the socio-economic conditions and personal vulnerabilities that predispose individuals to victimization, such as societal pressures, economic disparities, and the intrinsic need for companionship. This research utilizes secondary data to provide a comprehensive overview of the patterns and demographics of romance fraud victims. The findings aim to inform better preventive strategies and raise awareness about the complex interplay of factors contributing to the increasing incidence of romance fraud in China.

Keywords: Romance fraud, Cybercrime, Societal Impact, Sociological Analysis, Fraud Prevention, Functionalism, Social Disorganization, Anomie

1 Introduction

Romance scams, also known as "pig-killing plate", are a new type of crime that originated in Southeast Asia and mainly targets single women. "Pig-killing plate" is a form of telecommunications fraud. People in the industry vividly compare the process of making friends with victims, establishing intimate relationships with victims, and defrauding victims of property to the process of "raising pigs and killing pigs". In 2018, the new type of telecommunication frauds of "pig-killing plate" began to appear in mainland China. In recent years, the crime rate of the same type of case has been increasing. From January to August 2019 alone, the amount involved in the "pig-killing plate" online fraud cases in China amounted to RMB3.88 billion, with an average loss of RMB181,000 per victim, 4.8 times the average loss of other types of cases¹⁰ (Yu,

2020). In the first half of 2020, 101,000 telecom fraud cases were solved across China, up 73.7 percent year on year.

In view of this, this study will look for the criminal causes and social impact of romance frauds. The research question is why are single people more likely to be scammed? Why do most scams happen online, especially online dating? And the reasons why such cases can't stop arising can give us what kind of thinking and coping strategies?

2 Literature Review

In fact, the reflection triggered by such cases has long been studied in many sociological literatures. It is undeniable that the emergence of this criminal act is due to the rapid development of the Internet. Criminal acts committed by criminals with the help of the Internet as a carrier have been extensively analyzed, highlighting how the digital realm expands opportunities for fraud¹ (Buil-Gil & Zeng, 2022). Under the varied cases, the Internet varies in how central it is to fraud experience. There are three main roles that the Internet plays in this scam. One is as the dominant medium for the fraud, and in some cases, it was used together with other methods of communication, to produce the impression that the fraud was genuine or legitimacy. Finally, as an enabling tool to appeal the victim to such as a website being seen as evidence that the fraudulent goods were real² (Button, Nicholls, Kerr & Owen, 2014). From this point of view, the emergence of the Internet has provided great convenience for the occurrence of these criminal acts. It is undeniable that the Internet breaks the original time and space restrictions, allowing everyone to better get in touch, and also giving those who are not in touch the opportunity to establish social networks. But this also provides criminals with new ways and ideas for committing crimes. In addition, an important aspect of conducting romance frauds is the construction of personal identity. In the process of dating, a handsome or beautiful appearance, an excellent education, a decent job and a wealthy family background can make the victim unnaturally build a good impression, which lays the foundation for offenders' later success. Most criminals won't adopt a true identity, on the one hand, it is easy to expose themselves, increasing the risk of arrest, on the other hand, their own personal conditions may not be particularly outstanding, and can't help them stand out from a kind of netizens and become the best choice for victims. Therefore, the offender will create their own fake profile (often using legitimate photos of a different person) or take on the profile and identity of a genuine person³ (Cross & Layt, 2022). The transparency and information sharing platform of the Internet now gives criminals more opportunities to fictionally create a perfect identity, and they will borrow beautiful or handsome photos of individuals posted on the Internet as their own photos to deceive victims that they have excellent appearance, which will increase their favorability and credibility⁹ (Wang & Topalli, 2024). In addition, due to the limitations of the Internet, although the two parties can communicate, the communication is only through text messages or voice messages which removes many of the visual cues relied upon and places a stronger emphasis on words and pictures⁷ (Steel, 2010) so that they can't obtain enough information to make judgments.

However, the emergence of this criminal behavior not only depends on the development of technology, but also has the inherent factors of the victim itself. Singles are more likely to be deceived because their personal needs are different from those of other Internet users. This group is made up of singles in their mid-30s, who, according to social expectations, are expected to get married at this age and enter the next stage of life⁶ (Song & Ji, 2020). However, because they haven't fulfilled their parents' expectations according to traditional idea, coupled with the limitations of making friends in real life, they have to make friends on the Internet. Looking for a marriage partner and the requirement is urgent, which increases their chances of being deceived. Their need for love is intrinsic to the individual. Office of Fair Trading⁸ (2009) found another key factor in the research which called visceral appeal. Appeals to basic needs such as money, sex, love, pain, and sorrow are made² (Button, Nicholls, Kerr & Owen, 2014). That's the main reason which caused the frauds because these kind of victims' lack of love and they need company with to avoid parents' reminders. Even though the offenders with an illegal purpose but they provide the emotion they need in a specific period which called established trustiness. That's why the victim was willing to transfer the money to them.

