

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. Background of Study

Internet romance scams are described as a “specific type of mass marketing fraud” involving situations where “criminals pretend to initiate a relationship through online dating or social networking sites with the intention to defraud their victims of large sums of money” (Whitty, 2012b, p. 14). It is considered one of “the most insidious of the 419s [scams]” (Fortney, 2012, p. 2) because romance scammers rob the victims not only of their money; but also their trust and self-integrity. Indeed other than financial loss, other documented negative implications of Internet romance scams are:

- psychological and emotional impacts ranging from bruised ego, loss of self-confidence and embarrassment to resentment, severe trauma, depression or even potentially suicidal (*The Star*, 2011; Whitty & Buchanan, 2012b)
- psychological and emotional impacts may also affect the victims’ performance in their daily lives resulting in loss of job, relationship failures, etc. (ACCC, 2011, p. 12)
- involvement in other criminal activities such as money laundering or drug trafficking (Wong, 2011)
- identity thefts, whereby victims are tricked to hand over private information such as scanned copies of their passport, bank account numbers or credit card numbers, and these details are then used to initiate other crimes (Rege, 2009, p. 501)

- sexual harassment – some victims are lured to meet face-to-face and become victims of rape, others are tricked to perform sexually explicit acts during video-chats; all which are recorded and later used to blackmail the victims (Whitty, 2013)

In addition, victims also suffer from being perceived negatively by others such as family members, friends and law enforcement officers. A preliminary survey was conducted at the start of this study whereby an open-ended survey was created and distributed among Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) officers (50 female respondents) as well as distributed online via the RMP's Official *Facebook* page (80 respondents), in order to gain insights to the Malaysian public's opinion about Internet romance scam victims. Based on the responses provided, the general impression seems to be that Internet romance scam victims are stupid, gullible, too-trusting and attention-seeking; hence they ought to be blamed as they are the cause of this crime. While the opinions obtained in this survey are not representative of the opinion of the larger population, it gives a glimpse of how Internet romance scam victims in Malaysia may be negatively perceived (even by police officers) and the humiliation that they may have to go through. Indeed Whitty and Buchanan (2012b, p. 18) discovered that most victims were shamed and blamed for what happened instead of receiving emotional and psychological support, resulting in further psychological impacts as well as secondary victimisation, and such experience is similar to that of rape victims (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010, p. 2012).

Numerous reports suggest that Internet romance scams are on the rise globally. The Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre reports a "1,500 percent spike in romance scam complaints reported since 2008" with an average loss per victim of CA\$11,000 (La Rose, 2011). The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) (2012, p. 7) on the other hand states that the number of victims who were contacted by and responded to romance

scammers were fewer compared to other forms of scams such as the lottery scams or upfront payment scams (only 2110 out of 44,233 Internet scam cases); however, victims of romance scams would more often than not suffer huge financial losses (an approximate accumulative sum of AUS\$ 20.9 million, or 33% of the overall scam losses). In Malaysia, Internet romance scam is ranked second highest in the commercial crimes list (Ruban, 2012). Statistics from the Royal Malaysia Police Cybercrime and Multimedia Investigation Unit (RMP-CMIU) show that in 2011, 876 romance scam cases with a total loss of RM34.17 million were reported, and in 2012, 814 cases were reported, with a total loss of RM32.09 million (JSJK, 2013).

Interviews conducted with two RMP-CMIU officers who specialise in scam investigations revealed useful information that aided the understanding of this crime in Malaysia. Based on their investigation, the officers believe that romance scam syndicates in Nigeria may have set up training schools even since the 1990s to train Internet romance scammers (also see Kalidevi & Rusman, 2011). Nonetheless, Wayne (2010, p. 8) discovers that the victims of Internet romance scams he had encountered “had never heard of romance scammers until they were scammed”. Furthermore it was highlighted that Internet romance scams have been around in Malaysia for more than a decade; however, it was only recently that this crime had received more attention, thanks to the media. The officers also disclosed that interviews with Internet romance scam victims in Malaysia indicate that they were aware of such scams but they mostly were unaware of the exact *modus operandi* of scammers (also see Romancescams.org, n.d.).

To date, there is still a gap in peer-reviewed studies of Internet romance scams. This is not surprising, given that much of the relevant data are inaccessible, due to difficulties in gaining data from “law enforcement personnel and dating industry representatives”, and the inability to interview romance scammers (also see Rege, 2009, p. 496). This research aims

to address these gaps by examining the discursive methods employed by scammers to deceive their targets.

1.1 Research Aims and Questions

This study in general provides an in-depth case study of the linguistic techniques found in a successful Internet romance scam. This study examines the e-mails written by the scammer to determine the type of persuasive appeals used to entice, convince and persuade the female target in order to defraud her of money.

The analysis is guided by the following research questions:

1. *What are the personal attributes of the scammer's online identity and how are these attributes materialised in the e-mails to create a sense of credibility?*

Trust is the key to the romance scammers' success in persuading the target and in order to gain the trust of the target, the identity that the romance scammer adopts as disguise must be perceived as credible. In order to answer the first research question, this study identifies the *scammer's personal attributes* and explains how these attributes establish a sense of credibility.

2. *What emotional responses does the romance scammer intend to invoke from his target and what are the strategies that he uses to achieve his intention?*

This research question examines the linguistic and rhetorical techniques used by the scammer *to manipulate and exploit the target's range of emotions* (e.g. love, excitement, fear, guilt).

3. *How does the scammer present and develop his propositions in the romance scam emails?*

This research question examines the ways the romance scammer organises and develops his propositions diachronically (over time) to guide his target into his trap.

1.2 Online Scams

Due to the lack of research conducted on Internet romance scam, studies conducted on the 419 advance fee fraud (AFF or also known as 419 scams) - an infamous form of mass market scam - are reviewed in this section to provide background insights to the persuasiveness and effectiveness of the scams. To begin, mass market scam is defined by the UK Office of Fair Trading (OFT) as follows:

A misleading or deceptive business practice where you receive an unsolicited or uninvited contact (for example by email, letter, phone or advertisement) and false promises are made to con you out of your money.

(Office of Fair Trading, 2006; cited in OFT, 2009, p. 12)

A scammer is defined as the perpetrator of a scam (OFT, 2009, p. 12). The target is defined as the addressee in the scammer's deceptive correspondence while a victim is defined as the target who is deceived and accepted the scammer's offer (Atta-Asamoah, 2010, p. 108).

In Malaysia, this offence is chargeable under Section 420 of the Malaysian Penal Code ("Cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property"), as Section 415 of the Malaysian Penal Code stipulates that:

Whoever by deceiving any person, whether or not such deception was the sole or main inducement,—

(a) fraudulently or dishonestly induces the person so deceived to deliver any property to any person, or to consent that any person shall retain any property;
or

(b) intentionally induces the person so deceived to do or omit to do anything which he would not do or omit to do if he were not so deceived and which act or omission causes or is likely to cause damage or harm to any person in body, mind, reputation, or property,

is said to “cheat”.

The 419 scams, emerged in the 21st century in West African countries, in particular, Nigeria (Atta-Astamoah, 2009; Chawki, 2009) but have now spread across the world, with Asia surprisingly “being the new sphere of operation by the scammers” (Onyebadi & Park, 2012, p. 183).

Studies (Edelson, 2003; Glickman, 2005; OFT, 2009; Chilwa, 2010) reveal that while 419 scam e-mails may appear to use different pretexts (e.g. business proposals, humanitarian or philanthropic deals, etc.), these e-mails ultimately share a similar underlying pattern summarised as follows:

- The e-mail addresses an unknown receiver, but the author willingly shares information and personal details about his or her identity and hopes for this sharing to be reciprocated.

- This author would often identify him-/herself as person who has inherited, or has the authority to release a large sum of money, or a person who proposes a potentially rewarding business plan.
- Due to certain factors detailed in long narratives, the author is unable to retrieve the money or carry out the business plan on his/her own, hence the e-mail seeking willing and helpful volunteers to provide assistance in this matter.
- There is always “bait” thrown into these e-mails to lure the recipients in the form of either a monetary reward for their assistance or a lucrative return for their investment (Tseng, 2010, p. 1992).
- As the deal progresses, the victims would be persuaded to advance a certain amount of cash for various reasons, such as for payment of various types of fees, or taxes before the business plan can proceed or before the reward can be released. This advancement of money is in fact the crux of 419 scams.

These fraudulent e-mails are always written in English, generally using an Englishman identity and contain references to the English culture. Blommaert and Omoniyi (2006) suggest that this is because English is an index of a powerful identity hence can create a sense of credibility. Furthermore, 419 e-mails are constructed to reflect the business letter genre in terms of its discourse such as use of polite greetings and self-identification, and structural formulae such as formal opening and closing, description of business offer, etc. (Blommaert & Omoniyi, 2006; Chilwa, 2009; Freiermuth, 2011). These studies also suggest that the genre awareness, subtle pragmatic strategies employed to “fish” for information and agreement (Tseng, 2010, p. 1991) as well as the strategies used to attract

the attention and gain the trust of their targets are among the reasons accounting for the persuasive power of the 419 e-mails.

Despite increased effort in combating this crime, Chiluya (2009, p. 658) predicted that 419 scams would not become extinct; instead, they would be “precursors” of other online scams and “develop other complex varieties as society becomes more complex and provides greater impetus for its spread”. Indeed, Atta-Asamoah (2010, pp. 108-109) points out two generations of the West-African origin cybercrimes. The first generation such as the advance fee fraud, black money, lottery, inheritance scams, “generally depend on a target’s willingness to accept an idea proposed by the scammer, thus making a victims’ ‘will’ an essential part of the success of the scam”. The second generation cybercrime is deemed to be “more complex” and “focus primarily on assuming the identity of the target” such as in hacking and identity theft. However, the crime progresses into something more personalised, where second generation scammers usurp the hacked and stolen identities of their primary victims to establish relationship with their secondary victims and exploit this relationship for money, such as in Internet romance scams.

1.3 Internet Romance Scams Process

Information acquired from the U.S. Travel.State.Gov, Ontario Ministry of Consumer Services, SCAMwatch Australia, SOCA UK, Romancescams.org, lookstoogoodtobetrue.com, the investigation officers at RMP-CMIU, online newspaper articles, as well as the few academic research in this area (Rege, 2009; Pan *et al.*, 2010; Whitty & Buchanan, 2012b, Whitty, 2013), reveal that Internet romance scam operates in some kind of interactive pattern, and this is illustrated as in Figure 1.1.¹

¹ For the ease of understanding, the scam process is being presented here in the least complex manner, but in actual fact, the scam process is certainly not a linear process.

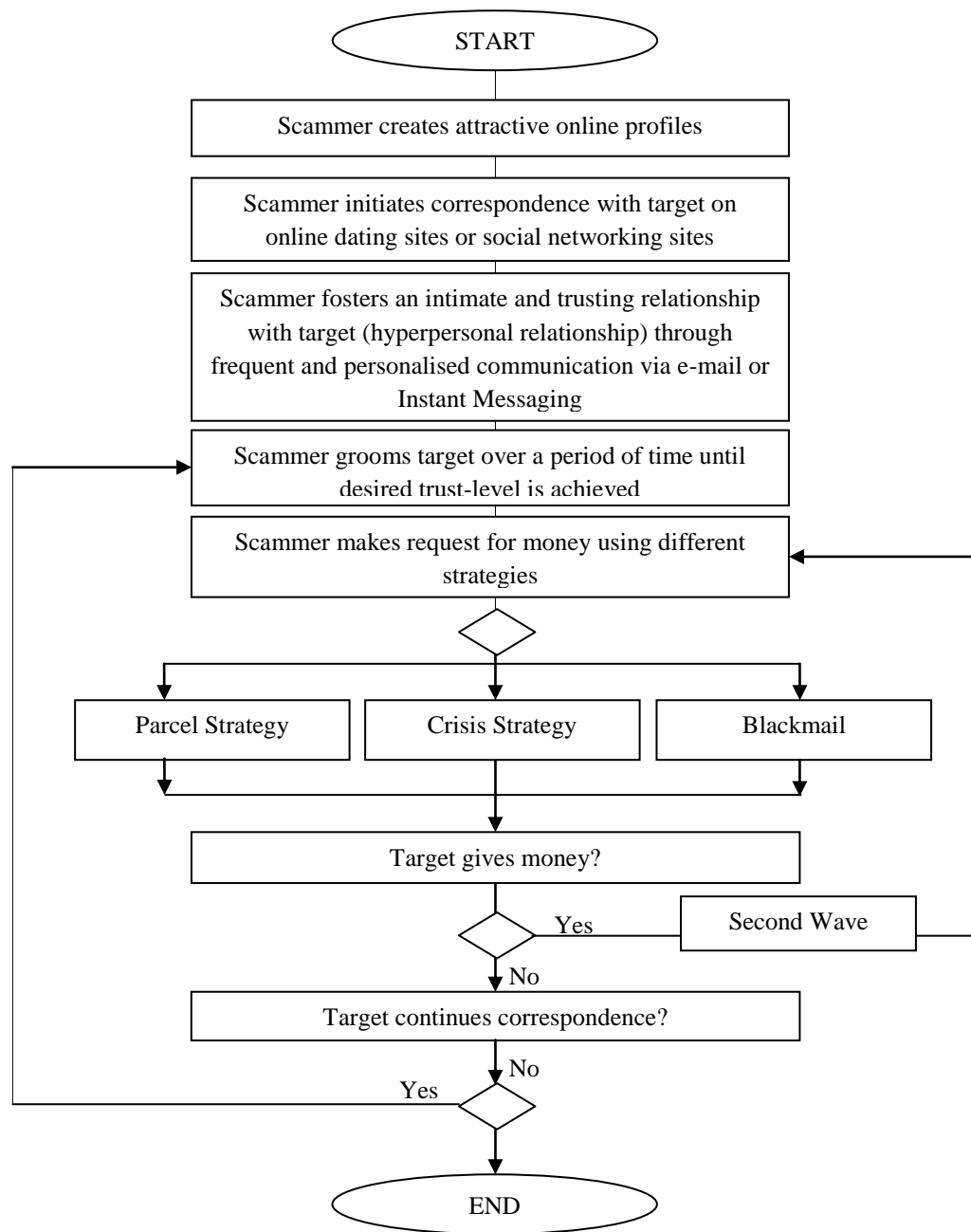


Figure 1.1: Internet romance scam process

At the first stage, the *Introductory Stage*, scammers often create profiles that contain attractive and detailed descriptions about their online alias, for example, photographs of them and of them with others which are actually stolen from the Internet and listing of personal attributes that reflect characteristics of socially desirable man or woman (Whitty

and Buchanan, 2012b, p. 11; *Pan et al.*, 2010; Malko, 2005). Besides that, romance scammers frequently pose as individuals with a career that requires travelling abroad, such as businessman, engineer or even U.S. soldiers serving in war zones; during which crisis would take place and there would be no other possible source of help aside from the target (USACIC, 2011, p. 1; Tracy, 2012; Marisa, 2010).

Upon engaging the attention of their targets, the scammer would try to persuade them to move their correspondence out of the online dating site or social networking site by suggesting the use of personal e-mail, instant messaging or even by phone or online video-calls. Authorities believe this is done so that the scammers are able to remove their profiles from these sites and avoid being easily tracked down (ACCC, 2011, p. 6). The scammer's willingness to correspond with the scammers via phone calls or online video-calls may throw the victim off-guard as one would presume that these audio and visual correspondences are proof that the person is genuine.² Moreover, these are also unmoderated communication platforms, therefore allowing scammers the freedom and time to 'groom' their victims. Time is an important factor in Internet romance scams, because scammers may require frequent correspondence and a long duration before they are able gain the trust of their victims.

Through frequent and personalised communication via email or instant messaging over a period of time, scammers are able to establish "hyperpersonal relationships", i.e. relationships that develop in a quicker pace and with more intensity than face-to-face relationships (this is discussed in greater depth in Section 2.1). This is done in order to "groom" their targets to be defrauded of large amounts of money later on (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012b). This *Grooming Stage* is described as a process where "a scammer tries

² Romance scams are reportedly becoming more sophisticated, using software programmes to manipulate video models (secretly recorded video sessions from other targets or videos stolen from the Internet) or voice changers to deceive their targets during web-chat sessions or telephone conversations (Tracy, 2012; Ormsby, 2012)

to build a trusting relationship with [the target] by making regular contact... try to gather as much information as possible about [the target]” (SCAMwatch, 2013) and can stretch to months or years, or “until the desired trust-level is achieved” (Rege, 2009, p. 498). The RMP-CMIU discovered that this process usually takes two or three months, during which, scammers used “witty and charming conversations” to court their targets and “lulled them into a false sense of security” (Sharanpal, 2012, para. 11). The grooming process often involves some, if not all, of the following features:

- use of instant messaging to “get in their [targets’] heads all day long to develop this very close relationship” (La Rose, 2011, para. 31) and to learn more about their targets through their self-disclosure
- immediate and persistent declaration of love (IC3, 2011; Travel State Gov., n.d.)
- portrayal of self as very romantic and passionate lovers such as by using poetry, giving gifts and using pet names (e.g. baby, honey) (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012b; Romancescam.org, n.d.)
- frequent compliments and showing concern (Bindley, 2012; Smith, 2012)
- expression of desire to commit to the relationship in the form of marriage proposals (Sharanpal, 2012; Adit, 2012)

After a period of grooming and when the scammers are certain that they have gained the target’s trust, the scammers may attempt to test the readiness of the target to be fleeced by making requests for gifts, or even sending gifts to the targets in order to convince them of their trustworthiness. In some cases, targets were not asked to give their money, instead, to help transfer money which the scammer would deposit in the target’s account, to another

account (Whitty, 2013). This form of money-laundering helps scammers avoid from being traced through the money transfers and also gives them a chance to see if their targets are compliant enough and willing to help their supposed ‘lover’.

If the scammer feels that the target is ready to be fleeced, the scammer will then proceed to the *Request for Money Stage*, where they make requests for money in a variety of forms. They will introduce stories narrating some form of ‘*crisis*’ that they or their family members are in and describing how helpless they are in that situation. These situations may differ in seriousness, and in some cases, scammers may start off with the less serious ones such as needing money to pay for rent (Wayne, 2010) or to pay electricity bills (La Rose, 2011). Serious ‘*crisis*’ situations are such as accidents, illness, deaths, travelling mishaps, lawsuits, business failures and so on (ACCC, 2011, p. 6; Sharanpal, 2012). The most common crisis identified by RMP-CMIU is the pretence of being detained at the airport upon arrival in Malaysia. Under the dreary circumstances of the situations described by the scammers, they would then request for large amounts of money to help ‘save’ them.

Another commonly used strategy identified by RMP-CMIU is the *parcel strategy*, whereby the scammer says he will be sending a parcel containing lucrative gifts to the target as a token of their love with the condition that the target channels some money in order to obtain the parcel. This tactic’s prevalence among scammers operating from Malaysia has led the authorities to also refer to Internet romance scams as ‘*parcel scams*’. RMP-CMIU also highlights cases of *blackmail* using sexually explicit photographs or online video session that targets shared with the scammers. Based on RMP-CMIU’s investigation, this tactic is the most effective because the target does not want to be publically shamed, and they will do anything to mitigate it. Whitty (2013) points out that the ‘request for money’ stage is when some targets would become highly suspicious and

consequently, figure out that this was a scam and refuse to give money to them. When this happens, the targets become *non-financial victims* (fooled but did not lose money) instead of *financial victims* (lost money).

One may expect that upon receiving the money from the victims, the scammer would cease communication and disappear. However, Rege (2009, p. 498) points out that the request for money does not stop at one attempt but is often “sequential”, occurring in a cycle and will continue as long as the targets are still unaware of the deception or refuse to believe that they have been scammed (Whitty, 2012; Tracy, 2011). The “second wave” is triggered when scammers switch to other pretences or begin involving other ‘characters’ (e.g. lawyers, doctors, etc.) to defraud their victims of more money. The only way for the scam process to end is when the target stops sending money perhaps because they have been completely emptied of their savings, or because they lost their “patience or realised that they are being duped” (Rege, 2009, p. 498). This final stage is also known as the *Realisation Stage* or as Whitty (2012) terms it, the ‘*Revelation Stage*’.

1.3.1 Perpetrators of Internet Romance Scams

Despite romance scammers being able to disguise their locations of operation, close collaboration between authorities and advocacy organisations worldwide has led to the narrowing of several countries where romance scammers may be hiding. Romance scammer locations that have been reported include Nigeria, Ghana, England, Canada, Senegal, Russia, Ukraine, Philippines and Malaysia (IC3, 2011, para. 4). In the case of Malaysia, the country has been highlighted as the most recent “scammer black spot” where “West Africans travel arrive on student visa and run internet scams instead of ever setting foot in a classroom” (Wayne, 2010, p. 43).

Romance scammers may operate either locally, i.e. defrauding targets from within the same country of operation, or internationally, i.e. defrauding targets from other countries, as organised syndicates, small-scale criminal groups, in pairs, or even individually (Rege, 2009, p. 502; Hamid, 2013). However, according to the investigation officers at RMP-CMIU, most cases that they investigated are conducted by African syndicates with the help of Malaysian accomplices.

1.3.2 Victims of Internet Romance Scams

It has been reported that romance scammers target their victims regardless of gender, sexual orientation or age (Rege, 2009; ACCC, 2011, p. 10). However the principal group of vulnerable individuals comprises those who are over 40, elderly (above 60), disabled, widowed or divorced (ACCC, 2011, p.10; Wayne, 2010; IC3, 2011). Whitty and Buchanan (2012b) discovered that while there was little difference in terms of other variables such as age or gender, there was a significant difference in terms of romantic beliefs. Individuals who were “higher on romantic beliefs” and had a “higher tendency towards idealisation of romantic partners” were more at risk of becoming victims of online romance scams and the former group was more likely to suffer financial losses (pp. 8-9). Based on the statistics provided by RMP-CMIU, the victims in Malaysia for 2011-2012 comprise more woman (63.1%) than men, between ages 21-50 years old and have diverse occupation – students, professionals, housewives (*The Star*, 2009; Othman, 2011; Filmer, 2010; Adit, 2012). The one common factor that RMP-CMIU discovered was that these victims were seeking companionship or romantic relationship on the Internet.

Authorities worldwide have pointed out that while much effort is being invested in curbing this crime; it is still an uphill task due to challenges in cross-jurisdictional investigations, untraceable money transfers and the under-reporting of the crime (Fortney,

2012). The following are among the possible reasons which cause under-reporting of Internet romance scams:

- victims feel ashamed, humiliated or upset (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012a, p. 8)
- victims fear legal repercussions as some may be involved in same-sex romance frauds where laws punish homosexuality (SOCA, 2010), and some may believe that they have been involved in criminal activities such as money laundering (Whitty, 2013, p. 19)
- lack of assistance and sympathy from law enforcement agencies, and in some cases, victims experience a second wave of scam due to possible “crossovers in the law enforcement sector and members of the scam network” (Rege, 2009, p. 506).
- victims want to avoid the hassle of police report procedures and/or are ignorant of the help they are actually providing the authorities with when a report is made (RMP-CMIU)

Indeed, the romance scammers may be manipulating the victims’ embarrassment, insecurities or fear in order to extort more money (SOCA, 2010, p. 2), and they may also intentionally invoke these emotions so that victims would remain silent about their ordeal, thus enabling the scammers to continue their deceptive operations without interference from law-enforcement agencies.

1.4 Conclusion

Based on the brief discussion on 419 scams and Internet romance scams, there seems to be noteworthy differences between these two types of scams and these differences are as summarised in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Difference between 419 scams and Internet Romance Scams

	419 Scams	Internet romance scams
Targeted emotions	Greed and naivety	Love, affection, curiosity (making new friends), concern, sympathy
Information Technology skills utilised	Mass sending of scam e-mails, then waiting for naïve or greedy individuals to take their bait; creating fraudulent documents (e.g. certificates, passports, etc.)	Hacking or stealing the identity of unsuspecting individuals online (e.g. photographs, personal details, etc.), then assuming these identities to pro-actively look for potential victims; creating fraudulent postal websites
Platform where they contact targets	E-mails (which e-mail service providers now filter as spam)	Online dating sites, online social networking sites (e.g. <i>Facebook</i> , <i>Tagged</i>)
Identity used to correspond with the target	Business partner, lottery company staff, philanthropic beneficiary	Friend, lover, potential life-partner
Relationship established with the target	Business-related; charity-related	Friendship, romantic
Language and communication style	Formal; technical business register	Less formal; interpersonal register

It is therefore expected that these differences would influence the way the scam e-mails are constructed linguistically as well as the strategies employed to persuade the targets.

The following chapter provides a discussion of some relevant literature to this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Introduction

This chapter lays the necessary foundations to address the research questions, and it covers the following key ideas related to this research:

- i. Online communication and online relationships (Section 2.1)
- ii. Related psychological theories (Section 2.2)
- iii. Persuasion, rhetoric and the means of persuasion (Section 2.3)
- iv. Textual analysis approaches (Section 2.4)

2.1. Online Communication and Online Relationships

Early studies conducted on computer mediated communication (CMC) have provided conflicting findings regarding the nature – impersonal or interpersonal – of online communication. On one hand, studies on CMC have suggested that online communication lacks social cues (visual context that provides paralinguistic features of communication) which can affect social presence and cause ‘psychological distancing’. Therefore, CMC is deemed impersonal and not conducive for establishing relationships (Rice, 1993; Walther, 1996, p. 7; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 252).

