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Self-Presentation in On-line Dating Personals: A Critical Analysis of Scam Artists' Persuasive Discourse

With the rapid spread of the Internet, on-line dating and matching services have become widespread globally. The rise of on-line dating scams has attracted the interest of cultural studies scholars and critical discourse analysts because of their highly sophisticated construction of impostor identities (e.g., a Nigerian male impersonating as an American female dating an on-line partner in the US) through their 'creative' use of discursive strategies in on-line email and instant messages to stage highly persuasive self-presentations to attract prospective victims. In this paper, I analyse these email discourse data (collected from different Internet sites) using the methods of critical discourse analysis. The critical analysis uncovers the formulaic, repetitive discourse patterns and strategies deployed by these 'on-line dating scam artists'. Finally the ideological resources mobilised by these 'artists' to construct attractive self-presentations to participants in on-line dating networks will be discussed. I shall then argue that these scam artists' success predicates on the larger ideological hegemony of certain discourses regarding dating, sex, and romantic relationships in contemporary society.