3 Data Analysis

3.1 Overview

The paper takes secondary research method which uses the secondary data from the mainland news media's reports about romance fraud to conduct data analysis. From the relevant news data collated, it can see that the phenomenon of fraud in the current society is more obvious. According to the uncomprehensive news data, just from the relevant news from 2019-2021, the study can know that the main age of current fraud is around 26-35 years old, accounting for 14%. In addition, most victims were Male which achieved 107, accounting for 61%. Therefore, I found that there are more victims are Male but not Female which unlike information from Internet. According to the results of the collation, most of the victims met the offenders through online dating platforms or marriage platforms which accounting for 37%. What's more, the online chat is behind than dating apps but also accounting for 30% which is the method that through add friends through WeChat by chance. Through the data, the study also found that the method that add friends through play mobile-phone games also becomes more and more popular. And then all of them made follow-up contact through social platforms such as WeChat, confirmed the relationship in a short period of time, and then began to carry out fraudulent behavior. Most victims have difficulty actively discovering the crime, and after months of money transactions, they often wake up only after the offender blocks or deletes them. But if the offenders don't take the initiative, the fraud can last for years. There are also many victims of fraud who learn that they have been scammed only after being prompted by family or friends. Many offenders cheat their victims of their own health problems or other credible accidents that happened on them.

3.2 Findings from Data

Through data collation, the study found that most of the victims were in the marriageable age of around 30 years old. This is because society expects that around 30 years old should start a family and start the next stage of life. However, due to the rise of personal living standards, the diversification of social entertainment activities, and the continuous improvement of social thinking, more and more people no longer regard starting a family as a stage goal, and young people of this generation will pay more attention to personal life and development. They shifted their personal focus to their careers, and no longer put the issue of personal marriage in the first place. Although the thinking of young people has changed, their parents still hold the inherent old idea. Under such circumstances, the society's original expectations for this group of young people of marriageable age can't be met, and their parents will respond to this. Feeling anxious and urging them to find a suitable partner for marriage. Due to busy work and the limitations of social networks, their existing relationship networks can't meet their needs for falling in love. But they don't have too much time to meet new people, and the Internet provides great convenience. They can make friends through the existing platforms and find suitable candidates for further development. The Internet satisfies visceral appeal for love to some extent. However, because their awareness of vigilance is relatively weak, and their families are more anxious, so their possibility of being deceived is greatly increased.

In addition, by sorting out the data, it was found that there were also some cases of money being scammed through gambling websites or money management websites. Some offenders will fabricate their finance-related professional status or that they have connections or family members working in-house and have relevant information. Thus, fabricating themselves to be capable of leading the victim to make money to tempt the victim into investing. Most of them will first let the victim see their benefits or help manage the account on their behalf, and then wait until the victim has an investment idea before making recommendations for the victim to invest. Moreover, they don't invest large sums of money or transfer property directly from the start. They will first let the victim get the benefits, and can successfully withdraw the cash, and when the victim feels the benefits of the investment, the victim will take the initiative to invest a large amount of money, and then through account freezing and other ways to make the victim have a crisis heart, afraid that the early investment will be deceived. Overly worried, they will follow the advice of the website's customer service and invest a large amount of money again to unblock the account. In fact, in most cases, this is the last time the criminal will commit a fraud, and once the money is obtained, it will disappear completely. When the victim discovers that the account is still unable to withdraw the amount after investing, they will realize that they have been scammed.

This is because people have a weaker sense of precaution and more trust in those close to them. According to Rempel, Holmes and Zanna⁵ (1985) study found that trust is related in important ways to the success of a close relationship, the most important aspect of trust in close relationships appears to be faith: the belief that one's partner will act in loving and caring ways whatever the future holds. Therefore, if the victim believes that there is a stable emotional foundation between them and their partners, and

they have confirmed the romantic relationship, then both parties already have a stable relationship. In addition, the victim believes that both parties in love are a community of interests, that their partner loves them, will protect them, and out of love, won't do anything to hurt them. They think that their partners won't cheat them, but in fact they don't know enough about the so-called "partner" and confirm the relationship through just a few days of contact on the Internet, their emotional foundation is very weak, so their feelings are fragile. And through the Internet, there will be certain restrictions, can't identify language loopholes from the text, what the victims know is only one-sided of them, so there is no way to fully understand a person. Therefore, when the offender says that there is a channel to make money, the victims themselves will have resistance but not particularly strong, because they have trust based on love, especially after seeing that their mates have made a lot of profits, the victims are more likely to be attracted, coupled with the victims' trust in their partners and their own desire for money, they will inevitably fall into the scam. Criminals make more use of the inability to satisfy desires in human nature, and victims will have a desire to get more after obtaining a smaller return on investment, so it will be easier for victims to invest more money.