However, with the development of technology, globalisation and a shift in lifestyles, CMC seems to be propelling people to migrate to cyberspace as an alternative medium to establish interpersonal relationships, meeting new people and even experiencing romance as seen in the increasing popularity of social networking sites and online dating sites (Ellison *et al.*, 2006; Park, Jin & Jin, 2011). The migration could be due to several

reasons, such as less restriction in terms of time and space, the experience of new forms of interaction and ironically, the anonymity factor (Rege, 2009, p. 494; Kopaczewski, 2010; Samp & Palevitz, 2009). Additionally, the nature of online communication empowers individuals to have more control over their self-representation, thus enabling them to strategise their self-disclosure or identity-management (Ellison *et al.*, 2006; Kollock & Smith, 1999, p. 9). Indeed, Walther (1996, p. 33) suggests that the desire to present the best impression of oneself is “an impulse that seems to be inherently human yet may be more easily enacted via technology”.

This ability to communicate as desired due to reduced social cues and asynchronous nature of certain CMC, has been said to raise interpersonal relationships to a *hyperpersonal* level, whereby the intensity of affection and emotions felt during CMC surpasses that of face-to-face interactions and becomes “more socially desirable” (Walther, 1996, p. 17). This is especially possible if there is “long term association” where “users have time to exchange information, to build impressions, and to compare values” (p. 33). *Hyperpersonal* relationship online is also possible because of intense self-disclosure brought about by uninhibited communication and lowered level of communication anxiety as a result of lack of physical presence (Anderson & Emmers-sommer, 2006, p. 206).

Self-disclosure can be defined as “an interaction between at least two individuals where one intends to deliberately divulge something personal to another” (Greene, Derlega & Matthews, 2006, p. 411). Self-disclosure is also viewed as a “transactional process”, in which the commodities being exchanged are not just general or private information about one’s self but could also be perception of trust or distrust, emotions of like or dislike, self-worth, etc. This is closely linked to the fact that self-disclosure is “highly reciprocal” (Tardy & Dindia, 2006, p. 236; Henderson & Gildings, 2004, p. 52), whereby a person’s

disclosure may motivate the recipient's disclosure, which, in turn, may prompt the first person to disclose more, and so on.

In online communication, self-disclosure enables the creation of an “identifiable personality in an otherwise fairly anonymous environment” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 252) as well as in the building and maintaining of online relationships (Gibbs *et al.*, 2011; Walther, 1996; Henderson & Gilding, 2004). Henderson and Gilding (2004, p. 498) discovered that in online communication, the lack of accountability, reputation and contextual cues are being compensated with high quantity and frequent self-disclosure. When one discloses information about one's self beyond the virtual world, one is perceived as being committed and accountable to the relationship. This continuous and progressive exchange of self-disclosure is what builds intimacy and trust in online relationships, as one of Henderson and Gilding's (2004, p. 500) respondents commented:

Text is the only medium you have online, and typing to each other, and revealing information about yourself, is about the only way you can get close to someone. In real life, you can just hang out with the person, and not say a word. Spending time together, and sharing experiences in real life brings you closer. Online, you share words.

Nevertheless, self-disclosure may be exploited by romance scammers where they reveal very personal albeit false information about themselves in order to develop closeness with their targets and gain their trust. Essentially in asynchronous online communication (e-mails), romance scammers would have more control over their deceptive self-disclosure and project an optimum self-representation because they are “better able to plan, and had increased opportunities to self-censor...more time for message construction, and less of on-

going interaction... opportunity for objective self-awareness, reflection, selection and transmission of favourable cues” (Walther, 1996, p.19).

2.2. Related Psychological Theories

Aside from discussing online communication as the medium in which romance scammers develop online relationships with their targets, some consideration must also be given to the psychological aspect of the target in order to better understand this issue; especially with regards to persuasion and trust-development.

2.2.1 Cognitive Theories of Persuasion

This section briefly discusses several cognitive theories of persuasion such as the *Post-Decisional Dissonance Theory*, *Cognitive Shorthands*, *Elaboration Likelihood Model* and *Heuristic-Systematic Model*, which have been used to investigate how a scam target may be influenced by the use of persuasive language or other persuasive strategies in scam e-mails (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012a; Chang & Chong, 2010; OFT 2009).

The *Elaboration Likelihood Model* (ELM) by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) focused on the cognitive processes of an individual when faced with a persuasive situation (or will also be known as the persuadee) and as Cameron (2009, p.312) points out, this approach as well as other process-oriented approaches (e.g. *Heuristic-Systematic model*) seeks to “identify the variables leading to persuasion, and to specify the process by which such message aspects influence one’s attitude”. This model posits that when an individual is confronted with a persuasive message or situation, he or she would engage in some form of thinking, or “elaboration” when processing the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 128). Depending on the type of persuasive message received, this model posits two forms of thinking; “one involving systematic thinking and the other involving cognitive shortcuts”

(O’Keefe, 2002, p. 137). Systematic thinking is a form of extensive thinking, involving close attention and careful scrutiny of the issue-relevant arguments, also taking into consideration other arguments that may be related to the persuasive issue at hand. This form of thinking requires high cognitive involvement (high elaboration) from the individual. It is suggested that an individual who engages in systematic thinking is not only motivated, but is also cognitively equipped with the ability to do so.

Cognitive shortcuts are the opposite of systematic thinking, in that the individual is less cognitively invested in the thinking process, therefore there is low elaboration. According to Chang and Chong (2010, p.4), people tend to resort to cognitive shortcuts especially when dealing with complex issues within a “bounded rationality...[which refers to] the limited cognitive capability of humans in decision making when they face problem complexity under the constraints of time and incomplete information.” Cognitive shortcuts, *cognitive shorthands* (Cialdini, 1993), or *judgmental heuristics* (Chaiken & Trope, 1999) are basically “simple decision procedures requiring little information processing...activated by peripheral cues, that is, by intrinsic features of the communication situation such as the characteristics of the communicator” (O’Keefe, 2002, p. 148). O’Keefe highlights three heuristics that people commonly depend on when they are not engaged in high degrees of elaboration:

- i. *credibility*; to what extent is the speaker credible enough to be trusted
- ii. *liking*, the extent of amiable feelings for the speaker
- iii. *consensus*, what other people’s reaction or perception of the speaker are.

Cialdini (1993) points out seven *cognitive shorthands* commonly used in the realm of advertising; *contrast, reciprocity, consistency, social proof, liking, authority and scarcity*.

Two of Cialdini's items share similarity with O'Keefe's list of heuristics, which are social proof (similar to consensus) and liking. *Authority* is closely related to *credibility*. Simons *et al.* (2001, p. 140) point out that in societies where individuals are taught to show "respect and unquestioning obedience to authority", a figure that displays authoritativeness would be immediately perceived as credible. *Contrast* is related to the structuring of contrasting stimuli in a persuasive situation, in that by presenting the less preferable stimuli first before the one that the persuader is advocating, the possibility of the persuadee accepting the advocated stimuli with little arguments is higher. *Reciprocity* involves the exploitation of people's tendency to respond in similar manner, and sometimes involves manipulation of guilt and feelings of obligation.

Consistency is similar to the *Post-Decisional Dissonance Theory* described by Chang and Chong (2010), whereby an individual tends to modify his or her behaviour to be in line with the decisions that are made (attitude or cognitive) to prevent cognitive dissonance. Scammers would usually get the target to change their attitudes towards the scheme or even elicit small fees as commitment which targets may agree to due to the perceived low risk. However this theory suggests that once the target's attitudes and commitment (however small) have been engaged, they would more likely continue pursuing the proposed scheme (time or money), so that their actions would continue to match their attitudes. The *scarcity* heuristic states that when an individual views and believes that a particular persuasive stimulus is limited, his or her perception could raise the value and the exclusivity of the stimuli, and this could lead to the *consistency* heuristic, whereby the individual would be committed to come in possession of the stimuli.

Having distinguished the two types of thinking processes, Petty and Cacioppo (1986) suggest two different routes of mental processes that an individual could engage in when faced with a persuasive message: *Central route* and *peripheral route*. When an

individual chooses the *central route*, he or she would be involved in *high elaboration*, whereby the individual would be engaged in extensive systematic thinking; processing the information and arguments that are presented as well as other relevant information in a detailed and systematic manner before a decision is made. When the individual chooses the *peripheral route*, he or she would be involved in low elaboration, whereby a decision is made using *cognitive shortcuts* and not so much based on processing of the information and arguments presented.

A study by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) found that when a message is highly relevant to the individual (i.e. a topic that affects the individual directly, or related to an issue that the individual advocates), he or she would actively process the contents (arguments) of the message and be less affected by external factors such the credibility of the speaker. However, when the message is irrelevant to the individual, he or she would form opinions or make decisions based on their assessment of the speaker, and not the message. For example, an individual may make his/her decision based on whether he/she finds the speaker likable, authoritative, credible etc. This can explain why scammers would always adopt identities that have symbolic power, despite having insufficient linguistic competence. Additionally, the scammer would create situations that may influence the target to depend on *cognitive shortcuts*, such as by creating a sense of scarcity of the offer; by manipulating the target's tendency to reciprocate or to follow others' consensus. Studies have found that scammers may use self-identification or self-disclosure techniques not only to establish their credentials, but also rather to influence and encourage their targets to disclose personal information about themselves (Chiluwa, 2009; also see Section 2.1).

There are two contesting views as to how these two mental routes work. The first view suggests that the two routes "represent prototypical extremes on the high-to-low elaboration continuum" (O'Keefe, 2002, p. 140). An individual can only be engaged in one

form of elaboration at one time, either low-elaboration or high-elaboration. However, the individual may progress from being totally dependent on *cognitive shortcuts* to more careful assessment of the message, or vice versa, resulting in varying degrees of elaboration in the high-low continuum. Depending on the message received, the individual may be persuaded at any point the continuum.

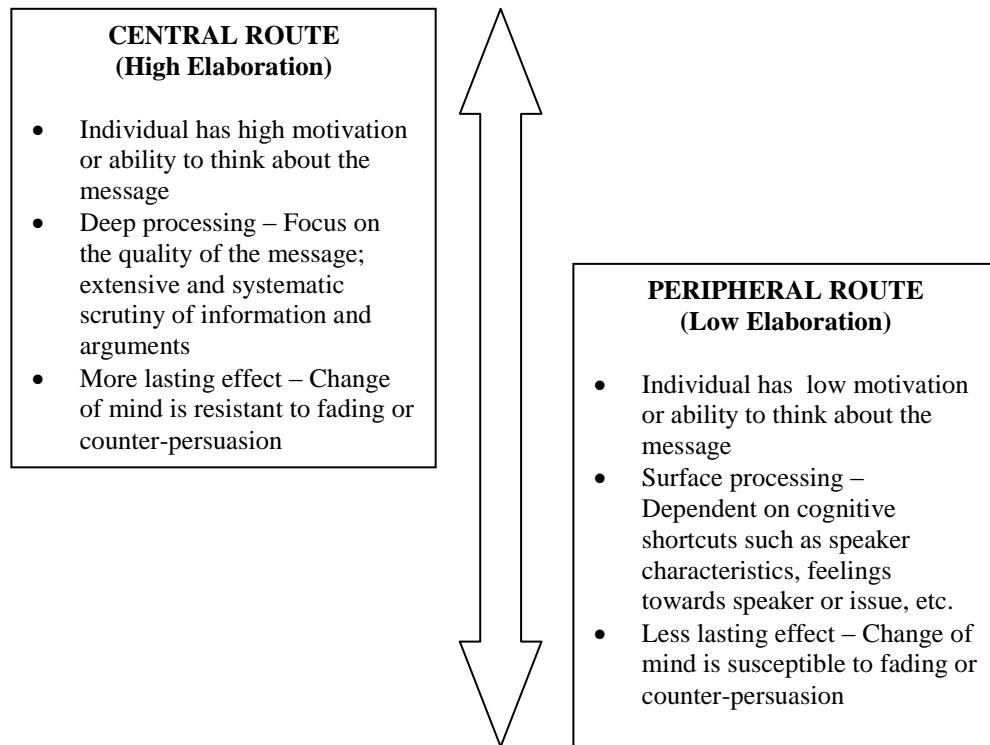


Figure 2.1 : Central and Peripheral Route as a Continuum

The first view was contested by Chaiken and Trope (1999), giving rise to the *Heuristic-Systematic Model* (HSM). This model shared similarities with the ELM in that there are two different types of processing; systematic and heuristic (similar to central and peripheral); however, instead of a continuum, these two types of processing should be viewed as parallel processes. When placed in a situation where there is lack of cognitive resources, motivation or time, there is a tendency for the individual to depend more or

entirely on heuristic processing, even though there is an on-going systematic processing. The individual will then judge the validity of the persuasive message based on simple decision cues or rules of thumb, such as trusted experts' statements. These cues are basically similar to *cognitive shortcuts*. However, Chaiken and colleagues argued that this would depend on how confident the individual is with their decision. In fact, the HSM suggests that systematic processing may stop when the individual feels that he or she has obtained sufficient understanding of the issue at hand (Chaiken *et al.*, 1989, cited in Cameron, 2009, p. 312).

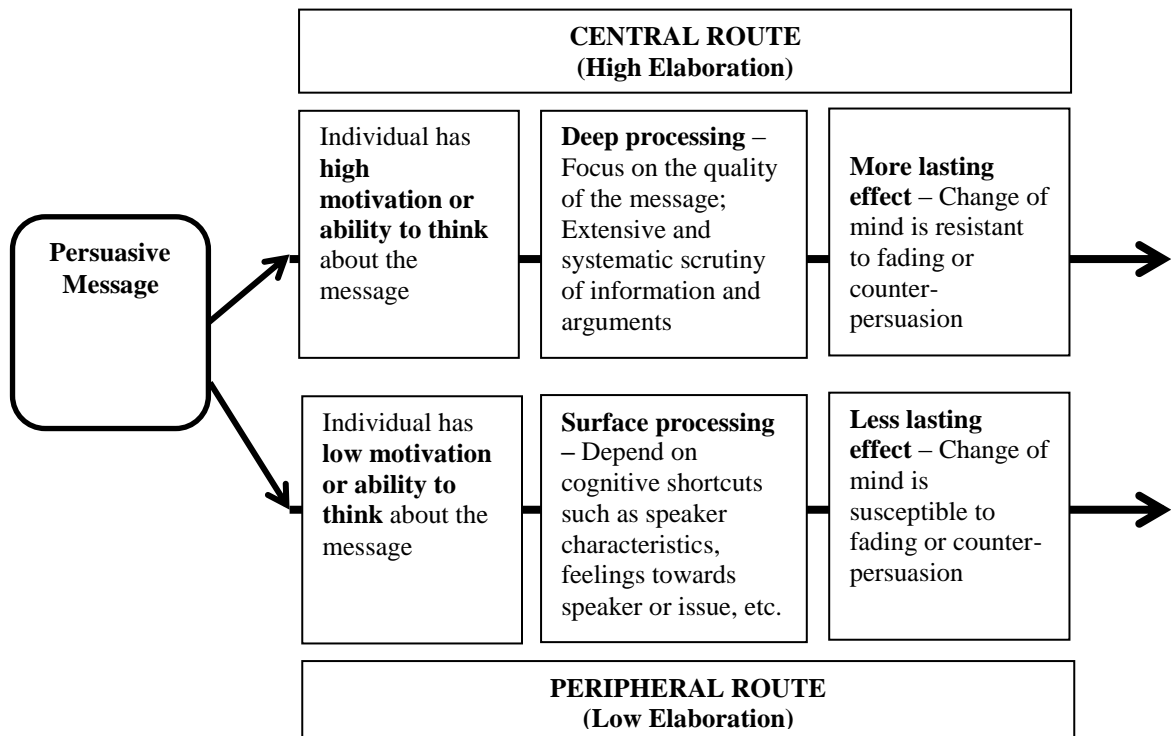


Figure 2.2 : Central and Peripheral Route as Parallel Processes

When placed in the context of scamming, the arguments from these cognitive-processing models seem highly relevant, in that when a target interacts with the scammer, he or she could engage in different levels of elaboration, hence taking different routes of thinking

throughout the communicative process. The target who employs systematic thinking may be less gullible to the scammer's persuasion, however, the target who depends more on peripheral cues such as the credibility of the speaker, or feelings for the speaker, may be more prone to falling prey. Moreover, the target may stop engaging in systematic thinking when he or she feels confident of having understood the situation or feels that he or she has known the scammer well enough. OFT (2009, p. 69) points out that in 419 e-mails, the scammers would attempt to distract the target from taking the *central route*; thus preventing the targets from engaging in *systematic thinking* and information processing by stressing on the importance of an urgent response and maintaining confidentiality, by creating a perception of authority and by exciting the emotions of the target. Essentially, the scammers attempt to lead their targets down the peripheral route so that they would make decisions based on the use of *cognitive shortcuts*.

2.2.2 Psychological Approach to Trust Development

There have been extensive literature on the exploration of trust and trust development in interpersonal relationships; however, as this is not the main focus of the current study, this section will only briefly discuss trust development in interpersonal relationship through online communication. Trust is defined as a situation involving an individual (the trustor) allowing him/herself to be vulnerable to the actions of other individuals (the trustee) based on the trustor's "expectations, assumptions or beliefs" that the trustee's actions would be acceptable, bring benefit or at least not bring harm to him/herself (Mayer, 1995, p. 172; Robinson, 1996, p. 576).³ The trustor's action of making him/herself vulnerable is also described as taking a risk or "placing a bet" (Sztompka, 1999, p. 25).

³ For the various approaches to trust-development, see Lewicki *et al.* (2006).

Trust development comprises three inter-related aspects: cognitive, affective and behavioural-intention (Lewicki *et al.*, 2006). Firstly, the trustor must perceive the trustee as a trustworthy person (cognitive), for example, whether or not the trustee displays attributes of benevolence, ability or integrity (Mayer *et al.*, 1995). Secondly, the trustor's emotional bond with the trustee (affective) may also affect the development of trust, be it positive emotions aroused from intimacy with the trustee or negative emotions aroused by a violation of one's trust. Indeed, Grabner-Kräuter (2009, p. 512) suggests that trust is more likely to develop when there is "emotional support involving provision of empathy or caring" which creates emotional closeness between the trustor and trustee. Thirdly is the trustor's willingness to take a risk based on the assessment of cognitive and affective factor (behavioural-intention); and this risk-taking action "engenders reciprocity", in that one's willingness to trust would lead others to also "behave in a trustworthy manner" and return the trust (Lewicki *et al.*, 2006, p. 998).

Similarly, Sztompka (1999) suggests that trust is generated based on the assessment of three features of the trustee: reputation or the "record of past deeds" (pp. 71-72); which is dependent on the consistency of one's trustworthy behaviour as the interaction progresses, performance or "actual deeds, present conduct, currently obtained results" of the trustee (p. 77), as well as appearance or one's dress code and mannerism, even gender, ethnicity, age, status, etc. (p 77). In addition, the trustor could also assess trustworthiness based on the context, such as the presence of an external party to assure the trustee's accountability, the trustee's act of pre-commitment (willingness to commit to the relationship first) or other situational features (e.g. a close knitted community, historical conditions) (Sztompka, 1999, p. 87). As such, it would seem that in context where there is anonymity or distance such as the Internet, trust would be limited as there is great possibility for fabrication of one's reputation and appearance or even performance.

However, studies have revealed that trusting relationships can still be developed over the Internet whereby Internet users depend on self-disclosure to create a sense of identity and reputation as well as to demonstrate one's willingness to be pre-committed and to take the risk to trust the other party (Henderson & Gilding, 2004; Gibbs *et al.*, 2011; also see Section 2.1). Furthermore, Grabner-Kräuter (2009, pp. 514-516) suggests that aside from taking the risk to trust based on one's assessment of the individual, individuals also base their decision on their evaluation of the system, for example, the social networking site or the online dating site. When an individual perceives a particular system as trustworthy (e.g. based on the security features provided, the accuracy of information provided, the competence of the site to monitor its membership, etc.), the individual may "transfer" or "extend" this trust in the system to the system's members (or users). For example, when an online dating site is perceived as reputable and trustworthy, its members may also be perceived as reputable and trustworthy. In fact, even if one member of the system is perceived as trustworthy, it is also possible that this perception of trustworthiness is transferred to the rest of the members in the system. It is perhaps through this way that individuals assess the accountability factor when making a decision to trust in an online communication.

Indeed, the *cognitive shortcuts* such as credibility (perceived trustworthiness) or liking (emotional bond) also play a prominent role in developing trust in online relationships and trust could lead to reduced critical analysis of the scammer's e-mails. It is interesting to note these *cognitive shortcuts* can be activated through means of rhetoric, as suggested by Aristotle; the appeals to credibility (*ethos*) and emotions (*pathos*). Not only that, these cues could also be activated through extensive amounts of frequent communication and extensive self-disclosure. Nonetheless as Aristotle pointed out, in persuasion, it is also important for a persuader to win over the audience by using concrete

arguments and rational thinking (*logos*), which on the flipside, ought to be thoroughly examined by the persuadee. The role that rhetoric plays in online scamming is hence magnified, considering that the basic channel through which meaning is conveyed online is via text, and with relatively limited amount of contextual cues.

2.3. Persuasion

While it is not the intent of this study to argue on the morality aspects of persuasion, it is important to acknowledge that there are differing views on the ethics of persuasion, i.e. whether influencing the minds of others is good or evil (Simons, 1976, pp. 35-37). Moreover, these views are dependent on and reflective of the different cultural and societal values and ideologies. This would in turn, affect how the concept of persuasion is defined and as such, there is no universally accepted definition of persuasion. Bearing this in mind, this study echoes the thoughts of Stiff and Mongeau (2003, p. 4), that:

What we present is a definition that we find useful in introducing the breadth and complexities of persuasive communication... what we suggest is not the objectively “best” definition of persuasive communication ... but rather one that works of us.

What then constitutes persuasion? O’Keefe (2002, pp. 3-5) argues for a clear and functional definition of the concept by drawing from “characteristics shared by paradigm cases of persuasions”. O’Keefe highlighted six characteristics:

- i. Persuasion implies success; there is no failed persuasion, just failed attempts of persuasion

- ii. There is a criterion, or goal to be achieved by the persuader behind every attempts of persuasion; this goal is generally to influence a change in mental states and/or behaviour.
- iii. There is some form of intent or plan to reach the goal
- iv. There is “some measure of freedom (free will, free choice, voluntary action)” on the part of the persuadee
- v. The outcomes of persuasion are achieved through the use of language and communication
- vi. Persuasion is, generally presumed, to result in some form of change in the mental state of the persuadee, which would effect in a change of behaviour

Based on these characteristics, O’Keefe defines persuasion as “a successful intentional effort at influencing another’s mental state through communication in a circumstance in which the persuadee has some measure of freedom” (p. 5). While Simons *et al.*’s (2001, p. 7) definition of persuasion does not include the component of success, their definition is closely similar, whereby persuasion is defined as “human communication designed to influence the autonomous judgements and actions of others”.

Persuasion is an act carried out in circumstances where there is variation of opinions or difference in mental states and it generally comprises of two dynamic and interchangeable roles: the persuader and the persuadee. The goal of the persuader is to consciously and intentionally influence a change in the beliefs, values, attitudes, and/or behaviour of the persuadee (Cameron, 2009, p. 309). This persuasive effect is brought about through human communication, either verbal or non-verbal language. In acknowledging the width and breadth of persuasive communication and the possibility of inadvertent persuasive effects, Miller (1980) broadly described persuasive communication

as “any message that is intended to shape, reinforce, or change the responses of another, or other”. In addition to that, the persuadee is also included in the definition by O’Keefe (2002) and Simons *et al.* (2001), and described as one who has the free will to make one’s own choice; i.e. autonomous, and is neither a mere passive recipient nor predisposed to the impositions of the persuader.

Along the continuum of attempted influence, Simons (1976, p. 20) posits that persuasion falls under a loosely demarcated domain between two extremes; on one end, there is the modification of behaviour by “unintended messages or direct experience” while on the other, there is “automatic, involuntary responses” triggered by “raw, physical coercion or other stimuli”. Later on, Simons *et al.* (2001, p. 7) specifically point out that persuasion should not be confused with and likened to material inducement (e.g. “If you let me play on that truck, I’ll play with you”), coercion (e.g. “If you stay on that truck, I’ll stop being your friend”) or conformity to group or a powerful figure authority. This suggests that in addition to the autonomous role of the persuadee, the persuasive context is also an open and neutral space; there ought to be no external influence and thus no pre-determined outcome. Yet, questions may arise, such as to what extent is this differentiation truly applicable in real-life situation? Is there truly autonomy on the part of the persuadee? It is interesting then that Simons’ earlier claim may provide an answer to these questions, whereby “persuasion is a manipulative act, but it also leaves receivers with the perception of choice” (1976, p. 20). Therefore, autonomy on the part of the persuadee could merely be a perception, one that could even have been planted by the persuader. For this reason, the concept of persuasion used in this study will also take into consideration material inducement, coercion or even conformity.

Drawing from Aristotle’s arguments, persuasion is not an art of dealing with matters of “certainty” but with matters of “judgement” and as such, there may not be

absolute truths. Nonetheless, he argues that “truth... still had a natural advantage over falsehood, and logic a natural advantage over illogic” (Simons & Jones, 2011, p. 9). While there is bound to be a difference in opinion, the acceptance of an opinion at the end of the argument depends on how well proponents of each opinion propose, defend and convince the other of their ideas based on truth and logic.⁴ The ability to do so is essentially known as rhetoric.

One of the earliest definitions and description of rhetoric which was given by Aristotle (384-322 BC) states as such:

Rhetoric then may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever. (This is the function of no other of the arts, each of which is able to instruct and persuade in its own special subject; thus, medicine deals with health and sickness) ...But Rhetoric, so to [speak] appears to be able to discover the means of persuasion in reference to any given subject. That is why we say that as an art its rules are not applied to any particular definite class of things.

