

Criminal Accountability of Love Scamming Perpetrators in Fictitious Investment Schemes Through Online Dating Applications

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Abstract. *Information technology has made social activities easier, such as finding a partner through online dating apps. However, this convenience has also allowed new types of crimes to emerge, one of which is fraud using fake investments. The purpose of this study is to examine various forms of criminal liability for love scam perpetrators and the legal protections provided to victims in Indonesia. Normative legal research using regulatory methodology and case studies of relevant court decisions was used. The results indicate that individuals who commit love scams can be held criminally liable because their actions are characterized by fraud and electronic transmission. Furthermore, law enforcement for this crime faces challenges, particularly in terms of providing evidence and identifying perpetrators. To raise public awareness of similar crimes in the future, this study finds that law enforcement must be more effective by improving regulations and digital literacy.*

Keywords: *Criminal; Fake; Investments; Liability; Scams.*

1. Introduction

The use of dating applications has increased rapidly alongside the development of digital technology and shifts in modern social behavior. These applications provide a platform for individuals to form new relationships quickly and conveniently before meeting in person. However, this convenience has also been accompanied by a rise in relationship-based crimes, including love scamming or romance fraud. Data from the Directorate of Cyber Crime of the Criminal Investigation Agency (Bareskrim) of the Indonesian National Police indicate that reports of online fraud, including emotionally driven scams, have increased annually, particularly through social media and dating applications. The Indonesian National Police have further confirmed that most financial losses occur because perpetrators exploit emotional closeness to lure victims into fictitious investment schemes. This phenomenon not only results in financial losses but also adversely affects the psychological well-being of victims, who feel betrayed by individuals they perceived as emotionally close (Kominfo, 2024). Research on digital crime in Indonesia has largely focused on online transaction fraud, personal data theft, account hacking, and phishing (Muliawansyah Apriandi, et al. 2024).

Several studies have examined the dynamics of online relationships and emotional vulnerability; however, very few have specifically analyzed love scamming, particularly schemes that exploit dating applications to offer fictitious investments. Most studies position love scams merely as a minor subcategory of cybercrime, resulting in a lack of in-depth analysis of emotional manipulation patterns, criminal planning, and aspects of criminal liability. Furthermore, there is limited research mapping the social, psychological, and technological factors that enable the development of this type of crime. These limitations indicate the existence of an important academic gap that needs to be addressed (Gita Eka Sila and Cevi Mochamad Taufik, 2023). This phenomenon is important to study because, in addition to causing monetary losses, it also affects the psychological well-being of victims, who feel deceived by individuals they perceived as emotionally close (CNN Indonesia, 2025).

Online transaction fraud, data theft, and phishing have been the primary focus of existing research. This study seeks to fill this research gap by providing a comprehensive understanding of love scamming carried out through fake dating applications. The research focuses on explaining how perpetrators can be held criminally liable and identifying the factors that contribute to the occurrence of such crimes. Accordingly, this study is expected to strengthen scholarly understanding while also offering practical contributions to crime prevention efforts, digital platform oversight, and public protection (Sarkawi Sarkawi, et al., 2024).

Criminal liability in Indonesian criminal law refers to the capacity of a perpetrator to be held accountable for unlawful acts based on the existence of fault (*mens rea*) and a concrete act (*actus reus*). In cases of love scamming, perpetrators typically engage in a series of planned actions, ranging from creating false identities and building emotional relationships with victims to committing fraud through fictitious investment schemes. These actions fulfill the element of intent, as the perpetrators consciously know that their conduct is unlawful. From a juridical perspective, perpetrators may be charged under Article 378 of the Indonesian Criminal Code (KUHP) concerning fraud, Article 28 paragraph (1) in conjunction with Article 45A paragraph (1) of Law Number 11 of 2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE Law), which regulates the dissemination of false information causing harm to others, as well as provisions under Law Number 1 of 2023 on the new Criminal Code, which strengthens prohibitions against the use of false identities and fraud through electronic means (Achmadudin Rajab, 2018).