After integrating the content of retrieved which reflective there is functionalism that it has manifest and latent functions. Criminal acts are undesirable factors that endanger public order and reduce the harmony and stability of people's lives. It will form a bad social atmosphere in society, and even spread this opportunistic idea, so that people feel that this way of making money is simple and fast, so they don't work hard and spread a lazy atmosphere throughout society. In addition, because adolescents are still in the growth stage and their personal values haven't yet been formed, they are easily influenced by external factors. When too much crime news fills everyone's life, teenagers who can't distinguish right from wrong are easily seduced by the statements of some criminals and learn to imitate criminal acts. It is undeniable that this criminal act will threaten people's property security, serious cases will lose assets, and some even borrow money to satisfy their partners' financial desires, resulting in heavy debt, which will affect the individual's living standards and future personal planning, and affect people's satisfaction with life. The existence of this criminal act disrupts the public order of the Internet, and because many people are defrauded through the Internet, it will reduce the people's trust in the national network security system and believe that the security of personal information can't be guaranteed. In addition, everyone is enjoying the convenience brought by the Internet and supporting the development of the Internet, which will affect the promotion and innovation of the Internet, and when the Internet technology is updated, out of personal privacy considerations will reduce people's enthusiasm for trying new technologies. Although illegal and criminal acts have brought a lot of adverse effects, they have also exposed the loopholes in the current Internet and the measures that should be strengthened in terms of national supervision, which is also a positive aspect of it. Criminal acts show that the state's supervision of the Internet is still incomplete and meticulous, allowing criminals to take advantage. In addition, social platforms don't give play to the subjectivity, there is confusion and perfunctory in the review of personal identity information, there is no comparison of detailed information and identity information, and there is identity fraud. In addition, the current law

hasn't amended relevant laws and regulations on telecommunications fraud, and there are judicial loopholes. Finally, it reflects that the publicity of telecommunications fraud isn't in place, and the people's awareness is weak, and the publicity should be intensified, so that the people can master the knowledge of fraud prevention.

Second, there is a problem of social disorganization. Most criminals are due to money problems, they don't have suitable jobs, and they choose to commit crimes to survive. If the state can improve the relevant training of vocational education, so that these unskilled people learn the means to earn a living, they will have a way to survive and play their personal value. In addition, the current market competition is fierce, it is difficult to find suitable jobs, and the current job is unstable, and the proportion of layoffs is large, making it difficult for the labor force to obtain a stable source of income. The government can provide job information to help job seekers find suitable positions. The significant gap between the wages of higher labor and coolies will exacerbate inequality, and the government can improve welfare benefits so that ordinary people can have a stable standard of living, so that life stability and crime will be reduced.

Finally, this behavior can reflect the current situation of social anomie. Durkheim proposed that anomie refers to the relative lack of norms in a society or group⁴ (Olsen, 1965). For Durkheim, social anomie stemmed from the weakening of collective consciousness. In the current period of rapid transformation that emphasizes individual interests, collective consciousness is gradually dissolving, and individual consciousness is becoming more and more open. Since the reform and opening, China's society has undergone large-scale changes, which not only occur in the national system and economy, but also affect the ideological concepts of individuals. The transition from a collective economy to a market economy requires individual pay for themselves, and the trend of globalization has made the economy interact with each other, and fluctuations affect a wide range. In the face of increasing life pressure, the gap between the rich and the poor in living standards has been increasing. In addition, the transformation of the social system, the emancipation of the people's minds, the original social norms can no longer resist the erosion of the adverse effects of the market economy, the concept that various needs and desires in human nature should be tempered has been forgotten, the collective consciousness of equal distribution has gradually disappeared, in order to improve individual living standards and meet economic desires, the formation and occurrence of telecommunications network fraud and irregular behavior have been born.

4 Conclusion

Overall, the romance fraud case originates from telecommunication fraud, which is a new situation of telecommunication fraud under the development of the Internet and technology. It also reflects the fact that crimes in the current society are evolving with the advancement of technology, which makes people unable to defend themselves. But the nature of these crimes is to take advantage of existing problems in society or loopholes in human culture to target the generation of criminal behavior. Therefore, an in-depth exploration of the causes of romance fraud and its impact on Chinese society can

not only help people better understand and prevent such crimes, but also help to reveal weaknesses in the social structure, cultural values, and other aspects of society, thereby promoting the improvement and progress of social governance and the legal system.

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