Aristotle (1926, p.15; as cited in Cockroft & Cockroft, 2005)

Persuasion and language are inseparable thus it is befitting that rhetoric is defined as “the ‘art of persuasive discourse’ in that ‘this most widely used and overworked term’ refers both to spoken and written language” (Cockroft & Cockroft, 2005, p.3).⁵ Burke, argues that rhetoric is present everywhere and has a broad range of application, in “spoken and written discourse . . . [and] less traditional forms of discourse such as sales promotion, courtship,

⁴ In Internet scamming, the scammers convince their targets based on perceived truth and logic.

⁵ Cockroft & Cockroft (2005) uses a loose definition of the term ‘discourse’ to mean “a series of connected utterances or continuous written forms of communication”.

social etiquette, education, hysteria, witchcraft, and works of art such as literature and painting” (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1985, p. 160). Burke views reality as socially constructed and meaning is rendered as relative, hence reality is dependent on the way people view it. From this perspective, rhetoric’s flexibility (its strategies are not pre-determined by the context, but is created and adapted to fit the context) enables it to become an independent and powerful tool. If it is used well by the persuader in the right situation, its persuasive force can bend the will of others for the benefit of one’s own interest. Indeed, Gardner (2006, p. 16) points out that “rhetoric is a principal vehicle for changing minds” and is most effective when “it encompasses tight logic, draws on relevant research, and resonates with an audience”.

Billig (1996) views rhetoric not as a monologue skill, but as a dialogic skill involving the persuader using rhetoric as a tool to influence the persuadee. Billig’s views are drawn based on social psychology developments in understanding the human cognitive process during a persuasive situation. This dialogic view of rhetoric can be likened to a game of chess, whereby two parties attempt to ‘conquer’ the other, by not only drawing from their skills to make winning moves, but also drawing on their ability to pre-empt the other party’s moves. In other words, in order for a persuader to be successful in his persuasive attempt, he must not only possess the ability to make well-formed arguments to support his stand; he must also be able to foresee possible resistance from the persuadee, and prepare to counter these arguments. In this sense then, a persuader can also be viewed as a strategist who is in control of the interaction (persuasive communication), by identifying and exploiting all the “ideological, personal and contextual elements” of the interaction (Cockroft & Cockroft, 2005, p.5).

Billig’s dialogic view places the persuadees in an empowered light, whereby they are not mere passive recipients of an argument; instead, they can be viewed as having an

equal footing with the persuader and having the option to comply with or resist the request of the persuader based on their assessment and acceptance of the persuader's arguments. Despite the fact that scammers may use manipulative and deceptive means to influence the targets, for the purpose of this study, we would categorise romance scam interactions as persuasive discourse, based on the argument that the targets have the option to accept or reject the scammers' persuasive advances. Van Dijk (2006, p. 361) points out that this option is what differentiates persuasion from manipulation, whereby:

...in persuasion, the interlocutors are free to believe and act as they please, depending on whether or not they accept the arguments of the persuader, whereas in manipulation recipients are typically assigned a more passive role: they are victims of manipulation.

Wodak (1987) suggests that this passivity could be due to the lack of necessary knowledge that can be used to resist the manipulation. Nonetheless, Van Dijk also points out that the boundaries between both terms (persuasion and manipulation) may be vague and differ according to context.⁶

The target has the early prerogative to decide whether or not to respond to the scammer's initial attempt at correspondence, especially when the contact made in online dating sites or social networking sites (SNS) such as *Facebook*, *Tagged*, etc. The target can choose whether to respond or not to the 'friend request' or 'messages' on the SNS site, or even random e-mails and 'chat requests' from an unknown person. Targets who respond positively to the scammer's initial attempt at correspondence could then be considered to have been fallen into the first move of the scammers' game plan. Indeed, an ex-scammer

⁶ Recall Simons' (1976) argument that persuasion is manipulative and that this freedom to "believe and act as they please" could be a mere perception. Wodak's (1987) concern about the lack of knowledge could be closely related to the form of deception in persuasion where information is with-held, a context-dependent premise that according to Simons (1976, p.37), is inevitable, though not recommended.

who was part of a Nigerian syndicate operating 419 scams once testified that, “when you get a reply, it’s 70% sure that you’ll get the money” (Dixon, 2005, para. 30). As the correspondence progresses, the scammers would try to change the targets’ attitudes to influence their behaviour. The targets can still choose to ‘counter’ these arguments using logic reasoning, questioning, or actively searching of the Internet to confirm the scammer’s claims. And as the deal unfolds, both scammer and target would have abundant opportunities to query, confirm or refute each other’s arguments and claims, but with the caveat that the scammer’s arguments and counter-arguments would most likely be deceptive in nature. Ultimately, the main concern of rhetoric (and persuasion) is about gaining control of the communication process in order to lead to a favourable outcome for oneself, as Young *et al.* (1970, p. 9) suggest, “mastering rhetoric means not only mastering a theory of how and why one communicates but mastering the process of communication as well”.

Aristotle suggested that an important characteristic of rhetoric is its flexibility, in that it is neither restricted to only one particular discipline when it comes to studying the underlying means of persuasion, nor involves the use of a single strategy to achieve persuasive goals. Aristotle proposed three means of persuasion: *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*. These persuasive means are developed based on how a persuader can convince a persuadee by triggering favourable responses in the persuadee towards the persuader. These three persuasive facets form the “structural principals” of persuasion, or “proofs” (Cockroft & Cockroft, 2005, p. 15).

Cockroft and Cockroft describe *ethos* as the “persuasion by moral character”; one that creates the persuadee’s confidence in the persuader (2005, p. 15). This character does not refer to the pre-conceived notion of the persuader’s character; rather that which is envisioned through the persuader’s speech. *Pathos* is “persuasion by putting the hearer into

a certain [emotional] frame of mind” (ibid.), and this is an important aspect because the way an individual responds to a persuasive message or even the persuader’s moral character would differ at various affective points. *Logos* refers to the “persuasion by the speech itself, when we establish the true or apparently true” (ibid.). Logical reasoning is also needed in order for the persuadee to grasp and process the character (*ethos*) or emotional triggers (*pathos*) that is being invoked by the persuader.

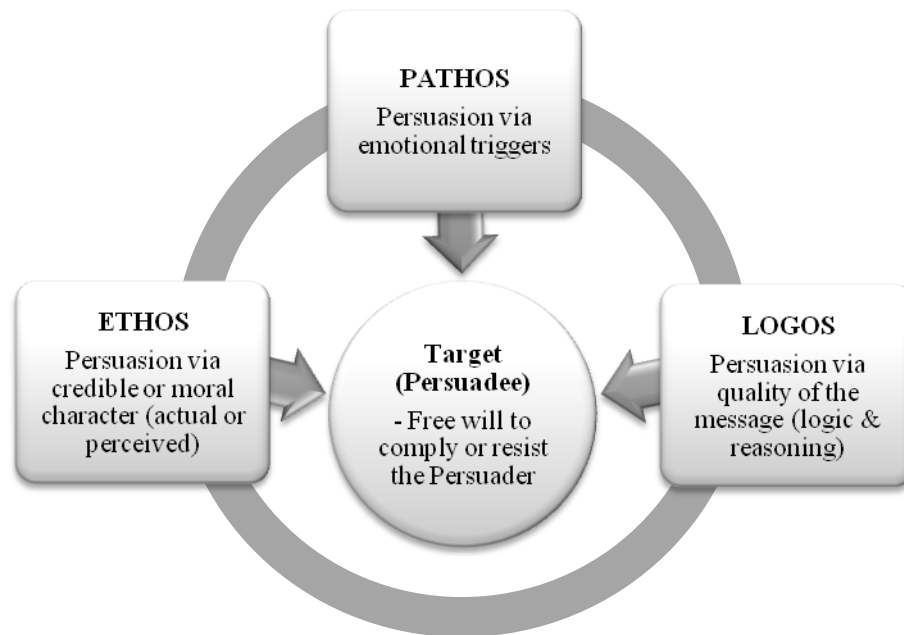


Figure 2.3: Means of Persuasion – *Ethos, Pathos & Logos*

While these three facets seem to be appealing to various aspects of the persuadee, essentially, they are not separate entities. Instead, they are linked to one another, may each influence the other, and may be simultaneously invoked in one persuasive event to lead to greater persuasive effect.

The following subsections discuss the various techniques in which Aristotle’s three means of persuasion; *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*, can be elucidated, by drawing from work in areas such as rhetorical analysis, impression management, identity representation, social influence, etc. (e.g. Higgins & Walker, 2012; Ho, 2010; Clifton & Van de Mierop, 2010;

Gardner, 2006; Cockroft & Cockroft, 2005; Simons *et al.*, 2001; Bhatia, 1993; Bhatia, 2004; Stevens & Kristoff, 1995). This discussion will be used to guide the analysis of the data.

2.3.1. Persuasion through ‘Ethos’

Persuasion using *ethos* requires the establishing of credibility through invoking stance and personality, whereby ‘*stance*’ signifies “...something inherently interactive, reflecting group values, but decadently subject to the persuader’s own control” (Cockroft & Cockroft, 2005, p. 28). ‘*Personality*’ on the other hand is “the persuader’s unique individuality...accentuating those character traits best matched to the audience and topic” and so “the more individually engaged a persuader seems to be, the more convincing the persuasion” (ibid.). It is hence undeniable that the identity or image that a persuader portrays bears weight in determining the persuasiveness of the subject.

Zimmerman (1998, p. 87) suggests that identity could play a role as a “rhetorical device” and in fact, Hart (1997, p. 84) argues that:

Persuasion...comes to us embodied. Most people cannot separate the substance of a message from its author. This is especially true in spoken persuasion, where the speaker’s attitudes, voice, and personal appearance interact constantly with what the speaker says.

Identity can be described, in the broadest sense, as “who people are to each other” and this is “accomplished, disputed, ascribed, resisted, managed and negotiated in discourse” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 4). The management of one’s identity, or *self-representation*, is defined by Schlenker and Pontari (2000, p. 201) as follows:

We define impression management as the goal-directed activity of controlling information about some person, object, idea or event to audiences...Self-representation is a more specific term that refers to the control of information about self.

Self-representation has a significant role to play in persuasive situations because in order for the identity to be persuasive, the self-representation must “arouse appropriate emotional response...[in order to] achieve credibility” (Bhatia, 1993, p. 65). Indeed, studies (e.g. Clifton & Van de Mieroop, 2010; Ho, 2010; Ruhi, 2010) have identified how identities that are presented using carefully selected linguistic choices (lexical, semantic and pragmatic features) can not only successfully establish credibility; it could also arouse emotions and/or display logic and reasoning.

How is a credible identity established? According to Schnoor (2003, p. 62), the primary objective of rhetorical discourse ought “to create the impression by a discourse that one is a person of sound sense, high moral character and benevolence”. Clifton and Van de Mieroop (2010, p. 2450) suggest that *ethos* can be further categorised into three aspects:

- i. “good sense” - relates to “the ability to display that one is intelligent’
- ii. “good character” – referring to an identity that displays “positive values such as honesty, sincerity and so on”
- iii. “goodwill” – referring to the identity that “has the interlocutor’s concerns at heart”.

Based on Clifton and Van de Mierop's (2010) description of credibility, the persuader would then need to display an image of a person who can be perceived as morally upright and one whose arguments are for the benefit of the persuadee, hence there ought not to be any manipulation or deception.⁷ There are several strategies in which a credible character can be portrayed (See Figure 2.4).

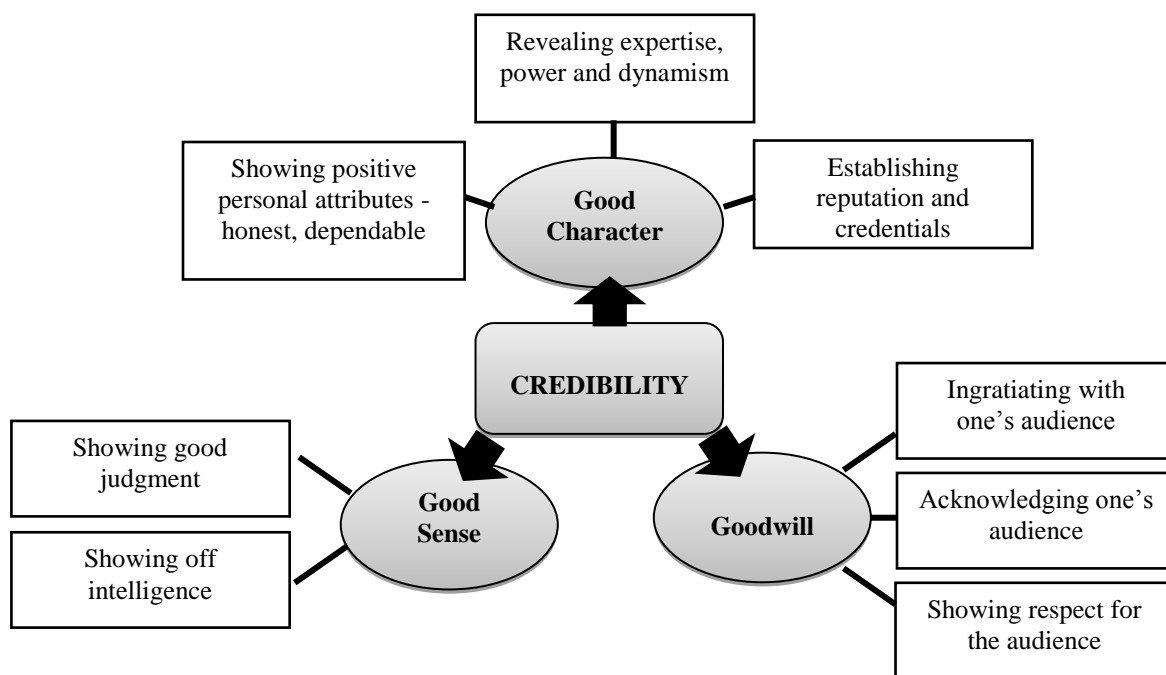


Figure 2.4 : Ways of Portraying a Credible Character

To create an impression of a *good character*, one could list and describe one's positive qualities by using "adjectival and adverbial expressions" as well as words with positive connotations such as honest, dependable, etc. (Bhatia, 2004, p. 94). Interestingly, Camiciottoli (2011, p. 309) found that explicit description of one's positive qualities may not always be effective because positive self-evaluation may cause the persuader to be perceived as being over-zealous in his self-representation. Indeed, such claims of good

⁷ Note that this description of credibility is based on the persuadee's point of view, hence, the persuader does not, in actual fact; have to meet all the morally upright criteria. The persuader could simply give the impression that he possesses these traits.

character would need to be proven; hence appealing to the employment of appeals to *logos*. Nonetheless, Higgins and Walker (2012) suggest that one way to portray honesty is by using *self-deprecation/self-criticism*, i.e. willingness to admit to one's limitations and past mistakes.

Besides that, one's *ethos* can also be demonstrated by creating the impression of one's expertise, power and dynamism. Simons *et al.* (2001, p. 81) state that 'power' refers to "the extent to which the speaker is perceived by the audience as willing and able to use rewards and punishments" while 'dynamism' refers to "the verve, passion, enthusiasm, and the like" of the persuader. Clifton and Van de Mierop (2010) found that the construction of an identity which invokes the 'power' or 'authority' could be done by referring to one's institutional or professional identity, the stability of this identity as well as drawing on the voice of those who endorse this identity (see also Ho, 2010). The latter is similar to the frequent use of credible (or perceived to be credible) sources such from celebrities (in advertising) and trustees (in fundraising) (Bhatia, 2004, p. 94). In 419 scam discourse, studies have highlighted the creation of online identities that are influential, professional, and knowledgeable in the endeavour to create a sense of authority as well as reliability (Schaffer, 2012, p. 167; Chiluya, 2009; Blommaert & Omoniyi, 2006, p. 596).

Furthermore, one could establish one's credentials and reputation by referring to one's past achievements and inclination to succeed, for example, the past and predicted successes of an organisation (Higgins & Walker, 2012), mentioning one's qualifications in job application letters (Bhatia, 1993, p. 61), or referring to established practices using the perfect tense with time adverbials (Bhatia, 2004, p. 99).

These strategies also help to create the impression that the persuader has good sense, can make good judgement and is intelligent. Intelligence could also be inferred from one's knowledge of the issue at hand. Depending on the situation, one's knowledge could

be expressed using either one's professional expertise or personal experience (Simons *et al.*, 2001, p. 157). For example, in convincing an audience about surviving depression, a health advisor could draw on professional knowledge and list the things that one could do to get through depression, while an individual who had experienced depression could share from her personal experience on how to survive depression (See also Section 2.3.3).

The persuader could also demonstrate *ethos* by acknowledging or identifying with the persuadee, for example, through a display of care and concern for the persuadee and by prioritising the persuadee's needs (Clifton & Van de Mierop, 2010; Cockroft & Cockroft, 2005, pp. 16-17; Simons *et al.*, 2001, p. 79). The persuader could also show respect for the feelings, beliefs, values and rights of the persuadee, for example, by using polite greetings as well as making request for permission, opinion or participation (Higgins & Walker, 2012; Ho, 2010). Another strategy is to "ingratiate" with the persuadee; that is to invoke the persuadee's interpersonal attraction and liking for the persuader (Stevens & Kristoff, 1995, p. 589). Ingratiation involves two techniques. The '*other-enhancement*' technique involves complimenting or expressing the desirability of the persuadee and this is based on the principle of reciprocal attraction, whereby people are attracted to those who are attracted to them. Indeed, the use of compliments may also increase positive regards for participants in a communicative situation and could enhance the emotional closeness between the participants (Guerrero *et al.*, 2010, p. 128). In 419 scams, compliments and praises could increase the target's self-confidence or egocentrism causing the target to underestimate the scammer's dubious intentions and skills as well as ignore the obvious warning signals (Freiermuth, 2011, p. 140).

The second technique, '*opinion conformity*' refers to the "verbal endorsement of the attitudes or values held by the target individual" (Stevens & Kristoff, 1995, p. 589). This strategy is based on the opinion that people like those who are similar to them. By agreeing

with the persuadee's attitudes or values, the persuader is also highlighting the similarity with the persuadee thereby establishing solidarity. Barnes (2003, cited in Anderson & Emmers-sommer, 2006, p. 156) argues that similarity is an important factor in online relationships because "it takes the place of proximity; people may not be able to be close in physical location to someone with whom they are interacting online, yet they can find others who share common interests and attitudes". In fact, "perceived similarity is a primary factor in deciding whether to develop an online relationship". This sense of similarity can be created by "emphasising similarities in background, experience, and group affiliation and also by displaying evidences of commonality through dialect, dress, and mannerisms" (Simons *et al.*, 2001, p. 80), using pronouns, more specifically, 'we' as well as 'you and I', thus creating the 'us versus them' frames (Higgins & Walker, 2012), as well as using language with religious sentiments such as "greeting the religious way" (Chiluwa, 2009, p. 644).

Essentially, a credible character enables the persuader to gain the trust of the persuadee and as Garver (1994, p. 190) asserts, "when *ethos* disappears, so does trust". Recall also that credibility is one of the cognitive shortcuts that people fall back on to help them make decisions in a persuasive situation when faced with insufficient cognitive resources, cognitive overload, or pressed for time. Hence in romance scam e-mails, it is expected that the scammer would give much consideration to his self-representation in order to increase his persuasiveness.

2.3.2. Persuasion through '*Pathos*'

Emotions play a role (of varying degree) in the way human beings form their perceptions and judgement of things around them. Cockroft and Cockroft (2005, pp. 55-57) state:

Inevitably, how we ‘feel’ about an issue combines emotional responses with rational and logical judgement...the real question is whether we can tell the difference between emotion which clouds an issue and emotion which illuminates and deepens our understanding of it...Undoubtedly, emotion is the ‘raw material of rhetoric, because without real (or simulated) emotion, effective persuasion is unlikely to take place, whatever the issue involved.

An emotional link between the persuader and persuadee is needed in order for the persuader to communicate his/her emotional state to the persuadee, as well as to familiarise with the persuadee’s affective needs in order to find the triggers that can effectively arouse his or her emotions.

There are two kinds of emotions: *primary emotions*, which are “states of affective arousal that are presumed to be hard-wired in human neuroanatomy” such as “anger, fear, sadness, happiness, disgust, and surprise”; as well as *elaborations of the primary emotions*, which are combinations of primary emotions such as hope (combination of satisfaction-happiness-aversion-fear), guilt (combination of sadness-fear-anger), and so on (Turner, 2007, pp. 2-3). Both primary emotions and their elaborations can be categorised as *positive*; emotions that are desirable and foster stronger social bonds (e.g. happiness, gratitude, relief, awe, hope, yearning), as well as *negative*; emotions that are undesirable and hinder the development of social solidarity or disrupt social bonds (e.g. guilt, shame, jealousy, betrayal, fear). Cockroft and Cockroft (2005, p. 57) suggest that some of these emotions such as guilt, pride or pity are socially constructed emotions, i.e. therefore the triggers may differ with each society’s culture and norms. As was discussed, liking is one of the most common cognitive shortcuts that people depend on to make decisions when there is lack of information or time (Section 2.2.1). If the target has amiable feelings for the persuader,

messages from the persuader would be perceived as more acceptable and trustworthy (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) thus the persuader could arouse positive emotions like making the target feel happy using compliments. Nevertheless, the persuader could also stir negative emotions as ACCC (2012, p. 28) warns, charity and romance scammers will not hesitate to “create a sense of guilt, anxiety, fear or personal attachment that will push you to fall for their scheme”.

As emotions may reflect one’s attitude and beliefs, some persuaders may express false emotions that contradict with their real attitude or beliefs in order to be consistent with what their persuadee expects. This seems to be the case in romance scams whereby scammers express their non-existent attraction and love for the targets in order to arouse victims’ emotions so that they too would reciprocate in similar manner.

Language plays an important role in conveying emotions. Language can be used to “create pictures for the audience in which emotions are inherent” or that which is “appealing directly to the senses” (Cockroft & Cockroft, 2005, p. 62). Vivid descriptions are created through the use of various linguistic resources such as adjectives as well as “a combination of sensory and suggestive lexis and imagery (‘soft hand’... ‘rich anger’)” (ibid.). Silva (2007, p. 71) examines male profiles on online dating sites and discovers that these profiles contained vivid descriptions of personality and physical traits of a stereotypically desired and attractive male (e.g. “dark skin, nice lips”, “sensitive man who’ll really listen”, “charming”, “sexy”, “intelligent”) in order to seduce as well as arouse the desires of the profile reader.

Figurative language such as, among others, the use of metaphors is also commonly used in persuasive situations as it invokes the persuadee’s imagination by providing abstract concepts a means of comparison. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that people “think” in metaphors and this makes metaphors “extremely powerful tools for turning

insights into pictures and planting those pictures in the minds of readers” (Booth & Gregory, 1987, p. 246). In fact, their metaphorical description of metaphors provides a clear understanding as to why it is a very useful linguistic resource in persuasion:

[The use of metaphors is like] looking at light through different coloured filters. When one filter is changed for another of a different colour, a new version of reality may suddenly come into view.

Indeed, metaphors may function as framing or reframing devices that can be used to direct or change the thoughts and viewpoints of the persuadee (*Simons et al.*, 2001, p. 118). Entman (1993, p. 52) points out that a frame serves “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicative text”. For example, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, pp. 156-157) describe the “war metaphor” not merely as “an emotionally loaded word” but it also “structured thoughts, directed actions” and intensified or downplayed certain aspect of the issue, such as by highlighting the threat of an enemy, or by downplaying the consequence of the war.

Metaphors also provide a means of exploring ideas and communicating thoughts in a less direct manner (Cockroft & Cockroft, 2005, p. 167). In Internet romance scams, it is possible that the scammer may attempt to use such figurative language to express themselves indirectly so that they do not appear too forward in advancing their intentions thus putting off their targets.

Additionally, the persuader could also use emotionally charged language – language which conveys intense emotions - such as *fulsome praise* (exaggerated praise), *invective language* (violent verbal language that reflects the writer/speaker’s agitation), as well as *slanted language* (seemingly innocent language that stirs longing and desires) (Booth &

Gregory, 1987, p. 236). Examples of *slanted language* such as the use of *euphemisms*, *doublespeak*, *innuendoes*, *half-truths* in advertisements and commercials are designed to create a sense of exclusivity as well as invoke desires and expectations that may not, or will not be fulfilled. However, *slanted language* can be dangerous as it is used to manipulate the emotions of the persuadee to gain assent to the persuasive agenda, which may not benefit the persuadee, but may additionally cause him or her to be continually blinded to the truth:

[Slanted language] attempts to fix our gaze on ideas and promises that are so alluring, distracting, or emotionally charged that we fail to see what the writer is really up to. And even when we do see the manipulative aim, we may find ourselves willing to be had in order to experience the pleasure of the words or images (Booth & Gregory, 1987, p. 236).

The danger of such language is evident in Internet romance scam cases. Lipka's (2012) interview with a romance scam victim revealed that the scammer was "nice and charming, and it was as if the conversation had become addicting" to the victim (para. 9). In some cases, this 'addiction' may have clouded the minds of the victims to the extent that they "continue to go back online with their tormentor even afterwards, unable to believe it isn't real" (Fortney, 2012, p.3).

Cockroft and Cockroft are also of the opinion that the use of persuasive appeals is not limited to only one instance, one linguistic resource or even one mode of communication; instead, the persuader could repeatedly describe one scene, issue, person, etc. using various linguistic resources throughout the interaction, or even through the use of visuals and graphics. As Gardner (2006, p. 16) suggests, "a change of mind becomes convincing to the extent that it lends itself to representation in a number of different forms,

with these forms reinforcing one another.” Therefore the *repetition* and *redescription* of a mutually reinforcing scene, person, issue, etc. can lead to successful persuasion.