Research on the practice of love scamming through dating applications has been conducted at both international and national levels; however, most studies are descriptive in nature and have not examined legal aspects and local-level law enforcement in depth. A study conducted by Abiyyu Rizki Daffa in 2024 entitled "*Modus Operandi and Law Enforcement of Romance Fraud Crimes through Love Scamming Using Dating Applications in the Special Region of Yogyakarta*" broadly examines the phenomenon of love scamming by emphasizing how perpetrators build false emotional relationships through social media or dating applications, use fake identities, and subsequently commit financial fraud against victims. The study also highlights the psychological impact on victims resulting from emotional betrayal, as well as various modus operandi employed by perpetrators, such as profile cloning and monetary

request schemes. Nevertheless, the study remains general in scope, limiting its relevance to the Indonesian legal context, and does not specifically address perpetrators' criminal liability or empirical cases handled by law enforcement authorities in Indonesia (Sutarman, 2018).

A study conducted by Nizda Azzima Fuazianti in 2022 entitled *"Catfishing and Its Implications for Romance Scam by Simon Leviev in the Netflix Documentary 'Tinder Swindler' from the Perspective of Law Number 11 of 2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions and the Criminal Code"* analyzes the Tinder Swindler case as a case study of love scamming through the Tinder application, focusing on catfishing mechanisms and emotional manipulation used by the perpetrator to financially defraud victims (Rizka Alifia Zahra, et al., 2022). The study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach through a literature review based on media sources and Netflix documentation, highlighting the perpetrator's strategies in building victims' trust as well as the resulting social and psychological implications. However, the study has significant limitations due to its reliance on secondary media data, which limits its empirical validity (Sakinah Pokhrel, 2024). Furthermore, the study does not examine law enforcement aspects in depth and focuses on an international context, thereby failing to adequately reflect its relevance to the Indonesian legal system.

In addition, a study conducted by Sekaring Ayu Meida Kusnadi in 2021 entitled *"Legal Protection of Personal Data as a Right to Privacy"* highlights the risks arising from the use of online platforms, including the potential for love scamming, with an emphasis on the ease of remote interaction and victims' emotional vulnerability (Sekaring Ayumeida Kusnadi, 2021). Kusnadi emphasizes the importance of personal data protection and the regulatory role of Law Number 11 of 2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions as a preventive measure against data misuse. Nevertheless, the study has a limited focus on privacy and data regulation and therefore does not comprehensively examine the modus operandi or law enforcement against love scamming perpetrators. Overall, these three previous studies reveal the existence of an academic gap, particularly with regard to the local context, the implementation of law enforcement, and empirical analysis of romance fraud crimes committed through dating applications, thereby necessitating more specific research integrated with legal practices in Indonesia.

Based on a review of previous studies on love scamming through dating applications, several gaps require further attention. First, prior research tends to be descriptive in nature and emphasizes global or international phenomena, resulting in limited relevance to Indonesia's legal context and law enforcement practices. Second, most studies focus on victims' psychological aspects, perpetrators' strategies, or personal data protection, but do not thoroughly examine specific modus operandi within the national legal framework or local law enforcement mechanisms. Third, empirical data from actual cases handled by Indonesian law enforcement authorities remain limited, thereby constraining the validity of research in providing practical legal recommendations (Zefal Mohammad & Romi Mesra, 2025).

Conceptually, love scamming is a form of cybercrime that uses digital technology as the primary means to commit relationship-based fraud. This modus operandi is generally carried

out through three stages: establishing emotional closeness, introducing financial needs or investment opportunities, and disappearing after the victim transfers funds. Within the category of cybercrime, romance fraud is classified as a cyber-enabled crime, as the entire deceptive process is conducted through electronic media and relies on the ease of identity concealment in digital spaces (Pudji Setiawan, 2024).

