

Catfishing: The Truth About Online Deception

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Abstract: Online dating has become increasingly popular to start romantic relationships, but it also brings certain issues, such as the possibility of encountering "catfishers" who create fake profiles to deceive others. This research paper delves into the concepts of catfishing and online impersonation, examining their prevalence and impact in computer-mediated communication. By reviewing relevant literature and analyzing secondary data, this study aims to understand the extent of online deception, the motivations behind it, and the emotions associated with such deceptive practices.

Keywords: Online dating, catfishing, self-representation, phishing, social media, online impersonation

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the dating scene has been transformed with the advent of online dating platforms. A growing number of people are meeting their partners through digital channels, signifying a shift in how relationships are formed. However, the rise of online dating has also given rise to new challenges, including the phenomenon of "catfishing" - individuals who create fake profiles to deceive others.

This paper focuses on the concepts of catfishing and online impersonation, exploring the prevalence and impact of such deceptive practices in computer-mediated communication. By understanding the motivations behind these acts, researchers can shed light on the emotional consequences for victims and develop strategies to mitigate online deception.

II. RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the prevalence of catfishing and online impersonation in computer-mediated communication, and what are the motivations and emotions associated with these deceptive practices?

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Catfishing and Online Impersonation:

The term "catfishing" refers to the deceptive practice of creating fake profiles on social media or online dating platforms to mislead and deceive others. This phenomenon has garnered significant attention, especially with the rise in popularity of the MTV reality show "Catfish: The TV Show." Extensive research has been conducted to understand the prevalence and impact of catfishing within computer-mediated communication.

Kottemann (2015) delved into the concept of "deliberate deception" and catfishing, asserting that constructing false personas through online identity-building is a rhetorical action. This study brings attention to the deceptive nature of catfishing and underscores the role of online self-presentation in perpetrating such deceit.

B. Prevalence of Catfishing:

Numerous studies have illuminated the prevalence of catfishing in various online interactions. The Better Business Bureau (BBB) conducted a study that revealed alarming statistics, with one out of every seven internet identities suspected of fraud. Moreover, catfishing victims have increased by more than 50% in the past three years, indicating the severity of this issue (BBB, Year).

Zytka (2016) conducted extensive research that highlighted catfishing as a significant problem plaguing the internet. Despite its prevalence, many research studies have failed to acknowledge the widespread impact of catfishing on users. This study emphasizes the pressing need for further investigation into the extent of catfishing across diverse online platforms.

C. Motivations Behind Catfishing:

Understanding the motivations driving catfishing is vital to develop effective prevention strategies. Lenhart et al. (2005) found that some individuals engage in catfishing due to personal insecurities or as an escape from reality. On the other hand, for some,

catfishing is merely a form of entertainment or a means to exact revenge and play pranks.

Whitty and Buchanan (2016) explored the motivations behind catfishing and revealed that anonymity and reduced accountability in online interactions contribute to deceptive behavior. The study highlights how some individuals manipulate and control others through catfishing, further illuminating the psychological aspects of this deceptive practice.

D. Gender Differences in Online Self-Representation:

Numerous research studies have delved into the gender differences in online self-representation and their impact on deception in online dating profiles. Toma et al. (2008) found that men often emphasize social status-related characteristics in their profiles, while women tend to understate their age and weight to align with societal expectations.

Hitsch et al. (2010) conducted a study on an online dating site and discovered that men prioritize physical attractiveness and youth in their potential partners, while women seek partners who can provide and display markers of social status such as education and employment.

E. Emotional Consequences for Victims:

Victims of catfishing often undergo significant emotional distress. Drouin et al. (2015) surveyed victims of catfishing and found that the emotional toll of being deceived online includes feelings of betrayal, anger, and mistrust. This research highlights the detrimental impact of catfishing on victims' mental well-being, leading to diminished self-worth and a reluctance to engage in future online interactions.

Kotake et al. (2018) explored the emotional consequences of catfishing within the context of online dating. Their study revealed that victims experienced higher levels of anxiety and depression, further emphasizing the need to address the psychological repercussions of deceptive practices in online relationships.