2.3.3. Persuasion through ‘Logos’

Earlier in this chapter, it has been pointed out that during a persuasive situation, the persuadee may scrutinise the quality of the message hence engaging in systematic evaluation of the message content and careful consideration of issues pertaining to the persuasive message, or the target may be influenced by external factors which are not related to the message content such as the appearance and credibility of the persuader. However, as Gardner (2006, p. 15) points out, most individuals in persuasive situations who consider themselves educated would usually adopt the “rational approach”, which involves “identifying relevant factors, weighing each in turn, and making an overall assessment”. It is the “central route” or the “rational approach” that this third means of persuasion, *logos*, appeal to – the process of trying to engage the persuadee through the message content.

Holt and MacPherson (2010) suggest that *logos* could refer to the ability of forming clear and reliable arguments. Aho (1985) and Green (2004) suggest *logos* also include logic, reasoning as well as justification. According to Cockroft and Cockroft (2005, p.18), *logos* ought to include the following characteristic:

...the process of identifying the issues at the heart of debate; the range of diverse arguments in the discourse; the structure of thought these arguments compose; and the sequencing, coherence and logical value of these arguments. Moreover, in order to be comprehensible, discourse has to be logical.

In other words, *logos* refer to well-developed and supported arguments as well as the way the arguments are structured. Cockcroft and Cockcroft (2005, p. 83) suggest a list of ten models of arguments, which “offers systematic and coherent methods of ‘thinking through’ a topic, and of selecting and organising the most effective arguments’. They are:

1. How do we define whatever is being argued about? *Definition model of argument*
2. What caused it and what effects will result? *Cause and effect model of argument*
3. What is similar to it? *Similarity model of argument*
4. What is in any way opposed to it? *Oppositional model of argument*
5. Is it less or more than something else cited? *Degree model of argument*
6. Can a witness or witnesses be cited? *Testimony model or argument*
7. How is the subject categorised, broadly or narrowly? *Genus/species model of argument*
8. What are its associations and qualities? *Associational model of argument*
9. What is the origin of the words used to refer to the subject? *Root meaning model of argument*

These models of arguments exist and are applicable in everyday situations, and not just in academic or literary settings. When one attempts to describe a person, for example, one is providing specific details (about the appearance, the characteristic, etc.) about the person, i.e. defining the person, in order to narrow down from a general group to a specific individual. In the realm of online relationships and online romance, this *Definition Model* is perhaps most apparent in the personal descriptions made during the initial stages of the correspondence, where individuals provide descriptions of themselves, and query the other person for details. The persuasive effects of this personal description could be attained

through the use of “a great deal of qualification by means of adjectives and/or adjectival in general”, “frequent use of the first person pronoun, I”, “a lesser frequent use of the person pronoun, you” as well as “short paragraph and sentences with many intensifiers which are easier to follow and grasp” (Silva, 2007, p. 70).

Another pervasive model of argument is the *Cause and Effect* model, whereby the persuader highlights the reason for something to happen, or points out the effect that follows what has/had happened. The *Similarity Model*, the *Oppositional Model* as well as the *Degree Model* are often used in advertising. Essential to utilising these models is the language of comparison and contrast, and in order to do so, the persuader must first identify some point of reference. Gardner (2006, p. 15) highlights that advertisers attempt to persuade the audience by pointing out the similarities between the values or quality of the product and the audience, or by comparison one product with the other to show the contrast. As pointed out earlier, the *Similarity Model* is also used to display credibility and appeal to emotions.

In establishing a logical and reliable argument, it would be a necessity for the persuader to provide reasons or evidences to support or justify his/her argument. One could draw from established policies, facts or values to provide reasons for one’s arguments as these imply credibility and acceptance of the society. For example, Freiermuth (2011, p.131) found that 419 scammers inserted their crisis narratives into “historically accurate events” with the hope that these established facts would lend credibility to the rest of the otherwise fake message.

Another form of evidences that one can use to support one’s arguments is the use of narratives. Simons *et al.* (2001, p. 167) suggest that the vivid and chronological description of one’s experience creates a sense of “lived experience” and increases the believability of one’s arguments. Indeed, narratives constructed in very specific details form the basis of

the 419 e-mails. Chang and Chong (2010, p. 342) posit that this could be to influence the target to use the *representative heuristic*, as people tend to believe that detailed description is a close representative of the actual truth. This relates to Higgins and Walker's (2012, p. 198) suggestion, that "*logos* in rhetoric is not just rationality, but the appearance of rationality, more like 'commonsense', thus not requiring the same verbal proofs as logic for its persuasiveness". Therefore, the arguments made by the scammer may not necessarily be logical or rational; it just needs to be perceived as such.

Nevertheless, since narratives as well as first-person accounts and witness testimonies are highly personal and told from a single point of view; their function as evidence may be questionable if one were to consider the possibility of the stories being biased, highly individualised, inaccurate or even fallacious. In fact, the use of other types of evidences such as statistics or facts can be similarly questioned. Furthermore, in online communication, recipients of a persuasive message ought to be able to focus on the content as there is less auditory (background noise) and visual distractions (appearance of persuader), and the slower transfer rate of the message (typing versus talking) should allow the receiver to better contemplate and carefully process the arguments of the message (Blasio & Milani, 2008, p. 802). Why then are targets still easily persuaded after merely reading the e-mail scams? Freiermuth (2011, p. 131) suggests that in scam cases, one possible reason is that people generally assume that the other person in the conversation would be cooperative; alluding to Grice's (2000, p. 308) *Maxim of Quality* – "try to make your contribution one that is true" and includes two other maxims:

- i. Do not say what you believe to be false
- ii. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

Additionally, targets may also be less motivated to test or check the message as well as evidence that they have been presented with hence depending only on the affective cues (Cameron, 2009) or if they are fixated on the outcome of the persuasive offer (Horvitz & Pratkanis, 2002).

It is expected that all three means of persuasion be present in a persuasive situation, but they may or may not be given equal focus in one instance (Higgins & Walker, 2012); it may be dependent on various situational factors such as the cognitive ability of the target, the psychological vulnerability of the target, time constraints and others. In the case of scamming, when dealing with a target who is highly involved and engaged in systematic thinking, the scammer may focus on providing more reasoning and evidence; otherwise, the scammer may rely on appealing to the target's emotions.

2.4 Textual Analysis Approaches

Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p. 252) point out the need for discursive creativity in expressing meaning, emotions, attitudes, etc. through textual means when communicating online. With the lack of physical presence, verbal and linguistic cues play an extremely important role in creating and conveying meaning and also in terms of self-representation. Indeed, the social information that builds interpersonal impressions are “conveyed primarily through language” and the ability to use language effectively to convey meaning becomes an asset to creating a persuasive self-representation since “verbal behaviour is commonly assumed to be more subject to our editing and control than non-verbal behaviours” (Walther, 1996, p. 20; see also Walther, 2007). This section discusses several linguistic means of conveying meaning that may contribute to the persuasiveness of the scam messages, in addition to that discussed in previous sections.

2.4.1 Referential Meaning

Meaning could be conveyed by “referring”, which is “used for the action of a speaker in picking out entities in the world” (Saeed, 2009, p. 23). *Referential meaning* is dependent on the context of use; the recipient needs to have some contextual information in order to correctly determine what the speaker is ‘pointing’ to. Take the following sentence as an example:

I am a graduate of the University of Malaya.

In an e-mail, the ‘I’ in this sentence undoubtedly refers to the writer of the e-mail, while ‘University of Malaya’ refers to a specific academic institution in the world. Take the next sentence as example:

He is a graduate of the university.

The recipient may have difficulty determining which ‘he’ the e-mail writer is referring to especially if there is no contextual information provided, such as mention of a person (e.g. my brother, my friend, Sam, etc.). While the use of ‘the university’ refers to an academic institution for tertiary education, the amount of information conveyed is still very limited and vague because the writer could be referring to any academic institution for tertiary education anywhere in the world. No doubt, these contextual information could be provided upon requests of the recipient (if they do so) hence meaning can be said to be co-constructed as the communication progresses (Wetherell, 2001, p.18). If the recipients do not request for any contextual information and instead proceed to form their own interpretation which differs from that of the writer, a breakdown in communication may

occur. A clear point of reference plays an important part especially when *comparison or contrast models of arguments* are used to structure a persuasive message (see Section 2.3.3). In asynchronous communication such as e-mails, such exchanges of contextual information between the recipients may occur but not instantaneously. Therefore in such situations, sufficient contextual information must be provided in order for meaning to be conveyed and interpreted according to the way the writer intends.

Studies on 419 scam e-mails have shown that scammers often provide detailed information in their form of narratives, such as information about their identity and background, their business offer and the benefits or rewards waiting for the recipient, etc. These detailed information may be necessary in order to ease the interpretation of the offer, ensure that the recipient is ‘on the same page’ as the scammer, as well as convince the recipient of the deal the scammer is offering. However, Chilwa (2009, p. 652) points out that in the 419 e-mails examined, the writers seem to be inconsistent and sometimes even erroneous with their references; for example, there are references to sudden funds of money without prior explanation of where the money is from as well as reference to wrong Bible verses. Chilwa suggests that these inconsistencies are then warning signs that these e-mails are of a fraudulent nature.

2.4.2 Connotative Meaning

Certainly, some words may have “additional meaning” that is “over and above their ability to refer” and this is known as “sense” or “intension” (Fromkin & Rodman, 1998, p. 174). The *connotative* meaning or *sense* could also be understood as meanings which have subjective cultural or emotional attachments. Saeed (2009, p. 33) suggests that when an individual encounters a particular word, he or she would generate a *sense* of the word based on “mental representations” that appear in his or her mind. However due to the cultural or

emotional variation between individuals, there may be problems when it comes to generating the *sense* for common nouns. Saeed provides the example of a “triangle”, whereby “one speaker may have a mental image of an equilateral triangle, another might be isosceles or scalene” (ibid.). In fact, it would be even more difficult to generate one common *sense* for abstract concepts such as love, happiness, justice, etc. as these concepts are intangible and cannot be experienced by the five senses. Therefore in any communication, one needs to be aware and cautious of the additional meanings that are connoted by one’s words. Essentially as Frawley (1992, p. 20) points out:

... meaning cannot be strictly what an expression refers to *in the world*. What matters is *the way the world is presented, the projected world*, the world construed, not the bare facts, if, indeed there even are such things as facts.

Yet in scam discourse, this characteristic of text and meaning becomes a dangerous tool as it could also be deviously manipulated by the scammer, wherein the scammer uses language to ‘present’ and ‘project’ the world that they want their targets to believe in; one that is absolutely fictitious. Take for example the concept of ‘politeness’. What construes politeness may differ from culture to culture and since there is no universally accepted fact of what politeness should be like, the scammer then presents his version of a polite individual, creating a *sense* that a polite person is well-mannered and comes from a respectable background. This sense is projected through the use of politeness strategies like greetings and salutations, hedging of requests, apologies for abruptness of the e-mail, and so on (Schaffer, 2012; Freiermuth, 2011; Chiluwa, 2009).

2.4.3 Presuppositions

In any human communication, information could be conveyed directly as well as indirectly. Fromkin and Rodman (1998, p. 199) suggest that “*presuppositions* can be used to communicate information indirectly” whereby the speaker makes an assumption that some information in their speech could be left unstated because these information are already known to the listener. For example, when a speaker asks “Would you like to have more coffee?” the word ‘more’ indicates a *presupposition* that the listener had already drank some coffee. Therefore, the word ‘more’ does not only convey the meaning of ‘extra of something’, it presupposes that there must have already been something before that. Similarly, in ‘doing something again’, the word ‘again’ does not just mean doing extra of something, but it presupposes that the something had been done before.

Another example; when we say that “someone managed to do something”, the conveyed meaning is that, the person succeeded in doing something, but also the *presupposition* that the person had ‘tried’ to do something (Yule, 2008, p. 28). Fromkin and Rodman suggest that this phenomenon could also be described as “*implication*”, whereby the assumed and unstated bits of information essentially convey additional meaning. While *presupposition* is often viewed from the perspective of the speaker, the unstated information may influence the interpretation of the message as recipients are expected to ‘fill in the blanks’ based on the available information.

As such, a scammer who may have a better command of the English language may intentionally compose the fraudulent messages with elements of presuppositions. For example, Chilwa (2009, p. 655) points out that in 419 e-mails, the request to ensure confidentiality as the offer is made only to the target conveys an additional sense of sincerity, secrecy and importance, which may create a sense of urgency and prompt immediate action by the target.

2.4.4 Speech Acts

There is more to text than just words and meaning. Yule (2008, p. 47) points out that “in attempting to express themselves, people do not only produce utterances containing grammatical structures and words, they perform actions via those utterances”. Indeed, “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (Austin, 1999, p. 65) and Searle (1976, pp. 10-16) suggested that *speech acts* could be grouped into the following five main categories:

Table 2.2 : Speech Acts by Searle (1976)

Speech Act	Description	Paradigm cases
Representatives	Speech acts which “commit the speaker to something’s being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition”	asserting, concluding
Directives	Speech acts which are “attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something”	requesting, questioning
Commissives	Speech acts which “commit the speaker to some future course of action”	promising, threatening, offering
Expressives	Speech acts which “express a psychological state”	thanking, apologising, congratulating
Declarations	Speech acts which bring changes to the status or condition of the target objects solely by performing the speech act; tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions	marrying, firing from employment

Austin suggests that some utterances may be “*explicitly performative*” whereby the utterance contains “significant and unambiguous expressions” that indicate the act of performing an action, for example, “I order you to go” or “I promise to marry you” (1999, p. 68). This would then be contrasted with “*implicitly performative*” whereby it is unclear if the utterance contains any performative quality. For example, Austin points out that the

utterance “There is a bull in the field” could be just a statement describing scenery; or the speaker could be performing the act of warning the listener, or ordering the listener to run.

Therefore, when producing an utterance, the action being performed would consist of three related acts:

- i. the *locutionary act* – the basic act of producing a meaningful utterance using linguistic expressions
- ii. the *illocutionary act* – the act of producing an utterance with a communicative purpose in mind
- iii. the *perlocutionary act* – the intentional or unintentional effect on the actions, thoughts or feelings of the listener upon the production of the utterance

(Austin, 1999, pp. 70-71; Yule, 2008; p. 48)

An utterance may have different *illocutionary* forces - conveys different communicative purposes, so to indicate the *illocutionary* force of an utterance, one could refer to the “Illocutionary Force Indicating Device, or IFID” such as performative verbs, word order, stress and intonation (Yule, 2008, p. 50). Besides that, there is also a need to consider the *felicity conditions* – the “expected or appropriate circumstances...for the speech act to be recognised as intended” (ibid.) hence, there are several conditions to follow:

- i. *General Condition* – Emphasis on the message recipient such as whether they can understand the language that is being used
- ii. *Content Condition* – Emphasis on the content of the utterance, for example, a promise must be referring to a future act of the speaker that has not taken place

- iii. *Preparatory Condition* – Emphasis on the act, for example, the act of promising requires two preparatory conditions; (1) the event promised will not take place on its own, (2) the event promised will bring advantages for the message recipient.
- iv. *Sincerity Condition* – Emphasis on the speaker's intentions, for example, for a promise to be recognised as one, there must be genuine intention on the speaker's part to carry out the future act.
- v. *Essential Condition* - Emphasis on the speaker's state of mind, for example, by performing the act of promising, the speaker is changing the state from non-obligation to obligation.

The fulfilment of all these conditions is required in order to assert that a specific speech act is appropriately performed. However in scamming discourse where the contents of the e-mails are written with deceptive intent, it would be expected that these felicity conditions would be flouted. For example, when a 419 scammer writes, "I guarantee that the transaction will be executed under legitimate arrangement" (Chiluwa, 2009, p. 653), the *sincerity condition* and *essential condition* are already flouted because there is no change of state of mind in the scammer, and there is certainly no intention to carry out any transaction at all, let alone legitimately. Nonetheless, unsuspecting individuals may believe that these conditions are being fulfilled when interacting with the scammer, and no doubt, scammers would also endeavour to ensure or at least make it appear as if these conditions are being fulfilled (Chiluwa, 2010) .

Despite not fulfilling the *felicity conditions*, the speaker's speech act may still cause some impact on the behaviour, emotions or thoughts of the message recipient; the *perlocutionary act* would still occur (Austin, 1999, p. 70). Back to the previous utterance by the 419 scammer, the speaker's act of promising may have been intended to create the

perlocutionary effect of convincing the message recipient about the credibility of the transaction, and this effect may influence the message recipients' subsequent actions (e.g. agree to the transaction), change of emotion (e.g. feel more secured about the transaction), or thoughts (e.g. believe that the transaction is reliable). Similarly if we reflect on the romance scam cases where victims believed and hung on to the promises of marriage that romance scammers made; we can see that while the promises certainly do not fulfil all the *felicity conditions*; the *perlocutionary act* had still occurred and its effects achieved.

The brief discussion of how meaning can be conveyed through text as well as how text can perform an action suggests that despite romance scammers being confined to mostly text-based communication (either in written form such as in the e-mails or audio form such as via telephone conversations); they are not incapacitated. Rather, if they possess sufficient command of the English language and the skills to manipulate the language, text-based online communication would enable them to operate more easily and effectively because there would be no non-verbal communication cues that may create conflict with what they say; all would be dependent on words.

2.5 Conclusion

As studies on scamming are relatively rare in the Malaysian context, the literature referred to in this chapter is mostly taken from studies conducted in other countries (mostly from a western context), therefore the use of some of the framework or theories in the analysis and discussion of the data have been done so judiciously, bearing in mind this limitation. Nevertheless, the various concepts and theories compiled from different disciplines could be summarised into a theoretical framework to guide the present study as shown in Figure 2.5:

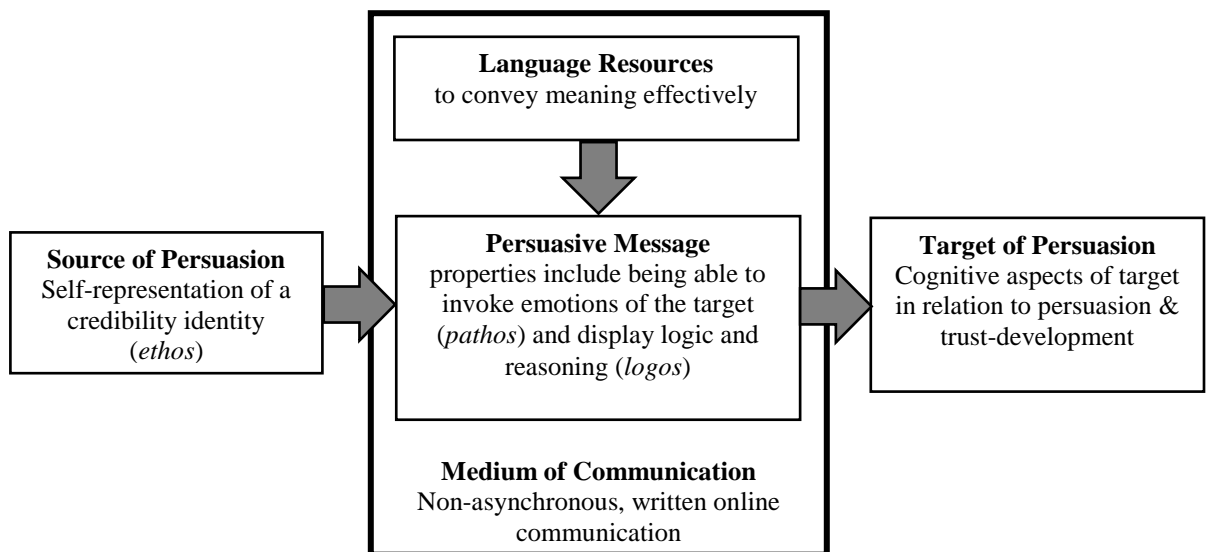


Figure 2.5 : Theoretical Framework of the Present Study

Due to limitations of this study that will be described in the following chapter, the analysis of this study will focus only on the ‘Source of Persuasion’ in terms of how the romance scammer represents himself as a credible identity and also the ‘Persuasive Message’, in terms of how the e-mail messages invoke the emotions of the target and display logic and reasoning. Explanation of the ‘Language Resources’ used by the scammer in consideration of the ‘Medium of Communication’ will be woven into the analysis and discussion. While the aim of this study is not on exploring the influence of the persuasive message on the ‘Target of Persuasion’, some consideration will also be given to the target’s responses throughout the analysis and discussion to give a sense of the context of the interaction and the possible effects of the scammer strategies that may have taken place.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design (Section 3.1), the data collection process and the data (Section 3.2) as well as the data analysis procedures (Section 3.3).

3.1 Research Design

This study is a preliminary work exploring Internet romance scam e-mails as a persuasive discourse. Rather than the quantitative approach that “provides a general picture of trends, associations, and relationships” the qualitative approach was a better fit for this study as it facilitates the exploration of how and why romance scam e-mails are written the way they are. They provide preliminary insights of the romance scammer’s “deeper thoughts and behaviours” as they carry out their deceptive plans (see Creswell, 2007, p. 40).

A qualitative case study research design was adopted as case studies are generally “the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over event, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin, 2003, p. 1). As such, the current study is conducted in a real-life context whereby the data of this study are taken from an actual correspondence between a scammer and his target in a successful Internet romance scam, and not in a contrived situation based on data collected through correspondence between a scammer and a pretend-victim⁸.

⁸ There are individuals who go online pretending to be victims and approaching scammers or suspected scammers with the intention to waste the scammer’s time or to reveal their deceptive intentions to warn others. This practice is called scam-baiting (Wayne, 2010).

Because such contexts are described by Titscher *et al.* (2000, p. 43) as “rich and complex” and each case may differ from another, boundaries are set in order to facilitate the collection of data as well as the analysis process. As such, a qualitative case study design allows this study to explore Internet romance scam within a specific scope, or in Creswell’s words, “bounded system” (2007, p. 73) but immersing and delving in-depth to provide answers to the research questions, ensuring “more detail, richness, completeness, and variance – that is, depth – for the unit of study” (Flyvberg, 2011, p. 301).

The scammer-target e-mail correspondences are the main highlights of this study, chiefly because the RMP only provided these emails and nothing more. While it is acknowledged that e-mails are “the most effective and direct means through which the scammers access their potential victims, persuasively entice and ultimately exploit them” (Onyebadi & Park, 2012, p. 182), literature have revealed that romance scammers also use online instant messaging services such as *Yahoo Messenger* to communicate with their targets. Nonetheless, the e-mail correspondences provide numerous insightful perspectives, such as:

- The e-mails were written in prose form. This indicates that the scammer has been selective of his linguistic resources in constructing a coherent text.
- Past e-mails are automatically stored in one’s ‘Inbox’ and this may not be so for instant messaging services. Because users may set their preferences to ‘store’ the history of their conversation sessions, it is easier to get hold of the e-mails rather than instant messaging text.

- E-mails are a type of asynchronous online communication that give the scammer the benefit of time to plan, select and use linguistic resources that are most persuasive.

While it has been reported that romance scammers have established a certain ‘system’ of their own, there may be slight variations depending on where the scammers are operating from, the type of resources available to them, the target’s norms and values, and so on (Marissa, 2010). It is then possible to assume that the persuasive strategies and linguistic resources utilised may be influenced by the ‘system’ that the scammer follows.

While the case study research design is advantageous in the many aspects as described, the common concern about using this research design is the lack of transferability of the findings (Yin, 2003, p. 37). However in the real-life context, Internet romance scam discourse is expected to be different for each case, depending on factors such as the skills of the scammer or the responsiveness of the target. Hence, it is acknowledged that the findings of this study cannot be generalised for other cases of Internet romance scams; however, it offers a glimpse into the vast options of persuasive language resources that has been used in a particular case rather successfully.

The next section discusses the research procedures as well as the type of data collected that have alluded to the characteristics of a qualitative case study research design as prescribed by Creswell (2007, pp. 37-39).

3.2 Data and Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process was conducted in three phases as illustrated in Figure 3.1 and each phase will be briefly described in this section.

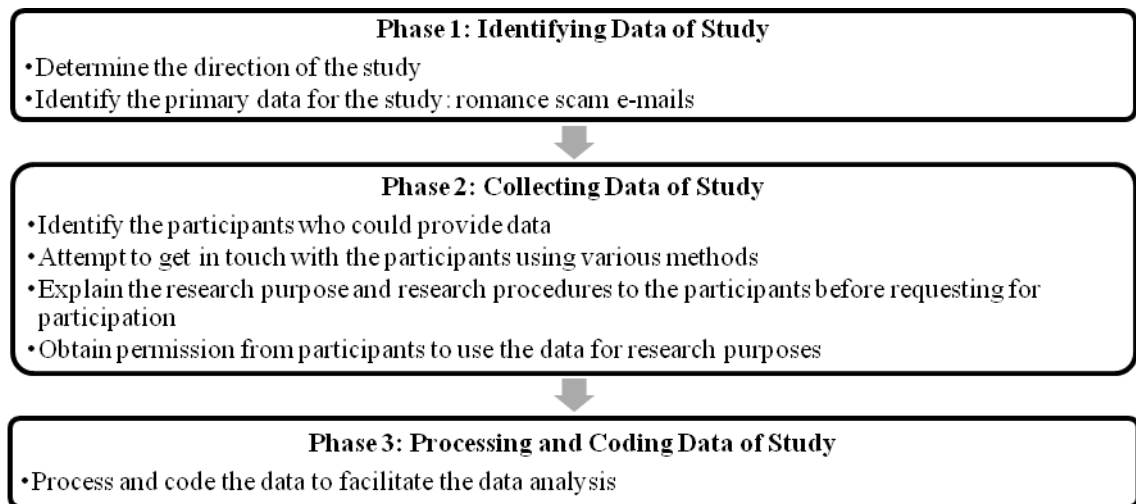


Figure 3.1: Phases of Data Collection Process

There were numerous technical challenges that were encountered in this research. As Internet romance scam is still relatively unexplored in the area of academic research, the study started off by exploring the issue as presented in both local and international media as well as over the Internet. It was also not possible to gain access to the scammers since their actual identity and whereabouts are unknown and it is not likely that they would openly expose details about their criminal activities even if they have been identified.