Criminal liability relates to an individual's capacity to be held responsible for unlawful conduct. In Indonesian criminal law, a person may only be punished if there is an element of fault or malicious intent, meaning that the perpetrator is aware that their actions are unlawful yet consciously commits them (Maulidia Mulyani, 2025). In cases of love scamming, the perpetrator's actions are generally carefully planned, ranging from creating false identities and manipulating the victim's emotions to committing fraud through investment schemes. This entire series of actions demonstrates the existence of *actus reus* (conduct), *mens rea* (intent), and a causal relationship, which constitute the requirements for criminal liability. Although proving intent in digital spaces often poses challenges due to the nature of online evidence, once it can be established that the perpetrator deliberately used digital platforms to commit fraud, the element of fault remains fulfilled and legal liability may be imposed (M Effendy, 2012).

Love scamming is a form of online romance fraud carried out by establishing a false emotional relationship in order to obtain material benefits from the victim. This *modus operandi* has increasingly emerged alongside the growing use of dating applications in Indonesia. Perpetrators typically use fake photos, create fictitious backgrounds, and construct convincing narratives to prevent victims from becoming suspicious. This type of fraud generally occurs in three stages: building emotional closeness, requesting financial assistance for various reasons, and then disappearing after obtaining funds. Love scamming falls under the category of cybercrime, namely criminal acts that use digital technology, computers, or the internet as a means. In the classification of cybercrime, romance fraud is categorized as computer-assisted online fraud, as technology serves as the primary instrument through which perpetrators carry out their actions (Palupi Sulistyoningrum, 2024).

Based on the above discussion, the research problems of this study are as follows: (1) What forms of criminal liability can be imposed on perpetrators of love scamming who carry out their actions through fake dating applications? (2) What factors contribute to the occurrence of love scamming crimes through digital media?

2. Research Methods

This study employs a normative juridical approach with a qualitative descriptive research design to analyze the criminal liability of love scamming perpetrators operating through fake dating applications and to identify the factors contributing to the occurrence of such crimes (Agus Wibowo and Sri Yulianingsih, 2025). The legal framework applied includes the Indonesian Criminal Code (KUHP), particularly provisions on fraud (Article 378 of the KUHP and related articles); Law Number 11 of 2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions as amended by Law Number 19 of 2016 (ITE Law) as the legal basis for regulating cybercrime;

Law Number 27 of 2022 on Personal Data Protection (PDP Law) concerning the misuse of identity and personal data; and Law Number 7 of 2014 on Trade, which is relevant to fraud involving fictitious transactions or investment schemes. In addition to the national legal framework, this research also considers international principles, such as those stipulated in the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, as a reference for best practices in combating cybercrime (Feny Rita Fiantika, 2022). The research data consist of primary legal materials in the form of the aforementioned statutory regulations, as well as secondary legal materials including scientific journals, books, academic articles, official reports from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo) and the Indonesian National Police, and credible media coverage. Data are collected through library research by identifying, reading, recording, and classifying literature relevant to criminal liability and patterns of digital crime. All data are then analyzed using qualitative descriptive techniques to identify patterns, relationships, and legal meanings, thereby enabling a systematic and comprehensive response to the two research questions posed in this study.

3. Results And Discussion

3.1. Forms of Criminal Liability of Love Scamming Perpetrators on Fictitious Dating Applications

This study finds that perpetrators of love scamming conducted through online dating applications can be held criminally liable because their actions fulfill the elements of fraud, psychological manipulation, and misuse of technology to obtain unlawful benefits, thereby causing both material and immaterial losses to victims (Alvina Alvina et al., 2024). Although romance fraud is not specifically regulated as a distinct offense under Indonesian law, criminal liability may still be imposed because such conduct violates existing criminal provisions and causes harm to others. Three main elements constitute criminal liability in these cases: intentional fraud, a causal relationship between the perpetrator's actions and the victim's losses, and the perpetrator's awareness of the consequences of their conduct. Case findings indicate that perpetrators commonly create false identities, claim to have stable employment or backgrounds, and subsequently build emotional relationships that are exploited to persuade victims to transfer money or invest in fictitious schemes. As a result, victims suffer financial losses, psychological trauma, and a decline in self-confidence. This crime continues to develop due to perpetrators' exploitation of limited digital literacy, lack of legal awareness, and minimal oversight of online interactions within society, thereby reinforcing the urgency of enforcing criminal liability against love scamming perpetrators (Mohammad and Mesra).