F. Cybersecurity Concerns:

Catfishing is just one facet of the broader cybersecurity concerns related to online deception. Phishing attacks, wherein individuals are lured into revealing sensitive information, have become increasingly sophisticated.

D'Onfro (2013) reported that 51 million US Internet users have encountered phishing scams, with around 2 million falling victim to such scams. Fire et al. (2014) highlighted that approximately 83.09 million accounts on Facebook have been identified as fake, contributing to both catfishing, and phishing incidents, raising significant concerns about online security.

G. The Role of social media:

The ubiquitous use of social media has led to concerns about user authenticity and the creation of false online identities. Safko and Brake (2009) define social media as platforms where individuals engage online, sharing information and ideas through web-based applications.

Tuten and Solomon (2013) describe social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter as channels for users with common interests to participate in online exchanges. These platforms offer opportunities for individuals to create online identities that may differ significantly from their real-life personas.

H. The Impact of Technology Advancements:

As technology advances, new catfishing variations may emerge, presenting challenges in discerning genuine identities during online interactions. Deepfake technology raises concerns about identifying real individuals in video chats and other digital communications.

Hanyu and Kim (2019) conducted a study on Deepfake technology, highlighting its potential implications for deception in computer-mediated communication. They suggest that the advancement of such technology may further complicate the identification of genuine online identities, underscoring the need for continued research in this area.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This research paper is based on secondary data obtained from reputable sources such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Science Direct, and ResearchGate. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to analyze the prevalence and effects of catfishing.

V. RESULTS

The results of the research indicate a widespread presence of catfishing and online impersonation in

computer-mediated communication. Many individuals engage in deceptive behaviors by creating false profiles on social media and online dating platforms to mislead and deceive others. Over the past few years, the prevalence of catfishing has significantly increased, with a notable number of internet identities suspected to be fraudulent.

The motivations driving catfishing were found to be diverse and multifaceted. Some individuals resorted to catfishing due to personal insecurities or as an escape from reality. On the other hand, others engaged in catfishing for entertainment purposes or to seek revenge by playing pranks on unsuspecting victims. The anonymity and reduced accountability offered by online interactions facilitated deceptive behavior, allowing certain individuals to manipulate and control others through catfishing.

Emotional consequences were reported by victims of catfishing, experiencing feelings of betrayal, anger, and mistrust after falling victim to online deception. The emotional toll of catfishing resulted in diminished self-worth and reluctance to participate in future online interactions. These negative effects on victims' mental well-being highlight the importance of addressing the psychological repercussions associated with deceptive practices in online relationships.

The study also brought attention to cybersecurity concerns related to online deception, particularly with the increasing sophistication of phishing attacks. A considerable number of internet users encountered phishing scams, leading to the disclosure of sensitive information, and compromising online security. Additionally, the prevalence of fake accounts on social media platforms contributed to both catfishing and phishing, necessitating robust measures to safeguard users from deceptive online activities.

VI. DISCUSSION

The prevalence of catfishing and online impersonation highlights the need for increased awareness and vigilance among online users. The emotional consequences for victims can be severe, affecting trust and well-being. Understanding the motivations behind catfishing can help design targeted interventions to prevent and mitigate these deceptive practices.

The study also revealed gender disparities in online self-representation, with men and women emphasizing different characteristics in their profiles. This finding

underscores the importance of considering gender-based factors when studying online deception.

Furthermore, the rise of sophisticated phishing attacks calls for enhanced cybersecurity measures to protect users from financial harm. As technology evolves, so do the tactics used by catfishers and online impersonators. Policymakers, social media platforms, and online dating services must collaborate to address these evolving threats effectively.

VII. CONCLUSION

This research paper contributes to the study of social media and online dating by highlighting the prevalence and impact of catfishing and online impersonation. It sheds light on the motivations behind these deceptive practices and their emotional consequences for victims. By understanding catfishing better, researchers can develop strategies to address this pervasive threat to users of online platforms. Continued investigation and vigilance are crucial to protect online users from the harms of catfishing and to ensure the safety and integrity of digital communities.

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