Furthermore, acquiring direct access to the victims of Internet romance scams has been rather difficult. Various local organisations which may be directly or indirectly involved in this issue such as the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the Ministry of Women, Family and Society Development, Women's Aid Organisation, All Women's Action Society, etc. were contacted, however this endeavour yielded no favourable outcome.

The solicitation of victims and individuals who were romantically involved with Internet romance scammers were done via the word of mouth, advertisements via the *Star* newspaper, a radio station (Capital FM) and social media sites like the RMP's Facebook

page.⁹ It is ironic that the public, including victims themselves, were very supportive in terms of providing morale and encouragement, however, only a few individuals who were identified as Internet romance scam victims responded. No data were obtained from them because they deleted their electronic correspondences, and some victims were not willing to disclose their experiences.

The RMP was then identified as an alternative source of data because they have access to the correspondences of both scammers and victims, which they obtained from police reports and from their investigations. The Director of the RMP Commercial Crimes Department allowed romance scam data from the Cybercrime and Multimedia Investigation Unit (CMIU) to be collected. It is unfortunate however that the CMIU officer only agreed to provide the following data:

a) One Set of Written Correspondence

One set of 21 e-mails (a combination of 15 e-mails from the male scammer and 6 e-mails from the female target) taken from a single case was provided by the RMP-CMIU. This set of data was taken from a closed case, which involves a West-African scammer who scammed a Hong Kong woman. The man had since been arrested, charged and convicted in the Malaysian courts. The e-mails contained personal identifying information of the victim and scammer and they have been replaced with pseudonyms in this research (Scammer-S; Target-T) to ensure the anonymity of the victim and scammer (see Appendix A for examples of the scammer e-mails).

⁹ This study caught the attention of *the Star* which prompted a special coverage of the issue and a short section highlighted the current study (December 4th, 2012). A *Facebook* page (www.facebook.com/theIRSproject) was also created for this research.

The e-mails given by RMP-CMIU were in printed form, with some still in the original e-mail formats. The e-mails were reproduced in verbatim in this study. The total number of words in the present study’s corpus is as detailed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Text Size in Terms of Number of Words

Total number of words in Scammer Messages (SM 1-15)	2,734 words
Total number of words in Target Messages (TM 1-6)	927 words
Total number of words in corpus of 21 e-mails	3,661 words

Since the main focus of this study is to look at the persuasive appeals used by the scammer, the e-mails written by the scammer (SM1-SM15) serve as the primary focus of the analysis, while the e-mails written by the target (TM1-TM6) were used to provide contextual information as well as to guide the interpretation of the findings.

As there were no dates on some of the e-mails, the order of the e-mails as received from the investigation officer was retained and assumed to be in the chronological order (see Figure 3.2). The removing of messages with identifying features by the investigation officers resulted in gaps within the written correspondence and this is acknowledged as a limitation of this study (see Section 6.3).

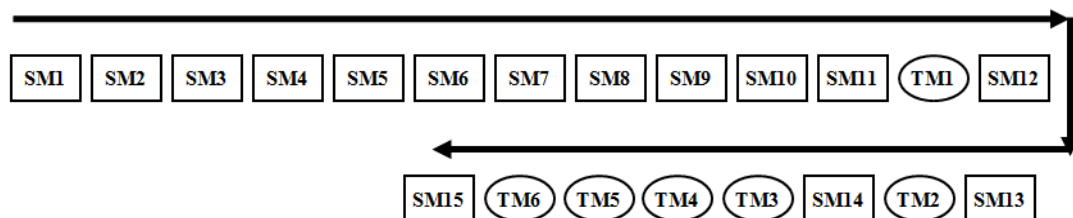


Figure 3.2: Order of Messages in the Data Provided by RMP

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis procedure can be divided into five stages as illustrated in Figure 3.3.

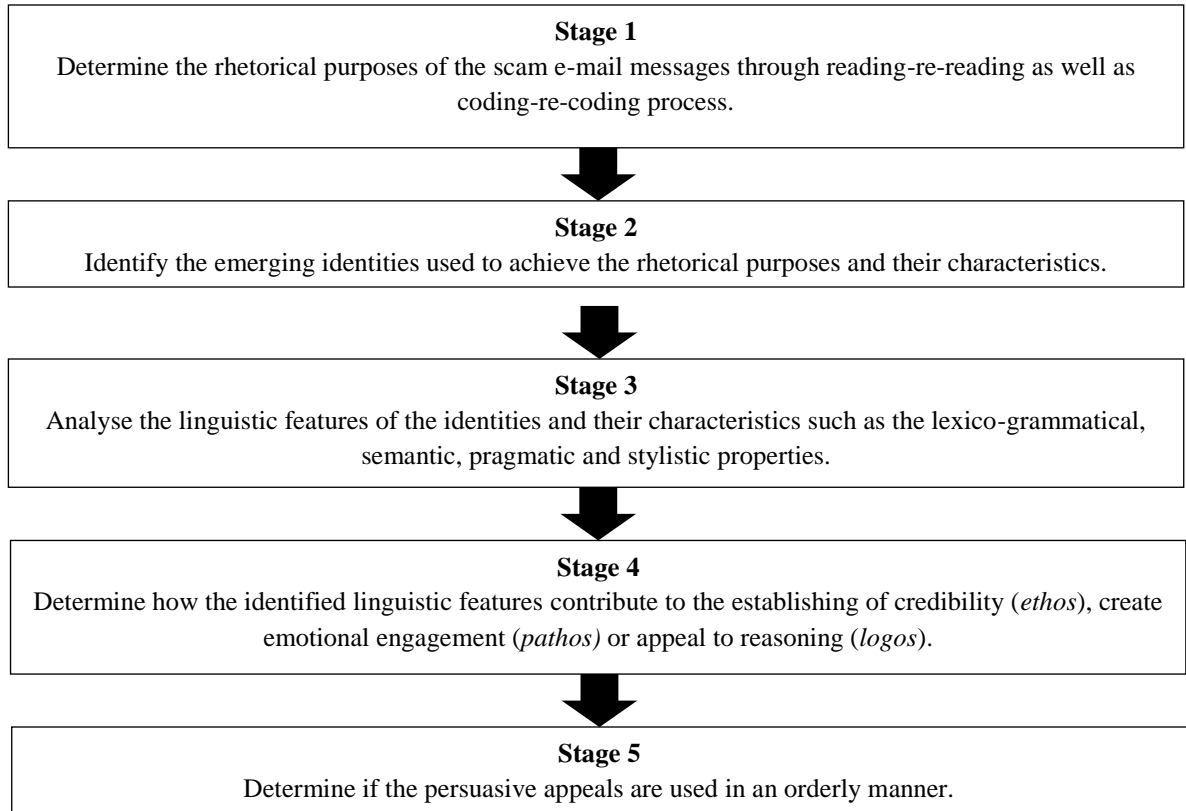


Figure 3.3: Stages of Data Analysis Process

The e-mails are analysed in a dialectical manner by referring to relevant theories and concepts for suitable analytical interpretation and by examining the data for unique features not covered in previous literature in order to identify important thematic aspects. This starting point of analysis, determining the rhetorical aims, which was also adopted by Freiermuth (2011), Clifton and Van de Mieroop (2010) and Ho (2010) facilitated a logical progression of analysis as well as helped formed themes and analysis units.

Reviewed literature suggests that scammers pay careful attention to the creation of their online aliases as well as their self-representation when corresponding with their

targets. Since identity in the virtual world is ‘ambiguous’ (Donath, 1999, p. 29), the romance scammer would be able to build his online persona via linguistic signifiers to create the most desirable self-presentation in order to ensure the achievement of his main objective. Hence at the second stage of analysis, the e-mails are examined to determine the identity and its characteristics that the scammer assumes to present himself to the target. These identities form the themes under which the persuasive appeals are analysed. The scammer’s identity and its characteristics were examined by examining the linguistic resources used, such as lexico-grammatical (e.g. use of pronouns, nouns, tenses), semantic and pragmatic (e.g. presuppositions, reference, speech acts) resources as well as rhetorical styles (repetition, hyperboles, metaphors and models of argument).

These linguistic features were then examined to determine how they may create a persuasive effect by appealing to credibility (*ethos*), emotions (*pathos*) and logic and reasoning (*logos*). Using the contextual information gained from the target e-mails (TM) as well as other relevant literature, this study discusses how the use of these persuasive appeals may influence the target’s state of mind and decision-making.

Reviewed literature and victims’ personal accounts in online Internet romance scam forums suggests that romance scammers do not operate randomly, but their every word and act follows a progression that is parallel with the development of trust level and intensity of emotions that the targets have for them. Therefore the analysis also examines the e-mails chronologically to determine how the scammer presents and develops his scheme.

Bhatia (2004) argues that an analysis of language ought to consider not just how the text is constructed, but also the way it is interpreted, used and exploited in a particular context to achieve specific context-based goals. Wetherell (2001, p. 18) points out that what people say is usually “indexical”, in that the sense or meaning is constructed depending on the contexts of use and may result in different versions of social reality. Wetherell also

suggests that this constructive quality of discourse leads to the persuasive quality of discourse:

...the study of the persuasive work and the organization of discourse to that end... demonstrates that what is said is often produced, heard and read in relation to the things which are not said. Discourse is a designed activity. It involves work. (p. 17)

Although direct accounts could not be obtained from the scammer and target, this study is certainly not void of context. This is because unlike other 419 scam studies which examined only the introductory e-mail, this study examines, though with its limitations, the stretch of correspondence. It can be assumed that each e-mail from the scammer is written in response to a prior e-mail from the target and possibly even a prior telephone conversation, chat session or even a non-response. The victim's messages also provided a window, albeit a small one, to understanding how she may have thought and felt as a result of the e-mails.

The next chapter presents the findings that have been acquired using the methods discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4. Introduction

This chapter addresses the following research questions:

- i. *What are the personal attributes of the scammer's online identity and how are these attributes materialized in the e-mails to create a sense of credibility?*
- ii. *What emotional responses does the romance scammer intend to invoke from his target and what are the strategies that he uses to achieve his intention?*

The analysis will be organised according to themes based on the scammer's self-representation while the analysis of the persuasive means in terms of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* will be incorporated throughout.

The e-mails obtained from the RMP-CMIU in general show that the scammer has a long-term goal that is, to mine his target for money. However, in order to reach this goal, the scammer has to fulfil a number of smaller social relational goals, which are:

- (i) To convince the target to trust him
- (ii) To entice the target into starting a relationship with him
- (iii) To develop and maintain the target's emotions for him
- (iv) To ensure that communication between them are continuous

In order to fulfil these social relational goals, the scammer hooks his target by representing himself as an individual with numerous positive attributes. These attributes are as follows, and they are discussed in greater depth in the subsequent sections:

- i. a credible and reliable person (Section 4.1)
- ii. an ideal and passionate lover (Section 4.2)
- iii. a distressed lover in need of help (Section 4.3)

4.1 The Identity of a Credible and Reliable Person

Before the romance scammer can even go any further in his deceptive endeavours, he must first entice the target and then gain her trust because if he is unable to do so, he will remain a stranger to her and she would be distrustful of him. In order to get his target to be interested in him and lower down her guard, the scammer presents himself as a credible and reliable man. This identity assumes four main characteristics, and these are discussed in greater depth in the subsequent subsections:

- i. A religious person who believes in divine providence (Section 4.1.1)
- ii. A person with a good reputation (Section 4.1.2)
- iii. An innocent person with good moral traits (Section 4.1.3)

4.1.1 A Religious Person Who Believes in Divine Providence

The scammer was deliberate in bringing in religious discourse in order to uphold his moral character. Right from the introductory e-mail, SM1, the scammer strategically uses key words that have religious connotations, such as ‘pray’, ‘praying’, ‘thank God’, ‘grace’,

‘God fearing’ and ‘almighty’, as shown in Extract 1 (just to reiterate here, the texts are produced verbatim):

Extract 1. Words that carry semantic connotations of religion and religiosity

SM1	My heart is full of joy knowing you and i pray that almighty who has brought us together through this way will guide and lead us to the right way.
	i have been looking for sincere ad honest God fearing woman to spend the rest of my life together.
SM12	i am always remember you in my prayer.
SM13	i am praying for you and your dad
SM6	Thank God for the grace to send me someone like you

Silva (2007) discovers that people with religious affiliations tend to be stereotyped as being more morally upright, decent and well-bred. Thus by creating a persona that seems to be express devotion, belief in and fear of ‘God’, the scammer is leading his target to believe that he cannot possibly be a bad person hence she does not need to be suspicious of him. After all, due to the anonymous nature of online communication, individuals who use the Internet as an alternative means of seeking for love or forming new relationships may tend to exercise more caution and suspicion. The scammer’s consistent reference to religious terms throughout the correspondence also seems like a form of subliminal messaging in hopes of getting her to think of him as a morally upright person (also see Luo *et al.*, 2004).

Based on the messages from the target, she too reciprocates and presents herself as a religious person based on instances where she indicates her belief in God and in prayers as shown in the following examples:

Extract 2. Victim’s expression of her religious inclinations

TM4	Honey, I believe in God and I believe you too
-----	---

TM5	I am right here pray for you again and again and to support you.
-----	--

There is a possibility that the victim's profiles in the online dating site may have stated her religious orientation and may have also contained information revealing that she is seeking for a partner of the same faith. With this possibility in mind, the scammer exploited his target's access point and was successful. Moreover, this religious similarity with the target may have made the scammer appear more attractive and also more approachable. After all, people tend to be attracted to those they perceive to be similar with them especially in terms of their worldview, attitudes and values in life (Byrne, 1971). With that, the scammer may perhaps reduce the psychological gaps between his target and himself, and increase his penetration proximity into her inner social circle.

To further emphasise on his religious merits, the scammer also dropped references to God and religion with his encounter with his target, and later on in the correspondence, to their intimate relationship as well. As shown in the following example, the scammer expresses to his target that his encounter with her on this dating site is all part of a divine plan.

Extract 3. Describing encounter with the target as part of a divine plan

SM1	My heart is full of joy knowing you and i pray that almighty who has brought us together through this way will guide and lead us to the right way. Well, am quite new here in the dating site. A friend of mine who got his soul mate in this site introduced me to the site.
-----	---

Because the target was a registered member of this online dating site, it could be presupposed that the target intended to find romance and an ideal partner. Because the target reciprocated to the scammer, she could have been a believer of divine providence and of the idea of a 'soul mate' (which itself is a type of divine providence). According to

Holmes (2007), there are people who believe that “there is a predestined soul mate ‘out there’ and relationship happiness will be instantly achieved and maintained if that special person can be located” and “long-term relationship success might not be attainable with anyone else except for that one ‘true’ soul mate”.

The passage shows the scammer trying to create the cognitive presupposition that the target is the scammer’s soul mate because it was God’s will that had “brought [them] together” and this was not the scammer’s doing. Hence, his target should ideally reciprocate because this is what God wants for her too. The idea of ‘Divine Providence’ was not only found in the first message, but was also emphasised and reinforced in later messages as shown in the following extracts:

Extract 4. Reinforcement of the idea of ‘Divine Providence’

SM6	You cannot imagine how much I prayed and asked God for sending me the partner he meant for me during the last months. When I finally decided to surrender, not to force anything, not taking any actions, you came into my life my dear, totally unexpected.
SM9	See the wonderful work of god that we have know each other...

The extracts show an interesting representation of thematic relations. The scammer removed the agency on his part when talking about how they met and how their relationship started, as exemplified in the phrases “I prayed and asked God for sending me the partner her meant for me”, “decided to surrender”, “not to force anything”, “not taking any actions”, and placed himself as the beneficiary instead. ‘God’ is instead given the role of the agent. In a sense then, the scammer is telling the target that if she cannot trust him, then she should at least trust ‘God’ because He was the one that had brought them together.

These thematic relations suggest that this is the scammer’s strategy to mask his intentions when approaching his target. The scammer created the impression that he did not

intentionally seek out his target from the start, but was led to her and with that, the target may perhaps be less suspicious about the scammer's intentions of approaching her.

Aside from establishing his credentials by referring to 'God' as their matchmaker, this could perhaps be a strategy to create a sense of serendipity in their relationship. On a relevant note, Towbin *et al.* (2004) found that the notion of "love at first sight" was a major theme in 26 Disney animated movies, whereby the couples met through serendipitous situations, fell in love within minutes, got married and "lived happily ever after". Perhaps, the scammer may be trying to draw from these popular albeit misguided notions of romance and lead his target into believing that what she is experiencing is just like the kind of romance found in movies; that they have found each other as soul mates and will now have a happily ever after life ending.

Extract 5. The target indicating her belief that the scammer is her pre-destined soul mate

TM2	I am really happy God linked us together and make you found me at the site. I feel you are my another half who i searched for long time. I really love you. I keep you saying I love you becoz i really love you so much.
-----	---

This strategy can be considered successful because as shown in Extract 5, the target reciprocated and indicated that she too believe that it an act of God who brought him into her life and that he is her destined soul mate.

This belief in destiny and divine providence in relationships may perhaps be an Achilles heel for many victims as they stereotype people with religious inclinations as morally upright, well-bred and therefore will never cause harm to others. As a result of that, they may have lowered down their guard the moment the other person displays characteristics of a religious person, resulting in them becoming easy targets of scams.

4.1.2 A Person with a Good Reputation

Reputation plays an important role in the real world and in many domains of discourses. For instance, job applicants try to establish their credentials by providing an impressive list of referee; or in sales promotion letter where the writer refers to the well-established nature of the company or its positive track record (Bhatia, 1993; 2004). Reputation has been found to also play an important role in online communication that may affect trust and one's access to opportunities (see Henderson & Gilding, 2004, p. 500).

The data also shows the scammer attempting to establish a good reputation by highlighting his education background. He describes himself as a graduate from a reputable university as well as describing his career achievements:

Extract 6. Scammer giving the impression he has a good education and career

SM1	i graduated from university of London, where i studied architectural. i come from a family in which am the only son and my father is late, while my mom is still alive, he was also an engineer, he died years ago. and am the only son who successful him with my talented skills and from the knowledge i gained from my studies,
SM1	i am an arc tech, in engineering department. i work with both government and private company as a building engineer, both internationally and locally. am from Scotland, i like in dunblane city. my position as engineer entitles me as, senior project surveyor monitoring in building department. am a good engineering, good in drawing both computer drawing and skilful drawing.

The scammer's pseudo self-disclosure in Extract 6 aims to create an impression that he comes from a good genetic pool and was brought up in a nurturing environment. In order to give the impression that he is an *übermensch* who comes from a well-educated and well-to-do family (father is an engineer), he chooses specific powerful references and words to connote them. For instance, he says that he is an architecture graduate from the University of London. Because this university is a well-known elite institution of higher learning, by

association, he is an intellectual elite too. Additionally, the scammer adopts a western identity, perhaps to create a sense of uniqueness and glamour to attract the target (who is an Asian); and this identity could also be an index of power and financial stability as the United Kingdom is one of the global powers (Blommaert & Omoniyi, 2006).

Moreover, the scammer was deliberate in his description of his career in order to make the impression that he has a credible elitist career. He underscores his influences and vast experiences by saying he has worked in “both government and private” and “both internationally and locally”. He also builds upon this elitist status by throwing in a fancy job title to indicate that he is not just any generic engineer, but a specialised expert who goes by the title “senior project surveyor”. Of course, this career information does not only create a reputable identity, it also suggests he has a stable career and he is a high-income earner, which are attractive qualities in any potential male suitor in a patriarchal society where the male is the breadwinner. One can also interpret his job description as a person who is not restricted to only “local” work engagements, but as a person who also needs to travel a lot, which makes him seemingly important and powerful individual. In other words, these quality indicators would likely create an impression in the target’s mind that she is lucky to have found the ideal life partner who would make her life comfortable.

It is interesting to wonder why victims of romance scam never considered the scammer’s grammar to be a telling sign that the credentials of the writer to be dubious. It certainly does not reflect the level that an individual who is from the United Kingdom as well as of such superior educational background would possess. His self-representation through the use of semantic references (university; Scotland) far outshines his grammatical and linguistic competency. This inconsistency in what he claims and what he performs ought to have been a warning sign to the target with regards to his trustworthiness. It is speculated that one plausible reason for this phenomenon is that victims want to believe so

badly that they have discovered their ideal life partner that they are willing to discount these indicators. Interviews with victims can shed light into this.

4.1.3 An Innocence Person with Good Moral Traits

Aside from presenting himself as a religious person to the extent that he believes their relationship is a divine providence and establishing his reputation, the scammer also presents himself as exuding moral goodness, which in turn lends credibility to his persona that he has the qualities of a trustworthy online suitor. Consider Extract 7:

Extract 7. Scammer pointing out his naivety on the dating site

SM1	...am quite new here in the dating site. A friend of mine who got his soul mate in this site introduced me to the site.
-----	---

Extract 10 is taken from the first paragraph in SM1 and it appears that the scammer made it a point at the beginning of their correspondence to demonstrate his naivety (“am quite new here”) of the dating site. One possible explanation for this is that the scammer is trying to create the impression that he is not a person who frequents online dating sites randomly looking for romance. Instead, this may be his first time engaging in online dating. The scammer is trying to add to his *ethos* that he is not an online flirt and the act of contacting his target is not merely for a random fling. It is also perhaps a way for the scammer to anticipate and dispel his target’s possible suspicion. The scammer also claims that his friend who introduced him to this site found a soul mate here; hence, accentuating his naivety that the online dating site is a trustworthy site that fulfils the dreams of people looking for a relationship. And of course, naivety tends to be associated with innocence, moral behaviour, and nicety of personal character.

To penetrate into his target's social circle, the scammer uses these words, 'honest' and 'sincere', words which connote characteristics of trustworthiness (Simons *et al.*, 2001, p. 81), as the following extract shows.

Extract 8. Words that connote characteristics of trustworthiness

SM1	I will always remain honest and sincere to you, and i wish to inform you that, i was married before with a daughter and i lost my wife, looking forward to hear from you again.
-----	---

Not only that, his use of "I will always" is a commissive deontic modality that places himself as a person who will fulfil an obligation in the future. It is relevant to note Bhatia's (1993, p. 70) remark that this kind of "self-glorification" lacks credibility and is likely viewed by the reader as purely subjective". Hence, it is possible that this is a conscious attempt by the scammer to overtly corroborate his statement by using such deontic modality as a type of performance or demonstration of character.¹⁰ To validate his claims that he is honest and sincere with his target, the scammer disclose a personal narrative that he was once married and he has a daughter. In a sense, by disclosing to his target that he has some personal flaw, his target will be more compelled to believe him and by extension, to trust his moral character.

An indirect way of presenting himself as an honest person can be found in Extract 1, where the scammer explains that he has been looking for "sincere ad honest God fearing woman to spend the rest of my life together". This could lead to a presupposition that if he is looking for a woman with such qualities to be his life partner, then he ought to be a person who possesses such traits as well; hence indirectly, the scammer is leading his target

¹⁰ Henderson and Gilding (2004, p. 492) notes that in view of the enormous possibility of fabrication in online communication, performance is deemed more important than mere reputation or appearance in promoting trust and in online communication, performance is executed through words in the form of self-disclosure.

to believe that he is a person of such trustworthy characteristics, and also, that his target possesses similar characteristics like him.

4.2 The Identity of an Ideal and Passionate Lover

Whitty and Buchanan (2012b, p. 9) discovered based on their profiling of victims that individuals with “high notions of romantic beliefs and idealised romantic partners” are mostly vulnerable to romance scams. It appears that this scammer knew of this fact and exploited it by assuming the identity of an ideal and passionate romantic person, which in turn can be discussed according to the following meronymy properties:¹¹

- i. Personal attributes of a romantic lover (Section 4.2.1)
- ii. Adores his lover (Section 4.2.2)
- iii. Willing to do anything for his lover (Section 4.2.3)
- iv. Offers a lasting and exclusive love (Section 4.2.4)

4.2.1 Personal Attributes of a Romantic Lover

Brabeck and Brabeck (2005, p. 208) report that in seeking a romantic relationship; women would often look for the following characteristics in their partner: “trust, caring, honesty and respect”. It was found that aside from establishing himself as a trustworthy person (Section 4.1), the scammer also presents himself as an ideal romantic lover by using specific connotative keywords, as shown in the following extract:

Extract 9. Words that connote characteristics of an ideal romantic lover

SM1	it something credible to say that am well encourage in having faith and
-----	---

¹¹ Meronymy refers to parts of a concept (Saeed, 2009, p. 70). For instance, a door is a meronymy of a building.

	understanding with people around me. and i believe that you are such minded person too. i don't believe in the world of playing around, am always serious with my pragmatic focus. hope you will understand my insinuations?
SM4	I would describe myself as being rather quiet almost shy when meeting new people, but open up rather quickly once i get to know you. I am a great listener and always there for my friends when they need me. I am soft. I am happy when ever my house is warmly and cosy.I love walks on nature, I adore fresh whiff of a wind, tender beams of the gentle sun.