3.2 Factors Contributing to the Occurrence of Love Scamming on Fictitious Dating Applications

The literature review indicates that love scamming is influenced by a combination of technological, psychological, and social factors that are closely interconnected. From a technological perspective, weak verification systems on dating applications and the ease of creating fake accounts provide opportunities for perpetrators to operate without clear identities. Psychologically, intense emotional interactions through private messaging tend to

make victims more open and trusting, particularly when they lack sufficient digital literacy to recognize signs of manipulation (Ahmad Ma'mun Fikri, 2024).

Meanwhile, social factors such as the increased use of dating applications since the COVID-19 pandemic, feelings of loneliness, economic pressure, and the need for emotional connection further increase society's vulnerability to romance fraud (Hanifa Miftahur Rahma and Victoria Kesha Ayunarendra, 2025). These three factors are closely interrelated, as perpetrators exploit victims' psychological conditions through technological means, while a social environment that is permissive toward online interactions allows such crimes to continue to grow. Therefore, love scamming is not merely a crime driven by the malicious intent of perpetrators, but also a phenomenon arising from weak social control, low levels of digital legal awareness, and victims' emotional needs, which create opportunities for perpetrators to exploit these conditions.

3.3 Impacts and Strategies for Addressing Love Scamming Crimes in Indonesia

The findings of this study indicate that love scamming has wide-ranging psychological and financial impacts. Victims not only suffer monetary losses but also experience feelings of shame, depression, and fear of forming new relationships, which in turn undermines public trust in online dating applications. This type of crime is generally addressed only after losses have occurred, rendering current responses largely reactive in nature.

To mitigate these impacts, a collaborative strategy involving the government, law enforcement agencies, and digital platform providers is required. Such strategies include enhancing public digital literacy, establishing rapid reporting systems within dating applications, and forming specialized cyber units focused on relationship-based online fraud. These measures offer the potential to create a more responsive legal protection system against digital crime. Improved digital literacy can increase public vigilance, while dating platforms can leverage artificial intelligence based technologies to detect fake accounts at an early stage. Accordingly, synergy between law enforcement authorities and digital service providers constitutes a strategic approach to reducing the incidence of love scamming in Indonesia (Kompas.com, 2024).

Table

No.	Contributing Factors	Description	Main Impact on Victims
1	Psychological	Victims' trust and emotional needs	Emotional trauma, loss of trust
2	Technological	Fake identities and weak account verification systems	Difficulty in tracing perpetrators
3	Social and Economic	Loneliness and economic pressure	Financial and social losses

Source: Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo, 2024); Hukumonline (2024); CNN Indonesia (2024)

Research shows that perpetrators of love scamming through online dating applications remain criminally liable for both the material and emotional losses suffered by victims, because these acts are carried out with intent, awareness, and deliberate wrongdoing, thereby fulfilling the elements of criminal responsibility even though the crime occurs without physical contact. This fact demonstrates that technology-based crimes can still be prosecuted under the Indonesian criminal justice system, as the emotional relationships and transactions involved are real despite taking place in a digital space (Anton Hendrik S, 2019).

Based on findings from the literature, the hypothesis that perpetrators of love fraud can be held criminally accountable is proven to be correct, as offenders consciously create false identities, build emotional intimacy, and direct victims to engage in financial transactions. This confirms that love scamming is not merely a moral or social issue, but a serious criminal offense with clear and enforceable legal consequences, without the need to amend existing criminal law foundations, since the principles of criminal liability contained in the Criminal Code (KUHP) and the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law) remain relevant and applicable to digital crimes.

3.4 Factors Contributing to the Occurrence of Love Scamming

Research on the factors contributing to love scamming indicates that perpetrators' economic motives, victims' psychological conditions, and the social dynamics of digital society are the main drivers of the growth of this crime, as offenders can easily exploit victims' emotional vulnerabilities through technology and limited digital literacy (M.A Mahyuddin and D F Mubaraq, 2019). These findings further reinforce the hypothesis that love scamming results from the interaction of psychological, social, and technological factors, and that formal law enforcement alone is insufficient if not supported by educational efforts and public awareness of the risks of online interactions (Soleha Liliani Malik and Fakhris Lutfianto Hapsoro, 2025).

Furthermore, studies on handling strategies and opportunities show that the approach adopted in Indonesia remains largely reactive, as enforcement actions are generally taken only after victims have suffered losses, while cooperation among the government, law enforcement agencies, and digital platform providers has not yet been optimally integrated. This condition confirms the hypothesis that improving digital literacy, strengthening inter-agency collaboration, and encouraging the active participation of platform providers in account verification and the detection of suspicious activities constitute effective and relevant solutions to reduce the incidence of love scamming. Empirical evidence also demonstrates a decrease in vulnerability levels when the public possesses better digital awareness and when dating platforms implement verification technologies, indicating that cross-sector collaboration is a key element in prevention and response strategies for relationship-based digital crimes such as love fraud.

Table Combined Table from Discussions 1–3

No.	Discussion Aspect			Factors	Impacts	Strategies / Recommendations
1	Criminal Perpetrators	Liability of		Perpetrators who commit love scams act with deliberate intent to obtain personal gain by manipulating victims.	This crime results in real financial and emotional losses; such actions fulfill the elements of criminal liability.	Law enforcement action is required even though the crime occurs in the digital space.
2	Factors Causing Scamming	Love		Influenced by psychological, social, and technological factors.	This crime is caused not only by the perpetrator's intent but also by the victim's condition and weak digital control mechanisms.	Increasing digital literacy and public legal awareness is key to prevention.
3	Strategies Opportunities for Handling	and Case		Handling remains reactive and not yet integrated across institutions.	Cooperation between companies and the government is needed for more effective handling.	Collaboration between governments and law enforcement agencies to detect fake accounts.

Source: Processed by the Author (2025) based on data from Kominfo (2024), Hukumonline (2024), CNN Indonesia (2024), and the POLRI Public Relations Portal (2025).

Based on the research findings and discussions conducted, love scamming through online dating applications is a form of fraud that is carried out consciously and in a planned manner by perpetrators with the intention of obtaining personal gain through emotional manipulation of victims (Wibowo and Yulianingsih). Although the crime is committed in the digital space, perpetrators can still be held criminally liable because their actions cause significant financial and psychological harm. There is an interrelationship between social, psychological, and technological components that drives this crime, in which perpetrators exploit victims' limited digital literacy and emotional needs to carry out fraudulent acts. This phenomenon highlights the complexity of love scamming cases. Therefore, a more comprehensive and prevention-oriented strategy is required, as the handling of love scamming in Indonesia remains largely reactive and not yet institutionally integrated. Efforts such as enhancing digital literacy, strengthening collaboration between the government, law enforcement agencies, and online dating application providers, as well as utilizing early detection technologies for fake accounts, are strategic measures that can be implemented to reduce the incidence of love scamming crimes and to strengthen public legal protection in cyberspace.

4. Conclusion

Love scamming committed through online dating applications is a form of fraud that is carried out consciously and in a planned manner by exploiting the victim's emotional closeness. As a result, victims suffer tangible losses, while perpetrators manipulate identities and create fictitious investment schemes. This demonstrates that perpetrators can still be held criminally liable even though the acts are committed in the digital space. Psychological factors of victims, the increasingly digital nature of society, and the ease of technology that enables identity concealment are all factors that drive the occurrence of this crime. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy is required, encompassing the enhancement of digital literacy, collaboration between law enforcement agencies and application providers, and the use of technological tools to detect fake accounts, as current handling remains largely reactive. These strategies are crucial to prevent the continued growth of love scamming crimes in Indonesia.

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