The scammer's lexical choices such as "faith", "understanding", "serious", "great listener", "always there", "does not play around", "always... focused" seem to suggest that not only is he a caring person, he is a person that others can depend on. He may appear to be "rather quiet and almost shy" with unfamiliar people, to show that he is modest in his social interaction and not an attention seeker. In order to support his self-appraisal, the scammer includes other characters in his description, such as "people around me" and "my friends". In fact, the scammer may be ingratiating his target by saying, "I believe that you are such minded person too", in a sense then, implying that the target has a set of commendable personalities.

The scammer also presents himself as a person who is goal-oriented, serious and also committed in what he does in life and work. Additionally, he also presents himself as a person who is serious with the target, as shown as follows:

Extract 10. The scammer expressing his seriousness towards love and relationships

SM1	Hello my dear, It's a pleasure to welcome you, and i hope this is a good start for a serious and positive communication.
-----	---

The scammer exhibit friendliness by using a casual form of greeting, "Hello my dear", but in the following statement, he shifts to a more formal tone, one that may be found in the business context where business associates meet for the first time to discuss possible

collaborations. Such interactions could be a type of culturally influenced formulaic sequence in West Africa where it is a common practice to initiate an interaction by saying, “It’s a pleasure to welcome you” in all sorts of situations, including e-mail romance correspondences (Chiluwa, 2009, p. 642), or it could be a case of the way this individual is trying to make his target comfortable and safe in English, possibly his non-native language. Such an expression would be deemed odd for a ‘westerner’ (the scammer’s persona) to use especially in introductory romance e-mails similar to this context, because it is not appropriate for an initiator to welcome anybody who is *not coming* to them. The initiator is instead *approaching* the addressee.

It is intriguing that this use of a seemingly formal tone in this expression, “It’s a pleasure to welcome you, and i hope this is a good start for a serious and positive communication”, creates an impression that the scammer is amalgamating a business-centred discourse into a romance discourse, or in other words, making this romance interaction a type of business correspondence. It is possible that the scammer uses such expressions to create the impression that he is serious, committed and reliable, in order to get his target to develop confidence in him, and to be in continuous contact with him.

Indeed aside from caring and trustworthy, Berscheid and Reis (2003, p. 240) suggest that commitment is also a quality sought after in romantic relationships and can result in relationship satisfaction. In the following extract, the scammer makes a number of volitive expressions:

Extract 11. Scammer’s use of volitive expressions of commitment

SM2	I want to spend the rest of my life with you. And I want to give you my love, and to make our home a place where you always feel warm and welcome, and for us to have a relationship in which we accept each other for who we are and always find a sweet dream in each others arms. All I want is for us to love each other for the rest of our lives
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Volitive is a type of grammatical mood that refers to the speaker’s hope, wish or fear (Palmer, 1986, pp. 115-117). The scammer wishes that he can spend the rest of his life with his target, and he wishes that they would be able to love each other for the rest of their lives. He also hopes that he is able to give her all his love and to fulfil her dreams. Note that these are not promises (commissives) because he is not saying he *will* do all these, rather he is *hoping* he would be able to do so.

The scammer also always ends his request politely with a “thanks”, to show that he is aware of his insistence and that he is grateful to his target for putting up with it and responding to him. This is perhaps to show some kind of gentlemanly behaviour. This is also another possible indicator of the scammer’s cultural norm in West Africa, or his idiosyncratic way of ending an interaction in English as a non-native user.

Earlier on, it was pointed out that the scammer uses ‘others’ as a point of reference to portray his dependability, but as was found in the following instance, the scammer also uses others to distinguish himself and solidify his merits as an ideal romantic partner.

Extract 12. Scammer distinguishing himself from ‘others’

SM1	I am serious with you and not here to play games. Some men and women are here to have fun, but there are few out there who are serious and ready to settle down at the right time and with the right person. I want to know you more and see what the future may bring between us, can you send me some of your pictures too?
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In Extract 12, he contrasts himself with a group he conjures: fun-seekers and non-committed individuals, attributes which he possibly knows to be frowned upon by his target (dating sites tend to list subscribers’ preferences). The scammer indirectly offers his target two choices for evaluation: him or other suitors, and through the way he presents these choices, it is obvious that he would seem to be the better choice.

Aside from these, the scammer also projects his romantic persona by showing off his ‘artistic’ skills, such as by using rhyme-endings and quotes, probably to impress his target. Examples of rhyme-endings are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 : Rhyme-endings

i will be there in any time, in every place, to touch you, to love you, to wipe the tears from your face
‘ll be the warm wind between shadow and stone, taking your heart into the depths of my own.
I’ll be with you wherever you go, on the clouds on high, on the firm ground below.
I’ll be with you in unexpected ways, to guide you, to watch you, through all your days.
For you’re in my heart, and you’re in my mind, and I’m with you now and for all time.

Interestingly, a search on the Internet revealed that these intertextual parts of the message are indeed taken from a poem in an online poetry site. Perhaps then, we can safely assume that the scammer is not genuinely romantically interested in the target because he is not willing to patiently formulate his own poetry or the scammer is not artistically inclined, or both.

4.2.2 Adores His Lover

The scammer also expresses a keen interest in his target, and makes it obvious that he fawns over her as the following extracts show.

Extract 13. Scammer expressing keen interest in his target

SM1	I am serious with you and not here to play games (...) I want to know you more and see what the future may bring between us, can you send me some of your pictures too? (...) looking forward to hear from you again. my regard to your
-----	---

	family. hugs and kissing for you. thanks
SM2	All I want is for us to love each other for the rest of our lives, you can call me with this number +447045702211 okay. i really want to have a word together Thanks
SM8	how are you doing? hope you are fine. am very happy reading your mail keep putting smile on my facen how is your work hope your doing fine, i really want to know you more and see what the future will bring between us please can you have account in yahoo messenger so that we can have a word together. hope to hear from you soon, kissing for you thanks

In SM1, the scammer indicates that he wants to know so much more about her because he finds her attractive and is seriously considering her to be his partner for life. However, as it turns out, the main reason of doing so is to data mine her for useful information in order to exploit her weaknesses. In SM2, the scammer uses a volitive expression to emphasise his hopes that they will forever be in love (fawning over her), and opens communication by giving her his contact number. In SM8, the scammer shows that he is thinking of her and is so infatuated that her e-mails put a smile on his face, and is craving for her attention. It appears that the scammer's persistent fawning had a perlocutionary effect of getting his target to lower her guard and to trust him with more confidential and personal information about herself.

The scammer's assertiveness and persistence could result in two different responses. On one hand, his target could perceive him as showing his sincerity in the relationship thus resulting in her responding to the assertiveness positively. On the other hand, the scammer's assertiveness could cause discomfort for his target since their relationship may still be at the courtship stage and this could result in her avoiding further communication. The scammer seems to be aware of the latter, hence, he seems to soften the assertiveness in various ways. Firstly, the scammer seems to justify his assertiveness, for example in SM1, where the scammer's claims he does not want to mess around with his target's feelings,

while in SM2, he claims that he loves his target. The scammer's strategy of justification simultaneously appeals to both reasoning and emotions. Secondly, the scammer displays emotional affection in the form of virtual 'hugs' and 'kisses', to demonstrate his desire for the target, which would then justify his assertiveness. Other forms of expressions include:

- hugs and kissing for you (SM1)
- miss u (SM6)
- I need you, I like you (SM3)
- you will be my soul mate, special friend and wife one who can trust and to be entrust (SM4)
- Thank God for the grace to send me someone like you to share everything with, to rely on, to have confidence. (SM6)
- I love you so much I do (SM7)
- My sweet heart, I do love everything about you.(SM9)
- i found you to be a very responsible woman with a kind heart. i am so proud of you, and i feel moved by your deep faith and confidence. (SM13)
- I love you angel from the bottom of my heart and my soul (SM13)

Note in particular, he bestows her with the title, 'wife', which is infelicitous as no one declared them both husband and wife. It is evident then that he uses this metaphor to show some semantic equivalence of how intimate they both are. This title would soon be exploited later (this is discussed in Section 4.3.1).

Besides that, the scammer also describes his target using the metaphor of a 'dream' as seen in Extract 14. As a dream or fantasy, she is indirectly being complimented as

someone that the scammer thought is unattainable - her qualifications as a romantic partner are out of this world and that is what why she is so desirable.

Extract 14. Scammer describing the target using the metaphor of a ‘dream’

SM7	You were a dream...A dream that filled my thoughts and my loneliest nights (...) You were the dream that made me smile... an escape from my reality,a fantasy I longed to one day come true. (...)My dream that used to be is now my reality.A fantasy waiting for its happy ending is now a fairytale come true.
SM9	you are all i have been dreaming for and i cannot imagine more honor than living by your side modesty. i feel moved by your deep faith and confidence.

This could also lead the target to think that she is exactly what the scammer has been waiting and searching for. Singling her out of the rest of the women in the world (“all I have been dreaming for”) could also create a sense of exclusivity; that she is special.

Studies have shown that such acts of adoration - giving compliments and praises and by giving assurance that one is special and desirable, could make one’s partner feel ‘good’ about him- or herself and lead to an increase in the emotional closeness and intimacy of a relationship (DeLameter & Myers, 2011; Pendell, 2002). Indeed, flattery is also a way of building solidarity (Freiermuth, 2011, 139). This would then be the scammer’s strategy to appeal to her emotions and at the same time, lure her deeper into their relationship.

4.2.3 Willing to Do Anything for His Lover

The scammer also presents himself as a romantic partner who is willing to do anything for his lover as exemplified in the following extract:

Extract 15. Expressions indicating willingness to do anything for a lover

SM3	i will be there in any time, in every place, to touch you, to love you, to wipe the tears from your face and to pamper you when you are sick, to cherish you, to be your best friend, your man. your husband ,your lover, your baby, your doctor, your teacher and everything you wish me to be. ‘ll be the warm wind between shadow and stone, taking your heart into the depths of my own. I’ll be with you wherever you go, on the clouds on high, on the firm ground below. I’ll be with you in unexpected ways, to guide you, to watch you, through all your days. For you’re in my heart, and you’re in my mind, and I’m with you now and for all time. Every moment of every hour, of every day, for every reason imaginable, and in every way, I need you, and I like you.
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These characteristic expressions such as, “I need you”, “I like you” and “I love you and “I will always love you put the target on a higher pedestal – as though the target is the most important person in his life. No doubt, these statements of commitment, promises and affection have not fulfilled the felicity conditions because the scammer did not have any intention to fulfil those conditions (see Searle, 1976), but these were not obvious to the target. Also, it needs to be remembered that SM3 occurred very early in the contact between the scammer and his target and these expressions of affection is particularly strong and hyper-intensive. Expressions such as “I’ll be your baby and your lover” and “you’re in my heart” tend to take place especially when the interlocutor is deep into the addressee’s intimate personal space. In other words, these expressions are common when the addressee is very comfortable and very familiar with the person who expresses them, as a result of a long-term nurturing of relationship. It could suggest then, that the scammer wanted to make haste with this target, so as to not invest too much time into a meaningless relationship, as opposed to genuinely building a long-lasting relationship over time. To achieve the desirable effect (which surprisingly works efficiently with this target), the scammer uses these themes, including hyperbole his roles “I’ll be your husband”, “I’m with you now and forever”, etc. to conjure an image of desirability and of prince charming himself.

Interestingly the scammer also seems to presuppose that his target may have certain desires and needs as a woman, as shown in Table 4.2, and he offers himself to be the agent who will satisfy these needs and desires.

Table 4.2: The Target’s Presupposed Desires and Needs and The Scammer as Agent that Satisfies Them

To Be	Presupposed Desires and Needs	To Do
Husband, Doctor	To be cared for and protected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always be there for you – anytime, anywhere
Lover, Man	To be loved or to feel completed	
Teacher	To have a person who could guide her in the right path or give her advice when she faces difficult situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love you • Touch you
Best friend	To have a companion in life or to have someone to share life’s experiences with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wipe the tears from your face • Pamper you • Cherish you • Protect you • Guide you • Need you
Baby	Appeal to the target’s female or maternal instincts to care for and love another person; the need to be needed	

The verbs used to express what he would do connote the idea of giving affection, comfort and care. Given the context that the target is a member of an online dating site, she may actually have stated these desires and needs and is looking for someone to satisfy them; hence the scammer’s use of these words would certainly be emotionally appealing to her.

In a sense then, the scammer is also appealing to his target’s subconscious logic and reasoning – she is seeking, he is offering. Guerrero, *et al.* (2010, p. 55) points out the following:

When people enter relationships, they hope to obtain benefits or rewards, such as companionship, affection, sex, fun, and sometimes even financial resources.

Therefore one of the most powerful influences on our attraction to others is our perception of their reward value, which relates to our interpersonal needs and preferences (...) what qualifies as ‘rewarding’ varies from one individual to another.

Given the credentials that the scammer had established for himself, accepting the scammer as her romantic partner would seem to be a rewarding act for his target.

4.2.4 Offers a Lasting and Exclusive Love

The scammer’s identity as an ideal romantic partner is also projected through his declaration of love for his target. This love that he offers is one that would last for a lifetime, as shown in the following examples:

Extract 16. The scammer’s declaration of undying love for his target

SM2	I want to spend the rest of my life with you ... All I want is for us to love each other for the rest of our lives,
SM9	it will be so wonderful to spend the rest of my life with you together, to learn with you together and to share daily life, i am so proud of you i love you and i will always loving you.
SM11	I love you and I will always love you till am no more on this earth.
SM13	I love you angel from my bottom of my heart and my soul

Hyperboles such as “rest of our lives”, “rest of my life” and “always” are used to create and amplify the enduring quality of the scammer’s love. The metaphor, “from my bottom of my heart and my soul”, was also used to intensify and exaggerate the depth and sincerity of his love for his target and so the love that the scammer offers is not only enduring, but also very genuine (Cockroft & Cockroft, 2005). Indeed, the scammer could also be leading his target to believe that the relationship that he is offering is the most superior in her lifetime.

Given the context that both the scammer and his target have never met face-to-face, the scammer’s promises of undying love and a lifelong future together may be perceived as unbelievable and unrealistic which could raise her suspicions (Bindley, 2012). He averts her suspicions and ensures that she continues the correspondence by making realistic promises in the form of meeting face-to-face in the near future, as shown in the following examples:

Extract 17. The scammer’s promises to meet face-to-face in the near future

SM13	and hope to meet you soon and share everything together. so that our joy shall be complete.
SM14	I am missing you so much and want to finalise soon and proceed to be with you in your home country H in couple of weeks

Words such as “hope”, “want” and “missing you so much” conveys his earnest desire to meet his target. However, two different time adverbials are used in these examples to indicate when this promise will be fulfilled. Because the scammer has no intention of fulfil this promise, the scammer uses “soon”, an indefinite time adverbial as a way to hedge his promises, to buy himself more time, and to keep his target interested and emotionally occupied. Similarly, the vague adverbial “in a couple of weeks” is used to make this promise seem more realistic and attainable.

In addition to a long-lasting love, the scammer also emphasises on this quality that love is able to overcome any obstacle, and the scammer also reminds his target that the love they share has this quality, as shown in the following extract.

Extract 18. The scammer reminding his target that their love can overcome any obstacle

SM11	I want to let you knoww that,sometimes life might prove to be difficult even relationships but it depends on how the two in love handles the situation and stand
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	strong for the love we share. (...) Regardless of the situation now,I want to re-assure you how much I love you and I will contiuue to love you.Even though something might have made you to question about out love,we should not let people or whatever factor to bring problem between us because in every ramification,love still conquers.
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From the target's e-mail messages, we see that she seems to be convinced that their love can indeed overcome all obstacles by responding and reciprocating the scammer's love, as shown in the following extract:

Extract 19. The target responding to and reciprocating the scammer's love

TM2	I really love you. I keep you saying I love you becoz i really love you so much. Although i can't meet you in person now, but i am very happy to hear your voice.
TM6	You have tried your best, please don't blame yourself! It is the money issue only. you still have mom, [xxxxxxx] and me, right? So, please be strong for me. I know you can do it.

These responses indicate that the scammer's fawning and hyper intensive affection towards his target had been successful in eliciting the desired perlocutionary effect from her. Granted, the conditions were right for the scammer and he played his cards right in ensuring that his target would grant him access into her private and most intimate space.

Aside from that, the scammer also increases the appeal of his romantic identity by creating a sense of exclusivity to the love and relationship that he shares with her. This is done by emphasising on togetherness and a sense of belonging, as shown in this excerpt:

Extract 20. The scammer creating a sense of belonging and togetherness

SM5	And I want to give you my love, and to make our home a place where you always feel warm and welcome, and for us to have a relationship in which we accept each other for who we are and always find a sweet dream in each others arms. All I want is for us to love each other for the rest of our lives,
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In Extract 20, the scammer’s metaphor of “home” is one where he aimed to evoke positive feelings of love, a sense of belonging, comfort and safety. He uses this imagery because for most people, these are people’s basic and fundamental needs (see Maslow, 1998), and he evokes them in order to convince his target that he will be able to fulfil her fundamental needs. In fact, studies on other forms of advanced fee frauds have also discovered that the scam messages contain “strong emotional cues” that “elicit visceral rather than cognitive information processing”, i.e. to get the targets to respond based on intuition and not on rational thinking, by zeroing in and exploiting the target’s vulnerabilities in relation to basic human needs (OFT, 2009, p. 19; also see Fischer *et al.*, 2008, Cukier *et al.*, 2007; Langenderfer & Shimp, 2001).

The scammer emphasises on the aspect of togetherness when he describes the things that he wishes to do in their relationship as well as by creating a sense of exclusivity:

Extract 21. The scammer creating a sense of exclusivity

SM5	Some people have such big dreams, but all I want is to love you, to wake up beside you each morning, to feel the warmth of your hand in mine, to share each moment, good and bad, with you, to lose myself in your loving arms. Some people want so much out of life, but all I want is to share everything with you, for us to talk long into the night, to dream together, and experience all of the little things together that makes life worth living.
SM9	it will be so wonderful to spend the rest of my life with you together, to learn with you together and to share daily life

The activities that the scammer wishes to do are described as involving two persons. In Extract 20 and 21, we see how the scammer uses second person pronouns, ‘you’ and ‘your’ to indicate a direct deixis that his treatment is exclusive for her and no one else will be able to enjoy such privileges.

Interestingly, the scammer also creates a sense of exclusivity by suggesting that they use special deixis forms of endearment, as shown in the Extract 22.

Extract 22. The scammer's suggestion to use special deixis forms of endearment

SM3	So my dear my romantic name would you like us to call ourself ,sweetheart, darling or honey?
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As the correspondence unfolds, all the greetings in the messages comprise the use of various forms, for example, “Hello my dear”, “Hello darling”, “My angel”, etc. To make it very personal to the target, the scammer made an overt request for her to specify their pet names. This request is made as a way to solicit some form of commitment to the relationship from the target as well as to get her to continue being emotionally invested in the relationship so that the correspondence can be sustained. This use of pet names is also reciprocated by the target, as can be found in the following example:

Extract 23. The target addressing the scammer using pet names

TM2	My dear honey, (...)Your sweet angel.
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The use of pet names is intended to make the target feel special, and is a tactic to maintain her interest and to invest more into the relationships. Indeed, as Guerrero *et al.* (2010, p. 131) also state, the use of personal nicknames could increase “emotional closeness” between partners.

Other instance of this strategy can be found in Extract 24, where the scammer requests her to express her love for him.

Extract 24. The scammer requesting his target to express her love for him

SM11	Please reply to me and tell me once again how much you loved me because that will make my day in great deal.
------	--

I love you and I will always love you till am no more on this earth. Take care.
--

After reading of the kind of the scammer's supposed affection and commitment in creating togetherness and exclusivity in their relationship, his target may be moved or even pressured to reciprocate in similar manner. Her altered beliefs, values and attitudes would subsequently also affect her future behaviour (Chang & Chong, 2010, p. 339). Additionally, her response to his requests serves as feedback to the scammer in evaluating whether or not his scheme is working.

4.3 A Distressed Lover in Need of Financial Help

The ultimate goal of the Internet romance scammer is without a doubt to get the target to give him money, if possible, willingly and without realising that she is being deceived at any point of time. In order to arrive at this stage of his deceptive plan, the scammer would have gained her trust and have developed a strong emotional connection with her as her lover. Therefore when the scammer begins to make requests for money, the identity that the scammer seems to assume is of a distressed lover in desperate need of financial help.

The e-mail containing the initial request for money by the scammer was not available in the data hence the analysis at this point is aided with the following contextual information inferred from the other three messages (SM10, SM11 and SM15) that contained requests for money:

- (i) Based on the contents of SM11, the scammer is in Malaysia on a business trip and is stranded there, apparently due to some 'problem' that requires monetary solutions

- (ii) The scammer must have made a request for help prior to SM10 after which, the target started to avoid his e-mails and phone calls
- (iii)The scammer is supposing that his request has caused her aloofness
- (iv)Prior to the request, she may have promised the scammer to help him whenever the need arises out of her love for him

Interestingly from the analysis, the scammer's financially distressed lover identity seemed to be projected with different dimensions to create different emotional impact, as summarised in the following points:

- (i) SM10 – A distressed lover who is disappointed and angry (Section 4.3.1)
- (ii) SM11- A distressed lover pleading for help (Section 4.3.2)
- (iii)SM15 – A distressed lover giving up and preparing to end his life (Section 4.3.3)

With this context in mind, we will now discuss the three messages that contain requests for money to see how these identities are realised through linguistics means.

4.3.1 A Distressed Lover Who is Disappointed and Angry

Simons *et al.* (2001) point out that narratives tend to be used as a way to support one's arguments as the description of details in a chronological order may create a sense of lived experience (p. 157). This strategy was employed in SM10 in order to exploit the target's cognitive and emotional vulnerabilities:

Extract 25. Scammer Message (SM) 10

Lines	
1	hello honey,
2	when I first singed up, on the site i questioned my self what am i doing there.i
3	didn't know if i was doing the right thing and i was fearful of meeting the wrong
4	type of woman. i am so hopeful and happy about it. if you are seriously , want to
5	know more and share your life with me, i am honoured i really want to spend the
6	rest of my life with you,i found you to be very interesting woman with a kind heart.
7	since i told you that i have problem in Malaysia and i need your help as my wife
8	you run way from me, well such is life. this is our wedding ring and i was thinking
9	that your serious with me i didn't know that you will dissappoint me by asking to
10	help me in Malaysia.well thank you for running away from me . i want you to
11	remember your promise that you will always be there when i need your help
12	may you have a wonderful day
13	S

The scammer starts off by describing the events that led to their current status of events – how he hesitated about joining the dating site in fear of meeting the “wrong type of woman” and how she had given him hope for a future together (Lines 1-6). The scammer then continues to describe his current situation in Lines 7-8 where he asked her to help him out with his problem only to find her ‘running away’ from him. Because of this, he feels disappointed and deceived by her (Lines 8-11).

This short narrative can be thematically divided into three parts: i) prior to meeting T, ii) upon meeting T and the promises they made together, and iii) after asking T for help. This division is evident through the emotions that the scammer expresses, as summarised in the following table:

Table 4.3 : Emotions expressed in SM10

Theme / Division	Emotions Expressed
Prior to meeting the target	Fearful
Upon meeting the target and being together	Hopeful, happy, honoured
After asking the target for help	Disappointed, angry (inferred from the scammer's use of sarcasm)

It would seem that although the scammer is narrating his experience, the spotlight seems to be entirely on the target's behaviour. Also, the scammer attributed an accusative tone towards the target by saying for example "you run way from me" [sic] and "you will disappoint me".

In a sense then, the scammer blames and shames his target for causing his predicament and emotional imbalance. The scammer does this by claiming that he thought the target was "an interesting woman with a kind heart" (Lines 5-6), and how her behaviour has proven this to be untrue. He also reiterates his feelings of being deceived in Line 8, where he thought she "was serious" with him; now his early fears have come true as she is becoming the "wrong type of woman" he did not want to meet. The scammer then brings up her expected role ("as my wife") in Line 7, implying that she has not fulfilled her obligated 'matrimonial duties'. Shaming and blaming are psychologically coercive techniques to compel her to 'do the right thing' that is, by saving him from his financial woes (see Dutton & Goodman, 2005).

The scammer's use of the word "well" indicate his resignation to the outcome of their correspondence and that he cannot do anything but to accept that he was deceived by her. In this way, the scammer's distressed lover identity projects the dimension of a pitiable lover and victim of deception while the target is being presented as the offender. The scammer's use of irony and sarcasm in Lines 10 and 12 also serves as a rhetorical purpose to create the impression that the target is the offender, but at the same time, he is able to keep a positive impression of himself. On the surface, the scammer seems to show that he is satisfied and happy with how she is treating him, but in essence, he is actually expressing his bitterness at her. This indirect form of expression also enables the scammer to distant himself from being the accuser; he could strategically claim that he is not accusing her and that it is she who interpreted his expressions wrongly.

Nonetheless, the scammer offers her a solution to clear this problem and redeem herself: to remember her promise to be always there for him. Interestingly, this solution was given in the form of a directive speech act; a demand – “I want”. This could be because the scammer is evoking his role as the victim in this situation, therefore the target, as ‘the offender’, ought to compensate the scammer, the victim – by doing ‘the right thing’, that is to help him financially. It could also be that the scammer is asserting his identity not just as her lover, but as her ‘husband’. Given the context that the target shares a deep husband-and-wife emotional bond as shown in in the following extract, the scammer’s use of the possessive pronoun in “my wife” implies that she should obey him.

Extract 26. The target’s husband-and-wife emotional bond with the scammer

TM2	I am really happy God linked us together and make you found me at the site. I feel you are my another half who i searched for long time. (...)You are my future husband. I love you. I need you.
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Considering this in the context that the target seems to be a Christian; the scammer invoking his role as the husband is a tactic to use religion to pressure her, as she may feel obligated to obey the instructions regarding the role of a wife and submission to their husbands. Whether or not she knows the exact quotes of the Bible, it is common practice for Christians to internalise the following quote:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. (Ephesians 5: 22-24)

Note that earlier in the correspondence, religion was used to establish credibility, but here, it is being manipulated to intimidate the target into performing the scammer's demands. There is also a stark change in the tone of the message. Previous messages were filled with positive and passionate expressions of love, hope and desire, but this message is the exact opposite, where it is filled with negative sentiments, it is demanding and forceful, and void of expressions of passionate love.

4.3.2 A Financially Distressed Lover Pleading for Help

In SM11, the scammer's portrayal of an angry and disappointed lover was not successful because she was still in incommunicado. The scammer then projected his distressed lover identity from a different dimension, one that is in distresses.

Extract 27. Scammer Message (SM) 11

Lines	
1	Hello darling,how are you doing today and everything around you? I hope you are
2	doing fine over there? I don't know how the situation might have been with you at
3	the moment but we must not be discouraged by the difficulties to finish what we
4	have started together and in due time we together will enjoy and share each
5	moment together.I have written some mails to you and even my sms' but you
6	seems to ignore my mail and my calls.I want to let you know that,sometimes life
7	might prove to be difficult even relationships but it depends on how the two in
8	love handles the situation and stand strong for the love we share.I do really
9	appreciate your love and kindness towards me and I cherish you so much for that.I
10	just want us to have family and be happy together. Regardless of the situation
11	now,I want to re-assure you how much I love you and I will continue to love
12	you.Even though something might have made you to question about our love,we
13	should not let people or whatever factor to bring problem between us because in
14	every ramification,love still conquers. Regarding to the issue of money that I am
15	facing here now,I still really need your help and I do really need us to work
16	together as couple and finish this together.I am very grateful for your help so far
17	and I must pay you back even with interest.I shouldn't be that ungrateful not to
18	surprise you with something you will marvel with as my beloved.I have something
19	special for you as we finish with this and I coming to meet you over there in your
20	country.My Angel, I really do not know what to do at the moment because I
21	haven't still completed the money yet.Please,I will pay you all the money back but
22	for this last time do something for us sweetheart.I have stayed long here already

23	and I need to come and see you so that we can plan for our future together. Please
24	reply to me and tell me once again how much you loved me because that will
25	make my day in great deal.
26	I love you and I will always love you till am no more on this earth.
27	Take care.

Unlike SM10 where the focus seemed to be more on the target, this message now revolves around the scammer, as shown in the prominent use of the deixis, ‘I’ which suggests that the scammer is claiming agency to all the actions described in this message. However, the tone of his agency seems to be less assertive and less blameful as compared to the SM10. The scammer assumes the identity of a weaker character whereby he expresses desperation of his situation and begs and pleads for help (Lines 15, 21-24). Note the use of adverbs such as “still”, “really”, “last time”, “already”, “very” and “once again”; adjectives such as “great”; and modal verbs like “must”, “will” were used to intensify the desperate effect. These were used strategically to appeal to the target’s sympathy, or to increase her guilt for not helping earlier on. It is interesting to note that even while adopting this weaker role, the scammer was still making promises (Lines 16-17, 21) and offering ‘rewards’ (Lines 17-19, 22-23) to her. These were aimed to enhance the desperate effect, and it is intended to demonstrate that the scammer is willing to do anything for the target, if only she would help him, or perhaps to pacify her because of his initial blaming.

However upon further analysis of this message, it seems that underneath this desperate and weaker façade, the scammer is still implying that she is the cause of his trouble hence the guilty offender while himself, the innocent victim. This is observable from the following behaviour being described in the message:

Table 4.4 : The Scammer as Victim and The Target as Offender

The scammer as victim	The target as offender
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scammer is unsure of what is going on or what is the cause of the problems (lines 2) • The scammer still shows concern for her (lines 1-2) • The scammer still encourages her to cling on to the love that they share and promises that they made (lines 3-4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The target has been avoiding him without giving him a proper explanation (lines 1-5) • The target may have allowed ‘others’ to come in between them (line 11) • The target is questioning their love and her relationship him (line 11)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scammer is grateful and appreciates what she has done for him (lines 8, 14) • The scammer reassures her of his unchanging love (lines 10, 12, 23) • The scammer promises to repay her for her help (lines 15, 20) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The target has not kept her promise to help each other in times of need (lines 13-14; SM10)

Also taking into consideration of SM10, it seems that the scammer has created a ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ dichotomy and is trying to subtly convince his target that she is currently the ‘bad’ person (due to her ignoring and not helping him). However, this implies that she has only two options of going forward: (1) to be the ‘good’ person, which would require her to change her current ‘misbehaviour’, or (2) to continue being the ‘bad’ person.

Similar to SM10, the scammer once again offers a solution on how she can redeem herself. However in this message, the scammer downplays his assertiveness. Here he suggests that both of them work together into solving the problem, instead of her doing it alone. This is clearly demonstrated in his use of the pronouns “we” and “us” instead of “you”, as well as other lexical items such as “together” and “two in love. This tactic bears resemblance to Cialdini’s (1993) concept of reciprocity or ‘door-in-the-face-technique’, whereby the target’s compliance is obtained by first making an extreme request which is not expected to be fulfilled, and upon refusal, a second request that is seemingly more reasonable is made (Baumeister & Bushman, 2011, p. 231). In this case, she was being

accused as being the cause of their relationship problems and she was ordered to solve the problem on her own (SM10) but she refused. So now the scammer is making a second request that seems more reasonable; that she cooperates with him to solve their problems (although she is still being presented as an offender).

Baumeister and Bushman (2011, p. 231) also point out that this tactic preys on the natural human instinct to feel guilty especially if the other person seems to have retracted to make the second offer. Hence the scammer could be making her feel guilty for not agreeing to this second offer. The scammer also pressures her and add on to her guilt as he reminds her about finishing what they have started (Line 3). He may be trying to get her to reminisce about their shared experiences, like their shared dreams and hopes for the future, and most importantly, to remind her that it is 'the Almighty' had brought them together. These are some of the ways the scammer cajoles her into making her feel guilty for risking their aspirations and even breaking apart what was destined to be. He also tries to invoke feelings of regret, in that if she continues to avoid him and not give him the needed help, she would then lose the possibility of a happy life (e.g. having an ideal love, romance and life partner given by 'God'). Additionally, unlike SM10 which seemed void of passion and affection, this message once again contained intense expressions of love.

This finding reveals that on the surface level, it would seem that the scammer is a distressed lover who has to beg for help, yet, he really is the one in control as he is manipulating his target's sense of reasoning and emotional needs. He is wary of the psychological effect that his words on the target, thus proving what Romancescams.org have pointed out, that romance scammers are adept at psychological profiling.

4.3.3 A Distressed Lover Giving Up and Preparing to End His Life

Assuming that the data (SM and TM) given by the police are arranged according to the order of the actual correspondence, it can then be assumed that the target had resumed correspondence after the scammer's attempt to be in touch with her in SM10 and SM11. This would mean that his pressure tactics were successful. In fact, the scammer was successful to the extent that the target had actually wired a large sum of money to the scammer through online banking, as shown in the following extract:

Extract 28. The target informing the scammer of the money she wired.

TM3	Hey I've sent USD\$7,425 to the M account. The bank teller said it may takes 2-3 days for processing the telegraphic transfer.
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Nonetheless, the scammer seems intent in getting more money out of T and therefore he projects another dimension to his financially distressed lover identity – a person who has tried very hard to solve his problems but still failed to do so and now wants to give up to the extent of ending his life. This could then be considered a second-wave of scam carried out by the scammer (see Figure 1.1), as was warned by researchers, police and advocacy organisations.

While we cannot be sure for certain what the scammer's exact financial problem is, based on TM5 in Extract 29, the problem seems to be related to his late father, hence this situation may have perhaps invoked sympathy from his target that she should try to help him in humanitarian terms. Furthermore, the scammer adds on to his pitiable state by describing how hard he had been trying to source for the money to solve his financial woes, such as borrowing money from friends and even his boss as shown in Extract 29. Essentially, the scammer bringing 'others' into the picture to justify his request for money

may perhaps be a way to appeal to logic, so that his target can be assured that she is not the only one giving him money.

Extract 29. The scammer informing the target about money borrowed from ‘others’

SM14	I was telling you over the phone that i got \$3,000.00 (Three thousand dollars only).Expecting from my friend is another \$2,000.00 (Two thousand dollars).making it (\$10,000.00 Ten thousand dollars) pending when i receive the money from my friend as he promised and you know the “D” day is Monday.
TM5	I know it is not easy for u and i know you’ve tried your very best. (...) Now you have raised USD 15,000 (include 5000 form your boss, 5000 from your friend and another 5000 from another friend). You still have to raise US 35,000. After that, u can receive the money which from the hard work of your late dad.

In the following example, the scammer conveys his suffering through words such as “stressful condition”, “cross to bear”, “heavy laden to bear” and “missing you so much”, to the extent that even his happiness from talking to her was insufficient to help him overcome his distress.

Extract 30. Words expressing the scammer’s distress and suffering

SM14	I am so glad to hear your voice today.I am very happy that i spoke with you but at the same time did not honor the stressful condition i am entertaining now in my life. It is just that i have the cross to bear,but seems a heavy laden to bear. (...) The lawyer was also trying from his part to make sure that the legal approach is firmly handled and the lawyer himself is active and will update us tomorrow as he promised. (...) I am missing you so much and want to finalise soon and proceeed to be with you in your home country H in couple of weeks.
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It seems that the scammer had also reinforced this impression of distress, hopelessness, and intentions to give up over the phone as can be inferred from the following messages from the target.

Extract 31. Words indicating the target's anxiety over the scammer's distress

TM5	I am very worried about u after speaking with u on the phone yesterday. I know it is not easy for u and i know you've tried your very best. (...) Please don't give up! Just don't give up! (...) I am right here pray for you again and again and to support you.
TM6	Honey, i know you must be very upset now. I understand that. Honey please don't cry. I don't want you to cry. You have tried your best, please don't blame yourself! It is the money issue only. you still have mom, J and me, right? So, please be strong for me. I know you can do it. I am always be with you and pray for you. No matter what happen, come to see me in H after finalizing the malaysia case

The scammer's tactics seems to be successful since the target became very troubled and worried as can be inferred from her repeated pleas to the scammer not to give up as well as her offers of emotional support and comfort for the scammer. It is worth wondering whether or not the scammer was able to speak with a British or American accent in order to reinforce the perception that he is indeed a white person from the UK. Since there is no audio data of the purported telephone conversation, we are unable to come to a valid conclusion. However, it seems that the target was convinced anyway that the scammer was the real deal. In any case, her reaction could perhaps be the response that the scammer desired because it indicates that he has successfully affected her emotions, meaning that he can continue defrauding her. This led to the next message:

Extract 32. Scammer Message (SM15) 15

1	Angel,
2	I have concluded within myself what to do if i miss this money and what ever is
3	the outcome please do not cry much about bit and after the funeral you can go on
4	with life and please always pray for heaven mercies to your late ones
5	Bye
6	Your husband S

There is an serious tone of finality in this message as implied in words such as “concluded”, “bye”, and “whatever is the outcome”; seemingly to show that the scammer has given up hope altogether. Although the word “bye” may seem like a common way of ending an interaction, this word has not been used before in any of the prior messages (SM1-14), thus, using this word to say farewell seem to add extra concluding effect to this message, in a negative sense. To add on to effect, the scammer uses words like “funeral” and “pray for heaven’s mercies to your late ones”, creating the impression that the scammer is also giving up on living, especially when he uses the pronoun “you”, and not “us”, when he talks about going on with life.

In this message, the scammer does not make an overt request for money from his target, unlike in SM11. Yet, considering that she is already wrought with worry for him, his declaration of what he has decided to do should he “miss this money”, assumed as a suicide threat, may be seem like an ultimatum: give me money to help me, or lose me.

In order for threats such as SM15 to be effective, DeLamater and Myers (2011, p. 212) suggest that “the target must want to avoid the sanction”, the threat must result in “large and serious consequences”, and that the credibility of the threat is high, i.e. the person threatening would carry out the threat. In this case, the scammer confidence to use this strategy may have stemmed from the following reasons:

- (i) The target had been persistently encouraging the scammer not to give up (TM5-6 in Extract 31).
- (ii) She has expressed and also proven how deeply in love she is with the scammer (in TM2, she affirms that the scammer is her husband, she promised her first night to him, she mentions about having had phone sex with him, etc.), therefore the stakes of losing him seems very high for her.

(iii)The scammer also seems to have created enough signs to show that he could be desperate enough to carry out the threat.

While threatening suicide seems like a drastic move, it does prove that romance scammers would resort to any deceptive tactics to achieve their goals. However as SM15 was the last message in the data provided by RMP-CMIU, there is no way to determine if this threat was successful.

Still, it is clear that the scammer's identity of a distressed lover gives off the impression that he is in deep trouble (one that he cannot solve by himself) so that he can arouse the target's sympathy and concern for him. At the same time, he also gives off the impression that he is helpless and feeling abandoned so that he can invoke guilt and fear in her. The scammer's portrayal of himself as a fragile person enables him to gain more control over her emotions and actions. Moreover unlike the first two identities (being credible person and ideal romantic partner) that appeals to positive emotions such as love, peace, happiness and satisfaction, the emotions that the scammer expresses and arouses with this identity are mostly negative and undesirable, as he displays emotions such as anger, disappointment, guilt, regret, fear, anxiety, sadness, etc.; proving once again that the scammer adapts his strategies according to his current situation and especially to his target's reactions.

4.4 Conclusion

The findings reveal that in order to present a favourable and desirable presentation of himself, the scammer utilises a mixture of persuasive appeals such and variety of linguistic features that display credibility, arouses the target's emotions as well as display logic and

reasoning abilities in his e-mails. The persuasive appeals and the linguistic features are as summarised in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 : Summary of Persuasive Appeals

Persuasive Appeal	Examples of persuasive techniques
Credibility (<i>Ethos</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a religious identity – using words with religious connotations • Establishing similarity with the target, in terms of religious orientation and personality • Referring to Divine Providence (God) to establish credentials • Establishing a good reputation by referring to education background and present career (semantic associations) • Using a formal tone to create an impression of seriousness • Describing himself using lexical choices which connote admirable and desirable personality such as of trustworthy, reliability, serious, focused and committed • Creating other credible identities and referring to them in the text, e.g. mother, lawyer.
Emotion (<i>Pathos</i>) – appeal to positive emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating the identity of a romantic and passionate lover (aside from a credible identity) • Describing himself using lexical choices which connote admirable and desirable personality such as of trustworthy, reliability, serious, focused, committed, artistic, romantic, etc. • Placing emphasis on the target by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Using compliments and ascribing desirable qualities to the target ○ Presupposing and appealing to the desires of a woman • Developing an intense and passionate emotional bond with the target: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Showing affection using affectionate expressions (e.g. I love you), forms of endearment (e.g. dear, honey) as well as lexical choices which create the impression of showing care and love. ○ Creating a sense of exclusivity and belonging to each other (e.g. use of pronoun ‘we’, lexical choice ‘together’, ‘your’, ‘mine’) ○ Requesting for expressions of love and desire from the target ○ Making promises for a future together (e.g. use of commissive speech acts, modal verb “will”, present tense to show certainty)

Table 4.5, continued.

Persuasive Appeal	Examples of persuasive techniques
Emotion <i>(Pathos)</i> – appeal to positive emotions (cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using emotionally provocative language such as by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Using words that connote “happily-ever-after” notions of romance, e.g. soulmate ○ Using hyperbole to exaggerate meaning (e.g. to create an enduring quality of the love he offers – the rest of my life) ○ Intensify meaning using repetition, adverbs (e.g. already, once again), intensifiers (e.g. really, more), modal verbs (e.g. must, shall, will), etc. ○ Using metaphor to direct (frame) thoughts and actions ○ Defining abstract concepts (e.g. love, romance, ideal lover) in concrete manner (e.g. physical activities involving each other) to prompt easy and controlled imagination; create a sense of realism
Emotion <i>(Pathos)</i> – appeal to negative emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating the identity of distressed lover in need of help • Expressing anger and disappointment at the target (e.g. sarcasm) • Using words that connote hopelessness and desperation • Repetitive begging and pleading • Invoking guilt by framing the target as an offender while self as victim • Invoking fear of authority and negative consequences • Invoking target’s anxiety/worry
Reason <i>(Logos)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporating real-world information in self-disclosure • Giving reasons to justify actions • Showing evidence of claimed credentials, e.g. evidence of honesty • Creating comparison to create the perception of the availability of options (e.g. offender vs. victim, me vs. others) • Bringing in other characters (e.g. friends, lawyer, mother, daughter) to support a claim and create a sense of realism

The next chapter will further discuss how the persuasive appeals are strategically employed diachronically in a manner similar to the development of a non-fraudulent relationship; and in fact, one which may be psychologically harmful to the target.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5. Introduction

This chapter aims to address the third research question, that is, ‘how does the scammer present and develop his propositions in the romance scam emails?’ and this will be addressed in Section 5.1. It will also discuss two additional issues, which are as follows:

- i. Comparison between the romance scams and non-fraudulent romantic relationships (Section 5.2)
- ii. Internet romance scam as a form of intimate partner violence (Section 5.3)

5.1 Use of Persuasive Appeals According to the Stages of a Romance Scam

As was discussed in Section 1.3, the Internet romance scam develops in a non-linear manner over a period of time, and comprises the following stages:

- i. Introductory Stage
- ii. Grooming Stage
- iii. Request for Money Stage or ‘The Sting’
- iv. Realisation Stage or ‘Revelation Stage’

In the previous chapter, it has been identified that the scammer uses a combination of multiple persuasive appeals to achieve various goals such as penetrate the target’s defences, to entice her into falling in love with him, to convince her to resume correspondence (when she started to avoid him) and lastly, to persuade her into giving him (more) money.

With the assumption that the e-mails examined are arranged in the sequence of the actual correspondence, this study suggests that while the three categories of persuasive appeals were used throughout the entire correspondence; there seems to a particular order which corresponds with the first three stages of the Internet romance scam process, as shown in Figure 5.1.

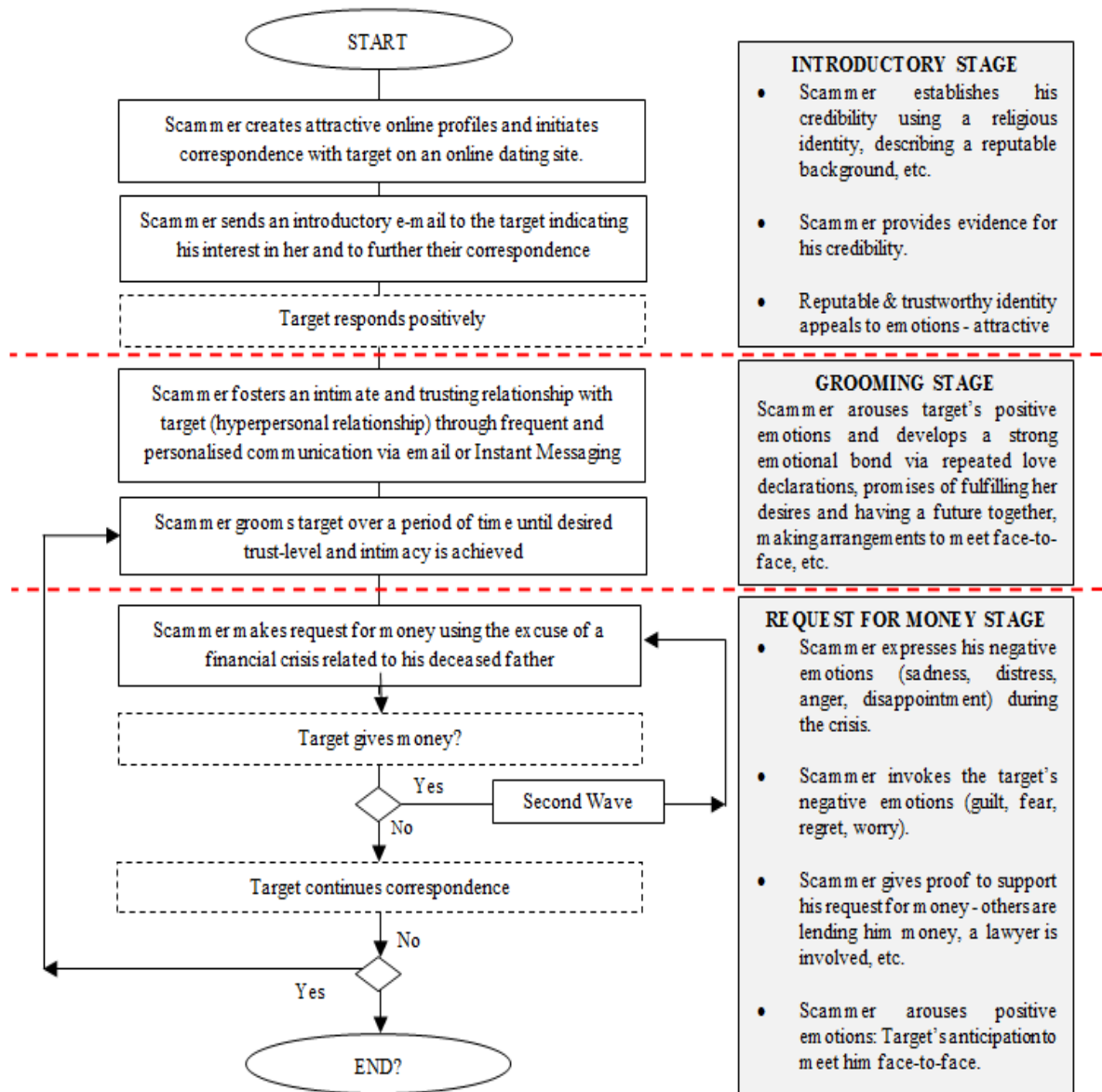


Figure 5.1: Use of Persuasive Appeals according to the Stages of the Internet Romance

Scam

Appeals to *ethos* were evidently employed at *Introductory Stage* (SM1-SM4), though the scammer still consistently maintained his credible persona throughout the correspondence, especially by using language which connotes religious orientation throughout the correspondence to maintain his religious persona, as well as other appeals to *logos* to prove that he is trustworthy and reliable. Essentially, this is expected as the moment the scammer loses the target's trust, his entire scheme would end. His display of credibility in the form of trustworthiness, high reputation and morally-upright attributes in the *Introductory Stage* also serves the purpose of attracting the target (in addition to the other attractive elements that he would have included in his fake online dating site profile).

At the *Grooming Stage* (SM3 – SM9), the scammer's focus is mainly on developing an intense emotional bond with the target therefore appeals to *pathos* were more prominently employed than the other two types of persuasive appeals. However at this stage, it is apparent that the scammer intensively stirs the positive emotions of the target.

At the *Request for Money Stage* (SM10, SM11, SM14, SM15), the most prominent persuasive appeal in e-mails was the invoking of negative emotions; especially when the target had temporarily stopped all communication with him. At this stage, appeals to logic and reasoning were also used, both explicitly as well as subtly. For example, the scammer uses different frames to create contrasting perspectives to subtly convince his target to give him money (e.g. offender vs. victim, good vs. bad). He also provides evidence to support his request for money such as using a Malaysian bank account number to prove that he is in Malaysia as well as conjuring fictional friends or lawyer who is assisting him.

Interestingly after the target had resumed correspondence with the scammer, scammer continues to appeal to the target's positive emotions in the same manner as he did at the *Grooming Stage* (SM12 and SM13), before he broach the topic about his financial problems again in SM14 and SM15, and once again stirs the target's negative emotions.

This exercise of matching the persuasive appeals with the stages in the romance scam process provides a diachronic view of how persuasive appeals were employed in order to successfully defraud a victim. Furthermore, it is evident that the scammer has many persuasive resources to draw from, he is prepared to counter the target's resistance, and is highly organised in the way he operates.

5.2 Comparison between the Romance Scam and Non-fraudulent Romantic Relationships

Based on the use of persuasive appeals, the way the scammer approaches his target bears similarity with the way a non-fraudulent dating-romance relationship is initiated and developed (Vangelisti, 2011; Samp & Palevitz, 2012; West & Turner, 2009):

Table 5.1 : Comparing Stages of the Scam with Stages of a Non-fraudulent Relationship

Stages in a Non-fraudulent Relationship		Stages in Internet Romance Scam
Initiating Stage	Focus on individuals making a positive impression on others	Introductory Stage
Experimenting Stage	Indication of growing interest in each other by getting to know each other and finding common grounds	
Intensifying Stage	Intensification of self-disclosure as well as display of affection	Grooming Stage
Integrating Stage	Unification of both individuals as a couple and engagement in joint activities	Request for Money Stage
Bonding Stage	Declaration of relationship and commitment through socially acceptable platforms (e.g. marriage ceremony)	Realisation Stage (victim realises that there is no Bonding Stage)

The *Introductory Stage* of the Internet romance scam corresponds with the *Initiating Stage* and *Experimenting Stage*. At the *Initiating Stage*, the scammer engages in positive self-representation which seems too good to be true. However, Toma *et al.* (2008, p. 1034) found that “deceptions in online profiles were frequent, subtle and intentional” to ensure the ultimate self-representation of oneself in the dating arena and Ellison *et al.* (2006, p. 419) suggest that this is a recognised fact among users of online dating sites. As a result of this, the target may have given the scammer the benefit of the doubt when he exaggerated his credentials (e.g. reputable education background and career status, personal attributes); when in fact, the exaggeration should have served as signals of a possible scam.

At the *Experimenting Stage*, both the scammer and his target supposedly get to know each other better and establish common ground; however, from the e-mails available, there seem to be very few exchanges that relate to the *Experimenting Stage*. Instead, the scammer progressed quickly to the *Intensifying* stage, whereby he started to display intense affection for the target through the use of repetitive appeals to emotion, in order to achieve the *Integrating Stage* as quickly as possible. No doubt there is a high possibility that the *Experimenting Stage* may have also occurred through other medium of communication (phone conversation, IM); still, it is possible that not much effort was needed on the scammer’s part as the target’s online dating site profile may have contained detailed description of herself in order to help her find her ‘perfect match’.

The quick progression to the *Intensifying Stage* may also be a tactic to pressure the target into reciprocating his affections; i.e. giving the target less time to cognitively evaluate the correspondence hence influencing her to become dependent on emotional cues (See Section 2.2.1 for discussion on the *Elaboration Likelihood Model*) or to create some form of emotional dependency on him (see Section 5.3 for more detailed discussion). Thus, this should also be an indication of a scam. Further down the correspondence, the target

accepted the scammer's proposition to become lovers, hence progressing into the *Integrating Stage*. In fact, they had even expressed their commitment to each other as husband and wife. The *Intensifying Stage* and *Integrating Stage* would correspond with the *Grooming Stage* of the romance scam.

In a non-fraudulent relationship, the *Bonding Stage* would be the end-goal of the couple (assuming that both are satisfied with the relationship up to this point), and as revealed in the victim's e-mails, this is exactly what she was looking forward to. In fact, the scammer had been fuelling her anticipation for this stage to take place, as Horvitz and Pratkanis (2002, p. 58) suggest, that the scammer's creates a "phantom fixation" for the target; getting the target to imagine and become fixated on the positive outcomes of accepting the scammer's offer. This is done so that the target would fail to notice and not be suspicious (or less motivated to address her suspicions) when he initiates the *Request for Money Stage*, which normally would not occur in a non-fraudulent relationship. This diversion from the normal pattern of relationship development is no doubt the most obvious warning of a scam.

Nevertheless, the close resemblance between the way the fraudulent and non-fraudulent relationship develops could perhaps be why Internet romance scams are difficult to detect, especially if the target is not perceptive or is not aware of Internet romance scams.

5.3 Internet Romance Scam as a Form of Intimate Partner Violence

The OFT (2009) suggests that responding to 419 scams is a result of "an error of judgement" on the victim's part as well as the scammers' use of persuasive strategies to "to create situations that increase the likelihood of such errors" (p. 13). In fact, studies on 419 scam discourse have categorised 419 e-mails as a member of the persuasive genre (see

discussion of 419 scams in Section 1.2). Findings of this study have revealed that similar to 419 scams, persuasive appeals were indeed employed by the romance scammer throughout the correspondence with the target. However, the findings of this study have also revealed that the Internet romance scam may be more than just a persuasive event in which the scammer lays his 'trap' and waits for unsuspecting individuals to fall prey. Instead, it is more personal whereby the scammer is an active agent controlling and directing the course of the relationship and the correspondence, i.e. the scammer 'pushes' the target into the trap, and keeps the target there. Interestingly, these characteristics seem to resemble that of intimate partner violence cases.

Intimate partner violence is defined as "physical, sexual or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse" which may "occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy" (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). The exploitation of emotion revealed in this study seem to fit the description of psychological coercion, whereby among many tactics, the coercive agent develops "strong aversive emotional arousals in the subject by use of nonphysical punishments such as intense humiliation, loss of privilege, social isolation, social status changes, intense guilt, anxiety, manipulation and other techniques" (Singer, 2008, para. 8). Dutton and Goodman (2005, p. 748) posit that aside from physical violence, psychological coercion plays a significant role in intimate partner violence and that the coercive agent often "sets the stage" for coercion to take place in the relationship by using one of the following tactics:

- i. Creating expectancy for the negative consequences
- ii. Creating or exploiting the partner's vulnerabilities
- iii. Wearing down the partner's resistance
- iv. Facilitating emotional dependency

The coercive agent may express his or her “ability, willingness and readiness to control [the] partner by punishing her or him or withholding rewards for noncompliance” (ibid.), for example, the coercive agent would describe in detail the negative consequences of the target’s non-compliance. This kind of message may create fear or anxiety in the target and so to avoid these negative consequences, the target would immediately comply with the coercive agent’s demands. In this study, the scammer was found to communicate the negative consequences of the target’s failure to provide financial assistance, ranging from anger and disappointment at her to possible death of her lover (See Section 4.3).

The coercive agent would also exploit the target’s vulnerabilities such as “economic liabilities”, “history of childhood abuse”, “substance abuse or mental health problems”, etc. or even create vulnerabilities such as getting the target to be “involved in illegal activities” or “engage in shameful experiences” (Dutton & Goodman, 2005, p. 748; also see Whitty & Buchanan, 2012a; Singer, 2003; Kilpatrick *et al.*, 1997). While the scam victim in the current study did engage in phone sex with the scammer, there is no evidence in the data showing that the sexual act was a shameful experience to her or that it was used to coerce her into giving money. However based on Whitty and Buchanan’s (2012b) study on victim narratives as well as anecdotal accounts from RMP; there are victims who have experienced this form of coercion.

The coercive agent would also wear down the target’s ability to resist coercion, for example, by limiting the target’s access to economic resources, by tearing down the target’s self-confidence, isolating the target from social support, etc. The scammer’s accusation of the target as a deceptive and uncompassionate woman as well as arousal of feelings of anxiety and helplessness could perhaps be tactics to tear down her self-confidence (See Section 4.3). It could also be presumed that by constantly emphasising on togetherness (e.g.

doing things together, solving problems together) as well as advising the target to not let others interfere with their love (Section 4.3.2), the scammer is attempting to isolate her from her social network. In fact, isolating the target is also a tactic employed in 419 scams (Freiermuth, 2011, p. 142); perhaps not for coercive purpose but rather to get targets to make decisions based solely on their own judgement.

The coercive agent would also create and facilitate the target's emotional dependency on him or her, then exploit this dependency for coercive purposes (Dutton & Goodman, 2005, p. 750). The findings reveal that the scammer had successfully cultivated the target's emotional dependency on him (See Extracts 19 and 26), and her need and desire for him was then exploited to achieve his goals. This tactic is perhaps the core of this romance scam case, and supports Whitty's (2013) findings that romance scammers groom their targets for fleecing purposes. While it is normal for intimate partners to develop emotional dependency on each other, in the case of Internet romance scams, this unbalanced emotional dependency or as Lipka (2012) describes as emotional addiction, is perhaps the reason behind romance scam victims' decision to give the scammer money even though they have never met face-to-face.

It has been documented that the negative impacts of intimate partner violence on the victims are more mental and psychological rather than physical, such as post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, etc. (Coker *et al.*, 2002; American Psychological Association, 2013). Whitty and Buchanan (2012b) discovered that victims of Internet romance scams also experience similar psychological impacts. Based on the scam victim's e-mails in this study, it seems that she may have experienced some form of anxiety (See Extract 31) and it is possible that there may be other psychological impacts; further implying the possibility that the Internet romance scam could be considered a form of intimate partner violence.

Recalling Billig's (1996) analogy of persuasion as a game of chess; the Internet romance scam seems to be a game in which unbeknownst to the target, both she and the scammer have different end-goals (the target wants a romantic relationship with the scammer but the scammer wants only the target's money) and based on the findings from this case study, this is one game that the target cannot win because it is deceptive from the start and her end-goal is non-existent. What remains is her choice to either give-in to the scammer's persuasion at the early stages of the correspondence hence accepting his offer, or to resist the scammer and leave the 'game'. Once an emotional bond is established, the use of coercive tactics by the scammer implies that her choice may no longer be a 'free choice' and her compliance may be out of fear of the negative consequences rather than being persuaded via truth and logic.

5.4 Conclusion

The findings as discussed in this chapter have revealed that the Internet romance scam is a carefully developed and structured fraudulent correspondence that targets the emotional and psychological aspects of its victims. The Internet romance scammer does not merely depend on persuasive techniques but employs coercive techniques as well to achieve his goals. The next chapter will discuss several policy recommendations and possible activism based on the findings discussed.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6. Concluding Points

As this study was unable to examine Internet romance scam from the victim's perspective, a different route was taken whereby the e-mails written by the scammer were examined in order to reveal the trap that the scammer created for his target. The following are discussed in this chapter:

- i. Research summary (Section 6.1)
- ii. Policy recommendations and possible activism (Section 6.2)
- iii. Recommendations for future studies (Section 6.3)

6.1 Summary of Findings

This study reveals that the persuasiveness of the Internet romance scam e-mails lies in the strategic representation of self through various identities, the employment of persuasive techniques to display credibility, arouse emotions and appeal to logic and reasoning, the development of a seemingly realistic relationship as well as the use of "language that will impress, entice, reassure, and/or evoke sympathy in their readers" (Schaffer, 2012, p. 171). The recurring theme in the scam e-mails is about a once-in-a-life-time love and romance. From a psychological perspective, these persuasive strategies may be aimed at satisfying the target's basic needs of security, love and self-esteem as well as creating a sense of urgency in the target to grab on to this superior offer in order to increase her dependency on emotional cues instead of cognitive cues when assessing the scammer's e-mail and the

relationship. Nonetheless, some of these strategies may be considered a form of psychological coercion that resembles the kind found in intimate partner violence.

From a linguistic perspective, the romance scam e-mails reveal that the romance scammer has sufficient language proficiency to carry on a casual correspondence for over a period of time. In fact, he was able to use language to create a sense of realism (Onyebadi & Park, 2012, p. 193) and his messages were “indexically argumentative” (Blommaert & Omoniyi, 2006, p. 568). Additionally, he was adept in using pragmatic tactics such as conveying politeness, using commissive and directive speech acts appropriately, etc.

Previous studies on 419 scam e-mails pointed out the e-mails were inundated with grammatical flaws (Schaffer, 2012; Blommaert & Omoniyi, 2006; Freiermuth, 2011), however in this study, though not examined as a research objective, there seems to be few grammatical flaws; only occasional wrong lexical choices and punctuation mistakes. It is possible that in a romance scam correspondence, the communication context is casual and may not require a high level of English proficiency (e.g. technical business register); therefore this could be a reason why scammers are able to ensure that the linguistic performance meets the expectations. The e-mails reveal that identifying romance scammers just by evaluating language quality, i.e. assuming that scammer have poor mastery of English, may not always be effective as indeed, “gone are the days of emails full of laughably broken English and absurd claims of outrageous rewards for very little effort on the part of the victim” (Ormsby, 2012).

6.2 Policy Recommendations and Possible Activism

Based on the findings of this study, this section provides a number of recommendations to reduce the number of Internet romance scams.

- i. Educate the public with information about Internet romance scams

Chang and Chong (2010) point out that there is a tendency to depend on affective cues in situations when there is insufficient knowledge. Therefore when faced with a predominantly emotion-based crime, individuals who lack knowledge about romance scammers and how they operate may be at greater risk of being scammed. This study shares the similar view as law enforcement agencies, advocacy organisations and researchers worldwide that the “[the] only weapon in this crime is education” because the more the people know about this crime, “the fewer victims these criminals have to choose from” (Romancescams.org, n.d.). Some important information that ought to be disseminated to the public are as follows:

- a) *Online identity* – The stereotypical characteristics of the romance scammer’s online identity (e.g. a trustworthy and reputable man, an ideal romantic lover, distressed and helpless lover, etc.).
- b) *Vulnerabilities targeted* – Personal characteristics of the individual that the scammer targets, for example, one’s inclination to trust in religious people, one’s beliefs in pre-destined (e.g. fate, God’s will) and everlasting romance as well as one’s desire to feel safe, loved and valued.
- c) *Romance scam process* – While there seems to be close resemblance between the way the romance scammer woos the target and develops the fraudulent relationship, individuals could be alerted about the exceptions; such as the scammer proceeds quickly from initiating the relationship to declaring his love, then he makes promises of marriage but there would be a request for money before this promise is fulfilled.

- d) *Language* – The e-mails are largely composed using language that is polite, stirs one's emotions, for example, repeated expressions that make one feel loved and appreciated or persistent requests to be together, as well as other persuasive strategies. While there may be few grammatical errors, these errors should not be overlooked or treated as typo errors as they really are an indication that the language proficiency does not match with the English native speaker and highly educated online identity that is presented.

In a sense, individuals seeking romance on the Internet, especially on online dating sites, are putting themselves in vulnerable positions because their personal information, preferences and interest, etc. are all disclosed to the members of the online dating site and the scammers could easily gain access to these information. As such, online dating site operators should also take the responsibility to alert their site members of this crime and provide the members with the necessary information so that the romance seekers would be able to protect themselves by avoiding the possible traps that await them.

ii. Reduce negative perceptions of Internet romance scam victims

Internet romance scam victims tend to be perceived as people who do not think, who are irrational or too emotional and thus they are often blamed for allowing the scam to happen. As a consequence, victims may feel ashamed for becoming a victim and perhaps even fearful of being censured by the society; hence they become unwilling to report the crime or to come forward to share their experience. This can cause problems because it limits access to invaluable insights about the crime that could be used to improve prevention steps and help other vulnerable people. As such, several steps could be taken to help reduce the negative perceptions of the victims.

Due to the highly personal nature of this crime, the media is perhaps the sole source of news regarding Internet romance scams. To date, it seems that news reports about Internet romance scams in the Malaysian media focus on the victims (people blindly in love) as well as the amount of money that the victims ‘gave’ or ‘lost’ to the scammer (life savings or money borrowed from family, friends or loan sharks); but there is little emphasis on the scammer, the way the scammer operates or even the psychological-emotional aspects of the crime. Perhaps the amount of monetary loss and the victim’s love story are more news-worthy and would attract the reader’s attention but for the benefit of the doubt, the media may perhaps lack information about the scammer, the process and the impacts on the victims. Nonetheless, bearing in mind the media’s influence on its audience’s perception of the victims, it may be beneficial to change the way Internet romance scams are being presented in the media (e.g. less description of victims using expressions with negative connotation; more emphasis on describing the crime and its perpetrator).

The negative perceptions of the victims could also be caused by the stigma of online dating, for example, people who seek love online are desperate (Madden & Lenhart, 2006), the impossibility to truly know a person online, virtual relationships being less ‘real’ as face-to-face relationships, etc. (Kopaczewski, 2010; Wildermuth & Vogl-Bauer, 2007). Therefore, there is also a need to educate the public about how online relationships could be more personal than face-to-face relationships (Henderson & Gilding, 2004; Walther, 2004). Additionally aside from the persuasive strategies, the public ought to be informed about the coercive strategies used by the romance scammer. If people are aware of the emotional intensity and psychological coercion that takes place in an Internet romance scam, they may perhaps understand how the victim’s emotions could have over-ruled her rational thinking and hence the non-victims would not downplay the victim’s experience or the psychological impact that they may have faced.

Perhaps the most important group of people who needs to be informed is the police, as they are the victims' first point of contact with the criminal justice system. The way the police officers perceive the victims who have come forward to report their case (which numbers are few) could influence the way they conduct the interview with the victims, the way they process the reports or even the way they investigate the case. If the police respond to the victims in an unsympathetic, accusatory or condemning manner, they could cause more psychological harm to the victims (Orth, 2002; Wheatcroft *et al.*, 2009). Not only that, victims may become less cooperative and unwilling or afraid to divulge every detail of their experience that may be helpful or important in tracking down the criminals.¹² Ultimately, these steps are important to ensure that the victims are not subjected to secondary victimisation - "negative social or societal reaction in consequence of the primary victimisation and is experienced as further violation of legitimate rights or entitlements by the victim" (Orth, 2002, p. 314) – as they are already experiencing multiple consequences as a result of their misplaced trust.

iii. Address the financial and the psychological loss of the victims

The current legal policy in Malaysia addresses Internet romance scams as a form of commercial crime (see Section 1.2 for more details) hence focusing only on the financial loss of the victims; however as it is, victims would never recover the money that they have lost (ACCC, 2012; Wayne, 2010). Victims are not empowered to seek justice for the psychological harm caused by the scammers such as their loss of self-esteem, integrity, ability to trust, posttraumatic stress and so on; all which could have long-lasting impact on their well-being as a member of the society. Undoubtedly, the emotional and psychological

¹² Indeed, the officers at RMP-CMIU pointed out that some victims withhold information about the actual amount of money they had sent to the scammer, or that they had been blackmailed using their sexually explicit photographs,

aspects of this crime are subjective in nature (e.g. the psychological spousal bond that exists despite being in a virtual husband-wife relationship); however, this raises the need for more research to be conducted to look into the possibility of such allocation in order to protect the victim's rights. The victims may not be able to retrieve the money or relationship that was lost, but at least they would be able to gain back some self-respect, and more importantly, their faith in the Malaysian legal system being able to serve justice and protect them as well as their faith in the Malaysian society would at least be preserved.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

This section addresses some of the limitations of this research and provides recommendations for the way forward.

The main limitation of the current research is that it is solely based on the analysis of the written text (scam e-mails), which is only one component of the entire Internet romance scam communication process. Furthermore due to ethical considerations, RMP-CMIU was not able to reveal background information about the case especially about the victim and the scammer in the case. Hence the interpretation and background information has to be inferred from the text itself, which may be subjected to inaccuracy due to the removal of e-mails by the investigation officer as well as researcher bias. Nevertheless, future research could triangulate the findings of this study by exploring the other components which may have influenced the text-production, especially the writer and the recipient of the scam e-mails. Future studies could attempt to obtain feedback from the romance scammers; perhaps soliciting the assistance of the RMP-CMIU to permit access to romance scammers who are in RMP's custody, to gain insights on the methods of constructing scam e-mails, the resources scammers use, the scammer's beliefs and values about the trust, love, scam, etc.

It would also be helpful if feedback from the victims, who are the recipients of the scam e-mails, could be obtained, so as to gain insights to what they were thinking or how they felt upon receiving the emails and why they responded the way they did. The victim's perspective would also be important to reveal if the scammer's techniques are indeed a form of psychological coercion. These, plus background information about the victim (e.g. personal and relationship background, personal beliefs and values about romance, trust, etc.) would certainly provide a richer and in-depth interpretation of how romance scammers can be so successful in defrauding their victims. However as this research has discovered, victims may be apprehensive about coming forward personally to share their experience therefore alternative means of soliciting response from them may have to be set up; for example, via open-ended questionnaire or focus-group discussions (Morrow & Smith, cited in Creswell, 2007, pp. 285-308) that are conducted online.

Additionally, the current research was conducted on a small repository of data; hence this may have limited the identification of persuasive patterns used by the romance scammer. Therefore future research should source for a larger repository of data (with e-mails arranged in the actual chronological order) - local or international; through collaboration with RMP or law enforcement agencies from other countries as well as international advocacy organisations or support groups for romance scam victims; so that more conclusive findings can be identified. Additionally, more data (e.g. scammer-victim e-mails from more cases involving different contexts - culture, location, etc.) is required in order to determine the consistency of the patterns and in so doing, future research could ascertain if there may be conventions that romance scammers adhere to. Such findings triangulated with the feedback from the romance scammer or the victims could perhaps contribute to the establishing of Internet romance scams as a genre of its own (Bhatia, 2004).

The current research limited its analysis to focus on the rhetorical aspect of the Internet romance scam e-mails, but since this is a preliminary study with the intent to provide an overview of the issue, this study had examined the persuasiveness of the romance scam discourse at various linguistic levels but only to a cursory extent. Therefore future studies may perhaps examine the romance scam discourse with more in-depth focus, for example, at the pragmatic level centring on examining the use of speech acts – the illocutionary and perlocutionary effects, or use of politeness strategies in the e-mails; or at the semantic level examining the use of signs and indexes to convey meaning or examining the online identities using the prototype approach. Future studies could also investigate the use of figurative language in romance scam e-mails to convey meaning and arouse emotions. Another area of future research could perhaps be from a critical discourse analysis perspective; examining the romance scam as a social practice, though an illegal and harmful one, in which the romance scammer creates and maintains hegemony through the use of various linguistic resources. Ultimately, the study of Internet romance scam e-mails opens up a new area for the investigation of online social influence attempts that are purely language-based (Walther, 2004, p. 388).

As this study was conducted within a narrow scope, findings from this study may not be transferable to other context; however as Titscher *et al.* (2000, p. 43) point out, “case studies may be implemented in the exploratory phase to provide insight into research object”. Therefore, it is hoped that the insights gained from this case study would be helpful to initiate and assist future work in this area of research.

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APPENDIX A

Example of scammer e-mail from *Introductory Stage*

SM1

Hello my dear,

It's a pleasure to welcome you, and i hope this is a good start for a serious and positive communication. My heart is full of joy knowing you and i pray that almighty who has brought us together through this way will guide and lead us to the right way. Well, am quite new here in the dating site. A friend of mine who got his soul mate in this site introduced me to the site. i have been looking for sincere ad honest God fearing woman to spend the rest of my life together.

Anyway i will use this opportunity to induce my self to you, S by name i am an arc tech, in engineering department. i work with both government and private company as a building engineer, both internationally and locally. am from Scotland, i like in dunblane city. my position as engineer entitles me as, senior project surveyor monitoring in building department. am a good engineering, good in drawing both computer drawing and skilful drawing. i like to go gaming whenever on holiday, i come from a family in which am the only son and my father is late, while my mom is still alive, he was also an engineer, he died years ago. and am the only son who successful him with my talented skills and from the knowledge i gained from my studies, i graduated from university of London, where i studied architectural. it something credible to say that am well encourage in having faith and understanding with people around me. and i believe that you are such minded person too. i don't believe in the world of playing around, am always serious with my pragmatic focus. hope you will understand my insinuations?

I must confess that i am so happy to hear from your previous message in AD, and it keeps putting smiles on my face. I am serious with you and not here to play games. Some men and women are here to have fun, but there are few out there who are serious and ready to settle down at the right time and with the right person. I want to know you more and see what the future may bring between us, can you send me some of your pictures too? I will always remain honest and sincere to you, and i wish to inform you that, i was married before with a daughter and i lost my wife, looking forward to hear from you again. my regard to your family. hugs and kissing for you.

thanks

S

APPENDIX B

Examples of scammer e-mails from *Grooming Stage*

SM3

Hello my dear,

i will be there in any time, in every place, to touch you, to love you, to wipe the tears from your face and to pamper you when you are sick, to cherish you, to be your best friend, your man. your husband ,your lover, your baby, your doctor, your teacher and everything you wish me to be. 'll be the warm wind between shadow and stone, taking your heart into the depths of my own. I'll be with you wherever you go, on the clouds on high, on the firm ground below. I'll be with you in unexpected ways, to guide you, to watch you, through all your days. For you're in my heart, and you're in my mind, and I'm with you now and for all time. Every moment of every hour, of every day, for every reason imaginable, and in every way, I need you, and I like you. And I wish you could wrap your arms around me, and embrace me forever, So my dear my romantic name would you like us to call ourself ,sweetheart, darling or honey?waiting for your reply.

miss u

Thanks

Thanks

SM9

My sweet heart, I do love everything about you. Thanks a lot for those wonderful feelings towards me. I do have the same feelings to my honey. You mean so much to me already. You are part of me and I am your honey. See the wonderful work of god that we have know each, i am willing to sacrifice for you to show how much i cherish you.it touches my heart so much to read about your deep feelings.you are all i have been dreaming for and i cannot imagine more honor than living by your side modesty. i feel moved by your deep faith and confidence. it will be so wonderful to spend the rest of my life with you together, to learn with you together and to share daily life, i am so proud of you i love you and i will always loving you.love and cherish

thanks

S

APPENDIX C

Example of scammer e-mail from *Request for Money Stage*

SM14

My Angel,

I am so glad to hear your voice today.I am very happy that i spoke with you but at the same time did not honor

the stressful condition i am entertaining now in my life.

It is just that i have the cross to bear,but seems a heavy laden to bear.

I was telling you over the phone that i got \$3,000.00 (Three thousand dollars only).Expecting from my friend is another \$2,000.00 (Two thousand dollars).making it (\$10,000.00 Ten thousand dollars) pending when i receive the money from my friend as he promised and you know the “D” day is Monday.

The lawyer was also trying from his part to make sure that the legal approach is firmly handled and the lawyer himself is active and will update us tomorrow as he promised.

I am partly on shipment services with my Office to see what i can realise and expect little thing from it.

I am missing you so much and want to finalise soon and proceed to be with you in your home country H in couple of weeks.

Regards

Your daling

S....T

APPENDIX D

Example of target e-mails (TM1 & TM6)

TM1

Dear S,
Hello! What are you doing now?
I am now at home. It is very cold outside and just wanna to stay inside my house and keep warm. Today is Day 25 since we chatted on yahoo messenger. It is just day 25 but i have the feeling that i've known you for a while. It is amazing. I tihnk God is with us. or else i can't explain the things happened on us. Please don't worry about me. I know you have to take care of your mom and your daughter and you have so much responsibilities. So i just want to relieve your burden by taking good care of myself. So don't worry about me. Have you imagine what will happen of us when it is Day 100, Day 200 or Day 365? I didn't think about it and i just let God guide our way. I don't know what will happen in the future. But now I am happy to have you. and i hope we can develop our mutual trust and understanding towards each other. Developing trust is not easy. But if we do, then we can have strong and solid base of our relationship. And thank you for your mom too. she is very kind. I am very happy to know you and your family :)

TM6

Honey, i know you must be very upset now. I understand that. Honey please don't cry. I don't want you to cry. You have tried your best, please don't blame yourself!
It is the money issue only. you still have mom, J and me, right? So, please be strong for me. I know you can do it. I am always be with you and pray for you. No matter what happen, come to see me in H after finalizing the malaysia case. Angel.